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## **Pork and Beans**

*by Stephon Senegal*

When I walked into the neighborhood, the sound and smell was familiar. This was Liberty City. Though the heyday of violence that once wrecked this neighborhood had waned some, its notoriety had not. Warmly known as Pork and Beans, the *dope game* has not yet released its hold. I recognized the stares from the young boys on the streets and the subsequent apathy from their customers. It was the early part of the day. I had already driven the streets the previous night and spoke with some of my hardhead brethren about the when and how of my arrival the next day. They assured me that they would not be a problem, and neither would the youngsters in the hood, but I should be wary of the police. Simply, their interactions with the police are predictable, the why and how following a particular script, but a strange face, doing strange shit, a little less predictable. Nonetheless, I arrived early.

The hood was quiet, just like I remember from walking the streets with my cousins. Early mornings are typically the end of a shift, that goes for both the protagonist and antagonist, the police. I parked and laid out my gear in the car for the install. This art installation was mostly paint, so I made sure to put some plastic down in the rental. The car was my mobile workstation today. Making a quick exit is typically an important component of my installs, so nearly everything stays in the car. I had no intention to run if the cops came. Though conversations with them can get rough, running is not recommended. If, however something popped off with one of the residents, in spite of assurances the previous night, it would be important to exit expeditiously (shoutout to Clifford Harris Jr.). Either way, I was prepped. I started to create. As work began, some of those coming from their night shifts stopped by. Some only to observe, others to have a quick chat. Thankful for their engagement and their temperament, I continued. Two hours had passed, dawn had arrived. Nothing extreme to report and grateful. As the artwork neared completion, I spotted what appeared to be police in the distance. I kept going. They began to come closer. They were Black, now that could be a plus, but as we all know, there are different types of Negro. At this point, the install was nearly done, so whatever happens, I was cool. As a precaution, I snapped a couple photos and waited for their arrival. Hand on gun they tentatively walked up, I stood up. I greeted them. They returned the favor with some questions. As I began to answer their trepidation subsided, the questions continued but not as a way to unravel what had been done, but a way to understand it. In the midst of the unscheduled conversation, others came closer to listen. As I spoke, I thought, this is why....this is why I do this. The opportunity to change a life, the willingness to change my community. There is no price.