

May 2018

FOXES HAVE DENS, AND THE BIRDS IN THE SKY HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOT PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD.—Mathew 8:20 A Photographic Project

Alex Morel

St. John's University, Queens

Joseph De Rege


Sieta C. Leon

Noah J. Letcavage

Wesley T. Martinez

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jovsa>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), and the [Photography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Morel, Alex; De Rege, Joseph; Leon, Sieta C.; Letcavage, Noah J.; Martinez, Wesley T.; Perrotte, Stefanie M.; Proscia, Nicholas F.; and Zelaya, Fernando (2018) "FOXES HAVE DENS, AND THE BIRDS IN THE SKY HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOT PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD.—Mathew 8:20 A Photographic Project," *Journal of Vincentian Social Action*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

DOI: 10.24073/jovsa/03/01/02.1

Available at: <https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jovsa/vol3/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by St. John's Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Vincentian Social Action* by an authorized editor of St. John's Scholar. For more information, please contact JoVSA@stjohns.edu.

FOXES HAVE DENS, AND THE BIRDS IN THE SKY HAVE NESTS,
BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOT PLACE TO LAY HIS
HEAD.—Mathew 8:20 A Photographic Project

Authors

Alex Morel, Joseph De Rege, Sieta C. Leon, Noah J. Letcavage, Wesley T. Martinez, Stefanie M. Perrotte,
Nicholas F. Proscia, and Fernando Zelaya

FOXES HAVE DENS, AND THE BIRDS IN THE SKY HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOT PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD.—Mathew 8:20

A Photographic Project

Participating Photographers

Joseph De Rege, Sieta C. Leon, Noah J. Letcavage, Wesley T. Martinez, Stefanie M. Perrotte, Nicholas F. Proscia, and Fernando Zelaya.

Project Director and Curator

Alex Morel
Associate Professor of Photography
St. John's University

During the fall of 2017, the Photography and Social Justice class at St. John's University, formerly Documentary Photography, engaged in a project and subsequent exhibition around the issue of homelessness in New York City.

Photographically speaking, the subject of homelessness has become a topic, for many, not seen as appropriate. One of the main arguments against it, being the vulnerability of the subjects due to their less than favorable conditions. Is it OK to point a camera at the misfortune of someone else? How much control do they have of the way in which they are portrayed? Are they truly free to say “no” or “yes”?

Inevitably, the position and power of the photographer is also questioned, as well as his or her responsibilities. What are the intentions of the photographer? Is it just to create a compelling image, one that might bring the satisfaction of recognition? Is it to bring attention to what is being ignored? Is the goal to provoke the viewer into action or behavior that might alleviate the problem? Is the photographer truly interested in the subject and genuinely concerned with this social problem?

The problem itself poses its own questions. What is causing this surge in homelessness? Who is most vulnerable and in danger of being affected? What is being done to find a solution? Should attention be brought to the issue? How? Is photography an effective medium for this?

These and many others questions and conflicts were part of long conversations among this group of photographers as they navigated through this project, conceptually and in practice.

Often we assume the homeless don't want to be approached, much less be photographed and have others see them in that way. Those assumptions however could easily come from a place of empathy or from our own fear to confront the situation. Approaching a stranger is not always easy for most people, and being a stranger and also homeless seems to remove one further away from others.

While the focus of this project was indeed on the homeless, there is throughout an aspect that points to our interactions with those in less fortunate conditions. Each of these photographers' experiences resulted in images, some compelling,

some problematic, that are reflective, like mirrors, of our stance in front of this situation: compassion, connection, indifference, curiosity, fear, guilt, empathy, etc. As much as these pictures confront us with the tragic reality of some of our neighbors, they also remind us of our own reactions or inactions towards someone, somewhere, at some point.

Surprisingly, getting close to someone with honest intentions and real interest leads more often than

we might guess to revelatory, comforting, and enriching experiences. This was, for the most part, the case for the photographers and many of the people they met during this project.

The resulting images were presented as a large scale exhibition during the 10th Biennial Vincentian Chair of Social Justice Conference: “A Focus On The Common Good: Homelessness And The Need For Systematic Change”, during the fall 2017 at St. John’s University.



8th Avenue, 2017.

When I asked him if I could photograph him, he told me I had to pay him in a slightly arrogant and aggressive tone, but I didn’t talk to him further.

© Fernando Zalaya

STEFANIE PERROTTE

“These images were mostly taken from a distance. I wanted to take a step back and capture what these people really look like, from the man who was pretending to sleep on the sidewalk, to the two men sleeping in front of Champs. The husband and wife I photographed were willing to participate as long as they did not have to talk about their stories. They thought their sign said it all. They also did not want to see the photos afterwards. These photos made me realize how bad homelessness has gotten.”



Man Sleeping in Front of Street, Times Square — NY, 7:22pm 09/07/2017.

© Stefanie Perrotte



Husband and Wife, Times Square — NY, 2:18pm 09/28/17.
© Stefanie Perrotte



Champs Sports, Times Square — NY, 8:54pm 09/07/2017.
© Stefanie Perrotte



168th Street Station, Washington Heights — NY, 3:18pm 09/27/2017.
© Stefanie Perrotte

WESLEY MARTINEZ

“This project served as an opportunity to pay greater attention to my surroundings as I went about my day in Queens. It resulted in me noticing aspects of the community which, I had hitherto paid little attention to. The presence of these previously unnoticed experiences gave me insight into the lives of a population that lived under very different circumstances to my own. Notably, the two images titled “Evidence” and “A Late Riser” served as a reminder of the similarities as well as the differences.”



A Late Riser, Utopia Parkway — NY, 2017.

© Wesley Martinez



Justice, Queens County Courthouse — NY, 2017.
© Wesley Martinez



Hidden, Forest Park — NY, 2017.
© Wesley Martinez



Evidence, Forest Park — NY, 2017.
© Wesley Martinez



A Cold Day, Forest Park — NY, 2017.
© Wesley Martinez

JOSEPH DE REGE

“My work was done with the intention of showing that homeless people are just like us. This came with respect, knowing that they are surviving in some of the worst conditions in this country and the world. Of all the people I spoke to, the one who stood out to me the most was Matt at 40th street and 7th avenue. I asked him for a picture and he said, “Should I stand behind my sign?” I told him no, because I just wanted the picture of his face. After I took his picture, he said, “Exploitation. Sell my soul for a fucking dollar.” I was much more hesitant to take a picture after that. I did not think that it would be a big deal, but it was to him.

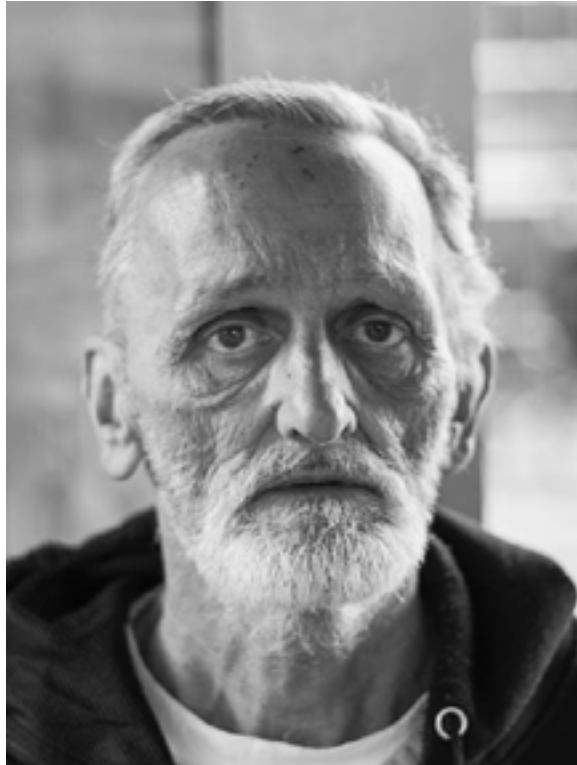
Seeing the work as a whole, I realized that the images didn’t show the people as homeless but rather just as people. This struck me because I understood that I shouldn’t judge people based on whether or not they are homeless. It could happen to anyone. The only difference between them and me is the amount of money I have.”



Corey, 38th and 7th, NYC, 2017.
© Joseph De Rege



Matt, 40th and 7th, NYC, 2017.
“Exploitation. Sell my soul for a fucking dollar.”
© Joseph De Rege



Boddy, 33rd and 7th, NYC, 2017.
He asked me for a copies of the photos,
which I later gave him.
© Joseph De Rege

NOAH LETCAVAGE

“Initially in shooting for this project my goal was to capture the essence of being homeless with candid portraits of the people. It wasn’t until my first time out that I felt uncomfortable searching the streets for homeless individuals to photograph. I would learn after being denied numerous times that they didn’t want to be photographed either. In the past, I have been involved in many homeless outreach programs, getting to know many people whose lives were turned upside down. I believe that because of this I didn’t feel like I was helping anyone with a portrait. I wanted to find another way to show the everyday life of these individuals.

After various heated in class discussions, I decided to change my approach to the more natural and story-telling style of *street photography*. This new light worked wonderfully and enabled the creation of two images that I felt worked very well with my intentions. The first image is of a man in a deep

sleep on a doorway stoop in Greenwich Village. The situation really shows the day-to-day struggle of finding a safe place to sleep and the long day experienced prior. The second image is of two men and two dogs out in front of the deli on 5th avenue and avenue A smoking their loosey cigarettes as I was going in to buy a coffee. The man who runs the deli helps out the people who live in and out of the half-way home nearby, so these men are there almost every day to get cigarettes and whatever food they are given.

I felt it was very difficult to find a respectful and natural way of capturing the life of homeless people in NYC. Even after changing my approach, it continued to be quite difficult and even a little dangerous, but I feel this experience was worthwhile and taught me much, not only as a photographer, but most importantly as a person.”



Man On Stoop, Greenwich Village — NY, 2017.

© Noah Letcavage



Loosey Dogs, East Village — NY, 2017.
© Noah Letcavage



Trash Picking in Chelsea, Chelsea — NY, 2017.
© Noah Letcavage

FERNANDO ZALAYA

“Photographing the homeless was a new experience to tackle. I found it difficult to approach them, much less to speak to them. The stigma of homelessness has always contributed to the sort of fear or intimidation that people may feel towards the homeless, that they’re dangerous in some way or something of the sort. What people tend to forget is that the homeless are just people as well, but in very tough situations. The

individuals I photographed reinforced that fact. The man with the guitar has a life and interests, just like anyone else. We talked about music and guitars and he told me he had gone to see the punk band NOFX more times than he could remember. Their situations and experience make them a bit aggressive to those that may seem to be “privileged” or “better off”, which is natural.”



23rd Street, 2017.

I used to see him most days on my way home from work over the summer. He was always playing his guitar, so I figured he would be an interesting subject to photograph. When I saw him again, I found out his guitar had been stolen while he was sleeping one night.

© Fernando Zalaya



32nd Street, 2017.
© Fernando Zalaya



19th Street, 2017.
When I asked him if I could photograph him, he said yes. Upon thanking him for letting me snap a shot, he went on a rant on how Americans are the real terrorists and that Muslims just want to be left alone.
© Fernando Zalaya

SIETA LEON

“I had never stopped to have a conversation with someone I wanted to photograph let alone someone who was homeless. This made me more conscious and aware of the people who are forced to sit on sidewalks to ask for help because other resources failed them. This made me stop and really think about *how much a dollar cost*, which is the title of a Kendrick Lamar song. The song focuses on the struggle people go through when

determining whether or not to give someone money. So that made me think about how it really isn't much for us to give a dollar or a few dollars to someone who definitely needs it more than we do. If more people were willing to give, think about how much of a difference they could make on an individual's life. Things would be so much better.”



Jeff and Charlie, Upper East Side, 10/9/2017.

Jeff and Charlie have been in the same spot for about a month. Jeff disclosed to me that this is a temporary situation, but it seemed like it's not the first time he's been homeless. He made me promise

that the photographs were only going to be used for the exhibit because the last time someone took a photo of him it ended up on a billboard.

© Sieta Leon



Terrance, Penn Station, 10/1/2017.

Terrance was in the U.S. Navy from 1984 until he was discharged in 1991 when he lost his leg from a gunshot wound. At some point he lost his other leg leaving him confined to a wheelchair. He was living in uptown Manhattan but was

forced out because he could not afford his rent due to gentrification. That was in January and he has been waiting on Veteran Affairs to provide assistance for nine months now. It is uncertain how long he will be waiting.

© *Sieta Leon*

NICK PROSCIA

“Midtown Manhattan Portraits”



Harry and Lucy, Midtown Manhattan, 2017.
© Nicholas Proscia



Ken, Midtown Manhattan, 2017.
© Nicholas Proscia



Douglas, Midtown Manhattan, 2017.
© Nicholas Proscia



Happy 50th, Midtown Manhattan, 2017.
© Nicholas Proscia



Unknown, Midtown Manhattan, 2017.
© Nicholas Proscia