Overshadowed: Inland Empire Holds Hope and Solutions for the Nation

Marguerite Casey Foundation: Movement Building Report
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Poverty has never been an ally to families or communities in the United States — a fact we all know. When I look to Washington, D.C., for comprehensive policies that will create a more just and equitable society, I see elements of hope. I also see indifference, dawdling and efforts to roll back our country’s social safety net. I see policies and administrative rules standing in the way of dismantling structural poverty and expanding the middle class. None of this helps the families collaborating to make progress in the face of poverty and economic insecurity. Like you, I ask: Why aren’t we doing more to support all families in the U.S. and make our country stronger?

Despite stagnation in Washington, D.C., many families in America are organizing and using their voices to ensure elected lawmakers hear their calls for equitable policies. The U.S. is only as healthy as our families and communities are strong. Policy from Washington, D.C., is important. But if we only turn to our nation’s capital for answers, we overlook our collective power in communities nationwide. Democracy flourishes — especially at the grassroots — because of us.

Civic engagement at the local and state levels is resurging these days — and movement building is playing a crucial, civic role. It’s an effective and trustworthy way to bring people together to harness positive, bottom-up action and find equitable solutions.

Since Marguerite Casey Foundation started, we’ve collaborated with family-led community organizations in some of the poorest parts of the country. We’ve issued more than $450 million in general-support grants to provide flexibility for organizing, advocacy and activism — and to nurture movement building.

The work of our family-led grantee organizations resulted in more than 25 million new people participating in the democratic process in 2016. People attended public meetings and registered to vote. Our support also fueled 300 local and regional policy victories in support of low-income families that year.

Success requires many steps, but it is achievable. Low-income families fighting for equity have won victories in health care, civil rights, criminal justice reform, LGBTQ+ protections, voting rights and higher minimum wages.

In this edition of Equal Voice Magazine, you’ll read about families organizing for social justice and how the Foundation intersects with this important work.

Families are building a road of hope in America, and Marguerite Casey Foundation is proud to stand with them and support movement building in communities nationwide. This is how democracy is supposed to work.

As the year comes to an end, please enjoy the winter holiday season, and take good care of yourself and your family.

Lucy Vega-Murguia
President and CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation

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The true story of Appalachia is one of transition from a shrinking coal industry to new economies. It’s a story of change for and by Eastern Kentuckians.

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It was once thought Black farming communities would vanish by 2000. But families who run these farms are continuing this important work.

Overshadowed: Inland Empire Holds Hope and Solutions for the Nation

Working families are at the forefront of social justice solutions in the Inland Empire because the issues they face are literally in their backyard.

A Light on Injustice

The Foundation speaks with two activists about the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Black American history and facing injustice.

#America’s Family Album: Rio Grande Valley

American Family Album is a series of photo essays about families who are unseen or forgotten. This chapter is about a family in South Texas.

Chicago Families Take on Gentrification and Housing

Gentrification is affecting housing in the U.S. In Chicago, families are organizing for solutions. Learn more in this story co-published with ImpreMedia.
Stories of Appalachia have been told over and over again for more than 100 years—often of families mired in heart-wrenching poverty that spans generations—collectively shaping the nation’s view of this lush mountainous region.

In the 1960s, Appalachia’s story was told as part of the War on Poverty, featuring black-and-white photographs of coal miners and their families sitting and standing somberly in mountain hollers. Today, another version tells of uneducated residents who voted against their own interests and for President Donald Trump.

These stories feed the nation’s periodic fascination with Appalachia. Every once in a while, the national media has focused its lens on the region’s small towns and mountains, creating stories that haven’t always reflected reality and splashing those stories across national newspapers, magazines and the network news.

These stories are invariably incomplete at best and damaging at worst. A sense of hopelessness can permeate stories of Appalachia. When the story of a place is relentlessly about its lack of hope—what it’s missing—it can create “a sense of fatalism, particularly in rural places, an assumption that nothing can be done,” said Lyndsey Gilpin, editor-in-chief of Southerly, which covers inter-sections of ecology, justice and culture in the South.

Appalachia’s flawed narrative is like an infection. It eats away at what families need, said Mimi Pickering, an award-winning filmmaker based in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

“They are just saying these people are poor because they deserve to be poor. They are lazy, dumb, shiftless. That all feeds into not providing the resources... that folks in the region need. Defund the public schools, defund the food stamp program, the welfare program,” Pickering said. “If you make people seem pitiful, helpless and hopeless and unwilling to help themselves it is easier to say: ‘I don’t want to invest in those people.’”

There is a different story in Appalachia, a hopeful one about the region’s transition away from a coal mining industry that’s been shrinking since the 1990s. In Eastern Kentucky it’s known as the Just Appalachian Transition, and it’s about families and organizations building new economies around farming and farmers markets—solar not coal power, arts communities and coal camps. It’s change for and by Eastern Kentuckians.

Appalachia’s Story: HOW THE NATIONAL MEDIA GETS IT WRONG

WHITESBURG, Ky.
"Making sure that those things that are popping up in Appalachia are done by people who live here," said Gilpin, who lives in Eastern Kentucky’s Knott County. "Ideas are created by the people who live here. The work is done by the people who live here. The people are paid for the work and the money raised from that work stays in the community."

Solar power and farmers markets are silver BBs residents cite when talking about how the region can move beyond coal mining jobs now only trickling through their green mountains. They need silver BBs because there is no silver bullet for the problems Eastern Kentucky faces – a poverty rate that can reach more than twice the national average, a scourge of opioid addiction and an economic future that’s cloudy on a good day.

"It really is going to take smaller efforts that are entrepreneurial and innovative, and people working together, creating things, like the whole chain that’s necessary to have a local food kind of industry," Pickering said. "Through small efforts here and there, we can rebuild the economy."

In the middle of this transition sits Appalshop, a creative hive of award-winning filmmakers (including Pickering), journalists, actors, actresses, organizers, activists, podcasters, photographers and even a recovering corporate banking lawyer. Together, they have been telling a richer and more accurate story of Appalachia, according to Rachel Garringer, public affairs director at Appalshop’s radio station WMMT. It was another example of how stories were often told by outsiders who wrote about families needing to be saved, and the saving and solutions typically came from outsiders.

"Defining Appalachian culture is often a top-down process, in which individuals with power or capital tell us who or what we are," Elizabeth Catte wrote in her book “What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia.” Appalshop has been working to flip that dynamic and balance of power for half a century from its recording studios and offices in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

"It often feels that rural people don’t get to tell their own story. If they have ideas of what should be happening, those are not taken seriously," said Ada Smith, Appalshop’s director of Institutional Development. Her family has lived in Appalachia for hundreds of years. "Those of us who live here know those [national] stories are not true…This is a place that should be invested in."

Sometimes Appalachia’s families seem invisible. Coal miners are leading characters in Appalachia’s national story. But others – LGBTQ+ families from its cities and towns, women who led its labor battles, people of color (including African American coal miners) and immigrants – often are not even bit players.

"Those are the voices that are left out," Southerly’s Gilpin said. "They have been since the beginning, and they continue to be.”

If we want to hear the story of Appalachia, we need to listen to those voices and to all of the region’s families and storytellers.

They are from there and of there. They’ve been telling their story for more than 100 years.

**True Appalachia**

As good a place as any to hear Appalachia’s story is Black Sheep Brick Oven Bakery and Catering tucked in the hills of Letcher County, Kentucky. The bakery sits on a one-time coal-mining camp that became a school, then now closed. The wood-fired bakery is the type of smaller business that could replace a slice of disappearing coal mining jobs, which show little sign of returning.

But it’s also a grassroots response to the opioid epidemic gripping the region; the bakery only employs people caught up in drug court. And it is home to the Hemphill Community Center, where people gather for traditional music, dancing, quilt making and to just connect.

At the bakery, customers don’t have much interest in fighting over politics most days, according to Herb R. Smith, a filmmaker whose family has called Letcher County home since the 1880s. Politics is number 11 on a list of 10 things they worry about, he joked.

Instead, they worry about resurging black lung disease, about mountains, streams and water supplies degraded and polluted by years of mining, about ever-present opioid addiction, and, of course, about the death of coal mining jobs. Only 145 of those jobs were left in Letcher County in the first quarter of 2019, according to Kentucky’s Office of Energy Policy. When diners talked politics on a lovely afternoon at the bakery, they didn’t bring it up. Instead they talked about the coal mining community.

It often feels that rural people don’t get to tell their own story. If they have ideas of what should be happening, those are not taken seriously.”

**ADA SMITH**

**APPALSHOP’S DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
the bakery, it lacked the bitterness and anger that light up cable news shows. There was a resignation that all politicians lie, and a desire to understand how they can tackle their community’s problems together. Some diners voted for President Barack Obama and others voted for President Trump. Some voted for both but would have voted for Senator Bernie Sanders had he made it to the general election.

It is a safe place where everyone can talk politics without prejudice, said Gwen Johnson, a powerhouse behind both the bakery and community center.

The community center “yokes everyone in the same direction. It goes across political affiliation,” Johnson said. “That’s a difference in our culture. Far left and far right, I don’t fall out with them.”

The community center is a spoke in the Letcher County Culture Hub, more than 20 community-led organizations dedicated to building a better economy and future for the region.

“Letcher County Culture Hub is a good example of putting aside political differences and really talking about and really recognizing how much they share together...and how much they really want to rebuild their communities,” Pickering said. “That is different from the national narrative: hopelessness and helplessness and addiction.”

Once you spend time in places like the Black Sheep Bakery, talking with people like Gwen Johnson, you begin to see the opposite, Herb E. Smith said.

“There’s this kind of truly amazing resilience to the place, real commitment to solving these problems,” Smith said. “We also realize there is a really rich culture of people who really care about a place maybe more [now] than most of the country. Families have been here for generations, and they really don’t want to leave.”

Now the challenge is to tell the nation those stories of commitment, solutions and community.

“We need to tell more stories that are sustainable, stories of folks who are starting initiatives that are going to last a long while,” said Mountain Association for Community Economic Development’s Ivy Brashear, whose job is literally to shift the narrative. “How we are trying to build a different future here, in terms of building better communities.”

PAUL NYHAN is the storytelling and partnership manager, and JANELLE CHOI is the program officer for the Midwest at Marguerite Casey Foundation.

A truck hauling coal in Carbon Glow, an old coal town in Eastern Kentucky. (Below) A former mining site in Eastern Kentucky.

(Top) Whitesburg, Kentucky, at night. (Middle) Appalachsh has installed solar panels, part of a broader push for clean energy in Kentucky. (Bottom) A gathering at the Summit City lounge in Whitesburg, Kentucky.
When Tim Robinson Jr. retired from a 30-year Army career in 2013, he moved home to the family farm in Baconton, Georgia. The land was defined as heirs’ property – an ambiguous and unprotected form of ownership that stems from land being passed down to family members in the absence of a will. Historically, land owned by Black families – many of them the descendants of freed slaves – often ended up as heirs’ property, a problem creating uncertainty for those who want to farm the land today.

When Robinson was a child, the community of Baconton largely sustained itself. “You had everybody – certified brick masons, electricians, accountants, business folks, blacksmiths, welders, nurses,” he says. “That’s who took care of you. That’s who built your house, took care of your plumbing.”

Farmers grow community gardens so that everyone could have access to food, and Robinson’s grandfather – one of the only farmers with a well – laid waterlines for his neighbors.

“Everybody else was poor and couldn’t afford a well,” says Robinson. “So he ran lines from his well all the way down the road, with a spout at each house so they could come outside and have water. It was that type of community.”

Though Robinson grew up working on the family farm, the younger generation was unwilling to take the reins, and the operation ceased in the 1980s after his grandfather passed away.

Robinson’s great-grandfather purchased the first of the family’s acreage in 1914, approximately 50 years after the abolition of slavery and the U.S. government’s broken promise of “40 acres and a mule.”

By Debbie Weingarten
Published: July 15, 2019
Photos by Mike Kane

Black Farmers Are
Reclaiming Family Land in the South

By Debbie Weingarten
Published: July 15, 2019
Photos by Mike Kane
In January 1865, General William T. Sherman ordered that land in the South be redistributed in 40-acre plots to freed slaves – the first attempt at government reparations for the unpaid labor and horrors of slavery.

But just months later, President Andrew Johnson overturned the order, displacing an estimated 40,000 former slaves from 400,000 acres.

The reversal of “40 acres and a mule” constituted a betrayal, exposing the continued exploitation and deception of Black Americans by the U.S. government.

Throughout the early 1900s, many Black families sharecropped, farming small plots of land as tenant farmers. In exchange for the use of land, sharecroppers paid a portion of the harvest to the (primarily white) landowners.

But the sharecropping system was often built on exploitative contracts, which forced Black farmers into debt. As such, land ownership was seen as the true path toward independence.

In an article for The Nation, journalist Leah Douglas writes that “by one estimate, 81 percent of these early Black landowners didn’t make wills, largely due to a lack of access to legal resources. Their descendants then inherited the land without a clear title, and it thereby became declared as heirs’ property.”

Douglas writes that thousands of acres of land defined as heirs’ property has been “forcibly bought out from under Black rural families – often second-, third, or fourth-generation landowners whose ancestors were enslaved – by real-estate developers and speculators.”

Making matters worse, heirs’ property is ineligible for a host of resources, including mortgages, improvement loans, or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs.

As property passes through the generations without a formal deed or will, “eventually, it goes from being owned by six or seven siblings to being owned by 60 or 70 grandchildren,” says Karen Lawrence, an agriculture specialist with the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, who lost part of her family’s land due to the lack of legal protections for heirs’ property.

Land becomes vulnerable with so many “co-owners,” many of whom no longer live in the community or have an emotional tie to the property.

Fellow Southwest Georgia Project agriculture specialist Deckton Hilton agrees that heirs’ property is one of the most threatening situations facing Black-owned land, and he estimates that 90 percent of the Black farmers he works with are affected.

In his job, Hilton has attended emotionally fraught meetings with extended family members who barely know one another but co-own land.

The goal of those gatherings is to designate a single executor to make decisions for the property. Without an executor, any of the dozens of co-owners could force a partition sale.

While the problem of heirs’ property needs to be addressed on a policy level, and by providing legal and mediation resources to families, Lawrence says solving the problem also involves a specific kind of relationship building.

“The future of farming in the South is to reconnect our young people with the land,” she says.

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Lawton Wilburn farms potatoes on land near Warwick, Georgia. It once belonged to J.N. Battle, a Black farmer who had acquired up to 3,000 acres in the early 1900s. But he faced severe harassment from white residents who attempted to drive the family off their land.

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KAREN LAWRENCE
AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST WITH THE SOUTHWEST GEORGIA PROJECT FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION
The younger generation grew up seeing their parents or grandparents struggle to overcome poverty and to access resources from white-controlled banks and agencies, says Lawrence. “All they saw was struggle. So when their parents passed, the children said, ‘Hey, I’m not coming back down there, so let’s sell it.’”

But Robinson’s story is proof that sometimes the younger generation does return home. Today, he leases 10.5 acres of family-owned land – an uncle is the executor – and has begun farming produce, with plans to expand to poultry, laying hens, sheep and cattle. He also wants to restore an old pecan orchard.

In the past five years, with the support of the Southwest Georgia Project and various USDA programs, Robinson put in a well, a hoop house and irrigation. He’s also working on various conservation efforts that are eligible for government reimbursement, including cover cropping and establishing a wildlife habitat.

Deckton Hilton works with Robinson and dozens of other farmers to provide technical assistance and business planning support. Originally from Jamaica, he says the organic farming methods he grew up with seem to resonate with the Georgia farmers.

“This is what their grandfathers and great-grandfathers were doing, but they’ve lost some of those skills,” he says.

Hilton is encouraging them to diversify, grow for niche markets, plant leguminous cover crops that replace nitrogen in the soil and practice traditional dryland farming methods to withstand drought – techniques that Hilton believes will support these small-scale, Black-owned operations into the future.

Robinson is thinking about the future, too. While no one in his family currently wants to sell the land, Robinson worries that the land is vulnerable if subsequent generations become more detached.

“Land is wealth, and it’s generational,” says Robinson. “But if you don’t understand that you have wealth, and if your mind sees the land as a negative because of our history with slavery, then you don’t want to have anything to do with it.”

He says he’s trying to “reprogram” his family’s thinking.

“To show them this land is not negative. That this is so positive,” he says. “This land will sustain your family for generations, even long after you’re gone.”

DEBBIE WEINGARTEN is a freelance writer based in Tucson, Arizona. MIKE KANE is a Seattle-based freelance photographer and videographer.

In 2013, after a 30-year career in the military, Tim Robinson Jr. returned to his family’s land. He now leases 10.5 acres of it and farms it with his dad, Tim Robinson Sr. They currently farm jalapeño peppers, okra and muscadine grapes.

TIM ROBINSON JR.
FARMER

This land will sustain your family for generations, even long after you’re gone.
The Inland Empire can seem more like a lost kingdom, hidden in the smog-filled shadow cast by neighboring Los Angeles. But within that shadow is a place with its own identity and a story the rest of the nation should hear.

It’s a place that’s ground zero for some of the greatest challenges that families face in the 21st century. The Inland Empire’s two counties are packed with low-wage jobs in warehouses that are spreading like clover across the beautiful and arid landscape, also blanketed with pollution from the trains, planes and trucks that fuel that work. The scourge of mass incarceration also thrives in this arid region, which is home to 11 federal, state and county correctional facilities.

But the intersection of jobs that can’t sustain families, pollution that sickens them and a criminal justice system that targets them is also one of the reasons the Inland Empire is a hub for solutions and hope.

Families are at the forefront of solutions here because these issues are literally in their backyards. There are waste sites oozing toxic sludge, school playgrounds that look out over a juvenile detention center and air so polluted that children are sometimes advised not to play outside, according to one organizer.

“This is where things we don’t want, that we don’t want to see are dumped, whether it be prisons, whether it be warehouses, whether it be acid,” says Sheheryar Kaoosji, executive director of the Warehouse Worker Resource Center in Ontario, California. “We are not just going to hide this stuff. We are going to take it on.”

In the Inland Empire, families and grassroots leaders are taking on the nation’s issues, such as wage inequality – only roughly 4 out of 10 jobs pay a living wage here – and the environmental toll of the modern economy. These problems are rawer in these valleys, organizers say, and harder to ignore.
"Everything is multiplied here," one mother says. The Inland Empire is also a place where families, leaders and the region’s issues are organically connected. How families in the Inland Empire most impacted by these issues are working together for solutions across politics, organizational turf, egos, race and ethnicity holds lessons for communities around the country.

Despite these lessons, the Inland Empire — contained within San Bernardino and Riverside counties — is often overlooked. Philanthropy has largely ignored this region, and few outside California even know its name. The nation overlooks the region at its peril though, since it likely holds keys to a healthier and more sustainable future.

It also holds hope for a more equitable one. "This whole idea of the Inland Empire, or the Inland Valley, becomes for us, and for me in particular, the Beloved Community, what Dr. King talked about in the ‘60s," the Rev. Samuel Casey, founder of Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE) in San Bernardino, says. "It is empowering people to use their agency to bring about solutions where they live, work and worship, because that is really the vision of COPE. It’s the vision of COPE to empower people to make the change."

Meet the families and organizers who are working together to drive that change and clear the clouds that threaten their homes and region.

THE LEGACY OF STRINGFELLOW ACID PITS

The history of the Inland Empire didn’t begin at Stringfellow Acid Pits, but a long-running story of its fight for environmental justice did. Forty years ago, a community rose up to fight toxic waste flowing from the pits. It took nearly three decades, but families won, though the cleanup will take hundreds of years, and the pits. It took nearly three decades, but families won, the nation’s interest rose up to fight toxic waste flowing from the pits. It took nearly three decades, but families won, the nation’s interest rose up to fight toxic waste flowing from the pits. It took nearly three decades, but families won, the nation’s interest rose up to fight toxic waste flowing from the pits.

Today, the region’s families are still battling toxic dumps and new threats that emerged as the region became a logistical hub for e-commerce: pollution from trucks, trains and planes, as well as warehouses that pay enough to sustain families, offer benefits and go to those from the most-impacted communities.

TODAY’S FIGHT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Allen Hernandez is at the front of the environmental fight. He has watched warehouses turn parts of his hometown of South Fontana into near ghost towns. At the same time, fumes and pollutants coated his lungs, inflaming and perhaps even causing his asthma.

Now, his niece struggles with the same asthma and breathed the same polluted air in San Bernardino County, which has California’s highest rate of asthma in both children and adults.

There has been plenty of progress. Years ago, for example, five organizers successfully fought to remove natural gas tanks buried near their homes. But since then, four of the five women have passed away from cancer. They lived in a cancer cluster, a community identified with unusually high incidences of that disease, according to CCAEJ.

"What makes the Inland Empire unique to the rest of the country is that our problems are very intense," Hernandez writes. "We have the worst smog in the country and have had it for many years now. We are the warehouse capital of the country, which has really exasperated our unemployment and underemployment issues in the region. This is why we have approached our organizing in an inclusive way that takes into consideration environmental justice, economic justice and social justice for communities.

He adds that CCAEJ works on solutions that move trucks to zero-emissions and warehouse equipment to 100-percent electric, as well as fighting for jobs in those warehouses that pay enough to sustain families, offer benefits and go to those from the most-impacted communities.

CHALLENGING MASS INCARCERATION

The Rev. Samuel Casey moved to the Inland Empire nearly 30 years ago, part of the second of three major migrations of Black families from South Los Angeles. These families moved because of violence exacted on their communities by the War on Drugs, the city’s housing crisis and the wake of the Rodney King Uprising. Today, Casey is still inspired by the power of communities of color to challenge systems of mass incarceration, and by the work at COPE.

“Our story is really challenging the proliferation of prisons and what they both mean to the exploitation of people and resources in the region and the denial of access and opportunity,” Casey says. It means “rethinking public safety and accountability, changing the narrative of how we engage public safety, not always looking at the punishment, and leading the nation in how we responsibly and redemptively lead change.”

It’s a national conversation, and one where COPE belongs. The organization is breaking the school-to-prison pipeline, improving educational outcomes for Black students, engaging voters, expanding and improving re-entry programs for returning citizens and protecting and revitalizing their communities.

“We have got to change the narrative around how we view poor people because we are all part of one community,” Casey says. “We believe in the principle of ‘Ubuntu,’ which means, ‘I am because we are.’"
RAISING FAMILIES AMID POLLUTION AND FREIGHT

The prison-industrial complex permeates the Inland Empire, perhaps nowhere more starkly than at San Bernardino’s Pacific High School. As students leave school, they can see a maximum-security juvenile detention center just across the street. At recess, Roger Anton Elementary School students look out at that center from their playground.

The prison’s proximity sends these students a chilling message. “When I am getting out of school, if I don’t succeed, you have a place already lined up for me,” COPE’s Casey says. “There is really no degree of separation.”

YOUR OWN VOICE

At the heart of success at COPE, and in much of the Inland Empire, are people who have lived the issues they are working on.

Demita Burgess, who leads COPE’s civic engagement work, knows firsthand what it means to return from incarceration. She works with teams of 20 to 40 staff members, many of whom had experiences with the prison system. They work phone banks and face-to-face in the community, talking with families about issues that affect them, such as reforming local schools and getting out to vote.

“Anytime you have more information you can use for the better of yourself, that’s a good thing,” Burgess, who has worked at COPE for nearly a decade, says. “We are trying to get people in the community to be advocates [for] themselves, so they have their own voice.”

FREIGHT YARDS AND LOW WAGES

Sitting fewer than 100 miles from the Port of Los Angeles, one of the nation’s busiest ports, the Inland Empire is home to perhaps the world’s largest concentration of warehousing and logistics, supporting massive multinational corporations. But this growth hasn’t flooded the region with good-paying jobs. Instead, only about 4 out of every 10 jobs pay enough to support a family, the University of California at Riverside’s Center for Social Innovation reports.

NEIGHBORHOODS CONSUMED BY WAREHOUSES

Within the Inland Empire, the appetite for new warehouses can seem insatiable. Developers are consuming whole neighborhoods to make way for more warehouse capacity. Inside those warehouses, workers cite a long list of hazards, from stifling heat to unsustainable work rates.
PAUL NYHAN is the storytelling and partnership manager, and ELIZABETH POSEY is the program officer for the West at Marguerite Casey Foundation.

AMAZON

The leader of modern commerce, retail behemoth Amazon, sits in the midst of all of this growth, its warehouses sprawling over the valley floor. “If you blink, there is an Amazon warehouse,” Casey says.

WORKING TOGETHER

Families and community leaders know they can’t solve the Inland Empire’s problems alone. The region’s challenges – the pollution, proliferation of low-wage jobs and spread of the prison-industrial complex – are all connected, the Rev. Samuel Casey says. “If we are talking about environmental justice, environmental justice is more than toxic sites, it is more than warehouses,” Casey says. “Environmental justice is the entire environment. Poverty lends itself to no access, no access to a quality education, a living wage … then it continues to perpetuate the cycle.”

COMMUNITIES ARE FIGHTING BACK

Nadia Solis urged public officials to listen to families who live and work in the region at a recent board meeting of the Inland Valley Development Agency. Better-paying jobs and cleaner transportation need to be part of any new air cargo hub. “There is this concept of power, and they see some people who have it and some people who don’t,” Solis, a CCAEJ volunteer and student at nearby Loma Linda University, says later. “There is a lot of work to be done … I see a lot of progress in regards to that. People are starting to wake up.”

A FAIR SHARE

These families are not fighting the new warehouses and economic growth. They are fighting for a fair share of growth that doesn’t threaten their environment and health.

“We understand how important our region is,” Sheheryar Kaoosji, executive director of the Warehouse Worker Resource Center, says. “It’s very important for the way our economy operates. We are organizing and demanding that our communities be valued on our productivity. We are doing the work, and we are not getting benefits, and we are doing something about it. We are fighting for a fair share.”

Today, for example, a coalition is working to ensure that a proposed air logistics hub – one that could handle up to 24 flights a day, according to the Inland Coalition for Sustainable Goods Movement – is developed with input from workers and families. If they can get this approach right in the Inland Empire, their work can help get it right at warehouses and logistics hubs around the country.

It’s “not this one project. We want a standard across the industry,” Kaoosji adds.

HOPE, POWER AND CHANGE

“In the end, the community is the expert, not the developers, because the community is the one who lives here, takes care of the land, works in this place, and in the end, the community is going to bring the future,” Gabriela Mendez, a youth organizer for CCAEJ, says. “I think there is still hope. I think hope is the most powerful thing you can have, because without hope there is no change.”

“A FAIR SHARE

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It’s “not this one project. We want a standard across the industry,” Kaoosji adds.

HOPE, POWER AND CHANGE

“In the end, the community is the expert, not the developers, because the community is the one who lives here, takes care of the land, works in this place, and in the end, the community is going to bring the future,” Gabriela Mendez, a youth organizer for CCAEJ, says. “I think there is still hope. I think hope is the most powerful thing you can have, because without hope there is no change.”

PAUL NYHAN is the storytelling and partnership manager, and ELIZABETH POSEY is the program officer for the West at Marguerite Casey Foundation.
The Equal Justice Initiative has brought stories of the victims of lynching to life in a painfully graphic yet artfully constructed memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice not only places the lynching of African Americans in the proper context of Black and American history, it serves as a reminder that, to echo sentiments of Mamie Till-Mobley, shining a light on injustice is something all Americans must do.
Marguerite Casey Foundation commemorated Black History Month in February by experiencing the lynching memorial through the eyes of two Alabama activists.

The term is said to have derived from the name of Charles Lynch, a Virginia planter and politician who formed a makeshift band of vigilantes to punish loyalists during the American Revolution. But the practice was popularized in the South with senseless killings of African Americans.

Scott Douglas is executive director of Greater Birmingham Ministries, a multifaith, multicultural organization that advocates for policies to help improve the lives of low-income families.

Kimble Forrister is the former executive director of Alabama Arise, a nonpartisan coalition of organizations and congregations that help low-income residents advocate for equitable state policies.

This coming together of those two leaders to discuss race, equity and the memorial reflects the Foundation’s values and longstanding, philanthropic commitment to families, social progress and dignity.

The Foundation stands with communities in the South to create space for the poor and families of color to elevate voices and views so gruesome acts such as lynching are remembered, taught and understood –
and so that racism is confronted.

As part of this multimedia report, the Foundation produced a special video, “A Light on Injustice: A Talk With Two Alabama Activists.” To view the video, please visit: https://caseygrants.org/en/v/a-light-on-injustice-a-talk-with-two-alabama-activists/

JOE BURRIS is Marguerite Casey Foundation’s program officer for the South. MIKE KANE is a Seattle-based freelance photographer and videographer.
America’s Family Album: Seeing the Unseen is a series of photo essays focused on our nation’s families and communities that are hidden, misunderstood, misrepresented, ignored or forgotten. At a time when it’s hard to see what unites us, we need to see all of our nation’s families. This project explores what family truly means in America, revealing the richness of our collective identity.

RIO GRANDE VALLEY, Texas — Carlos, a 12-year-old middle-school student, waits alone for over an hour outside his locked house. Then his cousins and siblings start trickling in from elementary school and high school, and Carlos’ mother Marta drives up with groceries. She also brings his two youngest brothers, four-year-old Diego and little Raul, just four months old.

In all, 11 other children will join Carlos at the small, four-room house leased in a colonia in the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. The early-evening sun bakes the westward face of the house, keeping the front door open and the kids on the move while Marta prepares tostadas for dinner. You might think that 12 children running through a house would indicate a birthday party or some other special occasion, but this has been the scene every day for the past several weeks.

The 12 children are from three families, and they’ve been living together — doubling and tripling up in beds and on the couch at night — ever since their parents were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. Carlos’ dad, uncle and two aunts were detained within the last four months, and they’ll likely be deported for immigration-related infractions. That leaves only Marta to keep the kids fed, in school and happy.

This is life on the border. This is an American family.
Marguerite Casey Foundation has commissioned this series, “America’s Family Album: Seeing the Unseen,” by photographer MIKE KANE. Kane is based in Seattle.
Gentrification is a process of exclusion and displacement. Not simply an individual process where people with money and resources move to poor communities, it is also a system that leaves the door open to investors who are attempting to profit.

This is what was explained by Norma Rios Sierra, a mother and president of Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), a community organization of families in Chicago who are attempting to fight for housing opportunities and against gentrification.

"I grew up in Logan Square," Rios Sierra said over the phone. "It has always been a community-based area. We all know each other, and our children always played together."

One sign of success among families who are trying to improve their quality of life is purchasing a home and building community. Homeownership allows a higher level of security and stability, but most of all, it creates the opportunity for people to pass property on to their children. For decades, homeownership has been central to the American dream for thousands of families.

"Our community has always had problems," Rios Sierra said. "But first and foremost, it was safe for our families. We took care of one another, and there was a sense of belonging."

Rios Sierra has lived in this community for several decades, and her family has owned their home for almost 30 years. They’ve had the chance to establish a social network that cannot be recreated just anywhere – something that cannot be bought with luxury apartments and that doesn’t exist without strong roots.

This sense of community, residents say, is being threatened and ripped apart through gentrification. According to local activists, cash purchase of low-cost housing and quick remodeling, or ‘flipping,’ is earning investors a lot of money – but at what cost?

"It is hard for families to make ends meet and cover basic expenses," Rios Sierra said. "Property taxes go up, and salaries stay low. On top of that, our friends and neighbors have been forced to leave this area."

According to census reports, between...
2000 and 2014, over 19,200 Latino residents moved—a reduction of 35.6 percent; the number of African American residents were reduced by 8.2 percent. Additionally, according to LSNA, a surge in development has resulted in the building of 1,000 luxury units in 2017, another of the main reasons for the increase in rents and expenses.

The exodus of thousands of families has left properties vacant and open for investors. Those vacant properties have created an opportunity for those who are searching for an answer to the housing crisis.

"Investors paying cash can purchase a property in a couple of weeks. It takes no less than a month for a typical family to obtain a basic loan," said Jennie Fronczack, the director of development for Chicago-based LUCHA, an organization that seeks to create a community land trust. "This is a model designed to ensure that the community maintains control over the lands and that the wealth and earnings are returned to the community."

It is a model of trust and collective earnings.

"The community becomes the owner of the lands, but the agency can sell the houses and maintain prices in balance with the needs of local families," Fronczack said.

These houses are sold directly to low-income families who qualify for loans. They sell them at competitive market prices—but can have control over who purchases them, and in conjunction with the city and the government, they can impose regulations as to what they can do with the properties.

This means that an investor who seeks only to sell the house to profit will not qualify, and it would be designated specifically for families.

Juan Arrieta grew up in Logan Square, and he has been directly involved in the creation of the trust. He remembers the first demonstration he participated in: "Emmet Street Affordable Housing March," where they marched along with local Chicago organizations because investors sought to convert a parking lot into luxury apartments. LSNA proposed converting the lot into low-income housing for families.

"This demonstration helped us undertake a local survey, where we found that 85 percent of the community supports the building of accessible housing," said Arrieta. "People want to stay here. They don't want to leave."

Arrieta married recently, and with such high prices, he does not see an opportunity to buy a house.

"The trust will be designed to keep families together," he said. "My wife and I want to buy here, in our community. Together, as a community, we can achieve it."

Marguerite Casey Foundation co-published this story, which originally appeared in La Raza, as part of its ongoing partnership with ImpreMedia, a national media organization that includes: La Opinión, in Los Angeles; La Raza in Chicago; El Diario in New York City; and La Prensa in Orlando. ARMANDO CARMONA wrote this for La Raza.
Movement Building Report

"The Foundation has provided us with the critical support necessary to expand our operations and achieve outcomes that empower and protect our communities."
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta

• Building and Engaging Bases: More than 2.1 million members built relationships with organizations in 2017 - up 170 percent since 2015. Members learned about core issues and how to be powerful advocates for change.
• Building Leaders and Opportunities: Community members serve on the boards of roughly two-thirds of grantees, driving strategies from positions of power. This places families and their issues at the center of the work and even opens doors to other work at organizations.
• Building Strong Infrastructure: With the Foundation’s consistent, sizable, general-operating support, organizations increasingly run operating surpluses – 71 percent ran a surplus in 2017. Organizations know how to best spend resources in their communities, and general-operating support allows them to spend effectively, leading to greater financial stability.

"Our biggest lesson learned is the importance of building more grassroots leaders from the communities we serve."
Alabama Institute for Social Justice

• Developing Skills: Training up new leaders means meeting individuals where they are and helping them figure out how to get where they want to be. Grantees report helping future leaders develop skills in community organizing, policy advocacy and issue education, often through a formal leadership training curriculum.
• Developing a Movement: Grantees supported over 215,000 leaders from 2015 to 2017 – individuals better able to conduct outreach, tell their stories to lawmakers and strategize about how to pass policies that will change their lives for the better.
• Developing Families: Grantees are intentionally involving younger people within the leadership process to ensure that when baby boomers are ready to transition out, the next generation is already in place with the skills and commitment necessary to sustain the work.

"The ability to network, think and strategize with other grantees through the Chicago Equal Voice Network has helped us keep a pulse on other organizations and streamline efforts."
BYP100 Education Fund

• Collaborative Power: We support regional collective action through the creation and funding of Equal Voice networks, and those networks are paying off. From 2015 through 2017, more than three-quarters of grantees pursued funding opportunities together. Instead of focusing on scarcity of resources, Equal Voice networks emphasize the power of collaboration.
• Benefits of Collaboration: Equal Voice networks provide shared knowledge, expanded capacity for outreach and advocacy, greater political power and more meaningful partnerships with low-income families.

"Even when well-crafted policy is enacted, it doesn’t automatically secure its intended impact unless resources are directed towards proper implementation, enforcement and long-term organizing."
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy

• Offensive and Defensive Policy Work: From 2015 to 2017, grantees split their time between defensive and offensive fights. They blocked policies aimed at destroying social programs while also putting forward bold agendas rooted in improving the lives of vulnerable people.
• After the Vote: Policy fights don’t stop when laws are passed. Grantees stick around to make sure policies are implemented in ways that truly bring about positive changes for families.

"People and circumstances shift, but we can’t get bogged down in what went wrong yesterday if we’re working towards impact. Instead we must be alert and swift to notice new opportunities to progress toward our goal."
United South Broadway Corporation

• Engagement Up: Low-income youth and families face growing threats and uncertainty in today’s shifting political landscape. That’s one reason why civic engagement has steeply increased since 2015.
• Votes Count: From 2015 to 2017, grantees trained over 100,000 people in voter engagement – proactive outreach techniques, voting procedures and issue education – who in turn reached over 15 million voters. Those voters spoke through the ballot box, reimagining what they want their communities to look like.
• Change is Personal: People who take part in family-led movements are empowered to transform their communities. They shed the deeply-entrenched mindset that policies happen to them – not by them – while also learning about ways to stand up for what they care about.

This report examines our grantmaking in 2017 and a cluster of movement building progress from 2015 through 2017. Marguerite Casey Foundation uses a framework of five indicators to assess progress in movement building. Our analysis of these indicators yielded several key takeaways that inform our work going forward.
Marguerite Casey Foundation has been a philanthropic leader on centering organizations that derive their agendas, work, and theory of change directly from communities on the ground. They have led their peers and created more space for funding directly to the ground and prioritizing advocacy and organizing derived from the ground/community.”

A Marguerite Casey Foundation Grantee

Our Opportunity to Grow

We use this survey as an opportunity to step back and reflect on the ways we can improve as a Foundation. In the survey, grantees shared that they want more clarity about the Foundation’s overall goals and strategy. As a Foundation that doesn’t fund by issue or change its strategy with new program officers, we recognize we are unique among funders. We are committed to provide long-term general operating support to cornerstone organizations that are building a movement of low-income families for social and economic justice.

We also understand that non-monetary support helps strengthen organizational infrastructure. To further support grantees, we are providing financial analysis sessions with program officers to assist organizations in deepening their understanding of how we assess financial sustainability. We are committed to providing tools and resources to help and we invite you to visit the “What We Are Learning” page on our website.

Marguerite Casey Foundation has regularly engaged CEP to conduct this survey over 13 years. We appreciate this opportunity to hear grantee feedback, which we take seriously. Our 2019 report, based on an independent and anonymous survey, showed that grantees view MCF as having a strong positive impact on their fields and on public policy. MCF continues to receive higher-than-typical ratings for our understanding of grantees’ contexts.

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Grantee Perception Report

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Each year, Marguerite Casey Foundation honors “America’s Next Leaders,” who are the recipients of the Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty Leadership Award. The award honors young people who, in the spirit of Sargent Shriver, have demonstrated a deep commitment to social justice and have transformed that commitment into effective action across an array of issues.

Marguerite Casey Foundation supports and promotes “America’s Next Leaders” in order to recognize their resolve and courage, and to help them build a network that will foster their individual and collective work moving forward.

Each year, Marguerite Casey Foundation board members meet with these young people to talk about their social justice work, lives, communities and plans for the future.

Read more about these incredible young people and their accomplishments at caseygrants.org.

Photos by Mike Kane
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