

Homelessness Old and New: The Matter of Definition*

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Abstract

The contemporary emphasis on the pathologies of shelter denizens and street-dwellers tends to conceal the great variety of makeshift ways of life that have characterized “homelessness” over the centuries. Diversity notwithstanding, those considered “vagrants” were historically marked as suspect members of a poor apart, even when their numbers increased sharply. Because kin ties have consistently proven to be the first line of defense against “literal homelessness,” skid row researchers thought their absence (along with the lack of associated ties to work and community) to be diagnostic of the condition. Indeed, earlier research tended to see as “homeless” any “disaffiliated” persons, housed or not, who lived alone in unconventional dwellings. Not only have the new homeless poor, by contrast, proven to be more diverse—their geographic locus, age, gender, ethnicity, and signal disabilities having all changed—but their common element is less often ascribed to faulty social connectedness than to sheer absence of shelter. This paper discusses such changes and reviews definitions of homelessness and several approaches to its social construction. The paper argues that, although definitions owe as much to political as to logical considerations, it makes both practical and historical sense to view the streets and shelters as but one variant of a class of informal or makeshift residential settings that increasingly characterizes the marginally situated.

Introduction

[A] distinction is drawn by arranging a boundary with separate sides so that a point on one side cannot reach the other side without crossing the boundary.

(G. Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form*, 1972, 1)

Credible testimony has shown that the “homeless” bear certain common characteristics or “badges” which identify them. Examples [are] their clothing and use of shopping carts.... [They] also display certain common living habits such as returning to their living area at the end of the day, sleeping under bushes and in doorways, and carrying bags containing their worldly possessions.

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(Judge B. Tam Nomoto, Opinion in *People v. Bell et al.*, February 1991)

Medieval maps used to carry the warning “Here Be Dragons” to mark the boundaries of the known world. It is a practice mimicked, if only inadvertently, in some recent commentaries on homelessness.

In 1981, the *New York Times* commissioned novelist and travel writer Paul Theroux to do a story on a group of people who, for all intents and purposes, lived underground in the vast reticulate subterranean spaces of the city’s subway system. Theroux delivered. His account of what he called subway “skells”¹ is riveting, an eerie evocation of a strange and unseen world.² It wasn’t the first such account; nor would it be the last.³ But Theroux sounded a theme that has menaced public perceptions and discussion of homelessness in this country for a century now: that such people constitute a distinct, even foreign species.⁴ As if to drive home the message, four years later in a futuristic novel (*O-Zone*), Theroux reinvented the same term (*skell*) as the slang epithet for an outcast group of misshapen, half-savage survivors living in the ruined, contaminated remains of what used to be Missouri in the days before a massive nuclear accident occurred.⁵

In the contemporary Western press,⁶ the theme of estrangement is sounded regularly in the evocation of Calcutta to describe what otherwise might be mistaken for an American commonplace: the street-dwelling poor. But if the fact of their estrangement does not distinguish the contemporary homeless from those in years past, other things do. In their sheer visibility, their manifest diversity, the prevalence of evident (especially psychiatric) disabilities, the forces contending on their behalf (home-grown champions and advocates from without) and the places in which that struggle is staged (the streets, the press, and the courts), and the terms of both popular and scholarly debate on the problem and proposed solutions—in all these varied respects, today’s homeless poor are set apart from their forebears.

This paper proceeds in two stages. It puts off dealing with a number of conceptual issues that are raised if one treats both homelessness and its social import as problematic, although that treatment should logically come first. Instead, the paper first limns the historical range of phenomena to which the label has been applied, takes note of anomalies in this mixed bag of groups and practices, and then applies a finer lens to the American scene of the past 50 years or so. The discussion touches on a theme that is often ignored in today’s analyses: the varieties of

unobtrusive aid, everyday practices of sharing and support, to which poor households have long resorted as a matter of course to avoid the indignities of public shelter. It is this theme that provides the skeletal frame for a larger, more ambitious argument that can only be sketched here. The argument that develops implicitly in the course of explicating several models of disenfranchisement is that it no longer makes sense (if it ever did) to treat the homeless as a poor apart. Poverty, especially as it occurs under the dramatically reconfigured conditions of housing and work that exist today, remains the most basic fact about homelessness. And it is within poverty's brace that the definition of homelessness should be located.

The paper begins, however, with a nod in the direction of this subject's contrary—home—if only to suggest some of the symbolic and affective resonances that typically have been ignored in the intense scrutiny of homelessness itself and to lay the groundwork for some concluding observations.

Varieties of homelessness

Home is where we start from. (T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*)

[H]ome ... is ... the human point of ultimate return.
(John Hollander 1991, 33)

Definitions matter because they alert us to how things have changed. Even in the strict sense of the literally homeless,⁷ caution should be exercised in applying the notion of homelessness across time, place, or culture. Although homelessness probably occurs in most societies, not only do the forces of displacement vary greatly but so do the configuration and meaning of the ensuing transient state. Moreover—and conceptually this is the most serious missing link in the contemporary discourse⁸—the reference point against which homelessness is measured (conventional dwelling) is not always clear. To take but one example, the rudimentary Western notion of home as a redoubt of domesticity and privacy (English *hearth*, German *heim*) is of comparatively recent origin. Rural housing for most of the population of the *ancien régime* was ruled by work and public sociability. Often such places amounted to little more than hovels shared with animals, and they “fulfilled no social function,” not even the minimal one of “serv[ing] as homes for families.”⁹ Well into the 19th century, as the home took on the trappings of “a glorified domestic retreat in the urban middle class,” it continued to serve decidedly more mundane purposes

(e.g., as a site for household production) for rural and working-class families.¹⁰

Drawing the boundary between home and homelessness is further complicated when mobility, work, and tradition enter the picture. Resort to irregular forms of accommodations—what some may refer to as homeless ways of life—can describe the usual situation of whole communities (such as the Rom “gypsies,” Irish “travelers,” or nomadic hunters and gatherers), who would never think of telling a visiting anthropologist that they do not feel “at home.” Uncertain domicile may designate the chosen practice of certain groups (e.g., religious mendicants, or warring or hunting parties) or the lot of specific occupations (migrant workers, prospectors, itinerant preachers). Occasionally, the distinctive niche recognized as homelessness is occupied by a miscellany of players, with little other than their mobility in common. In 14th-century England, for example, wayfaring was an established way of life. The minstrels, laborers, musicians, pardoners, “peddlars,” and pilgrims who made up its ranks provided valuable communication links between distant regions, but even they could not escape the traditional suspicion of strangers, a suspicion aggravated by the predations of highwaymen and the lawless example of runaway serfs.¹¹ Affliction, artifice, and misfortune join forces in Braudel’s catalog of the road population of 18th-century France:

widows, orphans, cripples, ... journeymen who had broken their contracts, out-of-work laborers, homeless priests with no living, old men, fire victims, ... war victims, deserters, discharged soldiers and even officers, ... would-be vendors of useless articles, vagrant preachers with or without licenses, “pregnant servant-girls and unmarried mothers driven from home,” children sent out “to find bread or to maraud,” ... strolling players whose music was an alibi, “instrumentalists whose teeth were as long as their viols and whose bellies were as hollow as their double basses.”¹²

Many others at the time, Braudel observes elsewhere, “were virtually homeless, living in makeshift shelters (what would be called shantytowns today).”¹³ But note how much of a stretch it would be to consider “virtually homeless” those who inhabit contemporary “squatments” in Latin America: the *favelas* outside Rio de Janeiro, the *barricades* outside Lima, the *barrios* of Caracas. Their dwellings may not be conventional,¹⁴ but they are surely customary and, informally at least, are accorded civil recognition. How else to account for the (conservatively

reckoned) 50,000 “pavement-dwellers” in Calcutta¹⁵ or the 5 million (of a total city population of 12 million) who are “technically squatters”¹⁶ in Bombay? Indeed, the official tolerance of such settlements amounts to a tacit housing subsidy that plays an undeniably essential role in the subsistence economy of the workers who live there.¹⁷

Diversity in form and content is reflected in linguistic usage as well. Victorian England would have recognized as homeless those whom its Elizabethan forebears would have hunted down as “masterless men.” Each era would have readily identified the other’s “vagrants.”¹⁸ Late 19th-century America would castigate as “tramps” those whom New England colonists somewhat more delicately referred to as the “strolling poor.”¹⁹ In the early decades of the 20th century, America’s “hobo” performed the same economic functions as Canada’s “bunkhouse man.”²⁰ And, curiously, when in 1959 the *Saturday Evening Post* asked, “Will ours be the century of homeless people?” it had in mind not the dispossessed poor but the vast cohorts of political refugees of the time.²¹

There is, then, a fundamental act of social production at work here—namely, classification. Like “the poor,” those whom we understand to be “the homeless” historically “emerge when society elects to recognize [homelessness] as a special status and assigns specific persons to that category.”²² It is not need per se, but a distinct set of practices and a formal social response—often devised under circumstances of confrontation—that distinguish these people in the most elementary fashion. Whether as recipients of emergency relief, as workers of a particularly rough and disreputable sort, as dodgers of work, as wanderers or squatters, as the merely (if cruelly) displaced, or as veterans of life on the street, those who make up a period’s official roster of “houseless poverty”²³ are the product not of a natural distinction drawn but of a cultural decision made. Conventions of recognition and legitimation apply to the homeless no less than they do to those who never leave the safe confines of hearth and home.

Homelessness past

The literature on homelessness in times past is voluminous and varied.²⁴ Studies of the indigent on the European continent in the late feudal period or *ancien régime*²⁵ make frequent mention of an itinerant poor who at times were all but indistinguishable from the poor at large. Owing to the dislocations after the dissolution of the monasteries, the tangled skein of Poor Laws, and

the upheavals caused by land enclosures and the rise of industrial towns, the English story is even more detailed and disputed.²⁶ Huge tomes have been assembled on the history of the vagrant, and fine studies have appeared more recently of the American tramp.²⁷ Some autobiographical and largely anecdotal material aside, however, very little is available on the history of the homeless woman.²⁸

Themes in the social history of vagrancy. If only to highlight a number of enduring (though often disavowed) attitudes toward the homeless poor, a brief overview of core themes in the social history of vagrancy is instructive. The durability of these themes attests more to an underlying cultural ambivalence toward dependency—and, to take it a step deeper, toward work and the bonds of kinship—than to the periodic occurrence of some canonical set of circumstances that recreates the attitude anew each time. Historically in the West, these themes begin to take shape in the wake of the massive dislocations caused by the Black Death in the 14th century. Until that time, a residual, church-based attitude of mercy tempered secular discipline. But the sheer press of numbers and the concentrations of importuning beggars, along with fears of unrest and predation, soon led to measures concerned more with policing than with providing for the rootless poor.

A visible affront, insistent appeals, and the threat of contact and contamination²⁹—such are the animating forces behind the call of the good citizens of Bruges in 1524 for a formal system of poor relief to succeed the messy imprecision of casual charity.³⁰ Although beggars tended to congregate in cities, it is hardly surprising to learn that mobility and unemployment figure strongly in their histories and come to dominate narratives of homelessness. The sources, however, of both their mobility and their lack of work are frequently considered suspect. So, too, is their cry of having nowhere else to turn. More darkly, from time to time allegations appear of outcast societies taking form in the nether ranks of the homeless poor, promulgating their own catechism of sedition and disorder; this occurred even as late as the mid-19th century in New York.³¹ The broader danger, of course, was that a working class but newly broken to the wheel of the factory would be “demoralized” (indeed, tempted) by this example of a livelihood wrested without submitting to the regime of work.³² Finally, given the suspect nature of the class itself, efforts to alleviate its plight—“indiscriminate charity” in particular—were also subject to suspicion, especially if those efforts were viewed as attracting still more of the rootless poor and enabling them to pursue their scurrilous trade.

Historically, then, to be penniless and on the road was to be marked as a member of a poor apart. “The tragedy of the tramp is his isolation,” R. H. Tawney observed in 1912. “Every man’s hand is against him; and his history is inevitably written by his enemies.”³³ It took six depressions in the 19th century before American reformers began to question the wisdom of the idea that vagrancy was at the root of unemployment, rather than the reverse.³⁴ Another major depression would pass and a second would be well under way before this nation’s cultural habit of holding men accountable (as they held themselves) for their lack of work would begin to abate. But by then, of course, the victims of unemployment were heads of households and of their families; single homeless men (and women) would once again have faded into the background of relief, there to be conveniently forgotten.

The legacy of the depression. Skid row in its classic form, the form that would fascinate a generation of American sociologists, was essentially a product of the war effort that had ended the Great Depression. After a decade that saw the numbers of the desperately poor rise to unprecedented levels, the gearing up of the war machine in the early 1940s effectively winnowed the ranks of those in the streets and shelters of all but the elderly and disabled. The 1930s had marked something of a watershed in the history of homelessness in this country: the newly dispossessed of that decade had included migrant families trekking westward, transients permanently on the move, squatter colonies sprouting along the rivers and in the parks of major cities, huge numbers of unemployed men, and a veritable army of young tramps riding the rails in hopeful transit to any place but home. Unprecedented numbers of local homeless made do, for the most part, by relying on family support and private charity. As their numbers grew, these “new poor”³⁵ surpassed, then displaced, the older, once-thriving communities whose ranks—by trade or by circumstance—had made up the legendary “knights of the road.” The lore and lifeways of “hobohemia” proved no match for the realities of mass hardship. Demand for their rootless, specialized labor, already diminishing in the economy of the 1920s, plummeted thereafter. And although traces of that way of life may be found even today, its demise was a matter of record as early as 1940.³⁶

Despite wholesale transformation in the ranks of the needy, the public response to homelessness during the depression, with a few notable exceptions,³⁷ remained hostage to some of the worst elements in the nation’s relief tradition. Temporary and plainly inadequate makeshift measures evolved into virtual institutions and once set up, continued to channel program and policy

directions through sheer inertial force. In cities everywhere, the common solution was massive congregate shelters as the cornerstone of homeless relief. Inventions³⁸ of emergency circumstance, such warehouses “crystallized into accepted forms of relief”³⁹ while the more intriguing (and politically threatening) work experiments were allowed to lapse. Even in the face of steadily mounting evidence of distress, the old American habit of self-blame on the part of the poor showed little sign of abating, except perhaps toward the end of the 1930s.⁴⁰ People may have recognized that “outside forces . . . were in some vague way responsible, but not really. It was a personal guilt.”⁴¹ For some, adherence to the notion that, come what may, they were to be held individually responsible for whatever economic lot befell them may even have been the last “paradoxical . . . minimum demanded by self-respect.”⁴²

The old distinction between neighbor (the local homeless) and stranger (the transient) resurfaced; relief efforts for the two categories were separate and ill-coordinated. Local officials, moreover, came to resent (for the brief period in which it was in existence) the qualitatively better accommodations that the Federal Transient Program offered.⁴³ Similarly, the distinction between the worthy and unworthy poor persisted, and the single homeless man once again virtually embodied the latter class. *Deterrence* remained the watchword of most of the shelters set up to serve him. He was barred not only from the original work relief program (the Civil Works Administration) but, for the most part, from the Works Progress Administration as well. Social casework bypassed him altogether.⁴⁴ Concern with the “demoralizing” effects of relief, moreover, at times seemed more pressing than a determined effort to see that all who were in need got help. Relief, no less than unemployment itself, was thought to breed “a subculture of fear and anxiety, a sallow acceptance of life, a bitter apathy.”⁴⁵

Nowhere, observers argued, was this more apparent than in the “shelterizing” effects of facilities for the homeless.⁴⁶ The unrelenting experience of failure, especially if constantly confirmed by the company one was forced to keep, rendered men “as open to the mental infection of dependency as they were to various physical infections.”⁴⁷ Despite such warnings, the warehouse shelter, “social anachronism”⁴⁸ though it was recognized to be, proved the dominant form of homeless relief. Sheer economies of scale and an age-old reliance on deterrence⁴⁹ were, in all probability, both at stake.

The upshot was that the old debate—over whether character or the economy was the chief culprit in the persistence of unemployment—was revived. But the debate was never resolved. A reformist focus on the structural underpinnings gave way early on to one that looked instead to the needs of special populations of the dispossessed. Only rarely was it recognized, as research findings available at the time suggested, that “the real danger of a permanent relief roll is not that men will have no desire to work, but that such a desire will make no difference.”⁵⁰ In the end, even in the face of mass hardship, it came down to that enduring staple of the American attitude toward the dependent, the uneasy amalgam of contempt and compassion for the unfortunate other that had marked poor relief since colonial days. Official efforts to suppress transiency while at the same time avoiding the spectacle of public starvation meant that policies and programs hummed with “ambivalence between repression and relief.”⁵¹

For many in need, the stigma of relief and the conditions in shelters amounted to no choice at all. What choice there was came from kinship, real and fictive:

Many of us know among our acquaintances, as well as among our clients, single men or women who have parents, married brother, or other close relative—sometimes dependent [i.e., receiving public relief]—living near at hand who have provided family association, perhaps a home and a common economic household. Many single individuals have lived for years with intimate friends, perhaps a landlord, or have other intimate associations which constitute a substitute family group.⁵²

The postwar period: skid row as prosperity's discontents. In the long period of postwar prosperity, homelessness—even in its relatively degraded form of life on skid row—appeared to be on the verge of extinction. Unprecedented improvements took place in real income and housing conditions for the population at large. Between 1950 and 1970, for example, median family income (adjusted for inflation) nearly doubled. A housing problem did exist, but it was one typified by the remaining cold-water tenements or sharecropper shacks. Notably, the homeless skid row “derelicts” were not considered part of that problem; nor, but for a few pages in Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962), did they make much of an appearance in contemporary studies of poverty, except to be reckoned among the “disreputable poor.”⁵³ These social “retreatists”⁵⁴—along with, according

to some, their distinctive “subculture”⁵⁵—were relegated to the charge of the missions, detox units, flophouses, jails, and an occasional social work program. “Deviants” in trade and identity, occupants of the lowest social station extant—they stayed within a well-marked sanctuary. Skid row provided both refuge to men who drifted there and respite to communities unwilling to welcome them elsewhere. In this, as more than one observer noted, it was not unlike the asylums to which other classes of misfits and failures were committed.

Among the more telling indicators of this stereotypical “old homelessness” is the ease with which it lent itself to sociological scrutiny. In large part, it did so because the subsistence of such men was rarely in question. For the most part, studies of skid row denizens revealed that, though poor, such men were not penniless. A good number of skid row men (between a third and a half, depending on the local labor market) worked, typically at menial jobs. During the late 1950s in Chicago, for example, Bogue found that the average dweller on Madison Street was employed, at least intermittently, in any week; the median annual income was \$1,058.⁵⁶ In *Subways Are for Sleeping* (1956), Edmund Love chronicled in fetching detail how a vagrant life could be managed on intermittent jobs (dishwashing, unloading trucks), two suits of clothes (one worn, the other at the laundry), and a berth in a public place (subways preferred) without ever resorting to public or private charity.⁵⁷

More telling still: No matter which skid row one observed—whether in New York, Chicago, or Philadelphia (to take only those closely studied at the time)—“homeless” men were regularly housed. In any of those cities, a street census would have turned up only a few score men (perhaps a hundred at most) sleeping rough.⁵⁸ Except in isolated, well-bounded “zones of discard,”⁵⁹ their effective invisibility was their salient feature.⁶⁰ Indeed, if contemporary trends of urban renewal were any indication, the ecology of skid row itself seemed threatened and the fate of its inhabitants uncertain. The population of the skid row sections of 41 U.S. cities declined by half between 1950 and 1970.⁶¹ Numerous commentators read in such signs the prospect of the imminent demise of skid row itself (or its dispersal in less concentrated areas). A few held out the possibility that such places might survive, on a much reduced scale, as

a refuge for drop-outs from the working class who have psychic disabilities, a significant proportion of which involve alcoholism. If present trends continue, the population of skid row will continue to decline, and . . .

[it] may come to function primarily as an open asylum.⁶²

It does not give away much of the ensuing story to note that, 15 years later, a journalist would reach for that same image of an open asylum to characterize contemporary shelters for the homeless.⁶³

The resurgence of homelessness

Something was up when *Newsweek's* inaugural issue for 1984 featured a grainy photograph of a homeless family whose mien and posture, and even the weather-beaten clapboard wall in the background, recalled those of the documentary record compiled by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s. The implication was unmistakable: were we as a nation about to traverse that same hardscrabble corridor that the Joad family had traveled during the Great Depression? Nowhere were such portents clearer than in New York City.

New York City. As early as 1971, it was clear that the new vagrancy⁶⁴ would no longer be confined to its traditional precinct, the Bowery. Indeed, the first and most salient feature of homelessness today is its disregard for the traditional boundaries of skid row. Much of this no doubt reflects the spontaneous dispersion of the homeless poor themselves as they search for individual refuge, shunning the common sanctuaries that the old zones of discard provided. But this centrifugal tendency is also apparent in the geography of emergency relief, and it attests to the press of sheer numbers. In May 1991 New York City operated 15 shelters for men (including one, Camp LaGuardia, 60 miles north of the city) and a dozen for women. Only two of these facilities were located in the traditional Bowery area, and, with the exception of those two and Camp LaGuardia, all of them have been opened since December 1979. Following the pattern of several years' standing, occupancy in the shelters tends to be highest in late winter. On an average night in February 1991, more than 8,700 men and women were lodged; on peak nights, that figure rose by an additional 300 persons.⁶⁵ Thousands more remain encamped on the streets and in other public spaces.

By comparison, in the mid-1960s the city's entire "shelter" population (including Camp LaGuardia) was estimated at roughly 8,000, and only 41 percent were being lodged at public expense through emergency shelter funds. Another 7 percent stayed in the missions or slept rough; perhaps 300 otherwise homeless

men were in city hospitals; an additional 50 were in jail. Homeless women were rare in public, and provisions for their lodging were confined to a single 46-bed facility on the Bowery.⁶⁶

More striking still is the picture for homeless families. Twice in the postwar period, New York City has had to turn to commercial hotels, at great public expense, to quarter homeless families displaced by fires or inhospitable living conditions. Both crises, in 1947 and again in 1970–71, were relatively short-lived. In the latter instance, the city managed to relocate 95 percent of a thousand homeless families within a year, almost all of them in public housing units.⁶⁷ No such option exists today. Affordable housing is scarce, and informal resources have been taxed beyond capacity. In the early 1980s the demand for emergency shelter on the part of homeless families accelerated, rising 24 percent from 1981 to 1982 and then doubling in the next year. The city now operates 20 shelters for homeless families and contracts with a number of commercial hotels to lodge additional families. By the beginning of summer 1986, the number of families lodged in such emergency accommodations had surpassed 4,200. In September 1986, the city was forced to turn to hotels in New Jersey (for the second time in three years) to meet the demand. But late in 1988, the city vowed to step up its relocation efforts and move 17,000 parents and children out of welfare hotels and into permanent housing in the next two years. By late summer of 1990, although the homeless family population was still more than 4,000, only 142 families were left in three hotels. Eight months later, that figure was back up to 682 families in 14 hotels, and another 516 in congregate shelters. City studies suggest that two-thirds of the total homeless family population—or more than 10,000 individuals—are children.⁶⁸ This means that in New York, children constitute a larger proportion of the sheltered population than do unattached men, a fact replicated in poverty statistics.

These figures pertain only to those homeless people who have found their way to public shelters. Large numbers persist in fending for themselves outside that system, for reasons that historically have had more to do with the terms and conditions of the offer of public shelter than with the impaired capacity of potential clients. Estimates of the numbers of people who regularly sleep on the street; in transportation depots, public parks, or shanty structures; on the subways; or in any of the innumerable fastnesses of the city hidden from sight are notoriously unreliable. The latest attempt—the Census Bureau's S-Night effort in 1990 to enumerate those who were visible on the street in preidentified locations—was fraught with difficulties in

definition, design, and implementation.⁶⁹ Even so, a total of 10,447 individuals were counted.⁷⁰ Seasoned observers—whether outreach workers seeking to engage these street dwellers, mobile soup-and-sandwich teams, or the long-term homeless themselves—are uniformly of the opinion that the numbers continue to grow.

The national picture. Changes of the order described above are not specific to New York City, although they appear to be unusually pronounced there.⁷¹ Nationwide, in the 1980s, the specter of homelessness proved one of the few embarrassing realities that proponents of a new morning in America could not conjure away.⁷² Whatever the precise magnitude,⁷³ scenes of men and women foraging in garbage cans, conversing earnestly with unseen companions, catching catnaps along the well-lit lanes of public commerce and transport, or simply lumbering along with tattered parcels of belongings in tow have become almost clichéd fixtures in the urban landscape. Their insistent, obtrusive presence in the rhythms and avenues of everyday life, together with the marked heterogeneity of the population, signals what is distinctive about urban homelessness today.⁷⁴

Already by the mid-1980s reports from city officials in 20 municipalities across the nation confirmed what earlier studies had predicted. Requests for emergency food and shelter assistance had continued to climb despite the improved economic climate after 1983; four years later, at the end of the decade, substantially the same story was told.⁷⁵ As the numbers rose, it became increasingly clear that the contemporary reality of homelessness accorded poorly with received images of skid row society. Local studies have documented the differences in great detail.⁷⁶

Today's homeless poor are a far more heterogeneous group than their immediate skid row predecessors. Indeed, if the reports of local researchers are any indication, in the past 15 years homelessness has undergone a transformation of a scale and complexity not seen since the Great Depression. What had been treated as a version of the rogues' gallery is now widely recognized as the staging ground for a new kind of poverty. And although it would be hazardous to take the map as too faithful a rendition of the territory, local studies have documented a good deal of regional variation. Today, the homeless population counts men, women, and children—alone, in small groups, and as families—among its ranks. Geographical mobility is the rule in some areas while, in other areas, most of the homeless hail from the immediate surrounds. Encampments of transients have sprung up in some places, reminiscent of the Hoovervilles of the thirties;

in other places, nomadism prevails on the street. Reflecting the changing composition of poverty at large, today's homeless poor are younger and more ethnically diverse than their counterparts of the 1950s and 1960s. If certain of their number have been found to have problems of substance abuse or a pronounced degree of psychiatric disability, it is also the case that others are distinguishable from the settled poor chiefly by the fact of their displacement.⁷⁷

Within the class as a whole, certain subpopulations may be identified, whose relative proportions vary from region to region:

1. Single-parent households, many of which were receiving public assistance when they became homeless, who have been evicted for failure to pay rent, removed on vacate orders, burned out, or turned out by friends or family with whom they had been doubling up⁷⁸
2. Single men, either indigenous or on the road, who are out of work, are increasingly of ethnic minority status, and often have rudimentary or obsolete job skills, the younger men tending to have job histories concentrated in the peripheral labor market⁷⁹
3. Single women of all ages, who have lost husbands or mates, have been turned out by friends or family, or simply cannot keep up with rising rents⁸⁰
4. Individuals with serious disabilities, severe and persisting mental illness, or long-standing substance abuse problems in particular⁸¹—some of them having been hospitalized, others not, and all having lost whatever precarious accommodations they once had and being now at a severe disadvantage in competing for the affordable housing that remains
5. Ex-offenders released from jail or prison to fall back on their own meager resources, who face discrimination in securing jobs⁸²
6. Homeless youths, who are especially vulnerable to the depredations of the street—some having been ejected from households unwilling or unable to support them any longer, and some having been victims of abuse or graduates of foster care⁸³

7. A host of smaller groups, including the displaced elderly, victims of domestic violence, and legal and undocumented immigrants

Frayed ties to kin, poor prospects of employment, problems of eligibility for assistance, inadequate public assistance levels, and compromised health⁸⁴ are circumstances that are distributed throughout these subgroups. Their categorical relationship rests on the single distinction of their seeking public or private shelter or having to trust to their wits on the streets. Though recognized as serious and widespread for nearly a decade now, the problem of homelessness remains consigned largely to the roster of emergency relief, on what is still a largely nonexistent domestic agenda.⁸⁵ Uncertainties over the precise scale notwithstanding, it does seem safe to hazard that not since the Great Depression have so many Americans been homeless.⁸⁶

Roots of the new homelessness. Whatever personal quirks, ailments, or deficiencies may put individuals or households at increased risk of becoming homeless, the structural roots of the problem lie in the changes that have taken place over the past two decades in the labor and housing markets in the United States. The net effects of these trends are exacerbated by declining welfare, unemployment, and disability benefit levels for those who qualify and by persisting inequities in federal housing subsidy programs. The upshot, terrible in its simplicity, is the contemporary delineator of homelessness: income insufficient to afford available housing.

The shift of the American economy from goods production to finance, information processing, and services over the past quarter century has dramatically altered labor markets and the demand for work, especially in cities of the Midwest and the Northeast.⁸⁷ Wage-based incomes have become increasingly polarized, a fact reflected in growing income disparities. Intensified competition from abroad, coupled with the influx of immigrants (both legal and undocumented) and part-time workers willing to accept the low-wage jobs that remain at home, has placed those Americans with low skills and poor schooling at a significant disadvantage. Minority men of age to enter the labor market have been especially hard hit by the loss of manufacturing jobs: Their earnings and labor market participation rates have plummeted for the past two decades.⁸⁸ The quality of life in inner cities has deteriorated—a consequence of both fiscal cutbacks and outmigration of more affluent households—and poverty has become more geographically concentrated. For many young minority men, the shadow economy offers virtually the

only source of income; a declining pool of marriageable males has meant, in turn, that many women see female-headed households (at least as they are officially reported) as the sole option for a family life. And what has been described as a sort of “tramping” rite of passage for young African-American males, temporarily between family affiliations,⁸⁹ may today frequently include a stint in the public shelters.

As with work, so with housing: Disabilities and social deficits may handicap a given tenant’s or family’s chances in the market, but it is the game of housing itself that is rigged.⁹⁰ Growing numbers of poor households are competing for a shrinking supply of affordable stock. In the past 20 years, the rental housing gap—the number of available and affordable rental units relative to the need—has widened ominously. In 1970, a total of 6.6 million units were reasonably affordable (at 30 percent of income) by about 5.9 million very poor households (those in the bottom income quartile). In 1990, the comparable figures were 8.5 million households chasing 4.3 million units—a gap of 4.2 million units. Huge numbers of inexpensive, unsubsidized units have disappeared from the market, casualties of rising operating costs and decisions to warehouse, convert, or abandon low-rent units. Not surprisingly, then, in 1987, more than a fifth of this nation’s rental households devoted more than half their income to meeting housing costs; 4 million households spent more than 70 percent.⁹¹ By an alternative reckoning, 27 million households, or a third of the nation’s total, are so tightly strapped that once they settle housing costs each month, they are unable to meet other necessities.⁹²

Housing subsidies fall far short of offsetting such difficulties for poor families. In 1989, only 2.2 million (or fewer than a fifth) of those households below the federal poverty line lived in subsidized units. Today, nearly two-thirds of households receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) live in unsubsidized dwellings, a third of which are substandard, and these residents pay more than half their income for the privilege.⁹³ Usually unrecognized as “housing assistance,” the bulk of such federal help is indirect, buried in the tax structure in the form of income tax deductions for mortgage interest payments, property taxes, or deferred capital gains. Such write-offs greatly favor the better-off Americans: the top fifth income group accounts for 60 percent of all housing subsidies.⁹⁴ Another form of subsidy—direct additions to the stock of affordable housing—has declined precipitously in the 1980s in favor of rental vouchers. In the past decade, the federal government has significantly reduced

support for new rental construction; even adding “commitments” to existing units, the federal outlay fell by more than 70 percent between 1979 and 1989.⁹⁵

Alternatives to decent work and affordable housing rely on a variety of makeshifts and buffers. Census data indicate that loss of a job was less often a ticket to poverty in the 1960s when families could afford to take on additional members,⁹⁶ but families today are finding themselves increasingly hard-pressed to make ends meet. Since 1970, welfare benefits have badly failed to keep pace with inflation, their real value declining by 39 percent; today, the maximum value of combined cash and food stamp benefits amounts on average to less than three-quarters of the poverty threshold.⁹⁷ Similarly, unemployment benefits are reaching a smaller proportion of the jobless than they have at any time in the past 20 years.⁹⁸ Thus, it is clear that the first line of defense against the streets remains the support of kin and friends. In Chicago, for example, the average duration between loss of a steady job and literal homelessness was almost four years; like General Assistance clients at large, “these people managed to stay in homes mainly through the generosity of family and perhaps friends, supplemented by casual employment.”⁹⁹ Perhaps the best index of the precarious situation of those living at the margins are figures that come from nonhomeless comparison groups; such figures have had the inadvertent effect of showing how unexceptional is the literal homelessness of the study group.¹⁰⁰

The social construction of homelessness

When Harrington undertook to chronicle that “other America” more than a quarter of a century ago, he confronted a poverty that was “invisible . . . hidden . . . off the beaten track.” Tellingly, his account omits sustained attention to homelessness; the subject is confined to a nine-page treatment of “the alcoholic poor,” drawing on his experience with *The Catholic Worker* on the Bowery in the early 1950s. Yet even here, in this “place of incredible physical and moral desolation,” Harrington departs from convention. Skid row denizens, he notes, “have long been defined as a major problem in our society, but they have not been understood as a problem of poverty, and that is an important fact about them.” Whatever the specific contributions of alcoholism, little progress would be made until “the fact that these people are poor” was recognized and dealt with.¹⁰¹

Here is an early lesson that society would do well to recover: the link between homelessness and poverty. It is one all too easily missed in the spate of epidemiological studies that dominate contemporary research on homelessness. The problem is not the specificity of such studies. Rather, it is their neglect of larger structural “givens” within which the decisive encounters between individual need and available resources occur. Only by attending to such circumstances can we begin to get at the factors determining how and to what degree personal disabilities become social handicaps.

The definition quandary

Every definition available to us in the literature on the homeless man becomes in the end an attempt to classify.... All such terms, like “hobo,” “tramp,” or “bum,” are really designations for conditions in which a man may find himself at any time. (Nels Anderson, *The Homeless in New York City* 1934, 151–52)

Although it is a welcome advance over earlier epithets, the studied imprecision of the term *homelessness* has resulted in much confusion—not so much because the distinctions are difficult to state clearly, but because their implications are seen to commit their users to radically different political agendas. In a word, what is understood as legitimate need may be prosecuted as a warrant of entitlement. Put differently, disputes over the definition of homelessness have their roots not in conceptual difficulties but in practical utilities. This section reviews some of the alternative definitions now in circulation and tries to clarify what is at stake in the manifest and tacit disputes.

Classification and reification

Definitions matter because they tell us not only where to look for what we seek but also how to recognize it when we find it. A perennial problem, and one that continues to dog labels even after their users have been apprised of it, is that of reification: the tendency to transform into *things* certain phenomena that are better understood as *relationships or processes*. Most relevant here are phenomena that not only get named and attached to an individual, but also come to dominate the person’s social identity and to locate his or her effective world at the margins of the world that so-called normals share.¹⁰² The problem is that in the process, contingent and mutable social forces—by virtue of

their being unrecognized—become invisible players on the cultural stage. As Rainwater has observed with specific relevance to the poor, “variables” get attached to “populations” with scarcely a thought given to the social circumstances under which these variables are invoked or to the response that they, in turn, provoke in others.¹⁰³ The upshot is that circumstances can be transformed into traits; makeshift, often transient ways of coping with difficulties become lasting attributes of the person coping.¹⁰⁴

All definitions are matters of convention, but that does not mean that they are simply conjured up out of thin air.¹⁰⁵ Political agendas, for example, may shape the discussion in both subtle and heavy-handed ways. In 1983, the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements announced that it had designated 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. It called on governments worldwide to submit demonstration programs—“ranging from self-help building activities to means of strengthening training, financial and management systems”—that would help others “to improve the grim shelter conditions of the majority of the poor.” The U.S. entry—“Freeing the Spirit of Enterprise”—reflected the almost *laissez faire* attitude that characterized federal policies toward the relief of homelessness at that time.¹⁰⁶

The range of contemporary attentions

Even a casual acquaintance with the contemporary literature or legislation dealing with homelessness is enough to reveal the range of definitions in use. Most definitions pertain to the population, not to the problem, and are at pains to distinguish these “new homeless poor” from their less honorable predecessors.¹⁰⁷ Some definitions, still bearing the dust of field notes, take the form of homespun declarations about the homeless:

those whose primary nighttime residence is either in the publicly or privately operated shelters or in the streets, in doorways, train stations and bus terminals, public plazas and parks, subways, abandoned buildings, loading docks and other well-hidden sites known only to their users.¹⁰⁸

Others boast the operationalized precision of survey research, either distilled—

“without shelter on the night of measurement.” Someone using a shelter for the homeless on the night of measurement is assumed to be “without shelter.”¹⁰⁹

not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling.... A person who does not own or rent a dwelling and is not a regular member of a household that does so is homeless.¹¹⁰

or elaborated—

those currently residing for at least one day but for less than fourteen with a friend or relative, not paying rent, and not sure that the length of stay will surpass fourteen days; those current[ly] residing in a shelter, whether overnight or transitional; those currently without normal, acceptable shelter arrangements and thus sleeping on the street, in doorways, in abandoned buildings, in cars, in subway or bus stations, in alleys, and so forth; those residing in a treatment center for the indigent who have lived at the facility for less than 90 days and who claim that they have no place to go, when released.¹¹¹

Legislative efforts at definition can also be fairly exhaustive (as in the McKinney Act), although more narrowly drawn statutory language is the rule.¹¹²

Finally, there are those who argue that what is distinctive about today’s homeless poor is the same thing that has been true from time immemorial: not “an absence of proper housing” but a pronounced social deficit, “a condition of disaffiliation, a lack of bonds, a pathology of connectedness.”¹¹³

Definitions matter because, depending on how the boundaries are drawn, the number in the class can vary substantially. Take the case of people using soup kitchens in Baltimore.¹¹⁴ If one adopts a strict criterion of the homeless—those whose usual residence is in the street or shelters—only 32 percent of the soup kitchen patrons are counted. If the definition is broadened to take in persons who spent at least one night of the past two weeks on the street or in a shelter, the figure rises by an additional 5 percent. If one includes those whose current residential status is uncertain and of limited duration, the figure climbs by another 10 to 18 percent (owing to gaps in the data). Finally, if one adds in those who have been doubled up for six months or more, the figure rises by an additional 18 percent. (Another 11 percent said

they had been interviewed elsewhere; they are not tabulated here.) Netted out, by the narrow but commonsense gauge of “a place of one’s own,” fewer than a fifth of the soup kitchen patrons were *not* homeless.

Some views of disenfranchisement

If one turns to the broader models of disenfranchisement within which the subject of homelessness is embedded and interpreted, three approaches may be discerned.

Sociological: a question of ties. Dominating the field of skid row scholarship for at least a decade was the disaffiliation school, bolstered by the heroic research efforts of the Columbia Bowery Project of the late 1960s.¹¹⁵ In the hands of those analysts, the term *homeless* referred to anyone without the usual social ties to family, work, or community life; it could be applied to the settled as well as to the unsettled (or “literally homeless”) poor.¹¹⁶ There is, moreover, an abiding trait/state ambiguity in the use of the term *disaffiliation*. By contrast, *homelessness* today usually refers only to a condition of subsistence fleeting, recurring, or stable, as the case may be—rather than to a property of persons.

The skid row depicted (or stereotyped, often unfairly)¹¹⁷ by these scholars was an anticomunity of exiles—the listless, aimless haunt of old men void of ambition or bonds, for whom the empty ritual of a shared bottle provided the only semblance of sociability. Its inhabitants were textbook cases of career retreatists. The place was less interesting for its social forms (typically perceived as perfunctory and evanescent) or its institutional elements than for the personal profiles of its gallery of misfits and failures. Later work¹¹⁸ laid greater stress on the processes of resocialization into skid row as a way of life. But because so little of this subculture was shared in other than fugitive fashion, a true sociology of skid row proved an awkward undertaking,¹¹⁹ a cul-de-sac that eventually led to the curious depiction of its social organization in terms of the dynamics, not of group behavior, but of aggregative behavior.¹²⁰

How much of the fault lay with men’s souls and how much with their circumstances remained unclear, an ambiguity that goes to the heart of the disaffiliation thesis. In their study of Bowery residents, Bahr and Caplow hypothesized that men who severed ties with the institutions of work, church, and family were more likely to drift into homelessness and remain there. But their survey data showed only that homeless men were likely to have

cut such ties, not that their disaffiliation preceded (let alone caused) their homelessness. Even if it begins as a condition, somewhere along the line homelessness acquires the status of a trait if it persists long enough; hence, the meaning of disaffiliation shifted over the course of Bahr and Caplow's analysis—sometimes denoting a social state, other times a personal attribute.¹²¹ However obscure its origins and uncertain its locus, “disaffiliation” is something that is “wrong” with such men; their homelessness, in turn, is only one manifestation of that something.

But the legacy of the disaffiliation school cannot be dismissed so easily. In its selective attention to the dimension of connectedness and its concentration on family and kin ties, the disaffiliation school both informs and misleads. It is, to this author's thinking, a serious error to reduce the dimensions of contemporary homelessness to “a pathology of connectedness” (as Bahr continues to insist), given the mounting evidence that both homeless single persons and homeless families have drawn upon, continue to draw upon, and in some cases have exhausted family and friends in their struggle to survive. Simply put, “family and kinship ties, friendship constellations, and organizational participation” are indeed “critical foci” in the dynamics of homelessness, even if they are not the essential elements in defining it.¹²² As was true in the 1930s, such makeshifts still account for the bulk of emergency shelter provided today and frequently spell the difference between a shared home among friends and the anonymous kindness of strangers.

Social-ecological: needs and practices. To say what “living in poverty” means practically, one must not only specify a (somewhat arbitrary) threshold of hardship,¹²³ but also describe coping behaviors: those practices that enable a household to survive below the official floor of subsistence. The same is true of homelessness. To the extent that public shelter lends itself to a variety of utilities—some of which are distinct from, if not at odds with, its declared purpose—recurring use of this resource may be included within the class of makeshifts that emerge under conditions of housing scarcity.¹²⁴

For purposes of policy, the broader definition of homelessness is preferable because it more accurately reckons the universe of need. Such an approach takes in the precarious lodgings of those who double up with friends or family, or the situation of those facing release from hospital or jail or a rehabilitation program without a residence.¹²⁵ It also accords with the findings of longitudinal studies only now beginning to yield results. Sosin

and his colleagues in Minneapolis, for example, tracked a cohort of nearly 500 homeless individuals. They conclude that

the state of homelessness appears to be more a drift between atypical living situations and the street than between normality and street life. In other words, the typical pattern of homelessness seems to be one of *residential instability* rather than constant homelessness over a long period.¹²⁶

Statutory definitions, with the notable exception of that contained in the McKinney Act, have generally been drawn in more restrictive terms. And although it can be argued that a more flexible definition of homelessness—say, along the lines of “residential instability,” as suggested by Sosin and colleagues—is more faithful to the phenomenon, neither consistency nor conceptual clarity is primarily at issue here. The definition of the class is also, potentially at least, the staking of an entitlement. And historically, in matters that concern redistribution, politics—not logic—plays the dominant role.¹²⁷

A social-ecological approach may also serve to redirect attention to necessary ingredients that are otherwise consigned to the status of background variables. Take, for example, Rossi and Wright’s catalog of factors affecting the numbers of those on the street or in shelters:

the size of the literally homeless population is driven by those macroprocesses that affect the availability of low-skilled employment, the ability of poor families to help their less fortunate members, the market conditions affecting the supply of very low cost housing for single persons, and the coverage of income-maintenance programs for disabled and single persons.¹²⁸

Strictly speaking, homelessness in this view takes on the sociological character of an ascribed status: a public recognition that follows an explicit or (as may be the case with some of those on the street) implicit declaration of need. This usage derives from Simmel’s sociology of *Der Arme*, in which he argues that the poor come into existence, as it were, by social fiat. Not absolute privation but relative deprivation, recognized as such, is the *sine qua non* for the emergence of the class:

It is only from the moment they are assisted—perhaps already when their total situation would normally require assistance, even though it has not yet been

given—that they become part of a group characterized by poverty. This group does not remain united by interaction among its members, but by the collective attitude which a society as a whole adopts toward it.¹²⁹

Simmel's approach has the advantage of preserving the historic association of homelessness with vagrancy. It does not fix the definition of homelessness to either work (as was historically done with men) or sexuality/marital history (as was the case with women). It is flexible enough to accommodate the broad class of shelterless individuals in evidence today. It suggests that the terms and conditions under which need is recognized as valid may be contested, subject to a host of competing interests that may be foreign (if not hostile) to the determination of actual need. It suggests further that the contingencies of service delivery are a better guide to actual policy than are officially espoused principles. And at the same time that it draws attention to the conceivably vast reservoir of unmet need, to a kind of shadow homelessness, it also raises questions about the utility of such a distinction.

Makeshift economies: homelessness and marginality. The boundary between the frankly homeless and those in imminent risk of becoming so has become increasingly porous in recent years, as the situation of the settled poor has become more tenuous. So striking is this development that the notion of a staged, one-way process, according to which individuals living at the edge of subsistence are pushed by some crisis over the threshold of homelessness, has been called into question.¹³⁰ An alternative hypothesis holds that within the subsistence world of the marginally situated, bouts of homelessness—like repeated moves into and out of the welfare system¹³¹—are increasingly common. Episodic in nature and affecting the lives of large numbers of the poor beyond those overtly without shelter on a given night, homelessness may be a recurrent fact of life, of varying degrees of frequency and severity, for members of these households. Indeed, researchers in Los Angeles have suggested that cyclical homelessness may now be the modal type of homelessness in that city.¹³²

Viewed in this way, homelessness is a contingent state defined against a shifting background of an array of conditional shelter arrangements (time-limited caretaking, doubling up with friends or family, seasonal employment with on-premises housing, and so on). Such a “makeshift economy” perspective¹³³ treats informal social support less as a capital asset than as a strategic good to be deployed in what may be complex and carefully calibrated

ways. How such reserves are traded on is a function of both the press of circumstance and the operant rules of relationship and reciprocity. Turning to such resources is not without costs, nor can their availability be taken for granted. Decisions about their use over time must weigh considerations well beyond the surmise of casual inquiry. Thus, what strikes an observer as a depleted informal support network or an immediate lack of housing may instead reflect a decision to reserve a privileged resource for later use.

Implications. This last approach not only accommodates those everyday means of coping with adversity and shortages that have long characterized life among the poor and very poor, but also suggests that homelessness of the scale and complexity evident today is best viewed as one manifestation of contemporary poverty.¹³⁴ Once this linkage is recognized, another one follows. The attachment of meanings to persons always involves the exercise of power, but that does not ensure that the act will be uncontested. Implicit here is the allowance for unexpected, even counterintuitive, action on the part of the subject class itself.

For example, the poor may (1) reject the terms or conditions of official definitions; (2) thwart official detection or verification rules (e.g., man in the house); or (3) organize, protest, riot, or appear to be threatening to do so, thereby shaking a little more out of the redistribution tree. The recognition of this possibility serves as a corrective to a too-dogmatic reading of the “social construction” position and honors a latent capacity that, when exercised by the poor, can “undermine the very status that they occupy.”¹³⁵ Poor people have done precisely that several times in the recent past, and even within the most disenfranchised of their ranks today, similar movement may be stirring again—as occurred in an organization of New York City’s homeless families, Parents on the Move.¹³⁶

The point is not simply that there is a moral (or cultural) dimension to relative deprivation that exists above and beyond whatever structural forces are posited. Rather, it is that the deprived themselves, people who are potential recipients of aid, may well play a determining role in setting the terms and conditions of legitimate need. Any account of the social construction of poverty must reckon with the “moral economy of the poor.” Discussing the food riots in 18th-century England, E. P. Thompson writes that

these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action.¹³⁷

No doubt, matters are not always so clear, and the dictates of a consistent traditional view—especially with respect to what constitutes a conventional dwelling—may be disputed. Nor has historical analysis succeeded in clarifying the circumstances under which moral outrage is fired. But in the troubled course of public shelter in the United States in the 1980s, the role of such indignation has been critical, and the tools at its disposal have ranged from public demonstrations to judicial petition to legislation.

Finally, such a position allows for the historically well-documented redefinition of public utilities—be they open spaces, jails, treatment facilities, or specialized shelters—by their users, as well as by frontline staff and the officials in charge of protecting order or recycling surplus property.¹³⁸ It thus credits the poor with more of a role in the day-to-day shaping of institutional routines and functions than is typically the case in social welfare histories.

Reprise: the functional space of shelter. Suppose one were to revise the social-ecological approach to homelessness to include a pattern of intermittent resort to informal housing resources, supplied on an ad hoc basis by one's network of family and friends. From this standpoint, homelessness is not a trait, an impairment, or even a social deficit (as various positions have claimed). Rather, it is a circumstance, arising from a variety of causes, that presents a problem to be solved: where to stay that night. It may be solved for better or worse, by design or default, in temporary or more lasting fashion, in seen and unseen ways, by a variety of makeshifts. Public shelter is one such makeshift—the most prominent but probably not the most substantial (in terms of actual carrying capacity).

This point may become clearer if the institutional space spanned by the category of functional emergency shelter is mapped in a two-by-two matrix, along the axes of visibility and formality (fig. 1). Four cells result, within which may be located the arrangements that pass for emergency shelter today:

Figure 1. The Functional Space of Shelter

	Visible	Invisible
Formal	1	3
Informal	2	4

1. Formal/visible: public shelter facilities and private refuges, the declared purpose of which is to offer emergency accommodations to those who have none
2. Informal/visible: jury-rigged emergency lodging provided by institutions whose avowed function is something else (although it may be related), such as churches and synagogues offering shelter in their basements, schools, or function rooms
3. Formal/invisible: public institutions whose primary function is not to provide shelter but to treat illness or trauma (hospitals, emergency rooms), to detain people accused of crimes (jails), or to confine the mentally disabled (psychiatric facilities), but that may, inadvertently, solve an individual's problem of homelessness for the duration of his or her stay
4. Informal/invisible: the makeshift arrangements provided by friends and family in their own dwellings, often illicitly

Regardless of the outcome of the scholastic debates, the thrust of current research is that homelessness in the most encompassing sense of the term has to do with various kinds and degrees of residential uncertainty and instability. In the absence of secure and stable dwelling, people have devised makeshifts that span everything from shared (and overcrowded) living arrangements to a nomadic life on the streets. Officially, only those makeshifts that are on display in public spaces, and the need that declares itself to public or charitable authorities, are classified as

homelessness. Up to that point, hardship may exist, but it exists as coping, as at-risk populations, or as unmet need. It is not defined as homelessness.

This approach accords the official definition of homelessness a certain face validity that, as ethnographic fact, is bound to be respected. It also draws our attention to subtler shaping currents. Culturally, the condition that the state defines as homelessness¹³⁹—like the acts it defines as crime—is not only interesting in its own right (whatever misgivings the members of the culture at large may have about the bias of that definition); it is also a telling sign of the political dimensions of categorical need. But the official definition is not the only one. The precise dimensions of the problem and the kinds of makeshifts that are to be sanctioned as legitimate homelessness are contested matters. Tradition too has its political aspects, and power—not logic—takes center stage in reasoning the need.

What kind of social problem?

Given the welter of studies, testimony, and reports the new vagrancy has occasioned—and, at times, the highly politicized nature of the discussion—it is not surprising that explanatory accounts have multiplied. Among the few constants is a consensus that homelessness today poses a serious problem in urgent need of redress. To any but the professionally contrary, the presence of large numbers of citizens living on the streets or in emergency shelters readily satisfies Merton's criterion of a social problem: "a sizeable discrepancy between what is and what people think ought to be."¹⁴⁰ Beyond that, little about the nature or locus of the problem is uncontested. If indeed some "cherished value" is being challenged, there is, as one of Merton's colleagues insists, no agreement about "what that value really is and . . . what it is that really threatens it."¹⁴¹

The idiom of pathology. In some quarters, the tendency to resort to the discourse of disease has been pronounced, and it serves to link what is thought to be the one novel feature of the contemporary problem—the presence of large numbers of the mentally ill among the homeless—to the problem of the indigent alcoholic. In other quarters, the new deviance has entirely eclipsed the old. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see virtually the entire problem of homelessness reduced to the dimension of deranged street dwellers.¹⁴² Although some analysts insist that the failures of deinstitutionalization must be placed within the context of a larger fiscal crisis and of a severely depleted low-income housing

market,¹⁴³ common folk wisdom remains hostage to the notion that were it not for the mass release of psychiatric patients, there would be no crisis of homelessness.

Nor have imputations of pathology been limited to the florid psychoses of the street. The rapid increase in homeless families in some areas has revived debates about the nature of such “disordered” families and about the reasons for the preponderance of single-parent households among them. In some of these analyses are echoes of the culture-of-poverty thesis, which posits a relatively autonomous system of values and behavior passed on from parent to child. It had been suggested, for example, that families in emergency shelters might be transmitting “a heritage of homelessness” from one generation to the next;¹⁴⁴ more recent studies dispute that interpretation.¹⁴⁵

A still-suspect class. There are, in other quarters of commentary, discernible traces of 16th-century tracts that aimed at penetrating the ruses and disguises of “counterfeit beggars.” One analyst warns cities against following New York’s lead in instituting a more adequate system of public shelter because, in his view, such a policy only encourages people who could otherwise manage on their own to take up permanent lodgings in emergency facilities. Despite much evidence to the contrary, this position sees the problem as a simple example of Say’s Law: A supply of emergency shelters is creating a demand that otherwise would not exist. The same argument has recently been extended to the situation of homeless families in New York, where the evidence of this happening has been met with an equal measure of disbelief.¹⁴⁶

For their part, advocates for the homeless have resisted any analysis that recalls the blame-the-victim approaches that have been applied to disenfranchised groups in the past. Instead, the advocates insist that homelessness must be seen as evidence that fundamental needs-meeting mechanisms—those in the market and those in government—have failed. The advocates’ fear is not without historical grounding. Reducing structural problems in the economy to the fault or burden of special populations is a familiar gambit in official policy and one that has long been applied to the wandering poor of this country.¹⁴⁷ Usually, but not invariably, such a reduction occurs in the service of a disciplinary agenda. Homelessness has been variously construed as the hapless plight of impaired minds, as the deviant subculture of the chronically marginal poor, and as the latest trick of the idle and unscrupulous. There is a common theme to such claims: Its origins may be varied, but homelessness, once it takes

hold, persists—like the “pauperization” or “demoralization” of earlier eras—because it transforms character. Therefore, corrective measures must have a moral as well as a therapeutic cast: “The majority of the homeless need intensive services, mental health care, discipline and order in their lives.”¹⁴⁸

Seeking to redress the balance, advocates (this author among them) have emphasized the victimization of the homeless. If this emphasis sometimes occurs at the expense of recognizing their specific humanity, here, too, the advocates have followed historical suit. Heirs to the documentary tradition of American cultural criticism,¹⁴⁹ they have also fallen prey at times to the strains of paternalism and sentiment that have marred that tradition in the past. With few exceptions, the homeless poor have played little role in these analyses, appearing rather as mute casualties of forces beyond their ken or control.¹⁵⁰

From the new homelessness to enduring poverty. The necessary corrective will be found only by returning the discussion of homelessness to that of poverty as a whole. There are, to be sure, significant risks in such a move. But it does seem fair to say that the harrowing simplicity of the term *homeless* may have outlived its utility. Whatever specific immediate gains are to be won by arguing for targeted programs for specific exceptional populations, it may be prudent in the long run to shift the definition of the problem, the focus of advocacy efforts, and the scope of analysis to more universal themes.¹⁵¹ Such a deliberate redirection would have the added advantages of moving from remedial programs to preventive measures¹⁵² and of engaging a potentially much larger constituency. But it will first have to contend with the legacy of a decade that saw misery return to the streets on a scale that had not been seen for 50 years. It must contend, that is, with the forces of distancing and dismissal with which this paper opened and to a discussion of which, in closing, it must return.

Conclusion

Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art (King Lear, act 3, sc. 4, line 106)

Largely because of seismic changes in the labor and housing markets, the cultural landscape shifted in the 1980s, allowing researchers and average citizens—as the Great Depression had allowed James Agee, Walker Evans, and their readers—a

glimpse into “a portion of unimagined existence”¹⁵³ ordinarily unavailable. In neither case was the poverty new; in neither case was its normal unavailability accidental. Whether the poor were tenant farmers in Alabama in the 1930s, African-American families in contemporary Chicago or Boston,¹⁵⁴ or, for that matter, working-class families in 19th-century Massachusetts,¹⁵⁵ such travails were part and parcel of what it meant to scrape by on the rough edge of subsistence. Out of such contrivances, unseen and unheralded, did the poor manage to survive. That this was largely unknown, at times even actively concealed, was as it should be: This was the way cultural (and class) boundaries were supposed to work.

When such boundaries are eroded, the shock of meeting poverty on the street—“houseless,” its hand outstretched, and the plea for assistance made personal and immediate—is both real and disingenuous. It is real because people who have lived with the convenience of not seeing poverty can prove to be quick studies when they finally confront it in the flesh. There is, after all, a linkage to be prized in the sudden realization of a Presbyterian elder at a Salt Lake City soup kitchen that she was “one job and one divorce away” from the people she was serving.¹⁵⁶ It is disingenuous because the poverty plainly had always been there for the seeing. It was not the case (much press to the contrary) that some previously unknown, long-festering underclass had emerged.¹⁵⁷ What was new, in a word, was that, as a fact of everyday life, poverty had become unavoidable. Shielding it from sight was no longer something that the culture took care of; to turn a blind eye to suffering these days, one had to cultivate the habit of not seeing. That takes time, and it is neither simple nor painless.

If, as Lilian Brandt¹⁵⁸ once argued, there is little that is new in the corrective measures each era adopts to cope with the burden of the displaced poor, it is also the case that recycled policy often goes unrecognized as such. Forced to cultivate the habit of not seeing, Americans have rediscovered how difficult that is and how easily resentment displaces sympathy. Like the citizens of Bruges in the 16th century, society has rushed to institutionalize measures that, whatever their long-term costs, at least promise the short-term gain of removing the spectacle of poverty from the street. Like their counterparts in the 19th century, New York City agencies, reading portents of general disorder in the example of unrestricted panhandling, have gone to court to secure a ban against begging in the subways.¹⁵⁹ Like irate townsmen combating the tramp menace, local governments have returned to the practice of “warning out” the undomiciled on the

premise that it is so much cheaper to move them on than to assist them or to suffer their presence. And like relief officials in the 1930s, states and municipalities have turned first to private charity and then to the long-discredited practice of storing surplus persons in warehouses and armories.

Driven by a mounting sense of things tumbling out of control, such measures have as their object, whether as underlying logic or explicit design, the reestablishment of proper boundaries between a well-hidden poor and a no-longer-uneasy settled citizenry.¹⁶⁰ Whatever their immediate value as instruments of relief, these measures stop far short of seeking to rectify—or even to address—the structural roots of the poverty attested to by mass homelessness. More damaging still, they may have the effect of easing the abrasion needed to motivate the search for a more lasting and inclusive resolution. To borrow Lear’s phrase, “the thing itself” is not mere lack of shelter. It is not the absence of a prescribed set of rules, services, and medications in a carefully structured environment that will enable the chronically ill or afflicted to live decently, if apart from the rest of us. It is not the lack of specialized assistance for troubled families. It is something far more fundamental than that: the barely noticed loss of a sustained and determined commitment to make available to all at least the material resources and social tools needed to participate fully in this society.¹⁶¹

In closing, what are the core elements to this line of argument? The opposite of homelessness is not shelter but home, and, socially understood, home must entail some claim to solidarity.¹⁶² The question underlying homelessness policy, then, is not, what does charity demand? but rather, what does solidarity require? It is not sufficient to ask what it is about the homeless poor that accounts for their dispossession. One must also ask what it is about “the rest of us” that has learned to ignore, then managed to tolerate, and now seeks to banish from sight the evidence of a present gone badly awry.¹⁶³

Phrased this way, the question is deeply disturbing. For some time now, aside from those infrequent and horrifying preparations for Third World invasions, this country has been markedly short on solidarity. It is not that common decency has become such an uncommon commodity. Rather, it is that mobilizing common decency, animating it, and putting it to constructive use in collective action require both a will and a stalwart sense of urgency that seem patently absent, embarrassing even to mention, in the ranks of the nation’s political leadership. With rare exceptions, there has never been (in William James’s fine

phrase) “the moral equivalent of war”¹⁶⁴—at *home*, on the *domestic front*. How easily and misleadingly those terms have come to signify shared heritage in so consistently divided a nation.

That Lear was banished to the heath was a transgression of kinship. He took refuge there in the cave of Poor Tom, himself masquerading as a homeless lunatic to escape the treachery of his half-brother. Is this as far as the legacy of tradition can take us—that answers are to be found in disciplining kinship to meet its obligations? Or in trusting to the comfort found only in the hovels of similarly kinless strangers? Grant that the welfare state has made some progress since Elizabethan times and assume that the word is something more than a slogan to be cheered safely on foreign shores: What would solidarity require here, at home?

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Endnotes

1. Possibly a corruption of the 17th-century English *skellum*, meaning “rascal, devil, pestilence, carcase, etc.” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
2. P. Theroux, “Subway Odyssey,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 1982, 20.
3. Anthony Muto wrote an article for the *New York Telegram* in 1929 describing “a new tribe of mendicants . . . young and old, male and female, white and black” living in the subways (*Literary Digest*, June 8, 1929, pp. 54–55); compare Theroux’s account with Jennifer Toth’s article on New York’s “mole people” in the *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1990, 1.
4. For a tracing of this theme in New York’s history, see Kim Hopper, “A Poor Apart: The Distancing of Homeless Men in New York’s History,” *Social Research* 58(1991):107–32.
5. P. Theroux, *O-Zone* (New York: Putnam, 1986). Strikingly, it is the discovery of their residual humanity, even in the most primitive surrounds, that sounds the novel’s core and quite traditional theme.
6. See, for example, a running series of *New York Times* editorials (begun on July 15, 1987, A26) entitled “The New Calcutta.” Compare with a fine piece in the *Washington Post* by Michael Specter (March 3, 1991, p. C1)

that, while succumbing to the Orientalist trope, manages to make exactly the opposite point. The image of Calcutta (especially with reference to “the black hole of Calcutta”) occurs in the press as early as the 1870s with respect to the denizens of the police stations (that period’s effective shelters).

7. That is, those who do “not [have] customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling” (P. Rossi, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989], 10)—essentially, those who live in shelters or on the street.
8. It is an issue recently and usefully explored by a range of scholars at a New School for Social Research conference, “Home: A Place in the World,” the proceedings of which have been published in *Social Research* 58(Spring 1991).
9. See P. Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 392.
10. See T. K. Hareven, “The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective,” *Social Research* 58(1991):273.
11. See J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring in the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (London: Ernest Benn, 1920), and A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640* (New York: Methuen, 1985).
12. F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 2, *The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 510–11.
13. F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1, *The Structures of Everyday Life* (London: Collins, 1981), 285.
14. Such “houses are not docketed in the city registries either as individual houses or as aggregates of houses, or places” (A. Leeds, “The Concept of the ‘Culture of Poverty,’” in *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique*, ed. E. Leacock [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971], 237).
15. S. Mukherjee, *Under the Shadow of the Metropolis: They Are Citizens Too* (Calcutta: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, 1975), 68. This is the official census figure and, even then, a hopeless underestimation.
16. *New York Times*, April 25, 1991, p. 15.
17. See, for example, J. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Closer to home, a *New York Times* editor has recently endorsed “legalized limited squatting” as an expedient for returning to use thousands of city-owned housing units for which there are no immediate development plans (October 30, 1990, p. A24).
18. C. J. Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887).
19. D. L. Jones, “The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,” *Journal of Social History* 8(1975):28–54.
20. N. Anderson, *The Hobo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923); E. W. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928).

21. *Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1959. When the magazine did run a story on the predecessors of today's homeless, it observed vernacular practice: "Skid Row: Junk Heap for Human Beings" (*Saturday Evening Post*, December 20, 1952). This distinction is one the disaffiliation school tends to elide: "Migrants and refugees" and "chronic wanderers and alcoholics" are seen as two subgroups of the larger class (H. M. Bahr, *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973], 18, 285).
22. L. Coser, "The Sociology of Poverty," *Social Problems* 13(1965):141.
23. The phrase appears in *King Lear* (act 3, sc. 4, line 26), a play freighted with images of homelessness, and introduces Lear's famous "poor naked wretches" speech (cf. M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* [New York: Viking, 1984]).
24. See H. M. Bahr, ed., *Disaffiliated Man: Essays and Bibliography on Skid Row, Vagrancy, and Outsiders* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) for an instructive selection.
25. See N. Z. Davis, "Poor Relief, Humanism and Heresy: The Case of Lyon," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5(1968):217–75; O. Hufton, *The Poor in Eighteenth Century France, 1750–1789* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1974); M. Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
26. R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green, 1912); S. Webb and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part I: The Old Poor Law*, rev. ed. (Hamden, CT: 1927; Archon, 1963); Beier.
27. P. T. Ringenbach, *Tramps and Reformers, 1873–1916* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973); K. L. Kusmer, "The Underclass in Historical Perspective: Tramps and Vagrants in Urban America, 1870–1930," in *On Being Homeless: Historical Perspectives*, ed. R. Beard (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1987), 20–31; E. H. Monkkonen, ed., *Walking to Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
28. In part, this lack appears to be because both local chroniclers and later historians have tended to be more interested in her common trade—prostitution—than in the destitution and homelessness she would otherwise suffer, as Stephanie Golden's work in progress (*Woman on the Outside*) should show.
29. That is, contamination from-not to put too fine a point on it—"pollution": fears of physical and moral infection were often symbolically confounded, if not fused (see M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966]).
30. See F. R. Salter, *Some Early Tracts on Poor Relief* (London: Methuen, 1926) for the relevant documents.
31. P. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 89–90. At that time, unattached paupers were considered the moral equivalent of the plague (see J. L. Hagen, "Whatever Happened to 43 Elizabeth I, C2?" *Social Service Review* 56[1982]:111).

32. Kusmer.
33. Tawney, 275.
34. Ringenbach.
35. To my knowledge, the term was first used by Pauline Young ("The New Poor," *Sociology and Social Research* 17[1933]:56–64) to characterize the Great Depression's casualties of unemployment, was later revived (and disputed) during the Johnson administration's War on Poverty (S. Thernstrom, "Is There Really a New Poor?" *Dissent* 15 [January-February 1968]:59–64), and then found new life on the heels of the 1981–82 recession.
36. For representative accounts, see N. Anderson, *Men on the Move* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940); T. Caplow, "Transiency as a Cultural Pattern," *American Sociological Review* 5(1940):731–39; K. A. Lovald, "From Hobohemia to Skid Row: The Changing Community of the Homeless Man" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1960); R. A. Bruns, *Knights of the Road* (New York: Methuen, 1980).
37. I have in mind chiefly the short-lived work camp experiments and the Federal Transient Program.
38. Or, more accurately, reinventions: the model was the age-old one of the almshouse, effectively retrofitted for emergency use (see D. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1973], and T. Finnegan, "The Once and Future Poorhouse," *Empire State Report* [May 1991]:48–54).
39. M. Lewis, "You Can't Stay Here. Washington Ditches the Transient." *Social Work Today* 3:8–10, 1935; R. S. Wilson, "Problems in Coordinating Service for Transient and Resident Unattached from the Point of View of Individual Service," Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 219.
40. See R. S. McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 11–12, and J. T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900–1980* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 52–53, for discussions.
41. S. Terkel, *Hard Times* (New York: Avon, 1970), 20.
42. E. W. Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 25–26.
43. See J. M. Crouse, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York 1929–1941* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), for an authoritative discussion of the program as it took shape in New York State.
44. W. McMillan, "Single Blessedness," *Survey* 70(March 1934):74–75; E. F. Reed, *Federal Transient Program: An Evaluative Survey* (New York: Committee on Care of Transients and Homeless, 1934), 35; I. Seligson, "The Case of the Homeless Man in New York City" (Thesis, New York

- School of Social Work, 1940); W. W. Bremer, *Depression Winters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 6.
45. T. Minehan, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934), xii.
 46. The locus classicus is E. H. Sutherland and H. J. Locke, *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men* (Chicago: J. B. Lippincott, 1936). For the contemporary version, see J. Grunberg and P. F. Eagle, "Shelterization: How the Homeless Adapt to Shelter Living," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 41(1990):521–25, and the exchange of letters in *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 41 (December 1990).
 47. L. Brandt, *An Impressionistic View of the Winter of 1930–1931 in New York City* (New York: Welfare Council, 1932), 24.
 48. R. S. Wilson, 219.
 49. At times, deterrence was formalized: In 1938, New York City rejected over half the applicants for emergency shelter simply by intensifying the intake inquiry to discover, for example, how many had relatives in the area (W. B. Herlands, *Administration of Relief in New York City* [New York: City of New York, Department of Investigation, 1940], 125).
 50. E. W. Bakke, "Fifth Winter of Unemployment," *Yale Review* 24(1934–35):268.
 51. Caplow, 732.
 52. R. S. Wilson, 214.
 53. D. Matza, "The Disreputable Poor," in *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification*, ed. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset, 2d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1966), 289–302.
 54. R. K. Merton, "The Sociology of Social Problems," in *Contemporary Social Problems*, ed. R. K. Merton and R. Nisbeth, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 7; Bahr, *Disaffiliated Man*, 42–44.
 55. S. E. Wallace, *Skid Row as a Way of Life* (Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press, 1965).
 56. D. Bogue, *Skid Row in American Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). By contrast, Rossi's research team found that only 39 percent of those interviewed had worked in the past month, and the adjusted annual median income amounted to less than a third of that of their 1950s counterparts (P. H. Rossi, G. A. Fisher, and G. Willis, *The Condition of the Homeless of Chicago* [Amherst, MA: Social and Demographic Research Institute, and Chicago, National Opinion Research Council, 1986]).
 57. E. G. Love, *Subways Are for Sleeping* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956).
 58. A single rough contrasting index is irresistible at this point: in New York City in March 1990, the U.S. Bureau of the Census enumerated 10,447 individuals in its street count.

59. R. E. Murphy, J. E. Vance, and B. J. Epstein, "Internal Structure of the CBD," *Economic Geography* 31(1955):21–46, as cited in J. C. Schneider, "Skid Row as an Urban Neighborhood, 1890–1920," in *Housing the Homeless*, ed. J. Erickson and C. Wilhelm (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, Center for Urban Policy, 1986), 181.
60. Arguably, it was only because homelessness—and poverty generally—differed in this way that so astute an observer of the urban scene as E. B. White could sensibly remark: "New York is peculiarly constructed to absorb anything that comes along without inflicting the event on its inhabitants, so that every event is, in a sense, optional, and the inhabitant is in the happy position of being able to choose his spectacle and so conserve his soul" (as cited by K. T. Jackson, "The Capital of Capitalism: The New York Metropolitan Region, 1890–1940," in *Metropolis: 1890–1940*, ed. A. Sutcliffe [London: Alexandrine Press, 1984], 348). For the fierce and indignant contrast, consult M. Magnet, "Homeless: Crazy-ness, Dope and Danger," *New York Times*, January 26, 1990, A31, among many others.
61. B. Lee, "The Disappearance of Skid Row: Some Ecological Evidence," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 16(1980):81–107.
62. J. F. Rooney, "Societal Forces and the Unattached Male," in *Disaffiliated Man*, ed. Bahr (1970), 34.
63. *In These Times*, January 23–29, 1985.
64. See J. Darnton, "Alone and Homeless, 'Shutouts' of Society Sleep in Doorways," *New York Times*, October 26, 1971, p. 82. Ten years later, the city was said to be facing a "crisis" on vagrants. D. Carmody, "New York Is Facing 'Crisis' on Vagrants" (*New York Times*, June 28, 1981, p. 1). Until 1983, the index to the *Times* listed all articles pertaining to homeless people and shelters under the heading "Vagrants and Vagrancy."
65. New York City Human Resources Administration, nightly shelter statistics.
66. Figures were culled from M. A. Baker, *An Estimate of the Population of Homeless Men in the Bowery Area, New York City, February 28, 1965* (New York: Columbia University, Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1965), 6–7, 19; N. Markel, "A Preliminary Study of New York City's Hospitals and Their Contacts with Homeless Men . . . [and] of New York's Legal Agencies and Their Effect on Homeless Men" (New York: Columbia University, Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1964); Bahr, *Skid Row*, chap. 6.
67. For the full account, see D. Gordon, *City Limits* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973).
68. Figures reported by the Crisis Intervention Service (New York: Human Resources Administration, July 1986); *New York Times*, September 27, 1986, A1; *New York Newsday*, November 7, 1988, p. 21; and *New York Observer*, April 29, 1991, 11.
69. For a detailed treatment, see the evaluation reports submitted to the Census Bureau. The count of those visible in public spaces of projected

occupancy of at least six occupants is estimated to have fallen short by a factor of more than 40 percent. The national picture was examined in a hearing before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs on May 9, 1991.

70. Recall that, by comparison, on a warm summer night in the mid-1960s, at most a hundred or so men could be seen sleeping on the street (G. Nash, *The Habitats of Homeless Men in Manhattan* [New York: Columbia University, Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1964]).
71. Nor are they confined to the United States. In 1985, the subject came up at a meeting of Common Market delegates: "The Homeless of Europe: A Scourge of Our Time" (*New York Times*, October 7, 1985, p. 2). It has more recently surfaced—and been christened one of the "backfires of capitalism"—in Eastern Europe, Hungary in particular (*New York Times*, October 23, 1990, A8).
72. Though God knows they tried: the Reagan administration coupled crass dissembling with outlandish dodges in its handling of homelessness. In June 1982, Philip Abrams, a senior official of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), proclaimed publicly that "no one is living in the streets" (*Boston Globe*, June 17, 1982). White House adviser (and later attorney general) Edwin Meese chose the Christmas season of the following year to observe that reports of persisting hunger were merely anecdotal and that people patronized soup kitchens "because the food is free . . . and that's easier than paying for it" (R. McFadden, "Comments by Meese on Hunger Produce a Storm of Controversy," *New York Times*, December 10, 1983, A12). Early the following year, the president himself opined that some of those on the street were there, "you might say, by their own choice" (F. X. Clines, "Reagan, in Chicago Speech, Assails Critics of His Tax-Cutting Plan," *New York Times*, February 1, 1984, A16). And later that June, the same hapless Mr. Abrams newly turned out as anthropologist, characterized overcrowding in Hispanic households as a cultural preference (R. Pem, "Housing Official Defends Remarks," *New York Times*, May 15, 1984, A25). The administration's apologists were joined by Thomas Main, who took to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to argue that many of the people in New York City shelters were not "truly homeless," but—in their resort to these dirty, dangerous and degrading places—were simply "exploiting a good housing deal" ("New York City's Lure to the Homeless," September 12, 1983). Compare with R. C. Ellickson, "The Homelessness Muddle," *The Public Interest* 99(1990):45–60.
73. For a discussion of both the difficulties of measurement and a number of attempts to overcome them, see W.R. Breakey and P. J. Fischer, "Homelessness: The Extent of the Problem," *Social Forces* 46(1990):31–47.
74. The rural picture still lacks a good deal of detail, but preliminary indications from an Ohio study are that it differs in some respects from the urban one. Specifically, women (nearly half of them with children) are more common; the homeless population itself is better educated than its urban counterpart and is more often white; and economic factors figure highly as causes of their homelessness. See B. Toomey and R. First, *Preliminary Findings on Rural Homelessness in Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio State University, November 1990).

75. U.S. Conference of Mayors, *The Continued Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities*: 1986 (Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1986); U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1990* (Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1990). Compare with National Coalition for the Homeless, *American Nightmare: A Decade of Homelessness in the United States* (New York: National Coalition for the Homeless, December 1989).
76. By now the studies are myriad. A representative sample would include Brown et al., *The Homeless of Phoenix: Who Are They? And What Should Be Done?* (Phoenix, AZ: Consortium for the Homeless, 1983); M. J. Robertson, R. H. Ropers, and R. Burger, *The Homeless of Los Angeles County: An Empirical Assessment* (Los Angeles: UCLA School of Public Health, 1985); New York State Department of Social Services, *Homelessness in New York State*, 2 vols. (Albany: New York State Department of Social Services, 1984); D. J. Baumann et al., *The Austin Homeless* (Austin: University of Texas, Department of Psychology, 1985); G. Morse et al., *Homelessness in St. Louis: A Mental Health Program Evaluation, Field Study, and Follow-up Investigation* (Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Mental Health, 1985); V. Mulkern et al., *Homelessness Needs Assessment Study* (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, 1985); D. Roth et al., *Homelessness in Ohio: A Study of People in Need* (Columbus: Ohio Department of Health, 1985); R. K. Farr, P. Koegel, and M. A. Burnam, *A Study of Homelessness and Mental Illness in the Skid Row Area of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, 1986); Rossi, Fisher, and Willis; D. Snow et al., "The Myth of Mental Illness Among the Homeless," *Social Problems* 33(1986):407-13; E. Struening, *A Study of Residents of the New York City Shelter System* (New York: New York State Psychiatric Institute, 1986); C. Hoch and R. A. Slayton, *New Homeless and Old: Community and the Skid Row Hotel* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); W. R. Breakey et al., "Health and Mental Problems of Homeless Men and Women in Baltimore," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 262(1989):1352-57. J. A. Momeni has compiled a set of state reports (J. A. Momeni, ed., *Homelessness in the United States* [New York: Greenwood Press, 1989]).
77. And, as a result of the "leveling" effects of homelessness itself, the differences between the subsistence strategies of those with chronic disorders and those without are not great (P. Koegel, "Subsistence Adaptation among Homeless Adults in the Inner City of Los Angeles," *Journal of Social Issues* 46[1990]:104).
78. In New York City, a significant proportion of them (44 percent) have never managed their own household (B. C. Weitzman, J. R. Knickman, and M. Shinn, "Pathways to Homelessness among New York City Families," *Social Forces* 46[1990]:125-40).
79. For the situation in New York City, see K. Hopper, E. Susser, and S. Conover, "Economies of Makeshift: Homelessness and Deindustrialization in New York City," *Urban Anthropology* 14, nos. 1-3 (1985):183-236.
80. Some of these women are more accurately classified as from "broken" families, having been forced to place their children under public care or

to arrange for alternative homes with friends or family for the duration of their homelessness.

81. For reviews, see R. Tessler and D. L. Dennis, *A Synthesis of NIMH-Funded Research Concerning Persons Who Are Homeless and Mentally Ill* (Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, 1989); S. Ridgely, H. H. Goldman, and J. Talbott, *Chronic Mentally Ill Young Adults with Substance Abuse Problems* (Baltimore: University of Maryland, Department of Psychiatry, 1986); P. Koogel, M. A. Burnam, and R. K. Farr, "The Prevalence of Specific Psychiatric Disorders among Homeless Individuals in the Inner City of Los Angeles," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 45(1988):1085–92; E. Struening and D. K. Padgett, "Physical Health Status, Substance Use and Abuse, and Mental Disorders among Homeless Adults," *Journal of Social Issues* 46(1990):65–82; P. J. Fischer and W. R. Breakey, "The Epidemiology of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders among the Homeless," *American Psychologist*, in press; Baumohl and Huebner.
82. "Serious" criminal activity among the homeless turns out to involve crimes of survival for the most part, such as petty theft (often shoplifting) and entry into vacant buildings and warehouses for shelter (P. J. Fischer, "Criminal Activity among the Homeless: A Study of Arrests in Baltimore," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 39[1988]:46–51; D. A. Snow, S. G. Baker, and L. Anderson, "Criminality and Homeless Men: An Empirical Assessment," *Social Problems* 36[1989]:532–49).
83. See Breakey and Fischer, 38.
84. See J. D. Wright, "Poor People, Poor Health: The Health Status of the Homeless," *Social Forces* 46(1990):49–64.
85. The Bush administration's contempt for taking the issue of poverty seriously bids fair to become legendary. It is perhaps best exemplified in the remark of a White House official asked to characterize the administration's poverty policy: "Keep playing with the same toys . . . but paint them a little shinier" (*New York Times*, July 6, 1990, A1).
86. Nor is the allusion simply an amateur historian's flourish: for some of those who donate to charities today, the same comparison beckons from living memory (*New York Times*, February 18, 1987, B4).
87. See F. Levy, *Dollars and Dreams* (New York: Russell Sage, 1987); W. J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and J. D. Kasarda, "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 501(1989):26–47, for discussion and analysis. Trends discussed in this paragraph are documented in contributions to *The Urban Underclass*, ed. C. Jencks and P. Peterson (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991).
88. Interestingly, where local economies have flourished, giving rise to tight labor markets, employers have shown few scruples about recruiting from within an alleged underclass—and the men have responded (R. B. Freeman, "Employment and Earnings of Disadvantaged Young Men in a Labor Shortage Economy," 103–21, and P. Osterman, "Gain from

Growth? The Impact of Full Employment on Poverty in Boston," 122–34, in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Jencks and Peterson [1991]). Nor does an unwillingness to work seem to be the problem (M. Tienda and H. Stier, "Joblessness and Shiftlessness: Labor Force Activity in Chicago's Inner City," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Jencks and Peterson [1991], 135–54).

89. Such men, owing to what is seen as their naturally disruptive tendencies and unwillingness to assume domestic responsibilities, are often encouraged to leave even the flexibly configured support of their families in the inner city. For a while, they "live a kind of vagabonding existence with age mates . . . [who] support and help each other, as they live 'on the street,' often as 'homeless' people in abandoned buildings, in low rent apartments with their 'brothers,' or moving around in and out of various family apartments" (P. Hainer, "Sharing Kith and Kin: A Study of Kinship Behavior, An Approach to Explanation" [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1991], 223–24).
90. The game has been recently likened by two analysts to that of "musical chairs" (K. Y. McChesney, "Family Homelessness: A Systemic Problem," *Journal of Social Issues* 46[1990]:191–206; E. Sclar, "Homeless and Housing Policy," *American Journal of Public Health* 80[1990]:1039–40).
91. Figures in this paragraph are taken from the analysis of J. Alker and C. Dolbeare, *The Closing Door: Economic Causes of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: National Coalition for the Homeless, 1990). As these authors point out, the gap in any locale may well be larger, owing to many units being substandard, of the wrong size, or in the wrong location. Furthermore, many inexpensive units are occupied by households with incomes above the limit charted here.
92. M. E. Stone, *One-third of a Nation* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 1990). The number of such shelter-poor households grew 42 percent between 1970 and 1987.
93. In 33 states, the fair-market rent level set by HUD is higher than the entire AFDC grant (C. Dolbeare, *Out of Reach: Why Everyday People Can't Find Affordable Housing* [Washington, DC: Low Income Housing Information Service, 1989]).
94. Alker and Dolbeare, 22.
95. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1990 Green Book* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 1309; compare with S. Levitan and S. Schillmoeller, *The Paradox of Homelessness in America* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, Center for Social Policy Studies, 1991), 15–16.
96. C. Jencks, "Is the American Underclass Growing?" in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Jencks and Peterson (1991), 50. However, census data have well-documented limitations when used to characterize the resource sharing and residential patterns of the inner-city poor (see P. Hainer, "Census Definitions and the Politics of Census Information," *Practicing Anthropology* 7, no. 3[1985]:7–8).

97. K. Hopper and J. Hamburg, "The Making of America's Homeless: From Skid Row to New Poor, 1945–1984," in *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, ed. R. Bratt, C. Hartman, and A. Meyerson (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1986); Alker and Dolbeare, 15; House Committee on Ways and Means, 555.
98. Benefits today reach about a third of out-of-work men and women. During the recessions of 1975 and 1982, the comparable figures were three-quarters and one-half, respectively. The reduction in covered workers is due largely to two factors: tightened eligibility requirements imposed by states, and a higher percentage of the work force employed in the service sector, where part-time work, frequent shifts in jobs, and lack of unionization (leading to more employer challenges to benefit claims) have meant that fewer laid-off workers qualify for benefits (*New York Times*, December 2, 1990, p. A1).
99. Rossi, 114–16. In New York, three-quarters of a high-risk group of welfare recipients had been involuntarily displaced in the past and never showed up in the emergency shelter system; they simply made do with friends or family until they secured replacement housing (G. L. Berlin and D. Baillargeon, *The Housing Alert Program: A One Year Evaluation* [New York: Human Resources Administration, 1989]).
100. Sosin and his colleagues, for example, found that half of an extremely poor comparison group in Chicago had been homeless in the past, some of them repeatedly (M. Sosin, P. Colson, and S. Grossman, *Homelessness in Chicago: Poverty and Pathology, Social Institutions and Social Change* [Chicago: University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration, 1988]). A more recent study in Los Angeles found that 39 percent of a comparison group of housed welfare families had been forced to double up (with "strangers") at some point in the past five years and a fifth had been literally homeless (Wood et al., "Homeless and Housed Families in Los Angeles: A Study Comparing Demographic, Economic, and Family Function Characteristics," *American Journal of Public Health* 80[September 1990]:1049–52).
101. M. Harrington, *The Other America* (1962; rev. ed., Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), 2–3, 94, 86, 100.
102. Obvious physical (R. Murphy, *The Body Silent* [New York: H. Holt, 1987]) or mental (S. Estroff, *Making It Crazy* [Berkeley: University of California, 1981]) disability and its ensuing stigma is one such master status, effectively displacing all other attributes and constituting, in effect, that person's public "identity."
103. "All of the research which relates personal characteristics of the poor to some outcome tends to assume that when a significant coefficient for that characteristic is discovered it is something about the person's behavior or culture or personality or whatever that is productive of the given outcome. But in fact it may be that it is the definition of that characteristic by others with whom the individual deals which is productive of the outcome" (L. Rainwater, "Class, Culture, Poverty and Welfare" [Unpublished manuscript, 1987, 71]).
104. It was the Great Depression that forced Nels Anderson, in *The Homeless in New York City* (New York: Welfare Council, 1934), to reconsider the

wisdom of such divisions; he himself had earlier devised one of the most widely used taxonomies of homeless men.

105. As T. Bethell suggests, "It was the invention of the concept itself . . . the word 'homelessness' . . . *which hitherto had not really existed*" that provides "the key to the detection of a problem" (T. Bethell, "Remarks in the Heritage Foundation," in *Rethinking Policy on Homelessness* [Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 1989], 2, emphasis added). But how this social problem "emerged," as recently charted by M. Stern ("The Emergence of the Homeless as a Public Problem," *Social Service Review* 58[1984]:291–301), is both more complex and less arbitrary than that.
106. *UN Chronicle*, July 1983, 107. Notably, a UN film produced as part of the year's activities was forced to omit footage of two American projects (the only ones to appear). The U.S. mission had objected that the film neglected to mention the "individual rights element" of homelessness in the United States (*New York Times*, December 29, 1987, A7). A State Department memo on the subject concludes that public homelessness is "not a function of poverty but rather of disorientation and of the toleration of American society for such aberrant behavior" (U.S. Department of State 1988, 5).
107. And, in the process of defending the "moral integrity" of the new homeless, such analyses often obscure the "social continuity" between the two groups (see Hoch and Slayton, chap. 10).
108. E. Baxter and K. Hopper, *Private Lives, Public Spaces* (New York: Community Service Society, 1981), 6–7; compare with G. Morse, "Homeless People: A Typological Analysis and Gender Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1984); Baumann et al.; Farr, Koegel, and Burnam.
109. M. R. Burt and B. E. Cohen, *America's Homeless: Numbers, Characteristics, and Programs That Serve Them* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1989), 17.
110. Rossi, 10, 12.
111. Sosin, Colson, and Grossman, 22; compare with Roth, 1989:148–9.
112. See, for example, M. M. Cuomo, *1933–1983: Never Again* (Albany: Executive Chamber, 1983).
113. H. M. Bahr, "Introduction," in *Homelessness in the United States*, ed. J. Momeni (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989, xx–xxi. Strictly speaking, this is an analysis of homelessness as an expression of some deeper deficiency, not a definition per se. See next section for discussion.
114. I draw here on the unpublished work of P. Campanelli et al., "Research on Enumerating Homeless Persons: Results of a Census Bureau Test of Alternative Methods" (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).
115. See Bahr, *Skid Row*; H. Bahr and T. Caplow, *Old Men Drunk and Sober* (New York: New York University Press, 1973). Of course, the disaffiliation thesis was anticipated by some earlier sociological and historical work on homelessness. H. Warren Dunham's brief study (*Homeless Men*

and *Their Habitats* [Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1953]), for example, made use of the notion of “undersocialization” to explain the original deficits from which such men suffered (cf. Wallace, 132ff.).

116. See, for example, Nash. Tellingly, an earlier version of disaffiliation appears here as “responsibilitilessness.” In the Columbia Bowery Project, homelessness was operationalized as anyone who lived “without kin of any sort in his housing unit, is 21 years old or older, spends a limited amount or nothing on his living quarters . . . [and] is not currently employed in the higher ranks of occupations” (Nash, A-1).
117. Again, see Hoch and Slayton 1989.
118. For example, Wallace.
119. A “culture” of the “disaffiliated” would appear to be a contradiction in terms.
120. Bahr, *Skid Row*, 162f.
121. Bahr and Caplow, 5–6, 55–56, 305.
122. Bahr, *Skid Row*, 313.
123. See, for example, Harrington’s discussion of the federal poverty level (“The New Gradgrinds,” *Dissent* [Spring 1984]:171–81).
124. Note, too, that this shifts the question away from personal attribute and toward strategic practice.
125. Rossi’s pragmatic use of “literal homeless” should not mask the more inclusive scope of his notion of homelessness as a “condition that describes persons who do not have customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling unit” (p. 10).
126. M. Sosin, I. Piliavin, and H. Westerfelt, “Toward a Longitudinal Analysis of Homelessness,” *Journal of Social Issues* 46(1990):171, emphasis in original. Along similar lines, other researchers have referred to homelessness as “a recurring waystation” for the marginally situated poor (Hopper, Susser, and Conover).
127. See D. Stone, *The Disabled State* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1984).
128. P. H. Rossi and J. D. Wright, “The Urban Homeless: A Portrait of Urban Dislocation,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 501(1989):141.
129. G. Simmel “The Poor,” *Social Problems* 13(1908, orig.; 1965):138–39. The roots of this “collective attitude” may be disputed. Some argue, for example, the necessity of maintaining social harmony by placating the poor in a society characterized by structured inequality. But until the decision to aid an officially needy group is taken—at least in principle and allowing for its defiance in practice—“poverty is individual suffering, without social consequence” (ibid.).

130. See, for example, Farr, Koegel, and Burnam, 256–59; Sosin, Colson, and Grossman; Sosin, Piliavin, and Westerfelt.
131. See M. Sullivan, *Teen Fathers in the Inner City* (New York: Vera Institute, 1985), 70; D. Ellwood, *Poor Support* (New York: Basic, 1988).
132. Farr, Koegel, and Burnam; P. Koegel and M. A. Burnam, “Traditional and Nontraditional Homeless Alcoholics,” *Alcohol Health and Research World* 11, no. 3(1987):28–34.
133. To my knowledge, the term was originally used in a study commissioned by the National Federation of Settlements to look into the effects of “broken work” on families of the unemployed (H. Hall, “Introducing Our Neighbors,” in *Case Studies of Unemployment*, National Federation of Settlements [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931], xxiii–1). It was later revived by Olwen Hufton in her study of the 18th-century French poor and was applied to homelessness by Hopper, Susser, and Conover in a study of New York’s sheltered men.
134. See also Rossi, Hopper and Hamberg; and M. Hope and J. Young, *The Faces of Homelessness* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1986).
135. Coser, 148.
136. See the chronicle of this organization in A. Mathieu, “Parents on the Move: Families Resist” (Ph.D. diss., New School for Social Research, 1991).
137. E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50(1971):79.
138. For discussion of this phenomenon in the settings indicated in the text, see P. Marin, “Helping and Hating the Homeless,” *Harper’s Magazine*, January 1987, 39–49; J. Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); J. Wiseman, *Stations of the Lost* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); D. L. Dennis, K. Gounis, and J. P. Morrissey, “Housing the Homeless Mentally Ill,” *Research Notes* (New York State, Office of Mental Health) 2, no. 5(1987):1–4; M. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (New York: Russell Sage, 1980); and R. Warner, *Recovery from Schizophrenia* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 91.
139. Again, a repeatedly contested matter: HUD officials are currently challenging the expansive definition of homelessness contained in the McKinney Act. They would prefer to see the dimensions of the problem restricted to the bounds of the literal homeless—those in shelters or on the street. From a programmatic standpoint, the latter is a problem more susceptible to being solved (S. A. Kondratas, “Presentation to the National Coalition for the Homeless,” March 16, 1991).
140. Merton, 7.
141. C. W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 7.

142. See C. Krauthammer, "When Liberty Really Means Neglect," *Time*, December 2, 1985; J. Perkins, "New Institutions for the Homeless," *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 1985; S. A. Kondratas, "Myth, Reality and the Homeless," *Insight* 14(April 1986):78; E. F. Torrey, "Finally, A Cure for the Homeless," *Washington Monthly*, September 23–27, 1986.
143. H. H. Goldman and J. P. Morrissey, "The Alchemy of Mental Health Policy," *American Journal of Public Health* 75(1985):727–31; National Institute of Mental Health, *Deinstitutionalization Policy and Homelessness* (Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, 1990).
144. E. L. Bassuk, L. Rubin, and A. S. Lauriat, "Characteristics of Sheltered Homeless Families," *American Journal of Public Health* 76(1986): 1097–1101.
145. Bassuk's current work should shed additional light; that of Weitzman et al. already has.
146. T. Main, "The Homeless of New York," *The Public Interest* 72(1983):3–23; R. K. Filer, "What Really Causes Family Homelessness?" *The City Journal* (Fall 1990):31–41.
147. See P. Marcuse, "A Shame of Cities," *The Nation* 244(1987):426–29, for discussion.
148. Kondratas, "Myth, Reality and the Homeless," 78.
149. W. Stott, *Documentary Expression in Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
150. Ironically, too, in this respect, the advocates are heirs to the scholarly bequest of skid row researchers.
151. As T. Skocpol has recently argued in "Targeting within Universalism: Politically Viable Policies to Combat Poverty in the United States," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Jencks and Peterson (1991), 411–36; compare with R. Greenstein's response, "Universal and Targeted Approaches to Relieving Poverty" (437–59), in the same volume.
152. McChesney.
153. J. Agee and W. Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941; New York: Ballantine, 1970).
154. N. Lehmann, *The Promised Land* (New York: Basic, 1991); Hainer, "Sharing with Kith and Kin."
155. A. Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
156. *Iowa Press-Citizen*, May 7, 1983.
157. Jencks and Peterson.
158. Brandt *An Impressionistic View*, 2.

159. *Walley v. New York City Transit Authority*, Index No. 177/91, 1991.
160. For close documentation of the case in New York, see C. Vergara, "Ghettos: No Way Out," *New York Daily News*, February 11, 1990; C. Vergara, "Showdown in Drug City," *Village Voice*, March 27, 1990; C. Vergara "Lessons Learned, Lessons Forgotten," *The Livable City* (New York: Municipal Art Society) 15(1991):2-9; and Finnegan.
161. Not all will want to belong, as Marin reminds us, and room must be made "on the margins" to accommodate that decision. My argument is that the option should be there.
162. As I read J. Berger, *And Our Faces, Dear Heart, Brief as Photos* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), and Ignatieff.
163. See also G. Blasi, "Social Policy and Social Research on Homelessness," *Journal of Social Issues* 46(1990):207-19.
164. W. James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," *Popular Science Monthly*, October 1910, reprinted in *Pragmatism and Other Essays* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 289-301. But recall that the attempt to revive the phrase itself was a miserable failure on the part of the Carter administration.

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