

by Becky Johnson and Robert Norse

**T**he arrest and extradition of a homeless, African-American tarot card reader raises serious issues of racial, social, and economic cleansing in Santa Cruz and the misuse of drug-war tactics. In an unsettling twist, the legal assault on Jason Paschal happened in a city that is known as sympathetic to medical marijuana users.

Santa Cruz police and *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reporters tried to spin the arrest of Jason Paschal (a.k.a. Ishmael, a.k.a. The Reverend Doctor Electronic Galaxy Jay) as a "mental health problem." Paschal is, in fact, an extremely extraverted, black, homeless, tarot card reader who is quite knowledgeable in his craft.

Recently, Paschal was ticketed twice for "giving a tarot card reading without a license"—an archaic statute used against street hawkers "reading for donation." Officer Willie Brandt issued the \$162 citation without any public complaint. Paschal was not cited for giving a tarot card reading, but for accepting a dollar donation afterwards.

*Santa Cruz Sentinel* reporter Cathy Redfern wrote a lengthy article in which she dismissed Paschal (albeit sympathetically) as a mental case. While Jason Paschal does suffer from a bi-polar condition, his mental state had nothing to do with his jailing. Nor has he ever been taken off the streets and confined for observation on an involuntary "5150" hold during his eight months in Santa Cruz.

The spinmeisters are putting out a liberal snow-job to whitewash police misconduct and write off the persistent SCPD harassment and mistreatment of a homeless, black man on Pacific Avenue as "a mental health issue." The real issue is the SCPD's

attempt, at the behest of merchants, to cleanse the area of "undesirables."

In July 2002 and January 2003, Mayor Emily Reilly's City Council passed anti-homeless laws that essentially gave a blank check to police to go after whomever they felt was a "problem." The Reilly Council buried resurgent criticism of SCPD "selective enforcement," hastily dismantled the Citizens Police Review Board, and gave the police the green light to target musicians, panhandlers, performers, or political activists.

Those in power do not consider Paschal to be part of the colorful scene of our community, with his streetside rap and sidewalk tarot analysis, but some sort of human blight which needs to be cleaned up. In mid-March, Sgt. Loran "Butchie" Baker forbade the Reverend from using the top of a concrete water box for his tarot card readings — which he had been doing for six months daily. The surface was already spiked off, lest some weary soul be tempted to sit on it.

Rather than appreciating Paschal's rather inventive and completely harmless use of the surface, Baker forced him to set up his own "display device." This Paschal did, using two milk crates covered with a blanket. Laying in wait, Baker then arrested and jailed Paschal for "criminal possession of a milk crate." Due to a special relationship the dairy corporations have with California legislators, having a milk crate is technically a misdemeanor — though never before prosecuted as such in Santa Cruz.

Released from jail five hours later, Paschal trudged back to the same spot (most places on the sidewalk are "forbidden" for display devices under the anti-homeless laws). Two days later, Baker returned to arrest him again.

This time, Baker slapped down the same warrant that he had unsuccessfully tried to get the State of New Hampshire to serve seven months before. On that earlier



Jason Paschal at his small table set up for tarot card readings in Santa Cruz.

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