

WRAP MEMBERS



COALITION ON
HOMELESSNESS
SAN FRANCISCO



HOUSEKEYS ACTION
NETWORK DENVER



HUMAN RIGHT TO
HOUSING WA



JUDI'S MIDNIGHT
DINER



LOS ANGELES
COMMUNITY ACTION
NETWORK



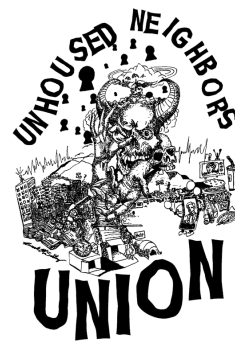
LOVE & JUSTICE
IN THE STREETS



**STREET
SPIRIT**

STREET SPIRIT

UNHOUSED
NEIGHBORS UNION
MISSOULA



Created by
the Western Regional Advocacy Project

THE MAKING OF HOMELESSNESS:

HOW US POLICY TURNED POVERTY
INTO A PERMANENT CONDITION



Poster
Syndicate

ABOUT THIS ZINE

Every day we hear narratives about homelessness that places blame on those living unhoused. The dominant narrative is that people fall into homelessness based on personal choice. Looking closer at the history, however, this story doesn't quite add up. Rather, homelessness was created through intentional policy design.

Under neoliberal housing policy, governments have abandoned large-scale public housing, deregulated real estate markets, and empowered landlords, developers, and financial institutions to treat homes as investment assets, fueling gentrification, displacement, skyrocketing rents, and homelessness.

At the same time, the erosion of housing, healthcare and other social welfare programs leaves working-class and poor people with fewer means of survival. Unfortunately, the state responds increasingly to the crises it created with policing, evictions, incarceration, and anti-homeless laws.

The purpose of this zine is to support community organizing with education about policies that continue to worsen poverty and systemic injustice while hoarding resources and profiting off of our suffering. This zine provides some analysis and information that hopefully energizes us to think about what can be done differently as we fight for basic human rights as well as a future that is dignified and comfortable for all.



CONCLUSION

Neoliberalism and criminalization work together to create conditions which have helped produce the rising fascism we see today. While denying basic resources to poor and working-class communities, powerful propaganda narratives & disinformation divide the people.

Housed and unhoused people are pitted against each other through disinformation propagated by government refrains about 'public safety.' Drug users and sober people are pitted against each other while those profiting off of criminalization, incarceration, and so called 'public-private partnerships' continue to reap resources and public dollars.

But when we build power together we can fight against the ways in which they try to divide us, and build the future we know is possible!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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And as we advocate for permanent housing production, we must make the distinct demand for large investment into *deeply affordable housing* as the primary structural solution to homelessness rather than expanding temporary shelter systems. This requires the full replacement of the over 498,000 units of public housing lost and assistance to the hundreds of thousands of households removed from Section 8.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING NECESSITIES

Community-based outreach is a central organizing strategy for community organizations. We need to identify policy priorities from those who are the most impacted. Nothing about us without us!

Our communities thrive with strong political education. We must counter dominant cultural narratives pushed by neoliberalism which frame homelessness and poverty as issues of "personal responsibility" and "deservingness" by instead highlighting the structural causes of homelessness and inequality in public discourse and within our communities. We must reframe housing as a basic human right rather than a commodity.



And lastly, we must build coalitions and solidarity across multiple issue groups to strengthen our fights for affordable housing, healthcare, education, and human rights for all people. We must unite against the capitalist and fascist systems tearing all of our communities apart!

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Austerity: Severe government budget cuts, most notably significant decreases in social welfare and assistance spending, while at the same time raising taxes on the poor. Austerity is a mechanism of the wealthy to attack the poor.

Criminalization of Poverty: Making life sustaining activities or behavior illegal, for instance, standing still, sleeping in parks or streets, serving food in public spaces, sitting or lying in targeted zones.

Fascism: Government rule through the power of militarized policing over the population under a dictator, often using classist, racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and queerphobic tactics to divide the public and the violent suppression of any political opposition.

Neoliberalism: The political and economic ideology that places profit, private ownership, and the market above human needs, transforming needs like housing, healthcare, etc into commodities rather than rights.



Organizing: Forging strong & accountable community networks and ties into sustainable action that builds power and wins real change.



NEOLIBERALISM

From Nixon and Reagan, to Clinton, Bush, and Trump, Neoliberalism has waged a war against the poor through systematic government disinvestment, privatization of housing, and the eradication of our social safety net. It uses crisis-driven governance to justify the repeated rounds of austerity with temporary band-aid solutions instead of structural reforms like permanent housing. Neoliberal policies have worked to line the pockets of the rich while the poor get left behind.



AUSTERITY AND CLASSIST NEGLECT

In 1981, social welfare and assistance programs totaled nearly \$295 billion. However, Reagan would drastically cut social spending. Throughout the 1980's Federal funding for subsidized housing fell from \$32 billion to \$6 billion. Meanwhile, Federal subsidies for homeownership through mortgage interest tax deduction reduced \$50 billion in federal revenue in 1988 alone. By the 1990s, the government had completely reversed its previous commitment to providing housing.

A Tale of Two Acts...

The Housing Act of 1937 committed:

"to remedy the unsafe & unsanitary housing conditions & the acute shortage of decent, safe, & sanitary dwellings for families of lower income..."

The Quality Housing & Work Responsibility Act of 1998 declared:

"the Federal Government cannot through its direct action alone provide housing of every American, or even the majority of its citizens."

PEOPLE'S RESPONSE IS to ORGANIZE!

In times of fascism, the people's only response is to get organized and defend their communities from their violent government, the wealthy elite and their rent-a-cop goons.

FIGHT FOR WHAT IS OWED TO US!

The first step in demanding justice is demanding transparency. Agencies like the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) have eliminated data tracking for hundreds of thousands of people who have been cut off from federal assistance, severely fragmenting data on our communities and undercounting the severity of crises like homelessness and poverty. The government intentionally obscures these facts in order to justify the continued neglect of the poor. Not only do we need to demand full transparency and data tracking systems for the future, we need our own independent community-based methods in measuring the health and wellbeing of all people.

We need to demand accountability targeting key decision-makers across federal, state, and local systems of governance. Officials at every level should be responsible for reasserting government responsibility for providing housing, healthcare, livable income and jobs for all. We must reestablish the housing ceiling so that no more affordable units are demolished and set a program to ensure permanent housing for all people!

We must demand an end to the criminalization of poverty through the elimination of punitive ordinances and brutal police enforcement that criminalize sleeping, resting, and surviving in public spaces. Funding for harm reduction and mental health must result in increased access to treatment and care that reflects community needs, rather than court ordered forced treatment at institutions.

MASS SURVEILLANCE

As the expansion of punitive governance replaces welfare provision, the criminalization of poverty only accelerates with the state's access to newly developed technology and AI surveillance. Companies like Palantir, Flock, Anduril, and Skydio receive billions of dollars in contracts with federal agencies like ICE and local police departments to spy on communities with ever-expanding networks of cameras and fleets of drones.

SFPD SPIES ON
OUR COMMUNITIES
WITH SKYDIO DRONES,
THE SAME DRONES USED
BY THE IDF IN
PALESTINE

AS OF AUGUST
2026, THERE ARE
483 FLOCK CAMERAS
IN SAN FRANCISCO
AND COUNTING

MONEY FOR WAR, NONE FOR THE POOR

As Trump unleashes his fascist attacks domestically, he also expands imperialist war abroad intensifying the genocide of the Palestinian people, kidnapping the President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, and continuing to expand war against Iran, already killing over 3,500 civilians.

Trump is using the One Trillion Dollar defense budget to wage war on Iran meanwhile the BFB's projected cuts to Medicaid will reach \$1.02 trillion.

CHANGE THE PRIORITIES



SUPPORT A HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS
HOUSE KEYS NOT HANDCUFFS

Today, this neoliberal trend continues with Trump's Big Fascist Bill, severe cuts to health care, food-aid, student loan assistance, etc.

As of August 2026, over 4 million Americans are no longer receiving food aid because of the Big Fascist Bill!

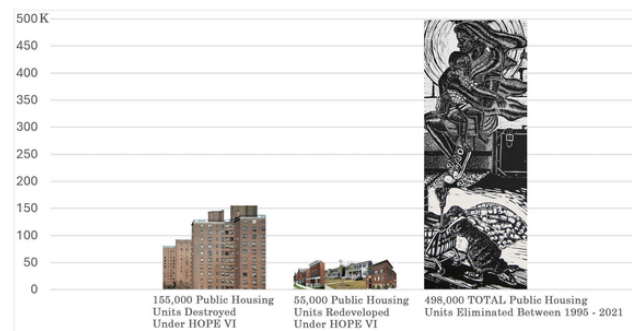
This is a direct result of neoliberal rhetoric which emphasized 'personal responsibility' over the government providing for the needs of our people. Policies since the 1980s have shifted all responsibility to state, local governments, and the private sector.

SHOCK THERAPY

Neoliberalism privatizes and offloads previously public services including housing developments to corporate developers and non-profits.

Although not the beginning of privatization, HOPE VI accelerated the wide scale destruction of public housing and gentrification of neighborhoods with private development in the 1990s through the 2010s. By 2021, the government had destroyed nearly 500,000 Public Housing Units without replacement.

Public Housing Units Lost



Other policies like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) increased the privatization and offloading of services like welfare programs, childcare, and job training from governments to corporations and non-profits, decreased overall funding for services with Block grants and set punitive time limits and eligibility requirements ensuring millions of people lost access to vital support.

THERE'S NO MONEY?! YEAH RIGHT.

Endemic capitalist economic crisis gives the government opportunities to attack the poor and reward the rich. The government used the excuse of emergency and the myth of scarcity to justify cuts to social services. However, after Neoliberalism's rampage on housing, healthcare, and social services, crisis-driven governance became the norm. Homelessness and poverty only skyrocketed, institutionalizing emergency conditions as a permanent response. Now with little federal funding remaining to address widespread issues like housing shortages and homelessness, they are now managed through negligent policies rather than resolved through structural investment.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was called on in the 1980s to fund emergency shelters and short-term assistance to address homelessness; while at the same time there was continued massive reductions in funding for permanent housing.

Decades of neoliberal evisceration of permanent housing solutions cement the sense that homelessness and poverty are incurable issues that can only be dealt with through temporary band-aid solutions instead of restoring the social infrastructure needed to ensure people have dignified access to housing and basic necessities. It is possible, the money exists, but the government refuses to do the right thing.

FASCISM TODAY

Neoliberal gutting of federal housing assistance and the criminalization of poverty and homelessness are only parts of the wider system of fascism thriving under Trump today. As attacks against the poor and homeless rise, so do fascist attacks against political dissidents, queer and trans people, and migrant and BIPOC communities. The systems of surveillance and control through AI technology have rapidly expanded federal access to sensitive information leading to voter suppression and increasing repression against people. American fascism continues to equate into American imperialism abroad where Trump spends trillions of dollars to wage genocide and war against the people of Palestine, Iran, and Venezuela.

ATTACKS ON THE PEOPLE

Trump is using ICE and Homeland Security as a personal paramilitary force much like Mussolini's Blackshirts or Hitler's Brownshirts, to roam the streets, detain, and kill.

From January 2025 and January 2026:

The number of people in ICE custody rose by **77%** Annual deaths in ICE custody rose by **3x**

In Trump's second term: Homeland Security has already deported over **985,000 people**

Other people and organizations identified as the enemy such as journalists, civil rights organizations, and political activists are also facing an uptick in repression.

Eight protesters at an ICE Detention Facility in Prairieland, Texas were sentenced for a total of

450 YEARS

As soon as the shelters were opened, camping bans, sit and lie laws, and spatial exclusion policies were implemented to control the visibility of homelessness through tent raids, sweeps, property theft, and other forms of police harassment and brutality, rather than addressing the root causes of homelessness.

Since the Supreme Court ruling on Grants Pass in 2024, **OVER 350 CITIES & 14 STATES** have passed bills and ordinances criminalizing homeless people

And who is hit hardest by these fascist sweeps? Queer and trans people, Black and Indigenous people, and people with disabilities are disproportionately displaced, homeless, and killed by the police raids.

For the growing number of poor and homeless people left out on the streets, the criminalization of poverty and the expansion of the carceral state was the government's solution... at the demise of millions of people.



Instead neoliberal governance exploits racist and classist tropes like the *Welfare Queen*, to further cut access to social services. Policies like the One Strike rule further kick people out of housing and shift the blame onto the individual. The government simply makes the absurd excuse they are not denying people aid, "the people are just not deserving."

CRIMINALIZATION

As Neoliberalism cut funding for housing, homelessness was rapidly being criminalized, locking homeless people in an inescapable cycle of poverty, shelters, and incarceration. Captive to the state's spatial governance, Black, Brown, immigrant, disabled, and women-led households became disproportionately criminalized and targeted through surveillance, restriction, and exclusion.

As poverty and homelessness skyrocketed in the 1970s and 1980s, capitalism needed a temporary fix to address the imminent social upheaval. Instead of improving welfare supports, public resources were shifted away from social welfare and housing towards shelters expansion, policing, and the prison industrial complex: an incarceration-based management of poverty.



MODERN DAY HOMELESSNESS: A TIMELINE

1980s

- Reagan takes office in 1981 dismantling prior social safety net and public housing
- Laws and policies transformed homelessness from a structural housing issue into a matter of short-term management (ex. FEMA running emergency shelters starting 1983 and McKinney Act of 1987 formalized this approach pouring millions of dollars in grant funding for emergency shelter)
- 1980s sees proliferation of local governments adopting vagrancy and so-called 'quality of life' ordinances criminalizing homelessness

1990s

- President Clinton campaigns on "ending welfare as we know it". His presidency introduced policies such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 which created strict eligibility requirements and time limits for aid resulting in millions of people losing access to their benefits driving people further into poverty and homelessness
- Hope VI, implemented in 1992, was presented as an initiative to renovate 'distressed' public housing units. Instead the federal government destroyed hundreds of thousands of housing units which were never replaced

2000s

- Largely symbolic policies that were all talk and little action. Task forces created to end homelessness but didn't address structural issues
- After the 2008 recession, the federal government gave billions of dollars in bailouts to banks and corporate interests to fix the problems these industries' greed created regarding housing. The few policies introduced to provide relief for those impacted by foreclosures had strict eligibility requirements. More people were removed from program than received relief
- By 2009, roughly 3.4 million families experienced foreclosure

2010s-Modern Day

- By 2015 homelessness had doubled according to the Department of Education Stats since 2005. From 655,591 children experiencing homelessness to 1,304,803
- Both political parties touted the benefits of HUD's homeless funding of Housing First programs while simultaneously overseeing HUD's elimination of 498K units of public housing
- In Trump's first term, he passed the The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 severely lowering the corporate tax rate by almost half
- Trump's Big Beautiful Fascist Bill drastically cuts funding for housing, health care, food stamps, and disability benefits while expanding subsidies for private industries prioritizing profit over people