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STREET SHEET



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ART BY JOSH MACPHEE

CORRECTION

We'd like to point out an error we made in our last issue.

The beautiful cover design of “El Corazón de Pan Dulce” is by Melanie Cervantes, not by Roger Peets. We did give proper credit to Melanie in our online newsletter, so to all who’ve seen both the print edition and the newsletter, we apologize for the confusion.

As repentance for our mistake, we are also giving a shout out to the Justseeds Artists’ collective, which features both the artwork of Melanie and Roger. Check them out at justseeds.org, and support their work there!

And again, apologies to Melanie. Great cover!

GRANTS PASS V. JOHNSON HOMELESSNESS CASE TO GO BEFORE US SUPREME COURT

JEREMIAH HAYDEN

Laura Gutowski resides just down the street from the Grants Pass home that she lived in for 25 years. Her son used to play baseball in Morrison Centennial 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 crowds gather near hotel lots and restaurant patios.

Now, the city is also at the center of a US Supreme Court case that is expected to have broad implications for homelessness policy across the entire country.

The court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in Grants Pass v. Johnson on 22 April. Grants Pass says that civil and criminal punishments are necessary for enforcing 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. “It kind of all piled on 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 month sleeping in 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 2013, 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 penalty. 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 what they would consider homeless, or how they view homeless in their minds,” Gutowski said.

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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!



“THIS IS WHY WE FIGHT”

LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK TARGETS SIT-LIE LAW

CATHLEEN WILLIAMS, SACRAMENTO HOMEWARD STREET JOURNAL

“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 Spanish crown, and then a Mexican pueblo before it was taken by the United States and became what it is today: the newest and last megalopolis built in the western march of Western civilization across the Western Hemisphere.” Hector Tobar, “Our Migrant Souls.”

“Segregation’s roots in Los Angeles trace back to when Anglo settlers conquered the indigenous populations of Southern California in the mid-1800s, violently taking the best land for themselves. The professionalized real estate industry, coming into its own after the turn of the 20th century, along with other associated business interests, then significantly deepened and institutionalized this foundation of white supremacy in the housing market. Again we see organizations like the Central City Association lobbying city officials and planners to adopt measures that help the market destroy the low-income housing, and working with the police to aggressively criminalize and expel the unhoused population.” Andrea Gibbons, “City of Segregation.”

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 devastation 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 people of this city, who were officially counted at over 75,000 in January 2024. Three-quarters live outside, enduring the extremes of the desert climate, the unrelenting hostility of City Hall and the private real estate interests that dominate it. Almost one-third of this population is Black—although they make up only 8% of the city’s inhabitants.

Skid Row is home to 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 unfolded in many cities is sharply revealed in all 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 corner 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 were 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!”

LA CAN’s campaign to repeal 41.18 has multiple pieces. Taking advantage of the electoral engagement that has brought new and progressive members to the city council, LA CAN has set up weekly delegations with each city council member to call for the repeal of 41.18.

Lobbying for the release of an audit of the ordinance’s “effectiveness” that was mandated by the City Council a year ago, LA CAN has issued its own report detailing the failures of the LA Homeless Services Agency (LAHSA), covering which possessions are being taken, determining whether shelter is being offered, exposing the pattern of arrests and sweeps and highlighting the conditions of life in Skid Row, where there are no trash cans, no bathrooms—just “sanitation” in the form of fire hoses

and garbage trucks that devastate lives.

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 beyond to involve unhoused neighbors by educating, mobilizing and serving their needs.

Dogon, 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. It’s a desegregation of LA—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 2010 and a sidewalk tent 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,” says another member. “These efforts will resonate across the country—positive and negative. There’s a statewide bill in the California Senate as we speak—SB 1011—which is modeled on 41.18. Sacramento passed Measure O, a sit-lie ban. As usual, Los Angeles leads the way, but attacks and sweeps of homeless encampment are up across the country! This is why we fight.”



ADVOCATES INDICT SAN FRANCISCO'S SWEEPS POLICIES BEFORE US SUPREME COURT

TJ JOHNSTON

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 could penalize existing while homeless even when no shelter is available. Members of the coalition and 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 Sheet*, 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 Court 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.

GRANTS PASS TO GO E

continued from page 2...

"HOUSING AS COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE"

Doug Walker, a retired builder and member of the city's Housing Advisory Committee, seems to never stop working. This winter, Walker and his team have been working to retrofit a building, turning it into an emergency shelter and navigation center, run by local organization Mobile Integrative Navigation Team (MINT).

Early one morning, Walker cut materials and delegated tasks inside "Parker's Place," a small building neighboring a used furniture store and a large Bi-Mart parking lot. Inclement weather was expected to settle in, and MINT staff hoped to accommodate people the following weekend.

Walker says that temporary shelters are part of the solution, but Grants Pass needs to get to work building more apartments and affordable housing. He argues that the current scenario is a result of the policies of the past 50 years. "We have woefully underbuilt housing, and I think we have to start to look at housing as infrastructure — as community infrastructure," he says.

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 2022, barring the city from enforcing its ordinances. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals held the lower court's opinion that the ordinance violated the 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 abstain from using substances, 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 material things like coats to people who choose to sleep in parks. "They have the option to not sleep in the park," he says. "I mean, we have forests all over the place."

Bouteller does not believe that the enforcement of city ordinances constitutes 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

GRANTS PASS V. JOHNSON HOMELESSNESS CASE BEFORE US SUPREME COURT

JEREMIAH HAYDEN

acknowledges that the idea that people should be made uncomfortable “is in the ethos” of many living in Grants Pass.

The 9th Circuit Court cited its *Martin v. Boise* decision from 2018 as the backdrop for the Grants Pass case. That ruling found that the US Constitution blocks cities from imposing criminal penalties for sitting, sleeping, or lying outside on public property upon people who are experiencing homelessness and cannot obtain shelter.

The two cases are closely related, and liberal and conservative city and state governments across the West have argued that the court’s injunctions obstruct them from resolving homelessness.

An amicus brief submitted by the city and county of San Francisco said the 9th Circuit Court’s decision has hamstrung its efforts. “The homelessness crisis defies ready solutions,” the brief said. “By restricting San Francisco’s ability to enforce those laws, judicial intervention has thwarted both the city’s ability to provide services to persons experiencing homelessness 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 commerce across the West submitted additional 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 larger problem. “Some politicians and others are cynically and falsely blaming the judiciary for the homelessness 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 address the housing shortage, he tends to face resistance. Glen Crest Cottages, a 14-unit housing project proposed in 2023, faced significant 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 pods, faced similar pushback. The project ultimately went through despite some community members’ objections.

Walker and his team worked for a year and a half to raise the money and spent another year building. He says that half the people living at Foundry Village are ready to move into housing but cannot leave because there is nowhere for them to move into. “That’s the nut at the center of the thing,” he says.

“THEY’RE SO MISUNDERSTOOD”

People living in parks are required to move every 72 hours. Police officers visit parks every Monday and Thursday, hand out 72-hour eviction notices, and give \$295 citations for “scattering rubbish,” a loosely defined term for leaving any item that officers find near a tent. Left unpaid, fines for violating camping ordinances increase to \$537.60.

As police hand out penalties to local residents, MINT has negotiated a relatively workable schedule, offering to help residents to move their tents every Saturday.

MINT began as a community project with Josephine County Public Health, providing vaccines to people experiencing homelessness in 2021. Leah Swanson, the county emergency preparedness coordinator, says that she saw inequities between COVID vaccine rates in people who were housed and those who were unhoused, so she started a program to build trust and meet people where they were.

“That’s quintessential public health work,” she says.

Cassy Leach, who worked as a nurse at a local hospital at the time, volunteered to help early on. As she built trust in the community, people started asking for other supplies, like the life-saving overdose reversal medication Narcan. Leach acquired some to give to people in the parks, and their work grew into a mobile service for responding to multiple needs. That was the beginning of MINT.

The organization recently acquired a van and customized it to allow the team to provide medical care in the parks. Bruce Murray, a retired internist, runs the medical team with his wife, whom he lovingly refers to as the “wound god.” Murray says that the medical situation is dire in Grants Pass parks due to 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 “Jay and Silent Bob” — checking in on people in the parks during the week. They ask them about upcoming appointments and developments in their daily lives, nurturing personal connections with anyone 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 what MINT is doing, and that it is not uncommon for people to drive through the park and take photos 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 receives two or more citations within a year for violating park rules, officers can give an exclusion order, barring them from being in the park for 30 days under threat of criminal trespass. 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 \$295 citations for camping in parks, followed by an exclusion order that barred them from Morrison Park on 2 June 2022. She added that court scheduling made it impossible for Cruz to have her day in court on the initial citations before officers issued the exclusion order, violating a right to due process.

“We’d tried to adjudicate them but she was getting an exclusion order and swept before those tickets were adjudicated,” 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 27 June 2022 — nearly as long as the 30-day exclusion order itself.

Cruz lost everything when she was swept. She said that police dumped an ice chest onto sentimental photos and important documents. Her blankets were soaked. She could not set up her tent again because the police intentionally broke the tent poles. “Everything was just destroyed,” 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 encapsulates the narrow question before the Supreme Court, which is tasked with determining whether people can be punished for involuntary homelessness. Johnson says that decades of precedent holds that people cannot be punished for any involuntary status.

The 9th Circuit Court affirmed that basic principle in *Martin v. Boise*, saying that “a person cannot be prosecuted for involuntary conduct if it is an unavoidable consequence of one’s status.” That decision was based in part on a 1962 Supreme Court case, *Robinson v. California*, which determined that states cannot punish a person simply for the involuntary status of being addicted to narcotics.

Justice Stewart’s majority opinion illustrated the cruelty of punishing a person for something they cannot help. “Even one day in prison would be a cruel and unusual punishment for the ‘crime’ of having a common cold,” Potter said.

“I THOUGHT IT WAS A LYNCH MOB”

On 17 May 2023, three days after one man experiencing homelessness killed another in Riverside Park, the city council held a public hearing and closed the park to all members of the public for one month.

During contentious public testimony, community members doubled down on the push to make residents experiencing homelessness uncomfortable, calling to privatize the parks, and describing Narcan as a “crutch” and the idea of providing shelter as “crummy.”

“We’re just so scared,” one person said.

Cruz says that she was planning to speak on behalf of the homeless residents but backed down quickly when she saw the community’s ire. “It’s kind of scary because these people were ... furious,” she says. “I thought it was a lynch mob.”

Her fear is not unwarranted. Vigilante groups calling themselves park watch groups have started to harass homeless residents, slashing their tents, emptying shampoo bottles and scattering their belongings.

Walker says that some in the community misdirect their anger, focusing on crime and drug use because it is too difficult to address the fact that homelessness is a broad, societal issue affecting a diverse population, including young children.

The most recent Oregon Point in Time (PIT) count revealed that 756 school-age children were homeless in Josephine County in 2023. PIT counts are widely understood to be a substantial undercount but provide a baseline for annual homelessness statistics.

Organizations like Maslow Project work in Josephine and nearby Jackson County to provide children experiencing homelessness with the resources that they need.

Many young people have moved into the nearby hills despite their danger and distance from services. Nicole Ritterbush, a case worker for Maslow Project, says that this is a consequence of the city pushing people to the edges, where there is a lower threat of criminal penalties. “The mental health stress and toll it takes on them to have to constantly be moving and not be able to sleep is not good,” she says.

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 to 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 lost her housing, she went back to college to study family support services so that she could support young people struggling with social and behavioral challenges. But without consistent access to electricity, she was often unable to keep her laptop charged, and she could not afford fuel to drive to and from school each day. She had to drop out after the first term, “which was irritating, because I had finally gotten up the guts to actually go to college in the first place,” she says.

She says that it is unfeasible to take steps out of homelessness in Grants Pass, as debts from citations become insurmountable and police and vigilante groups provoke and harass people for various reasons — in her case, for doing her homework.

Johnson says that despite the national attention to the case, the Supreme Court’s decision may do little to materially change the situation in Oregon. ORS 195.530 and Article I, section 16 of the Oregon Constitution require city ordinances to be objectively reasonable regarding people experiencing homelessness. Still, the decision is likely to impact the way that cities and states approach homelessness, regardless of whether it is sound public policy.

“My fear is if cities are allowed to criminalize without any limitation, we’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,” Johnson says.

Courtesy of Street Roots / INSP.ngo

WILL THE US SUPREME COURT MAKE IT EASIER FOR CITIES TO BANISH US? MAYBE...BUT WE WILL NOT DISAPPEAR!

WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

On April 22, 2024 the U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Gloria Johnson. The case determines if the U.S. Constitution allows for local governments to fine, arrest, and jail people for living outside, when they have nowhere else to go. Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) members are planning a day of action on April 22, 2024 to speak out for the rights of unhoused people to exist, in 14 cities and counting!

The Case: The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which governs nine states in the western U.S. including Oregon, has ruled that criminalizing basic survival amounts to cruel and unusual punishment. But Grants Pass is challenging that ruling. Grants Pass officials have explicitly stated their goal is to make the city “uncomfortable enough for [unhoused people]” that they decide to “move on down the road.”

Currently, cities are not supposed to criminalize sleeping if no “shelter” is available. Temporary shelters are no replacement for housing. Yet, the current legal requirement that cities cannot criminalize people if there are no shelter beds available gives unhoused people some legal recourse in court when they are cited and arrested for basic survival activities, such as sleeping, sitting, standing and eating.

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 would remove current meager protections—which already allow for incredible violence to occur.

A typical sweep goes something like this one, experienced by WRAP members in Denver: on January 5, 2024 around 10 a.m., several police officers arrived at a 30-person encampment on the corner of Colfax and Mariposa Streets. Tents were on the public right-of-way, not blocking the sidewalk. It was 32 degrees with a wind chill of 27; below-freezing temperatures persisted nearly the entire month. Officers told residents they had 72 hours to pack up and leave. Twenty minutes later, however, city workers began throwing tents, backpacks and other belongings into garbage trucks. Residents asked for time to pack their belongings, but crew members ignored them, trashing personal items: food, essential paperwork, sleeping bags, clothing, work tools, medication and identification.

Though methods vary, forced displacement is always traumatic. If Grants Pass wins, it will be even easier than in the past for police to roll up to encampments at the behest of elected officials, and send people to jail for refusing to leave their tent, vehicle or community. It would allow governments more leeway to disappear people carte blanche. Unsheltered people would continue to be pushed from block to block, from city to city, each time becoming more targeted, more degraded and more

dehumanized. Cities would do this with violence and impunity, with less fear of potential litigation.

This is the same kind of power and property grab that those in power have been trying to get away with for centuries.

History of Banishment: Governments have been using laws to control the use of public space by particular community members since the birth of this nation. The criminalization of poverty and homelessness has ALWAYS existed to ease racist fears and protect (predominantly white people’s) property and profits. Unhoused people, and especially indigenous communities, Black and brown people, trans and queer folks, immigrants, and people with disabilities, are hit hardest—but now we’re rising up.

White settler efforts to control public space began with the genocidal theft of indigenous lands. Early colonizers then brought anti-poor laws banning “vagrancy” across the Atlantic, enacting “warning-out” laws that enabled towns to force unemployed individuals out of the area. 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 horrific 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 and fined, and failure to pay fines resulted in forced labor. 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 after dark. 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. Chicago’s 1881 ordinance read: “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 not therein or thereon 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-Okie laws. During the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, hundreds of thousands of displaced farmers, referred to derogatorily as “Okies,” migrated to western states.

Local governments passed laws to punish the presence of displaced farmers who lived in “shanty towns.” For example, a Yuba County ordinance said “[e]very person [or entity] that brings or assists in bringing into the State any indigent person who is not a resident of the State ... is guilty of a misdemeanor.”

Banishment Today: Laws banning camping like the one in Grants Pass are the 21st century’s version of this trend. When elected officials in Grants Pass first enacted the anti-camping ordinance that became the basis for this Supreme Court case, they made it crystal clear that their goal was to banish unhoused people from the city.

When a group of people threatens the very root of the system that keeps the powerful empowered, governments move to legislate against them. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required that slaves be returned to their owners even if they were in a free state, for example. These days, substantial profits come via real estate, retail and tourism. When the presence of unhoused people threatens profits, elected officials call the police. Police cite, fine, arrest, jail, harass and displace people surviving unhoused. Instead of providing public housing, tenant protections and other

support, officials banish those who cannot afford housing.

The actions of local governments imply that homelessness is only a problem if you can see it. These centuries-old efforts to make us disappear can be collectively described as “invisible laws”: if you can’t see homeless people in your community, then you have eliminated the issue of homelessness in society. We know this is not true.

Fighting Back: These fights we engage in are not just about winning or losing, they are about building community. They are about letting poor and unhoused people know, in no uncertain terms, that we get stronger when we join forces and defend our rights to exist in the places we call home.

When poor people see our reality respected and celebrated in the public domain, we build power. In this power, one day the change we organize for will come. Dignity, respect, celebration, accountability, and love are the building blocks of our community organizing. Come out with us on April 22 to bring attention to the Grants Pass case, have a blast, and of course, kick some ass!

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FACING EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS WITH A MENTAL DISABILITY

JACK BRAGEN

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 living, and from 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 few prospects, and most of the prospects are jobs that the treatment system creates to give to mental health consumers.

Those who hire usually discriminate against people with neurodivergence. I believe this makes it much harder for me, individually speaking, to rise out of poverty.

I'm currently trying to increase my income, meet my basic needs and establish security in my life. Most of my money is from government benefits, and this amounts to having very low income. This is not a reassuring way to live.

When I'm fired up and trying to accomplish something, I encounter various forms of opposition. Some of it is internal, consisting of mental and emotional resistance and self-doubt; some relates to time usage, logistics and similar constraints.

Some of the external opposition comes from individuals who don't want me to succeed at what I'm trying to do. In many instances, the strategies of an "enemy" include the need to gather information to be used against me.

My objective is to create economic security for myself. It would be one way of alleviating my housing fears. And I don't know yet how this will play out. My thoughts of how to create wealth—or to be more precise, not be poor—entail creating something good and offering it to people in return for income.

There are villains in the picture. Many people can't stand it and dislike you for doing something they can't do or haven't been able to do. Then, you are dealing with people coming after you because they resent something good you have created. Unfortunately, this has

been the pattern—people have seen me create something good, and then they knock me down. Each time this happens, it is harder for me to get back on my feet.

If you have a psychiatric impairment, there are numerous barriers to employment. You might have developed symptoms before you could get some college or other training under your cap. Even so, after being diagnosed, you could still go to college and/or training. Yet your parents or other people in a position of advising you might

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.

dissuade you from schooling because they believe you wouldn't be able to do it, and thus persuade you to aim lower. That's what seems to have happened to me. My parents at some point gave up on me obtaining an education. I think it would have been an ideal time to do this when I was in my 30s.

But I did not think ahead. The responsibility of this belongs on my shoulders.

Now I am approaching sixty, and I can't conceive of starting afresh with new education.

Most of those who my age are probably looking ahead toward their retirement. Others are still going at it full bore—but they're not starting at the bottom, they're at the top and they're making big bucks.

It's great to be a "famous" author. It really puts a feather in your cap. But you can't eat a feather or live in it, it

won't fill your gas tank and you can't use it to invest in the stock market.

Being in treatment for a psychiatric condition most of your life can badly hamper the ability to competitively perform at most jobs. Medication does a number on you. Though medication is designed to suppress some of the symptoms of mental illness, I guess it is also intended to keep us manageable through keeping us numbed out and sedated. Honestly, I don't know what goes on in drug companies, but it seems that their agenda isn't necessarily that of making us high performers. Drug engineering has probably evolved enough that a much better medication could easily be invented that treats mental illness without its side effects causing other impairments.

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Still, I encourage mentally ill readers to give it 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..

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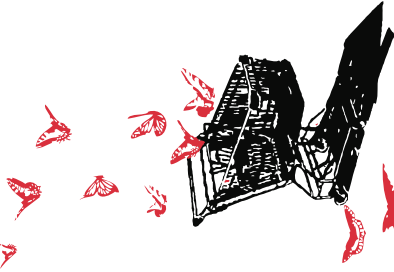
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