

RESOURCE GUIDE

S5 E5: Punished and Persecuted for Being Unhoused, Part 1



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ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story

THE ENCAMPMENT IN ECHO PARK, LA

CESAR SEGURA “WALL STREET” SEGURA, 32, AND HIS PARTNER, JESSICA “QUEEN” MENDEZ, 34, SHARE A KISS IN THE SAME SPOT WHERE THEY HAD THEIR FIRST KISS ABOUT TWO YEARS NEXT TO ECHO PARK LAKE IN LOS ANGELES, CALIF. PHOTO CREDIT: ALISHA JUCEVIC



REFLECTION QUESTION:

How does your local government protect or punish unhoused people in your community? Are there regulations in place to prevent reckless eviction, rent hikes, or the erasure of communities that have long stayed in your and surrounding communities?

As of 2022, nearly 42,000 residents are unhoused in Los Angeles. Some have cycled through the criminal justice system or are suffering from mental illness. Virtually all struggle to afford housing. In 2020, Echo Park, a public park in downtown Los Angeles was home to a growing encampment of tents, where unhoused residents received support from local organizations such as the Ground Game LA, and Street Watch for basic supplies and necessities. The encampment's growth built tension with housed residents. According to Los Angeles City data, Angelenos called the city's sanitation department over 48,000 times in 2021 to complain about homeless encampments. In response, the city has legally punished and physically removed residents of this and other homeless communities. In response, the city has legally punished and physically harmed residents of this and other homeless communities. As COVID-19 shut the entire city down, the self-reliance of the encampment community was crucial. Starting in March 2020, the city began Project Room Key offering temporary housing to unhoused people who were exposed to or recovering from COVID-19, and those who were at high risk for infection. The number of unhoused people outnumbered the rooms available, and those who did have interim housing were not provided support to be housed long-term, so many returned to the streets. The presence of law enforcement and sanitation crews grew each week, trying to remove anyone who tried to stay in the Echo Park area.

On March 24th, 2021, more than 400 police officers, many dressed in riot gear and armed with less-lethal projectile launchers and batons blocked off the streets surrounding the park and faced off with a group of protesters—housed and unhoused residence alike. Reporter Mark Betancourt met with organizers and residents of the Echo Park encampment. Ashley Bennett, an advocate for unhoused people with Ground Game LA said about the days leading up to the raid, "It was obvious because there were so many outreach workers there. We were getting information from the inside like that, 'Oh yeah, there's a big sweep that's going to happen.'" Queen, a resident of the encampment shared, "They started coming in very little days... And then slowly, it became into like, "Oh, well we're going to sweep and you need to go here. You need to go to the PRK [Project Room Key]."

Like many cities across the country, Los Angeles has laws and regulations that make it nearly impossible to live or camp outside in public places without police intervention. Law enforcement is used to remove people from their encampment communities, often making arrests, and destroying their belongings—IDs, medicine, personal documents, and other crucial items. During the clearing of the Echo Park encampment, the city erected a large metal fence enclosing the entire park. Learn more in Part 2, on the next episode of 70 Million.

PEOPLE DOING THE WORK

The National Alliance to End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to end homelessness in the United States.

UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy

The UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy advances radical democracy in an unequal world through research, critical thought, and alliances with social movements and racial justice activism.

The Los Angeles County: Homeless Initiative

The Homeless Initiative is the central coordinating body for Los Angeles County's ongoing effort – unprecedented in scale – to expand and enhance services for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their homes.

Encampment Resolution Funding Program

The Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) Program grants will fund local demonstration projects that provide services to address the immediate crisis of experiencing unsheltered homelessness in encampments

Street Watch Los Angeles

Street Watch is a coalition of organizers concerned about tenant rights.



ASHLEY BENNETT, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER AND CO-FOUNDER AT GROUND GAME, IS PICTURED IN GRIFFITH PARK IN LOS ANGELES, CALIF., ON AUG. 1, 2022. BENNETT EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS AS A CHILD, LIVING IN A CAR WITH HER MOTHER FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS. PHOTO CREDIT: ALISHA JUCEVIC

Ground Game LA

Ground Game LA is a horizontally-managed, grassroots group, building community & electoral power in Los Angeles

Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

To drive the collaborative strategic vision to create solutions for the crisis of homelessness grounded in compassion, equity, and inclusion."

National Homelessness Law Center

The Law Center leverages its legal expertise and the pro bono power of the private bar in its fight to establish a right to housing in the United States.

Housing Not Handcuffs

Housing Not Handcuffs was initiated by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless, and more than 100 participating organizations,

NationalHomelessness.org

The National Coalition for the Homeless is a national network of people who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, activists and advocates, community-based and faith-based service providers

LEARN MORE

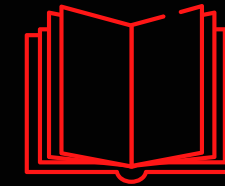


LOS ANGELES SANITATION WORKERS CLEAN A SIDEWALK DURING A SWEEP IN VAN NUYS, CALIF. ON JULY 29, 2022. PHOTO CREDIT: ALISHA JUCEVIC



VOLUNTEERS FROM STREET WATCH, KIRA, LEFT, AND MICAELLA, RIGHT, HELP MOVE PEOPLE'S BELONGINGS DURING A SWEEP IN VAN NUYS, CALIF. ON JULY 29, 2022. PHOTO CREDIT: ALISHA JUCEVIC

Reading



[No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities](#)
by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

[Housing Not Handcuffs 2021: State Law Supplement](#)
by Housing Not Handcuffs & the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

[Los Angeles' War on the Poor: A Case Study in Militarism, Displacement, and Public Space at Echo Park Lake](#)
by Ina Morton, Occidental College Senior Comprehensive Project

[\(DIS\)PLACEMENT: THE FIGHT FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFTER ECHO PARK LAKE](#)
by UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy

[Forced into Breaking the Law" The Criminalization of Homelessness in Connecticut](#)
by Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic yale law school

Websites



[Know Your Rights Training](#) by The Civil Liberties Defense Center

[Los Angeles: Affordable housing, Understand the City of LA budget, and Operational Analysis](#)
by Kenneth Meija

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