SEVEN

# The Old Runaround: Class Cleansing in San Francisco

In many ways, the migratory worker is a man without a country. By the very nature of his occupation he is deprived of the ballot, and liable when not at work to arrest for vagrancy and trespassing.
—NELS ANDERSON, *The Hobo*

Sometimes, you wonder if we're really Americans. . . . Whether we're a citizen or not. . . . It defines homelessness in the dictionary—they define it as without a country. You know, you go in the bar, in the coffee shop, they don't want your money. You go in the park, they move you on. You try to sit down on the stoop, somebody calls the cops. It doesn't stop.
—GEORGE, homeless in San Francisco, 1998

THE PURITANS CONCEIVED OF AMERICA AS A PLACE WHERE they could build a pure community, a "city on a hill" that would serve as a beacon, beckoning the righteous and leaving behind the worldliness, miseries, and corruption of old Europe.[1] As real American cities grew larger, though, they took on a much more ambivalent role in the national imaginary. Great powerhouses of production and consumption, the nineteenth-century cities drew vast and diverse armies of workers from across the world as well as the rural hinterland. City streets became increasingly dense and heterogeneous, places where Jew and Gentile, seamstress and millionaire shared the same public spaces.





On the one hand, educated Americans were proud of the architectural majesty and productive power of their great metropoli. At the same time they distanced themselves from urban culture, counterposing a nostalgic image of the small town "Main Street" to a wicked city characterized by runaway greed, polarities of wealth, glamour and vice, and the unhygienic mixing of peoples and races.[2] Jefferson's agrarian romanticism found its complement in the literary anti-urbanism of Emerson and Thoreau and later in the influential work of sociologist Louis Wirth, who feared that the density and heterogeneity of large cities eroded community, kinship, and any shared moral compass.

Many city dwellers themselves, however, had higher hopes for urban life. As the immoderate exploitation of the Gilded Age fed desires for both reform and revolution, increasingly assertive working classes and their allies started to pressure the city fathers to counteract the human costs of intensive exploitation. Powered by the wealth and technology of the industrial revolution, cities became producers of public goods on a grand scale—with public transportation, libraries, subsidized housing, welfare services, and eventually affordable institutions of higher education. As Neil Smith puts it, the Keynesian city of the 1930s and 1940s was a "combined hiring hall and welfare hall," doubly a magnet for Americans down on their luck.[3]

With the suburbanization of the postwar years, the American downtown started to lose its position as the hub of leisure and consumption. The fetishized instruments of domestic utopia—the car, the TV, and the mechanized kitchen—reoriented leisure and consumption around private, low-density dwelling.[4] Older city neighborhoods lost much of their earlier population and eventually most of their businesses. Among those left behind were many African Americans, blocked from leaving the cities by both poverty and racist housing covenants. Instead, their numbers grew rapidly as southerners continued to migrate into the northern and western cities. City leaders supported their white constituents' efforts to avoid integration, trying to contain their overcrowded ghettos by building concentrations of public housing that all too quickly became vertical slums.

The most significant postwar attempt to mitigate the increasing poverty of the central cities arrived as the mass civil disobedience of the civil rights movement spurred on the Equal Opportunity Act of

1964.[5] But the War on Poverty provided too little too late. It was too late to re-create the New Deal, let alone the Eisenhower boom years, for African Americans—and the piecemeal programs initiated by the poverty warriors of the 1960s collapsed into the fiscal and political crisis generated by the Vietnam War.[6] By the time of the great manufacturing decline of the 1970s, the stage was set for urban crisis. Most of the prosperous members of the white middle and working classes, and many of their former workplaces, had already left the American central cities, the vital mosaic of class, race, and ethnicity of the early twentieth century replaced by a largely depressed terrain sharply segregated between aging white ethnics, growing immigrant enclaves, and African American ghetto tracts now experiencing their own middle-class exodus to the suburbs.

At this point, the strong binaries of American sin-talk became again starkly spatialized within the urban form. Where the European medieval town and the early New England theocracies had used the city wall to exclude the undeserving poor, the American urban crisis of the 1970s segregated the poor in an inside-out or doughnut fashion, corralling them *inside* the limits of the old city. Always under suspicion for their concentrations of racial minorities and fresh immigrants, central cities now became more than ever the primary marker for the social problems of the nation.[7]

As the primary engines of the nation's economy, American cities during the New Deal era had been subsidized at the federal level in a multiplicity of ways. But the de-industrialized cities of the 1970s and 1980s no longer represented the nation's economic engines, and the leaner, meaner federal government of the post-Keynesian era followed Gerald Ford's lead, dismantling the mechanisms of national redistribution, progressively shedding commitments to public housing, preventative health, and the myriad services previously subsidized through block grants.[8]

Urban politicians have been left with fewer and fewer funds with which to maintain their increasingly impoverished residents. Still overwhelmingly Democratic in their affiliation, they have been forced to recognize that they no longer have the power to implement the broad tax-and-spend policies used to mitigate social suffering and disorder in previous decades. Slowly but surely the leaders of former Keynesian strongholds have turned, whether reluctantly or eagerly, to forms





of business-led regeneration that entail no significant commitment to social reproduction. The great masses of manual workers that propelled industrial capitalism are largely irrelevant to the real estate developers, financiers, and retailers that are the primary business constituency for the post-Keynesian city. Instead, local politicians have been faced with the paradoxical demand that they deliver a safe and aesthetically appealing environment for shoppers and white-collar workers, despite the disintegration of former institutions of class compromise.

The cornerstone of post-Keynesian urban policy has been gentrification, the remaking of urban space to pull affluent suburbanites back into the city, both as residents and as visitors. Neil Smith's invaluable work on the subject shows the commonalities between older forms of bottom-up gentrification and the more interventionist top-down redevelopment that has proliferated since the 1990s.[9] Whereas bottom-up gentrification encourages middle-class incomers to turn around dilapidated housing stock, top-down gentrifying developments use public/private partnerships to remake urban spaces on a large scale. At the heart of both strategies is the project to produce a physical environment that attracts and calms people uncomfortable with gritty city life. To achieve this, city governments have developed or revived an arsenal of techniques to preserve the value of redeveloped and gentrified spaces by excluding the disorderly poor.

Nowhere is the importance of gentrification more evident than in the radical changes in the practice and philosophy of urban policing over the last two decades. In chapter 2 we saw how police departments and local officials eagerly took up the "broken windows" discourse of Wilson and Kelling across the United States during the late 1980s and 1990s. In thousands of municipal discussions on the problem of homelessness, "broken windows" became the beachhead for the return of a firmly moral discourse on poverty, a narrative with which local politicians and officials could shift the terms of social policy away from the language of rights and equal opportunity bequeathed by the Great Society. The problem of homelessness became the problems *created by* the homeless, and in particular, the threat to safe and clean urban spaces.

At the core of Wilson and Kelling's argument was the claim that overly permissive environments are more important in creating disorder and crime than "inexorable social forces," as they put it: Vandalism, panhandling, graffiti writing, and "loitering" create an opening

for more serious crime.[10] The postwar focus on car-based policing and more serious crimes, said Wilson and Kelling, had left neighborhoods without protection from low-level disorderly conduct that propelled them into criminality and chaos. This retreat from the attempt to create public order had been caused in part, they said, by the activities of the ACLU and other legal defense organizations, whose focus on individual rights blocked the kind of day-to-day policing most effective against nuisance offenses. Instead of dashing around in cars solving high-profile crimes, police officers needed to return to small-scale patrolling, backed by "the legal tools to remove undesirable persons from a neighborhood when informal efforts to preserve order in the streets have failed."[11]

The first cities to mobilize large-scale campaigns against panhandling and sleeping in public space were places where economic inequality is strongly marked by racial difference. The leaders of Atlanta and Orlando, most notably, moved swiftly and firmly against their majority-black homeless populations.[12] But many others swiftly followed them. Small towns that had always been hostile to the vagrant poor revived municipal articles forbidding loitering or sitting on the sidewalk that had not been used since the Great Depression, as well as more contemporary innovations such as banning shopping carts outside of supermarket property and employing undercover cops to catch people panhandling.[13]

Most of the new and revived "quality of life" laws focused on out-of-place home practices,[14] expressing on the principle that public space should be a complement to private space, not a substitute for it. Commercial streets should be used for shopping, not conversations, sleeping, or sitting; public transportation for traveling, not for basic shelter; and parks for playing sports and walking, not sleeping or drinking.[15] The wide mobilization of these codes played an important role in bringing the politics of urban space in line with what Peck and Tickell have called "rollback neoliberalism"—a comprehensive project to destroy and de-legitimize forms of social welfare and political mobilization developed during the Keynesian era.[16] For example, in many cities, the "broken windows" approach drew strong support from new community groups that focused almost entirely on crime. These organizations abandoned the cross-class conceptions of neighborhood articulated by many neighborhood movements of the 1960s and 1970s,





redefining community as a collection of stakeholders—merchants and property owners. The city was to be made safe for gentrification.

There were clear continuities between the kinds of "community" sought by the new community organizations of the 1980s and 1990s and the suburban impulse of the postwar period, when vast numbers of whites had left the old heterogeneous, unpredictable city neighborhoods for the glories of clean lawns and the PTA. But now the suburban values of the gentrifiers were being applied back to the wicked city they had fled. While many of the gentrifiers found the city more exciting than the suburbs, they could not help bringing deeply held assumptions about the desirability of clean, class-homogenous neighborhoods. Furthermore, their ability to negotiate a modus vivendi with unruly neighbors was probably hampered by the limited interactional style that Baumgartner characterizes as suburban "moral minimalism."[17]

Under pressure from frustrated merchants and residents disturbed by vagrants sleeping on their doorsteps, city halls across the country revisited the fortress tactics previously only employed by the very rich: architecture to repel invaders, surveillance cameras to watch them, subsidiary police to roust and remove them, sprinklers to drench them, and stadium lighting to prevent them from sleep.

The legislation directed at controlling the movement and behavior of homeless people was supported by many more subtle mechanisms of homeless control. One strategy used in many cities was the leasing of the sidewalks of commercial strips to merchants so that trespassing laws could be enforced. Common also were the destruction of encampments and the confiscation of property, the locking of public bathrooms, and the replacement of bus-stop benches with narrow "flip" or barrel-topped seats on which people could not slump, let alone sleep. Both public institutions and businesses started to use more aggressive lighting, surveillance cameras, spikes on windowsills, and locks on dumpsters to prevent scavenging. In the zones of the most intense battles over public space, anti-homeless tactics moved beyond the piecemeal, becoming a major design parameter for new buildings. Under these principles of "anti-homeless architecture," architects avoided creating discreet nooks and crannies outside of major sightlines and cut out the kinds of window ledges or boundary walls where homeless people might sit or sleep.[18]

The imperative to physically corral the disorderly homeless became another reason for political leaders to expand top-down gentrification: public-private partnerships with real estate developers to create new forms of pseudo-public or "urbanoid" space that would attract shoppers and tourists while keeping out the desperate and unwashed.[19] The first areas sacrificed to such projects were inevitably down-at-heel liminal zones that harbored remaining cheap hotels, further reducing the stock of affordable housing for the single poor.

## *Cracking Down in San Francisco*

As resurrected sin-talk swept the country, it was not only taken up by historically conservative small towns and suburbs, but it also gained considerable strength within the citadels of North American urban liberalism: Manhattan and San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago. Precisely *because* residents of these cities had fought hard to maintain functional, high-density urbanism, they now have vital public spaces vulnerable to devaluation by the presence of homeless people.

San Francisco, a historical stronghold of the labor movement, civil rights activism, and other social movement activity, embodies this tension between valuable public space and progressive politics to a high degree, an important reason for the political centrality of its "homelessness problem" over the last twenty-five years. The city's wealth of Victorian housing stock, expanded by the enforcement of strict building codes after the 1906 earthquake, presents an extraordinarily beautiful built environment, further complementing its magnificent natural setting as a highland promontory colored by rapid sweeps of sun and fog. High residential density and limited off-street parking encourages mass pedestrianism, keeping the sidewalks lively and meaningful, a central sphere of daily life for most of its residents. Fed by a comprehensive and well-used public transportation system, downtown teems with office workers, tourists, and shoppers during the day, and the neighborhood commercial strips beckon with restaurants, all kinds of shops, and sidewalk cafes.

The city's cosmopolitan cachet has attracted cultural industries, financial services, and corporate headquarters, keeping the economy buoyant through the recessions of the last thirty years. Politicians,





local businesses, residents, tourists, and hoteliers all recognize that the streets of the city themselves are a priceless commodity, one whose value must be maintained.

Yet the same streets that attract visitors from the world over are also wandered by thousands of homeless paupers. As the 1990s saw the city's rental market become one of the most expensive in the world, the *threshold* of homelessness dropped lower and lower. Top-down gentrification and the destruction of low-income housing progressed steadily over the last twenty years, wiping from the landscape scores of vital single-room-occupancy (SRO) hotels and cheap apartment buildings across the South of Market and North East Mission neighborhoods in favor of large-scale development projects: the Yerba Buena Center, the new SF Museum of Modern Art, the Sony Metreon Mall, and block after block of new "live-work" lofts.[20] For many poor San Franciscans, the extraordinary strain of trying to maintain housing was compounded by an absence of strong social ties. As a great destination of migrants, cultural, economic, and political, more than half of the city's population were born elsewhere and had no local family members to help them in times of trouble.[21] Every year thousands lost tenure in cheap apartments or hotels. Many left, but others resorted to living in cars and vans, homeless shelters, and encampments under freeway bridges.[22]

San Francisco represents a particularly important case of the criminalization of homelessness. In this progressive stronghold, sin-talk of the "broken windows" proponents had to compete with strong opposing systemic and therapeutic arguments articulated by formidable voices among both service providers and activists. Yet even in liberal San Francisco, the construction of homelessness as bad behavior became powerful enough to propel large-scale police campaigns against nuisance offenses, repeated attempts to abolish General Assistance, and numerous other strategies aimed at pushing the "visible poor" back into zones of invisibility.

The following story of how San Francisco came to normalize clearance, incorporating it into a coherent discourse of authoritarian medicalization, speaks strongly to the contemporary politics of homelessness across the United States as a whole. If it could happen there, it could happen anywhere.

In San Francisco, like most major American cities, street homelessness returned to a significant level in the early 1980s, coinciding with rising rents and widespread gentrification. First a handful, then hundreds of ragged, desperate people appeared in the downtown area, panhandling for change or just sitting on steps and benches for hours at a time, backpacks and bedrolls around them. At night those walking the downtown sidewalks became used to the sight of homeless people stretched out on sidewalks or huddled in doorways and stairwells. As numbers steadily increased through the middle-1980s, discomfort rose. Merchants started to grumble and sympathetic citizens started to organize informal soup kitchens and temporary shelters, many of them in the halls of churches and synagogues.

The consensus at the time was that this was only a temporary problem created by the economic slump of the early 1980s. The mayor, Dianne Feinstein, responded by subsidizing rooms in single-room-occupancy hotels run by slum landlords, a precedent that would be repeated by subsequent administrations. The "hotel voucher" strategy helped some off the street, but the problem continued to grow rapidly in scale. The city was already getting itself a name for having one of the worst homelessness problems in the nation. Hundreds of encampments proliferated along prominent arteries—Market Street, Van Ness, and Folsom—and concentrated under freeway bridges and outside construction sites, while panhandlers and street entertainers worked every block in the most heavily frequented tourist areas. The hotelier and merchant associations were alarmed and the city's population as a whole disquieted by these developments.

Feinstein's successor, Art Agnos (1988–1991), took the problem much more seriously, throwing himself into drafting a more comprehensive policy. A former social worker, Agnos attributed the increasing rate of homelessness to shrinking affordable housing, together with insufficient funding for mental health and substance abuse services.

As an old-school Keynesian liberal, Agnos struggled to maintain credibility within a city infected by the new neoliberal zeitgeist. From the beginning his administration was dogged by pressure from residents and merchants in the Haight-Ashbury district, a neighborhood in the process of gentrification that was heavily affected by the return of large-scale homelessness in the city. Agnos's political opponents

*Sleeping under cover on Market Street.*

demanded immediate solutions to street homelessness, arguing that it was useless to talk about the macrosocial conditions that had led to the problem. "Everyone wants to talk about ancient history, federal history, Republicans . . . and nobody wants to talk about people fifteen feet away. I don't want to hear about what happened a decade ago. I want to know what you're going to do tomorrow," charged Supervisor Richard Hongisto.[23]

Agnos's election roughly coincided with the formation of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness, an activist organization led by homeless and formerly homeless people that rapidly rose to prominence within the radical flank of the national advocacy movement. The Coalition was quick to support a group of homeless people evicted from their camp in the Civic Center Plaza outside City Hall in 1989 and organized a "Camp Agnos" vigil there for several months, to much public attention and outrage. When the protests of downtown merchants and hoteliers became too intense, Agnos would order a sweep.

but the encampment protest continued throughout his administration, at times mobilizing several hundred homeless people.

Agnos responded to the heat from both homeless activists and business people with "Beyond Shelter," a report that proposed the construction of two multiservice centers. Prefiguring the federal Continuum of Care model, these institutions would centralize homeless management, combining shelter with counseling for substance abuse and mental health problems, and ultimately serving as a conduit into affordable housing and employment training. The multiservice centers were indeed created, and Agnos's vision was given national recognition. He did not, however, keep his leadership long enough to supervise the new system. Camp Agnos had infuriated more conservative constituents, who started to mobilize toward a radical change in policy.

### *The Battle for Downtown*

In the heated mayoral election of 1991, the politics of homelessness took center stage. Agnos was challenged by his former police chief, Frank Jordan. Jordan promised to crack down on the homeless population, rejecting Agnos's combination of structured *system-talk* and therapeutic *sick-talk* in favor of a clearance strategy more in line with the contemporary "broken windows" philosophy and punitive sin-talk. Jordan proposed new restrictions on panhandling and the creation of mandatory mental health and detoxification services. More controversially, he raised the possibility of a "work farm" at the San Bruno jail, to which noncompliant homeless people could be sent.[24] Jordan's anti-homeless platform probably won him the mayoralty; several opinion polls named homelessness as the most important issue of the election.

Jordan's administration, with its aggressive, full-frontal attack on social-democratic notions of citizenship and entitlement, and its determination to wrestle back public space from the poor, epitomized the "revanchist city" delineated by Neil Smith.[25] The mayor's office ordered the police department to adopt the zero-tolerance clearance strategies pioneered in Giuliani's New York, a policy turn explicitly framed within the broader imperative to promote both bottom-up gentrification of the neighborhoods and economic growth through top-down redevelopment.[26]





Jordan immediately moved to introduce "broken windows" policing, reviving various archaic nuisance laws and sponsoring new legislation. With financial support from downtown business interests, he introduced a new ballot initiative against "aggressive panhandling," which passed with a 55 percent majority. The following year the new policies were consolidated into a Quality of Life Enforcement Program, better known as the Matrix Program. Matrix instituted a number of violations subject to citation or arrest, all of them aimed at curbing the behavior and presence of homeless people downtown. The primary offenses cited were trespassing, setting up lodgings, blocking the sidewalk, drinking from open containers, aggressive panhandling, and urinating outdoors. Sleeping in doorways now warranted a ticket for trespassing, while the "setting up lodgings" prohibition kept people from making shanties with shopping carts and tarpaulins or blankets. The average ticket was $76, increasing to more than $180 for offenses deemed more serious. Most homeless people were unable to pay the fines, and many who had not previously been in trouble with the law came to have outstanding warrants.

Homeless advocates met the persistent stream of quality-of-life propositions with fierce countercampaigns. The Coalition's efforts were critical to the narrow defeat of a 1994 proposition that would have made it illegal to sit on downtown sidewalks. Its Civil Rights Working Group challenged many of the practices of Matrix in the courts, from the confiscation of shopping carts with personal possessions to the prohibition against bringing bedding into the parks. During this time advocates also won several less well-reported victories, substantially improving conditions for the homeless population: the right to earn small sums to supplement low-level welfare benefits, an advocacy system for the shelters, and improved rights for workfare workers.

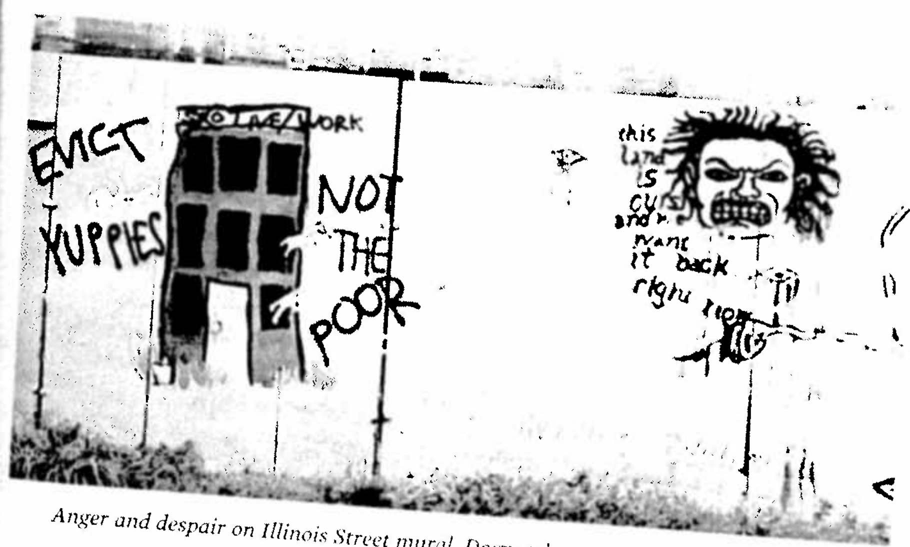
Spearheading San Francisco's exceptionally strong lobby of system-talkers were the Coalition on Homelessness; Religious Witness with Homeless People, led by the indefatigable Sister Bernie Galvin; and the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. Without the unusual political makeup of the city, this small group would have had scant success, but their efforts pulled in a broad network of liberal and radical sympathizers inside and outside city government, people schooled in ways of seeing

developed within the hobo tradition, the labor movement, the Beats, the civil rights movement, gay rights, and the many other social and cultural movements that have pulsed through the city over the years. The cause won even more legitimacy through the participation of several competent, even brilliant individuals from the city's homeless and formerly homeless population.

One of the Coalition's most important victories was maintaining the city's continued provision of General Assistance payments. This took on a dual significance, as both crucial assistance to homeless people and symbolic centerpiece of a rights-based approach to homelessness. While other cities across the country were abolishing or vastly reducing cash transfers to single adults, the Coalition and its allies foiled a multitude of similar attempts, either defeating them or fighting tenacious rearguard actions in the courts that prevented their implementation. In 1993, they successfully fought the revival of Mayor Feinstein's Hotline Program, which would have limited homeless GA recipients to hotel vouchers instead of cash. Next, they managed to block the implementation of 1994's Proposition N, which mandated deducting $280 for rent out of the GA recipients' monthly check of $345, as well as the mayor's office's 1996 attempt to circumvent the proposition process with a Mandatory Direct Rent Payment Program.

Under constant fire for its aggressive clearance policies, the Jordan administration retreated from the unashamed sin-talk of the election campaign, now claiming that Matrix represented not clearance alone but a combination of policing and social work, punishment and treatment. They hired seven extra outreach workers, and the police officers assigned to warn or ticket homeless quality-of-life offenders were also authorized to give out vouchers for shelter beds. Advocates complained that this represented little more than musical chairs, as those with Matrix vouchers then took precedence over others standing in line. The Coalition, together with other activists and advocates, succeeded in 1994 in persuading the city's board of supervisors to pass a resolution demanding an end to the program.[27] Mayor Jordan refused to close down the program, instead extending it from downtown to Golden Gate Park,[28] but his opponents had succeeded in discrediting Matrix in the eyes of many city residents, and Jordan's image was now tainted with inhumanity.






*Anger and despair on Illinois Street mural, Dogpatch.*

The much-ridiculed social welfare element of Matrix was the first attempt to bring together strategies of clearance and treatment vis-à-vis the homeless population, an approach that would be progressively refined over the next ten years. Even this first form represented an important step toward authoritarian medicalization, making the police the arbiters of the fine line between sickness and criminality. For example, when officers in the special Matrix vans came across a homeless person behaving aggressively or strangely, they were authorized to do spot psychological assessments and to forcibly bring people judged to be mentally ill to the hospital.

In practice, the clearance strategy had far more effect on homeless people's lives than the social welfare elements. In the first two years of the program, police gave out 22,000 citations to the thousands of homeless people frequenting the downtown area. Most of the tickets remained unpaid, eventually turning into bench warrants. During this same period, the outreach workers recorded 9,000 encounters with homeless people, but had little power to provide more than a conduit to the limited set of services already available. Generally they simply gave out information about available mental health and substance abuse programs. The most practical service they performed was doling out the aforementioned vouchers and, sometimes for the lucky

few, arranging one week's stay at one of the city's dilapidated single-room-occupancy hotels.[29]

## *Willie Brown and the Institutionalization of Homeless Clearances*

The modification of Jordan's policy and rhetoric with the outreach elements of Matrix did not save him from a fatal backlash from the substantial sector of the electorate that was still broadly sympathetic to the homeless. Homeless policy was again a key issue in the 1995 election, with more than 30 percent of those polled by the *San Francisco Chronicle* ranking homelessness as the most pressing problem in the city. Jordan defended what he called his "compassionate but realistic" policies, while his challengers attacked Matrix's focus on quality-of-life crimes. Willie Brown, the wily former state speaker who was to win the election, took advantage of the unpopularity of Matrix, promising that "in my administration, the police will spend their time going after crack dealers, thugs, aggressive panhandlers and other predators, rather than rounding up people whose only crime is being poor."[30]

Brown's new administration immediately announced the end of Matrix and started to work toward a homeless summit that would bring together service providers, academics, advocates, community groups, and merchant associations to create a comprehensive plan. Significantly, this summit never materialized. It became clear that there was not going to be sufficient common ground for any kind of consensus, and that the mayor's office would not countenance the large-scale affordable housing initiative demanded by the advocates. (The Coalition on Homelessness, calling for a "People's Budget Initiative," did push the board of supervisors into funding various more permanent solutions to homelessness in the late 1990s, but affordable housing programs could not keep up with the steady loss of SRO units and other cheap housing to gentrification projects.)

The cost of housing in San Francisco continued to soar through the late 1990s, as the San Francisco Bay Area became the least affordable metropolitan area in the United States. Faced with the difficulty of delivering on promises of affordable housing, the Brown administration maintained the nuisance policing emphasis of Matrix, minus the high-profile rhetoric. Tickets for quality-of-life violations—trespass-





ing, camping, carrying open alcohol containers, and violating park curfews—continued to increase, averaging more than 20,000 a year in 1999 and 2000, and the city attorney set up a special unit charged with prosecuting these offenses.

"There is no room anywhere," complained Randy Shaw of the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, the organization that managed the hotel voucher program. "We used to find rooms for about 150 people a month, and now it's more like 35 or 40. There are no vacancies."[31]

At the time, San Francisco had about 1,400 shelter beds and between 5,000 to 8,000 homeless people. An informal *Chronicle* survey of shelters found an average of 250 people turned away from shelters each night because of lack of space, with the largest shelter reporting about 1,200 turn-aways each month.

The heated struggles over multiple homelessness-related ballot propositions in the 1990s had made it clear enough that the San Francisco population was polarized over the issue of homelessness. Jordan's defeat had showed the danger of taking an overly antagonistic position against the homeless population, yet merchants, hoteliers, and residents associations continued to vociferously demand the class cleansing of the city. While Willie Brown did not offer any radical departure from Matrix, he and other members of the centrist Democratic establishment had clearly realized that a "broken windows" policy toward the homeless should not be overemphasized in public.

As the rollback neoliberalism of the 1980s and early 1990s developed into a more mature "roll-out" phase, politicians at the national and state level moved on to an active program of building new structures of governance that forced local municipalities and public sector institutions at every level to permanently compete for capital investment. Put in the position of "responsibility without power," as Peck and Tickell put it,[32] mayors like Willie Brown and his successor, Gavin Newsom, bowed to the new model of entrepreneurial city management. In the absence of other forms of wealth creation, it became more important than ever to keep the city attractive for tourism, middle-class taxpayers, and corporate investment.

Half of the city's housing projects crumbled to the wrecker's ball of Clinton's Hope VI program, removing all obstacles to gentrification in the Mission, Fisherman's Wharf, and the Lower Haight and further depleting the city's African American population.[33] The supply of

*Boom and bust.*

affordable housing lurched to a new low. Advocates managed to anchor a handful of hotels by leasing them or converting them into nonprofits, but other independent hotels continued to disappear, redeveloped for tourism and condos or burned in suspicious circumstances.[34]

## *Fighting for Hearts and Minds in the Haight*

Like urbanites in other cities, San Franciscans were divided over the new clearance policies. In the neighborhoods with the largest numbers of visibly homeless these divisions swelled into a bitter conflict during the 1990s. Competing groups of residents mobilized rival community organizations with profoundly divergent ideas about how to define and manage the problem. An old guard remained true to the more broadly defined "community" of urban liberalism, but the new

"stakeholder" organizations had far more resources at their disposal. A particularly prominent battle for the heart of a neighborhood occurred in Haight-Ashbury, where arguments about how to police the popular commercial strip of Haight Street gave concrete and immediate form to the furious debate over the definition of both community and homelessness.

"The Haight" had been home to large numbers of homeless people since the mid-1980s. Some of them were 1960s and 1970s dropouts and acid casualties who had lived entire adult lives in the neighborhood, gradually losing access to housing as rents rose. The others were young runaways drawn by its colorful history and reputation as the epicenter of the West Coast drug culture. Yet more were simply drawn by the neighborhood's excellent service agencies and the critical mass of other homeless people who provided some protection from police attention. Many of these people lived in the neighboring Golden Gate Park, the "gutterpunk" crowd openly claiming the part nearest to Haight Street and many more hiding out in more wooded patches where they could camp in relative privacy.

The long-standing Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council (HANC) consistently campaigned for more and better social services for homeless residents and supported the rights of homeless or street people to live in the area and sit or panhandle along the main thoroughfare. In opposition, several organizations emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s: the Cole Valley Improvement Association, the Haight-Ashbury Improvement Association, and, most explicitly, Residents against Druggies. All these groups were strong supporters of Frank Jordan's Matrix Program and pressured the police to clear the street.

In opposition to HANC's calls for more services for the homeless, their opponents complained that services drew undesirables to the area and that willfully homeless "druggies" were destroying the community. The new groups made an invaluable connection with Ken Garcia, columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle,* who took a leading role in giving voice to their complaints. The significant clout of this alliance became apparent in the fall of 1997, when Garcia wrote an impassioned article claiming that the homeless people living in the park included a number of dangerous parolees who represented a significant danger to the welfare of neighborhood residents.

Mayor Willie Brown held a news conference a few days later, where he and the director of the parks department charged the media with exaggeration and distortion. But Garcia and other reporters pushed back aggressively, claiming its homeless residents were destroying the park. A local TV station joined the investigation, showing lurid pictures of people using drugs in the park. At this point, Mayor Brown recognized his danger and made a lightning about-turn. He apologized to the media, the director of parks resigned, and he gave the police instructions to start a series of nightly sweeps into the farthest reaches of the park, handing out citations, confiscating property, and sending most of it to the city dump.

In retrospect, this incident marked a clear turning point for the politics of homelessness in San Francisco. The following year saw the narrow victory of Proposition I, which subjected the approval of new facilities dealing with the homeless to further community oversight, suggesting that the politics of NIMBY (not in my back yard) had finally won a crucial political edge.

The Coalition and its allies were far from defeated, but it now seemed Brown's de facto continuation of Matrix was perhaps less a political liability than he thought; maybe he had more to lose than win by appearing "soft on the homeless." (Here it may be worth noting that Willie Brown, previously Democratic speaker of the California Legislature, had a long record as a progressive, even radical politician. That he was now administering homeless clearances and other characteristically "neoliberal" policies is perhaps less evidence of his personal outlook than of the impossibility of returning to Keynesian city management.)

San Francisco's system-talk, and its political radicalism in general, was far from dead, as shown by the astoundingly successful write-in





mayoral campaign of Tom Ammiano in 1999. But Ammiano's proposals to tax corporations to pay for broad-based services and affordable housing could not survive a gloves-off second-round election against the far richer and more institutionally powerful Brown. The balance of power had turned, and the class cleansing of San Francisco would continue.

The clearance of United Nations Plaza, one of the only open spaces in the downtown area, continued day and night. After several years of endlessly rousting homeless people from the twenty-four benches, city workers sawed the benches off at their bases in 2001. By then it was illegal to sit anywhere in the area. Signs indicated that the lawn was closed for maintenance and that it was prohibited to sit on the low wall around the grass or on the fountain blocks. (Non-homeless people sitting on the wall or fountain were rarely disturbed. I myself spent countless hours in the late 1990s sitting on the wall, writing field notes without so much as a questioning look from a police officer.)

Around the same time that the benches were removed, city officials debated a plan to remove the central fountain itself, at a cost of $1 million. The justification for this proposal was that the fountain, an ungainly composition of concrete slabs set at different angles, was being used by homeless people as both bath and latrine. The mayor himself suggested lighting the plaza so brightly that it would be impossible to sleep there.

Another innovation in 2001 was the so-called HOMETEAM unit (Helping Officers Maintain the Environment through Enforcement, Accountability, and Management). The intention was to direct more resources to "quality-of-life code violators," the common police euphemism for the street homeless. From the beginning, the unit focused on destroying "encampments" (anything from one person sleeping under a freeway bridge to fifteen people sleeping under tarpaulins in an alley), clearing 300 in their first two weeks.

## *Nowhere to Go*

Away from the channels of elite discourse and policy, what were the effects of the homeless clearances on those at the bottom of the class ladder? Most deeply affected were those sleeping outside and the people who made their cash panhandling. The endless moving on, the

tickets for encampment, the slashing of tents, and destruction of possessions all combined to further disturb and disorganize already difficult lives, provoking anger, despair, and bitter alienation.

During the most intensive sweeps it became a battle even to sit downtown, let alone lie down. Between 1995 and 1998, the ten of my street companions who spent most time downtown were collectively given more than eighty tickets. One of the perpetrators was Julius, the middle-aged African American who spent much of his time collecting bottles from garbage cans in the Theatre District on the edge of downtown. Julius was given seven tickets for lodging, camping in public, and trespassing. In the case of two of the camping tickets, he was sleeping in the doorways of shops or office buildings after hours, a violation of Police Code 25. (The police had successfully criminalized taking this kind of rudimentary shelter by encouraging business owners to post signs indicating that they did not permit after-hours trespassing.)

To avoid citations for creating a "structure," Julius usually slept with most of his things in the cart beside him, using only his sleeping bag and an old sweater for a pillow. He kept his ID and any cash in an inside pocket. The downside of his strategy was that the cart made it easy for police officers to confiscate his possessions, which had happened on several occasions.

A few days after one of these episodes, I met up with him in the Central Library, where he had gone to read the newspaper.

"I didn't get any sleep last Wednesday night, it was so damn cold," he said quietly, keeping an eye on the security guard. "I have to keep moving when it's like that, go out, do some extra recycling. So I sell my bottles Thursday morning, the sun comes up, cash in my pocket, feeling OK, but I'm tired. I know I can take the bus over Bayshore[35] and get me some shut-eye, but I'm waiting for an appointment with this social worker at 10:45 a.m. Of course, there is nowhere to go. I'm not going to go get picked on by some dope fiend in the Tenderloin, so I sit down on one of the benches in the Civic Center.

"Next thing I know, this cop is banging on my arm with his baton. His buddy has already taken my cart and everything in it. I'm all sleepy, you know, like, 'Hey, what the hell's going on?' I want to run after the other cop to see if I can get some of my things, but my guy won't let me. He's shouting, 'Just try it. I'll take you down, you better





believe it.' Like I'm what, a bank robber? He's writing out a ticket and I say, 'What's the charge, Officer?' He says, 'Encampment.' Like I set up camp. I just fell asleep for a few minutes. They don't want you there even a few minutes. I guess it's too close to City Hall. The mayor doesn't want to be reminded about all the people they are leaving out in the cold."

Julius's experience with Matrix and later waves of ticketing heightened his sense of exclusion. It seemed evident to him that this direct crackdown was only one element in a much broader range of strategies. As he said, there was "nowhere to go."

"Have you noticed there's barely any benches anymore?" he asked me. "No bathrooms, no benches, and the one place they got benches you ain't allowed to sit down. Nowhere to lie on the grass, not if you're homeless. Like the Yerba Buena Center. Very pretty, but you know that the second you sit your butt down in *there* you in big trouble. They don't want any more Union Squares. Then you got some people go to the Golden Gate Park, and what do they get? More of the same. It's *cold*, you know."

As downtown public spaces were steadily replaced by large-scale "urbanoid" public-private developments[36] places to sit became sparse indeed.

The clearances during Brown's terms in office were particularly hard on those living in vans and cars. People living in vehicles get relatively little attention in the literature on homelessness, but they make up a significant proportion of the American population outside conventional housing. One national survey has suggested that this less visible fraction could even constitute the majority of the literally homeless.[37] Certainly in the San Francisco Bay area, car and van living, temporarily or semipermanently, was a common strategy for economic survival. As the police intensified efforts to clear, first, residential neighborhoods and, then, edge areas with little other demand for the space, people living in vans and cars found themselves ticketed, towed, and roused in the night. The vignette following this chapter shows how crackdowns on vehicular living steadily eroded the marginal but initially sustainable existence of Emory, a middle-aged Chinese American and San Francisco native—one of countless vehicular dwellers to

*Walking all day, nowhere to go, nowhere to rest. Finally nodding off against some scaffolding on Twenty-fourth Street.*

be displaced during the 1990s. Bit by bit, the old communities were pushed out of the Panhandle, the roads bordering Golden Gate Park, China Basin, Mission Rock, Illinois Street, even the dubious refuges of Alemany Boulevard and Sunnydale.

Contributing to this crackdown was a development juggernaut that, as it advanced around the northeast corner of the city, threw up whole neighborhoods of new townhouses and lofts, the seemingly obligatory new skybox stadium, and a new University of California biotech center. Thanks to the new light-rail line, Dogpatch, now touted in *Men's Journal* as one of the coolest "nabes" on the West Coast, became a fifteen-minute commute to the financial district. The swelling population of





loft dwellers soon increased pressure for clearances that wiped the van communities of misfits, artists, stoners, and mad visionaries off the map so thoroughly they seemed like a dream that disappears as soon as you try to think of it.

By making it hard to panhandle, scavenge for food, sit, sleep, or go to the bathroom, Matrix was supposed to reduce the attractions of downtown areas for homeless people. But it would take an extended war of maneuver to wear down the sense of entitlement to downtown public space shared by many of the poorest residents of the city. After all, young and old, patrician and immigrant, black and white, tourist and old-timer have long mingled in San Francisco's downtown without giving each other a second look.

Downtown was certainly the place where panhandlers, sidewalk vendors, and street entertainers could make the most money, but the region's homeless and indigent did not congregate there simply to make money. Like the book vendors in Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk*, they also went there because they felt that city streets were for everybody. Neighborhoods might be claimed by residents, but downtown and the main arteries of the city were by their nature open, diverse spaces where anyone had the right to be.[38]

Freddie, as a longtime panhandler, was one of the most vociferous in this respect. "This is downtown! Anyone has the right to be downtown. Whatcha think this is, Palo Alto?" he snarled at a police officer that was telling him to leave Market Street or get ticketed.

In contrasting lively, heterogeneous San Francisco with sleepy, upscale Palo Alto, Freddie took for common sense the distinction between the sidewalk democracy of a large, vital city and the enforced homogeneity of an exclusive suburb. Similarly, when recycler Desmond was first told not to sit on the sidewalk on Fourth Street, he couldn't believe it. "It is downtown, for God's sake! If you can't go downtown, where the hell *can* you go?"

The resistance of many San Franciscans to open victimization of the homeless meant that San Francisco's quality-of-life legislation and policing, both downtown and in the neighborhoods, was less comprehensive than what went on in many other American cities and towns. Yet in some ways this relative restraint only encouraged the city to develop less publicly transparent anti-homeless practices. Where the Las Vegas homeless were legally prohibited from showering, shaving,

or other forms of cleaning up in public bathrooms, San Francisco merely got rid of most of its bathrooms. Where the Orlando homeless were cordoned off into confined areas by the police or forced to apply for licenses for panhandling, San Franciscans sleeping outside were jolted awake by freezing water sprayed by Department of Public Works trucks or returned to their encampments to find their tents irreparably slashed or their shanties flattened.[39]

## *Radicalization*

The excesses of Matrix created a permanent buzz of resentment on the street. Several of my street companions felt that harassment by GA, the hotels, and most of all by Matrix had risen to a point where they had lost any sense of citizenship. "That bastard Jordan" and the "fucking cops" came up in conversation all the time. Clearance, needless to say, felt like persecution, plain and simple, not the "compassionate realism" claimed by Jordan.

As we saw earlier, the recyclers had constructed a street subculture in explicit opposition to the backbiting character of much street life. In doing so, they developed a collective version of system-talk that was far more consistent and embodied than the sporadic furies of Tenderloin hustlers like Del and Sammy (see Part II). It was not unexpected, then, that recyclers became some of the most prominent activists against "broken windows" policing in the neighborhoods.

In their public persona as recycler or canner they felt more able to assert their rights to freedom from official harassment than if they had been panhandling or lying on the sidewalk. Panhandlers Jim, Freddie, and Sass, for example, would respond to police officers with resentful grumbles and curses, but inevitably did what was asked. In contrast, the more radical recyclers could sometimes fight back, leaving behind the repertoire of the disgruntled lumpen proletariat for the indignation of the mistreated citizen.

George, a Greek American ex-con who worked as a delivery driver before serving a long stretch in prison, would regularly intervene with police officers on the behalf of his colleagues. One time I was with him when an officer overturned the cart of an older recycler. George sped toward the scene like a superhero. "You call this keeping the peace?" he angrily repeated until the other officer righted the





cart. George's outrage at the humiliation of homeless people by the police and criminal justice system had a slightly different character than the resentment expressed by those African Americans—most of them—who had always been poor. Legal harassment was not new to them. A more common response to ticketing or cart confiscation was less shocked than world weary—"Just the cops getting their kicks" said Dobie sullenly. George, however, had experienced another reality and tenaciously held onto his pre-prison understanding of the respect due to a (white male) American citizen.

In the following conversation, Ray—last seen with the Dogpatch dumpster divers in *Moorings*—and George compared Matrix policing with "real" crime-fighting. (George found Ray a willing interlocutor, but while they were talking Ray maintained a state of physical relaxation and a philosophical smile that strongly contrasted with George's tight voice and clenched fists.)

"You know, I get quite a bit of harassment," said George. "I've got a few tickets for disturbing the peace [by rattling bottles], for having an unauthorized, stolen, shopping cart. . . . Then certain things, like a couple of times they kicked over my shopping cart. I had to bite my tongue because I wanted to kill them. I'm real serious. When I got arrested that one time I told them, 'If you want me out of this dumpster, you're just gonna have to come in and get me out of this dumpster.' . . . I added a few other things, like, 'What would your mother think, you doing this kind of work, instead of a real policeman's work?' I told them back in the seventies a lady would be able to go up the Tenderloin in a wheelchair. Now, even *without* a wheelchair they can't do it here, and the macho policemen are harassing *me*. I told them they made me sick to my stomach."

"Uh-huh, real sick," nodded Ray accommodatingly. "You're right on, man, they should be going after the big dealers, the violent criminals. But we are easier to pick on, 'cause we've got nowhere to hide our asses. Like that fat-ass white officer, that Dickinson[40]—he couldn't run after a real bad mofo to save his life. But he is all over us. He took DT's sleeping bag yesterday, and that was the second time."

George's eyes flashed. "I could *kill* that fucking asshole. One of the kids was making a phone call down by the market and Dickinson gives him a ticket for blocking the phone booth. What the fuck does *that* mean? Like we can't use the fucking phone?"

"And his buddy, Ramirez, his shit about loitering." Ray shook his head. "He searches me like *I'm* gonna be carrying a gun. And there's a couple of herone (heroin) dealers on the other side of the street and he don't even look at *them*."

"He'd be scared," said George scornfully. Ray laughed.

Of the recyclers, George was the most organized opponent to Matrix, becoming something of a community leader. Unlike many of the recyclers, George was willing to see common cause with the younger gutterpunk crowd; he was not interested in drawing normative divisions among the homeless. He socialized with both middle-aged street denizens and young runaways, taking on the role of roving legal adviser. Most notably, he distributed legal rights leaflets produced by the Coalition on Homelessness. With the title "When you're homeless, knowing the law sometimes keeps the law from stepping on you," these handouts gave the exact wording and established usage of the various police codes used on the Matrix tickets. To those too blurred with drink or blunted by inertia to read, George would declaim key paragraphs of the text aloud.

If some of the African Americans were less surprised by how they were treated, they still fought back. Morris, as I described in Part II, was the indigenous intellectual of the Dogpatch community—helping his handful of friends and companions to understand their experience within the tread of Californian history. Luther and Dobie, both veterans of Camp Agnos, also proved themselves capable leaders of collective action on occasion. Dobie had a magnificent presence. Negotiating a delay of execution on a clearance, he would stay quiet, looming down on the officers from his rangy six-foot-three, never letting his anger reach more than a subterranean flicker. As the sweeps of Golden Gate Park gathered in frequency, Dobie's camp was surrounded by a cluster of others, more than a dozen people hoping he would help to shield them from disruption and further dispossession.

Luther was furious when he was sent to work off his General Assistance by clearing the encampments of other homeless people in the park. After a couple of hours he walked off the job, taking the two other workers with him. "I may be a poor man, but I've got my limits," he told the supervisor. "It's evil, setting us on each other," he told me later. "It's like slavery, when they took the biggest guys and got them to beat up on the rest. We supposed to throw out other folks' shit, they

*Workfare detail outside the Hilton, Geary Street.*

blankets, they clothes, so they come back and it all gone. Can you imagine what that's like? It's the worst. Like you starting all over again." Luther was nearly thrown off GA for this protest but managed to persuade them to change his detail. Others were not so lucky. Word on the street, maybe apocryphal, had it that some GA recipients were forced under pain of arrest to clear their own possessions into a dump truck.

The men's sense of grievance and injustice tended to taint even those elements of the local homelessness industry that were genuinely aimed at providing help. This feeling of alienation was well articulated by George.

"You're not an American, you have *no country!*" he stormed at me one day in a cafe. "How could you not—how could you not feel like that when you're, when supposedly someone's trying to help you get off the merry-go-round and actually what they're doing is pushing you onto a worse one."

George was highly suspicious of the pairing of police officers and outreach workers in the Matrix teams. "Like, with the Matrix, they say they want to help, but it's, like, go to the shelter or get beat up or sent to jail. . . . It's all the same bullshit, when you come down to it. They want to get you out of sight, then get in your business, quiz the hell out of you, and tell you it's all your own goddamn fault. That's why I don't bother with welfare, and I'm not asking anybody for nothin'. Period. That way I don't owe them an explanation for anything, because . . . even if I did give them the right explanation, their questioning would be a crock of shit anyway." George swore under his breath. "I have my problems, but who says *they* got the right to judge *me*?"

While George was ready to admit to "problems," his experiences on the street made him so angry with the city that he was alienated from homelessness services altogether. There was no way, he said, that he was going to relinquish his right to privacy and his sense of self-determination to try the new transitional programs opening up during that time.

As we have seen in previous chapters, many others shared George's feelings. In particular, many felt that the shelters relied on police action to bring them clients and therefore funding.

"They say they want to help," said Carlos, who at that time was staying frequently at MSC South, "but you get the feeling it's all about numbers. You know, the more of us in there, the more money they get. You know, a lot of guys would only stay in there in the worst weather. . . . I mean, yeah, it's dangerous outside, for real, but if you put the effort into finding a decent place to sleep, I'd say it's safer than MSC. It's more healthy, that's for certain. Place is crawling with bugs. I'm looking for a new place to stay right now, but whoa—with this Matrix crap I dunno. You gotta be real creative. What I'm saying is, like, if the cops didn't make it so damn difficult to sleep out, maybe the shelters wouldn't get paid. See what I mean?"

The men's critique of the links between quality-of-life policing and the shelter system served as a counterdiscourse to both the criminal-





ization of street homelessness and the sick-talk promoted within the transitional shelters. David (last seen frustrated with one of the transitional programs in *The Homeless Archipelago*) took Carlos's system-talk one step further, seeing a clear connection between the "problems" he was labeled with in the shelter and the city's clearance policies.

"OK, so generally in the daytime I keep busy recycling. I am done with the programs, that's for sure. No GA, no so-called life skills. I'm not going through that again. I won't say it isn't a hard life. I could deal, only they won't leave me alone. I guess I'm getting to be one of the scum the mayor keeps talking about. How we are 'littering' the city? How we are all useless druggies, scum, criminals. The cops just don't fucking stop. Ever. You have a nice comfortable camp spot where you can go out, recycle, leave your stuff unattended without being able to get ripped off and what do you have? . . . 'You are messing up the area—you have to pack it up and move.'

"Fuck it, not everyone's on drugs and alcohol; they *keep* sayin' that. Not everybody is. There's plenty people wanna eat, sleep, just get by, and they can't pay that high rent by themselves. It's too hard."

Another of the recycling pros, Anthony, had come up while we were talking. Picking up on David's last comment, Anthony, who was a hard drinker, butted in. "Well, you know drinking just relaxes things. Because people that live on the street—man! It gets them depressed. So they go up to Tenth and have a beer and relax. If they were home they might not even be drinking. They got something to do, you know. They have a TV. They can clean their bathroom, their kitchen. They got somethin' to do."

"Uh-huh, right," said David, who was himself not immune from sporadic but fearsome binges on "MD" (Mad Dog malt liquor). "I'm not disrespecting anybody. It's just, like, they *use* it, you know? If they see you drinking, then, hey, they can say, just wino scum, drek. *You* are the problem, you know. . . . Who's looking at what *they're* drinking?"

## The Convergence of "Sin" and "Sickness"

In San Francisco, as in other large American cities, the systemic narratives about homelessness (system-talk) developed by activists and advocates in the 1980s gradually lost ground over the next fifteen years. The early emphasis on unemployment and poor wages was drowned

out by the kind of aggressive sin-talk exemplified by San Francisco's Frank Jordan, painting men and women living outside as dirty, dangerous blights on the social landscape. Equally important, though, was the rise of sick-talk—the construction of homelessness as a symptom of individual pathologies, especially substance abuse and mental illness. Nurtured within the professionalizing agencies and shelters, medicalized discourses on homelessness were developing a formidable institutional base, unlike the systemic critique of the cash-strapped activists. As sick-talk permeated the public sphere, filtered by the changing voice of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, it was taken up by many residents frustrated with the intractability of the problem.[41]

Willie Brown's administration may have energetically pursued clearance, but the mayor still seemed conflicted about his position on the city's persistent homeless problem. The old California speaker seemed to be caught between system and sin, between his old discursive comfort zone of civil rights talk and the pro-development realpolitik of his later years. Even though he proved willing to expand treatment and services, he did not apply the twelve-step lexicon of denial and tough love to the homeless—perhaps out of principle or perhaps because he failed to recognize the potential of transforming the tension between sin-talk and system-talk into a productive hybrid. In any case, Brown's public statements on homelessness remained split between primarily aesthetic justifications of the police sweeps and his continued project to present himself as the defender of the poor. In a typically oblique move, he eagerly promoted a complete rebuilding of Union Square, the heart of the war of maneuver between the homeless and the merchant associations. Construction kept the square closed for two years, to reopen in 2002 as a public-private plaza anchored by businesses with patio seating.

At this point, many other Democratic public officials had already abandoned system-talk about poverty and homelessness. Bill Clinton was skillfully navigating the shoals of welfare reform at a national level, and Democratic politicians all over the country were developing parallel strategies for withdrawing citizenship rights and existing social entitlements in the name of tough love. It was only a matter of time before San Francisco's leaders created their own Clintonesque mixture of therapeutic and punitive discourses on homelessness.





San Francisco would get there in the end, but at the moment what was more noticeable was that such medicalized narratives were becoming standard operating procedure in Bay Area municipalities less encumbered by San Francisco's weighty social movement legacy. From the early 1990s onward, officials in smaller towns and suburbs all over California had started to present acts of punishment and exclusion within a therapeutic register. Police clearances became a kind of tough love, a necessary push to help people change their unhealthy lifestyle.

For example, during 1997 the city of Menlo Park, a suburb south of the city, decided to clear the small homeless shantytown under the San Francisquito Creek Bridge. The police chief and the director of the local multiservice agency unanimously framed the clearance as aid to those evicted. "This isn't a place to live," said Bruce Cumming, the Menlo Park police chief. "We're actually doing these folks a favor. They need to make changes in their lives."

The homeless men experienced the eviction as an act of exclusion, complaining that they had been hunted down even in a place where they were "out of the way,"[42] but Daryl Ogden, executive director of the local multiservice center, agreed with the police chief.

"It's a reality check for the homeless," he told reporters. "For too long, we've been enabling them, not helping them climb up the ladder to attain the lifestyle they need to be normal. This isn't normal."[43]

This example illustrates not only the discursive convergence of sin-talk and sick-talk, but a developing interdependence between the key practices of homeless management that follow from these two discourses. As quality-of-life policing and transitional shelter programs developed, they grew in mutual dependence. The existence of the services, as David and Carlos argued, provided local politicians with vital legitimacy for their clearance policies: conversely, without these clearance campaigns, it was far from clear that transitional shelters would attract enough of the client base to justify their existence. Street life had to be made as difficult as possible so that clients would choose to come inside and submit themselves to rehabilitation.

Underpinning this extraordinary marriage of sin-talk and sick-talk was the professional lexicon of the rehab industry, with its constant depiction of "out there"—the street—as the ground zero of drug damage. Within

this broad pop-medicalization homeless people *as a category* could be constructed as fundamentally out of touch with their own interests, needing to be physically coerced out of "denial" into "treatment."

Back in San Francisco, the power of sick-talk made it harder and harder for the coalition to rally public support against clearance policies. As discussions of substance abuse and mental health moved to the fore within the media, the radicals of the Coalition on Homelessness found themselves fighting on two fronts, forced to acknowledge that many homeless people had serious problems with addiction and mental illness, yet insisting that they still deserved the human rights accorded to other citizens. The Coalition staff demonstrated their usual resilience, producing their own surveys and harnessing evidence about the medical needs of many homeless people into rights talk by instituting their own Substance Abuse and Mental Health Work Group to campaign for more and better treatment slots. In 1998 they pushed through a Single Standard of Care, guaranteeing the uninsured the same mental health treatment as the insured, a crucial gain for the homeless mentally ill. Yet within the discourse wars, the emphasis on access to mental health and substance abuse treatment was not a straightforward issue to play. It took a lot of effort to combat the common assumption that the homelessness of addicts and the mentally ill was purely a product of their individual problems, and politicians were becoming ever more sophisticated at harnessing sick-talk in the service of clearance.

Spearheading the breakthrough of authoritarian medicalization in the early 2000s was the ambitious young city supervisor Gavin Newsom. Visible homelessness was still creating consternation among both business interests and the electorate, and there was more talk of emulating Rudy Giuliani's famous cleanup of Manhattan. "If New York can do it, why can't San Francisco?" fulminated Bob Begley of the San Francisco Hotel Council. Newsom decided to prepare his bid for the mayoral race of 2003 with a breakthough campaign to reform homelessness policy.[44]

Newsom was no Frank Jordan. From the beginning he was extraordinarily careful to couch his positions in terms of authoritarian sick-talk rather than punitive sick-talk. For example, when discussing the $200 million a year spent on dealing with homelessness in San Francisco in 2001, he adopted technocratic yet caring language. "It's inexcusable





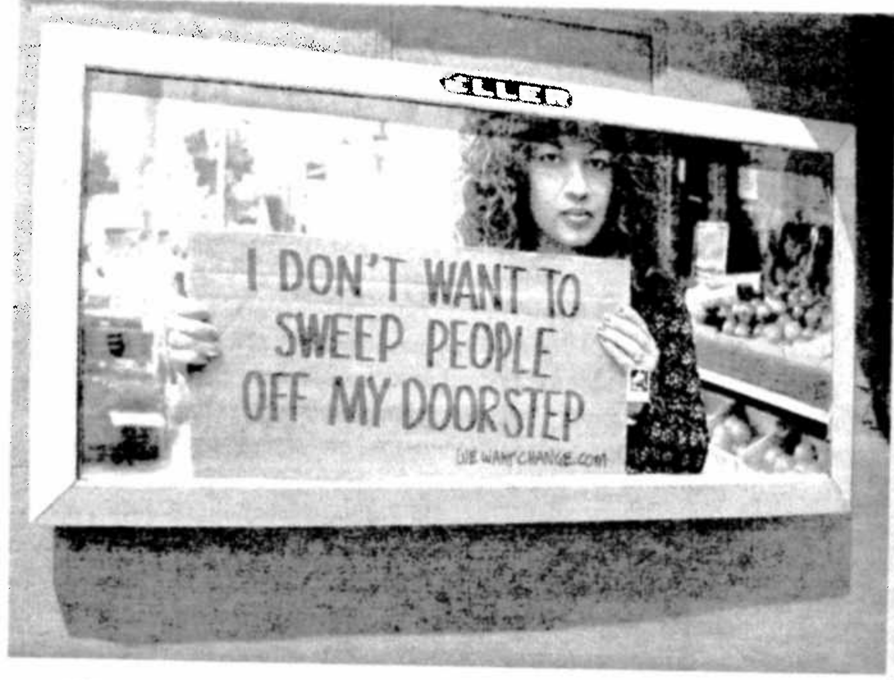
that we have performed so badly. People are suffering because of our inability," he said.

Newsom argued that the homeless population needed more oversight and tighter control, proposing a central shelter intake procedure, with fingerprinting, and the adoption of work requirements for transitional shelter programs. But the centerpiece of his mayoral strategy was the 2002 campaign to finally abolish the General Assistance entitlement, "Care Not Cash." San Francisco was one of the last large cities in the nation (and one of only two counties in California) to still provide more than minimal pocket money to indigent single adults, and several similar attempts to slash it had been blocked by the all-out efforts of system-talking advocates. At the time of Newsom's proposal (Proposition N), the San Francisco homeless on GA were still drawing between $320 and $395 a month, while their equivalents across the Bay in Oakland were receiving a maximum of $24 a month. Newsom proposed that payment be cut by 85 percent to $57 per month, and that the money saved by the cuts would go into a fund to support permanent supportive housing for recipients.

The Care Not Cash campaign was heavily advertised, with a major grassroots effort from not only Frank Jordan's constituency but also the incomers who had so profoundly altered the city's demographic and political makeup over the previous decade, many of whom volunteered for the campaign. In November 2002 it passed with 60 percent of the vote. Voters were impressed, and Newsom was elected the following year. After a long legal battle, the proposition was fully implemented in May 2004. (The homelessness rate in the impoverished city of Richmond, across the bay, veered sharply upward.)[45]

The mayor's office continued to mobilize volunteers for monthly Homeless Connect events, creating compelling moments of collective effervescence around an anti-political narrative of disability and compassion. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, which had continued to give some space to systemic perspectives on homelessness through the 1990s, at this point placed its weight squarely behind the mayor, staff writer Kevin Fagan producing a steady string of puff pieces about the city's new homelessness initiatives.[46]

Where Brown's homelessness policy had been fragmented and prone to U-turns, Newsom layered a skillfully coherent discourse over a set of policies that were, if anything, even more equivocal. For example,




*Billboard promotion for Care Not Cash.*

as a supervisor Newman had stood up for treatment on demand and other supportive services. Once in power, he continued to frame his discourse around care, but in reality was unwilling to dedicate the resources. He tried to reduce treatment funding, which had doubled under Brown, and reduced psychiatric beds and made large cuts to mental health services.

In the meantime, he vigorously pursued his quality-of-life agenda, instituting centralized shelter intake and fingerprinting and pushing through a new proposition (M) tightening up legislation against "aggressive" panhandling and panhandling near ATMs.[47] Now "spare-changing" was forbidden in parking lots, on median strips, outside check-cashing businesses, and on buses. Again, punitive sanctions were couched in terms of care. Offenders were to be fined or, if appropriate, diverted to substance abuse or mental health programs, where they would be given precedence over others on the waiting list.

"The idea is not to just throw the homeless into cells, but to help them," said Newsom. "The main thing is we don't want them suffering on the streets, and if they're not suffering it's better for everyone, including them."[48]





Both Care Not Cash and Proposition M shifted city resources toward pulling the most visible and rowdy off the street, especially those in the downtown and tourist areas. For justification, the administration placed increasing emphasis on the need to serve the "chronic homeless"—a new category traveling the policy circuit. From the outset, this group was defined in the characteristically neoliberal terms of cost-benefit analysis; these were the single, long-term homeless individuals with "disabling conditions" who accounted for a strongly disproportionate outlay of homeless assistance dollars.[49]

Here again San Francisco was at the forefront of national homelessness policy initiatives. During the 2002 mayoral race the *San Francisco Chronicle* received an open letter from President Bush's so-called "homelessness czar," Phil Magnano. The administration was prepared to spend $200 million next year on a range of new homelessness initiatives "targeted to supportive housing, services, and employment for those on the streets and in shelters," and Magnano encouraged San Francisco, perhaps the most prominent example of the "national disgrace," to compete aggressively for the funding. "We stand ready to deepen our partnership with San Francisco," Mangano wrote. "San Francisco is positioned to demonstrate that if there's a will, there's a way to end this national disgrace."

The principal target of this money, to be released to municipalities through the "10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness" model, were the chronic homeless, a group often treated as synonymous with those who "spent most of their time outside."[50] (I hope readers of this book will understand by now the problematic character of this assumption. True, my own study of recycling had drawn me to some of the healthier people living outside, but these men were far from unusual. Perhaps the rough sleepers were disproportionately mentally ill and severely addicted, but they also included many who were healthier than more regular shelter-users and certainly used less resources.

Magnano, former manager of the pseudo-folk-revival group Peter, Paul, and Mary, sent out an inspirational PowerPoint document encouraging local ten-year plans that were to be "driven, shaped, and implemented by a business mindset" and oriented to strict benchmarks of "visible, measurable, quantifiable change on the streets, in neighborhoods,

and most important in the lives of homeless people." Magnano's emphasis on quantifiable reductions in visible street disorder well matched Newsom's own urgent desire to finally clean up the visible homeless, and he enthusiastically attended the announcement of San Francisco's 10-Year Plan in 2004. The plan followed the standard cost-benefit construction, aiming its money at 3,000 individuals, roughly 20 percent of the current homeless population, who they estimated to cost the city 63 percent of its annual homeless budget.

The therapeutic rationale behind the chronic homelessness push was "Housing First," an approach pioneered by New York's Pathways to Housing program in the 1990s for people with mental illness.[51] Housing First reversed the "Treatment First" model of the Continuum of Care (the former federal orthodoxy), instead moving clients directly into independent housing supported by on-site services. Evaluation studies so far have generally been very favorable, yet as Drs. Kertesz and Weiner have shown, the cost-benefit incentive for cities to promote this approach quickly decreases when Housing First is offered to less severely debilitated individuals.[52]

The national turn to Housing First is replete with ironies, contradictions, and possibilities. This is not the place for a detailed investigation of how or why this explicitly anti-moralistic harm-reduction strategy—hitherto most strongly represented in the United States by underfunded and marginalized needle exchanges—came to be taken up by the Bush administration. Key for the politics of homelessness, though, is the way that Housing First has come to dovetail with the class cleansing of the central city.

The principle behind Newsom's Care Not Cash was to offer SRO hotel rooms to all the homeless General Assistance recipients whose benefit was cut—more than 1,200 people.[53] A lucky 15 percent of the single homeless population had gained basic housing, but the conditions were now even harder for the rest. With the designated Care Not Cash rooms filled, new homeless GA claimants were left forfeiting most of their check just to stay in the city shelters.[54] The General Assistance rolls predictably fell sharply following the cuts, yet the annual homelessness count showed little change.[55]

Newsom astutely incorporated elements of system-talk—talking about "putting people directly in housing" and even arguing that "there is no such thing as housing resistant"—ideas long used by





the Coalition in its criticisms of the authoritarian medicalization of the transitional shelters. Just as his support for gay marriage had won the hearts of liberal San Franciscans, his promotion of the progressive Housing First principle seemed to inoculate him from stronger criticisms of his homelessness policy.

The "broken windows" agenda within the Housing First initiative became more apparent as officials started grumbling about Care Not Cash recipients still spending time hanging out on the street. They quickly started a Homeward Bound bus-ticket program that gave out thousands of free bus tickets away from the city. Most seriously, though, the 1,441 citations for sleeping outdoors in the first year of the Newsom administration tripled the count of the previous year. City hall geared up for the next initiatives: a return to Matrix-style combinations of policing and "outreach," a downtown Community Justice Court aimed at pushing quality-of-life violators into services, and a radical reduction of the emergency shelter beds, drop-in centers, and soup kitchens available to those outside the transitional shelter programs.

As Trent Rhorer, director of the city's Human Services Agency put it in 2007, "The idea of expecting something for nothing is not a direction the Mayor wants to go any more. It's a two-way street, and you have to meet us halfway. The idea would be that if you're in a shelter, you're in a care-management plan."[56]

San Francisco was no longer the famous radical outlier within the field of the American politics of homelessness. With Care Not Cash, the name of which so neatly symbolizes the inexorable shift of American poverty management from cash transfers to authoritarian medicalization, Newsom had pulled the city closer into line with the national zeitgeist.

## Cognitive Mapping

The earlier conversation between David and Anthony gives a sense of the way that those living on the street tried to grapple with the confusing combination of "cold" punishment—the tickets, the destruction of their camps, the early morning soaking from the DPT trucks—with the caring discourse of the social workers and other professionals.

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One evening Pipe, ex-con and thief, held forth on the subject to a group of his friends while sitting on the broken pier at Mission Rock,

just north of their camp in Dogpatch. "If those politicians in city hall want to really help us, why don't they just give us housing, or at least let folks camp in peace without being kicked around by idiot cops? I'll tell you why. Because all their friends running the shelters and all these other programs would lose their jobs."

"Right!" "Ain't *that* the truth!" chorused companions Manny and Tom.

Manny took the line of thought further, setting up the disease model itself as a form of social control designed to prevent collective action. "It's not just about the money, you know. Those shelters will break you down. They want us all shelterized, you know, like depressed and sniffling around, snitching on each other, that's the idea. They don't want another tent city on Civic Center for sure, and they reckon these new-style shelters, that's the best way to do it. Then they don't even need the cops."

Derick in South of Market, Morris, Spike, and Valentino in Dogpatch, Anthony in the Mission, George in the Haight, Dobie on the west side of the city—all seem to have a similar project. They were building a cognitive map of the homelessness industry, which linked it to their critiques of policing and the criminal justice system. There must be a connection, they felt, between punitive and supposedly therapeutic aspects of homelessness management, between the ticketing and tent-slashing *clearance* from the streets and *corral* in the shelter. Manny's way of seeing it persuaded some of his friends in Dogpatch. First the police kept them "off their feet" and pushed them toward the shelters, they argued, then the same shelters further broke down their independence. For the icing on the cake, the politicians used the shelters to justify their clearance policies.

Unlike those who raised more than half a million dollars to promote the 2003 anti-panhandling legislation, these men had few resources to get their discourse out.[57] As the city continued to gentrify rapidly, and as the patches of liminal turf grew smaller, some of the homeless activists with more wherewithal—the van livers of HANC and Food Not Bombs, the political squatters of Homes Not Jails, and the organic intellectuals of the street homeless scene—finally gave up and left town. University-educated dumpster diver Quentin, for example, went to live in the garage of a friend in a small town north of the city. A period of exhaustion hit the indefatigable few running the Coalition





on Homelessness. The media presence of system-talk was quieter than before, and its constituency among the housed was shrinking, many of the more progressive residents embroiled in their own struggles to hold onto affordable housing.

This chapter has followed the journey of Wilson and Kelling's discourse of "broken windows" from the national politics of urbanism to its specificities in San Francisco, and then from Frank Jordan's deliberately confrontational Matrix Program to the increasing normalization of clearance under Brown and Newsom. In an endless war of maneuver, the police and other public agencies moved in on the fragile urban spaces made by the placeless, denying their right to share the city's busy pedestrian nodes and destroying their makeshift shelters in obscure corners. As they walked this path, politicians and officials learned to temper the exclusionary language of sin-talk—which remained unacceptable to the general population—first, with the shift toward the aesthetic, and second, with an authoritarian medicalization that focused on chronically homeless lost souls in need of a firm hand.

I argued in *The Homeless Archipelago* that the medicalization of the transitional shelters seemed particularly dissonant when applied to the more "high-functioning" among the homeless—the straddlers moving in and out of homelessness as their fortunes rose and fell, the temp workers, the pro recyclers. But once we see these policies in the context of the class cleansing of San Francisco, they take on a different aspect. The relentless drive to cleanse the city of even the most out-of-the-way and self-sustaining of its homeless tells a different story, a more straightforward one. It was not only the most scabrous and disreputable, the Freddies and the Dels, who threatened the ritzy urbanoid imaginary of the new San Francisco, but any and all of the shabby dreamers and aging drag queens, humble isolates, and grumpy blue collar relics lacking the wherewithal to roll with the tide of change. The clearances might be driving many further down into the most desperate layers of the lumpen proletariat, but as long as these people continued their downward trajectory in a lateral direction—in Oakland, Richmond, or farther off—then the policy could indeed be deemed successful. In the broader policy context, the decision by Newsom, and indeed of Magnano and Bush's HUD, to make

a high-profile push toward getting the "chronic homeless" Housing First makes more sense.

Through gentrification and redevelopment, the reduction of public housing, and quality-of-life policing, neoconservative politicians have reversed the three-decade abandonment of the central cities to "tax-and-spend" Democrats, forging a new pro-urban conservatism that reappreciates the city and claims it back from the deviant and unruly.[58] Within this context, the push toward authoritarian medicalization of the homeless serves a dual strategy. First, the focus on overcoming the self-destructive delusions and denial of the sick justifies the steady progress of quality-of-life policing and vehicle confiscation against all those living outside, whether flamboyant or discreet, cleansing valuable urban space for more profitable uses. Second, by throwing a media floodlight onto the most visible, desperate, and degraded tip of the homeless iceberg, it creates a chasm between homelessness and mundane poverty. High-profile initiatives like Housing First and Homeless Connect demonstrate compassionate action in aid of the most needy without disrupting continued divestments in more broad-based programs and public goods.

"The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread," runs Anatole France's aphorism, suggesting the inherent violence of a civil moral order imposed on a vastly unequal population. We have now learned to make these rulings in a different register, adding to the majestic impartiality of class rule a bombastic, intrusive compassion. We spray our fellow men and women with freezing water, slash their tents, destroy their shanties, and tow their cars, all in the name of a compassionate crusade to save them from their inner demons.



## *The Road to Nowheresville*

EMORY, AN AGING CHINESE AMERICAN HIPPIE with a flamboyant mustache and a long ponytail, had lived in the Haight since he was in his early thirties. He didn't make much at his job in a rehearsal studio where he set up fuzzy sound systems for would-be rockers in bandannas and leather trousers, keeping the ledger and sorting the cash. In the early 1990s, he was sharing an apartment with four younger speed freaks, the only living situation he could afford in the ever more expensive housing market.

Exhausted from the bassy cacophony at work, Emory craved quiet, but living with his hyped-up roommates got more and more crazy. In 1994 he decided to save for a van instead. The legacy of the "summer of love" still lingered in his neighborhood, Haight-Ashbury, and at that time, there were still other stalwarts of the San Francisco counterculture living in ramshackle vans around Panhandle Park. By joining them, Emory could continue living near his old apartment.

All in all, Emory didn't regret the decision to leave the crazy apartment. He really liked living on his own, a luxury that few can afford in San Francisco. Being naturally tidy, he was able to manage his possessions within a very limited space without getting claustrophobic. He still knew lots of people in the neighborhood, and friends would come by to chat when they saw his distinctive green van. One friend, Hector, gave him a spare key so he could use the bathroom whenever he needed.

But parking the van in the Haight became harder and harder. First of all, as the neighborhood continued to gentrify, parking spaces became increasingly scarce. Emory's old Ford needed a big space, and some nights he found himself driving around for hours after work. But still he persisted. Without the proximity of his friends, especially Hector, he knew that van living would be a lot less attractive.