

From the photographer...

In June 2009, many economists declared the recession officially over. Really? A very large percentage of Americans believe it never ended. Now with the debt ceiling chaos and the stock market falling, the probability of a double-dip recession looms large.

Politicians, pundits and policymakers seem out of touch with the consequences of the current economic crisis. It's not surprising since the average net worth of members of the Senate is \$13.4 million and \$4.9 million for members of the House, according to the latest data available from the Center for Responsive Politics. Those who walk the marbled hallways of power on Capitol Hill are supposed to come from and represent ordinary citizens. But there is a disconnect; their constituents in the nation's Capitol and across the country are living a different reality.

As a *Washington Post* photographer many of my story assignments, although not directly related to the economy, seem continually to circle back to the problems faced by Americans struggling to make ends meet. Whether photographing watermen on the Chesapeake Bay trying to eke out a living in the dying oyster industry or a mother of four worried about how cuts to Head Start will affect her family, it's clear the recession has not ended for average Americans.

Katherine Frey  
August 29, 2011

About Katherine Frey

*Washington Post* photographer Katherine Frey began life in a whirlwind. Born in 1961, she had lived in four states by the time she was 5. She believes the early transient lifestyle instilled a sense of adventure and curiosity about the world.

As an undergraduate at the University of La Verne, Katherine was encouraged to practice her photography and went on to become Photography Editor for *La Verne Magazine*. She was hired as a photography intern at the *Ontario Daily Report* before it merged with the *Pomona Progress Bulletin* to become the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*. Several weeks into the internship the paper hired her to fill a newly created post, thus launching her career as a photojournalist. She went on to work at the *Orange County Register* in Santa Ana, California, and later the *Journal Newspapers* in the Washington, D.C. suburbs before joining the *Washington Post* in 2006.

Katherine's love of photography and capturing the human condition has never diminished. It informs her creativity and impels her to work chronicling the lives of ordinary people, all of who have extraordinary stories to share.

Reflecting on the Pictures

Elizabeth Zwerling, Associate Professor of Journalism

What is the human toll of our “Great Recession”?

The diverse and poignant images of photojournalist Katherine Frey’s “American Dream” offer some insight.

Set in the backyard of Congress and the Pentagon, her images show better than words could explain, the recession’s emotional toll. Weary suffering, along with precarious hope are evident in many of the photos.

From the underemployed mom’s stress at wondering how she will feed her children, to the teenager who has witnessed unimaginable gun violence, to the middle class family forced to give up their historic home. Frey’s exhibit presents a broad cross section of life in these tough times. And it reminds us, in case we needed a reminder, that we are all vulnerable.

Crisp color shots of families bidding temporary and final farewells to soldiers beside scenes of environmental decline, together with rural and urban economic plights make the depth of suffering palpable.

And yet there are messages of hope and good humor. A close-up of dogs – the lively clientele of an anarchist dog-walking business – and several photos of a “High Tea Society,” which offers tea-time gatherings and college prep courses for low income girls remind us that kindness can flourish in tough times.

Reflections on Katherine Frey's "American Dream"

Jason Neidleman, Professor of Political Science

We Americans have become increasingly good at insulating ourselves from the suffering of others. A very small fraction of the population is participating in our two ongoing wars; the government and media obligingly protect us from unsettling pictures from those wars; and our increasingly privatized, self-directed engagement with the news media enables us to hear and see only what we want. Other than senior citizens, most Americans don't even read the newspaper anymore or watch the nightly news.

Millions of Americans are currently suffering through a great economic crisis. Most of them suffer in silence, as those of us who have escaped relatively unscathed (so far) focus our gaze on our own ambitions and amusements. Katherine Frey's "American Dream" forces us to confront the faces of the economic crisis. Many of Frey's photographs center around the theme of meaningful work—a concept hardly captured by the cold language of employment statistics. Frey reminds us that work is not only about the struggle to make it; it is at least as much about our desire to make a difference. Losing one's livelihood is devastating, but losing one's purpose is even worse.

Katherine Frey's photographs capture the dignity of meaningful work, whether it be at home, in the workplace, or in the armed services. In so doing, Frey simultaneously conveys the burden carried by those who no longer have meaningful work. This is something that many of us who are fortunate enough to have it may prefer to ignore. Thankfully, the work of artists like Katherine Frey forces us to look when we might be tempted to avert our eyes.

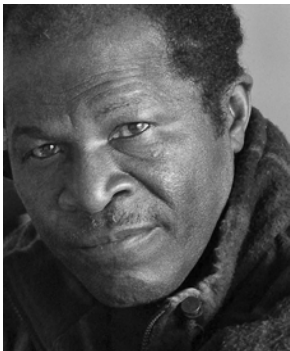
## Captions

### East wall, north end, first panel



GAITHERSBURG, MD - MARCH, 5, 2009

Mohamed Soumah talks with a representative from his cell phone company trying to buy some time before they terminate his service. He owes nearly \$4,000 in utility bills and may be evicted from his garden apartment where he has lived for three years. He represents the growing number of Montgomery County's working poor.



GAITHERSBURG, MD - FEBRUARY, 25, 2009

Mohamed Soumah, a security guard, spends his off hours visiting an array of county social services offices to no avail. He and his wife have put most of their possessions in a storage unit and have been living with a mattress on the floor, a couple of lamps and little else. They send their son, Abdulaye, downstairs to practice sleeping overnight with neighbors so that if the county sheriff's office comes to evict them, Abdulaye can stay in his second-grade class at nearby Sequoyah Elementary School.



WASHINGTON, DC - SEPTEMBER, 18, 2006

Shekita McCallister, 16, sports earrings with the name of her dead 2-year-old brother. She joined Peaceholics, an organization aimed at quelling violence in Washington, DC, in hopes of a better life.



WASHINGTON, DC - SEPTEMBER, 3, 2006

Since 1989, the year Monica Watts was born, 6,000 homicides have been recorded in the District. By her count, Watts, at 19, has lost more than a dozen relatives (two brothers) and friends (including a boyfriend) to violence since 2003. With the help of Peaceholics she's striving toward the life she dreams about for herself: the one with a college education, money in her pockets and a home to call her own.

**East wall, second panel**



**TILGHMAN ISLAND, MD - NOVEMBER 3, 2008**

On the first day of oyster season, Shawn Murphy shovels bivalves into a pile onboard the Thomas Clyde, one of the last working boats of its kind. A vast government effort to bring oysters back to the Chesapeake Bay has turned out dismally. Since 1994, state and federal authorities have poured 58 million into rejuvenating the famous bivalves and the centuries-old industry that relies on them. They have succeeded at neither.



**TOLCHESTER, MD - NOVEMBER 3, 2008**

The crew of the Thomas Clyde unloads the day's haul of oysters, 150 bushels, 16 hours after leaving port. A century ago, hundreds of skipjacks plied the Chesapeake Bay, sailing her waters and dragging dredges in search of oysters so lucrative they were called Chesapeake Gold. Now, the skipjacks are victims of the changing times as much as the dwindling oyster population. It just doesn't make much sense to sail big, wooden sailboats to catch fewer and fewer oysters.



**CHESAPEAKE BAY, MD - DECEMBER 3, 2008**

Development along the edge of the bay near Annapolis has contributed to the bay's decline.



**SMITH ISLAND, MD - NOVEMBER 10, 2009**

Smith Island, once a home to watermen and crabbers, is looking to a new industry to help sustain itself: Baking Maryland's official state dessert, Smith Island Cake. The current residents hope the bakery will bring new life back to its economy and perhaps save some of the century old wooden homes that have been abandoned.



**SMITH ISLAND, MD - NOVEMBER 10, 2009**

Donna Smith, a lifelong resident of Smith Island, creates one of the signature cakes that originated on the tiny hamlet, Maryland's only inhabited offshore island in the Chesapeake Bay. "This is the first time in my adult life I've had a winter job, and I'm enjoying it," said Smith, who picks crabs and tends to soft-shell crabs in the summer.



**SMITH ISLAND, MD - NOVEMBER 10, 2009**

Brian Murphy, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, said the bakery is the first project of his new investment firm and "I really think on a revenue basis, we can be a \$1 million business in a year." He rides a golf cart loaded with flour and sugar from the dock to the bakery. Crab pots and a crab shack flank the dock where the biggest current export is the locally harvested crustaceans, a dying industry.

**East wall, third panel**



JESSUP, MD - MARCH 1, 2010

Christine Foote, 33, of Salisbury, MD, makes her way to her job at "Data Entry" as the sun begins to rise at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women. She'll be released from prison April 16 after serving two and a half years of a 10-year sentence for felony theft. She was convicted of stealing more than \$68,000 from her employer, a roofing company in Salisbury. Foote will receive financial advice from Michelle Singletary, a nationally syndicated personal finance columnist, as she reintegrates into society.



ON THE EASTERN SHORE, MD - May 17, 2010

Out of prison a month and without any job prospects, Christine Foote plays with her year-old niece and nephew at the home she shares with her parents. In order to have some income, she will charge her brother and sister to watch their children until she can find full time employment. She said she lost a job opportunity because of her criminal past.



JESSUP, MD - APRIL 9, 2010

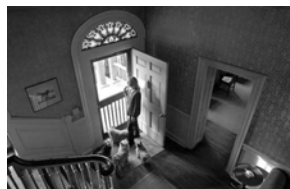
Stephanie Harris goes through a range of emotions hours before her release from the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women. Harris was convicted in 2007 on two counts of possession of heroin and sentenced to eight years in prison where she served 2 1/2 years. The five-time felon said she routinely earned \$3,000 a day selling drugs. But that job landed her in prison. Upon release she knows she has to find legal employment.



BALTIMORE, MD - MAY 18, 2010

Stephanie Harris recently released from prison works as a Clean Sweep Ambassador near Baltimore's Inner Harbor. "I don't mind cleaning the streets," Harris said. "To me, when you go from working seven days a week earning 95 cents to a dollar a day, to making \$7.25 an hour, it's an upgrade."

**East wall, fourth panel**



BERRYVILLE, VA - JANUARY 25, 2011

Fairfield, a house built by Warren Washington, first cousin of George Washington, has been in the Richardson family for 130 years. Robin Richardson-Greenhaulgh who lived in the home till she was 8-years-old is reluctantly putting the colonial estate up for sale because she doesn't have the means to care for the 8,400-square-foot stone mansion.

**West wall, south end, first panel**



WASHINGTON, DC - JUNE 1, 2011

Beau and Oliver are eager to get started on their walk with Diana Vashti who is part of Brighter Days, an eight-person dog walking collective founded on anarchist principles. The group makes decisions by consensus, splits earnings evenly and has a group health insurance plan. They cover for each other on days off and even get paid vacation — seven weeks of it.

**West wall, second panel**



FREDERICK, MD - FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Two Frederick County commissioners chastised women during a budget hearing, suggesting they stay at home and raise their children instead of relying on Head Start. Elizabeth Sprague, 31, is one of those Head Start mothers, feeding her four children (and a friend) black bean burritos, a salad and peaches on “cheap eats” night at her home.



FREDERICK, MD - FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Elizabeth Sprague relaxes with her son, Kian, 5. She is married, but her husband, a disabled Army veteran, left. He visits once a year. Sprague, whose dream is to be a college English professor and teach the classics, has found herself variously on welfare, working at a cosmetics counter and as a bank teller to try to make ends meet.



WASHINGTON, DC - JANUARY 05, 2011

Caroline Frazier's daughter went missing August 2, 2010 and has not been seen since. Frazier is now raising her granddaughter Diamond, 3, in transitional housing after living two years in a DC homeless shelter. She's unable to work due to a disability and cannot afford a car. She rides several buses to shuttle her granddaughter to and from daycare passing the Nation's Capitol en route.



WASHINGTON, DC - JANUARY 10, 2011

On a frigid winter's night, Caroline Frazier stops cars at the intersection where her 18-year-old daughter, Latisha, was last seen. She hopes the “missing person” fliers will help. The day the story was published, police got a break in the case and ruled her daughter's disappearance a homicide. Latisha Frazier's body has never been found.

**West wall, third panel**



WASHINGTON, DC - DECEMBER 19, 2010

Retired D.C. Superior Court judge Mary Terrell launched the High Tea Society in 1997. She takes girls from low-income backgrounds and, each Saturday, gives them college-prep courses and stock market advice as well as expands their cultural awareness.



WASHINGTON, DC - DECEMBER 19, 2010

Girls mentored through The High Tea society launch a business, Tea on Wheels, Sunday, December 19. Brandi Taylor, 17, CEO of the newly created business, serves tea to Gloria Herndon, second from right, who is sitting with the Heussen family – Estelle, left, Maya and Zahra.



WASHINGTON, DC - DECEMBER 19, 2010

Wearing monogrammed aprons, teenagers serve peppermint tea at the inaugural High Tea at the Thomas Law House in Southwest, DC.



WASHINGTON, DC - DECEMBER 19, 2010

Mariessa Terrell sips tea at High Tea put on by students, a cross-section of girls from Northwest to Southeast, who were practicing for their tea-catering venture, Tea on Wheels.



**West wall, fourth panel**



BETHESDA, MD - FEBRUARY 22, 2011

Ashley Bowers enjoys a facial from Amy Huynh at Roxsan Day Spa in White Flint Mall. A group of military wives/caregivers received free manicures, pedicures and facials. These are women whose husbands are recovering from war injuries at Walter Reed, and who rarely get a break from the grind of caring for their husbands and children. Bowers' husband had his lower leg amputated due to injuries he suffered in Iraq.

**West wall, fifth panel**



CLARKSVILLE, TN - APRIL 6, 2011

Seana Arrechaga kneels beside her husband as he lies in his casket. Army SFC Ofren Arrechaga was killed in a firefight in Afghanistan eight days earlier. The 22-year-old widow is lost. She doesn't think she could stay in the Fort Campbell area, where she feels as though she has the word "widow" stamped on her forehead. She also doesn't want to move home to Ohio. "I married Ofren when I was 19," she says. "I don't know how to live in the civilian world." Seana's been a wife and mother. Now she's a single mother who must find a job and create a new future. She has a \$100,000 death gratuity, a one-time non-taxable payment from the military to help her until she finds her way.



HOPKINSVILLE, KY - APRIL 8, 2011

Alston Arrechaga, 3, waits with his half sister Tristan for his father's interment service to begin at the Kentucky Veterans Cemetery West.



NASHVILLE, TN - OCTOBER 26, 2010

Army Capt. Jeff Hinds with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne division says goodbye to his wife, Kitty, in Nashville before he boards a flight back to Afghanistan to what has become a particularly difficult and deadly deployment. Once her husband is back on the war front, Kitty Hinds will resort to e-mail and cell phone calls to stay in touch with him.



FT. CAMPBELL, KY - OCTOBER 26, 2010

Before dawn 8-year-old Jack Hinds waves goodbye to his dad, Army Capt. Jeff Hinds, who was headed back to Afghanistan after a two-week break. The 10-year war has been an emotional and financial drain on military families as well as the nation.