

# “NO HUMAN INVOLVED” (“NHI”) Reference Guide

*The following references and explanations of the term and title “No Human Involved” (“NHI”) have been gathered by STROLL PDX to help audiences better understand the origins of the term and the lineage of its use across activism, academia, and art. We would like to acknowledge filmmaker, artist, and SW activist [PJ Starr](#) for in-depth conversation on the title of this exhibition, and for providing further resources and references in connection to it.*

“No Human(s) Involved” is a slang term used by police to refer to crimes, usually involving a death, but sometimes injury or theft, which are considered low priority. Its specific origins are unclear, arising from the fog of imperfectly documented, pre-Rodney King, pre-internet times. Oxford English Dictionary dates it to 1973, but one wouldn’t expect the OED to be fully up to speed on US cop slang, so usage is likely to be at least as old as the mid-’60s. Filmmaker PJ Starr briefly discusses the origins of the term and decision to use it as the title of her 2016 documentary about Marcia Powell [here](#).

From then on, the label ‘NHI’ was given to many cases in LA throughout the 1980s, and its usage was quickly picked up on by the very groups it deemed less than human.

It is important to note that NHI refers to “undesirable” social elements generally, in addition to sex workers: gang members, transient folks, houseless people, people who use drugs, immigrants, and those at the nexus of these identities—unsurprisingly, primarily people of color.

Since being picked up and—if not reclaimed, then made bitter use of by those it labels—NHI has become a sub-cultural catchphrase that immediately evokes the callous brutality of police and policing under capitalist white supremacy:

## 1992

- “[NHI](#)” opens, a four-part art event that looks into the rapes and murders of 45 local women, (all either prostitutes, transients, and/or drug addicts) by San Diego

artists Deborah Small, Elizabeth Sisco, Carla Kirkwood, Scott Kessler, and Louis Hock. They published an accompanying book, also out that year, which explored media and police response (or lack of) to the presence of a serial killer in the community, and relationships between some police officers and some of the victims.

- Wynter, S. (1992). “[No humans involved](#)”: An open letter to my colleagues. *Voices of the African Diaspora*, 8, 1–17. A 1994 open letter by Sylvia Wynter, part of the [NHI forum](#) entitled “Knowledge on Trial” which dealt with police brutality and Rodney King

## 1993

Documentary by Simeon Williams about a serial killer targeting prostitutes in San Diego and police not caring because they were escorts

## 2003

- “No Human Involved”, a murder mystery by Barbara Seranella

- “No Human Involved”, title of an episode of “CSI” (S5E10)

## 2015

- “Human Involved”, a piece by Australian artist Mikki Mischief

## 2016

- [No Human Involved](#), a highly regarded 2016 documentary film by [PJ Starr](#) about sex worker Marcia Powell, who died of heat exposure in Joe Arpaio’s prison camps.



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