



# 2010

Dear LAPD attached folk.

Here's the up-date on what we've been up to.

LAPD is a pip-squeak organization, light on our feet. We work locally but like a flying maple seed propeller, our ideas drift all over the place. It doesn't hurt that we're located at one of the most important social incubators around: LA's Skid Row.

This newsletter features the voices of LAPD'ers, former LAPD'ers and some of our pals who've come from other parts of the world to work with us. Read on -and if you can, make a donation via paypal or in the mail.

Thank you.  
John Malpede



## State of Incarceration

Los Angeles Poverty Department has spent much of 2010 making 'State of Incarceration'. The project combines theater, installation and public education to examine the personal and social costs of incarceration in the US. Project events

started with a panel discussion about the effects of California's parole reform on parolees. As we built the performance, State of Incarceration, we performed it in Skid Row, in parolee re-entry programs in the San Fernando Valley and LA and in 5 performance events at the BOX gallery that took place within a wall-to-wall prison bunk-bed installation. In the BOX's basement we showed images charting the expansion of the prison population and new prison construction in California over the past 3 decades and the 21 year and counting history of the lawsuit challenging the quality of the health service in the state's over-crowded prisons. We invited our audience to read one page of the 184-page lawsuit. We'll continue doing this until all pages are filmed. The resulting 5+ hour film will be part of the project. In December LAPD performed and conducted a workshop for the students of Chuco Justice High School in Inglewood. The finished State of Incarceration will premiere at Highways on Jan. 28 and 29, 2011.

**YOUR SUPPORT  
OF LAPD  
IS GREATLY  
APPRECIATED**

LAPD is a 501(c)3 non-profit and your donation is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Mail contributions to:

LAPD  
PO Box 26190  
Los Angeles CA 90026

Or donate via Pay Pal on  
lapovertydept.org.

**THANK YOU !**



Riccardo Porter

**Riccardo Porter**, LAPD core member, and a significant contributor as a writer and actor in the project, reports:

State of Incarceration, a play about prison life from the homeless perspective, begins with a song, "History of Incarceration" and ends in song. A group of actors, mostly from the Skid Row area, gather in a tight circle to sing about incarceration; a subject that has affected the lives of many in Skid Row and the rest of the city and country. State of Incarceration amounts to a state of mind, a culture or social order; one that must be overcome.

A "kite" is a note that gets passed off in jail or prison; State of Incarceration and History of Incarceration are just those messages. Los Angeles doesn't have a sound plan for curbing the plight of recidivism. The LA Poverty Department does its part to address and confront recidivism and hopelessness.

Many residents in Skid Row have no connection with the rest of society: they just operate in an alternative universe, in a continuum. Nothing changes. Pretty buildings go up all around them, but the poorest segment of the population remains in a paradigm. In the play, State of Incarceration, "Reach out with the longest spoon there is" becomes a mantra of sorts. "Reach out to all the hungry in the universe." Humanity transcends its state of being to reach another point of development; it doesn't seek to have a useless state in place. Helping one another equals reaching a new point.

The other LAPD uses the Safer Cities Initiative to push many homeless out of the development picture. Prison works as a state of mind more than a physical place, in that it becomes a way of life that goes counter to the idea of humanity. Police practices, gangs, drugs and crime eat their way into the flesh of residents creating hopelessness. Hopelessness promotes uselessness. Many have been beaten, arrested, and some killed under the initiative. Solving the problem of homelessness requires something more humane and inclusive.

In the end, what is the state of humanity? "This food is for the ones who were denied food." Of course, incarceration and homelessness aren't the fodder for coffee shops and cafes but they mean life and death in Skid Row and beyond. It makes sense to find out who is throwing babies in the river. Changing minds begins with how things are viewed, done and responded to.

*The largest population of homeless people resides in Skid Row LA, an area the size of a medium college campus. State of Incarceration connects to the Safer Cities Initiative, now in its third year, which led to 27,000 arrests in an area with 14,000 inhabitants of whom roughly a third are homeless; countless numbers go in and out of jail for just being homeless.*



Kevin Michael Key

Susan Flannery of "Bold & Beautiful"

## Prison Bunk Beds by "Bold & Beautiful"

By **Kevin Michael Key**, core member LAPD

Recently, the CBS soap opera, "The Bold and Beautiful", began airing episodes that took place in downtown Los Angeles, on Skid Row. A producer of the show had looked at our webpage and gave us a call. He needed someone to show him around Skid Row for a segment they were shooting down

here. John put him in touch with me and I scheduled a tour of Skid Row for the cast and crew. During that tour many of the stereotypes about Skid Row were put to rest. It quickly became apparent to the creative folks at B&B that in order to properly portray the community and its people they would have to develop a more extensive storyline.

In addition to hiring over 35 residents and LAPD'ers to work as principals and extras, a Skid Row set has been built for future episodes. A Poverty Department member has earned a recurring role as a waitress on the show. And we were dazed and amazed when the Bold & Beautiful set decoration crew searched for, secured and donated, the 30 bunk-beds and 60 mattresses we needed for our "State of Incarceration" production. Most important of all, they have treated the community and the residents of Skid Row with dignity and respect. We thank them for allowing us to help them help our neighbors.



## LET'S GO!

LAPD members went out into the streets and asked the people they met about their hopes, dreams and aspirations. When we came back together we improvised and wrote about our encounters. From this material we created the performance LET'S GO! October 27 performances: 9.30 AM @ UCEPP for Skid Row photography club + Cal Arts students, and 8 PM @ the Central City Community Church.

### Anthony Taylor

When I was first faced with the task of going out into the Skid Row community, I thought: "Hey, can I really go out and talk to people whom I thought didn't want to talk." I thought that I couldn't take the rejection that I was sure that I was gonna take. And I did get a few bad feedbacks but I persevered and I began to meet people who really wanted to share about their hopes and dreams. It was interesting because I could see the sincerity in their eyes and voice. Every emotion was expressed. I began to feel for what we were doing and I even enjoyed hearing that some people have the same dreams that I do.

### Kevin Michael Key

Lets Go! allowed me to interact with my peers in more personal ways than ever before. I had made presumptions and stereotyped men and women just like so many outsiders do, and that was very disturbing for me to learn. I also learned about many folks I thought I knew. The gentle, intelligent homeless guy who has been setting up the seats for the AA meeting in the park for the last 10 years and simply wants to, "serve God"- the tall rangy addicted vet, who's face adorns a huge mural, dreams of being able to forgive himself- the shelter resident who spends most of his days in the library putting together his book of haiku's- the photographer with the expensive equipment who is so exhilarated by his art that he never had to drink or drug, these are the hidden treasures of Skid Row that this project opened up to me. I learned that by engaging in this seemingly perilous yet simple project, I found out some real things, not just about my friends and neighbors, but also about myself.

## Interview with Anthony "Tone Tone" Taylor

by Zoey Sternheim



*"When I first came to the rehearsal at UCEPP I thought, this can't be it... there are people selling drugs outside!" He laughs.*

Despite his doubts whether this was a real theater group, he entered and the more he got into it, the more he saw the deeper meaning. It became of great importance to him, he even ran from work in his break, to participate in the rehearsal. *"I just wanted to act, any kind of theater. First, I didn't even know the message the LAPD was sending out. But it is kind of a big deal... It brings another dimension to it all, the people in the group lived what they talk about."*

Tone Tone is proud to have learnt so much with the LAPD already. It gave him the confidence he could do something. To make theater from nothing, just a five-minute improvisation can lead to so much. And after that, how to write it down. *"I actually have some writing skills!"* Tone Tone says with a smile on his face. And after a while he started to understand this "goofy" group of people. *"I started to feel it. I wanted to be a better person in life. I have been there; I was homeless, on the streets. The LAPD is a platform to act and look at the issues of society. I bring up the best of me."*

And what are the plans for the future? *"I don't care about the money, but I want to be famous. Be a star. And I will be, I know that. My dream? A weekly sitcom, being part of a cast, being on TV regularly. So that people know you. And helping the community, the kids back home and here on Skid Row."*

Will he stay with the LAPD when he is a big star? **HELL YEAH!**

*New LAPD member Tone Tone Taylor acted on his lifelong dream of becoming an actor when he found a flyer for LAPD workshops on the floor of an elevator in Skid Row's Weingart Center.*





# Skid Row and the Cold War

By Floris van Delft

Floris van Delft and Valentijn Fit are members of the PeerGrouP, a theatre working on location in the North of the Netherlands. They came to work with LAPD on the LET'S GO! project and to do research for the Cold War performance project that LAPD is developing over the next two years with PeerGouP.

My research on the Cold War leads me to a string of completely different places. From a professor in political science at UCLA, to the left wing Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. From the Reagan Library to the Titan Missile Museum in Tucson. From the Wende Museum in Culver City to veterans on Skid Row. The Cold War as a topic for research is quite a big one. So I try to focus on different events every time. The Berlin airlift, the Cuban missile crisis, the development of nuclear weapons and the meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan.

Skid Row works like a mirror. While getting to know the people and the neighborhood, you have to deal with all the stereotypes you have in your head. The first evening I came to Skid Row, I saw streets full of potentially violent and definitely crazy people. But then I met the LAPD group, which consists of... the same people I just saw walking around. And during the weeks I worked with them, heard their stories and found out how all these 'crazy' people are part of a community. All my stereotypical thoughts about 'these' type of people were put to the test and failed.

Skid Row gives purpose to the work of LAPD. With so much going on, so much to fight for or against, there's no question why the stories they tell should be told. Prison overcrowding, aggressive policing, real estate fraud, political mistakes. It automatically raises the question of purpose in what I do. With Skid Row LAPD also works as a mirror for me as a theatre maker. It's not that I feel I should do the same kind of work: it's the question why I do what I do.



# Internship Experience

By Vera Lúcia Azinheira Soares

**Vera:** I arrived at LAPD almost 6 months ago. I remember how shy I felt hugging all these people: mostly big black man exchanging jokes and laughing unbelievably loud. I remember how unorganized I thought they were but I especially remember how surprised I felt when one of them looked at me and bossily pointed at the rehearsal floor in a clear sign that I should be there: that I shouldn't be just watching but participating. I was testifying for the first time to the **feeling of ownership** that each LAPDer has about each creation they are part of.

**Sara:** I started working with LAPD in September and I immediately went with LAPDers to the streets of Skid Row to ask people about their "Dreams, Hopes and Aspirations". When I was talking with people in the street I learned that some of them were there because they hadn't made good choices in their lives. But there were others who actually choose to be there, because it is a place where people **accept** each other.

**Zooney:** "I learnt a lot with John and Henriëtte because they let the people be who they are. I used to feel in my school that I had to pressure my actors to do what I wanted them to do, but now I feel that it is so much more important to see who they are, and then work with that, with their **identity**".

**Anne Maïke:** I always was taught to make my rehearsal more structured, with a plan, so I am enjoying seeing how things can work out well with a loose structure and **chaotic working conditions**. I like to be at the rehearsals because I too like to create an open working situation and so this feels familiar to me.

*We are four LAPD interns now: Vera and Sara from Portugal and Anne Maïke and Zooney from the Netherlands. When we interviewed each other it became clear that each one of us pointed out a different ingredient of what we call "the LAPD recipe":*

**Ownership  
Acceptance  
Identity  
Chaotic Working  
Conditions**  
*Mixing these ingredients is risky but it allows spontaneity and the beauty of simple moments.*

# Ron Allen September. 13, 1947 – August 10, 2010



One extraordinary voice, that of Ron Allen, hasn't been silenced cause his words live on, but Ron has left the building.

In 2002 LAPD was going to Detroit to do Agents & Assets. But we didn't have the right situation for the project. Two theater-making friends, Buzz Alexander and Gillian Eaton of the Prison Creative Arts Project, suggested I look up Ron Allen. Well Ron Allen is one of the most amazing human beings ever. Amazing poet, playwright, Buddhist monk, veteran, many years in recovery, wise beyond belief, funny as hell, compassionate dispenser of tough, tough love and creative locomotive till his last conscious moment.

Ron was on dialysis when I met him in '02. That's at least eight years on dialysis three times a week. I got him to come to LA and create an LAPD project, Fried Poetry, in 2006. He liked it here and decided to stay. He did another project with us: he directed his play "My Eyes are the Cage in My Head" in 2008. While in LA 2 of his plays were produced at Theater of Note, and he performed all over town with his poetry / jazz band "Code Zero".

The man was unstoppable, all the while in and out of the hospital struggling with the hydra-headed demon of diabetes. Ron never complained. He never complained. He never complained. Never.

Rick Mantley was a huge part of LAPD when we went to Detroit in 2002. Rickey, who now works and lives in Minneapolis / St Paul, wrote a beautiful poem for Ron that we were able to read at Ron's bedside the day of his death. Thank You Rickey. Thank you Ron.

## JuJu Man At The Gate

You are too much for them  
They stand fearful and trembling when they see you coming  
You hurl more fire, a backwash, than what spikes the entrance to the lair of that fallen angel  
You drip copiously with milk and honey and Cajun spices  
with more wax than the sun can make malleable  
You have more steel than they built the city of Detroit with  
And none of the plastic, the petroleum distillate they used to cheapen their dreams  
Those pearly gates will tarnish and turn into the dullness of zinc at your touch  
Copper eyes, brillo hair, voodoo voice, cracking your whips  
Words that left blood streaks, venomous snakes and sadness in their wake  
At other times you celebrated, you conjured, you danced  
And we moved when you said don't stand still if you must die then be possessed  
Abandon your senses you exhorted and we did  
We strutted like wild men and women and children when seized by the loa  
Oh, Mama, we cried, oh Vaudon  
Dis here Poetry man told us not to look back for fear of footsteps  
The Music Man has unbound our feet, our toes, unleashed our dust devils  
A Master of Ceremonies, a daring MC, has taken control of this circus  
Yet he did go gentle, but not without a quiet battle  
He slipped away behind the closed door before it was forced open  
Just as we were starting to go into a frenzy  
Wish him peace when they launch the funeral pyre  
Let his ashes mix with the muddy waters of the Ganges  
So that others will taste him and swallow him and choke on him  
Nirvana will claim him like a fragrance, molecular and clinging  
We will never be rid of, not ever again

To the indomitable spirit and monumental legacy of Ron Allen

Rickey C. Mantley



# MAKING THE CASE FOR SKID ROW CULTURE

In January John Malpede (LA Poverty Department) and Maria Rosario Jackson (Urban Institute) presented their study, commissioned by the Americans for the Arts: **“Making The Case For Skid Row Culture”** to more than 60 residents, artists and organizations at the Japanese American Cultural Community Center. The paper, a result of interviews of focus group meetings with community residents and organizational representatives, found that culture in Skid Row comes from the ground up and is often initiated by residents and resident driven initiatives. The pdf is available on our website and on the website of Americans for the Arts: [www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/pdf/reading\\_room/LAPD.pdf](http://www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/pdf/reading_room/LAPD.pdf)



The paper has proven to be a useful tool for residents and community organizations to call attention to the fact that there's a vibrant creative community on Skid Row. LAPD is continuing to create events that call attention to this vibrancy. **July 22, we presented a panel discussion “Reweaving The Social Fabric Of Skid Row” in the ALOUD series of the Public Library.** The panel consisted of social and artistic innovators who have contributed to weaving the social fabric of Skid Row and a conversation about LAPD's performance project 'Walk the Talk' that chronicles the emergence of a permanent community in what has been perceived as a transient Skid Row. The panel was moderated by Maria Rosario Jackson and included panelists: Clyde Casey (Another Planet), Pete White (LA Community Action Network), Jeff Dietrich (LA Catholic Worker), John Malpede and Manuel Campito (Skid Row 3 on 3 basketball).



On Dec. 4: we produced a **‘Festival For All Skid Row Artists’** in Gladys Park. The festival was designed to bring together the artists of Skid Row – known and unknown – and to archive samples of their work, while collecting the data necessary to make the case for Skid Row culture. We set up a booth in Gladys Park where all Skid Row artists could self-identify and sign-in and we took pictures of their work and filmed and recorded their performances. We logged contact information including where and how Skid Row artists are making their art and we will make this info available to the Skid Row community. So far, we have collected data of more than 100 Skid Row artists and we handed “menacing cool” shades to all: giving a menacing-cool face to the creative community of Skid Row.

## Upcoming in 2011

- State of Incarceration  
January 28 & 29, 8:30 PM
- Highways in Santa Monica  
November VSA Arts of New Mexico
- 2012: Tucson-PIMA Arts Council, Arizona  
and The Queens Museum, NY, NY.
- Walk the Talk
- Festival For All Skid Row Artists
- Agentes y Activos in Nicaragua
- Cold War: a collaboration between Peer-Group and LAPD



Photography by Henriëtte Brouwers, Anne Maike Mertens and KevinMichael Key