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STREET SHEET



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THE STORY OF 300

CHAPTER ONE: STREET SURVIVAL

VINAY PAI

This excerpt from “The Eviction Machine” was originally published by our allies in Street Spirit. It tells the story of the life of the man known as 300, a life-long Berkeley resident who died in 2019 after being evicted from his home.

I met 300 sleeping on a bench outside Au Coquelet Café on University Avenue one late night in the summer of 2013. He had a burly mustache and he wore a dark poncho with a black skully on his bald head. A square black cross hung from a black shawl around his neck. He held a heavy book about the American origins of Nazi eugenics, and we talked for a while about the history of fascism.

300 was born in Berkeley in 1968, he went to Berkeley High, and he lived in Berkeley most of his life. He lost his housing during the 2007 recession, and he sheltered at familiar spots around Berkeley for years. He used an Obama phone to get wi-fi at the café, and he slept sitting upright on the benches outside. A few years ago, those same benches were flipped backward and filled with flower pots so unhoused people couldn’t shelter there.

I studied in the café every night until 2 A.M. After closing, I’d sit outside and talk with 300. He had a photographic memory and he told stories like the film was projected in the back of his dome. He taught me about the history of Berkeley and growing up in the time of the Black Panthers. He saw abandoned storefronts and high-rise towers and reminisced about the shops and venues that used to stand there. He worried about who was rummaging through his shopping cart when he was asleep. His voice got low when a police officer walked up and addressed him by his government name.

As silhouettes drifted past in the dark, he pointed out predators and prey, who was abusing, who was being abused in the shadows of foyers and alleyways at night. That summer, I got an education in street politics. When summer ended, I moved away for school and I lost touch with 300.

In the fall of 2014, after I moved back home, a jury acquitted a police officer who had killed a young man named Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. I saw a crowd marching up University Avenue and I joined them, followed by police shooting tear gas grenades and rubber bullets at our backs. 300 was sitting on the bench outside the café again, watching the scene and the cloud of smoke. I stopped to say hello, and he gave me the number to his prepaid flip phone.

I caught up with 300 a few days later at the “cop shop,” the Berkeley Police Department building on Martin Luther King. He was doing masonry work for a sheet metal company on Gilman Street and recycling alumi-

num cans to make ends meet. Every other week, he went next door to City Hall to attend the City Council meetings. His portable radio played KPFA while he sat on the steps of the cop shop every night.

The cop shop was 300’s last resort. He had camped with tree-sitters at the Memorial Stadium oak grove, until the university destroyed their tents and cut down the trees. He had slept below the arches of his church on Bancroft Way until the clergy chased him off, dripped in jewelry and driving foreign cars. He had lived in a tool shed behind a house where he worked as a gardener, but the owner snapped the knob off the door, angry that 300 brought other unhoused people to visit. 300 had no family ties: he was estranged from his twin sister, his only living relative.

300 wasn’t eligible for a subsidized apartment unless he signed a form declaring a “mental illness” or “disability”—he refused, because he understood that those labels could be used to incarcerate him. He was trapped in a circle: “I could not find work because I did not have a place to live, and I could not get a place to live because I could not find work.” The police station was the last, safe place he could find to sleep. He maintained the grounds around the Public Safety Building, planting flowers, trimming hedges, and sweeping debris. In exchange, BPD quietly allowed him to set up camp on the front steps.

The police station is quiet at night, and 300 spoke freely when I met him there. He told stories about his childhood growing up in a violent neighborhood in Southwest Berkeley segregated by Jim Crow. The parking lot by his home was a popular place for dealing dope and turning tricks, and Berkeley police left the block to its business. His mother lost her house to a mortgage fraud scam in 1991, and she started renting a unit in a duplex near San Pablo Park. She was found dead in her apartment, alone, in October 1996, at age fifty-three. 300 believed she was murdered, but BPD ruled her death an “accident” and didn’t investigate further. He put police racism in simple terms: “They classify all African-American people as either criminals or servants.” He meant that BPD didn’t consider her life worth protecting.

300 was a “street therapist” and he crossed paths with people from all walks of life. He was always outside: if I named anybody in the city, he’d probably met them, from the gas station clerk to Lil B the Based God. He knew my landlord, my next-door neighbor, and the man who slept on the bench by my house. The nephew of a notorious Black Panther gun-runner visited him often. A Google engineer paid rent on a storage unit for 300 to keep his belongings safe. Graduate students were glad to have someone listen to them talk about their research. Once 300 started a

continues on page 6...

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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.

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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Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.

ORGANIZE WITH US

HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP TUESDAYS @ NOON

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone! Email mcarrera@cohsf.org to get involved!

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAYS @12:30

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join! Email lpierce@cohsf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!



NO ON PROP E:

ENDANGERING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRIVACY

Nathan Sheard

San Francisco voters have a lot to consider before the March 5 election. Voting No on Proposition E should be an easy choice for anyone who is concerned with addressing our city's challenges, rather than benefiting from them. If passed, Prop. E would significantly weaken measures meant to protect the rights and safety of San Francisco residents and visitors. If Prop. E passes, it would strip accountability for the use of dubious surveillance tools, remove the City's Police Commission's authority and lower the bar for when police can engage in high-speed pursuits through our city streets.

The decision to support or oppose Prop. E comes down to how you answer one straightforward question: "For how long should police be allowed to violate our privacy and safety without accountability and oversight?" As simple as it may seem, it's an important enough question that tech billionaires are donating more than \$1 million—with the support of the San Francisco Police Officers' Association—to convince us the answer is at least one year.

When tech billionaires and police associations are side-by-side at the donation plate, it's wise to investigate the stakes. One million dollars might not be enough to eliminate all the challenges San Francisco's under-resourced residents face. Still, that money could be used for much more effective purposes than convincing voters that the solutions lie in what's proposed in the measure.

In 2019, responding to vocal support from a wide range of community members and organizations, San Francisco's Board of Supervisors voted 10 to 1 to adopt a groundbreaking surveillance transparency and accountability law. This commonsense legislation established a democratic process requiring the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) to submit a use policy to the Board for approval before acquiring or using new surveillance technology. Once approved, these policies establish parameters on how the technology can be used and how the rights of anyone impacted will be protected. They also outline the steps that must be taken to ensure any information collected is held securely or deleted.

Prop. E would recklessly abandon this process. The SFPD would be given free rein to secretly use untested and highly invasive surveillance technologies on San Francisco residents for at least one year—without oversight or safety policies. And after a year, if the SFPD submits a use policy for a surveillance technology and the Board of Supervisors fails to act on it, nothing would stop the police from surveilling residents this way indefinitely. While the possibilities are nearly limitless, this could include equipping closed circuit TV cameras with AI-powered biometric tracking, installing long-range listening devices on city blocks, and, according to the City Attorney, even operating face-scanning drones.

Civil rights groups, privacy advocates,

and community organizations—including the ACLU of Northern California, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Coalition on Homelessness, Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), League of Women Voters, National Harm Reduction Coalition, Older Women's League, San Francisco Rising Action Fund, and San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—have been rallying against the ballot measure. They believe that Prop. E would undermine the privacy and civil rights of our city's residents, especially those from marginalized communities already disproportionately targeted by police surveillance and discrimination. They also argue that Prop. E is unnecessary and ineffective, as the current ordinance does not prevent the SFPD from doing its job or acquiring the tools it needs. The current law simply assures a democratic process that involves public input and legislative oversight.

During a November 13, 2023 meeting of the Board's Rules Committee, a member of the mayor's staff arguing in support of the measure shared that Prop. E "authorizes the department to have a one-year pilot period to experiment" and "to work through new technology to see how they work." This should alarm us all. We deserve more than to be the canaries in the surveillance coal mine. Police should know if and how these technologies work before deploying them on our streets. The people of San Francisco

and our elected officials should have access to the information needed to provide confidence that the technology works as promised, and to know that informed measures have been put in place to protect our civil rights. Our leaders and concerned residents should be able to ask questions about how these technologies will impact communities before the harm is done. "Surveil first and ask questions later" is not an acceptable strategy when human lives are the collateral.

Poor and unhoused residents of our city are already subject to near-constant surveillance and harassment from police. Trashing necessary oversight measures that keep police from acting without democratic checks and balances will not make us safer. History and reasonable deduction lead us to expect more violations of the rights and dignity of those of us most in need of protection.

San Franciscans know a scam when we see it. Unchecked surveillance is not the solution to our city's challenges, and we can't sit silently while opportunists turn our streets into a surveillance state testing lab. Vote No on Prop. E. And tell your family, your friends and anyone who will listen to turn in their San Francisco primary election ballots with a NO vote on Prop. E.

Nathan Sheard is managing director of advocacy at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital civil liberties nonprofit based in San Francisco.

NO ON MAYOR BREED'S PROP F F Will Mean More Homelessness in SF!



San Franciscans rightly deserve a city where all residents are housed and those at risk of overdose get the help they need. We deserve an effective response that truly addresses these important issues. Proposition F does not. It is a fatally flawed measure to cut vital assistance to those profiled as people using drugs. It was put on the ballot by Mayor London Breed as a political maneuver to shift blame for the overdose crisis onto the backs of the poorest San Franciscans. Prop F will make a bad situation worse, wasting taxpayer dollars in the process.

Join These Organizations in Voting No on F:

- SF Democratic Party**
SF Human Services Network
SEIU, 1021
San Francisco Tenants Union
Homeless Emergency Provider Assoc.
SF Women's Political Committee
Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club
Alice B Toklas Democratic Club
- Affordable Housing Alliance**
SF Treatment on Demand Coalition
SF Small Business Forward
Bernal Heights Democratic Club
Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Coalition
District 11 Democratic Club
Latino Democratic Club



Prop F contradicts evidence-based approaches to public health

Prop F defies accepted best practices for addressing substance use disorders and homelessness and will have deadly results. Research by public health experts shows indisputable evidence that proposals such as Prop F, which mandate treatment, are ineffective and counterproductive. Worse, it will lead to increased rates of return to substance use, overdose deaths and suicide.



Prop F wastes valuable health care resources

Under this proposal, the Human Service Agency will have to hire clinicians to add assessments to their already over-extended workloads. San Francisco is facing a dire clinical shortage. *Prop F will actually result in more people being turned away for treatment and clinicians are diverted to assess welfare recipients.*



Prop F is a treatment shell game

It is a documented fact that there are not enough treatment services to serve everyone in San Francisco who currently need it. Those who need help should not be pushed aside to serve those who are obligated to get care as a condition of receiving benefits.

For more information or questions about No on F, visit www.ReduceSFHomelessness.com. Created by Reduce SF's Homelessness; a Committee Against Proposition F. Financial Disclosures available at the San Francisco Ethics Commission, 25 Van Ness Ave, San Francisco 94102

Proposition F is a cynical political ploy to shift blame onto the poorest San Franciscans.

Prop F will increase homelessness

Under the measure, those profiled as people using drugs who receive public benefits from the County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP) will be assessed, and will be required to enter treatment or lose assistance. At any point, if the individual misses appointments or services, they will also lose their assistance. They will lose their shelter. They will lose their housing. Even if they repeat the onerous process to become reinstated, they will owe back rent and can easily be evicted, making it more likely that the thousands of people who receive housing/shelter and cash assistance will end up on the streets.

Prop F will result in fewer treatment connections

Currently, individuals who receive public assistance are encouraged to seek treatment - as they can trade their work requirements for treatment. Under this proposal, individuals will be afraid to admit to substance use issues for fear of losing their tiny income, housing or shelter. While touted as a means to get more people into treatment, this will do the opposite, as less people will reveal to social workers that they use drugs.



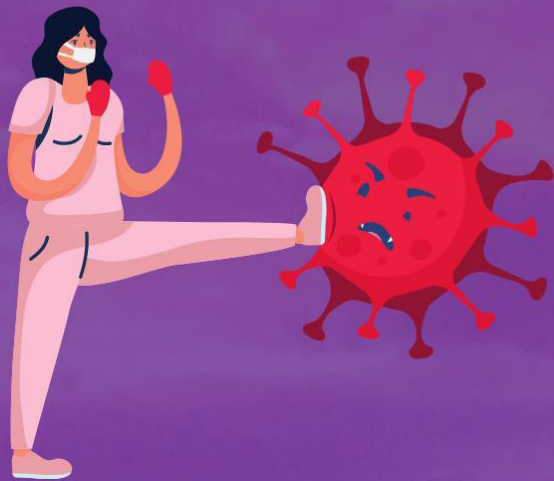
10 ACTIONS FOR PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE LONG FUTURE



PANDEMICSOLIDARITY.ORG

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While capitalist institutions produce mass illness and death, we must not abandon each other. Together, we have the power to shape our communities. **To do so, we must prioritize the health and safety of all our people by committing to these 10 actions:**

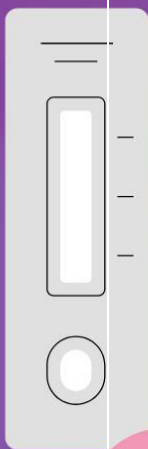
1

MASK UP: Wear high-quality, well-fitted respirator masks (KN95 or better) when sharing air beyond your household to care for your neighbors and yourself.



CLEAN THE AIR: Clean the air you breathe by utilizing air purifiers, opening windows, upgrading filtration, and monitoring air quality.

2



4

TEST OFTEN: Test frequently and according to best practices before events, after gatherings, and in your daily life with PCR-quality tests where possible. Isolate from others in your home and community if positive or sick.



3

MAKE A LAYERED PLAN: Make a COVID-19 safety plan that includes multiple layers of protection, a support crew, and protocols for sickness or a positive test.

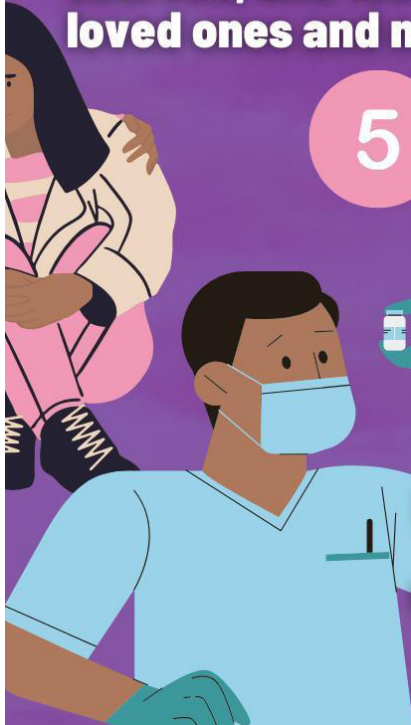
SHARE TOOLS: Share resources such as high-quality masks, updated information from reputable sources, and tests with your loved ones and neighbors.

5



6

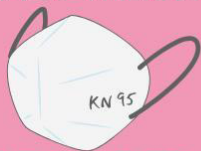
CHANGE THE NARRATIVE: Use intentional language to promote COVID-19 safety and combat misinformation, minimizing, and denial in your relationships and communities.



REQUIRE SAFETY: Require universal masking, testing, and clean air protocols when gathering with friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors to keep everyone safe and not leave anyone out.

7

FACE MASK



REQUIRED

8

PROTECT PUBLIC SPACE: Demand rigorous and robust COVID-19 safety requirements – including universal masking and clean air protocols – from your workplaces, organizations, healthcare providers, neighborhood shops, and event venues. Boycott those that do not implement them.

NO ON F: F IS FOR “FAIL”

In what has to be one of the dumbest, most desperate yet conniving pre-election moves this publication has seen in years, Mayor London Breed put an initiative on the March ballot that will dramatically drive up homelessness while wasting valuable public resources.

This brain fart has been labeled Proposition F. While the Mayor has failed in addressing the overdose crisis, with more people dying from accidental overdoses than ever, she has come up with a plan to cut those suspected of drug use off of welfare.

Yes, you heard right. No, the plan is not to increase treatment options. No, the plan is not to look at evidence-based research. No, the plan is not to even implement her health department’s own very smart overdose prevention plan. No, No, No.

Clearly those who have died mean very little. Because as Mayor Breed said at a forum on this initiative, “this is not about the data, this is not about the numbers.” God forbid policy be about science when we are talking about a public health emergency. Instead, it is all about politics—and bad politics at that. Readers know the routine: Talk to your billionaire buddies and see what will pique their interest. Maybe do a poll or two. Put out some lies. See what voters fall for and—voilà!—we have a policy agenda! This is what we call a “wedge issue.” Who gets demonized? Oh, welfare recipients? Perfect! Throw in some demonization of drug users? Even better: double whammy! This will fill the campaign coffers for real and drive conservatives to the polls.

How would this bozo proposal work? Under the measure, those profiled as people using drugs who receive public benefits from the County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP) will be assessed, and will be required to enter treatment or lose county assistance. At any point, if the individual misses appointments or services, they will also lose their assistance immediately. This increases the likelihood that people who depend on welfare

assistance to keep a roof over their head will add to the ranks of San Francisco’s unsheltered population.

At a February 8 press conference, local medical professionals and licensed treatment providers announced their opposition to Prop F, citing the likelihood the local ballot measure will increase the unhoused population in San Francisco.

Gary McCoy, vice president of policy and public affairs at HealthRight 360, a non-profit provider of substance use disorder treatment, mental health services and primary care, told the media at the press conference that front-line workers disapprove of the proposed measure and foresee repercussions if it passes.

“Let’s be clear: Substance use disorder treatment providers who are licensed and certified are overwhelmingly opposed to Proposition F,” he said. “The City’s Human Services Agency has already acknowledged that many will lose their benefits under this measure. Prop F only laysers on punishment, shame, and social isolation, while stripping people of resources to stay housed and stay alive.”

Oh, and get this: Proposition F defies accepted best practices for addressing substance use disorders and homelessness and will have deadly results. Research by public health experts shows indisputable evidence that mandated treatment is ineffective and counterproductive. Mandated treatment often leads to increased rates of return to substance use, overdose deaths and even suicide.

Dr. Marlene Martín, associate professor of clinical medicine at UCSF and director of its addiction care team, joined experts who agree that the measure would foster welfare recipients’ suspicion of human service providers—and potentially destabilize their lives.

“Proposition F threatens the very safety net that keeps people who are on the brink of becoming unhoused housed,” she said. “It threatens the

trust it takes for someone to disclose their substance use without fear. It threatens access for the people seeking addiction treatment today who may not come knocking again tomorrow. I have seen addiction and overdose worsen when people lose support systems and that is what Proposition F threatens to do.”

Under Proposition F, San Francisco’s already overtaxed Human Service Agency workers will be made to do more with less. They will need to pre-screen clients suspected of drug use and, while they already make referrals to treatment, they will have to monitor compliance and terminate benefits. Prop F will thus likely result in more people being turned away for treatment as clinicians are diverted to assess welfare recipients.

We have a clinician shortage that is prolonging waits for care and treatment. So let’s get this straight: We are going to take valuable clinician time to conduct an assessment with a client, who if they have a substance use issue and are honest about that issue will possibly lose their benefits, because they will be forced to navigate even more requirements. Are these really the conditions under which we want clinical assessments to take place? And what clinician with a bit of integrity would want to do these assessments?

“Prop F is a cynical waste of resources that will materially harm very vulnerable people and increase homelessness in San Francisco,” said Laura Thomas, senior director of HIV and harm-reduction policy at San Francisco AIDS Foundation. “This measure does not in any way increase access to needed substance use disorder treatment. That is why we are opposed to Prop F and we are proud to stand together with the San Francisco Democratic Party, SPUR, SF Black Wall Street, SEIU 1021, the League of Pissed Off Voters and many others.”

Oh, and another thing: We all know how HSA will play this. The mayor will want to make sure there is plenty of treatment available under the political spotlight so instead of doing the hard work of expanding treatment, her administration will take the easy way out and set aside treatment spots for this population—only for it to sit empty. We see this over and over again with political priorities. The system goes all screwball to please the King.

Right now, folks are encouraged to seek substance-abuse treatment services because CAAP recipients are spared the duty of cleaning buses if they go to treatment. Yes, everyone, except people with disabilities, has to earn their paltry welfare check by

cleaning Muni buses. This change would discourage folks from seeking treatment because admitting they have an issue means they risk losing housing, shelter and money for food.

This initiative plays on classist images of welfare recipients, the infamous welfare queen trope. It feels like 1994 again, when Republican Pete Wilson said, “I wouldn’t begrudge you a 6 pack of beer,” when he proposed cutting welfare by 25 percent.

The reality is, studies show folks use their welfare for things like housing and food. Necessities. And the money is soooooo little. If you are housed you get a bit over \$700 per month. If you are unhoused, you get a little over \$100 a month. About 20% of the 5,000 welfare recipients are homeless, and of those, about 400 are in shelter, dependent on assistance. If they lose assistance, they lose shelter. About 30% are in permanent supportive housing under the City’s Care Not Cash housing program. About a third of their income goes to rent. Many people today get evicted because they lose their benefits for some stupid reason, like missing an appointment. This initiative would pile on more appointments, and with that, more reasons to lose assistance and even more evictions.

About half of people in CAAP pay for some other type of housing arrangement. Reality flash: Poor folks in SF live in housing where they don’t have a lot of rights. They rent from roommates or family members. If they don’t pay, they gotta go. That is how homelessness happens. Worse, whenever welfare adds more requirements, more people lose their benefits. It is just another budget-saving trick. Another requirement. Another setup. Another place to trip and fall. The Human Service Agency is COUNTING on that, and that is how they hope to pay for the clinicians. So what kind of hell are they building? Can we solve homelessness and not keep exacerbating it for some cheap political thrill?

Oh, and get this. A bunch of billionaires are pouring in money to support. Do they want to kick welfare recipients off aid? We don’t know. It’s so cold. We do know an initiative like this is a way for a politician who is running for office to dump a bunch of money and avoid candidate campaign spending limits while putting their face out there. Mayor Breed’s face is all over the literature. While it might sell her political brand, she has no excuse for this madness.

For a list of organizations and individuals who have endorsed “NO on Prop F” go to <https://www.reducesf-homelessness.org>

9

DEMAND GOVERNMENTAL PROTECTION:
Demand free, accessible, and updated masks, tests, vaccines, treatments, and clean air tools from your local, state, and federal governments.



10

ACT IN SOLIDARITY:
Put your commitment to liberation over convenience by making connections between the pandemic and ongoing liberation struggles across the globe, divesting from all systems of oppression, and supporting groups fighting for just futures.

FROM PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY FOR THE LONG FUTURE

CONTRIBUTE TO STREET SHEET

WRITING: 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!

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!

VISIT WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/SUBMIT-YOUR-WRITING/

OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED. PIECES ASSIGNED BY THE EDITOR MAY OFFER PAYMENT, ASK FOR DETAILS!

SURVIVAL

AKIR JACKSON

Surviving in the tech-fueled wealth bubble of San Francisco on a poverty-level income is a constant battle. As rising costs of living continue to push out all but the elite, being poor here means struggling for the basic dignity and security that many take for granted.

With median rent for a one-bedroom apartment approaching \$3,500, finding an affordable place to live on a limited budget is next to impossible. Low-income neighborhoods like the Tenderloin are filled with rundown single-room occupancy hotels and overcrowded apartments that often lack necessities, such as laundry, secure mail or pest control. Many families cram into small spaces, sacrificing comfort and privacy just to keep a roof over their heads. The waiting list for subsidized housing is years long, so there’s little hope for relief.

Food security is another daily worry. With high prices at local markets and few affordable supermarkets, many are forced into choosing between nutrition and cost. The lines at food banks and soup kitchens stretch down the block. Community gardens help supplement diets when funding allows, but fresh produce remains inaccessible to many. Malnutrition and obesity disproportionately impact the poor as a result.

Stable employment at a livable wage is elusive, especially without

advanced degrees now sought by tech companies. Most jobs available to those without specialized skills pay minimum wage—far below the cost of living. Families often depend on multiple part-time gigs just to scrape by. But the instability of shift work wreaks havoc, making child care virtually impossible to arrange.

San Francisco’s underfunded public transit system fails to adequately serve poor residents. With routes cut and fares hiked annually, those living in marginalized neighborhoods can’t reliably get to jobs across town. Waiting through delays and transfers for cross-city commutes forces many to give up on opportunities. Lack of affordable transit locks the poor out of economic mobility.

Displacement constantly looms as an existential threat as well. Landlords cash in on the real estate boom by finding excuses to evict lower-paying tenants in rent-controlled apartments. Within weeks, their homes are renovated and relaunched at sky-high prices they could never afford. Navigating the maze of tenant protections requires time, English proficiency and access to legal aid. Few walk away with their housing intact or get relocation assistance.

These realities cause constant anxiety and hopelessness. Working multiple low-wage jobs

leaves little time or energy for self-care, community building or creative enrichment. Families become isolated in overcrowded housing projects and neglected neighborhoods. Mental health needs go unaddressed due to lack of culturally competent care. Depression, trauma and addiction claims lives when people feel powerless to chart a better course.

San Francisco’s wealth gap is perhaps felt most acutely in education. While tech giants send their children to elite private schools, the city’s underfunded public education system fails working-class students. Teachers are overstretched and resources scarce within a bureaucracy seemingly designed to be ineffective. Many simply stop showing up to overcrowded, crumbling schools that feel more like prisons than places of learning.

The result is young people being left behind without skills or options. Youth homelessness and recidivism rates are heartbreakingly high. Lacking support at home or school, kids end up on the streets or stuck in the prison pipeline without alternative paths being presented. A few may find refuge in community programs, but budgets keep getting slashed as inequality grows unchecked.

These are the stories you rarely

hear in San Francisco—the voices muffled beneath the flashy facades of tech campuses and luxury condos. But the human toll of exclusion and indifference is very real. No child should have to do homework under a freeway overpass by flashlight. No parent should have to work three jobs without benefits just to feed their family.

The poverty is by design, upheld by those whose power and wealth accumulation depends on this stark inequity. But when we look past the glimmering illusion and into the eyes of those being crushed under the wheel of “progress,” we must ask: can we still call this prosperity, and does the health of a society not depend on the welfare of all, instead of just the privileged few?

By refusing to see and value the humanity in front of us, we risk our own. The choice remains: continue down this path of greed and exploitation, or renew our commitment to solidarity and justice. For if we cannot uplift the most marginalized among us, the moral foundation of our community will continue to erode as the great, glittering lie of San Francisco fades to reveal a city in spiritual poverty and decay.

THE STORY OF 300

VINAY PAI

continued from page 2...

conversation, he could swap stories for hours.

I heard a lot of crazy “shite” from 300. He never used curse words, and he always found a polite way to describe bizarre and unbelievable episodes. He told tales of zombies shambling from Barrington Hall, and dance parties with the crown prince of Norway. A BPD patrol officer thought 300 was hallucinating a pink furry animal running sprints on Shattuck Avenue, then doubled back to apologize after he met the man in the fur suit later that night. I learned about Berkeley pimps, politicians trading sexual favors, and police who smoked meth from the evidence locker. “I was a dancer for many years,” he often said with a wry smile. “I understand body language very well.”

Sleeping outside took a toll on 300.

His body was breaking down in the cold. He carried the heavy anxiety of street survival. A few years before I met him, he got jumped and bludgeoned in the head near the downtown public library, where he was sheltering at the time. He had daily headaches but he hated going to the hospital, so my father, a neurologist, came to break bread and give a street check-up. My mother was a history professor at the university, and she packed hot Indian food for 300 cooked by my uncle. 300 always reminded me how lucky I was to have a big family and a strong system of support. “This is my living room,” he said, pointing around Civic Center Park. “I have no privacy. It’s cold and people come and go as they please.” He told me: “You’re lucky your worst enemies are within you. You don’t know what it’s like to be surrounded by people who wish you were dead.”

On the street, you can get violated by anybody at any time. As a survival tactic, 300 became friendly with

many Berkeley police. He learned police lingo and he addressed them by rank. He was tapped into department politics at all levels of the BPD, from the police chief to the custodial crew. When one detective realized that 300’s outlandish street tales were true, he gave 300 a small field recorder for his protection. 300 kept the mic on his body, in case the detective tried to copy the memory card from his shopping cart while he slept. 300 said the police were always taking notes. He called them “secretaries with guns.” Some police on the graveyard shift confided in 300 because they had no one else to talk to in the dead of night. He told me about a patrol officer who jovially showed him a video of a savage beating filmed on duty. 300 thought the officer was traumatized and struggling to process what he’d witnessed. The officer stopped smiling when 300 said: “You’re not going to beat me like that, are you?”

Some people on the street viewed 300 with suspicion—he never touched drugs, and talking with the police gave him a reputation as a snitch. Sitting on the steps of the police station every night made him look even more like a rat. In the summer of 2016, 300 used to text me late at night and invite me to the cop shop steps. When I got there, I found him anxious about enemies prowling in the dark. At first I thought he was being overly paranoid, but soon I found out why he was afraid to be alone.

One early morning in August 2016, a White suprema-

cist called “Creature” showed up at the cop shop steps before dawn. Creature and his crew liked to bully and harass 300. Creature was an antisemite, and he believed 300 was Jewish. Now, high on methamphetamine, Creature threatened to kill 300. He put his hands around 300’s neck and tried to gouge 300’s eyes with his thumbs.

The attack was outside the police station and the CCTV saw everything. Creature was arrested a few hours later. I visited 300 that afternoon, and he pointed to tiny drops of blood that stained the steps where he always sat. He refused to leave the cop shop. He had to get off the streets immediately.

A man named Kareem sometimes visited 300 at the cop shop in those days. Kareem studied industrial engineering in his country in North Africa. He came to America on a student visa, but he was now seeking asylum status: his city was under siege in a civil war involving the US military. He lived in a run-down building owned by an infamous slumlord, across from the 7-Eleven on University and Sacramento. Kareem had invited 300 to sleep in his room, but 300 declined. He knew the landlord’s bad reputation and he didn’t want to share a crowded space with strangers. Now, after the attack, he was willing to get indoors by any means necessary. In November 2016, 300 moved into Kareem’s place.

Note: Street Spirit will resume print publication as of March 1, 2024. Street Sheet wants to thank the East Bay-based newspaper for allowing us to run its content online and in print while Street Spirit has been rebuilding. Street Sheet is also extending gratitude for Street Spirit vendors in distributing Street Sheet over the last eight months. Thank you, all!



Au Coquelet Café in 2013 (Bryan Eldridge)

A FUTILE ATTEMPT TO MAKE MONEY FOILED BY SOCIAL SERVICES

JACK BRAGEN

The social services systems in California punish success and punish efforts at raising one’s standard of living and personal security—at least, that’s how it seems in my case. Even if your earnings are literally tiny, Social Security, the IRS, county food assistance and Medicaid all insist they need to know, and insist they all get their share.

As hard as I work at my two to three little-paid writing gigs, Uncle Sam and his gang still need to know every little detail.

State and federal governments use what amounts to intimidation tactics in an effort to keep people hiding and cowering in the shadows. It’s more of a dominance thing, rather than taking away every scrap that poor people can get: The designers of the system want poor disabled people to remain in their place, with no hope of things being better.

Apparently, we are considered a population of rejects. It’s not clear what social purpose is served by keeping us down. Yet, in a past conversation with a person of privilege, when I mentioned college ought to be accessible to poor people, they said something to the effect of “Then everything would all be equal,” and objected to the idea.

When we embark on paid work, we put our benefits at risk the moment we enter our Social Security number in the system. Our data goes into various databases, and Uncle Sam will know. If we work for cash without it being documented, we are suspected of fraud .

When we work part time, which could be all we can handle, we might

be no further ahead than if we made no work attempt, because Medicare and Medicaid take a portion, as does Social Security and—if we use it—permanent supportive housing. In addition, we pay tax and work expenses. We’re also regularly questioned about our disability status and face reviews.

It is very simple: The social services systems do not reward work—they punish it.

And aren’t we punished enough? We may be from backgrounds in which we were abused while growing up. There are many forms of this: Even verbal taunts are abuse. It could be worse than that. When does it end? When can we be free?

My housing is linked strongly to the social services system. Everything is documented. Everything is recorded. There are many surveillance cameras here. Big Brother is here.

This makes for a difficult home environment. It isn’t about any resident being a bad person. It is about living in a cubicle; not feeling close to anyone; living in crowded, congested conditions; the inability to find a parking space; the high costs associated with living here—and the stress of all of this put together.

I continue to need health care.

My health is not great because of several medical conditions that I’ve been ignoring. I can’t keep it up. I am better off if I can document my health problems, which helps the “system” work to my benefit.

Still, the health care systems, Medicare and Medicaid, are like rocket science to me, and I have not taken the time to read the material and understand how they work. I can only do so much. It seems to me it will be a grand exercise in tedium to comprehend all of the rules of Medicare and Medicaid.

My disability is invisible but it’s real and well documented. People don’t believe I am disabled because I can do things that require intellect, like writing books. But I still have to deal with a condition that requires medication and talk therapy.

Much of my time is absorbed with trying to get my symptoms under control, making me very inefficient at accomplishing needed tasks. If I can’t control them well enough, I’m prone to making poor decisions. And I have seen myself do this and have seen the awful results of this in my life.

I’m fighting for my life, and it feels like I’m losing. I might have made a name for myself by publishing a lot, but I have not devised a method for turning this into cash. So, I continue

to be dependent on the government, and this is no way to live. I’m in constant fear that the government will cut me off. This could be irrational, or the fear could be realistic. Since I don’t know what the government thinks unless they tell me, I have no method of validating or disproving my worries.

But I do know that some government workers exercise their power in a bullying manner, and that there are others who genuinely want to help. It is a mix, and on a good day, you could get something that can help you survive.

I am disabled and 59 years old, and even though I may have hoped to rise above the poverty line, it might not happen. Trying to work, with the social services systems as they are, seems like an exercise in masochism.

The government has its rules. In the news we see examples of how the rules apply differently to people of different socioeconomic backgrounds. If you are mega-rich, you might get a six-figure fine for your violations, which you can pay by selling a little bit of your stock. If you are poor, you might be picking up trash at the side of the freeway, or you might be thrown off benefits without any method of support.

I’m still at it; I haven’t given up. I hope to someday improve my circumstances. As I close in on 60, I don’t see millions of dollars coming my way thus far. The hope could be futile, or if I get a few lucky breaks, I might have a comfortable old age.

Jack Bragen writes fiction and commentary and lives in Martinez, California.

My housing is linked strongly to the social services system. Everything is documented. Everything is recorded. There are many surveillance cameras here. Big Brother is here.

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Vendors pick up the papers for free at our office in the Tenderloin and sell them for \$2 apiece at locations across the City. You get to keep all the money you make from sales! Sign up to earn extra income while also helping elevate the voices of the homeless writers who make this paper so unique, and promoting the vision of a San Francisco where every human being has a home.

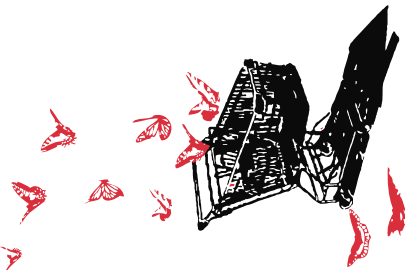
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STOP BLACK DEATH

SAVE BLACK LIVES March & Rally

Monday, February 19 • 1pm
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FEBRUARY 17-24, 2024

We are in an unprecedented moment where the world is rising up in solidarity with Palestinians calling for a ceasefire. It’s imperative that as we intensify our calls for a ceasefire, we extend our solidarity to stand with & stand up for Black people who are dying under the boot of white nationalism unaddressed.

White nationalism requires the deprivation, deportation, sterilization, incarceration, exploitation, and extermination of people of color in general and, in particular, of Black communities. We must seize this opportunity to broaden the movement and build the relationships necessary to successfully remove the boot of white nationalism off the necks of people of color worldwide.

We call on the world to end Black death and save Black lives from West & East Oakland to West & East Africa, South Berkeley to South Sudan, Hunter’s Point to Haiti, Chicago to the Congo.

Join @community_ready_corp & the 4 Peace Coalition for our Stop Black Death: Save Black Lives March & Rally on Monday, February 19 at 1pm at Oscar Grant Plaza, 14th & Broadway, Oakland.

The 4 Peace Coalition is convened by Community Ready Corps and includes KANO Special Services, From the Cage to the Stage, Anti Police-Terror Project (A.P.T.P.), MH First, Haiti Action Committee, Pathways to Peace, and Guiding A New Generation (GANG).