

by

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lionaires. You know what's funny, half this city is rich and the other half is poor! You live in this place where there's billionaires right down the street from you, and yet you're struggling just to get insurance, and struggling to pay this [and that], and there's a billionaire right down the street! It's so funny, but it's true. And everybody's like 'the city of Angels, oh I can't wait to go to Los Angeles.' If they could see that there is a whole other side that is so poor – in poverty! really bad! - like little hut houses! I don't know why that is, but I've seen it. And then you go to this beautiful side of Hollywood and it's gorgeous, makes you want to cry - their bathroom is bigger than my house! And it's like holy crap, how do you get there?

I live in Los Angeles. And this city is filled with mil-

I'm going to put it to you like this: I was born in chains because of my social institutions. My mother and father they was on drugs. They sold drugs. So this is the type of environment that I grew up in, and I seen this all my life, so I thought it was normal growing up. And as I grew older, I became a product of my environment and started getting involved in the streets myself. [...]

Long Story Short is a composite group interview that takes form variously as a film, an installation, and an online interactive web documentary drawn from and linked to an archive of video diaries made by 75 interviewees who reflect on poverty in America – causes, challenges, misperceptions, and solutions. Multiple frames of videos sit side by side – creating a new form of social cinema. Voices are woven together to align and intersect, suggesting that for every speaker there could be numerous others, and that many of poverty's narratives are fundamentally shared, as are the psychological states it can produce.

Video diaries were made using webcams and laptops – the tools of amateur online video and some of the same technologies – high tech and digital – that ushered in hardships for low-skilled workers and their families in the first place, leading to a shrinking demand and lower wages for unskilled labor. The video diaries - inserted within the vernacular of social media – bare the markings of that genre: its direct address, intimacy, informality, and faces illuminated by the screen. The potential to travel across digital networks and platforms is written on their surface. While one of the potentially productive effects of networked culture has been a shift away from a focus on one voice to many, it has also produced a class of overvisible and a class of unseen – those whose data is not worth much. Long Story Short creates a missing archive, jarring expectations and making visible the limits of who we typically find speaking to us on our screens. It responds to our current moment of increasing and dramatic economic inequality, and explores how depictions of poverty might benefit from, as well as reflect on, current modes of digital and image mobility, dissemination, and display. It explores lives mostly not seen, and not often represented in public, especially not in digital form, and not on our screens. It proposes a more social media.



Figure 2. Joshua L. Morris III. Screenshot from *Long Story Short*. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

I call the American ghetto a prison and I even call it baby Iraq, because in our communities we got little kids running around with AK-47s — they are fifteen — killing each other. But you know I really believe that them are tears that's coming out of them barrels. Them are tears of neglection.



Figure 3. Michael Carter. Screenshot from *Long Story Short*. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

You know things are not okay. Children are running around crazy because they don't have an outlet, they're not given an outlet; people refuse to give them an outlet. Certain things the media needs to say they're not saying. There's people out here struggling and they're doing the right thing. There's people out here that are homeless and their father's on drugs and they're trying to go to school but they can't and it needs to be known. I believe the young adults who are trapped in these low-income communities – they're in hell and they don't have a way out.



Figure 4. Suzette Shaw. Screenshot from Long Story Short.
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I agreed to do this video because it was very important to me to bring awareness to the new face of homelessness. Ladies like myself, people like myself living in wayward standards, it's not necessarily safe out here for us. There is very little housing. I wanted to bring awareness to the fact that there's a crisis here on our frontier, here in our country, that we need to be addressing with and dealing with — right here in our home front. There's a new face of homelessness that is going unseen, that is not being presented. What happened to equality? Where is all of that? I don't see it. What happened to the American dream?



Figure 5. Tito McMillian. Screenshot from Long Story Short. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

To be here and in this country and be of color, it's still difficult. You got to remember we wasn't brought here to be free, we wasn't brought here to be able to sit in front of this camera and interview like this. Put that on top of everything else – being a black man – some days it feels good just to be able to walk in the house and not be shot and not be harassed by the police.

to us. How's somebody gonna to know how to do something or be something if it hasn't been taught to him? How a rich man gonna be rich unless he learned how to be rich? But if a poor man all he know how to do is be poor than he's gonna be poor. If all he know how to do is struggle, than he's gonna struggle. It's like if all I know how to do is be a laborer, than I'm gonna do what I know how to do and that's be a laborer Ain't gonna sit here and try to better myself to be a boss, cause I only know how to work paycheck to paycheck.

stand how to even write a grant - ain't been taught



Figure 6. Leslie Williams. Screenshot from Long Story Short. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

We trying to hustle as hard as the person that got twenty thousand, twenty million dollars. It's just that we don't have all the opportunities, the education. A lot of stuff we don't know until somebody tell us, and then it's like, oh, we didn't even know it was that simple. A lot of government programs that a lot of the upper class communities or even middle class communities are taking advantage of we don't even know about until somebody tell us about it, and then it's a hassle just to even get a grant cause we don't under-



Figure 7. Lolita Brinston. Screenshot from Long Story Short. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013, Used with permission.

Every story has a different side. So if you're outside of this box of smoke, you can't say, "Oh, we'll turn the fan on from the north and it'll blow it all out." You actually got to get in there with the smoke and see what's causing the smoke. [...] A lot of the people who know the neighborhoods, and do know how to fix what's going on in the neighborhoods, their voices do not get heard. [...] Like my mom, when she had her house, she would just sit out on the porch all day after she retired her daycare, and she knew all the people walking by. She had a garden in her backyard, so she would pass out fruits and vegetables to the women at the bus stop with the kids that were coming out of the elementary school right across the street. She would speak to every wino that walked by, every drug dealer, every prostitute, every person from every walk of life that's in that neighborhood she knew on a name-toname basis. So it's those type of people that you need to talk to that can offer you an opinion about what's going on in the neighborhood and how to fix it.



Figure 8. Michael Leninger. Screenshot from Long Story Short. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

I would love for someone in political power who's watching this to imagine being in this chair where I'm sitting right now. Imagine you have been let go from your job. You have lost your car, your family, and your house, and you're living under the roof of a non-profit who depends on federal funding and depends on private funding. Just put yourself, like I said before, in someone else's shoes. Put yourself in this chair where I'm sitting, and imagine how you would exist and would you survive. And without the government, without private funding, the answer for me is no.

When Occupy came to Oakland, I went downtown Broadway, and - I'm not bragging but I'm telling you - I went down there and I said "Occupy, before



Figure 9. Lorine (Angel) Johnson. Screenshot from Long Story Short. © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

you came these young black people were hanging out downtown looking for a safe place to be without being harassed by the police. They were here!" I asked Occupy to go to East Oakland and show some interest in these neighborhoods. "Don't just go making a nice environment for you", [I] explained to the people. "This is our neighborhood. Don't go gentrifying. This is our neighborhood. We're a part of this. Lets make this beautiful together!" ■

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Doray Atkins is from San Francisco, and was raised by her aunt and her grandmother. She was born with cerebral palsy. She is currently raising her daughter and living in transitional housing in Pasadena, trying to save money. She hopes to find an affordable place to live in a safe neighborhood with decent schools, and to go back to school.

Lolita Charee Brinston is from Oakland California. She received her high school diploma in 2004 and worked as a mail handler at the Richmond, CA post office. She left the job after a very close friend and co-worker and shortly thereafter, her boyfriend, were murdered. She recently completed an internship at The Bread Project, an organization that trains and assists low income individuals for careers in the food industry.

Michael Carter, from Louisiana, moved to Northern California at a young age, where he was abandoned by his parents. He grew up homeless on the streets of Oakland. He is currently an intern a technology company in San Francisco. He is also a member of turfing 24/7, a dance group that makes music and dance videos in areas of Oakland where friends and colleagues have been murdered. Their videos are available on YouTube.

Michael Leninger, from Long Beach, lived in Silver Lake, Los Angeles until he lost his apartment. He had been working as a facilities manager at the Pasadena Play House, but because of bad health – he is HIV positive – he began missing work and was eventually laid off. His disability payments weren't enough to cover his rent, and now, after nearly a year of being homeless, he's qualified for Section 8 housing, and is moving into his own apartment.

Tito McMillian is from Oakland California. He drove a tow truck for AAA for fourteen years, but work was inconsistent, so he briefly moved to Texas for a refinery job that never panned out. He's been mostly unemployed ever since. His dream job would be to council young men in similar situations. He recently received his GED and is looking for work.

Joshua L. Morris III is from Oakland California. He's been in and out of prison most of his life. He is a deacon-in-training at his church, and is studying to get his GED at the mentoring program at Next Step Learning Center in Oakland.

Lorine (Angel) Johnson is from Trenton New Jersey and lives in Oakland. She has six grown children, is a grandmother, and finally has some time for herself. She loves learning, and is back in school.

Suzette Shaw is from Yuma Arizona, a small town on the Mexican border. She worked as a human resources manager for a business processing plant, and was laid off three years ago when the company downsized. Subsequently, she lost her home and moved to Los Angeles in search for find better opportunities. She currently resides at the Downtown Women's Center in Los Angeles.

Leslie Williams is 31 years old and a former gang member from Inglewood Los Angeles. He moved to Pasadena to get away from his previous life and turn over a new leaf. However, since leaving his lucrative lifestyle, he has become homeless. He is taking workshops and receiving some support from the Union Station Homeless Services in Pasadena

Natalie Bookchin is from New York, and lives in Los Angeles. She is at work on Long Story Short, an experimental documentary and online archive made up of hundreds of video diaries about the experience of poverty in America, narrated, defined, and analyzed from within.

http://longstory.us



Figure 10. Screenshot from Long Story Short (in-progress). © Natalie Bookchin, 2013. Used with permission.

