

EDITORIAL

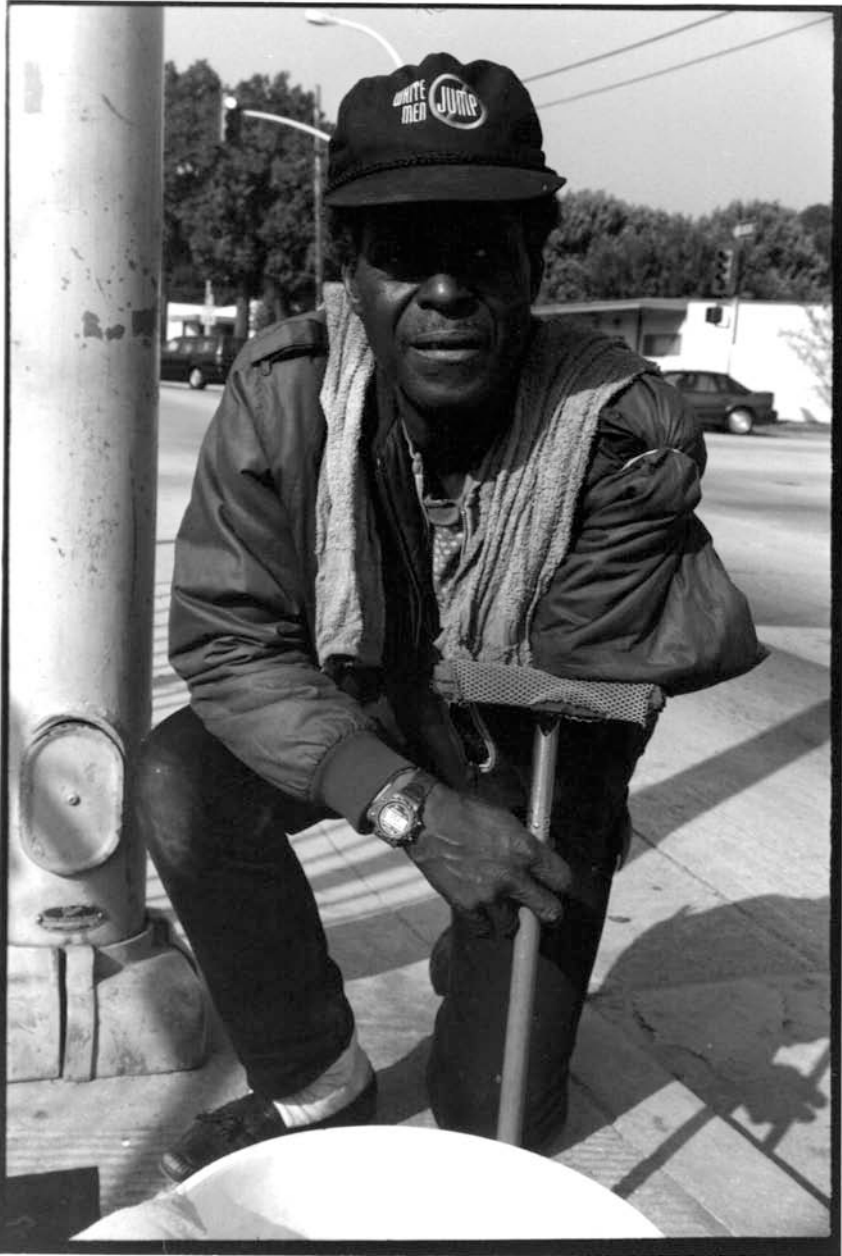
“Give me your money,” were the last words that John Theodore Stacks heard one memorable summer night. With barely enough time to reach into his pockets and give the man what he asked for, Stacks was looking down the barrel of a shotgun, and then BOOM! He felt cold. In and out of consciousness. Hands all over his body. The gunman prowling through his pockets, then, the paramedic administering care, calling out, “Sir, can you hear me? What’s your name? Stay with us.”

John Theodore Stacks stands on the corner of Pasadena Avenue and Del Mar Boulevard. Stacks is rather unimposing but quite evident. He stands across the street from a carwash alongside the 101 Freeway with a bucket, a squeegee, wash-clothes, cleaners, and a sign that says, *John Sez: “I’ll Wash Windows.”* With one arm and a strong will, John T. Stacks washes many of our windows, as he is part of a growing work force consisting of those who have found themselves subjected to hard times.

The eldest boy of twelve children, four brothers and seven sisters--all from the same two parents, John Theodore Stacks (born John Theodore Bearden, though prefers to go by the name Stacks for reasons of his own) was born in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, on May 29, 1949. After a failed attempt to join the Marines, lying about his age, he acquired his first job at the age of fifteen, parking cars after school from 4pm-1am. He worked both to help his family and escape a troubled household. After high school he went to work for a local steel mill, where he was employed making bomb casings. He worked as a steel hand for the next two years before being employed by the *Tip Top Bread Company*, where he drove a truck until that one life-changing night in 1975.

Stacks had just finished his rounds and was returning to the loading docks when he describes, “Some young, bright, intelligent kid shoved a shot gun in my face and robbed me, but not before he felt it necessary to pull the trigger.” Seventeen days in intensive care, twenty-six operations, and fourteen blood transfusions left Stacks without an arm and shotgun pellets permanently lodged in his brow and bridge of his nose. He was on his second marriage and the coming difficulties made his marriage unsustainable, eventually ending in 1979.

After having been shot, Stacks moved to a new position as book keeper with the company that would soon be bought by *Butter Nut*. After twelve years of employment Stacks was laid-off. Living alone, struggling with depression, and hooked on pain killers, he found work as a telemarketer, even in the midst of his stark reality. Stacks explains, “Let’s be honest.



John Theodore Bearden AKA "Stacks"

PHOTO © Jim Lopez

Who wants to hire an uneducated, one-armed black man?" After several more years of moving from his telemarketing job to selling light bulbs, vacation packages, and IRA's (whatever was selling at the time) Stacks could no longer take another Chicago winter. The pellets lodged in his head would freeze causing painful headaches, which led to an addictive dependency on pain killers and other street drugs. So in the fall of 1991 Stacks headed west for warmer climates. He traveled to Los Angeles, where he knew no one.

The first few months were bleak. No one would hire Stacks and he was down to his last dollar. He heard that Pasadena was a safer community than downtown Los Angeles and Hollywood, and that he might find employment there with the revitalization of Old Town. So he got on the bus and headed for Colorado Boulevard, where he lives to this day.

Stacks did not find any "official" employment, but he did find a small community of people who were receptive to his plight. He found the corner of Pasadena Boulevard and Del Mar Avenue to be busy enough yet not too crowded to be disruptive to the flow of traffic. He started washing automobile windows, not in an imposing manner, working on a donation bases. Stacks explains some people give food, clothes, others give money. "A job is a job. And this job has taught me about life. It gives me incentive to make it on my own, even in the face of extreme difficulties. I am not in the streets asking for a handout or causing trouble. I want to offer my services to anyone who calls me over to do a job for them. This job occupies my time, keeps me from depression and self-pity. It not easy and I'm not getting rich, but I am paying my way, living at the Green Street Motel. I get up every day, put my roller blades on and make my way to this corner, where I feel like a king. People know me and I am appreciated."

I have known John T. Stacks since 1998 meeting him on his corner, where he works to this day contributing to the economy and carving out his character in this time and history. Though his occupation is not substantiated by the Employment Office it is work, which is rooted in the fabric of capitalism: the person who goes out and creates their own job despite disapproval. Many others collect recyclable products (I call them "Ecological Environmental Workers"), play instruments and "donate" their arts and crafts on the streets, mow lawns, polish shoes, sell their bodies and attention (exchanging sex for money), pan-handling, dish washers, fighting for peace and justice, and countless other freaks in the undocumented service sector field. These are the Underdogs who are making a living as best they can, while at the same time challenging "the Haves", Nobodies who are indeed Somebodies, elucidating the efforts that are still necessary to create equality and value for the so-called "marginalized." They are people determined to not let life beat them down, reminding us of who we are and what we might become as a species.



Sammy Shoeshine
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The REVOLT of the UNDERDOGS issue is dedicated to all those freaks who have ever felt like or consider themselves an UNDERDOG.

Jim Lopez