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Art by Josh MacPhee
Laura Gutowski resides just down the street from the Grants Pass home that she lived in for 25 years. Her son used to throw baseball in Morrison Memorial Park, where she now lives in a tent not far from the diamond. Her children were born and raised in the neighborhood, where her husband died unexpectedly in 2021. ’Still hard,’ she says. ’Still hurts.’

Grants Pass is a city of 39,000 residents in southern Oregon’s Josephine County, an hour’s drive northwest of the California border on Interstate 5. It is nestled between the Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges, and the southern edge of the city center sits on the banks of the Rogue River. Baker, Tussing and Riverside Parks offer access to the Rogue, where crows gather near hotel lots and restaurant patios on 22 April. Grants Pass says that civil enforcement laws banning people experiencing homelessness from public spaces. Lawyers representing a class of homeless residents argue that penalties against people who have nowhere else to go constitute cruel and unusual punishment — a violation of the Eighth Amendment.

The Oregon Law Center initially filed the class action lawsuit on behalf of Debra Blake in October 2018, Blake died in 2021, and Gloria Johnson and John Logan stepped in as class representatives as the case made its way through the appeals process.

Gutowski became homeless soon after her husband died. She can’t talk about him without choking up, sitting outside her tent, leg resting on a bucket holding a tarp down on the grass. ’I kind of fell apart at the same time,’ she says. ’Flipped my world upside down. I never expected to be out here for this long.’

Gutowski thought that she would be without a home for a month at the most, but a month tumbled into two. She spent a third of her money on her car after moving to a different park. More than two years later, she still considers herself part of the Grants Pass community but says that the housed residents in the area do not. ’It can happen to anybody,’ she says; ’anybody, at any time.’

THE POINT IS TO MAKE IT UNCOMFORTABLE

On the afternoon of 28 March 2015, the Grants Pass city council held a community roundtable to ”identify solutions to current vagrancy problems.” In its own words, the purpose was to ”focus on developing strategies to modify behavior [and] connect people to services.” At that meeting, Lily Morgan, the council president, stated that the point is to make it uncomfortable enough for them in our city so they will want to move on down the road.

City code explicitly bars anyone from sleeping in public spaces, including parks, sidewalks and in cars, or using sleeping materials for the purpose of maintaining a temporary place to live, under threat of criminal and civil penalties. In city code, ”parks” are defined as city halls, community centers, police and fire stations, parking lots, traffic islands and urban beautification areas owned or maintained by the city.

At times, the city has shut off the water in public parks and closed the toilets, a tactic about which Josephine County Public Health voiced concern, saying that a lack of access to handwashing stations could have ripple effects in the broader community. Some homeless residents have no option but to use the Rogue River for bathing, restrooms and drinking water.

”They’re trying to put us in this situation and put us in society’s view as how they view homeless in their minds,” Gutowski said. Continue on page 6...
"My hometown is located on a flat coastal plain once covered in brush, and intersected by rivers and creeks where pure water has bubbled up from creeks since the dawn of the Pleistocene. As a settled, human place, it has belonged to the Tongva and to three different empires. Once it was a rural outpost of the Tongva and to three different empires. Once it was a rural outpost of the Pueblo before it was taken by the United States, concentrating up to 8,000 houseless residents within its 50 blocks, just east of downtown. The area is crowded with vibrant life in tents, cars and sidewalk gatherings. In Los Angeles, what has unified the city many cities is sharply revealed in all of its brutal reality: the loss of the neighborhoods that used to be home to the poor and working class people of the city, the disappearance of the jobs that sustained their families and, finally, their expulsion to the streets. This is a place where activists are coming and going, threading their way past the corners where men play basketball in the park, where the "Hippy Kitchen" serves lunch—as it has done for more than 50 years—and where there seem to be fewer drinking fountains—and more police —than anywhere else in the city. On a recent Monday afternoon, the LA CAN Human and Civil Rights Committee met in its spacious conference room to sum up and strategize about the ongoing campaign to repeal the City’s updated initiative to police and criminalize unhoused residents: Municipal Ordinance 41.18, which makes sitting, lying down and leaving personal property in public areas illegal. Under new amendments enacted to conform the law to restrictions on "cruel and unusual punishment" under the U.S. Constitution established by Martin v. Boise—and currently before the Supreme Court in the Grants Pass v. Johnson case—each city council representative can designate "zones" where no unhoused people can stay. Though Black people account for only a small part of the LA population, they make up 43% of people arrested under the code, according to a report by Kenneth Mejia, LA’s progressive controller. I thought Jim Crow was supposed to be abolished, but he’s still running around," says LA CAN organizer General Dogon, as the meeting comes to order. "Look at Los Angeles 41.18—this ‘sit-lie’ ban been around for decades, based on the old vagrancy laws which criminalize unhoused residents: Must be a tool of white supremacy back in the day—and now, we’re trying to show that Jim Crow laws must go! You either support humanity or criminalization!" Peaceful Dogon, as the meeting comes to order. "Look at Los Angeles 41.18—this ‘sit-lie’ ban been around for decades, based on the old vagrancy laws which criminalize unhoused residents: Must be a tool of white supremacy back in the day—and now, we’re trying to show that Jim Crow laws must go! You either support humanity or criminalization!"

Nowhere in this country does Black Lives Matter less than in Skid Row. In 1976 Skid Row was created as a containment zone to ensure housing and services for poor, predominantly Black Angelenos were sealed off from the rest of Los Angeles. In other words, a place to hide the violent outcomes of racialized segregation, redlining, racial covenants, de-industrialization, welfare reform, the introduction and decimation caused by crack cocaine and the building of the world’s largest prison industrial complex. to cage Black bodies. A place where no expectation of human rights, dignity and respect was fully warranted. Pete White, "Skid Row Responds to Kanye West,” LA CAN website.

A sturdy cement block building houses the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), set back from Sixth Street in the heart of Skid Row. LA CAN is a bulwark—an organizing base and strategy center—for the unhoused population. Andrea Gibbons, "City of Segregation." Los Angeles is one of the largest stable populations of unhoused people in the United States, concentrating up to 8,000 houseless residents within its 50 blocks, just east of downtown. The area is crowded with vibrant life in tents, cars and sidewalk gatherings. In Los Angeles, what has unified the city many cities is sharply revealed in all of its brutal reality: the loss of the neighborhoods that used to be home to the poor and working class people of the city, the disappearance of the jobs that sustained their families and, finally, their expulsion to the streets. This is a place where activists are coming and going, threading their way past the corners where men play basketball in the park, where the "Hippy Kitchen" serves lunch—as it has done for more than 50 years—and where there seem to be fewer drinking fountains—and more police —than anywhere else in the city. On a recent Monday afternoon, the LA CAN Human and Civil Rights Committee met in its spacious conference room to sum up and strategize about the ongoing campaign to repeal the City’s updated initiative to police and criminalize unhoused residents: Municipal Ordinance 41.18, which makes sitting, lying down and leaving personal property in public areas illegal. Under new amendments enacted to conform the law to restrictions on "cruel and unusual punishment" under the U.S. Constitution established by Martin v. Boise—and currently before the Supreme Court in the Grants Pass v. Johnson case—each city council representative can designate "zones" where no unhoused people can stay. Though Black people account for only a small part of the LA population, they make up 43% of people arrested under the code, according to a report by Kenneth Mejia, LA’s progressive controller. I thought Jim Crow was supposed to be abolished, but he’s still running around," says LA CAN organizer General Dogon, as the meeting comes to order. "Look at Los Angeles 41.18—this ‘sit-lie’ ban been around for decades, based on the old vagrancy laws which criminalize unhoused residents: Must be a tool of white supremacy back in the day—and now, we’re trying to show that Jim Crow laws must go! You either support humanity or criminalization!" Peaceful Dogon, as the meeting comes to order. "Look at Los Angeles 41.18—this ‘sit-lie’ ban been around for decades, based on the old vagrancy laws which criminalize unhoused residents: Must be a tool of white supremacy back in the day—and now, we’re trying to show that Jim Crow laws must go! You either support humanity or criminalization!"

Members regularly attend LAHSA and police commission meetings to monitor and expose the impact of criminalization, data collection and surveillance. They also work with allied groups, such as the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and the Downtown Women’s Center. At the core of their activism is continuous street organizing, rallies and protests: The organization regularly sponsors “Fight Back Thursdays” and outreach to the Skid Row community and allies—students, teachers, neighbors by educating, mobilizing and serving their needs.

Dogan, the LA CAN organizer, sums up the discussion: "Endgame is abolition. It’s a long road. It’s a fight. It’s a war. You have to face the city that don’t give a damn about people. That’s what we are fighting against. Educating folks, doing delegations, writing reports, getting the word out. They know we are coming for them.

“There are tens of thousands of us—our goal is to organize every homeless person to fight back. We aren’t going anywhere without house keys. We need to shut the whole city down. Get rid of these laws. The denigration of Los Angeles as one humanity, one people, one fight. This city is the worst—leads the nation in homelessness, police brutality, lack of housing. Laws have been passed or are in progress in other jurisdictions, another member points out. San Francisco officials have put similar exclusion measures on the ballot, which voters approved. A sit-lie ban in 2016. Proposed bans in six states included language based on a model bill by the conservative think tank Cicero Institute. "Yeah, this is the heart of the rebellion, this is who we are fighting. The law says you can’t pitch a tent. They are fighting against. Educating folks, doing delegations, writing reports, getting the word out. They know we are coming for them.

"This is why we fight"
A coalition of current and former San Francisco officials and civic organizations filed a friend-of-the-court brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in advance of a hearing on whether cities can punish people existing while homeless even when no shelter is available. Members of the coalition, their counsel, Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, announced the filing in a press conference on Zoom.

Separately, the Western Regional Advocacy Project filed their own brief supporting the plaintiffs against the city of Grants Pass, Oregon. Over a thousand organizations, entities and people across the country have independently submitted about 40 similar briefs as well.

The Grants Pass case, which will be heard on April 22, could determine whether a 2018 ruling in Martin v. Boise stands. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld previous rulings declaring that arresting and ticketing unhoused people for sleeping in public without making shelter available is cruel and unusual punishment.

That precedent could be overturned by a conservative majority presiding over the nation’s highest court if it decides in Grants Pass's favor. If that happens, San Francisco and other cities could institute policies where living outside is punishable by law—even when no shelter is available.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and San Francisco Mayor London Breed filed briefs of their own in Grants Pass. They agreed that criminalizing sleeping in public when shelter is unavailable is unconstitutional, while at the same time urging the Supreme Court to essentially allow them to criminalize unhoused people who have nowhere to go. At the press conference, Zal Shroff, then-acting legal director of the Lawyers’ Committee, said that Newsom and Breed are engaging in “political theater” by blaming the courts for their own failures to implement real solutions to street homelessness.

“Why?” Shroff said. “The reality is that our leaders have chosen to play politics instead of doing their jobs on ensuring services and affordable housing.”

By extension, the San Francisco coalition’s amicus brief also implicated San Francisco’s failed response to unsheltered homelessness—despite the City’s purported “compassionate, services-first approach” to its street outreach programs. The City’s failure to follow its own policies is the subject of a separate lawsuit that the Coalition on Homelessness, the homeless advocacy organization that publishes Street Sheets, brought against the City.

The Lawyers’ Committee coalition’s brief cited a City internal audit stating “the City’s street teams do not achieve their established goals” in providing an indoor place for people living outside. It also referenced a finding by the Northern District of California that San Francisco failed to make shelter available before arresting them—something that the City has never disputed.

Disinformation campaign

In the brief, the Lawyers’ Committee’s coalition accused the City of spreading disinformation about the Northern District’s order in 2022 barring encampment sweeps as long as there are more people than available shelter beds.

“San Francisco claims the Northern District ‘inserted itself as a policy maker’ to change the City’s policy on homelessness,” the committee’s coalition wrote.

“That is false,” it added. “What is at issue is the body of detailed evidence demonstrating significant failures to comply with the policy.”

The committee coalition continued, “The only thing cities cannot do is intentionally banish their unhoused residents than for being homeless—which California leaders agree is cruel, unusual and counterproductive.”

A racial justice issue

In an additional filing with the Supreme Court, the San Francisco-based Western Regional Advocacy Project noted that homeless sweeps are patterned after other expulsion practices in U.S. history, particularly Jim Crow segregation laws enacted after the Civil War and the establishment of “sundown towns” that effectively barred people of color.

Its brief also said that Grants Pass was a sundown town, citing a 19th century editorial that warned Black, Latinx and indigenous people to stay away.

At the press conference, Brandon Greene, the organization’s policy director, framed homelessness as a racial justice issue. Despite the relatively small proportion of Black and brown people citywide, they make up for a significant part of the unhoused population, according to figures from the City’s point-in-time counts.

Greene said that race figures heavily in how the City responds to homelessness, as well as criminal justice.

“If those numbers were different with Black and brown people not disproportionately represented among the unhoused population, the solutions would look very different,” he said.

In a city that spends more than $20 million policing homelessness, Greene said that sweeps fail to place people in homes—they just further displacement.

“We know when you move people from one section of the city, they end up going to another section,” he said.

“That is neither a solution that is fiscally responsible, nor is it a solution that actually helps us.”

Grants Pass v. Johnson, docket no. 23-175, is scheduled for April 22.

Despite community pushback, MINT opened its emergency shelter for three cold nights the first weekend in March, offering 38 cots and other services to homeless residents. Grants Pass has been under a district court injunction since July 2020 and a federal injunction since September 2021 barring the city from enforcing its ordinances. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals held the lower court’s opinion that the ordinance is unconstitutional and cruel and unusual punishment clause because Grants Pass residents had no other option for shelter.

The only consistent overnight shelter is the Gospel Rescue Mission, a high-barrier shelter, meaning that clients are required to sign a contract with stipulations, attend daily Christian services and abide by a host of other rules as a condition of their stay.

The Mission also requires residents to turn over all medications and stay nicotine-free. It does not permit socializing between men and women except at approved events. The Mission acknowledges gender and sexuality in “Biblical terms,” meaning that residents must “dress and behave according to their birth gender,” according to its house rules.

Brian Bouteller, the Mission’s executive director, says that he believes that people need to be compelled to seek help and that the problem of homelessness is growing in Grants Pass because organizations are handing out materials that tell people to choose to sleep in parks. “They have an option to not sleep in the park,” he says. “I mean, we have forests all over the place.”

Bouteller does not believe that the result of city ordinances constitute cruel and unusual punishment. He says that when he received a $300 speeding ticket as a teenager, it made him think about the way he drove and that he changed his behavior accordingly. “It changed my desires because it was painful,” Bouteller says.

Walker says that the Mission does help certain people, but that the approach “doesn’t work for everybody.” Still, he

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acknowledges that the idea that people should be made comfortable "is in the ethos" of many living in Grants Pass.

The 9th Circuit Court cited its Mar- tim v. Boise decision from 2018 as the backdrop for the Grants Pass case. That ruling found that the US Constitution blots cities from imposing criminal penalties for sitting, sleeping, or lying on public property upon people who are not a "menace to public safety" and cannot obtain shelter.

The two cases are closely related, and liberal and conservative city and state governments alike have argued that the court's injunctions obstruct them from resolving home- lessness.

An amicus brief submitted by the city and county of San Francisco said the 9th Circuit Court's decision has ham- strung its ability to try. "The homelessness crisis defies ready solutions," the brief said. "By restricting San Francisco's ability to enforce its anti-camping rules through the use of non-lethal interventions, the court has thwarted both the city's ability to provide services to per- sonally assist homeless individuals and its ability to protect the health, safety, and welfare needs of its residents as a whole."

Local and state governments, police departments and chambers of com- merce across the West submitted addi- tional briefs in support of Grants Pass, making similar claims.

Ed Johnson, the Oregon Law Center's director of litigation, who brought the initial suit against Grants Pass, says that the case is specifically about whether civil and criminal enforcement of anti-camping regulations violates the US Constitution when people have no other place to go.

He says that penalizing people in need of housing will do little to solve the lack of housing problem and others are cynically and falsely blam- ing people for their situation or the crisis to distract the public and deflect blame for years of failed policies," he says.

Walker says that no matter what he tries to do to help people find housing, he tends to face resistance. Glen Crest Cottages, a 14-unit housing project proposed in 2022, faced signifi- cant challenges from nearby neighbors despite being a grant-funded project on donated land, specifically built for veterans.

"I think we have the right as tax- paying citizens to want to remain safe and have our property values remain the same as they currently are," one complaint said. "It is questionable if we can even sell them if this development goes in."

Walker says that the Foundry Village project, a long, narrow piece of land alongside the railroad tracks offering 17 transitional housing units, faced similar pushback. The project ultimate- ly went through despite some commu- nity members' objections.

Walker and his team worked for a year and a half to raise the money and spent another year and a half to get the people living at Foundry Village are ready to move into housing but can- not move without help for the city to move them to into. "That's the nut at the center of the thing," he says.

"THEM THEY'RE SO MISUNDERSTOOD" People living in parks are required to make park visits every Monday and Thursday, hand out 72-hour eviction notices, and conduct paternity tests to prove that they are "not really pregnant," a loosely defined term for leaving any item that finds near a tent. Leah acquired air to hand out to people in the parks, and their work grew into a mobile service for responding to mul- tiple needs. That was the beginning of MINT.

The organization recently acquired a van and customized it to allow the team to work in the parks. Bruce Murray, a retired inter- nist, runs the medical team with his wife, who lovingly refers to them as the "wound god." Murray says that the medical situation is dire in Grants Pass but there is not a lack of access to basic hygiene services.

Alongside a small group of volunteers, Murray works with Leach and her colleague Jessica Mueller — who refer to themselves as "Jaw and Silent Bob" — in checking in on people in the parks over the week. They ask them about upcoming appointments and develop- ments in their daily lives, nurturing people who wants to talk. "These people are just beautiful souls who have amazing stories, and they're so misunderstood," Leach says.

Murray says that the city council and the community have been suspicious of their work, but MINT is dedicated that it is not uncommon for people to drive through the park and take pictures and videos of them to share on social media. "They really don't understand what we're doing," he says.

THE 'CRIME' OF HAVING A COMMON COLd

City municipal code states that if a person violates a city code or a city's municipal code within a year for violating park rules, they can be fined up to $295. A person found guilty of criminal trespass can be punished with up to 30 days in jail and a $1,250 fine.

Brodia Minter, a Southern Oregon public defender, said that in three weeks, her clients, Helen Cruz and her partner, each received $295 citations for violating park use regulations, two separate $350 citations for camping in parks, followed by an exclusion order that barred them from Morrison Park on June 2, 2022. She added since consistent scheduling made it impossible for Cruz to have day in her court in the initial timeframe before officers issued an exclusion order, violating a right to due process.

"We're not going to adjudicate them but she was getting an exclusion order without proof that she was indeed camped out," Minter says. "There was literally nothing she could ever do to be doing it right."

Cruz decided to appeal after reading a notice at the bottom of a ticket that said that she had the right to do so within two days of receiving the order. She was the first person in Grants Pass to appeal an exclusion order but had to wait for the proceeding until 21 July 2022 — nearly as long as the 30-day exclusion order itself.

Cruz lost everything when she was swept away and she said she had an ice chest onto sentimental photos and important documents. Her blankets were soaked. She couldn't let her sent again because the police inten- tion to resolve the camps. "It had nothing to do with her sendo," she says.

It took my self-esteem and ... just stomped on it, basically.

Minter says that unless the city is giving no-barrier shelter, there are no legitimate options for people with no source of income. This encumbrance is narrow and not acceptable even before the Supreme Court, which is tasked with deciding whether people can be punished for involuntary homelessness.

Justice Stewart's majority opinion illustrated the cruelty of punishing people who are homeless for being absent due to health reasons. "We're just so afraid," one person said.

Cruz says that she was planning to work one of the homeless resi- dents but backed down quickly when she saw the community's ire. "It's kind of a double whammy. It's been very furious," she says. "I thought it was a lynching mob."

Minter says that the idea of criminalizing without any limitation, "My fear is if cities are allowed to criminalize without any limitation, they're going to wake up in a few years and we're going to have twice as many homeless people as we have right now," Minter says. Her fear is not unwarranted. Vigilante groups calling themselves park watch groups have started to harass homeless residents, slashing their tents, empty- ing shampoo bottles and scattering their belongings.

Walker says that some in the comm- unity are even recording people camp- ing on drug and use it to too difficult to address the fact that homogeneous communities are suffering a diverse population, includ- ing young children.

The most recent Oregon Point in Time (PIT) census by the Portland Homeless Union found that 72 percent of homeless resi- dents were homeless in Josephine County in 2023. PIT counts are widely understood to be a substantial undertaking but provide a baseline for annual homelessness statistics.

Organizations like Maslow Project would like to see the Oregonian County to provide children experienc- ing homelessness with the resources that they need.

Many young people have moved into the streets, "My fear is if cities are allowed to criminalize without any limitation, they're going to wake up in a few years and we're going to have twice as many homeless people as we have right now," Minter says. Her fear is not unwarranted. Vigilante groups calling themselves park watch groups have started to harass homeless residents, slashing their tents, empty- ing shampoo bottles and scattering their belongings.

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Phone service is also less accessible out of town, meaning that young homeless residents have a difficult time staying in school and connecting with case managers like Ritterbush, who could help them integrate into other parts of society.

Gutowski knows the struggle of trying to stay in school while experiencing homelessness. After her husband died and she moved into a homeless shelter, she went back to college to study family sup- ports. Her fear is not unwarranted. Vigilante groups calling themselves park watch groups have started to harass homeless residents, slashing their tents, empty- ing shampoo bottles and scattering their belongings.

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On April 22, 2024 the U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Gloria Johnson. The case stems from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and concerns a forced displacement of homeless people from a public park in Grants Pass, Oregon. The city implemented a policy of clear-out and displacement, citing public safety and order. The case is significant as it challenges the enforcement of local ordinances that criminalize homelessness and displacement from public spaces. The Supreme Court will likely set a precedent on the legality of such actions and the rights of unhoused individuals.

The case highlights the ongoing struggle between local authorities and homeless communities. The actions of the city have drawn scrutiny from civil rights organizations and advocates who argue that these policies are discriminatory and violate the rights of homeless individuals. The Supreme Court’s decision could have far-reaching implications for cities across the country that have similar ordinances in place, potentially setting new legal standards for the treatment of homeless populations.

The case also raises broader questions about the role of government in serving the needs of the homeless and the extent to which cities can enforce regulations that limit the rights of unhoused people. It is a test of the constitutional protections afforded to all Americans, including the right to housing and the right to be free from arbitrary government interference.

The stakes are high, and the outcome of this case will likely shape the legal landscape for homeless rights in the United States. It is a moment for all concerned parties to reflect on the fundamental principles of justice, equality, and compassion, and to work towards solutions that empower all members of our communities to live with dignity and respect.

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**What’s At Stake:** Over the last 40 years, thousands of lawsuits have been filed to protect the rights of unhoused people in public spaces. But the Grants Pass case could remove current meager protections—which already allow for incredible violence to occur.

A typical sweep goes something like this: police cite, fine, arrest, jail, harass and displace people surviving outside, when they have nowhere else to go. Dignity, respect, celebration, access to resources—none of this is available.Temporary shelters are no replacement for housing. Yet, the current legal requirement that cities can criminalize people if there are no shelter beds available gives unhoused people some legal recourse in court which they are cited for. These laws are designed to control public spaces, with less fear of the police. Police cite, fine, arrest, jail, harass and displace people surviving outside, when they have nowhere else to go.

The ugly laws likewise aimed to control public space. The formal abolition of slavery, vagrancy laws were repurposed to control Black folks. Local Black codes, passed in nearly every Southern state, established the horrific institution of separate schools, hospitals, and public spaces. Warning-out laws ostensibly protected towns from "economic instability" brought on by newcomer residents lacking gainful employment, and provided a legal mechanism for authorities to control public space.

In 1619, white plantation owners established the historic institution of slavery, controlling nearly every aspect of the lives of Black people. Following the formal abolition of slavery, vagrancy laws were repurposed to control Black folks. Local Black codes, passed in nearly every Southern state, established brutal punishments for unemployment. Tens of thousands of Black people were arrested, fined, and forced to work. Southern states went on to banish Black individuals from public space using Jim Crow laws. Simultaneously, cities across the country adopted "sundown town" policies, prohibiting the presence of Black, Chinese and Latinx people in public places. The City of Grants Pass itself was a sundown town, and leaders explicitly targeted the act of sleeping for non-white people.

The ugly laws likewise aimed to control the presence of disabled people. The 1881 Ordinance reads: "Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places in this city, shall be removed or therefrom expose himself to public view, under the penalty of a fine of $1 [about $20 today] for each offense."

In the 20th century, other instances of displacement came via anti-Oke laws. During the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, hundreds of thousands of dispossessed farmers, referred to derogatorily as "Okies," migrated to western states.
Most people in the U.S. in their 20s don’t need to think about the harsh realities of life. Their parents are probably still helping them out, and they’re probably still getting an education. But what I’ve seen, most, are willing to support them as they make their way through the last transitional stage into adulthood. Most people in their twenties expect good health and have their needs met—and this means that usually, desires and dreams are in the driver’s seat.

But if you’re disabled, the picture is different, and more so when you reach past 40 and you’re living in poverty. Things might begin to feel pressured. And while most Americans in their 40s are at their peak of physical, mental and money-earning condition, those of us with disabilities are usually not as fortunate. I had a friend who died at 50. Fifty is a young age to die.

My friend had type 2 diabetes. One day he showed me his teeth, all extracted, which he kept in a glass jar. He had bipolar disorder, and he would become dangerously violent. He was also, in calmer phases, a mental health advocate. His example was exceedingly bad for the mental health self-help movement, because of his violence and other destructiveness and because he was so against psychiatric medication. This man’s behavior might have been responsible for the end of the consumer movement in the East Bay.

Unfortunately, in modern times almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all mentally ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all medically ill people whose conditions are publicly known have almost all socially disadvan...

I have a psychotic illness. I have difficulty adapting to various environments and circumstances. My symptoms make me more fearful. I also have delusional tendencies that make it harder for me to remain in touch with reality. Medication just lowers the volume of my symptoms—it doesn’t eliminate them. So, my ability to be hired and to work is that much harder.

Still, I encourage mentally ill readers to give a shot. Mentally ill people deserve a piece of the pie. We may not get the entire pie, just a small slice. Just because it might be twice as hard for us to get half as much is not a good enough reason to give up. I’ve mostly failed at things but succeeded at a few, and this is good enough for me to keep trying.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California. His work has appeared in many publications, and he sells indie books on Amazon.