

INDEPENDENTLY PUBLISHED BY THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SINCE 1989

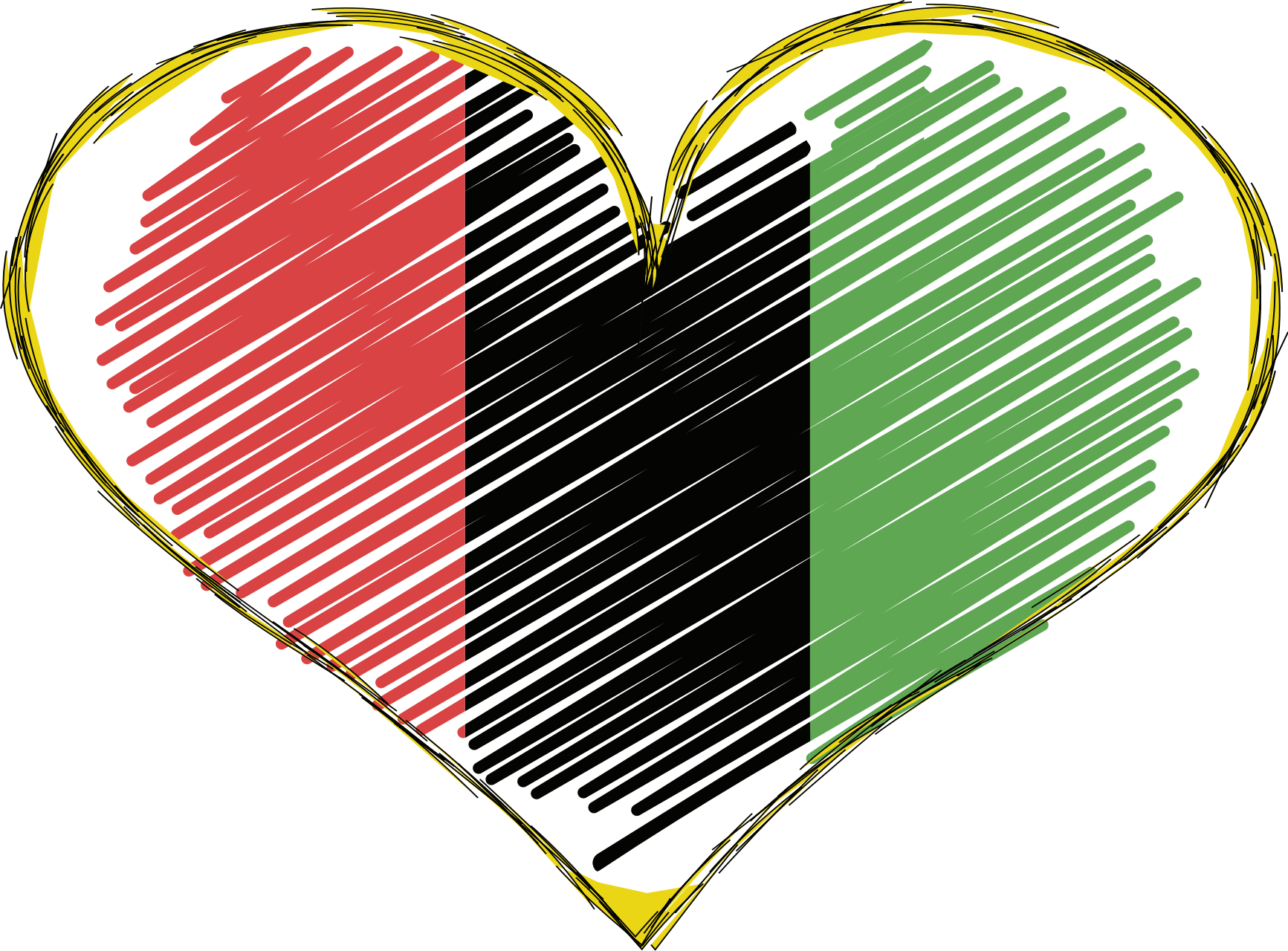


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# STREET SHEET

BEHAVIORAL LEGISLATION	2	OFFICER INVOLVED DOUBLE FATALITY ON MAY 19, 2022	3	'BOUT TIME WE RECOGNIZE JUNETEENTH	4	WITHOUT A HOME: "A GOOD 12, 13 YEARS NOW."	6	STAR: ON THE LONELINESS OF LIVING UNSHELTERED	7
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## JUNE 19TH



### JUNETEENTH FREEDOM DAY

## CELEBRATE

Image by j4p4n courtesy of openclipart.org.

# BEHAVIORAL LEGISLATION

In memory of Luis Temaj Tomas

By YOLONDA CATZALCO

I  
On Tuesday, October 12, 2021  
TV news announced  
That a homeless man  
Had died from his burns  
He had been sleeping  
In his sleeping bag  
The previous Friday  
When someone set his  
Sleeping bag on fire  
At 25th street and South Van Ness  
In the Mission neighborhood  
In San Francisco’s Latinx neighborhood  
He was Latinx.

II  
Yet, local and state government  
Wants to intern and force medicine  
Upon the homeless,  
Governor Newsom with his  
Cares Court in all of California,  
San Francisco Supervisors Mandelman  
And Safaí with their sponsorship of  
CA proposal of “Modernizing California’s  
Behavioral Health Continuum,”  
Which would force internment and  
Forced medication upon the homeless.

III  
The ones that should be forced into  
Mental Health treatment with forced  
Medication and forced treatment  
Are those that have killed the homeless,  
They’re the guilty ones.  
Incarcerate them,  
Investigate those cold-blooded, fascist killings!!!

IV  
Don’t think fascist growing state, local  
Government structure will stop murderous  
Attacks against the homeless.

V  
Raise your voice against Care Court,  
Which is targeting the homeless,  
Raise your voice against SF Supervisors’  
And California elected representatives’  
Anti-homeless legislation.

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STREET SHEET  
GOING !



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## COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition’s work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: they bring their agendas to us.

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## STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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Red Star Black Rose

## WRITING:

We are always looking for new writers to help us spread the word onhestreet! Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

## ARTWORK:

Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for STREET SHEET! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power! Cover dimensions are generally 10x13 but artwork of all sizes are welcome and appreciated!

## PHOTOGRAPHY:

Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you’d like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet! Note that subjects must have consented to being photographed to be included in this paper.

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280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED

# A PREVENTABLE TRAGEDY

## STATEMENT ON OFFICER INVOLVED DOUBLE FATALITY ON MAY 19, 2022

BY COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS, SAN FRANCISCO

Rising rents and a lack of stable, affordable housing have pushed many people into homelessness in San Francisco, like they have in cities up and down the West Coast. Living without stable housing is difficult and traumatizing, and it has long-term health consequences for those forced to endure it. With no door to lock and no safe place to rest, unhoused people live without the fundamental stability and safety a home provides. Unhoused people are disproportionately African American in San Francisco and across the country.

Unhoused people are often vilified, subject to discrimination and derogatory language. Their lives are consistently undervalued by the policy and practices of government institutions, including police departments.

On May 19, two men named Michael MacFhionghain and Rafael Mendoza were engaged in a fight involving sharp-edged weapons. Police shot both men dead. We are deeply saddened by this loss of life, and our sympathies go out to their families and friends.

As part of our work, the Coalition on Homelessness is engaged in protecting the human rights of those forced to sleep rough on our sidewalks and parks. This work has included extensive campaigns to change the San Francisco Police Department's use of force policies, challenging SFPD practices with regards to the unhoused community, and helping to establish the Crisis Intervention Teams that deploy specially trained officers in response to mental health crisis calls.

In review of the nine minutes of police body camera footage of the incident, it appears as if SFPD General Order 5.01 was not followed. Key and relevant sections of the policy include:

**SAFEGUARDING HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY.** *The authority to use force is a serious responsibility given to peace officers by the people who expect them to exercise that authority judiciously and with respect for human rights, dignity and life.*

**ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION.** *Communication with non-compliant subjects is often most effective when officers establish rapport, use the proper voice intonation, ask questions and provide advice to defuse conflict and achieve voluntary compliance before resorting to force options.*

**DE-ESCALATION.** *Officers shall, when feasible, employ de-escalation techniques to decrease the likelihood of*



Police bodycam footage from shooting on May 19, 2022.

*the need to use force during an incident and to increase the likelihood of voluntary compliance. Officers shall when feasible, attempt to understand and consider the possible reasons why a subject may be noncompliant or resisting arrest. A subject may not be capable of understanding the situation because of a medical condition; mental, physical, or hearing impairment; language barrier; drug interaction; or emotional crisis, and have no criminal intent. These situations DGO 5.01 Rev. 12/21/16 2 may not make the subject any less dangerous, but understanding a subject's situation may enable officers to calm the subject and allow officers to use de-escalation techniques while maintaining public and officer safety. Officers who act to de-escalate an incident, which can delay taking a subject into custody, while keeping the public and officers safe, will not be found to have neglected their duty. They will be found to have fulfilled it.*

**PROPORTIONALITY.** *When determining the appropriate level of force, officers shall, when feasible, balance the severity of the offense committed and the level of resistance based on the totality of the circumstances known to or perceived by the officer at the time. It is particularly important that officers apply proportionality and critical decision making when encountering a subject who is armed with a weapon other than a firearm.*

We have the following observations to make:

- De-escalation techniques cannot work if there is no language capacity. In this situation and several others, including those of Thai-speaking chocolate factory worker Pralith Pralourng and unhoused

Mayan resident Luis Gongora Pat, officers unsuccessfully engaged with individuals in behavioral health crises by shouting commands in a language the individuals did not speak. Both of these incidents resulted in the deaths of those experiencing crisis.

- The de-escalation techniques utilized by officers could be radically improved. The officer involved in de-escalation was not using proper voice intonation and instead was shouting, repeatedly trying an assertive technique largely based on issuing orders. There did not appear to be a team looking into who these individuals were or seeing if there was anyone who knew them and could help to establish rapport. Instead, you could hear an officer saying he recently arrested one of the men but could not remember his name. There was no variety in technique—for example changing the officer involved, changing the tenor of voice, asking questions or offering items of assistance, providing helpful choices or refraining from threats. In sum, there were insufficient attempts to reduce the level of intensity.
- One officer tried to build rapport, but he was surrounded by 17 other officers and a lot of talking and noise. The communication from officers was confusing, with multiple officers yelling. This has the opposite of the desired effect and increases the level of intensity.
- The use of a firearm put the victim at risk because of the close proximity of the two individuals. Multiple officers shooting at once also increased the likelihood of a fatality.

### IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?

The Compassionate Alternative Response Team, funded last year by Mayor London Breed, provides an alternative response—but the team would not have been sent on this call, because of the presence of a sharp-edged weapon. However, there is a possibility that CART could have prevented this by engaging in de-escalation earlier in the day, before the situation reached crisis. Unhoused individuals who are worried about a conflict will be able to call CART for assistance, once it is implemented. CART members would be highly trained in mediation techniques.

The reliance on weapons in these situations should be changed. Shields or other objects could have been used to create a barrier between the two men, for example.

While there is no predicting definitively, there are a variety of techniques that officers could have used to improve the de-escalation outcome, such as asking questions, changing the tenor of their voice, and seeking additional information to assist with negotiations. There also did not need to be such a large show of force, which can escalate situations. Officers not actively negotiating should have been out of line of vision.

The deaths of two valuable members of our community is a tragedy that could have been avoided with timely interventions at so many different points in this process. From the city's chronic lack of affordable housing down to the very moment when shots were fired, preventable failures were allowed. We mourn these terrible losses and demand that the city of San Francisco do better. ■

# 'BOUT TIME WE RECOGNIZE JUNETEENTH

By JAZZIE O. GRAY

Juneteenth—also known as Jubilee Day, Freedom Day, Black Independence Day, Emancipation Day and Juneteenth National Independence Day—is the annual commemoration on June 19 of the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the United States. President Biden first officially recognized the federal holiday in 2021, but Juneteenth has been celebrated since 1865. So why did it take so long to acknowledge the freedom of all African Americans in this country nationally? Let's look at its 150-year history and illuminate its importance today.

On January 1, 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved people in the Southern secessionist states of the Confed-

eracy. In parts of Confederate territory, this information was met with resistance, was not enforced due to the lack of presence of Union troops, or did not make it to the region at all. On June 19, 1865, 2,000 Union troops arrived in Texas, the last state of the Confederacy with institutional slavery, to deliver the news of freedom. Union General Gordon Granger delivered General Order Number 3 to 250,000 enslaved people and their enslavers in Galveston, stating:

"The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore

existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor."

As this profound news rang across the state of Texas, reactions from the formerly enslaved varied from astonishment, to joy, to confusion. Some lingered to learn of this new relationship between employer and employee, while those with nowhere to go immediately headed North for better opportunities to reunite their families and enjoy the breath of freedom.

To mark this occasion, the formerly enslaved and their descendants gathered annually to celebrate by hosting barbecues with activities such as rodeos, fishing, praying and public readings from African-American writers. Everyone came

prepared with a traditional dish. Red foods were commonly incorporated because they contrast with the green, brown, and white foods often fed to enslaved people. The color red was also a unifying symbol among Africans and Caribbeans who were shipped through Texas during the slave trade, because all their home countries have the color red in their official flags. People from the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Benin, Togo and the Yoruba of Nigeria place spiritual value on the color red and therefore incorporated red foods such as watermelon, red velvet cake, hibiscus tea, and strawberry pop in honor of their heritage. As traditions continue through time and differ among regions, memories of the past are acknowledged, recognized, and honored by the descendents of enslaved people—but only for those who are aware of this day.

Although more are aware of its existence today, the history and significance of the Juneteenth holiday are not familiar to all Americans, even within African American communities. Some found Juneteenth more recently, in their teenage or adult years. It is often something heard through the grapevine from a family member or friend but never explored until later in life. Many African Americans are "disconnected from their history and culture," says local San Franciscan Danielle Taylor.

Juneteenth is a way of honoring those who have built this country with their blood, sweat, bones and tears. It is a time to "celebrate the freedom of our people," adds Alexis Rodriguez, executive director of the SF Citywide Black Student Union. Celebrating means recognizing a painful history while honoring the contributions African Americans have made to this country. Juneteenth is about reconnecting with ancestral lineage by nurturing the traditions and passing down this heritage to the next generation.

According to Taylor, while it may have taken over 150 years to acknowledge the actual day of Independence for all people in America, "having a day to celebrate our independence and to bring light to our dark history [is one way to] pay homage to the legacy we have now."

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# WHAT DOES JUNETEENTH MEAN TO ME?

By Tracey Mixon

Imagine not knowing that you’ve been freed from slavery because nobody told you. That’s how the Juneteenth holiday got started.

Juneteenth is celebrated in the African American community on June 19 every year. It began as a commemoration of the emancipation of slaves in Texas. It was first recognized in Galveston, Texas, two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Even after Texan slaveholders knew of the proclamation, they continued to use brutality to keep enslaved people submissive.

For me growing up, the only significance of Juneteenth was food, rides at the amusement park and music. Oddly enough, my mother, who attended an all-Black school in the 1930s and ‘40s, never explained it to me, which is surprising because she won first prize in a contest about Negro History. But she was of a generation that didn’t discuss these kinds of things with their children. It was not until far later in life that I truly understood what it was about.

Last year, my daughter and I attended the Juneteenth celebration in Oakland. The celebration was one of the most powerful things that I have ever experienced in my life. For me, there was even more of a sense of



Angela Davis cheers on thousands of demonstrators on Juneteenth June 19, 2020 during a march and motorcycle/bike/car caravan to Oakland City Hall via the Oakland Police Dept to shutdown Port of Oakland. Photo by Peg Hunter.

urgency than usual to attend. It was less than a month after the killing of George Floyd.

I was never taught about Juneteenth during my time in school. Hon-

estly, it wasn’t until last year that I learned about Galveston. This is why I not only educate my daughter, but myself as well. It is up to all of us to learn about this significant event in

American history and to teach others as well. ■

*Originally published in Street Sheet’s June 1, 2021 issue.*

# LYING DOWN AND WAKING UP A SLAVE IN TEXAS

By Pariah A.K.A. Robert Cooper

It’s poetic...  
In Texas, we’re trapped in pits with small windows.  
Inside these cells, we’re funding our own imprisonment;  
the chains are encrypted inside the chips and soup sales.

We’re inside of an identity crisis believing our souls out of favors,  
So we accept the chains;  
believing a greater change will come save us...  
Can you dig that?!?!  
I guess that Willie Lynch Syndrome dies hard in some places.  
Since I’m older now,  
In these younger guys I see my own reflection.

It seems as if the hate for ourselves is baked in  
Perhaps it takes breaking one down,  
in order to build one up and to make a man.  
I used to beat up on myself!  
The whipping took away my strength...

Then I killed my bad habits and drug ‘em to a ditch!  
I changed from a threat to a promise;  
but in Texas I’ll always be a number/  
Every day it’s the same old song...  
In doubt: our systematic-scars found a home.  
In Texas: It’s death before parole.  
In unity: we can overcome!  
But we won’t...  
Because by the throat we’re holding our resolve under the water.

Christians and Muslims accept this torture.  
The trauma cemented the bangers in a corner;  
Set-tripping, cooking drink and getting stoned.  
I envision us standing up for ourselves,  
and not being exploited with little to no health care.  
But tomorrow we’ll be back in the “Fields,”—  
under a sun giving off heat like hell!

There ain’t a night I don’t look beyond these walls  
— with cataract  
eyes, and pull in the stars.  
Today’s a blessing...  
Every good one I’ll record them.  
Tomorrow I’ll wake up behind these bars.

*To follow Pariah’s work visit his Instagram: @godhands888.*

# WITHOUT A HOME: “A GOOD 12, 13 YEARS NOW.”

INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY COVARRRUBIA BY ROBERT GUMPERT

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DATE: 19 MAY 2022 PLACE: ALAMEDA AND UTAH STREETS

## WHAT DOES HOME MEAN?

Home is changed for me now. Initially it was a house with my parents and brothers and sisters, somewhere like warm and safe and clean. Now actually it's about the same, just on a smaller scale, where my bed is. Where my bed is, that's where home is.

## IS THERE COMMUNITY?

You have to be very careful because some people use the idea of community to get close to you, to take advantage of you a lot more than in a community that's not like homeless.

## THINGS AND POSSESSIONS:

I love things and possessions. I don't think I'm necessarily like a materialistic person, but maybe something like my guitar that I cherish. I take great care of it. I got a really nice guitar that I hide, and I never bring it out. Living on the street that is a luxury that you don't get to have anymore. My girlfriend just got housing and the first thing I think of is I can put my things in your place, you know. Like they're not going to get stolen. But that just me. My girlfriend is the complete opposite, she doesn't really care about anything, but I love her. But me, I do like possessions.

## WHAT DO SOCIETY'S RULES AND LAWS MEAN TO LIVING ON THE STREET?

For me, what I think it means for a lot of us is how much you're willing or not willing to spend time in jail. For me that's what it comes down to. I hate jail. I've been there a lot and I don't want to go back. The rules and stuff - why does somebody else get to pick them for me is kind of how I think about them a lot. I know I'm rebellious, but why do you get to choose what I can do or not, especially with drugs and stuff like that. It really bothers me when it gets in the way of like with family. I think if a parent has problems with their kid because they're using drugs, but more because they're breaking the law type of thing. I just can't believe sometimes that the law is thicker than blood type of deal. For a long time that happened with my family and that's why I feel that way. But after so long my parents, they've changed a lot with me and now I think they accept me for who I am.

I don't ever call the police but there have been times that I thought it would be nice if I could, but I can't. I'm a pretty easy-going person but being on the street I've had to be a lot more violent, a lot more often, than I ever wanted to be. It's come to be a weekly, daily basis I'm getting into a fight with somebody or something. That is really frustrating and tiresome.

I've only been in San Francisco for a year on the street. Originally, I'm from Los Angeles and there are different dynamics, definitely. With San Francisco being more concentrated I think you have more people bumping into each other, rubbing each other the wrong way. LA is humongous. What I love about San Francisco, the bus system. Awesome, great!

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT RULES ON THE STREET FOR THE UNHOUSED BETWEEN LA AND SF?

Well, you know, yes. In a way LA seems to be more enforced. San Francisco, what I've noticed, is people (the unhoused) are lenient on delivering punishment to people that do talk to the police, and stuff like that. With people that associate with people (that they shouldn't) and I know in LA that's unacceptable. [In LA] you pay "taxes" [to the gangs] if you're selling in their area. You definitely have to pay to them if they are controlling or enforcing. But LA's so big you can squeeze by a lot of times without them even noticing that you're there. ■

# STAR: ON THE LONELINESS OF LIVING UNSHELTERED

BY MARTHA CAST

On a lazy Sunday on Solano Avenue in Berkeley as I am strolling into my favorite coffee shop, I meet a woman who goes by the nickname Star. Star is a woman in her fifties of Latin-American descent who tells me she moved to the Bay Area from New York City over 20 years ago. In the beginning she is reluctant to talk to me and tells me I can write an article about her, but that she does not want her picture in the paper, because she says “she takes care of herself and is not a thief.” She is sitting on the sidewalk, zipped up in a tent without poles, and her belongings are lined up behind her in front of a closed business. As I sit down, I see that her hair and fingernails are clean, and her belongings are put away and organized. She tells me she doesn’t do drugs and does not smoke. I believe her. What I see as we start talking is a woman with learning disabilities and no family, making the best of a bad situation.

She tells me she picked this spot because she knows she can sit here for at least 24 hours before someone tells her to move, and there is still enough foot traffic that someone will most likely give her a few dollars so she can eat before the end of the day.

“I didn’t think you were a thief,” I tell her, reassuringly. “I just want to tell your story, I think it’s important.”

“Well you’re a nice person,” she tells me. “Those women up there,” she says pointing at the Berkeley Hills, “they told me I should be burned and that I don’t deserve to live. They don’t have any right to judge me like that, that’s not how God wants us to be.” She tells me this with an almost childlike demeanor.

After some encouragement, she opens up and starts telling me about her situation. She even agrees to let me photograph her belongings as long as her face is not in the picture. Star’s story is like so many others. She receives an Supplemental Security Income (SSI) check and has for most of her life. She says she used to find work sweeping steps and through online companies, but that the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse. She tells me she does not want to be homeless like some other people do. That she is a “normal” person and that “those women,” she says again pointing to the hills, “don’t understand, they could easily end up in this situation too. They don’t have any right to judge me,” she says again. “They are so mean to me. They tell me I don’t have a right to live and that I should be burned.”

“What is the worst thing that’s happened to you living on the streets?” I ask her. “Have you been beat up or raped or anything like that?”

“No,” she tells me, “nothing like that. I have been robbed, sometimes by people like them,” she says again pointing at the hills, “sometimes by the city workers. They come through here and make fun of me and throw my stuff away. That’s not their job. Their job is to clean up the streets and empty the trash, not throw my stuff away.” Her voice cracks and she almost starts crying. “I’ve had to spend so much money re-buying the stuff they throw away. I want to start a lawsuit,” she tells me.

I see how upset she gets trying to talk about her situation. I really do understand how she feels. It seems to me that one of the most painful things a person can endure in this life is being bullied. And she isn’t talking about being bullied by high school classmates. She is telling me about being bullied by grown women who are rich enough and successful enough to live in the Berkeley Hills, who have enough leisure to shop on Solano Avenue on a Sunday afternoon. Star’s most painful street experience is not physical violence, but that feeling of loneliness that comes from not being wanted.

And that, it seems to me, is something that all homeless people experience at one time or another.

I ask Star what she needs to truly change her situation. “I don’t mean a meal or a couple of bucks to get through the day,” I tell her. “I mean something big, something that would get you housed and warm and feeling like you really didn’t have to live like this anymore.”

“A house,” she tells me. “I had an apartment in the city seven years ago and it didn’t work out. There were too many crack dealers and it was too loud, and I didn’t feel safe so I had to move. I’m better off on the streets than in that environment. I applied for housing assistance here in Berkeley, and they told me the waiting list was eight years long, and that priority is given to single women with children and the elderly. I can’t do



Star and her belongings near Solano Avenue. Photo by Martha Cast

that. That’s a joke. Why even bother signing up?”

She tells me she receives approximately \$1,100 a month from SSI and that is all she has to live on each month. In an area where the average price of a one-bedroom apartment is \$3,000, deposits and good credit required, it is easy to see why she lives on the street.

Social Security is based on federal, not local, poverty guidelines, and has not been updated properly in years. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends that a person should budget between 25 to 33% of their gross monthly income for housing and never over 40%. Just so we are clear, 40 percent of Star’s \$1,100 per month is only \$440, and there are hundreds of thousands of people living on that same amount of federally allotted disability income—most of them are old, sick or have severe disabilities. You show me the acceptable housing solution anywhere in the U.S. where the rent is \$440 today. These are the same guidelines most professionally managed apartment complexes use for screening tenants, as well as the guidelines used to determine if a person can afford a mortgage.

So herein is the problem. Where is someone like Star, who has been deemed “disabled” by the federal government and who is quickly approaching retirement age supposed to live? Some say, get off disability and get a job; others say, move somewhere cheaper. But these are not realistic solutions. After talking to her for a few minutes, I question what kind of work she could realistically do. Her disabilities are not her fault and

have only been compounded by age. Second, this area is her home. She has lived here for over 20 years, and saying “just move somewhere cheaper” is just as ridiculous as saying “just go get a job.” And third, that suggestion of moving and working elsewhere is only passing the buck to another city where the same problem still exists. Then, what is the answer to this type of homelessness? Star nailed it beautifully and succinctly: a house.

Not a hotel voucher, not a cot in a homeless shelter, not a quick fix. Not a handout. And certainly not anyone’s pity or judgment. Star needs a house, a place that’s hers. If it were available, I believe she would pay for it and happily take care of it to the best of her ability and be a good neighbor.

It seems that this is an area where capitalism is failing, and all of us, collectively, need to rethink the fabric of our society. When some of the richest people in the country have made millions in the form of passive income through rent collection, why are there no controls in place to meaningfully tax that income, cap inflation and use that money to ensure that every single one of us has access to a safe, secure and comfortable place to live?

We have the resources to fix this problem. It is only a matter of allocating them appropriately and taking the time to care. ■

*This piece originally appeared in the “Street Spirits” column of Street Spirit, which is published in the East Bay and, like Street Sheet, is sold by vendors who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Visit it on [thestreetspirit.org](http://thestreetspirit.org).*



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