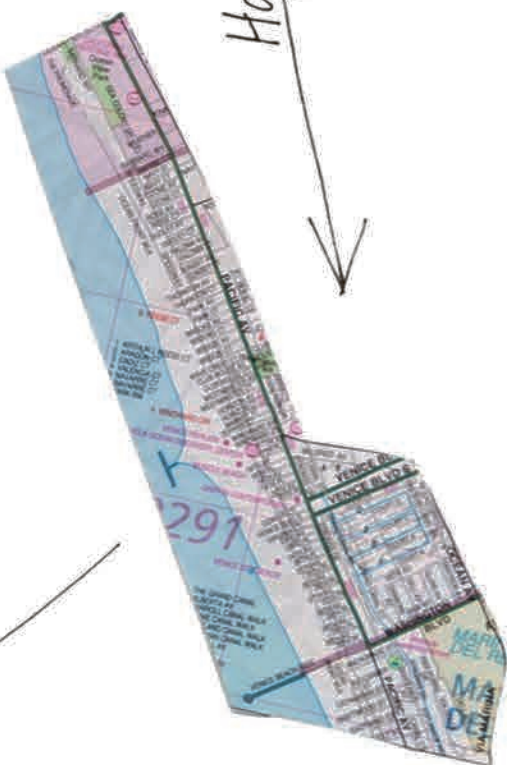


030518118

030518118

A Guide to Los Angeles' Moral Crisis



pity

Care

FB

Hope

Hate

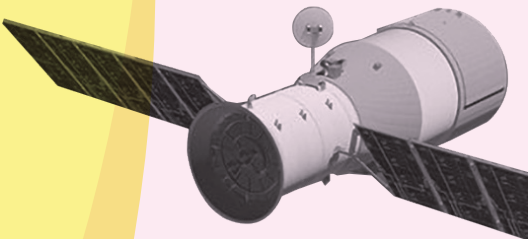
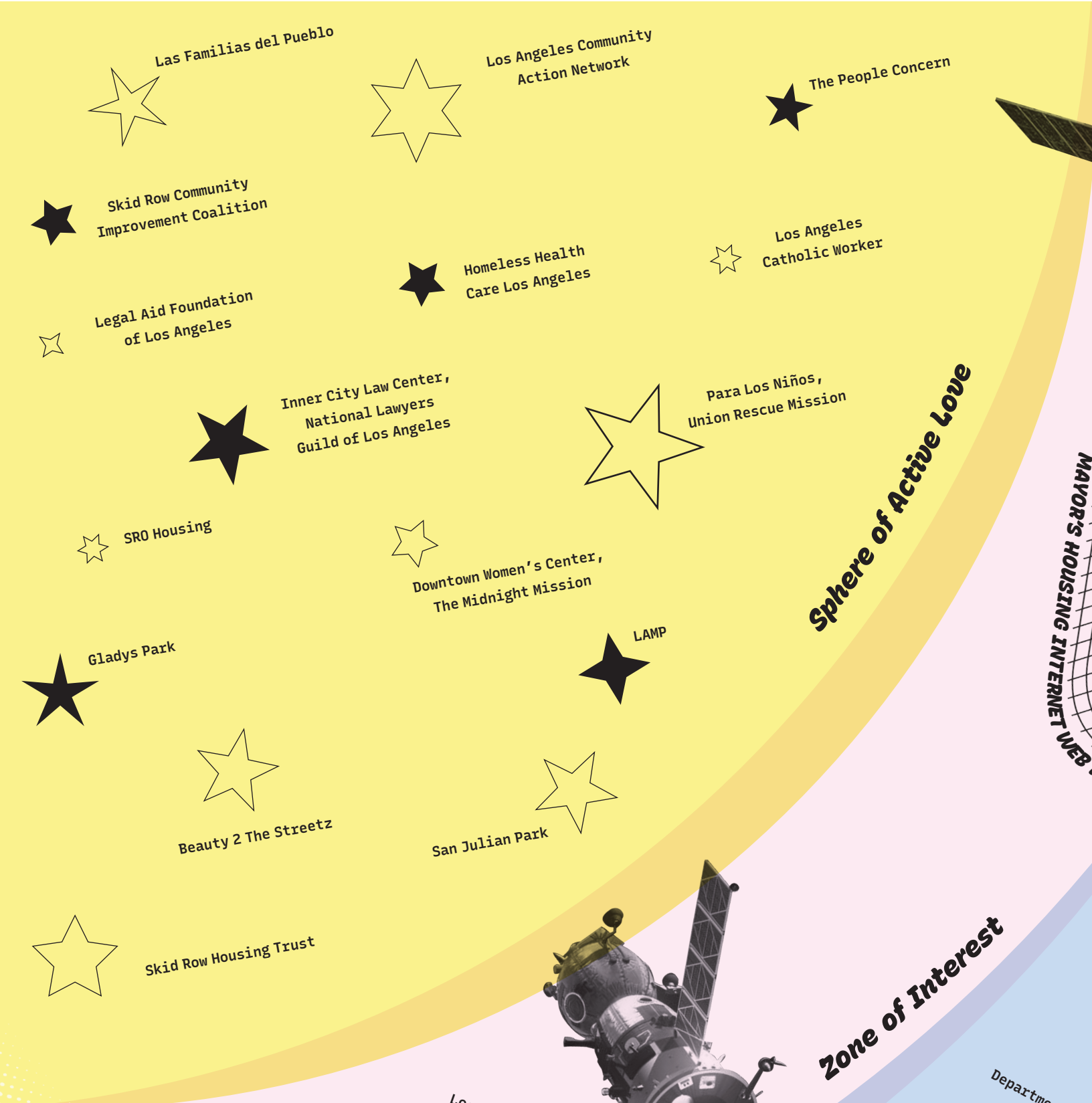
Grief

Pride

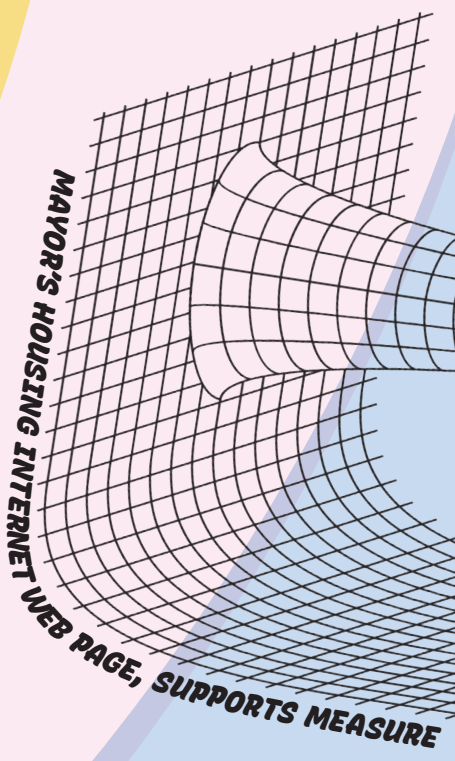
Joy

Disrespect

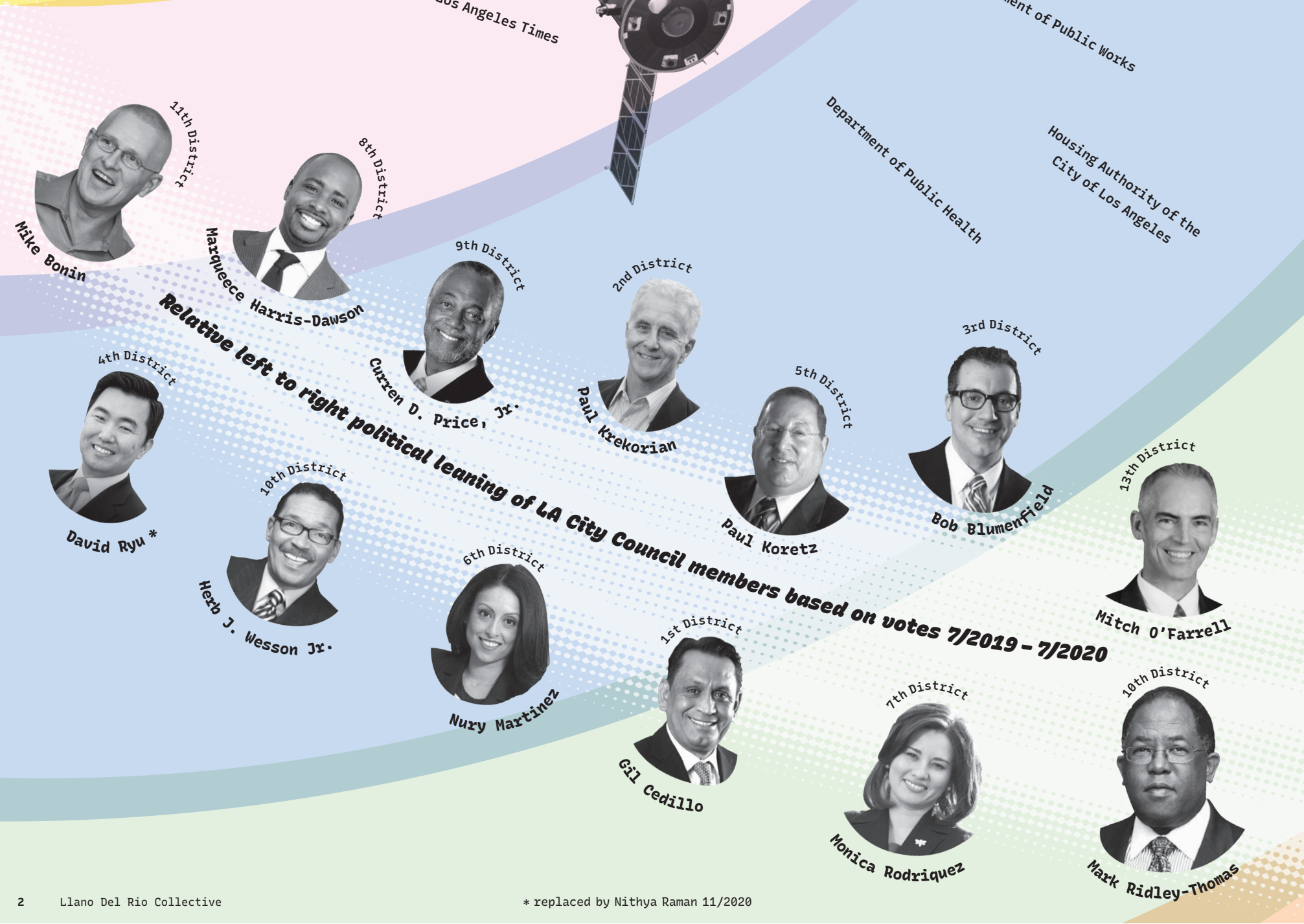
Love



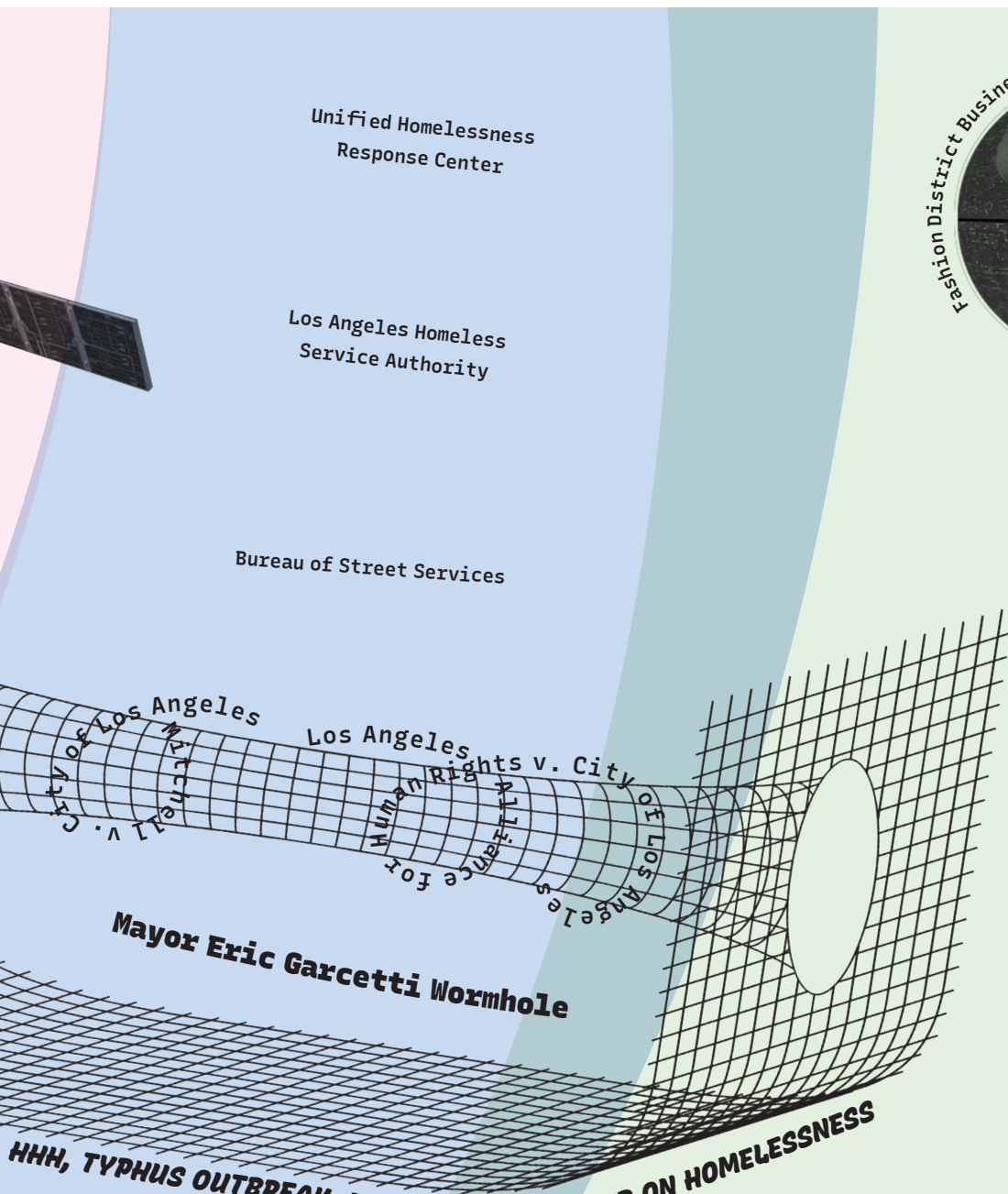
United Nations



MAYOR'S HOUSING INTERNET WEB PAGE, SUPPORTS MEASURE



CELESTIAL GUIDE To the Moral Universe of Skid Row

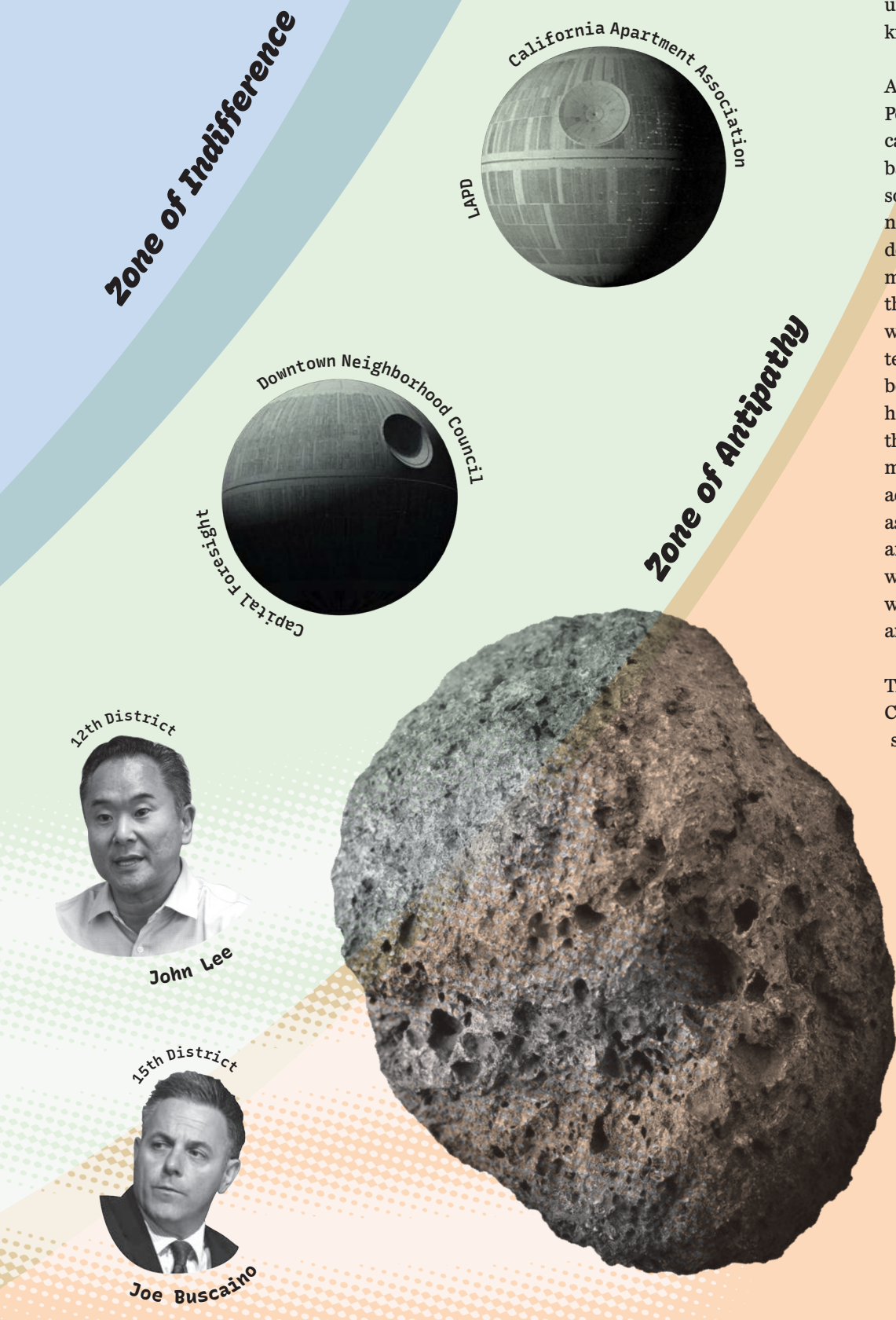


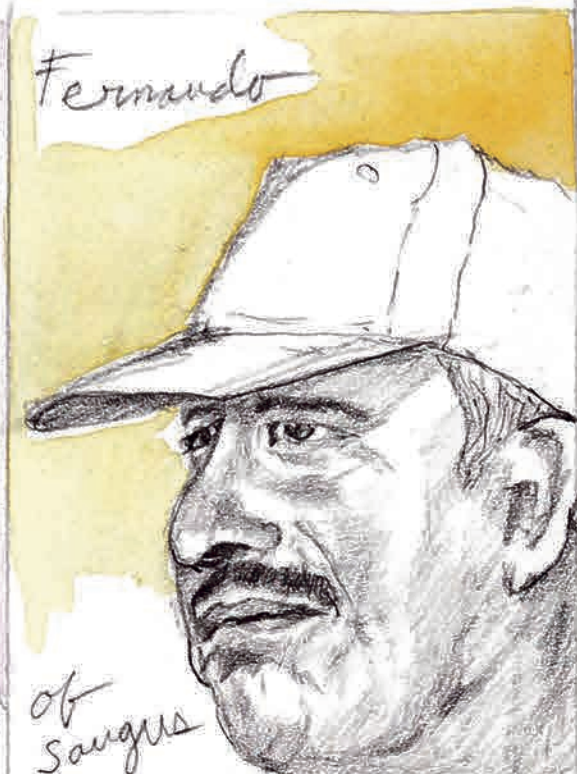
Can it be said that there are four active emotions expressed regarding LA's Skid Row: Compassion, Interest, Disinterest, and Antipathy? At the core of morality is caring for a stranger. Susan Sontag wrote, "Compassion is an unstable emotion, it needs to be translated in action or it withers," and we know this to be true as well.

At the heart of a moral map of Skid Row is the neighborhood itself. People and groups actively demonstrating compassion compose it. They care for people. Others may shun them, but they push against the barbarism our world inflicts on the destitute. Adjacent to this emotional-social core are also other people and organizations interested in the neighborhood, in studying it and reporting on it to the outside world. They don't participate in the labor of love necessary to sustain the variety of meaningful and transformative interpersonal experiences taking place there, but they care to witness it. Beyond this ring are the bureaucrats who maintain the city's status quo. As functionaries they are not permitted to exercise more than their mandates. Employees working in this belt of acronyms and abbreviations (UHRC, LAHSA, HHCLA, etc.) might have great compassion for the residents of Skid Row, but institutionally they're obliged to follow rules that organize the poor through a management schema. At the cold outer edge of this universe is a barrage of firms actively working against the full-hearted impulse that binds Skid Row as the "world's biggest recovery community." Whether it's the developers and businesses that see the neighborhood as a burden, or LAPD tasked with containing Skid Row's misery, this orbit is composed of organizations whose interests or goals don't ally with the poor. They are the ruling class, and because of this they don't understand the poor as humans.

Traversing this solar system are Los Angeles' politicians, including the City Council and the Mayor. These celestial bodies are in lots of places simultaneously, because they are relatively democratic, and because they are sleazy. The City Council is an unpredictable asteroid belt, everywhere at once, though it exerts a force. With recent additions, it's only getting wilder. The Mayor is a wormhole, confounding logic, nowhere and everywhere all at the same time. His moral elusiveness, his ability to say one thing that can be understood in many different ways, only helps maintain the status quo of inequality. For example, the Mayor spins lawsuits against the way the city has organized the homeless as stupendous opportunities to organize the poor in cruel new ways, as is the case with the lawsuit Mitchell v. City of Los Angeles.

Self-deception is the game the Mayor and Los Angeles play with Skid Row and the un-housed. Working without compassion for the poor, they trick themselves to think they can adequately address inequality. In the absence of boundless compassion, this cruelty which has caused the neighborhood of Skid Row to flower will only expand.



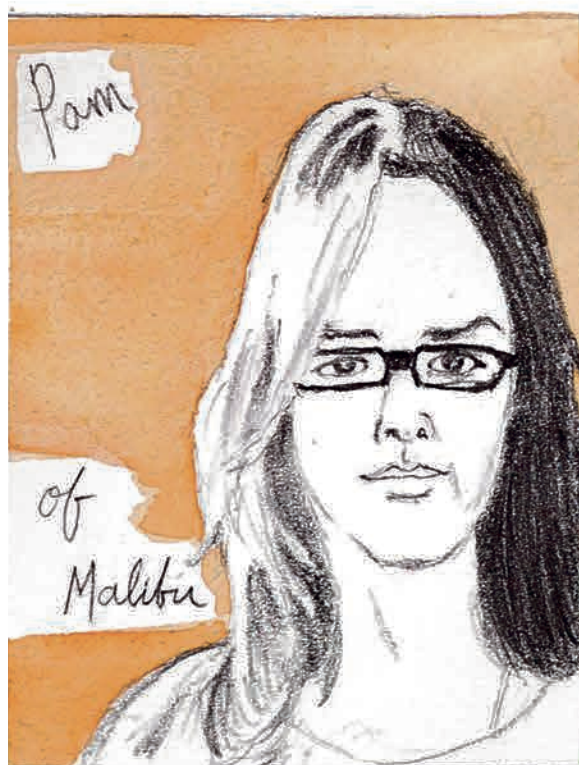


Fed
Fernando
of
Saugus

Gave
Water to
Gabe
of
Sunland

Handed
Linh
of
Arcadia
a jacket

Hou
Mich
Eagle



Vanity
clouded her
relationship
to
June of
East Hollywood

Was greedy
with
Anthony
of
Palmdale

Sought to
control
the body of
Sal
of
El Monte

Had re
Screw
vie
of
Rach
of
D.T.L

 <p>Linh</p> <p>of Arcadia</p>	 <p>Michael</p> <p>of Eagle Rock</p>	 <p>Janelle</p> <p>of Compton</p>	 <p>Ari</p> <p>of Glendale</p>
<p>sed ael of Rock</p>	<p>Visited Janelle of Compton who was sick</p>	<p>Visited Ari of Glendale who was in jail</p>	<p>Buried Pam of Malibu</p>
	 <p>Rachel</p> <p>of D.T.L.A.</p>	 <p>Anna</p> <p>of Carson</p>	 <p>Steven</p> <p>of Long Beach</p>
<p>really ed up w el A.</p>	<p>Took all of Anna of Carson's stuff for herself</p>	<p>Was wrathful toward Steven of Long Beach</p>	<p>Was lazy as fuck to the point of dereliction, and this had serious consequences for Carla of Los Feliz</p>

0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
A
B
C
D
E
F

Another Planet

Homeless is a 2
In reality I'm
human. Nothing
food. I still s
I still work.

The un-housed community and defended a remarkable maintenance and care having 24-hour access to the community and its outdoor showers but took those away, but remain. In addition a have been added by the iated jobs program (3 camp residents to do cooking, and bookkeeping. LA shows up with supplies up cellphones, and

The park shows usage. But in general, it's well ordered and well used. Joggers, folks with strollers, families, all are welcome. Residents of beauty and tranquility together.

Note:

Echo Park

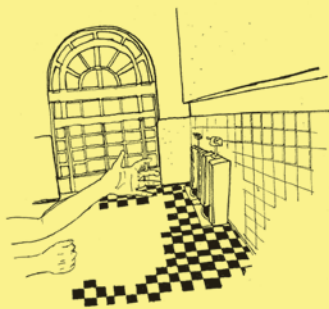
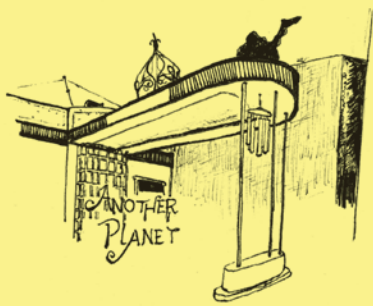
label put on me by society. I'm still a man and I'm still a man. I still need sleep. I still wake up. And
— Ayman, Echo Park 8/2020

For over a year, the Echo Park Lake has been a site of radical self-organization by LA's unhoused community. It is home to over 60 individuals. The lake is located in a treasured public space between two hills. It is a prominent commercial district in Los Angeles' hippest neighborhoods. One of the park's campers, to maintain the encampment there, is matched with a lot of attention of care for the park and the question "where are we supposed to go?" is a common one you'll hear, responding to the fact that homelessness is now common throughout the city. The Echo Park Lake camp's publicness has earned it credit for its longevity and power. Ayman describes it as a "love-based community of homeless and local people who've successfully defended the camp against displacement by the city government. Ayman says the city doesn't view us as humans."

The community at Echo Park Lake has built up a lot of infrastructure there for its own use. The park has public restrooms, and the struggle to them has been a major struggle for the advocates. Another struggle has been the displacement by the city government. The city has manufactured models were donated and a community garden, pantry, and kitchen were added to the park. A camp initiated (funded through online donations) paid for the park and camp work like cleaning, sleeping. Twice a week Street Watch provides solar electrical chargers to charge phones and hand out NARCAN to counter any opioid overdose.

Despite some wear from its more intense history, the dwellings there are still in good shape and the park is relatively clean. It's a great spot for a stroll, children and adults co-exist with the park's inhabitants. Residents value the park as a site where they lay their heads down to sleep.

NOTE: The Echo Park community was evicted March 25th, 2021



It operated as a hip cultural center for the Skid Row community, apparently connecting with LA's wider arts scene for the year and a half, until a fire shut the place down. Wooden signs decorated it: "No Brains, No Service," "Welcome Visitors From All Planets," "The Best Way to Get Ahead is to Have One," and "No Matter Where you Go, There You Are." Also this: "Looking for all the world like a Fellini mirage, this converted gas station redolent of psychedelic gizmos and gewgaws is actually a substance-free cultural oasis." Beyond film screenings, poetry readings, chess games, jam sessions, and live entertainment, Another Planet provided the neighborhood with two portable toilets and a storage service for boxed items. A group of folks slept there too. The \$350 rent was raised through donation, "penny pinching," or sales of Casey's art. Before it went up in smoke, Casey said "Missions feed the stomachs and the spiritual nature somewhat. But when it comes to feeding the mind, the missions don't. And that's basically what this energy's all about: Feeding the imagination."

Barricade the Men's Room at City Hall

For 4 hours in May of 1994, a group of activists blockaded the second floor men's bathroom in LA City Hall. "Thousands of people have no place other than alleys, sidewalks and doorways to go to the bathroom," said Alice Callaghan, the director of Familias del Pueblo. Callaghan and other Skid Row advocates had been battling for years to get bathrooms installed in that neighborhood. In 1992, the city was set to install public bathrooms there when Mayor Tom Bradley killed the plan. Two years later the bathroom blockade successfully targeted the new administration of Richard "Dick" Riordan. He approved a short-term program installing 30 portable toilets in the Skid Row neighborhood. In 1998, the city removed the toilets, but a sit-in at Riordan's office with chants of "Outhouses for People without Houses" brought them back. They would disappear again, and the issue of toilets for the un-housed remains unresolved till today.

Do It Himself Toilet

David Busch opened a DIY public restroom on 3rd and Venice in 2012. It consisted of a bucket, soapy water, and a tent for privacy. He was arrested and tried in April, 2012, on charges of public nuisance and leaving property on the sidewalk.

Public Sinks for the People

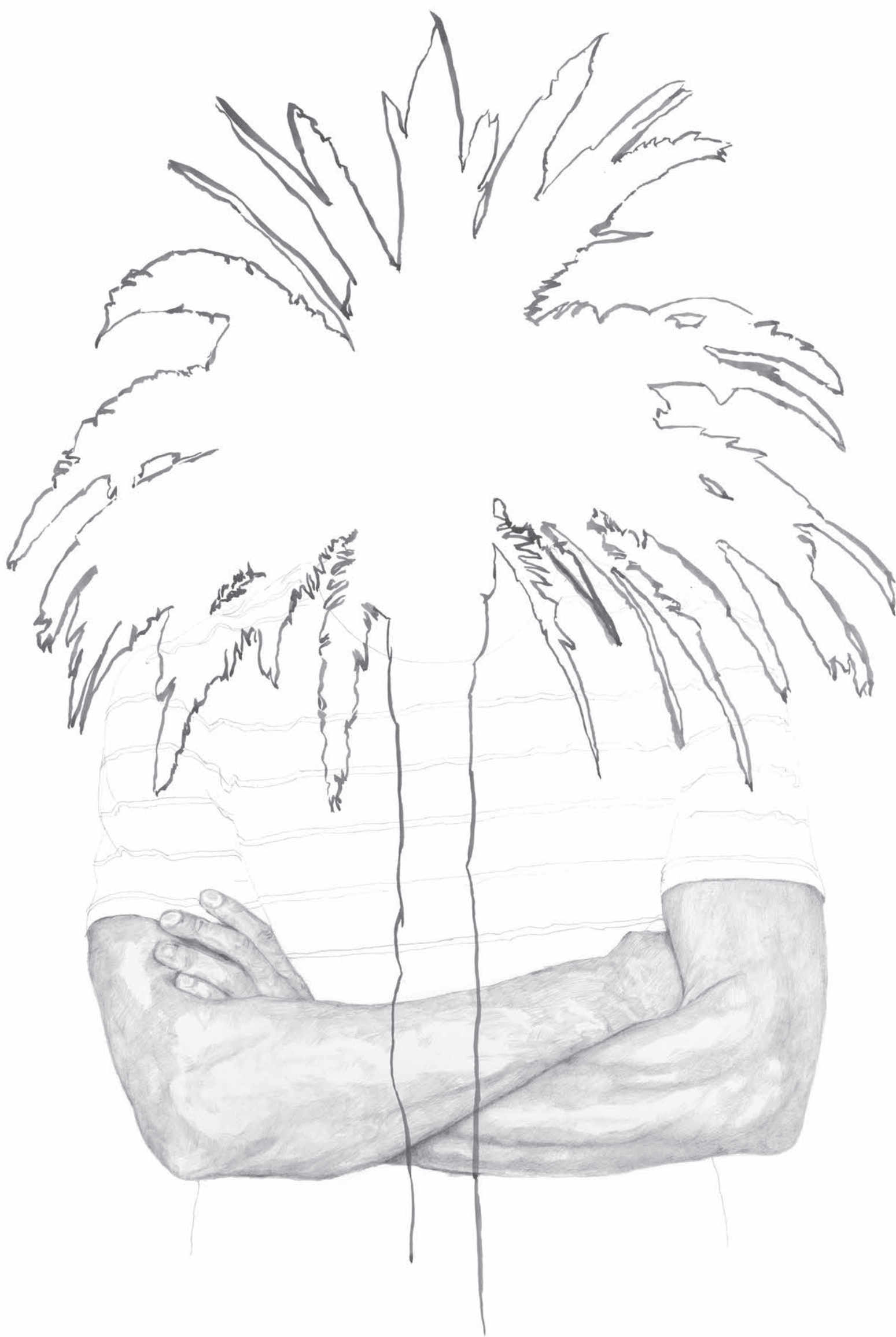
For years Skid Row and Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) has been fighting the "Dirty Divide", the inadequate sanitary conditions the city's un-housed face. With the novel coronavirus breathing down everyone's necks in 2020, LACAN stepped up to organize a network (along with Street Watch, Human Rights Watch, and Mutual Aid LA) of hand built, and citizen maintained, DIY sanitation stations.

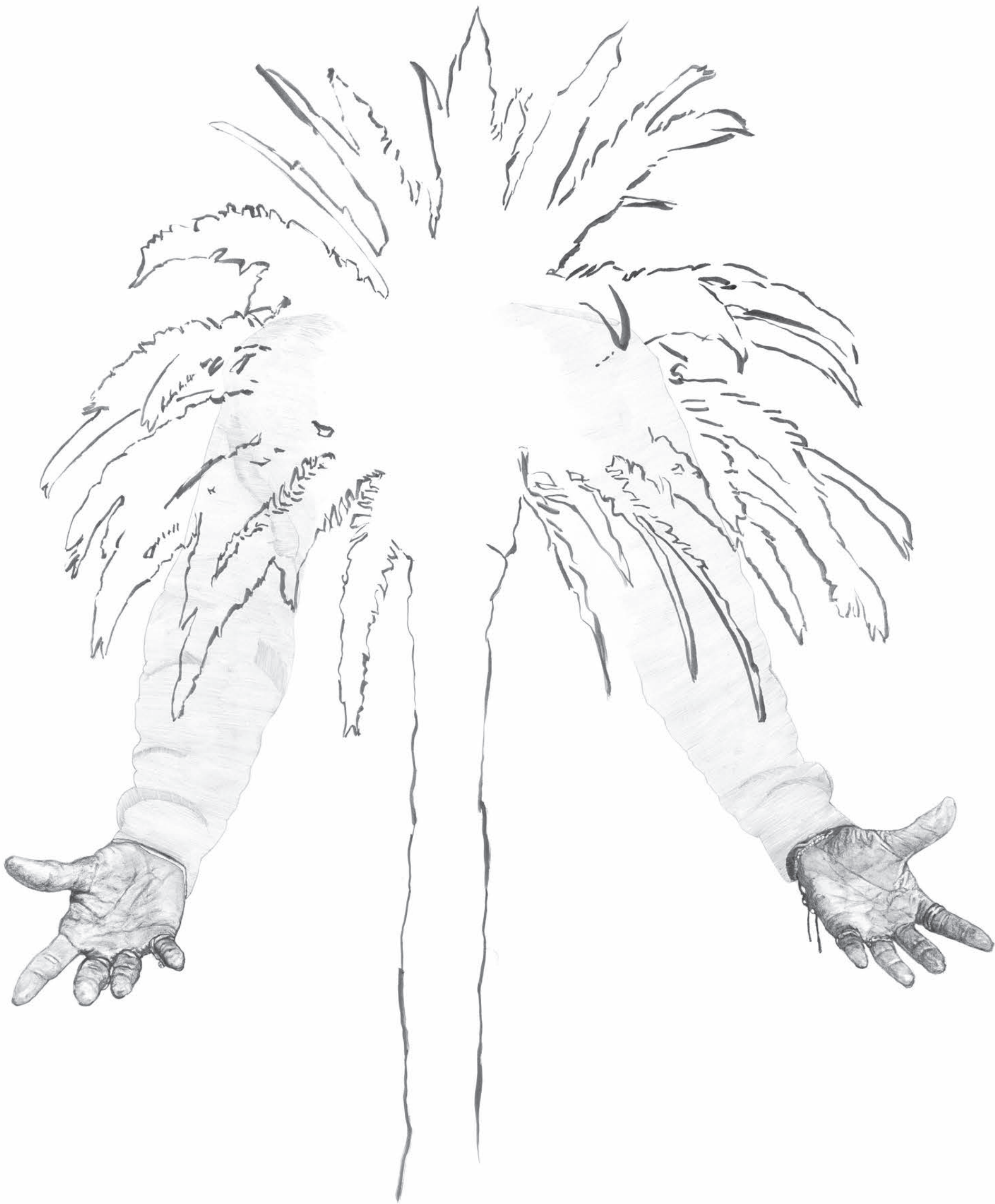
Davon Brown Checks into the Ritz-Carlton, 5/1/2020

Impersonating a pop star with a three-party entourage, Davon Brown was shown to suite 222, on the 22nd floor of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel adjacent to Los Angeles' Staples Center. He had told the hotel's clerks that he wished to first check it out to approve it for a four-night's stay. Once inside Brown reportedly declared, "Actually, I'm not famous. I'm homeless. I live in Echo Park. And I'm not leaving this hotel until Mayor Garcetti commandeers these vacant rooms." Brown's action was intended to provide him with a safe space during the Covid-19 pandemic, and to spotlight Eric Garcetti's failure to provide for the city's vulnerable. Project Roomkey is a state and city sponsored program to move the un-housed into 15,000 city hotel rooms during the health crisis. The program, then shy of a month old, had only provided for 1,508 rooms at the time of Brown's action, and would be poorly implemented during its duration. The city has the power to take the hotel rooms to meet the massive demands of a chunk of homeless Angelenos, but instead opted for a small, slow rolling, voluntary, and selective program.

Reclaiming a Home from the 710 extension

Approximately 163 homes in the El Sereno neighborhood of Los Angeles sat empty at the start of 2020. They had been purchased by Caltrans up to 70 years ago for a planned extension of the 710 freeway, an extension that won't ever happen for various reasons. In mid-March of 2020 two moms, their children, and a 64-year-old man moved into three of the homes in a public action. They had been inspired by a similar reclamation by moms in Oakland months earlier. The Reclaimers (as they came to be known), called out Caltrans, the city, and the state for sitting on these homes: "We the Reclaimers are calling on the city and state to immediately use all vacant properties to house people. We need all levels of government to make a massive investment in public and social housing so that everyone has a home during this housing and public health crisis." In November of 2020 it was announced that the occupiers would be legally permitted to stay in thirteen of the homes they had opened up, and an additional nine homes would be opened up. The homes would be managed as transitional homes for three-years by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles.







Aryeh Cohen

In your book *Justice In the City*, you write the following: “Homelessness strikes at the heart of the community of obligation. Being a part of a community involves being somewhere. Being homeless is literally being nowhere. Having no address, having no home, brings in its wake having no community. If people come to populate cities in order to, in some way, pool resources for added security and shelter, homeless people are not city dwellers. For them, the city is another wilderness—a wilderness which threatens to overtake the rest of the city ethically.” In this paragraph, what do you mean by community of obligation and how do you personally address this wilderness within the city of LA?

Since I wrote this, my understanding of people who are houseless has evolved. It was wrong for me to characterize houseless people as not having communities. They do have community. However, I stand by the fact that they don’t live in a city—in the sense that the city is a place where people come together to afford them protection and houses. People who are without homes are amazingly vulnerable and do not have protection, and in that sense, they are in a wilderness.

So, what I was saying about the community of obligation is that within the rabbinic tradition cities are formed by people who have a certain number of obligations towards their community, including the well being of all of those participating in it. Being a citizen or a resident of the city doesn’t depend on papers. Being a resident of the city means that one takes upon themselves the obligation to make sure that all people in the city have a basic level of needs met.

And what I practice is speaking to houseless people when I encounter them, and giving them money when they ask. But speaking to them is the more important part of it. I recognize that the money might solve something immediately, but it’s not solving anything systematically. It’s symbolic. It is symbolic for myself, more than anything else, to remember that these people are part of my community. These people are my responsibility. And that becomes a motivation, or a driver, for activism on a more systemic level. I ask, “How could it be that in one of the richest metropolitan areas in the world there are people that are living on the street?” This systemic question is addressed on the political level through city budgets, elections, and things like that. I try to work on both levels to address this issue. But unfortunately, we’re not doing it so well.

A city like Los Angeles is a contradictory place. Because it offers anonymity, it’s a place where individuals can find refuge from the world, and as such remake themselves. Simultaneously because of the anonymity the city provides it can be a place also of intense social isolation, disconnection, alienation, and callousness. How do you square these contradictions?

I’m not sure that I see that as a contradiction. Jill Stuafter coined the term “ethical loneliness.” She talks about the difference between loneliness and

ethical loneliness. Loneliness is if I’m in my room, I don’t want to talk to anybody, I’m an introvert, maybe shy, but I have conversations going on in my head all the time. And those conversations have objects, and these conversations have conversation partners. And here is the most important thing, I know that in an emergency somebody will be there that I could reach out to. Now ethical loneliness is when that doesn’t exist. Ethical loneliness is when all the ties, the web of interpersonal relationships that make up community and ultimately a city, no longer exist or are broken. If that happens, that’s the situation you describe.

The second half of the question where people are alienated and don’t have any place to go, I don’t think people want that. I don’t think anybody comes to Los Angeles for that. I’ve met people on the street who came to Los Angeles because they were going to make it big, or they were going to be in Hollywood, or they were going to do whatever it was that they wanted. And they ended up in Skid Row without money for bus fare to get back to wherever they came from. And since they didn’t have any money, they decided to stay.

But nobody comes to Los Angeles to be lonely in the sense of having no connection to anybody. People come to Los Angeles to be part of some mythical community in their head. This is similar to a question that people often ask me when I talk about my book, “Is this just the price we pay for living in a city? It’s a cultural hub, an amazing place to live and people will be lost on the side.”

And the answer to this is no. It’s possible not to do that. It’s possible to put into place policies where all people can be housed. There are a minority of people who don’t want to be in community with other people. And that’s fine. The question is when those people are in their time of need, whether they could reach out? I think that we, as a community, we as a city, are obligated to supply that.

You’ve stated something like, “The city has the responsibility to make sure that no one is alone.” How is this structurally possible in your mind? Can this be legislated, is this social architecture, or something else?

It’s obviously social architecture, and this is connected to the previous question. People should not be alone when they are in need. Personally, I think it’s better to be in community. For me it’s in a religious community. I like people most of the time, except for when I don’t. There should not be a mandate that everybody should be in community. I do think that it is the obligation of the residents of the city, via the government, its budget, etc., that nobody should be alone when they’re having, say, a heart attack. Nobody should be alone when they are being evicted from their house and end up on the street with nobody to look out for them.

I think that there needs to be a web of relationships of interhuman relationships around the city. There needs to be somebody who is going to see that person and respond to them in their time of need. And that somebody is both an individual and individuals, mediated by the city.

In a city of such great economic and social disparities how can we exhibit a kind of compassion that’s not gated by our own economic and social dispositions?

That’s an important question. And that’s a question I answer with the Talmudic notion of “accompaniment,” that our ethical responsibilities go beyond our geographical boundaries. On the human level one needs to make an effort to get outside of one’s geographical boundaries and to remember how many people are dependent on the things we do in the city. So, when I vote against a tax increase, or when I go shopping, I am making choices that don’t only impact me, and my family. They impact lots of people, people whom I won’t even meet. As a city, we should keep in mind the web of consequences of all those decisions.

It’s just immoral that within miles of each other you have houses in the Hollywood Hills where you could put 200 people, yet three people live there. And you have apartments in Koreatown where you have three families in a two-bedroom apartment. These disparities in wealth also cause disparities in the access to basic things of life like education, healthcare, and food. There should be a redistribution of resources.

If you’re not moved by the justice argument that people should not be without, then one should be moved by the fact that without the people who live in Koreatown, the businesses and the lives of the people who live in the Hollywood Hills wouldn’t work. Nobody would be serving customers. Nobody would be fixing the streets. This is what it means to live in a city. There’s mutual responsibility so that we don’t all live in a wasteland.

Matt Harper

Do you think it is difficult to remain human in a city like Los Angeles?

I believe that mainstream U.S. culture, rooted in white supremacy and capitalism and fixated on values like individualism, disposability, and scarcity, aim to make remaining human as much of an impossibility as possible. Profit thrives off disconnection—from our bodies, from our spirits, from our neighbors, from our communities, and from the larger world. I think that major urban centers like Los Angeles, with their priority on investment, consumption, and development, deeply desires people out of touch with their humanity.

In Los Angeles specifically, I’ve grown alarmingly accustomed, and frequently desensitized, to much of the squalor of Skid Row. I watch the unrelenting violence of systems and have to build up walls because I have not learned how to process such a deluge. Feeling the need to be both unbreakable and still gentle has fractured me. Seeing the insatiable need around me, and having mostly superficial solutions, leaves me starving and searching. But at moments, I stumble upon the pulse of this city, I hear the heartbeat calling me back into connection, relationship, and life. Sometimes I trip into my humanity and I am so grateful.

Los Angeles’ Skid Row neighborhood is unique. Internally it maintains dynamic institutions with deep commitments to the values of human dignity and collective care amongst its residents. Conversely, viewed from the outside, Skid Row can be seen as a place where human misery is most on display in our city. As a person committed to compassion, what do you make of this duality?

In a weird way, on the person-to-person level, Skid Row presents both the problems and the solutions to the issues before us. We see what happens when you throw away people who have needs that must be met and expel them from the forced “norms” of our dominant culture. On one level, we see violence, criminalization, disposability, selfishness, and shortsightedness. But on another, we see healing, empowerment, relationship, interdependence, sharing, and resilience. And on the systemic level, I see mostly the first and very little of the second; they have just gotten good at making it look like the shuffling of papers is progress.

Reality is that each of us has this duality constantly in conflict inside of us, and we spend most of our lives suspended somewhere in the middle. Too often, despite our capacity for good, we can prioritize assuaged consciences over effective solutions. We have not learned to sit in discomfort nor seek solutions in the right places. We have been stripped of a connection to our bodies, our ancestors, an accurate history, an understanding of our power, and the assurance of the hope we can have and the wins we are capable of if we just work together. Sometimes, it even feels like the duality is part of what traps us. Everything is bigger than either/or.

Working in the community of Skid Row through the Catholic Worker, it would seem your life is spiritually and structurally aligned with the value of mercy. Do you imagine that this kind of seamlessness of values is attainable by Angelenos whose lives may be more ethically challenged and distant from a community of universal care?

I know it is challenging to integrate humanizing values with the complicated lives so many people are forced into, and struggle to escape. These systems have structured every dimension of our lives such that they’ve cut off almost every alternative life-giving option. We have been cut off from our communities so we face the world nearly alone. We’ve been cut off from collective aid and care. So many feel compelled to work jobs that neither fulfill nor treat people, or the earth, with reverence and care. We’ve been cut off from ourselves.

I don’t believe this is because people do not want to live integrously and fully. We’ve just been subject to so much fear-based learning, simplified understandings, incorrect histories and false cure-alls, that we don’t always know which way is up and how to get there. That said everyday people perform small and large acts of defiance saying they will simply not be quiet in this mistreatment and they will not give up so easily. I have never seen a community of universal care like I have seen on Skid Row. On the best days, they model the future I wish we would buy into and build.

It’s also worth noting that there is a lot of deserved and righteous indignation from those who bear the burden of the unrelenting violence from the people, culture, economy, and state. I don’t blame folks who have no interest in pursuing the path towards “seamlessness of values” when they live in a world that has proven time and time again that it is only looking to hurt them. “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me.”

Pastor Cue

How is it that we can move the heart of the city?

In order to find out how to move the heart of the city we’ve got to find out what city officials treasure most. Then use that to move them to action.

Why can’t we move the heart of the city?

I believe the heart of the city is already moving in a particular direction. The city seems to value capitalism above all else.

Can we move the heart of the city?

We can move the heart of the city by organizing to build enough power to be able to affect whether officials can be removed and or remain in power. Officials have power and Frederick Douglass said it best, “Power concedes nothing without a demand.” We cannot sit around and wait for the heart of elected leaders to change.

Argyeh Cohen is a Los Angeles based activist, rabbi, and scholar. He’s involved with the American Jewish University, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action SoCal, and Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). He is the author of *Justice in the City* (Academic Studies Press, 2013). The book is an attempt to frame the obligations for a just and equitable city within the rabbinic textual traditions of the Talmud.

Matt Harper is part of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community, which spends its time comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. There, he helps run their Skid Row soup kitchen, serves as one of the editors of their newspaper (the Catholic Agitator), supports their resistance efforts, and engages in the varied works that inevitably arise in the course of their efforts. Matt is also an organizer with White People 4 Black Lives, and the Showing Up for Racial Justice affiliate in Los Angeles.

Pastor Stephe “Cue” Jn-Marie is the founder of Skid Row’s Church Without Walls, which gathers each Friday night outdoors on the corner of Wall and Winston Streets. He is also an organizer with CLUE, Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice.

Compassion & Self Deception: A Guide to Los Angeles' Moral Crisis is the seventh guide by the Llano Del Rio Collective. Not strictly a collective, the Llano Del Rio Collective negotiates its ideals through an advisory group of vanguard oriented Angelenos. This project was created by Robby Herbst with the additional labor of Neha Choksi, Ian Byers-Gamber, Terra Graziani, Marc Herbst, Tony Manzella, Elizabeth Opholt, Kimberly Varella, and Sam Wagner.

This publication, created by the visual artist Robby Herbst, is an element of "Compassion & Self-Deception," a multidisciplinary art project of the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), that includes this publication, their performance "The New Compassionate Downtown", and a series of public conversations. The publication and the performance were generated through parallel research processes and ongoing dialogue between Herbst and LAPD performance directors Henriette Brouwers and John Malpede. The publication is funded by the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts

Los Angeles Poverty Department is an arts organization. We make performances, curate exhibitions, show films, and host community events at our Skid Row History Museum & Archive. Our activities affirm the vitality of the Skid Row community and all the people living in our Skid Row neighborhood, both housed and unhoused. Our projects connect the experience of people living in poverty to the social forces that shape their lives and communities. Our workshops are open to everyone in Skid Row.

SKID ROW HISTORY
MUSEUM & ARCHIVE

Los Angeles Poverty Department

