

DIRECTED BY
LAURA WATERS HINSON

STREET REPORTER

SCREENING DISCUSSION GUIDE



THE STORY OF A CITY IS WRITTEN ON ITS STREETS.

IMAGE BEARER PICTURES PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH RENGA MEDIA AND STREET SENSE MEDIA A LAURA WATERS HINSON FILM "STREET REPORTER" FEATURING REGINALD BLACK, SHEILA WHITE AND MICHAEL HARRIS
PRODUCED BY BRYAN BELLO ORIGINAL CHANDA DANCY EDITED BY DAN SADOWSKY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY KASEY KIRBY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HILLA MEDALIA, NANCY SCHAFER, JOHN AND ED PRIDDY CO-PRODUCED BY KASEY KIRBY COORDINATING PRODUCER AMELIA TYSON
WRITTEN BY DAN SADOWSKY AND LAURA WATERS HINSON IMPERCE REGINALD BLACK, SHEILA WHITE AND ROBERT WARREN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY'S COMMUNITY VOICE LAB AND HUMANITIES DC
WWW.STREETREPORTERFILM.COM

ABOUT THE FILM

Sheila and Reggie are budding journalists covering the story of DC's "Tent City" for a local street paper while striving to overcome their own experience of homelessness. During their reporting, they meet Mike, a charismatic tent resident who yearns for life outside the underpass. As the city threatens to shut down the encampments, our subjects' journeys are interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with unexpected results. Over the course of the film, Sheila and Reggie evolve into powerful public advocates for the need for housing solutions in America's most rapidly gentrifying city. Street Reporter is a tale of three individuals whose lives intersect on the front lines of the housing crisis in the nation's capital, providing a vision of the re-humanizing effects of one of life's most basic needs: a place to call home.

FEATURING



REGINALD BLACK

Reginald Black is a journalist, filmmaker, activist and life-long Washingtonian. His craft is informed by his decade long experience with homelessness which ended in fall 2019. Black has written for Law at The Margins, Street Sense Media and the International Network of Street Papers. He is a founding member of the nation's first Homeless Filmmaker's Cooperative. His directorial contribution, "Fairness Rising," has screened at the Department of Justice, D.C.'s Landmark Theater and community venues across the country. His cinematography for the film, "Who Should I Be Grateful To?" was featured in special programming by the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. Black is an impact director with the homeless advocacy organization, People for Fairness Coalition and serves as a consumer representative appointed to the D.C. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Reginald also serves as an Impact Producer for this documentary.



SHEILA WHITE

Sheila White is a rising documentary creative, activist and photo-journalism student at the University of the District of Columbia. Her eight-year experience with homelessness ended in May 2020. A life-long D.C. resident and member of the Homeless Filmmakers Cooperative, White's work has been published by Street Sense Media, the International Network of Street Papers, Law at the Margins and DCTV where she has worked as a certified producer. White is also an active member of People for Fairness Coalition, D.C.'s top homeless-run advocacy group. Sheila also serves as an Impact Producer for this documentary.

HOMELESSNESS AT A GLANCE

THE UNITED STATES

On any given night in the U.S, more than half a million people experience homelessness. Some of the country's most at risk populations for homelessness include Pacific Islanders and Native Americans, while "Black Americans, multiracial Americans, and Hispanics/Latinxs...are far more likely to be homeless than the national average and white Americans." Meanwhile many homeless individuals live in areas with large general populations—45% live in areas with a high rate of homelessness. High rates of homelessness are often associated with "notable housing issues" like high housing costs and rent burdens[2]. This is especially the case in Washington, DC.

"THE DISTRICT'S HIGH COST OF LIVING HAS CONTRIBUTED TO AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS."

HOMELESSNESS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

Washington, DC has the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the United States, where there are an estimated 94 homeless individuals per 10,000 in the city[6]. This rate is higher than any other state's[9], and more than double the national rate of homelessness[10].

The District's high cost of living has contributed to an affordable housing crisis. The city also has the highest rate of gentrification of any in the country[3]: from 2000-2012 the number of low-cost rentals fell by half and the number of lower-value homes fell by about three quarters. Most financial guidelines recommend that a household should spend no more than 30% of income on housing expenses[4]. In DC, this would require a household to earn at least \$132,000. The median family income in DC for 2019 was \$121,300[5]. A lack of affordable housing is a significant contributing factor in a family or individual becoming homeless.

Washington, DC provides a unique case study of homelessness—where the government, policy, culture, health, and economics overlap. Known as "Chocolate City," DC has always historically had a large or majority Black population. In the District, African-American individuals make up almost half of the population, 46.6%, but the overwhelming majority of the homeless population at 86.4%[12]. African-American residents are disproportionately affected by the drivers of homelessness—systemic racism.

THE INTERSECTION OF COVID, RACE, AND HOMELESSNESS

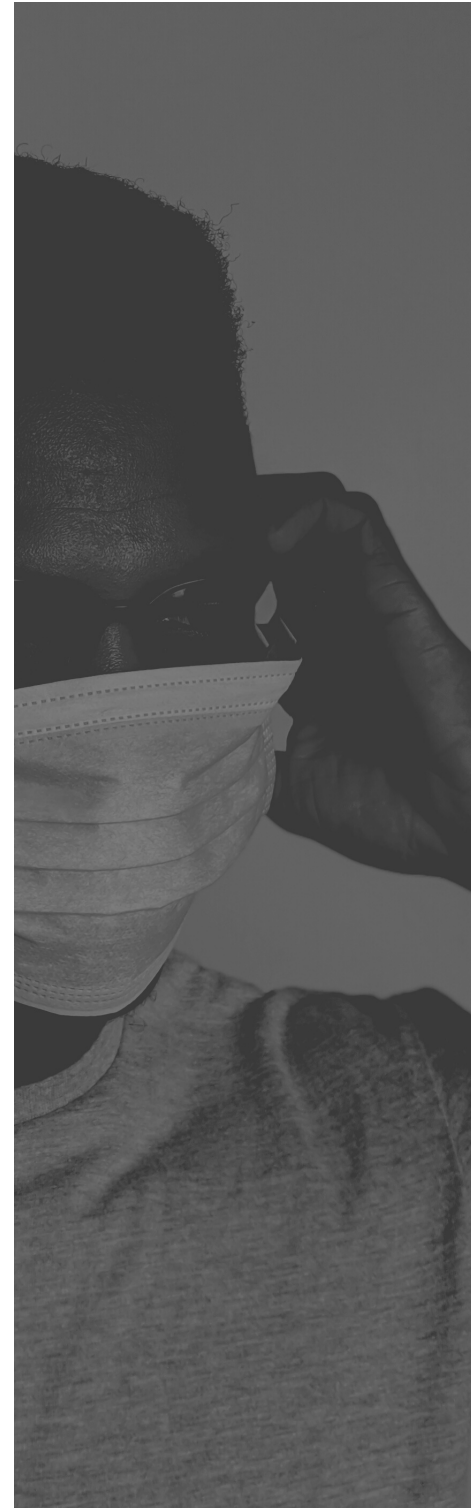
COVID + HOMELESSNESS

While the national-level of homelessness has decreased over the last three years, the effects of COVID-19 threaten to affect these rates nationwide. [1]

Homeless individuals often experience common health conditions and experiences like substance abuse, mental health issues, chronic health issues, domestic violence, were formerly in foster care, or are veterans[13]. In 2020, the advent of COVID-19 pandemic brought a new set of complicating challenges to the scene—creating an overlapping trifecta of public health and societal concerns.

COVID has exacerbated the disproportionate effects of homelessness on the Black community in Washington, DC.

Homeless individuals are not just at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19, but also have pre-existing health conditions that might increase this risk.[16] Additionally, it is difficult for those without shelter or those in group shelter environments to follow CDC and health guidelines that recommend social distancing and self-quarantining to prevent the spread of the virus. When homeless individuals contract COVID-19, it adds an additional layer of difficulty in providing those homeless services. The pandemic has further limited the community's access to “help from agencies, neighbors, and local governments,” in addition to their lack of access to primary care physicians.



THE PROMISE OF STREET PAPERS

As the internet becomes more popular, and news is increasingly covered online, many regional newspapers are shrinking, reducing local coverage, or closing altogether. Small local papers are most at risk due to these changes.

Local journalism is an important part of any close-knit community. It binds together the community's concerns and interests—presenting them with an ease and familiarity not present in national media. In an area where people share knowledge, food, language, or other cultural norms and ideas, community journalism can help spread information in an intimate and recognizable way.

This is especially true when considering the phenomena of street papers. Communities within communities, like homeless populations, often have specific interests and concerns.

Street papers are a place to express happiness, highlight individuals' success, air their grievances, and distribute resources. Most specifically, they can be a means of income.

The phrase “street papers” refers to papers sold by those experiencing poverty in a specific region or locale, to help them earn an income, spread information, and distribute independent media. These papers exist globally, and in 1994 the International Network of Street Papers (INSP) launched with the goal of helping papers start up, supporting them, creating jobs, training, and skill development opportunities. As levels of homelessness across the planet increase, refugee crises become more dire, and housing prices increase, these street papers continue to be a source for independent community journalism and media.

CHECK OUT THE GREAT WORK OF THESE STREET PAPERS

Community Connection, Los Angeles, CA

Homeward Street Journal, Sacramento, CA

StreetWise, Chicago, IL

The Heartland News, Omaha, NE

Toledo Streets, Toledo, OH

One Step Away, Philadelphia, PA


The Contributor, Nashville, TN

The Challenger, Austin, TX

Street Sense, Washington, DC

You can read more about the phenomena of street papers from the [International Network of Street Papers](#).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



Street Reporter is intended to spark discussions. While the film doesn't cover all of the causes, nuances, or experiences of homelessness, it points to numerous broader issues impacting all communities: affordable housing, housing insecurity, racial inequity, and COVID-19, among other issues. Here are a few questions to inspire conversation.

DISUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the film, Sheila and Mike describe some of the difficulties of living in a shelter. How might these factors contribute to people choosing to live on the streets instead? Are there better ways to provide housing for individuals and families rather than shelters? What are the alternatives?
2. Residents of "tent cities" explain that encampments can provide a sense of emotional and physical community. What other benefits do encampments provide for their residents? Street Reporter briefly touches on the tension between encampments and the neighborhoods they exist within. How might communities with tent residents work together to solve these tensions?
3. Washington, DC has the highest per capita rate of homelessness in the United States. What factors exacerbate homelessness in DC? What is the per capita rate of homelessness in your state? What risk factors or circumstances contribute to homelessness?
4. Washington, DC is a rapidly gentrifying city—leading to the displacement of longtime residents, and shifting the economic, racial, and other demographics in the city. What effect does gentrification have on social issues, specifically homelessness? What solutions are possible to address the negative side effects of gentrification?
5. Why do you think it's important for people like Reggie and Sheila to document stories within the homelessness community for the public? What are the benefits of community journalism? How might we better empower people from marginalized communities to report on their own issues and solutions for the problems they face?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

6. One of the longest running, best-known street newspapers, The Street Sheet, was founded in San Francisco, CA. Studies cite street newspapers as an important means of providing homeless individuals with independence, self-respect, and offer a “voice with which to speak out against social injustices,” through their own words. As local journalism gives way to click bait journalism, what benefits does a street newspaper provide its community? Is there a street paper in your city? What do they do?

7. What types of opportunities are there for employment within the homeless community in your area, especially those driven by the community itself? What benefits can empowering or dignity-based employment have?

8. Sheila’s story highlights the circumstances that homeless individuals face when applying for vouchers or other forms of subsidized housing assistance. What logistical issues, e.g. not having a physical mailing address, lacking identification or birth certificates, etc. pose as a barrier to receiving assistance?

9. Housing first policies champion solving an individuals’ foremost need first—a safe place to call home. After which, additional needs like healthcare, education, and employment can be met. What are the benefits of housing first policies? Do you think they are effective? Why or why not?

10. African-Americans are disproportionately affected by the drivers of homelessness. Combined with the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on the same community, how might the two compound each other? How did the pandemic exacerbate existing inequalities related to the intersections of race, homelessness, and gender?

11. What other larger concepts has Street Reporter encouraged you to discuss? What issues does the film allude to but not cover directly?

Street Reporter is a collaboration between American University’s Community Voice Lab and Street Sense Media. It was made possible by grants from HumanitiesDC and American University.

For more resources, visit:
www.StreetReporterFilm.com