

# The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

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[Home](#)

## **Charlie Has Moved—Off the Streets and Off the Left's Agenda Represent Our Resistance**

**By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD**

**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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To be poor in the United States today is to be always at risk, the object of scorn and shame. Without mass-based empathy for the poor, it is possible for ruling class groups to mask class terrorism and genocidal acts.

- bell hooks, [Where We Stand: Class Matters](#)

Hollywood is cranking out talkies. Tired of hearing that silent films were finished, Charles Chaplin said—okay! Fine!

In the first scene of Chaplin's *silent* film, *City Lights*, politicians and wealthy philanthropists, in their finery, stand at a podium before a crowd of citizens (and the film's viewing audience). It is 1928. The politicians, philanthropist, and the citizens have gathered for the unveiling of a monument donated to the city *for the people*. The monument is entitled "Peace and Prosperity"! The philanthropists and the mayor begin their *announcement*. It is a series of kazoo sounds, non-sense sounds emanating from their mouths.

Okay. A Talkie!

*Talking* is done and the mayor motions for the covering on the monument behind them to be lifted. The covering comes off, and there's the black jacket, pants, and derby hat of Charlie, The Tramp, lying across one of three white statues of figures resembling *Roman gods*.

The monument has been a useful place for the homeless man to sleep. But the politicians, philanthropists, and their audience are appalled! A tramp, a bum, a homeless man, on *their* valued property! The Tramp, not without registering his mockery of the *good society* in stride, climbs down and disappears from the scene.

Unveiling U.S. society's hypocrisy became a hallmark of The Tramp's experiences on the streets. In turn, the FBI identified *Charles Chaplin*, an English citizen, as a menace to U.S. society, and the media hissed: communist! In 1952, Chaplin was denied permission to return to the U.S. Centralizing the humanity of Charlie, the homeless, was a *Leftist* interest during the McCarthy era.

Today, Hollywood has no use for The Tramp or any such *incidental* human being except as a victim of a seemingly *incidental* but predetermined death in a production that introduces its audience to another slick, glamorous or all-powerful super hero.

Recently, an event was classified as so significant that it warranted 24/7 network and cable coverage by a predominantly *right-winged* media.

This was the case with the death of the "Lion of the Senate."

A man born into wealth with a prestigious family name, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, it was noted repeatedly by family members, friends, Democratic and Republican colleagues, loved the sea. He loved to sail. In return, both the sea and sailing offered him a philosophy for living on Earth.

When not on the sea, Kennedy championed the poor and the working class.

To be a champion for the poor and the working class is not only a *liberal's* interest, but it seems to be a grand experience in itself, thanks to crafty spin masters and to innovative technicians of images. *The* marginalized are the liberal champion of the poor, it would seem. In death, Kennedy, the Democratic liberal, is championed as a hero, monumental, in and of himself.

The *Left* is no longer in the equation.

In the social realm, the experience of being penniless, homeless, jobless, undereducated, in poor mental and physical health in a country that proclaims itself the world's richest nation, receives little attention. In this consumer-driven society, the homeless are far from heroic.

Today, the *Christianized* capitalists have packaged an image of *America* that sanctions the throwing of stones toward an ever expanding list of flawed groups of humanity. Jesus loves Homeland Security, Wall Street, the IMF, and the World Bank. New age spirituality, writes hooks, undermines "traditional biblical condemnation of the greedy rich by insisting that those who prosper are the chosen, the spiritual elect." Even some among the *least of those* populations scramble to appear at least members of the petty bourgeoisie, leaving the *them* to *Judgment Day*.

And many in *good society* believed judgment day came on a day in August 2005.

Consider the news coverage in the aftermath of Katrina. U.S. citizens (fellow neighbors, fellow brothers and sisters) and the world were shocked and horrified to discover—again—poor people in their midst! And they are floating—dead—in the city's precious waterways! Corporate moguls panicked. Orders were given to news producers to repress the shock and shift to fear and the more familiar narrative of criminals in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward. Four years later, large parts of the Ninth Ward in New

Orleans still looks as if the flood waters just receded yesterday. Thousands of "disabilities, poor, elderly, minority and immigrant communities" of East Biloxi or the Lower Ninth Ward, according to Jeffery Buchanan ("Ending the Human Rights Crisis in KatrinaRitaVille)," still live in "toxic government-issued trailers" while affordable housing construction has come to a halt. In New Orleans, homelessness has doubled to 12,000. "Tens of thousands of internally displaced survivors lack the resources to return and reunite with family and many more are unable to access proper training and living wage work to lift their families out of poverty. The result is a domestic human rights crisis," Buchanan writes.

And the real criminals responsible for this human-made disaster are among *good society*, enjoying the *American Dream*.

If politicians, civic and religious leaders had been truly concerned about the plight of the poor and working class, would they have continued the poor people's campaign begun by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?

The McCarthy trials are still underway, complements to the corporate productions of *entertainment* and *infotainment* from Murdock, Walt Disney, Time Warner, Inc., and Viacom subsidiaries and affiliates. There is no room in *good society* for the poor.

*Under* what monuments are we now burying the poor?

*Do not bother to ask the U.S. Left. The Left here is MIA.*

On a bright and sunny day in Philadelphia, PA., I passed two police men, one white and one Black, standing over a group of elderly Black men who were sitting on a stoop, at a distance from the entrance to a Midas repair shop. I have seen these men sitting there before, among a constant stream of shoppers and merchants passing by on Cheltenham Avenue. One of the officers had a ticket book in his hands, and from what I gathered, the homeless men would have to move.

Anyway, maybe I was mistaken and assumed the worse.

No, those guys drink and urinate. They've been complaints against them, said a woman who answered the phone at the Germantown Police Department. I told her I never saw the men drinking or urinating. It is a very open space. She repeated—they drink and urinate...

Okay.

I ran into a Black police further down Cheltenham Avenue, the next week. I asked to speak to him and he agreed. I told him what I observed the week before: the police ticketing or warning elderly Black men about sitting on the stoop in front of Midas.

They drink and urinate there. And the Midas shop complained.

Okay, I said, as I smiled and walked away.

These elderly homeless men are not without flaws. Their flaws reflect the tragedy of maintaining the flawed system of capitalism.

But in another America, Goldman Sachs second-quarter earnings was \$3.4 billion, according to Adam Turl and Alan Maass, *Socialist Worker*, August 13, 2009, and "its executives are looking forward to the return of their mega-bonuses to pre-crisis levels." It was \$2.7 billion for JP Morgan Chase, "a 36 percent increase over the year before."

Citigroup received \$45 billion in government bailout money and “booked \$4.3 billion in second-quarter earnings,” according to Turl and Maass. One of Citigroup’s “top oil traders...is owed a cool \$100 million in bonuses under his contract.”

Forget the display of citizen anger against these corporate executives and the functionaries of profit—these men and women are heroes. Those who shout the loudest against the excessive profits of these individuals are likely to be among the majority of U.S. citizens who want to be those individuals! Today, the monuments in honor of hypocrisy Chaplin critiqued will not be marred by the presence of a menacing population that might threaten by mere presence or challenge by activism the corporate state.

In New York, Mayor Bloomberg welcomes these hard-working financial workers. But the homeless must go! The city has paid some 550 families since 2007 to leave the city “as a way of keeping them out of the expensive shelter system, reports the *New York Times*, July 28, 2009. The homeless can receive a one-way ticket to anywhere in the world! The “Department of Homeless Services employees do all the planning for international travel.” This is not the synopsis of a Charlie Chaplin film!

Ships are carting Haitian and Mexican poor back to their native lands while planes are flying the domestic poor anywhere—away—just not here. Where are the poor to go when society clings to an economic system whose very existence produces more homeless people?

In the pervasive nonsensical chatter today, the talkies have silenced the questions: Where will the poor go? Who is responsible for this mass of humanity?

How the homeless men on Cheltenham come to spend the bulk of their days sitting on a sidewalk stoop in front of a Midas repair shop I don’t know. I have never witnessed anything other than men sitting and talking among themselves. The homeless men may be an eyesore since they are not walking or sitting billboards for Nike or the Philadelphia Eagles. Maybe a bathroom with a tub and shower is hard to come, too. To clean oneself requires the proper identification papers, employment with sufficient income, or at least some lost of dignity, independence.

After talking with long-time residents in the neighborhood, it comes down to this: the shelter opens its doors in the morning and the men are sent out until night fall. In the interim, they drink and, of course, they urinate. The washroom doors of both Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King near the Midas shop are locked. Customers must ask for the keys. These homeless men are not exactly *customers* of either place of business, so the washrooms are not available for their use. As one older Black man told me, these men end up urinating on the street, and often, these men fall asleep along the sidewalk in the evenings.

*Gentlemanly tramps*, they are not. But they were once someone’s son, maybe someone’s husband, someone’s father. And in another time and place, these elderly Black men would have had honored positions among their tribes, communities. Hunters, gathers, warriors would have sought their advice, and they would have shared their wisdom.

Maybe the shop keepers have had enough of these figures lingering about on their monuments to business and corporate ingenuity.

Maybe it all comes down to the bottle for the day and urinating in public. It does not have to be if we all had enough of what creates this *reality*.

Who will take responsibility for this reality Charles Chaplin tried to uncover and capture in an image so many years ago?

Challenging the inherent injustice of capitalism would inherently entail challenging the right/liberal illusion of its monuments to "peace and prosperity." But the U.S. Left has allowed this corporate driven government to legitimize torture at all levels against an increasingly larger portion of humanity.

We do not have to invent the wheel; we just have to be sincere.

Where are the socialists, the environmentalist? Saving nature is more than just saving trees. Are the elderly Black men and the increasing numbers of Black, Red, Latina women housed in prison moved right off the Left's agenda?

Where is the *Left*—channeling Marx?

**BlackCommentator.com** Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.



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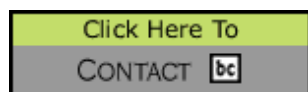
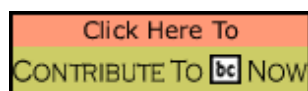
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[Contents of Issue](#)  
[Click here](#)

[Home](#)



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