

1995

# The public response to homelessness

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# The Public Response to Homelessness

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Celine-Marie Pascale

December 1995

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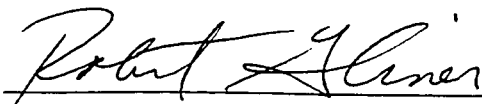
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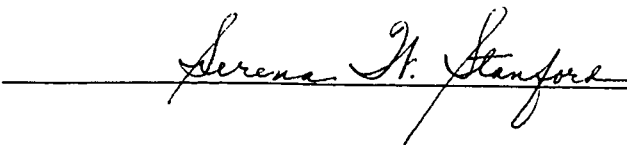
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## ABSTRACT

### THE PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

by Celine-Marie Pascale

This thesis addresses the current crisis of values, perceptions and resources that arises among the non-homeless when confronted with the presence of homeless people. It draws upon the economic, political and philosophical roots of American culture to examine the civic leadership's perceptions of and responses to homelessness between the years 1989 and 1994 in Santa Cruz, California.

This research reveals that a long standing commitment to competitive prosperity, as represented by the mythology of the American Dream, has created a social environment in which it is difficult to perceive homelessness as a violation of the social contract.



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## Introduction

Encountering a homeless person for the first time is often an unsettling experience for more affluent people but seldom is it an experience that draws one into human relationship. Even for the person who drops a bit of change into an outstretched hand, there is rarely any social recognition, any conversation, or personal interaction. The extent to which non-homeless men and women lack an ability to engage with homeless individuals is the extent to which they also tend to experience begging as a personal assault. Passing a gauntlet of panhandlers or the cardboard houses of beggars then violates one's sense of liberty—indeed it is a civil liberty to walk unmolested through public places. There is, however, no comparable legal right to food or shelter.

Our conception of liberties protects us from the encroachment of undesirable others; but it does not guarantee a right to basic survival needs such as food and housing. From this perspective, the presence of homeless people becomes an obstruction to be removed from the paths of more prosperous citizens. Therefore “solutions” to homelessness must include, if not emphasize, programs designed to minimize the visible need of individuals and families who are homeless. Laws created to “protect” citizens from the visible poverty of homelessness reinforce the social partitioning of society.

As a society, we want to believe that poor people are themselves responsible for their own poverty, either because of substance abuse, mental illness, or laziness. Certainly, nothing exacerbates whatever

problems people might have like the lack of food, money, and shelter. Yet to believe that homeless people are responsible for their poverty is to believe that for some mysterious reason, a sizable group of citizens suddenly and simultaneously became irresponsible (Blau 1992). While there have always been economically marginalized people in society, the proliferation of homelessness is a relatively recent phenomena exacerbated by the economic trends established in the mid-1980s.

Research on homeless people largely has focused on demographics. Books and articles continually attempt to explain how many homeless people there are and how they became homeless; the media constantly asks are they local or transient, are they drug-addicted or mentally-ill . . . as if some personal characteristic could be discovered which would explain the desperate poverty of millions of Americans. Less well publicized analyses of national economic trends have offered systemic explanations for the incidence of homelessness. Certainly many people have looked at homelessness from various perspectives but seldom has a study examined society's response to contemporary homelessness. This thesis will examine the public response to homelessness from a sociological and philosophical perspective.

What can be learned by studying the way society responds to the visible poverty of homelessness? Sociology and the sociological study of moral philosophy can tell us not what is right but why people believe that certain things are right. Such a study can reveal the nature of a society, what its needs are, and what tendencies in it are amenable to intervention. It can thus direct us toward lines of action which are sensible and have a chance of success.

It is essential to consider a "public" response to homelessness separately

from a personal response. Certainly there are many individual differences which account for personal responses to homelessness. Fear, for instance, is often named by individuals in casual conversation as a primary emotional response. And clearly, there are reactions which can be explained best by social psychology. But it happens that most all of our intensely “personal” responses to homelessness fit neatly within our culture’s prescription for behavior.

Society is defined by a collection of shared values. What are our society’s prescriptions for behavior and how do they affect our perceptions of and reactions to homelessness? Every society has a variety of personality types ranging from altruistic to greedy but only our society responds as it does to homelessness. To see stark contrasts one needs only consider other countries such as Japan, where homelessness is virtually unknown because of economic, cultural, and political factors; or India, where homelessness is an ingrained and accepted part of society because of economic, cultural, and political factors. It is impossible to extricate political and economic systems from a nation’s cultural beliefs. Homelessness is a cultural phenomena as well as an economic and political one.

To understand contemporary American reactions to homelessness, it is essential to understand the cultural context from which they arise. For instance, why do Americans defend equality among people as a *civil liberty* rather than as a *human right*? We speak of a *civil rights* movement that helped to establish more equitable conditions for African Americans and other people of color, not a *human rights* movement. Are not all people entitled to equal treatment because we are human? Why does the United States actively resist recognizing social and economic needs as human rights?

How does this philosophical environment affect the way local governments perceive and respond to homelessness? The hypothesis of this thesis is that a long-standing devotion to civil liberties, and the competitive prosperity they endorse, has created a social environment in which it is increasingly difficult to perceive homelessness as a violation of a social contract—except perhaps to the extent to which the presence of homelessness interferes with commerce.

The review of the literature establishes a brief context for the developing social and economic trends. U.S. mayors, in their own national survey (1994), identified employment problems as the major cause of homelessness. Yet research shows that the most common response of local governments to homelessness is one of criminalizing the behavior of those who are homeless. How can this apparent contradiction be understood?

In a nation of competitive prosperity, everyone is taught to believe that prosperity and opportunity are “just around the corner” for those who deserve it. Society clings to the American Dream but what is the American reality and how does it differ from the Dream?

The field work for this research turns to Santa Cruz, California, where a community famous for leftist politics has implemented some of the most controversial laws targeting the behavior of homeless people. The interviews are placed in context by a brief section focusing on the economic and social history of Santa Cruz.

# Literature Review

## *Economic Background*

Egalitarianism, as an ideal, seems well established in many areas of American life. We share common rights to vote, emigrate, and to travel. However, there is little evidence or support for economic egalitarianism. Income is less equally distributed in the United States than in any other industrialized country; the United States spends a smaller share of its gross national product on social welfare policies than most other affluent nations.<sup>1</sup> Still, public opinion polls generally indicate little enthusiasm for limiting the amount of money that can be earned and only moderate support for taxing the rich in order to redistribute wealth.

In the American Dream, increased economic prosperity looms in everyone's future: there is no final stopping point, no point of arrival. Like gamblers at slot machines, workers feed the system with their lives, always hoping, sometimes believing, that greater success is imminent, just a few more pulls on the lever and then surely prosperity will be won. At each level of income, Americans strive for about 25 percent more income than they have (Merton, 1957). The measure of monetary success is both indefinite and relative. Believing in the near-limitless possibilities of their own success, no one desires to limit chances of success for those more prosperous than themselves. But what do the odds really look like?

In the spring of 1993, the United Nations released a report announcing that white Americans enjoy the highest standard of living on earth, but the

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion see: Kerbo, Harold R. (1991). *Social Stratification and Inequality*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.



quality of life for African Americans and Latinos, on average, approximates that of residents of Trinidad and Tobago. The same could be said for many women who are single heads of households. In 1991, 47.1 percent of all female-headed households with children under 18 lived below the federal poverty line ( Committee on Ways and Means, 1993).

Sixteen percent of all Americans, or 39.7 million people, live at or below the poverty line established by the federal government (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992). Today, the federal poverty line for a family of four is \$14,000. However, the realities of daily life clearly set a different definition of poverty. Just what does the national poverty line represent? Formulated in the 1960s at the birth of the War on Poverty, this measure starts with the idea that poverty signifies the inability of families to afford the basic necessities. The calculation begins with the minimum amount of money needed to buy food that would meet minimum nutritional requirements. At the time that the poverty line was set, food made up one-third of a family budget; consequently, the federal poverty line was set at three times the cost of the minimal food budget. For a family of four in 1970 the official poverty line was \$3,968; in 1980, it had risen to \$8,414. By the early 1980s, however, the cost of food had fallen to about one-fifth of the average family budget. Correctly calculated by the original standard, the poverty line in 1980 should have been \$14,000—60 percent higher than was claimed.

By 1994, when the federal poverty line officially reached \$14,000 it had become completely meaningless. The basic calculations for the federal poverty line have not been adjusted since it was developed thirty years ago; since then, the cost of food has dropped to one-sixth of the family budget (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992). Having lost its connection with the original concept of poverty, the government's official poverty line now has no solid

tie to reality. An American family of four earning as much as 155 percent of the official federal poverty line (\$21,700) is not self-sufficient by the definition of poverty.

If the original principles used to develop the federal poverty line were applied today, the view would shift dramatically. Assuming that one-third of the Federal poverty line (\$4,667) is the minimum annual cost of food for a family of four and food is now one-sixth of the total family budget, a federal poverty line \$28,000, or six times the cost of food for a family of four, would be more consistent with the original intent and methodology.

The U. S. Department of Labor uses a low-income, or poverty-line budget based on the cost of living for a family of four (costs of all necessities are priced out). The lower family budget was 166 percent of the poverty line in 1990, roughly \$23,000. "The actual number of Americans experiencing working poverty is more than double the official estimates including family members, nearly 30 million people—the equivalent of every man woman, and child residing in the nation's twenty-five largest cities—live in this condition, and this describes the situation in America during favorable economic times. During recession, the tragedy worsens" (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992, pp. 3-4).

According to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1993) the median income for white families in 1991 was \$37,783; for African American families it was \$21,548 and for Latino families, \$23,895. While the median income was once associated with the middle class, for African American and Latino families, it has become synonymous with poverty. In 1991:

- 29.7 percent of white families earned less than \$25, 000 (7.3 percent of white families earned less than \$10,000).

- 55.9 percent of African-American families earned less than \$25, 000 (26.4 percent of African American families earned less than \$10,000).
- 52.2 percent of Latino families earned less than \$25, 000 (18.8 percent of Latino families earned less than \$10,000).

Race, like gender, is clearly a strong factor in disparate rates of pay and consequently, level of poverty. “It is noteworthy that no matter what the level of the worker's educational credentials, race and gender nearly always made some difference in the rate of economic sufficiency” (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992, p. 74). However, because they are so dominant in the work force, white males head the largest group of working poor households.

Whether one recalculates the federal poverty line to place an annual food budget in perspective, or uses the Labor Department's low economy budget, the number of Americans experiencing poverty is at least double the official government estimate of 39.7 million—79.4 million, or one-third of all Americans live in poverty. Two parents working full-time at minimum wage jobs earn only \$16, 320 in pre-tax income. Employed at the median hourly wage for production and nonsupervisory workers (\$10.02/hour, or \$20, 841 a year), a full-time worker does not earn enough to reach the threshold of self-sufficiency for a family of four. Twenty-one thousand dollars a year is not a comfortable family wage, but almost 25 percent of all workers currently earn *three-quarters or less* of this amount (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992). The Labor Department reports that seven million people now need more than one job in order to survive.

When the United States Conference of Mayors released *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1994*, the dispute over the numbers of poor people and their needs came into focus from yet another

perspective. The annual report included statistics on homelessness and hunger drawn from surveys commissioned in thirty cities. The mayors found that in 90 percent of the cities, emergency food assistance programs were relied upon by families and individuals as a steady source of food over long periods of time; and, 53 percent of the cities surveyed reported that emergency food programs were unable to provide an adequate quantity of food (United States Conference of Mayors, 1994, p. 1). The mayors cited unemployment and other employment-related problems as the most common cause of hunger. Indeed, recent years have been no friend to the worker. Not only are more workers being laid-off, fewer workers are rebounding back into the labor force.

In 1988, 1.5 million workers were laid-off; two years later, in 1990, 22 percent of those workers were still left out of the labor force (Committee on Ways and Means, 1993). By 1993, the United States was averaging more than 2,000 job layoffs a day. While high paying jobs are being lost, they are quickly being replaced with jobs in service industries where both wages and the chance for promotion are low. Over-qualified workers then displace the workers at jobs below their skill and salary levels in a domino effect that both pushes qualified workers onto the sidewalk and inflates skill requirements for jobs. *Fortune Magazine* reported in 1992 that 78 percent of new jobs were in the service sector; most of those jobs were for janitors or maids. Not surprisingly, 25.7 percent of American workers in 1992 held low-wage jobs.

The success of capitalism depends upon a large pool of poor people who can be used as cheap labor and thus ensure high profit margins. Structural unemployment has been long established as an essential component of capitalism which induces workers to tolerate low wages and poor working

conditions. If poverty was once associated with the absence of work, today that is no longer true. In the late twentieth century, the success of capitalism draws upon a substantial number of marginally employed workers: those who work several part-time jobs, those who are employed through temporary agencies, and those who are under-employed. These workers maximize corporate profits because they are entitled only to minimal wages and benefits; they have become a disposable workforce clinging to the last economic rung above homelessness.

The pursuit of private wealth has not produced "the good society." Instead, 79.4 million Americans have worked their way into poverty. Recent trends which have increased corporate profit while placing millions of workers at economic risk include: the move to offshore production for a broad range of industries, reducing the number of workers without reducing the work load of the company, and restructuring to eliminate middle-management positions. Public and corporate policies to increase profits, not personal defects, are devastating the standard of living for 40 percent of the nation's workers. In addition, these policies are producing millions of poor and homeless people who can't be counted or tracked through the government systems. Clearly, this level of economic distress can not be solved by philanthropy on any scale.

### *Demographics of Homelessness*

The size of the homeless population in the United States remains a topic of contentious debate. Extrapolating from the number of homeless people receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the

California Homeless and Housing Coalition (CHHC) calculates that one million people are homeless in the state of California alone—a full three percent of California's population (personal communication, September 15, 1994). Using the same process, the Coalition estimates that one to three percent of the general population is homeless at any given time. By this method of calculation, the number of homeless individuals in the United States ranges between 2.5 and 7.2 million people in any given year. The most rapidly growing homeless population is that of women and children. CHHC also estimates that 25-30 percent of all homeless populations are families.

U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Henry Cisneros, told the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour (May 16, 1994) that between 1985 and 1990, seven million Americans experienced homelessness. By contrast, Christopher Jencks, in his book, *The Homeless*, estimates the number of homeless people to be as low as 324,000.

One thing most experts seem to agree on, is that the number of Americans unable to afford housing is expected to dramatically increase in the next six years. Women and children head the rosters as the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. To avoid homelessness and reduce expenses, many people are doubling-up and sharing housing. The *Statistical Abstract of the United States* shows that in the years 1989-1990, 41.6 percent of renter-occupied housing units were shared with another householder, as compared with 4.2 percent before 1969.

Homeless people may stay from time to time with friends or family but doubling-up is often only a temporary solution, particularly for families. The options are bleak. Shelters, because of disease, crime, and a lack of privacy, often are seen as a last resort. They tend to be used only by

homeless people who have lost their stamina for making homes in subway tunnels, parks or abandoned buildings. Many homeless families drift between life on the street and welfare hotels.

If there was any doubt that homelessness is a large-scale, national problem, the U. S. Conference of Mayors eliminated that doubt with their 1994 report. While people identified in the survey typically remained homeless for an average length of nine months, three-quarters of the cities surveyed said the average length of time people spend being homeless increased during the last year. As for the cause of homelessness, the Conference of Mayors reported that the three leading causes of homelessness are: unemployment, low wages, and other employment-related problems. Other frequently cited causes are: a lack of affordable housing, family crisis, substance abuse, mental illness, and the lack of corresponding services.

Requests for assisted housing for low-income families and individuals increased over the past year in 85 percent of the cities. An average of 28 percent of eligible, low-income households currently are assisted by housing programs. Clearly, there is a lack of low-income housing; 63 percent of the cities have stopped accepting applications for one or more housing programs because the waiting lists have become too long. Currently the *average* waiting period for Section Eight vouchers is 35 months; however, in Chicago it is 96 months; in San Francisco, the wait is 84 months. San Francisco estimated that it had met only 5 percent of its housing needs in 1994 but stopped accepting applications for assisted housing because the waiting lists were too long.

Requests for shelter are on the rise, with the fastest growing need

among families. According to the Mayors report, families with children account for 77 percent of the homeless population in Trenton and 74 percent in New York City. Homeless families comprised an average of 39 percent of the homeless populations surveyed. Alexandria, Virginia, maintains what is considered a high ratio of shelter beds (19.1 for every 10,000 residents) but still faces situations where demand for beds exceeds capacity. Most cities (71 percent) expect requests for emergency shelter both by families and individuals to increase in 1995.

As one might expect, cities with a high population of African Americans have large numbers of homeless African Americans. For instance, Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis report that African Americans comprise 80 percent of the homeless population (United States Conference of Mayors, 1994). The racial composition of homeless populations reflects that of the surrounding housed population. Whites account for a majority of the homeless population in Salt Lake, Louisville, and Portland (United States Conference of Mayors, 1994).

When asked what were the most important actions the federal government could take to address the income needs of homeless people, the Conference of Mayors identified: raising the minimum wage, expanding job creation efforts, expanding job training, and increasing benefit levels of public assistance programs. (The absence of requests for additional subsidized housing was not addressed by the report.) The federal wish list has much to tell us in light of the local government's responses to homelessness.



### *Local Governments Respond to Visible Poverty*

In 1994, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty published a study of local government responses to homelessness in 49 U.S. cities. The survey showed that 42 of the cities pursued efforts to criminalize activities associated with homelessness—most common have been restrictions on basic human activities such as sleeping and sitting.

Berkeley's new anti-loitering law makes it illegal to loiter for more than three minutes in a one block radius around laundromats, parks, recreation centers, and other property. If a person refuses to leave the area when requested to do so by police, they can be arrested and charged with a misdemeanor—"intent to buy sell or use drugs." San Francisco spent 450 police hours and \$11,000 to arrest 15 people for begging in 1993 (Howland, 1994). In Martinsburg, Florida, begging has been illegal since 1990 and is punishable by a \$500 fine. In Richmond, Virginia, beggars are required to purchase a license.

Typical examples of hostility directed toward homeless people by local governments include: efforts to "remove" homeless people from specific areas of the city, restrictions on sitting on the sidewalk, loitering, leaning against buildings, and sleeping. Some cities regulate the language people use when panhandling, the places where one can panhandle, whether one must stand or sit when panhandling, use a sign or not, and the number of people who can panhandle together. In Santa Cruz, California, it is a criminal offense to tell a lie when panhandling (e.g., asking for money for food that later gets spent on cigarettes). Cities also commonly apply standing laws unfairly; for instance, homeless people may be ticketed for jaywalking more often than wealthier pedestrians. In addition, park

officials may enforce park rules strictly, denying camping privileges to homeless people, while applying the same rules more loosely to other groups such as the Boy Scouts.

Faced with contemporary homelessness, most local governments and business communities express two primary fears. The first of these is that if the city were to provide needed services for homeless people, the city would become a magnet, drawing homeless people from all parts of the country to enjoy the benefits. The city, as a “mecca” for homeless people would find its businesses destroyed and city funds depleted. This fear in particular was articulated by many local leaders in Santa Cruz. On the surface, this may be a compelling point of view; however, there is no research to confirm it. To the contrary, national estimates calculating the numbers of out-of-state homeless people parallel the census figures for housed people who were not born in the state (Rosenthal, 1994). Census data indicate that roughly 40 percent of the housed population were not born in their present state of residence (Rosenthal, 1994). Estimates for homeless people show that a similar number were also born in other states. There is no evidence to indicate that people move to another state for benefits after they have become homeless (Blau, 1992). The fear of becoming a magnet for homeless people reflects a particular perspective about the cause of homelessness and the character of homeless people.

The more important question behind the fear of becoming a “magnet city” is: *Why* do homeless people move? The answer for homeless people is about the same as the answer for more prosperous residents: climate, the presence of family or friends and job opportunities. There is no evidence that homeless people are drawn to services. “*Within* metropolitan areas homeless people may move from surrounding suburbs into central cities

where welfare, shelters, and employment are to be found, a rational coping strategy. But no data collected to date show that social services cause homeless people to undertake major relocations" (Rosenthal, 1994, p. 144). It would seem that potential job opportunities are a greater draw for poor people than services; a rational concept which debunks much of the current thinking about "magnet cities."

The other common and prominent issue for local governments is the general cost of providing services to homeless people. Cities argue that they cannot afford to fund services for homeless people. In Santa Cruz, Mayor Scott Kennedy went so far as to write to the Grateful Dead for financial support for homeless services. The mayor claimed that because so many of the local homeless population were "Dead Heads" that the band should help pick up the tab for supporting them.

The argument that cities are too poor to help the desperately poor is somewhat of a shell game. Most local governments already are spending significant amounts of money on homelessness unknowingly and unsuccessfully. Program budgets which aren't specifically or exclusively aimed at homelessness often are strongly affected by homelessness (Rosenthal, 1994). For instance, police enforcement, health care, child protective services, alcohol treatment programs, and court costs are just a few of the services whose budgets could be reduced by creating effective programs to serve people who are homeless. By increasing spending on services, cities could reduce expenditures in other areas. The rising numbers of homeless children forewarn a dramatically increasing need for effective services to prevent devastating social costs. A survey conducted by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (1995) revealed that there are 980 children known to be homeless enrolled in school; 12 percent of these are

youths unaccompanied by an adult. There are many more homeless youths unaccompanied by adults who are not in school. Many of these children turn to prostitution for financial support and to drugs for comfort. There is a generation of young people growing up in exile from society as homeless persons.

Given the continuing lack of national support, local efforts can only try to manage homelessness rather than eradicate it. In the end, every budget comes down to priorities, not just dollars. As a nation, we spend three cents on housing for every dollar spent on defense; we spend fifteen cents on housing for every dollar spent on the S & L bailout. ("Where Has All the Money Gone?" *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, April 1990, p. 12.) A simple declaration by the federal government of the right of all people to housing would have a profound effect on public discourse. But, our Constitution does not guarantee housing.

News media often attribute the increased prevalence of anti-homeless city legislation and police actions to an angry public, besieged by panhandlers. In New York, businesses have launched advertising campaigns that portray the housed citizens, whom panhandlers ask for help, as victims who have every right to be selfish and annoyed. In fact, the criminalization of activities associated with homelessness is more closely linked to the local business community than to local residents. Opinion polls commonly contradict the media's representation. A national opinion poll conducted by Paul Toro and Manuel Manrique at Wayne State University found that, in the Spring of 1994, 65 percent of the public (both Republicans and Democrats) would pay higher taxes to fund aid for homeless people. Other polls have placed this figure as high as 81 percent. There seems to be an distinct gap between the opinions of individual

residents and the actions of local governments. Perhaps this gap would be understood better by examining the influence of business and media interests.

Of the 49 cities in the National Law Center's survey, six adopted both alternative and criminalization approaches; seven exclusively adopted alternative approaches. Dade County Florida, for instance, adopted an alternative approach by implementing a one percent sales tax on restaurant meals at restaurants grossing over \$400,000. All revenues from this tax are used to fund facilities and services for homeless people. In its first year (1993) the tax raised \$7 million dollars (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1994). Unfortunately, there is a disproportionate emphasis on shelter rather than affordable housing. In the first year of the program, 80 percent of the meal tax money was slated to build three very large shelters housing 500 beds each. While some argue that providing shelters is less expensive than providing housing, \$5.6 million dollars could provide nearly 1,500 homes worth \$50,000 each. Critics of the meal tax program assert that it is aimed at removing homeless people from city streets, rather than creating long term solutions. The drive to remove homeless people from public view is closely associated with local efforts to revitalize or gentrify neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, the strongest proponents of the large shelter or "warehouse" concept have been civic and business groups.

The 49 cities surveyed by the National Law Center had a number of significant circumstances in common in addition to their responses to homelessness. By the cities' own accounts, in virtually no instance were emergency shelters sufficient to meet the existing needs of homeless people (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1994). The survey also

reported that no one living on a federal minimum wage job could afford fair market rent in these cities. Others unable to afford fair market rents in these cities include persons living on Supplementary Security Income (SSI) and one-parent families of three living on AFDC. (See the chart in Appendix A.)

Given the lack of available shelter, it is important to reiterate that anti-sleeping laws have been among the most common legislation passed. The national average ratio of homeless people to shelter beds is ten to one, leaving nine out of ten homeless people with no sheltered place to lay their heads. Anti-sleeping ordinances or camping bans generally make it illegal to sleep out of doors or in a vehicle between 10:00 PM and 8:30 AM. In the absence of sufficient affordable housing and shelter, homeless people *literally* have nowhere to go. If they sleep on private property they are trespassing; if they sleep on public property they also are subject to criminal charges.

The result of such legislation is to force homeless people farther away from highly visible locations. While housed people may feel safer with poverty out of sight, homeless people in general, and homeless women in particular, are at increased danger of assault, battery, and rape in areas less protected by general visibility.

In the absence of adequate shelter, penalizing homeless people for sleeping in public would seem to violate the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on punishing status. In San Francisco, the municipal court rejected the argument that the failure of the city to provide sufficient shelter rendered homelessness a status. The court held that "status cannot be defined as a function of the discretionary acts of others." The court continued: "Homelessness is not readily classified as a status because it is

not necessarily an involuntary acquired quality and the individual has control over the characteristic" (*Joyce v San Francisco*, 846 F. Supp. [843 N.D. Ca. 1994]).

Clearly this opinion is spoken in the language of the American Dream: whosoever tries, can succeed; failure to succeed is only proof that honest effort is lacking. Lawyers continue to argue that homelessness is in fact a status since all people must sleep and current laws make it impossible for homeless people to do so without breaking the law. Without adequate shelter, a homeless person has no real choice. Regardless of the root cause of homelessness, once homeless, a person's life-sustaining activities become criminalized.

Common beliefs about fairness tell us the court is wrong, yet local legislation continues to be aimed at controlling the behavior of homeless people rather than at eliminating their plight. Many people will sympathize with the plight of the person standing before a judge for having fallen asleep, but the fact remains that society seems to experience homelessness as an assault rather than as a catastrophe.

Piven and Cloward (1965, 1971, 1977) explain government action and inaction regarding poverty in terms of control rather than compassion. Piven and Cloward assert that historically the role of government assistance to poor people has consistently operated from an agenda of quelling turmoil that disrupts business instead of a program designed to genuinely address human need. Indeed, this perspective is difficult to dispute historically; whether one considers striking workers, the New Deal, or the War on Poverty it is clear that government intervention has been a response to unrest, not poverty.

While historical parallels are fraught with dangers, history can teach

general lessons well enough to suggest certain precedents. In the face of mass homelessness the government has responded in the 1980s and 1990s as it did in the 1930s—sheltering homeless people has become an industry that replaces affordable housing with a cot and a meal. Public perception remains directed by business and government interests and we are asked to blame those who are unable to help themselves. Today millions of Americans live in subway tunnels, sleep on park benches, and sort through garbage in search of food. Our political reflex responds to mass turmoil but is apparently numb to mass poverty. Here, the work of Piven and Cloward must be expanded to include a broader philosophical analysis.

### *Daily Life: The Intersection of Philosophy and Perception*

Most studies on poverty have attempted to understand why people become poor and why some remain poor while others do not. Far fewer studies have examined the attitudes and perceptions of nonpoor people toward poor people. Perception itself is not a stagnant or innocent act. People do not perceive events the way a camera lens perceives and records them.

Human perception is an experience, not an image (Hartman, 1984). Personal experience and beliefs act as the hands behind the lens focusing the view to our own specifications, our own sense of balance. One person “sees” social misfits, indolent people lacking in motivation, another “sees” unfortunate victims of a society that creates and fosters conditions of poverty. Both of these views might be held by compassionate, sensitive people but the difference between them, one of attribution, is critical.



In the mid-1960s, various researchers began to note the tendency of people to blame the victims of misfortunes for their own fates. Lerner (1965) formulated the just world hypothesis which asserts that individuals need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve. Without such a belief it would be difficult to commit oneself to long-term goals or even to regulate day-to-day living. As a consequence of perceived interdependence (if others can suffer unjustly, then so can I), individuals are quick to restore the perception of justice to any situation. One way of accomplishing this is to compensate the victim; another is to persuade oneself that the victim deserves to suffer (Lerner & Miller 1978). From this it follows that for the sake of one's own sense of security, individuals may choose to avoid or condemn injustices, or they may find reasons to condemn the victims. People generally want to believe that the world is constructed so that terrible things happen to people who deserve them.

"We can arrive, then, at the prediction that innocent and 'helpless' observers who are confronted with prima facie evidence of someone's undeserved suffering will be increasingly likely to reject that victim as a function of the degree of injustice associated with the victim's fate" (Lerner, 1980, pp. 55-56). In situations of injustice where no remedy is immediately obvious, observers persuade themselves that the victim deserves to suffer either through some act of poor judgment or some character flaw. The victim is perceived then to be responsible for their plight and consequently there is no need to come to their aid. If one sees the victim as deserving of his or her fate, there is no implicit threat to the image of one's self as a good citizen for failure to intervene, no sense of impotence at being unable to intervene, no risk to one's safety or resources.

There are situations in which observers are not completely helpless to come to the aid of someone suffering unfairly but their investment in maintaining their own status prevents them from interfering. Typically, such a person is solidly middle-class with a reasonably good job, house, and car (Ryan, 1984). Although such a person may find fault with the system, basically, he or she likes the social system pretty much the way it is, at least in broad outline. Because such a person basically approves of the system as it is, there is an intense inner conflict when he or she becomes aware of acute poverty or other injustice. Such a person is unable to side with an openly reactionary, repressive position that accepts continued oppression and exploitation since this is incompatible with one's own morality (Ryan, 1984). However, the "extreme" solution of radical social change must be rejected since such change threatens his or her own well being—it might mean that he or she would have less. Even while such people want to help the victims, they cannot bring themselves to attack the system that has been so good to them. Their solution is to analyze the victims to find a way to fix them (Ryan, 1984).

In studying how nonpoor people evaluate poor people, researchers in the mid-60s began to explore Max Weber's Protestant work ethic both independently and in conjunction with Lerner's just world belief. According to Weber's Protestant Work Ethic asceticism, hard work, and consequently wealth, are evidence of one's being favored by god. Some researchers tested a causal relationship between the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) and vocations (Mirels & Garrett, 1971) while others extrapolated tests of the ethics of personal conscience and social responsibility (MacDonald, Jr., 1971). Ultimately, the combination of such work showed that individuals who adhere to a Protestant Work Ethic place a premium

on fulfilling duties and tend to blame individual people, rather than the system, for poverty.

MacDonald's work in 1972 showed that endorsement of the Protestant Work Ethic was directly related to negative attitudes toward the poor and opposition to a guaranteed minimum annual income. MacDonald (1972) controlled for age, education, and religion in his study and consistently found that the PWE had a high correlation to authoritarianism and to negative attitudes toward poor people. Those who strongly endorse the Protestant Work Ethic are negative in their attitudes toward the poor. When controlling for gender, the relationship was much stronger for men than for women. Unfortunately the sample sizes for religion were too small to be of use.

However, in a study by Rubin and Peplau (1975), researchers found that those who believed in a just world tended to be more religious and more authoritarian than nonbelievers. They were also found to admire political leaders, to trust social institutions, and to have negative attitudes toward underprivileged groups. In line with this work, Furnham and Bland (1983) extended the work of MacDonald (1972) and others by investigating the relationship of PWE and general conservative beliefs held by a population of British adults. Furnham and Bland found that while the Protestant Work Ethic may no longer be related to specific religious beliefs, it is clearly related to socio-political beliefs. Those beliefs are quite similar to the beliefs identified by Lerner's just world hypothesis. In particular, as they relate to attitudes toward poverty, there is a common theme between the Protestant Work Ethic as described by Weber and the just world belief articulated by Lerner.

<b>Table 1 Central Themes: Protestant Work Ethic and Just World Belief</b>	
<b>Protestant Work Ethic</b>	<b>Just World Belief</b>
God is in control of everything. There are no accidents.	Nothing in life is arbitrary. It is an orderly universe.
Destiny is predetermined.	Sooner or later, everyone gets what they deserve.
It is every person's duty to god work hard.	You get what you earn. There's no free lunch.
Wealth and success are signs of god's blessing.	Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.
Poverty, illness, and misfortune are signs of being out of favor with god.	Poverty, illness, and misfortune are evidence of bad choices or personal flaws.

A cornerstone of conservatism is the notion of individual choice and responsibility. Not surprisingly, Furnham and Gunter (1984) found that demographics which correlated with the just world belief and the Protestant Work Ethic supported conservative ideologies. The individuals who were strong supporters of a just world belief (and the Protestant Work Ethic) tended to be economically secure, better educated, older men who voted along conservative lines. The results of their experiment "concur with previous studies which suggest that those with a more individualistic perspective on social and economic phenomena tend to blame the poor for their plight and as a result have negative attitudes toward them" (Furnham & Gunter, 1984, p. 286).

Public beliefs about poverty and attitudes toward poverty occupy a central place in the nation's sponsorship of welfare and assistance programs. Americans, in particular, hold very strong attitudes toward the

poor—the Protestant Work Ethic and belief in a just world are two very strong and stable examples. Kluegel (1987) showed that hard economic times, as well as times of economic stagflation, do not affect people's general attitudes toward poverty. Kluegel's work supports Lerner's and others at a particularly key point. Kluegel found that, in general, welfare spending attitudes did not respond consistently to change in either unemployment or inflation rates. This would seem to indicate a strong, underlying belief system that remained constant during those times.

Of course this does not mean individuals consciously express belief in the Protestant Work Ethic or a just world when confronted with extreme poverty. More often, these ideologies are the fertile soil for arguments which attribute poverty to personal, rather than systemic causes. Aside from believing that homelessness is a deserved punishment, observers may romanticize homeless people as the embodiment of a free spirit for whom homelessness is a lifestyle, not a hardship. It is almost a cliché in our culture to consider the poverty-stricken or even the relatively deprived as having their own compensating rewards. "They are actually happy in their own way." Other reactions include the denial of blatant need by believing that the lives of homeless people are improving and there is no need for interference. Often homeless people simply are excluded from the definition of community; consequently, ordinary moral standards are not applied.

The fact that many homeless people are not actively searching for work and that some others claim to have chosen homelessness would seem to support conservative notions that poverty is the consequence of personal rather than systemic factors. The government and individual responses to these homeless people has been especially harsh. Here, it is claimed, are

people who deserve no sympathy because they do not even try to better themselves. What must one's options in life look like in order for one to choose homelessness? To prefer eating out of dumpsters and sleeping in the cold and rain? To what options are these fates preferred?

A homeless person's disdain for a society that rejects him or her might be understood in terms of that society's conception of pride, dignity, and independence (Goffman, 1963). There is more dignity in seeing oneself as a rebel rather than as a reject. It is certainly less painful to refuse to want what one has lost, than to struggle for a goal one feels incapable of reaching. Aspirations, after all, reflect an individual's view of what his or her own chances are for getting ahead (MacLeod, 1987).

Since Americans are taught by their schools, the mass media, and political rhetoric that America is the land of equal opportunity, the poor are apt to attribute their condition to their own failings. "This view of themselves as unworthy is further supported by cues from governmental practices toward them which place in question their morality, ambition, and competence. As a result, the poor in America have typically been meek and acquiescent, requiring less coercion and less in benefits than has been true in other developed countries" (Deutsch, 1985, p. 52).

Many homeless people do lack motivation to change their circumstances; they tend to quickly reconcile themselves to their plight. Devoting one's energy to survival, finding food, shelter, safety, toilets, and so forth, may be a more intelligent way to spend one's energy than applying for work without benefit of a shower, an address, or phone number. The choice to not look for work can only be understood in the context of trying to escape homelessness in a housing market which demands \$1500 to pay "first, last, and deposit" (Rosenthal, 1994). Many homeless people will not

take jobs that offer no imminent hope for getting off of the streets.

Poverty is cruel, but a continuing struggle to escape that is consistently frustrated is more cruel. There is a high risk associated with outreach and a high penalty for failure when self-esteem is all that one has left. It is, in many ways, more intelligent as well as more practical that people reconcile themselves to what seems inevitable.

Based on past experience, poor people often do reconcile themselves to what seems inevitable (Galbraith, 1979). Yet, the lack of interest and motivation among homeless people is often perceived as laziness and further proof that poor people deserve to be poor. Such a perception reflects an underlying belief that deprivation does not have any fundamental impact on an individual's world views or values.

Housed people generally assume that homeless people have middle-class values and aspirations. But unlike people born into poverty, those who "fall" into poverty tend to turn away from the American Dream, as a battered spouse might turn away from her batterer. Unfortunately, this prevalent disdain for "the system" among homeless people often alienates service providers and others who might otherwise be more sympathetic.

At any point in history it is possible to identify marginalized people who have been treated harshly and not seen as full members in society. Their suffering may elicit pity but, because it is believed to be deserved suffering, it seldom elicits change. Other common rationalizations which prevent fundamental change include declaring the situation so hopeless and overwhelming that nothing can be done to make a difference. Or, as common, the observer believes he or she is doing all that is possible without making himself or herself into a victim.

Americans are taught to believe that as individuals they, and they

alone, are responsible for their fate. Friends or family may be called upon in times of hardship, but nothing should be expected from one's community or government. There is an assumption that friends and family should and would come to the aid of homeless individuals *if they deserved help*. The assumption follows that a homeless person must not be able to maintain relationships with friends and family and hence be even less deserving of a stranger's help.

Many people are saved from life on the streets precisely because they are receiving help from friends and family. Some people stay for one or two nights with one friend and then move onto another person's home for a few more nights. Hence, this kind of support, sometimes referred to as "couch surfing" actually shields homeless people from public visibility. Other people move in temporarily with friends or family members. In Watsonville, California, where seasonal work and low pay commonly displaces field and cannery workers, as many as 40 people may share a single house in lean times. The support of friends and family keeps many homeless people off the streets and virtually invisible to mainstream society. But what is one to do if one's friends and family are also poor?

Many people living on the streets have lost contact with family and former friends, but most often they lose contact after becoming homeless rather than before (Rosenthal, 1994). The American Dream is part of the ideology which makes poor people feel responsible for and ashamed of their fate. One reason it is so hard to maintain former relationships is that an individual's conception of what he or she is entitled to is influenced by the dominant ideologies and myths (Deutsch, 1985). The American Dream, like the Protestant Work Ethic is devoted to the belief that in a just world people who behave deservingly are rewarded. The following table



compares Weber's Protestant Work Ethic, Lerner's theory of a just world belief and the American Dream.

<b>Table 2 Central Themes: Weber, Lerner, and the American Dream</b>		
<b>Protestant Work Ethic</b>	<b>Just World Belief</b>	<b>American Dream</b>
God is in control of everything. There are no accidents.	Nothing in life is arbitrary. It is an orderly universe.	Everything is fair and everyone has an equal chance.
Destiny is predetermined.	Everyone gets what they deserve.	You can't keep a good man down.
It is every person's duty to god work hard.	You get what you earn. There's no free lunch.	You get what you earn and earn what you get.
Wealth and success are signs of god's blessing.	Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.	Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.
Poverty, illness, and misfortune are signs of being out of favor with god.	Poverty, illness and misfortune are evidence of bad choices or personal flaws.	Poverty, illness, and misfortune are evidence of bad choices or personal flaws.

There are many ways to explain how individuals arrive at this level of confidence that hard work will be rewarded. For instance, childhood myths and fairytales emphasize that rewards follow from virtue and that misbehavior ultimately is punished. Heroes and heroines are virtuous, diligent and beautiful; villains are evil, lazy and ugly—it is as if our minds seek some kind of balance by putting all positive traits into the same object and all the negative into another. Such representations help to establish a

belief that the rich deserve to be rich because they are in some way superior people and similarly the poor deserve to be poor.

The process of socialization teaches children to respect authority and that power and prestige are signs of merit. While many children learn to believe in a just world, some adults often later adopt other views of the world. Religious beliefs are strongly correlated with the Protestant Work Ethic and belief in a just world, but it also seems likely that some people believe in a just world governed by fate, rather than a deity.

Certainly, the easiest way for more affluent people to protect such confidence in a just world is to never allow it to be tested or confronted with evidence: One doesn't go into poor neighborhoods or make a practice of getting to know homeless people. The United States is a highly segregated society which makes this quite easy. From such a limited vantage point it is simple to avoid reality and assume "it will all work out in the long run." Denial only requires viewing information selectively—it is not a direct distortion of reality. Similarly, such segregation prevents poor people from seeing just how wealthy some others are. Living in substantial social and economic isolation, it is easy for poor people to believe that disparities in income can be justified by levels of skill or education.

Belief in a just world was approached from another perspective by Zuckerman (1975) in research that showed that in a time of need, those who hold just world beliefs were more inclined than others to do good deeds in an attempt to make themselves more deserving of a better fate. When subjects felt uncertain of some future event (pending exams were used in the experiment) they frequently engaged in unrelated "altruistic" behavior—if they believed in a just world. Only in times of personal need

did people in Zuckerman's study (1975) go out of their way to help others. This suggests that both rejecting victims and helping victims can be related to the same psychological construct.

The quantitative analysis presented in Appendix B views the Protestant Work Ethic, belief in a just world, and the American Dream as metaphors for a class experience. Based on the General Social Survey (GSS) for 1991, the research articulates a definite, but not definitive, relationship between belief in the American Dream and attitudes toward poverty and the redistribution of wealth. Cornerstones of the American Dream, such as home ownership, show a strong correlation with attitudes toward poverty.

In the last ten years homelessness has become an acceptable part of society. Unlike the cataclysmic unemployment of the thirties which displaced one-quarter of the workforce in four years, real wages and family income have been steadily declining over the past fifteen years. Having had time to gradually become accustomed to the presence of homeless people, homelessness itself is not viewed as a crisis. Once desperate poverty becomes embedded in daily life, as homelessness has become, more privileged people come to believe that efforts to overcome such poverty are both futile and costly (Deutsch, 1985). A well-meaning and well-informed majority become besieged by fear and a lack of hope as the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" grows ever wider and harder to span.

A kind individual may contribute a few dollars to a homeless person begging on a corner, but it is rare for housed people to have conversations, much less make relationships, with homeless people. Even when compassion exists, there is little or no social recognition. This certainly provides some emotional insulation but at what cost? Are we losing our potential for social rather than individual survival as we seem to have lost

our ability to advocate for social betterment while struggling for personal advancement?

### *Philosophical Background*

As a nation, Americans have learned to believe that in a free society people showing individual responsibility and diligence will get ahead. In a nation that lacks a common ethnicity, belief in the American Dream provides some sense of cohesive social identity (Parenti, 1978). What other belief do we share as a nation but the American dream? The mythology of the American Dream is our shared birthright in a kaleidoscope of difference (Parenti, 1978). At its core is a belief in inclusion. It is a belief that everyone can succeed.

Our roots in a Lockean ideology anchor us to a vision of society in which individuals are free to make their own way. The framers of the Constitution, however, clearly intended the Constitution to be applied to those inside their own social sphere (white, propertied men) rather than to all citizens. Sixty-nine percent of the signers of the Declaration of Independence had held colonial office under England—they were merchants and businessmen who had rebelled against the crown in order to be free to do business as they chose (Fresia, 1988). In Massachusetts, the new Constitutions of 1776 to 1780 actually *increased* property qualifications for voting and in Maryland, 90 percent of the population was excluded from holding office because of property qualifications (Fresia, 1988).

The narrower one's scope of community, the narrower will be the scope of situations that are governed by considerations of justice. Historically, this

has meant that the poor and discriminated-against ethnic groups have not been included in the collectivity that makes up the “real” society. They are not considered, and often do not consider themselves, part of ordinary society (Rainwater, 1984).

So while Adam Smith saw the market for obtaining wealth as an open one in which potentially everyone could participate simply by pursuit of self-interest, he failed to consider, or chose not to consider, that all people cannot compete equally. Smith treated the laborer and the entrepreneur as equals in his theories of economics. Ultimately, this point of view reflects a belief that labor is commodity like any other. But in fact, labor is not like other commodities; labor is linked to a person who cannot be bought or sold or used without regard to his or her rights as a person. In addition, a worker has a limited amount of labor to offer the market whereas the entrepreneur, by comparison, has vastly larger resources of capital with which to compete.

In this “free” market of capitalism envisioned by the framers, buyers (employers) have a market advantage because there are fewer employers than employees. In day to day life, competition is not between the propertied and propertyless, but among the propertyless themselves for earnings and positions within institutionalized structures of employment. One consequence of this style of economy is that people and relationships come to be valued on the basis of input/output ratios. In a competitive economy, wages, and work are determined by supply and demand.

Yet a person’s moral worth does not vary according to how many other people offer similar skills or how many others want what he or she can produce. No one supposes that when someone’s abilities are less in demand or have deteriorated (as in the cases of opera singers and athletes)

that his or her moral deservingness undergoes a similar shift (Rawls, 1971). Yet, in the midst of a strong national identity of competitive prosperity, Americans tend to consider poverty a sign of personal or moral failure which should be concealed from public view.

Private enterprise is presented as the mainstay of liberty, prosperity, and social order (Parenti, 1978). And yet, the very poor live with the constant threat of having their lives overturned by forces they can neither control nor direct. Layoffs, wage cuts, rent increases, inflation are part of the typical gauntlet all workers must run with some workers cycling between a near middle-class existence and poverty. At the same time the American myth of equal opportunity provides the rhetoric of equality, it establishes a rationale for discriminating against those who are poor. If everyone has an equal chance, then each is limited only by his or her own character and poverty is believed to be evidence of personal failure. Such "evidence" of personal failure often leads those with more privilege to further distorted conclusions.

Employers, landlords, banks, stores, and the police—when acting in economic self interest—are apt to discriminate against those whom they consider to be poor risks. On the surface, this appears to be just common sense rather than discrimination because to choose "a poor risk" would place oneself at a competitive disadvantage. Yet the perception of what constitutes a poor risk is based on rhetoric, not reality. Given the choice of hiring a person with a permanent address and phone number and hiring someone without either, most employers choose the former. But is it truly always a poor risk to hire a homeless person? Self-interest, social pressure, and ideology combine to perpetuate the victimization of those who are perceived to be poor risks (Deutsch, 1985).

The segregation of social classes effectively keeps pervasive inequality from becoming visible. Gronber, Street, and Suttles (1978) elaborated on the consequences of such stratification becoming visible when they noted that the fragmentation of society is not the result of a number of diverse and contending groups; rather, they claimed, social fragmentation is more the result of the dramatic and visible inequalities in a society that holds universalism as sacred.

In the United States, the white, middle-class is synonymous with universalism—it is the “norm.” In order to cope with the presence of individuals who are not a part of the white middle class, labels are developed to signify the status of these people. Embedded within these labels are a kind of etiology and diagnosis that “explains” the presence of these people who do not fit the norm. These labels include hard-to-reach, problem family, underclass, inner city youth, and homeless.

### *A Sense of Fairness*

All citizens do not begin life from the same starting point; deep social and economic inequalities affect each person’s chances for success. These are the inequalities to which the principles of justice must apply (Rawls, 1971). “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory, however elegant and economical, must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise, laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust” (Rawls, 1971, p. 3). It is at this point of considering justice and fairness when we must turn to conceptions of human rights and civil liberties.

When governments try to preserve their power by jailing, torturing, and murdering those who oppose their rule, it is likely to be said that they are violating human rights—instead of simply being said to be barbaric, unjust or immoral. That is because the actions violate the internationally recognized Universal Declaration of Human Rights established by the United Nations. The formation of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 codified a discourse on human rights. The creators of the United Nations believed that reducing the likelihood of war required reducing the large-scale violations of people's rights (Nickel, 1987). The first twenty-one articles of the Declaration present rights similar to those found in the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution. These include civil and political rights to due process, nondiscrimination, and political participation. Unlike the U.S. Bill of Rights, the Declaration includes men and women in its language and Articles 22 through 27 go much farther than the Bill of Rights and declare entitlements to economic and social benefits such as: a right to work, equal pay for equal work, fair wages, an adequate standard of living, shelter, rest and leisure, special assistance and care for mothers and their children, assurance that all children born out of wedlock receive social protection, support during disability and old age, medical care, and education. There is little in our political or economic history that could lead one to believe these values are implicit in the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

These social and economic guarantees in the U.N. Declaration were conceived of as universal *rights* existing independently of any cultural norms and as important norms that imply a sense of duty. The Declaration states that such rights are rooted in the dignity and worth of human beings and in the requirements of domestic and international peace. Some



advocates of the Declaration wanted not just a declaration but an enforceable procedure capable of applying pressure to nations who violated the agreement.

Despite the fact that Roosevelt, in his 1942 address to Congress, had identified freedom from want as one of the four freedoms<sup>2</sup> to be achieved through the impending war, the United States refused to sign any international covenant acknowledging economic and social rights as human rights. The United States delayed signing of any covenant on human rights until 1966. By then, the covenant had been split into two documents (The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) to appease nations, most predominantly the United States, which believed economic and social security were not genuine human rights.

In the United States, struggles against exploitation and marginalization have been fought with the language of civil liberties. Thurgood Marshall argued his historic cases not on the grounds that African Americans were entitled to basic *human* rights but basic *civil* rights. In other words, their entitlement came not from being human beings, but from being American citizens protected by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Examined more closely both the concepts of human rights and civil liberties can be understood as *ideals* which recast the fundamental issue of responsibility. Both civil liberties and human rights have definite content only as an expression of community. Liberty is the rubric that confirms power as a right and affords opportunities to capitalize on difference. So, in this land of equality we each have the liberty to move ahead and become unequal. The person whose attributes are more favorable in any

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<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt told the nation that the war effort was to secure four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from war.

circumstance prevails and his or her success is lauded as fulfilling the ideal of liberty and therefore just (Weinreb, 1994). Liberty confers only an opportunity, not a duty.

To speak of human rights is to speak of the equal moral worth of humans; differences in individual characteristics are only circumstantial and do not convey any quality of natural superiority. One asserts a right to equality with another person on the ground that—as deserving persons—both are alike. While the outcomes for each person may differ by their personal abilities, the starting places for all individuals would be the same. Equality, in the sense demanded by human rights, would deny some opportunities to those who are favored by the competitive pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. For instance, it would be impossible to establish one's success by exploiting the labor of other people.

There is no document or period in American history which honors a sense of individual entitlement to any level of well-being. For the framers of the constitution, justice and general welfare were to be the by-products of government; commitment to some minimal level of welfare is not a constitutional guarantee.

#### *Social Justice: An ethic of care*

Moral principles don't have a life of their own; they arise from particular institutions and practices and, as a consequence, can't be justified apart from those institutions and practices (Manning, 1992). Capitalism has developed a cultural philosophy which emphasizes personal liberties and competitive prosperity over human rights and entitlement to social and economic welfare. As a result, we have developed an affluent society in which millions of people are homeless.

Preoccupation with liberties and self-determination constricts dialogues and conversations about the issue of homelessness. To be faced with a person who does not have a place to live, is to be faced with a story of need and despair, of struggle, hope, success and failure (Manning, 1992). In a society obsessed with the American Dream, preoccupied with independence and self-sufficiency, much of this story is irrelevant. What matters most to society is the visible and disruptive fact that this person has no shelter. From this perspective, providing temporary, warehouse-style shelters can become a measure of charitable kind-heartedness.

The visible poverty of homelessness challenges definitions of human rights. It is not only that a person is denied a right to a home, but that a person's sense of place and belonging is also denied. No matter what the root cause of homelessness, a systemic wrong occurs when one loses the right to belong to society.

Yet society remains preoccupied with demographics which assist in determining "deserving" versus "undeserving" poor. Rights secured by justice are not subject to this sort of political bargaining—but housing, like food, is not usually seen as a right. As a nation, we seem to be refusing serious intervention until demographics tell us that the American "middle class" is in danger of homelessness or until a "significant" number of displaced people is reached.

This concept of promising or intending to do something upon the right contingencies does not reflect a moral principle but a constitutive convention similar to game or legal rules (Rawls, 1971). What is morality if not the obligation to care? How one proceeds from this sense of obligation reflects many divergent moralities. Clearly, if we understood our obligation to care for others as following from the existence of need and helplessness,

we would respond to homeless people with caring regardless of how many people there are or how they became homeless. Or would we?

### *Summary*

The philosophical and economic foundation of the United States leads people to believe that a lack of economic success should be attributed to personal failure. It doesn't matter if that failure is named as a lack of ambition or talent, a lack of skill or education, a lack of discipline or focus, but it must never be named as a lack of opportunity, for this is the "land of opportunity" (Parenti, 1978). Under capitalism, private profit rather than collective need is the primary determinant of who receives what. There is never an indictment of the capitalist economy.

This emphasis on personal responsibility deflects criticism of the social structure onto one's own self and consequently protects the structure of social power. It encourages individuals in the lower social strata to identify themselves not with their peers, but with those at the top—whom they believe they will ultimately join. The pressure to conform to the cultural dictate of unslackened ambition is reinforced by the threat of less than full membership in the society for those who fail to conform (Merton, 1957). It is almost a cultural rite that those who fail must be blamed for their failure.

Yet, an increasing number of hardworking, fully-employed people live in poverty—unable to afford the basic necessities of food, housing, clothing, medical care. The new poor include people who remain poor despite having jobs as well as those who fell into poverty when they lost their jobs.

Despite technological advances, rising productivity and profits, the

capital recovery from recent recessions is largely the result of mechanization and exportation of labor-intensive work. As the Gross National Product continues to increase, real wages are steadily declining. Income and wealth continue to accumulate among the top 20 percent of the population while millions of middle-class Americans are working their way into poverty.

Homelessness is the logical outcome of government and corporate policies designed to change employment and investment patterns. These policies have created a shift from an industrial to a service economy, a business-led effort to contain or reduce wages, and a reduction in social welfare. The pattern emerging from analyses of homelessness show the U. S. economy to be dependent on methods and structures that produce widespread homelessness. The economy, as it is now, cannot provide everyone with permanent housing, nor can it pay everyone a wage large enough to support a family nor can it fund enough services (drug counseling, job training, etc.) for people who need help. The prevailing capitalist economy demands that the standard of living for millions of workers is sacrificed to maintain extraordinarily high profit margins for elite sectors of the society. In order to provide a higher standard of living for a larger segment of society, elites would need to accept lower levels of profit.

The current economic decline has been a slow one when compared with the Great Depression of 1929. Had numbers of people become homeless in the course of a year or two, rather than over the course of ten years, the American public would not have had time to acclimatize to such extraordinary levels of poverty. Nor would the poor themselves been so willing to accept their fate. Compounding the numbness of this slow descent is that, unlike the 1930s, poverty today is easily segregated. In the 1930s the middle class was more

likely to know people who were poor or even to be poor themselves, however temporarily.<sup>3</sup>

Many U.S. mayors believe that to solve the problem of homelessness, communities need an integrated approach that includes, jobs with livable wages, houses with affordable rents, and services that meet the needs of the broad spectrum of disinherited people and their children. But the most common responses of local governments has included an effort to criminalize the behavior of those who are homeless. How does our national identity as Americans, our belief in the American Dream, encourage this kind of schism? Santa Cruz, California, provides an excellent location for field work to answer this question.

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<sup>3</sup>Today, credit cards are often all that enable the middle class to cling to pretensions of economic safety. An increasing amount of credit card debt keeps many people off of the streets. In the 1980s, household debt climbed to over \$3 trillion (Phillips, 1990) and consumer installment credit more than tripled.

## Santa Cruz, California, 1989-1994

Frequently regarded as a bastion of radicalism, Santa Cruz is known for having a socialist mayor, one of the first openly gay mayors and the audacity to turn the U.S. Navy away from its harbor on the Fourth of July. In 1994, when Santa Cruz passed some of the nation's most restrictive laws targeting the behavior of homeless people, the mayor was a well-noted war tax resister and long-standing member of the nonviolence community. What leads a community visibly committed to left politics to create laws against peacefully sitting on the sidewalk? In a city with a maximum of 350 shelter beds and an estimated homeless population of several thousand, what purpose does a law against sleeping in vehicles or in public actually serve?

Santa Cruz is one of a growing number of cities to pass such legislation. It is a particularly interesting city to study since the progressive self-image of the community is in direct contrast to the restrictive legislation supported and passed by the city council and condemned by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). If in a more conservative city, such laws might be explained as "politics as usual," in Santa Cruz this is not such an easy possibility. In addition, since the 1989 earthquake displaced hundreds of individuals and families, a direct comparison can be made between the city's response to natural disaster as compared to its response to a more diffuse economic disaster.

Just after the devastating earthquake of October 17, 1989, The Short-Term Housing Coalition of Santa Cruz County (STHC) put together an

assessment of shelter and housing needs. In March, 1990, the STHC counted 1,910 homeless individuals and 229 homeless families in Santa Cruz County. The survey targeted those housed in temporary FEMA trailers, those staying in shelters and campsites, and those sleeping in vehicles parked on public or private property (in direct violation of the city's camping ban). They found that 45 percent of the homeless population was sheltered by agencies, 34 percent lived in vehicles and 21 percent were shelterless (STHC, 1990). The survey cited a need for 225 unsupported single room occupancies (SROs); 20 were in development at the time.

While the survey may not have intended to distinguish between homeless people displaced by the earthquake and those who were displaced for other reasons it appears to have done precisely that. Of all those surveyed, 73.5 percent had become homeless since the earthquake. It can be assumed that those who were homeless before the earthquake comprise more than 25.5 percent of the total homeless population for several reasons. Prior to the earthquake, the total size of the homeless population in Santa Cruz was estimated to be 1,500-2,000 persons—as large or larger than the total count of homeless people after the earthquake. In addition, shelters established by emergency relief organizations such as the Red Cross, and used as survey sites, often turned away homeless people who had not become homeless as a result of the earthquake. Other sites surveyed such as FEMA trailers and legal campsites were also beyond the access of previously homeless people. And while the survey was able to count those living out of vehicles parked on either public or private property, prior to the earthquake anyone camped in such an area would have been cited or arrested by police making it unlikely that many of those visibly living out of vehicles had been homeless before the earthquake.



In the case of a natural disaster, community residents rallied to survey and aid those who had become displaced. The STHC coalition, responding to the displacement generated by the earthquake, called on government to declare a state of emergency with regard to housing and homelessness. Local residents generously offered help to individuals, families and business that had been displaced by the earthquake and radio broadcasts frequently reported an excess of volunteers. But four years later, in 1994 when there were an estimated 2,000-3,000 homeless people in Santa Cruz County and only 250-350 shelter beds, the response was quite different. No national emergency was declared; there was no outpouring of volunteer support. Instead some of the most restrictive laws in the country were adopted to cope with the presence of "street people."

The 1989 earthquake destroyed the business district and provided a rare opportunity for high-speed gentrification. Since the conflict between business interests and homeless people is consistently evident in areas targeted for gentrification, Santa Cruz in many ways was a crucible of such conflict. Between 1989 and 1994 gentrification and homelessness simultaneously increased. Another dimension which makes Santa Cruz an interesting area of focus is the high level of poverty hidden beneath a veneer of prosperity. As a tourist resort, Santa Cruz cultivates an atmosphere of creativity, relaxation, and wealth. The central business district, the Pacific Garden Mall, is a string of upscale boutiques, bookstores, and cafes. Yet few people who work in Santa Cruz are able to spend much money on the mall. Despite the economic resurgence of post-earthquake growth, most new jobs, like the old jobs, are low-wage.

Since October, 1989, Santa Cruz has been listed by the U.S. Department of Labor as a surplus labor area. This means that the unemployment rate is

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at least 20 percent above the national average. Other California cities designated as surplus labor areas include Watsonville, Gilroy, and Salinas—clearly economically depressed areas. (Neither Berkeley, San Jose or San Francisco are included.) Santa Cruz, by contrast, is not visually recognized as easily as a depressed area; the public face of Santa Cruz is more similar to Los Gatos or Carmel than to Watsonville, Gilroy or Salinas. Santa Cruz, as a tourist-dependent city, works very hard to maintain an image of prosperity. But Santa Cruz doesn't hold much assurance of economic prosperity for its residents. In addition to problems of high unemployment, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics placed 15.7 percent of the population of the city of Santa Cruz in 1993 at or below the Federal poverty line—a full five percent more than the Santa Cruz County figure of 10.7 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, bringing the federal poverty line up to date provides a perspective on the level of economic hardship hidden by these statistics: per capita income, \$15,538; median family income, \$40,157; median nonfamily income, \$21,584. These figures are not truly representative since median calculations are distorted by incomes at either extreme, for instance, computer engineers earning \$200,000 working in the Silicon Valley and dishwasher earning only \$10,000 working in Santa Cruz. The University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) provides 1572 career staff positions, the majority of which pay an annual salary “in the low 20s” (Robin T. Santos, senior affirmative action analyst at UCSC, personal

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<sup>4</sup>In 1992, distressed workers (those employed well below their skill level, those who can only find part-time work and those earning poverty-level wages, as well as people who are unemployed but not tracked in the unemployment system) totaled 36 million workers or 40 percent of the American labor force, according to the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute. During this same time, unemployment was officially reported at 7.6 percent.

communication, August 15, 1995). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, in 1990 a family of four required an minimum annual income of \$23,000 in order to be considered "self-sufficient" (able to meet basic needs without federal assistance).

A good measure of local economic security may be found in the want ads. The average job advertised in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* pays between \$6 and \$8 an hour and does not offer health benefits. Most service sector jobs supporting the tourist industry pay between \$4.25 and \$6.00 an hour without health benefits—well below even the official poverty line. Many people choose to commute to San Jose for better paying jobs; however, these jobs tend to be for more highly skilled workers. For a person of average intelligence with a high school degree, there are few jobs in Santa Cruz or the surrounding area that pay a living wage.

Compounding the problem of low wages is the reality that Santa Cruz is also a high-rent area. A room in a house commonly rents for \$300-400 per month. The fair market rent in Santa Cruz for a one-bedroom apartment is \$719 as determine by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This is 97.6 percent of a month's salary at minimum wage. Rent for a two-bedroom house starts around \$1,000. The National Association of Home Builders 1992 nation-wide study showed that the Santa Cruz housing ranked fourth among the least affordable cities in which to rent and sixth in the nation as the least affordable place to buy a home.

The figures add up to this: In Santa Cruz, it is possible to work full-time and not be able to afford both food and shelter. Yet middle-class residents commonly express the belief that Santa Cruz is a "magnet" for transients from other parts of the nation. Like other cities, Santa Cruz tends to claim that few homeless people are long-time residents—a reaction that harkens

back to the 1930s when public relief, then the exclusive domain of local governments, was contingent upon local residency.

The homeless population in Santa Cruz County is estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,000 by Paul Brindel of the Community Action Board. The private resources of the Interfaith Satellite Program provides 350 shelter beds from December through February and 250 shelter beds during the rest of the year. This means that 90 percent of the homeless population has nowhere to stay on any given night. The camping ban forces people in the city of Santa Cruz out of high visibility areas, but where do they go? Parks close at dusk. There aren't many options and more and more often, homeless people are turning to residential areas (personal communication with homeless people, 1995).

In addition to the Interfaith Shelter Program, the homeless population within the city of Santa Cruz is also served by the Day Resource Center, the Citizens Committee for the Homeless, and a local chapter of Food Not Bombs. In 1994 city council passed a controversial raft of laws, known as the "Downtown Ordinances," which target behavior commonly associated with homeless people such as sitting on the sidewalk and panhandling. The new ordinances provoked protests and demonstrations from homeless people. Many businesses that donate to nonprofits serving homeless populations made their continued support contingent upon these nonprofits speaking out against those who challenge the "Downtown Ordinances"(personal communication with service providers, 1994). Five donors pressured a single agency to turn away and discredit those homeless who were protesting the ordinances; out of fear of city reprisals La Familia, a nonprofit agency serving the Latino community, ended its relationship with Food Not Bombs when the group protested against the ordinances.

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Neither in the 1930s, nor in the past decade, has the presence of poverty, in itself, motivated significant aid; relief from poverty has come to those who have created effective protest. As Piven and Cloward have argued, for those under the boot of institutionalized poverty, as are homeless people, this means creating social, political, and economic disruption. Many homeless and formerly homeless people attribute some existing meal programs and shelters in Santa Cruz to their earlier efforts and repeated demonstrations. The protests of the poor are often described as unstable and extremist (Piven & Cloward, 1971). In the case of protests by homeless people such a perception is quite strong. Since organizational structure is simply not an option for homeless people, collective defiance becomes the key distinguishing feature of a protest movement. Government officials are quick to blame disturbances on a small number of troublemakers, and newspaper accounts commonly criticize the disenfranchised for attacking the wrong target or using the wrong means (Piven & Cloward, 1971). In Santa Cruz, city council members and leaders of the business community repeatedly blamed the protests against the Downtown Ordinances on outside agitators and claimed that the "real" homeless people of Santa Cruz were not interested in demonstrating.

The protests over the ordinances, which resulted in an enormous show of police force, subsided almost six months later when the ACLU won a demurrer against the anti-sitting law. Within months the old law was replaced with a new law and the ability of homeless people and their advocates to maintain viable protest failed. While the ordinances brought some visibility to the issues homeless people face, there doesn't appear to be energy or resources for a sustained legal battle. Shortly after the demonstrations store owners escalated their number of complaints about

the presence of homeless people and police regularly arrested homeless people for jay walking, sitting on the sidewalk, and disturbing the peace. Hostility on both sides continued to simmer, even as the sense of urgency faded. By 1995 there were few visibly homeless people seen in the commercial district.

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# Research

## *Methodology*

This study focuses on Santa Cruz during the years 1989-1994; the field work draws upon interviews with city council members, 1990-1994, and with local merchants who were presidents of the Downtown Association during those same years. The Downtown Association (DTA) is an organization of merchants who own businesses in the downtown area (Pacific Garden Mall) of Santa Cruz; the principal objective of the DTA is to enhance commerce in the downtown area.

The focus of these interviews is intended to highlight the opinions and actions of community leaders with respect to visible homelessness in the city. Community leaders effectively set the tone for community action: they can liven or deaden the sensitivities of the community to injustice, establish social and political priorities, and shape public perceptions of local issues. Certainly, over the last 15 years the predominant commitment to progressive politics on the part of civic leaders has done much to contribute to the image and feeling of the city of Santa Cruz.

All those who served as city council members between 1989 and 1994 were contacted for an interview. All are included here except city council member, Jane Yokayama. Although in her chambers, Yokayama did not return any of seven phone calls. Of the five local merchants who were president of the Downtown Association between 1989 and 1994, two declined to be interviewed. The names and identities of those merchants who were interviewed have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Initially, the interviews were to include two local merchants who did not hold officially recognized positions but were nonetheless extremely influential in the local debates on homeless issues. One interview was to represent a pro-ordinance, and the other an anti-ordinance, point of view. Unfortunately the merchants who were central in rallying support for the Downtown Ordinances declined to be interviewed. Consequently, the interview with a local merchant who opposed the ordinances has been omitted from this case study. In all, eight individuals were interviewed: six city council members and three past presidents of the Downtown Association. (See the table on the next page.) Since the sample size was so small, no effort was made to analyze data by gender. All of those interviewed have resided in Santa Cruz for 15 or more years.

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<b>Table 3 Case Studies: Part I</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>City Council Member</b>	<b>Downtown Association</b>	<b>Owns local business<sup>5</sup></b>
Katherine Beiers	appt. 1989; elected since 1990; mayor 1995	no	no
Neal Coonerty	1990-1994; mayor 1993	member	yes
Robert Delgado	no	former president; member	yes
Scott Kennedy	elected since 1990; mayor 1993-1994	no	no
Cynthia Mathews	elected 1992	no	yes
Louis Rittenhouse	1990-1994	former president; member	yes
Mike Rotkin	1979-1988; 1992-present	no	no
Eleanor Weston	no	former president; member	yes

Interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to nearly three hours, with the median length being slightly over one hour. All interviews were recorded at locations and times selected by the individuals to be interviewed. Some chose to be interviewed at work, others at home, and

<sup>5</sup>Includes rental property as well as storefront businesses in the downtown area.

on one occasion the interview was conducted at the author's home.

The interviews consisted of two sections of questions, one which probed the individual's awareness of homelessness and related issues in Santa Cruz and another which focused on the individual's perceptions of the American Dream and issues of social justice. The first half of the interview consisted of open-ended questions which allowed the individuals to provide narrative responses; the second half of the interview included both open-ended questions and a set of statements which individuals were asked to characterize as true or false. (See Appendix C for the list of questions.) All interviews were transcribed immediately afterward and include sections of hand-written notes made at the end of the interview.

To place the perceptions and responses of local civic leaders in perspective, first-person research into existing services for homeless people was conducted after all interviews with community leaders were complete. In addition to exploring the services offered and the populations accessing those services, three service providers were interviewed. The names and identities of the service providers has been altered to protect their privacy. The service providers each contributed their perspectives on homelessness in Santa Cruz and then were asked to evaluate how well or poorly the local homeless population was being served by existing programs and how well or poorly the local community was responding to homelessness. All points of view belonging to service providers are identified as such; the reader may assume that any general references to interviews refer only to civic leaders.

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## *Field Work: Part I*

### *How Is Homelessness Perceived?*

Interviews began with a general discussion on homelessness in which each person was asked to describe the population of homeless people in the city of Santa Cruz in terms of size and composition. Consistently, the core population of homeless people was estimated to be between 1,000 and 3,000 people. The population size was believed to vary during times of the year: some estimated a slight decrease in colder months, others estimated an increase during colder months, and still others noted large increases during nearby Grateful Dead concerts. (While there is wide-ranging disagreement regarding the proportion of people in the homeless population who are “Deadheads” following the band around the country, everyone interviewed agreed that Deadheads comprise a nomadic portion of the homeless population in Santa Cruz.) If the variance among population estimates seems sweeping, it is far more moderate than might be expected. As seen in the review of the literature, population counts remain one of the most contentious aspects of demographics regarding homelessness and range nationally from a few hundred thousand to several million people.

Even though the exact number of homeless people in Santa Cruz remained elusive, Rittenhouse, Mathews, Rotkin, Weston, Kennedy, and Delgado expressed beliefs that the city has “more than its fair share of homelessness” and attributed the disproportion to the services offered by the city. Some attributed this to the belief that Santa Cruz is known nationwide for its good social programs. Others expressed the belief that a statistically disproportionate amount of homelessness in Santa Cruz results from the combination of a more politically and socially tolerant

environment and a mild climate.

Those who believed that Santa Cruz is renown nation-wide, indeed perhaps world-wide, for first-rate services for homeless people, also believed that people travel equally long distances to take advantage of the services. Others who did not believe Santa Cruz social services enticed people from across the nation, expressed the belief that most homeless people, who were not local residents when they became homeless, came from nearby cities such as Berkeley and San Francisco. Eleanor Weston expressed an opinion that seemed to mediate between these two views. While Weston doesn't believe a homeless person in Des Moines, Iowa, would decide to come to Santa Cruz to access a particular service, she does believe that the cold weather would be instrumental in such a person's decision to leave Iowa. Once on the road, this person may come across some indication that Santa Cruz is a better place to wind up than Carmel.

Why is Santa Cruz a better place to be than Carmel? The answer was clear to everyone: in terms of visible homelessness, "there is more of a political will to move homeless people out of sight" in places like Carmel. Santa Cruz, in this sense, was commonly viewed as a victim, either of its own compassion or of its lack of political will, depending on one's perspective. According to Rittenhouse, Monterey, for example, has less homelessness than Santa Cruz because homeless people are simply driven out of the area by police.

Civic leaders largely shared the belief that Santa Cruz has made life more comfortable for homeless people and therefore more homeless people settle here. This corresponds with the prevailing belief that most homeless people were not local residents when they became homeless—Rittenhouse put it this way:

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The problem is such we have a population of homeless who the bulk of are not Santa Cruz people. They are not my son, your daughter, the neighbors down the street. In 1940 the city of Santa Cruz dealt with problems that were its problems. Homeless people didn't migrate; that concept didn't exist. A community could deal with it because its problem was relative to its size. The churches could deal with it, the community could deal with it.

While not everyone believed that the majority of homeless people came from distant cities, there was a pronounced belief that the homeless population of Santa Cruz is not composed of long-term city residents. Many people believe, for instance, that the homeless population largely is composed of people who, although not homeless when they moved to Santa Cruz, arrived with such tenuous resources and poor jobs skills that they soon became homeless.

Rittenhouse clearly underscored the belief that if Santa Cruz had to care only for its "own" homeless residents, the task then would be feasible. However, there was a unanimous feeling that even if the city could attend to the needs of all the homeless people currently residing in Santa Cruz, an endless onslaught of more homeless people from other areas would ensue. In short, everyone believed that the more successful the services are in restoring people to economic equilibrium, the more homeless people the city would attract.

Standing literature both predicts and debunks the theory that cities become "magnets" for homeless people (Blau, 1992; Rosenthal, 1994). The beliefs expressed by the civic leadership in Santa Cruz are typical of those associated with local government leaders throughout the nation. Research

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by Rob Rosenthal indicates that the numbers of out-of-state homeless people parallel the census figures for housed people, that is roughly 40 percent of any population, housed or homeless comes from another state. There is no evidence that people will travel across state lines for social services. Within metropolitan areas, homeless people do move from place to place to try to maximize their opportunities for food, shelter, and employment. San Francisco, Berkeley, and Santa Cruz, to some extent, share a contiguous homeless population.

The overlap of homeless populations in these cities was highlighted by Scott Kennedy, who was mayor in 1993-1994.

Very concretely, when there is a crackdown on homeless people in San Francisco we know it here because people come down to Santa Cruz to get away from periodic waves of repression against homeless people that happen all over the place. I'm sure that when certain actions in Santa Cruz are taken to crackdown that people head up to Berkeley and when things get hot in Berkeley they come back to Santa Cruz or go to San Francisco. I mean, there's probably only eight or ten towns on the West Coast that have a reputation for being somewhat sympathetic to the plight of poor people, homeless people and they're going to tend to gravitate to those cities if they have a choice.

It would seem that local governments motivate some degree of the "migration" they associate with superior programs and lenient law enforcement. The pervasive sense of the homeless population as an ever-changing community—for *whatever* reason—contributed to the difficulty people had in assessing the overall size of the homeless population. While

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a majority of the people interviewed believed the numbers of homeless people in Santa Cruz are fluid, there was no clear conception of a baseline population parameter or an agreement as to *why* the numbers change or by how much.

All civic leaders described their views as varying combinations of personal experience and information gained through current literature. Rotkin, Beiers, and Kennedy provided long lists of publications and organizations regarding homelessness which they rely upon to keep informed. Coonerty, like the more conservative leaders, Mathews, Delgado, Weston, and Rittenhouse, tended to emphasize his interactions with individual people on the street and his associations through the Downtown Association.

Despite the reported predominance of individual interactions with homeless people, the patterns of people moving in and out of the Santa Cruz homeless community remained a mystery to policy makers. This seems to indicate the degree to which housed and homeless communities are segregated from each other. Even daily encounters between housed and homeless people seem to fail to yield any significant information about homeless people as individual members of a larger community—their histories, goals, and motivations are either treated as isolated and unrepresentative or are absent from the discourse about homelessness.

Even with this vague sense of an ever-shifting homeless population, there was remarkable consistency among the perceptions of community leaders regarding the composition of the homeless population in Santa Cruz. Each person interviewed either actively divided the local homeless population into three general groups or agreed that such a grouping accurately reflected homelessness in the city. The groups were characterized

as: those with mental illness and/or drug and alcohol addiction; those who are homeless by circumstance; and those who are homeless by choice.

While there was unanimous agreement that these categories overlap, each group was characterized by what was perceived to be core elements. For instance, Viet Nam veterans were believed to be disproportionately represented in all three groups yet were said to comprise a particularly large presence among those homeless people with drug or alcohol addictions or an untreated mental illness.

The group “homeless by circumstance,” was characterized as people who had been living one paycheck away from the streets until they lost their jobs and typically were described as hardworking people who had fallen through the safety net. In general, this group was said to be composed of local agricultural workers, single parents without enough income to maintain a rental, working people with low-paying jobs—they could be just about anybody on any given day. Those perceived to be “homeless by circumstance” were considered to be “the deserving poor” by everyone’s standard; they were clearly viewed as people who wanted back into mainstream society. In addition, they were described as the “invisible” element of the homeless population and most people identified sympathetically with those whom they believed to be part of this group.

Civic leaders described those who were homeless by circumstance as: people who are just looking for homes, looking for jobs, coping with the everyday challenge of just surviving; people who are most interested in getting by rather than in affirming the rights of homeless people; and as the people who have no interest in displaying themselves on a public street. It seems that the choice to remain less visible and less problematic, brings a corresponding measure of appreciation or respect from civic leaders—in

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the minds of the civic leadership, these are the people who are trying to gain economic solvency and are deserving of assistance.

Similarly, those believed to have drug, alcohol, or mental health problems were viewed as deserving of help but clearly were a more problematic group in that they often were associated with anti-social behavior such as aggressive panhandling, urinating in public, or incoherent ranting. For this second category of homeless people, "help" seemed often synonymous with institutionalization of some sort, whether it was a mental health facility or a detoxification center.

In general, both categories of homelessness, those with drug, alcohol, or mental health problems and those who were homeless by circumstance, were viewed as being deserving of help but, for the most part, were believed to be beyond the scope of the system as it exists. Kennedy delineated the limits of the system:

... if the biggest drunk on Ocean Street walked up to me right now and said I want to get clean and sober what can you to help me? Well, I can get you on a waiting list and four years from now you can get into a detox program. Does that sound really terrific? Or if our full-time social worker . . . comes up and says I just found a guy who is paranoid schizophrenic who needs full-time medical care . . . . Yeah, let's get him on a waiting list. Twelve years from now, six years after this guy's been dead, after he killed himself or killed someone else, we might get him into a program. And that's the way . . . or if you are a young woman with two kids, we'll put you on a waiting list for a housing program that is seven years long. Your kids will be out of high school before you can get a house.

In a city where the former mayor expresses this level of frustration with safety net services, both conservatives and progressives emphasized individual initiative rather than public services as key to individuals in these groups eventually rebounding from homelessness to the security of a private home.

The third group, “homeless by choice,” is not viewed with any such sweeping consensus. Why would anyone choose homelessness? Louis Rittenhouse, a conservative politician and businessman responded succinctly in a manner representative of his political allies when he said flatly, “they don’t like the system.” Typically, more politically conservative people categorized those who were homeless by choice as better educated, belligerent people who do not want to be a part of “the system” yet believe the system owes them something—food stamps or a monthly stipend are commonly demanded as partial payment of that debt. The “homeless by choice” were further described as people who refuse responsibility and have nothing to lose—a combination which then enables them to then prey upon the hardworking members of society. “You can’t sue him for anything, he has nothing to lose. But the minute you even come close to hitting him in a car,” complained merchant Robert Delgado, “the first thing he thinks of is coming after you because you have something to lose. I’ve seen this scenario played out quite a few times.” Among the politically conservative merchants and politicians, there is a pervasive sense that the “homeless by choice” are a disingenuous group who exploit the system for a free ride while sneering at society. Delgado adds:

And the people that are homeless by choice need to see themselves

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doing something. So they will sometimes align themselves with political causes or sometimes align themselves with homeless causes, give *themselves* some kind of an agenda. Because the lifestyle they've chosen for themselves doesn't. They give lip service to being activists for human rights, *et cetera*, but if they don't have that, they don't have anything because they don't have a business, they don't have a home, they don't have responsibilities by choice. So by choice they are kind of taking on a more profound agenda for themselves to make themselves feel part of larger whole, a humanitarian outlook, "I'm part of a greater whole than just you greedy little merchants that are motivated by the almighty dollar." And a lot of times . . . they view merchants as the big ugly big brother that our only reason for existence is the dollar. I can understand that if they don't have it and they see people working hard to generate a profit. And of course if there wasn't the element of the merchant that's generating the profit, there'd be no downtown, there'd be no place for these people to have their stage to espouse their causes.

How does one recognize those who are choosing homelessness as opposed to those who are homeless by circumstance? Consistently, those poor who are publicly visible are derided as not genuinely homeless. "I'm not talking about the people you see in front of the supermarket with signs," says Weston, "my sense is that most of those people are homeless by choice." Those believed to be genuinely homeless, the homeless by circumstance, as noted earlier, were believed to be less visible. "You seldom if ever see homeless by circumstance because they are aggressively trying to move into the system to solve their problem. They don't like being homeless," said Rittenhouse.

A common belief among more conservative people interviewed was that people who were homeless by choice have no desire to improve their circumstance and instead find fulfillment by aggravating the general public and disrupting business. One social service provider was convinced that many people don't want to work and prefer receiving food stamps. "There are plenty of jobs in Santa Cruz that pay \$6.50 an hour," he said. "That's \$800.00 a month. That's a lot of money for a single person."

If \$800.00 a month once was adequate support for a single adult, it no longer is the case in Santa Cruz where fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$719.00 a month. Rosenthal (1994) explained the daunting task of raising first, last, and deposit for such an apartment as a significant factor which inhibits homeless people from even attempting to change their circumstances. The energy required for daily survival—finding food, shelter, toilets, safety—can exhaust an individual and prevent the momentum required to catapult oneself from homelessness to a heated apartment.

Liberal council members were apt to make one of several countering points regarding people they identified as homeless by choice. Mayor Beiers described this group as composed of people who just don't know what else to do with themselves. "Maybe it's just a period in life and they are going to turn around," said Beiers, "or say they are going to have a fling for four or five years and then settle down." Beiers identified the group in general as being "comfortable in their way of life." And adds, "They aren't meant to hold a job and they don't want to."

Where Beiers clearly saw individuals choosing a lifestyle, council member Mike Rotkin pointed out that many of the people who proclaim themselves to be homeless by choice, in fact, no longer have a choice because they are no longer employable. What may have begun voluntarily

becomes a self-perpetuating circumstance which is quite difficult to change. Similarly, Neal Coonerty noted that there is a qualitative difference between a person choosing to sleep without shelter when their choices are severely limited and a person choosing to sleep without shelter when they have access to a middle-class lifestyle. Ultimately, for a person with limited options, the word "choice" may become meaningless. This is not to say the Beiers, Rotkin, and Coonerty disagree with each other's points but that the salient issues surrounding those who choose homelessness are different for each. Their more conservative counterparts, held a much more uniform perspective with respect to salient issues.

A pervasive belief shared among those who were interviewed was that each of these three groups composes one-third of the total homeless population. Only those who self-identified as allies of homeless people (Beiers, Kennedy, Rotkin) believed that the category "homeless by choice" to be a small or insignificant grouping.

A notable contrast provided by social service providers was the decisive belief that children comprise the fastest growing segment of the homeless population today with a significant number of those children being unaccompanied by a parent or guardian. This is consistent with a survey conducted by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (1995) which revealed that 980 homeless children currently are enrolled in Santa Cruz County public schools. Remarkably, 12 percent of those homeless children enrolled in school do not have a parent or guardian. However such surveys, by their nature, produce very low counts of homeless children. The survey is not designed to include the large numbers of children who are homeless but not enrolled in school. For many children, lack of suitable clothing, and the embarrassment of poor hygiene caused by the lack of access to a shower or bath keeps them away from school. For some

children, the effort required to find food and shelter prevents them from considering school. In addition, parents of homeless children may find it impossible to get a child to school everyday and take care of their daily survival needs as well. For other parents, there may be emotional or legal complications which prevent them from enrolling their child in school.

Homeless youths who do not have guardians often fear that coming into contact with any authority will place them at risk for being arrested for outstanding warrants. According to police, these children generally range between ages eleven and nineteen, with an average age being fifteen. Their former relationships with their parents tend to be characterized by abuse and neglect. Most of these children suffer from drug or alcohol addiction; many turn to prostitution. These children, many of whom previously have been identified by civic leaders as “young punks” are just coming into social view as homeless youth. While many of the people interviewed were recently made aware of homeless youth, none included them in their categories of homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

When the 1994 U.S. Council of Mayors was asked to describe the elements of the homeless population in their cities, they responded by delineating three groups: single men, women with children, and families. The distinctions made between the deserving and undeserving homeless populations, so pervasive in these interviews, were absent from the official documents of city assessments. The distinction between deserving and undeserving poor people is consistent with Piven and Cloward's (1971) analysis of government's response to poverty and with belief in a just world as articulated by Lerner. Piven and Cloward have argued that visible need, in itself has rarely motivated governments to intercede with aid. Similarly,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1994 efforts to by local merchants to establish a youth curfew failed. In 1995 merchants continue to lobby for a youth curfew in Santa Cruz.

Lerner and Miller (1978) explained that for the sake of one's own sense of security, people want to believe that terrible things happen to people who deserve them. In situations where there is no immediate remedy, people tend to persuade themselves that the victim deserves to suffer because of some poor judgment or character flaw. In Santa Cruz, a majority of the civic leadership expressed belief that two-thirds of the homeless population were homeless either because of personal choice or personal flaws such as drug addiction or mental illness.

Certainly untreated drug addiction and mental illness have a complicated relationship with homelessness. Many people with drug and alcohol addictions maintain middle and upper class lifestyles. Why do others fall into homelessness? Once on the street many people, particularly children, develop drug and alcohol addictions as an attempt to mute the relentless emotional devastation and vulnerability. Similarly, budget cuts forced many people with mental illness out of care facilities and onto the street, yet it is also true that many people develop mental illness from the enormous stress created by homelessness. Untreated substance abuse and mental illness are often erroneously cited as personal flaws that *cause* homelessness (and hence render people "undeserving" of help) when in fact substance abuse and mental illness may be psychological adaptations to the distressing experience of homelessness.

Selective intervention, based on distinctions between deserving and nondeserving poor people, is bolstered the belief that some people chose to be homeless. What must one's choices in life look like in order to make choosing homelessness a reasonable decision? How dissatisfied with "the system" must one be in order to prefer eating out of dumpsters to holding a job? Goffman's (1963) analysis of a person's disdain for the society which

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rejects him or her frames this choice in terms of human dignity—there is more dignity in seeing oneself as a rebel than as a reject. If aspirations reflect a person's view of what his or her chances are for succeeding, as McLeod (1987) argued, then choosing homelessness makes sense if one sees no open door into mainstream society, if one believes that what has been promised to others through membership in society has been denied to oneself. In this sense, choosing to be homeless may be best understood as the inevitable result of a nation tottering at the edge of economic and moral bankruptcy.

Yet it is almost cliché to consider the poverty-stricken as having their own compensating rewards. Delgado expressed this attitude when he noted that those who choose homelessness choose freedom from the responsibility and obligation which so often burdens the merchant class. Mayor Beiers also subscribed to this point of view when she described those who choose homelessness as "comfortable in their own way." Both of these points of view reflect the romantic belief that poverty has its own compensating rewards and also support the belief that some portion of homelessness is the result of personal rather than systemic causes.

The single population believed to be most deserving of aid was that of "homeless by circumstance" who also were the group described as least visible. This group, although admittedly not visible is estimated to comprise an equal third of the city's homeless population which was estimated to be somewhere between 1,000 and 3,000 people. Even this group, which by these estimates is between 300 and 1,000 people, is beyond local government's ability to successfully intervene. While it is true that, in general, social services have been the domain of national rather than local government, it is also true that historically, homelessness (as in the 1930s) was relegated to the domain of local governments and charities until local governments were so



overwhelmed by the angry protests of homeless people that they also pressured the federal government for assistance. It also needs to be noted that subsequent to the 1989 earthquake, local, state, and federal governments were willing and able to declare homelessness a national emergency to gain needed relief money.

In addition, the argument that the city does not have adequate funding to cope with homelessness adequately is rooted to the disproportionate emphasis on temporary shelter and services designed to draw homeless people away from commercial districts which leads to an inefficient use of existing funds. Under these circumstances it has been possible for the city of Santa Cruz to spend nearly a million dollars, according to city council officials, and not be able to make a noticeable dent in getting people off of the street—as opposed to getting them out of sight. Using current funds alone, enough permanent housing could be purchased to make a substantial difference.

### *A Day In The Life*

Individuals were asked to step beyond the general categorization of types of homelessness to construct a “typical” day for homeless people. Those who were able to create some imaginative narrative constructed a day like this: getting up early for some free meal, doing some recycling work afterward or going to the homeless garden project, then heading over to a noon meal at the shelter where they might get some job counseling or participate in a twelve-step program. By evening they would go to another free meal, perhaps go around to the stores that give away food at the end of the day and then to a corner where a van would pick them up and take them to a shelter for the night. At the shelter and in between meals they

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would socialize and hang out with friends.

Those who were willing to try to describe a "typical" day for a homeless person (many refused to even try) consistently created a narrative around the services with which they were familiar, yet two people in the social service industry in Santa Cruz estimated that fewer than 10 percent of the homeless population access services. "People don't understand cultural economics," says one service provider. "People on the street," he explained, "won't sit around waiting for appointments. It's a real problem when you try to send them for medical care much less anything else."

Similarly, individuals interviewed had difficulty imagining the length of time individuals typically remain homeless. "I don't know. I don't see it. That's the thing," said Eleanor Weston. "I don't see it as something with a resolution." Perhaps this reflects the sentiment behind the broad range of responses depicting homelessness as an experience which could last anywhere between a few months and "forever." Only one person provided a detailed response. Scott Kennedy, relying on his "sense" of things, rather than established facts, described homelessness as an experience that changes qualitatively after six months. During the first six months of homelessness, according to Kennedy, many individuals are able to recover from the economic trauma and return to some kind of housing. For those who are not able to get back into the system within six months, individuals are likely to become chronically homeless. "With poverty in general," said Kennedy, "the complications and difficulties tend to multiply on each other, so if you get too much momentum going then it becomes much more difficult." Kennedy also added that there also are people who "don't think a lot about being homeless" and do it for years.

According to the U.S. Council of Mayors the average length of

homelessness is growing each year. In 1994, the Mayor's survey showed the average length of time on the streets to be nine months. The longer one remains homeless, the more danger there is of being trapped by circumstances: clothes wear out, social networks fade, teeth decay and fall out. The longer one is on the street, the more difficult it becomes, in very practical terms, to get off of the street. There is no evidence that people who are homeless stop "thinking about it" even though they may no longer actively seek employment. There is evidence, however, that based on past experience, poor people often reconcile themselves to what seems inevitable (Galbraith, 1979). The lack of motivation among homeless people is often perceived as either laziness or proof that homelessness is a lifestyle choice. Such attitudes reflect a fundamental belief that deprivation does not change an individual's personality, world view or values. While all of those interviewed remarked that they did believe the experience of homelessness affected individuals emotionally, most notably by arousing feelings of shame and frustration, no one articulated an understanding that the experience of homelessness can also alter one's values and beliefs about the world. A "fall" into chronic homelessness generally produces a disdain for "the system," whereas those born into poverty tend to believe in some version of the American Dream and strive to become part of "the system."

### *Perceptions and Solutions*

While everyone described homelessness as a problem in Santa Cruz, some people emphasized the ways in which homelessness is a burden for the city while others emphasized the difficulties people experience as a result of being homeless. Rittenhouse, for example, described the most disturbing aspect of homelessness as belligerence.

They have no respect for society as it exist. They perceive the situation as: "Hey I'm as good or better than you and the law says I can do anything I damn well please and it makes me feel good to irritate the hell out of you by sleeping on the sidewalk because the courts have said a six-foot man on a 12-foot sidewalk is not an obstruction. So I can sleep here. If you don't like it, tough. Screw you. I can do what I damn well please." That's where the problem lies.

For Rittenhouse, the second most disturbing aspect of homeless was the failure of the system to address the problems of homelessness. His frustration was provoked both by government's response, or lack of response, to those he describes as belligerent and also by the government's inability to efficiently assist those he would describe as truly needy. "Part of the problem that communities are having," explained Delgado "is that panhandling somehow or other has nationally almost become protected under first amendment rights. You have a right to panhandle, you have a right to beg." Delgado went on to complain that this makes it almost impossible to enforce vagrancy laws. The failure to produce adequate legislation and enforcement was commonly perceived by more conservative people as a significant problem regarding homelessness.

While conservative merchants may be most likely to agree with Rittenhouse's assessment of belligerence, at least one service provider shared a similar sense of frustration with the social service system: "It's not a lack of money, it's how it's distributed. Homeless people are commodities and there is a billion dollar industry built around them." According to this man, agencies trade people back and forth as they buy and sell services, in

the end, he claimed, Santa Cruz County makes \$21 million a year on homeless people. This is not an unusual point of view and one could argue that it is historically consistent with the responses of local governments in the 1930s when sheltering homeless people became an industry that replaced affordable housing with a cot and a meal. However, many others might disagree with this assessment of social services and the problems associated with homelessness.

More progressive members of city council and the business community tended to frame "the problem of homelessness" in terms of the individuals who experience homelessness. Mayor Beiers captured both of these views:

I can only say that [homelessness is a problem in Santa Cruz] by the amount of time and money we put into homeless services. Prior to the earthquake and since, the merchants downtown obviously felt that the homeless were causing all of their problems and that they had no customers because of the element on the public streets and hanging out and the panhandling. So of course, we heard that all the time. And of course, I think there was a correlation there. People don't want to go shopping, I mean people don't want to look at people who are homeless. They don't like the looks of them. And so that was a problem. For me a certain and obvious problem was that we had 1500 or 500 people who had no place to sleep, and there simply was no place to sleep and we have a camping ban so they can't sleep anywhere. I found that just offensive and a very serious problem.

While others have been upset by the *presence* of homeless people, Beiers has been most disturbed by the visible levels of need and want. Although

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Beiers was concerned about the ability of merchants to conduct business, she expressed offense at the fact that hundreds of people had neither shelter nor a legal right to sleep in public. The way individuals framed the “problem of homelessness” was reflected in the ways in which they each as individuals and collectively as civic leaders responded to homelessness.

Beiers’ concerns for the problems of homeless people lead her to help establish the Homeless Garden Project, Above The Line,<sup>7</sup> dental services for homeless people and other such programs that directly respond to the needs of homeless people. Rittenhouse, on the other hand, advocated an environment which simultaneously would be hostile to those who are visibly homeless (the nondeserving poor) and far more supportive of the less visible, “homeless by circumstance” (deserving poor). For instance, he strongly supported the presence of a full-time social worker at the homeless shelter to help individuals navigate the social service bureaucracy; he also strongly advocated for harsher laws against behaviors commonly associated with homeless people (loitering, sleeping in public, panhandling, etc.) and “no nonsense” enforcement.

Everyone interviewed noted the fiscal burden of providing for homeless people and all city council members remarked that, historically, it has been the responsibility of state and federal governments to fund and administer social programs addressing poverty. In a state with 32 million people, a city of 50,000 can’t solve the problem of homelessness, yet as the county seat, Santa Cruz is compelled to exhibit some leadership. This, according to the civic leadership, becomes problematic for Santa Cruz if neighboring towns such as Scotts Valley and Capitola show little or no

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<sup>7</sup>An organization created in 1995 to fund programs serving homeless youth unaccompanied by an adult.

interest in addressing the needs homeless people. The natural tendency then becomes for homeless people in those bordering communities to come to Santa Cruz either to escape police harassment or to access services.

With only one exception, those interviewed were proud of the actions Santa Cruz has taken on issues like homelessness and affordable housing. Rittenhouse was the lone voice dissenting from otherwise unanimous accolades for service providers who were seen as “incredibly dedicated people.” Nearly all city council members referred to a four-page list of services funded in part or total by the city. Many business people referred to the Downtown Association as a depository of statistics on such services. Yet, there was a strong persuasion to count all social services as services for homeless people and thereby vastly expand the programs “designed to help homeless people.” For instance, Sunflower House, a residential substance abuse program for young people, is not intended to serve homeless youth; rather, it primarily serves youths who have been directed to Sunflower House by a court order. Child Protective Services, Planned Parenthood and Consumer Affairs, also on the list of services, may be accessed by anyone, homeless or not, but they are not designed to target the needs of homeless people. Cynthia Mathews acknowledged, “that four-page list is not aimed at getting people a place to spend the night or housing for the next month.” But she does believe it provides some degree of essential support.

Mike Rotkin, who is in charge of the city’s social service committee, detailed a list of services including a loan program to help people get back on their feet by providing “first, last, and deposit” for rentals; a drop-in childcare center with sliding scale fees; free washing machines and dryers; free showers; free lockers and an answering service where people receive messages when looking for work. Yet service providers describe the loan

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and child care programs as almost impossible to access. There is one phone at the Day Resource Center with a typical home answering machine to serve the entire homeless population of Santa Cruz. Again, the washers, dryers, and showers are important but similarly limited resources. Civic leaders, however, consistently evaluated the services as performing very well.

Neal Coonerty reflected a common sentiment when he praised both the quality of services being offered and the service providers working in the social service agencies. Consistent with that perception was the belief that any government money spent on government social services and other nonprofit social services is very efficient use of money. Civic leaders tended to base their evaluation of local programs on the self-evaluative reports of service providers—either through casual conversation or via funding applications.

Among the services leaders expressed most satisfaction with was the Day Resource Center whose opening was planned for Spring, 1994 but was delayed until August 1995 because of issues of building safety. The Day Resource Center was created to provide three showers, two washers and dryers, and a place for homeless people to be during the day. It is thought to be a functional compromise between the immediate needs of homeless people and the concerns of the business community. Mayor Beiers described it this way:

We also just bought and are operating a homeless day shelter. And why the merchants in Santa Cruz are pleased now is because instead of everyone hanging out on Pacific Avenue on the main street, with all their backpacks and everything they own on them and that was always

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scary looking, we have a day shelter where they can hang out at. . . . It's called a Day Resource Center. So that's a new program and its been *very* successful. Even the merchants are saying they aren't seeing the homeless in the retail area. Which is not to say there aren't some but it amazingly reduced. We always knew, or at least I always felt in my heart, that it was just a social thing, they wanted to be somewhere among people like themselves and they didn't necessarily need to be on main street but they didn't know where else to go. And so now we have this area where they just all hang out.

Civic leaders, who had believed that the Day Resource Center would meet the needs of both the homeless and business communities when it opened, find it a great success. It appears to have removed a lot of direct interaction and confrontation between the homeless people and merchants.

The other program most noted for its success was one implemented by the local business community. According to Rittenhouse and others, merchants pay the salary of a social worker whose job it is "to walk the streets of Pacific Avenue and attempt to communicate with new transients coming into the area and to suggest that there are places to go and things to do other than sitting on the street in Santa Cruz." Every merchant was provided with a beeper number for the social worker and store owners rave about the social worker because he is available at all hours and responds quickly. If an unwanted homeless person enters a store, the social worker can be called, and within a few minutes, will arrive to direct the individual to a homeless shelter or other appropriate services.

The social worker shares an office with the Santa Cruz Host Program—a concept developed by local businesses and funded by city government.

Described by merchants as Santa Cruz's version of a welcome wagon, the Host Program places four or five people on the street to offer directions when asked, discourage people from "anti-social" behavior such as sitting on the sidewalk and to notify police of any trouble spots. The "hosts" patrol parking garages and alleys as well as main streets. Weston explained: "We were trying to move things in terms of creating something that would serve our needs but not at the cost of having daily police sweeps of the Avenue to chuck them [homeless people] all into the San Lorenzo River." The hosts, hired and trained by the First Alarm Security Company, wear polo shirts and khakis while they patrol Pacific Avenue with walkie-talkies. Much like the security forces in amusement parks, they maintain an innocuous presence.

According to Rittenhouse, the Host Program is similar to a program created in Eugene, Oregon. "The concept," he said, "is very simple. You put more eyes and ears out on the street and you see problems quicker, faster. It's far less expensive than using a police officer which is going to cost the city 50 or 60 thousand dollars a year with support, insurance and benefits." Indeed the host program with a starting salary of \$6.00 per hour and no benefits is much cheaper than additional police. It also has a much friendlier look which provides a less obtrusive way of dealing with "undesirables" without alienating visitors by a show of police force.

The Host Program may help merchants control the presence of visible poverty and anti-social behavior in the downtown, but it has also created some confusion. Representing itself to the general public as a welcome wagon and information center rather than a security force, the Host Program has usurped the image, but not the substance, of the Santa Cruz Visitor Center. The Visitor Center, staffed by people in the tourist trade, has

historically provided visitors with information, maps, and directions. Since the Host Program is far more visible than the Visitors' Center, it regularly receives large numbers of simple inquiries from tourists. However, the Host Program is not authorized even to distribute maps of Santa Cruz and most tourists are referred to the Visitors' Center where their questions can be answered.

Leaders consistently over-estimated the success of programs in terms of aiding homeless people and under-estimated their failures. Undoubtedly, having access to a phone and answering machine is a tremendous asset to homeless people; however, one phone and one answering machine to serve the needs of 200-450 people who pass through the Day Resource Center on any given day cannot be a highly successful service. The same can be said of the three showers, two washers, and two dryers—the services are doomed to fail homeless people by virtue of the disproportionate population they are expected to serve. Similarly, it may be that the social worker may assist some homeless people but the Host Program seems not to serve the needs of homeless people at all. How is it that reasonable, caring people could rate these services as successful? The services appear to meet the needs of the local merchants quite well—this is one obvious explanation. There are others.

Lerner's just world hypothesis provides reasonable clues in piecing some sense of understanding from a different point of view. There seems to be the belief that if good people are doing the best they can with the most money they can afford, the system must be working. If people are not being served it is either because they are choosing to be homeless or are beyond the resources of what a local government can do. Those who point out facts to the contrary are derided by civic leaders and sometimes by social service

workers as “so called homeless advocates” and relegated to the status of troublemakers. The members of Food Not Bombs fall into this category.

While no one would claim to be eradicating homelessness, most civic leaders believe that Santa Cruz provides more services and fewer legal restrictions than other cities of comparable size. By virtue of the financial, psychological, and political efforts being made to address homelessness, leaders become invested in seeing their programs and efforts as successful. Even social service workers tended to over-estimate their ability to help homeless people. One service provider estimated that social service programs serve 85 percent of the homeless population in the city—far above the national estimate that only 10 percent of any given homeless population access social services. It takes a lot of hard work to make even a small dent in the enormous need of large numbers of homeless people; consequently, many people become quite invested in believing their efforts to be successful. They tend to reconcile evidence to the contrary by rationalizing that the homeless people who are not being served are beyond anyone’s reach. There is a pervasive belief that the people who are truly deserving and want help are being served therefore individuals who are not being served either do not deserve or do not want help. On the whole, social service providers praised the participation of both city hall and local merchants in responding to homelessness. Merchants and city hall similarly praised the service providers. Those activists and homeless people who did not share this perspective were consistently derided both by service providers and public officials.

Ryan (1984) illustrated yet another type of motivation common to observers in situations where they are not completely helpless to intervene, yet their investment in maintaining their own status prevents

them from intervening to create real change. As described in the literature review, such people may find fault with society but basically like the social system the way it is, at least in a broad outline. They like the system because it has been good to them; typically they have achieved at least middle class status, a reasonably good job, a house, a car—the trappings of the American Dream. Because such people basically approve of the system, there is an intense inner conflict when they become aware of poverty. Poverty is offensive to this person, but she or he is unable to work for *fundamental* social change because it threatens his or her own well-being. Even when such people want to help, they cannot bring themselves to attack the system which has been so good to them. Consequently, their solution is to analyze the victims of the system and to try to find a way to fix them—here is the return to demographics and the attempt to explain the presence of homelessness by discovering the personal attributes of homeless people.

While Rotkin and Kennedy, from socialist and anarchist perspectives would describe the capitalist system as corrupt, both are committed to working within government. The radical social change needed to adequately address the issues of poverty has come to be seen as idealistic by both Kennedy and Rotkin as well as many others. A social service provider explained that protesting against poverty and restrictive ordinances is just passing the buck. “If the revolution isn’t coming by dinner time, I’ve got better things to do. There’s a meal to get ready.” She described her clients as interested in survival issues rather than rights, liberties, or social change. Social service providers typically are apolitical, perhaps because the stress of meeting day to day needs keeps them focused on immediate solutions rather than long-term social change.

The other services lauded by civic leaders, fundamentally, were those

designed to remove homeless people from commercial districts. In Santa Cruz these efforts have a much softer touch than in many other cities where such action is achieved by police sweeps. Santa Cruz appears to have replaced police sweeps with the combination of "hosts," a social worker, and the Day Resource Center. Santa Cruz civic leaders, such as Mayor Beiers, all tended to emphasize the success of these efforts in terms of the diminished visibility of homelessness in the downtown area. As noted in the 49-city survey conducted by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, cities making an effort to remove homeless people from commercial districts have two other common characteristics: by the cities' own accounts, emergency shelters are not adequate to meet existing needs; no one living on a minimum wage job could afford fair market rent.

Consistently, efforts to remove visibly homeless people from shopping areas has paralleled development efforts to gentrify business districts. While the desire among merchants to rid the town of visibly poor people is nothing new, in Santa Cruz the fact that the local progressive government is working together with merchants to accomplish this feat reflects changes brought on by the rebuilding and gentrification of downtown Santa Cruz. It is important to understand this new alliance in order to understand the city's response to homelessness.

### *Changing Alliances*

The programs currently available in Santa Cruz reflect relatively recent changes in the politics of Santa Cruz as well as recent changes in the presence of homelessness. Mike Rotkin recalled that even in 1980, city council members, police and merchants referred to homeless people as

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UTES (undesirable transient elements). According to Rotkin, police systematically beat homeless people in an effort to drive them out of town. Rotkin recounted a story of six police officers who were charged with beating up homeless people after they had been arrested and handcuffed. A jury had found the officers innocent but there was sufficient evidence to fire the officers. During the following year, one-third of the officers resigned and one-third retired. In the early 1980s, Santa Cruz hired a new police chief and, essentially, a new police force with new directions for interacting with homeless people.

The local business community continued to resist city council's efforts to establish a homeless shelter until, according to Rotkin, it became clear that city hall would no longer banish the homeless. Eventually, a shelter near the intersection of River Street and Highway One was established. "Although it was still too close for comfort," said Weston, "it was seen as a good compromise in terms of creating somewhere for people to be that wasn't dead in the heart of downtown, that wasn't smack in the heart of the retail district." While many would criticize this approach as "out of sight, out of mind," merchants defended their position with the fact that they must compete with stores in the regulated environment of the nearby Capitola Mall. Shoppers who do not like the environment of a public downtown are free to shop in a well-controlled, air-conditioned shopping mall just miles away. Downtown merchants believe that their image is matter of survival. Both the image and substance of Santa Cruz has changed considerably in the last 15 years.

A slow struggle gradually transformed a very conservative retirement community into a more progressive university town. Part of that struggle was reflected in the antagonism between a conservative business

community and the progressive city council believed to be elected by votes stemming from the university system. Although his phrasing may be unique, Scott Kennedy voiced a common point of view regarding the tension between business and council.

My own view is that before the quake, not to a person but by and large, the business people, a large part of the business community, still had this kind of ridiculous anti-historical view that somehow the impact of the university was just an accident and that almost as though you could turn back the clock to where the majority of the people in city government were not liberals or progressives or whatever you want to call it. You still have a little echo of this. The extreme right still harangues on the university and still wants to get rid of the student vote and stuff.

But before the quake there was a much stronger view like: these progressives are sons of bitches, anti-business creeps who we've got to get rid of. On the other hand, I think the council and political leadership in town both the city and county who tended to be progressive were kind of . . . eh, Santa Cruz, these people bitch all the time but in fact they're doing fine. We can tax them; we can raise fees and charge them more for permits. They'll piss and moan but in the end they always pay. Everyone's making money anyway and they'll complain all the time but it doesn't matter, cause they are still here doing business.

Kennedy's fundamental points were broadly accepted among those interviewed. Neal Coonerty found himself in an unusual position as a merchant, who through his commitment to progressive politics, landed a



seat on city council. Coonerty asserted that the strongest political arm of the business community is in fact the real estate and construction interests, not the merchants. Retailers, according to Coonerty, don't share the same interests in growth advocated by those in development. The retailers, however, did have an important role to play in the battle between conservative and progressive political forces. ". . . any problem that happened downtown" said Coonerty, "was used by conservatives to point out the failure of a progressive city council, [that] they were anti-business." There was a lot of antagonism between the two groups and for years, Coonerty served as a link between the downtown business community and city council.

If this liaison once functioned to maintain communications between the business and political communities, after the 1989 earthquake it was no longer necessary. Both communities realized their interdependence profoundly when they saw the downtown had been destroyed. Kennedy described the experience:

I think the business people thought "Oh my god, whether we like it or not these creeps are going to be in charge of the recovery. We don't have time to get rid of them before we start the recovery process. They're the ones who are going to oversee this thing." Mardi Wormhoudt, Gary Patton, and all the others you know. We're going to have to deal with them. And I think the other side of it, you know, was the elected progressive political establishment realizing that all of our businesses were out of business. It wasn't like oh well, they'll just get a long kind of laissez faire. It was like, we're really going to have to concentrate on what is the mix of decisions and things that can be done now to make

sure that we actually have a viable business community in downtown Santa Cruz. I think it was a real knock on the head for both parties.

The earthquake forced an extraordinary relationship between city hall and the business community to develop immediately. “. . . city administrators and city elected officials, individually and collectively, I think were *much* more sensitized to the issues that individual small business people faced and how they, particularly in those several years after the earthquake, were really walking a fine line for survival themselves,” said Cynthia Mathews.

In this mutual fight for economic survival, Vision Santa Cruz was created by then-mayor Mardi Wormhoudt to equally divide the power and responsibility for rebuilding. The Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Association collectively appointed 18 members to Vision Santa Cruz and city council appointed 18 members. Within a year’s time, Vision Santa Cruz developed the downtown recovery plan. “I was in town for 15 years before the earthquake,” said Delgado, “and I didn’t know hardly *anyone*. And after that earthquake, I got to know 45 business owners *real* well. There’s been a strength to the community that we have now.”

Despite the new sense of common goals, the rebuilding process went slowly. Businesses took refuge in tents, homeowners found shelter in FEMA trailers and many senior citizens on fixed incomes were forced to leave the area when the affordable housing collapsed. Absorbed in the crisis of rebuilding, civic leaders shared few common perceptions regarding homelessness during this time. One person cites a dramatic *decrease* in homelessness “because they weren’t able to access their services” yet another cites an *increase* in homelessness because numbers of people were

displaced by the earthquake, yet another person saw no significant change in homelessness. Surveys on homelessness conducted during this time target those displaced by the earthquake, leaving the previously existing population of homeless people all but invisible.

By 1993 the city no longer looked like a disaster zone: businesses had moved out of tents and back into storefronts, the streets had been repaved, trees brought in, many new buildings had been erected. It was the first year the rebuilt downtown would open for the winter holiday season. Things were looking up but the gaping holes of old building foundations still pock-marked vacant lots and remained a constant reminder that life had not yet returned to normal. Many of the redevelopment deals that were to transform the city, such as the new cinema-plex, had been signed but were years from fruition.

According to most accounts, local business people were feeling over-extended, at-risk, unappreciated, and vulnerable. The economic turning point was still more conceptual than real and anxiety about the town's ability to recover from the earthquake persisted. It was then that homelessness came back into collective view. Scott Kennedy recalled the demonstration established by a local homeless man nick-named Won Ton. Won Ton is among those homeless people consistently characterized as "homeless by choice." Won Ton established a cardboard shelter on the sidewalk of Pacific Avenue which he called a Peace Vigil. Half a dozen or so people attended the encampment and passed out literature to draw attention to the presence and needs of homeless people in Santa Cruz—that is Won Ton's recollection. Kennedy, who was then mayor, recalled the demonstration in winter of 1993 this way:

We had this demonstration where David Won Ton Jacobs and his little coterie of jerks set up a cardboard sleeping area right on the downtown street. I was there, you know, I saw it. I went by it a lot of times, I thought, you know, this too will pass. Frankly all we need is a good rain and they'll go away, you know, but I'm sure as heck not going to tell the police to come and . . . that's what they *want*, they want us to react and that's like this whole game that's played.

So I said to them, I'm sorry to disappoint you but I don't have a moral obligation and certainly not a legal obligation to play a part in your grade B drama. You want to have your little melodrama do your thing but I'm not gonna play my part. But they persisted for the whole time, for two weeks I think it was. It really drove merchants nuts. Christmas wasn't as good as they thought, the holiday season wasn't as good as they'd hoped. And it absolutely drove people, you know, beyond what. You know really, beyond . . . .

You know, I don't think that David WonTon Jacobs was responsible for their bad Christmas season. That's ridiculous. But typically you started getting letters to the editor. Typically, I think the Chambers of Commerce, I'm joking here, but the Chambers of Commerce of other cities write these letters to the editor about how horrible it is, about how I got harassed in downtown Santa Cruz you know . . . . Anyway, the point I'm trying to build to here is there was in downtown this building sense of kind of irrational something's got to be done.

Kennedy was unable to persuade merchants that the presence of homeless people did not destroy their year-end sales. Eleanor Weston recalled the tension among the members of the Downtown Association

that year regarding the negative impact of homelessness on their ability to do business. Weston explained that most of the downtown merchants operate small businesses on a very thin margin. "It's not like you open a store and get rich," said Weston. "Most small business owners are working harder than they would ever work for anybody else for less money." Consequently merchants, according to Weston, are very sensitive to anything that impacts their business. "If it keeps five or ten customers away from my door that's significant," said Weston. Business owners shared a great deal of concern about the potential for anti-social activity in the downtown. They believed that in order for people to choose that district as their shopping option rather than any of the many other available choices, they had to be able to present an inviting image. Since stores on Pacific Avenue look for people's discretionary income allocated to recreational spending, the concern regarding the town's image was especially strong. There was nothing for sale downtown that anyone *had* to buy. Concerned about their image, merchants shifted their attention to "that portion of the population that hangs on the street . . . . It is actually a relatively small number of people but it doesn't take too many to have a real negative affect on image," said Weston.

Neal Coonerty responded to these concerns by drafting a set of ordinances aimed at controlling the behavior of people downtown. Coonerty, like many other merchants, was angry because he believed a minority of people had created the perception that the downtown area was unsafe. This small group of people was generally referred to by civic leaders as a collection of "so-called homeless activists, homeless by choice, punks, and derelicts." It seems that no one believed that the "true homeless," those who were homeless by circumstance and trying hard not to be visible,

were part of the problem. This anger about the downtown was a familiar feeling for many.

Kennedy had faced it every year that he had been on council. He recalled how year after year, a raft of ordinances that had been used in some other city would be brought to council. He described them as “more or less repressive” and acknowledged that for years the council had refused to adopt them. But in 1994 things were different. “I think I was a little naive,” said Kennedy who was mayor at the time. “I didn’t see it coming as big as I should have.” Conservative merchants, politicians and media churned about “something” needing to be done to restore the viability of downtown commerce but no one was prepared for what happened next.

A short while later, at the New Year’s Eve celebration around the town clock on Pacific Avenue, a riot erupted as police tried to end the celebration and disperse the crowd. A group described as “young punks” rushed down Pacific Avenue, smashing windows and stealing from display windows. Years of carefully building confidences between conservatives and progressive threatened to dissolve completely as conservatives attacked the mayor and city hall for failing to take matters under control. Just then, Kennedy’s friend and fellow council member Neal Coonerty stepped forward with what has become known as the Downtown Ordinances.

The ordinances covered everything from making it illegal to sit on the sidewalk, to requiring permits for pan-handling, to a youth curfew. This was the first time such sweeping ordinances had been presented in an intensely politically charged arena. Would council and business lock horns again? Kennedy revealed the council’s process as a compromise.

Now politically, you know, for most people it's disgusting but I just say it the way I see it, you know, whether its disgusting or not . . . . We felt that because so much had been done since the quake had been done on a community-wide basis, based on a community consensus and stuff . . . we made a political decision early on when with Neal, I did, that we would not now have a three month period of open warfare on the council. Basically say, let's try to keep this coalition. At least the council should try to speak with a single mind. If we start to just break down into warring factions it's really . . . .

City council held tight in their effort to present "one mind" to the business community. The ordinances underwent modification: the permit requirement for panhandling was dropped, the youth curfew was dropped, panhandling restrictions were added. Kennedy told Coonerty that he would support the ordinances provisionally but added: "I want you to know that when some of this stuff settles down I'm going to come back and try to change this because this is stupid. They're stupid laws."

Debate on the ordinances drew such large crowds that city council meetings were moved to the Civic Center. The ACLU was among the many who urged city council not to adopt the ordinances. Merchants turned out in force to urge just the opposite. During the course of the vitriolic meetings, two stores had their windows broken. The attack on the stores, owned by the two most vocal supporters of the ordinances, was seen by many merchants as an act of terrorism and further proof that something needed to be done.

One month later, in the Spring of 1994, all of the ordinances passed unanimously with one exception: Katherine Beiers refused to vote for the

ordinance which banned sitting on public sidewalks. Santa Cruz now had new laws regulating public behavior that were among the most restrictive in the country.

The day the ordinances went into effect a public protest march took to Pacific Avenue. After the march, approximately 500 people gathered at the corners of Cathcart and Pacific. Kennedy looked back at the protests as a show of strength by "so-called" advocates of the homeless. According to Kennedy, the people who protested the ordinances had not demonstrated the slightest bit of "community-mindedness" previously. "As far as I was concerned," said Kennedy, "their credibility was just nil." Kennedy attributed the protests, which went on for several weeks, to a handful of "really nasty characters" who misrepresented the ordinances, mobilized the media, and caused a lot of problems. Like many others who supported the ordinances, Kennedy asserted that the concerns of the demonstrators were unfounded.

The demonstrators had condemned the ordinances as an attack on the homeless and disenfranchised. They claimed that the laws unfairly targeted homeless people who were more likely to sit on the sidewalk or panhandle than middle-class residents. Merchants and city council continued to insist that the laws did not target homeless people and to deride those associated with protests. Both daily and weekly papers in Santa Cruz published editorials and letters to the editor against the demonstrations and featured cartoons making fun of homeless people. In a capitalist economy, the civic and social atmosphere inevitably must place the demands of business above the demands of homeless people. If the alliance between business and city hall had improved, the relationships between the disenfranchised and those in power had eroded.



Civic leaders refused to acknowledge the real or potential value of the protestors' concerns. Coonerty described the sitting ban as "an issue that appealed to college students." To challenge the constitutionality of the sitting ban many people violated the law and were arrested in the weeks immediately following the enactment of the new law. Even when the sitting ban was declared unconstitutional in a municipal court, Coonerty expressed a common sentiment when he derided the qualifications of the presiding judge who was a commissioner, not a "real judge." In a subsequent trial, the initial finding of unconstitutionality was upheld by a municipal judge. The city filed an appeal and rewrote a new, more specific version of the law which has been upheld by the courts. "The community, by passing an ordinance, says these are standards this community feels strongly about," said Coonerty. "They educate the people and people change their behavior to meet those standards." Such laws also provide fines of \$160.00 for each violation and six month jail terms for two consecutive violations.

Civic leaders all expressed confidence that these standards are established clearly now. There was unanimous agreement that the ordinances were successful. Each leader interviewed expressed a strong belief that these ordinances do not target homeless people any more than they target any other population and insisted that the ordinances make the downtown safe and accessible for everyone.

In addition to enacting laws which regulate leaning against buildings, sitting on sidewalks, and panhandling, the city of Santa Cruz also supports a long-standing camping ban. According to Mike Rotkin it was initially passed to stop university students from sleeping on the beaches during Easter vacation. According to Scott Kennedy, it was passed to prevent

“people in campers and Winnebagos who were parking on West Cliff Drive on the cliffs above the beach or people who were sleeping on the beach at night.” Whatever the original intent, today the camping ban is used to prevent homeless people from sleeping in visible areas. The camping ban prevents individuals from sleeping on public property, from sleeping inside vehicles parked on public property and from sleeping in vehicles parked private property—regardless of the owner’s consent.<sup>8</sup>

Since trespassing laws prevent individuals from sleeping on private property, it may be logical to assume that the function of the camping ban is to prevent people from sleeping on public property. The issue, consequently, appears to be one of visibility. The camping ban goes so far as to prevent people from sleeping inside vehicles parked on private property even when they have the consent of the property owner.

City council members were quick to note that the camping ban is enforced on a complaint basis; police do not go looking for homeless people who are violating the camping ban. Since the camping ban is enforced only by complaint, individuals may sleep on condition that they remain invisible to the public eye. For most council members the camping ban is described as a “non-issue.” An average of one person a month, according to Kennedy, is cited under the camping ban without a complaint having been lodged with police. From the perspective of city council as a whole, the camping ban does not present any real problem to homeless people. “To me the camping ban is possibly the least interesting and productive way to enter the discussion of homeless issues in Santa Cruz but its the most prominent point because it lets people posture,” said Kennedy.

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<sup>8</sup> In 1995 the law was amended to allow people to sleep in vehicles parked on private property when they have the consent of the property owner.

The camping ban falls into the category of laws which Kennedy calls “stupid, just plain stupid” and yet he and others deride those who argue that the law should be abolished completely. Kennedy insists the camping ban “is just not a problem” despite the regular complaints from “so-called” homeless advocates.

For three-quarters of the year there are a maximum of 250 shelter beds for homeless people and a dirt lot used as legal campground. During the other quarter of the year another 100 beds open up through various programs. Since the homeless population is estimated to be between 1,000 and 3,000 people, there clearly are a lot of people affected by the camping ban. Where can these people go to sleep without breaking the law? “Over the city line,” said Coonerty.

Given that camping bans have been the most common legislation passed by cities seeking to control the visibility of homelessness, the direction “over the city line” just might take one from city to city to city. There are, however, many places within the city of Santa Cruz where homeless people make temporary or semi-permanent camps—a fact of which all council members and merchants were aware.

The result of the camping ban is, ultimately, to force homeless people into less visible areas, which often puts them at higher risk for being assaulted, raped, battered, or murdered. It is illegal to sleep under the overhangs of buildings, in doorways, on beaches and in parks; the most common, low-visibility sleeping places, such as under bridges, are being abandoned because they are targeted by thugs who attack people while they are sleeping. Consequently, many homeless people are beginning to hide in the shrubbery of residential neighborhoods in order to gain a safe night’s sleep.

Merchants and council members insist the camping ban is a “non-issue” but, by and large, so vehemently oppose lifting the camping ban that it clearly must serve some unspoken purpose. The camping ban protects middle-class residents and tourists from the visible poverty of homelessness but what other purpose(s) does the ban serve?

Laws not only establish codes of conduct, they institutionalize attitudes and infuse them with special value. The law against sleeping at night in public has importance beyond the obvious goal stated as the purpose of the law. Institutionalized forces tend to stabilize expectations, conduct, and belief. The conduct targeted by the sleeping ban is clear but what expectations and which beliefs are being stabilized by criminalizing sleeping in public? Historically, we are accustomed to laws designed to protect citizens from behavior that threatens lives or property. As a result, one might assume that homeless people sleeping in a park constitute some risk to the well-being or property of wealthier residents. Why does a housed citizen have the right to have a homeless person arrested for sleeping in a park, particularly when there is no indoor alternative? Such a right would seem to reinforce beliefs that homeless people are in themselves, a criminal element, that the presence of homeless people is unsafe, that homeless people have other options but, for some reason, are choosing deliberately to interfere with or threaten the middle-class quality of life.

Creating a ban which is enforced by complaint only may provide some sense of progressive compromise to liberal, middle-class residents, since other cities have much harsher laws which are enforced systematically. Yet, why should an individual’s right to sleep be dependent upon the goodwill of another simply because he or she is poor? Trespassing laws prevent unwelcome persons from sleeping in someone’s yard, but why should an

individual have the right to have a person arrested because he or she noticed the person sleeping on public property? In public affairs the goodwill of others cannot be relied upon to produce fairness; the institutional order must provide some basis for a claim of right. Only power can check power, yet in today's society the homeless have no power.

Fundamentally, all such issues of community must be understood as issues of moralities, rather than as issues of rational thought. There is no cost/benefit analysis that can address the criminalization of sleeping. Some have complained that homeless people do not "live light on the land" but instead drag in mattresses and leave trash and feces in their wake. If littering is the offense, why punish sleeping?

Piven and Cloward (1965, 1971, 1977) have explained government action and inaction regarding poverty in terms of control rather than in terms of compassion. From this perspective, the camping ban, the "Downtown Ordinances," as well as social services such as the Day Resource Center find a larger meaning in the social structure of Santa Cruz. These responses to homelessness can best be understood by the legal and political history preceding them. While the attitudes of civic leaders toward homeless people have been improving, many people, on both sides of the issue, clearly remember the interactions of previous years. It is not difficult to find homeless or formerly homeless people in Santa Cruz who have personal stories of being beaten by police and dumped on a road 20 miles outside of town. Nor is it difficult to find merchants or council members who remember simpler times when they didn't have to "tip-toe" around the rights of homeless people. The camping ban, given the lack of alternatives for homeless people, may be more rooted to an oppressive past than to a progressive future.

While some of the “Downtown Ordinances” do criminalize threatening behavior such as aggressive panhandling, the camping ban, like the ordinance which prohibits sitting on public sidewalks criminalizes peaceful behavior. This behavior, even though it is peaceful is believed to contribute to perceptions that Santa Cruz is not a safe place to be. One must conclude that visible poverty rather than the act of sitting or sleeping is what is threatening since middle-class residents and their children sitting on the sidewalk to eat ice cream have not brought comparable concern.

The presence of visible poverty often does discourage shoppers, particularly those out to do some “recreational” spending. But if one is to recognize the merchants’ struggle for economic viability, one must also recognize the fight for survival which homeless people face. Indeed many merchants likened their experiences after the 1989 earthquake to homelessness, yet none had been threatened by hunger or a lack of a bed. Their uncertainty regarding their economic future is not comparable with the uncertainty homeless people face. The fear of losing everything, is not the same as the experience of having lost everything—including your ability to represent yourself credibly in the public sphere. To remove all the material goods from an upper-middle or middle-class merchant tomorrow would still leave that person with a greater sense of entitlement, more expectations, resources, and hope than most homeless people currently experience. Yet the rhetorical battle for survival was waged if their struggles for survival were comparable.

If the presence of visibly gay people prevented shoppers from coming downtown, would city council legislate restrictions to make the city “safe” for shoppers? Would the city be forced to restrict where gay couples could hold hands or kiss in order to bring shoppers back to the downtown? Many

shopping malls currently ban public displays of affection between same sex couples, just as they ban panhandling and “discourage” the presence of homeless people. Apparently those who regulate the environment of shopping malls believe that visible homosexuality is an impediment to a healthy shopping environment. How far can cities go in efforts to preserve the viability of their downtowns? How far should they go?

Merchants counter that without the downtown, there would be no place for homeless people to panhandle, there would be no town. If the economic viability of Santa Cruz was threatened between 1989 and 1994, what truly was the cause? All community leaders agree that the homeless by circumstance, the “truly deserving” homeless people, were never a problem because they are not very visible and they are not aggressive panhandlers. Consequently, leaders can honestly say that the ordinances, the camping ban, the host program and similar programs were never intended as an attack on homeless people.

On the other hand, those who are mentally ill or drug addicted do tend to display anti-social behavior and are harder to control. While they may deserve help, there is no help available; therefore, there must be clear enforcement of social standards in order to protect the interests of commerce. Shoppers don't like to be verbally assaulted and the presence of addicts, alcoholics, and people with untreated mental illness increases the chances of such assaults occurring. So if this group is primarily defined by mental illness and substance abuse problems, rather than by their status as homeless people, one can target their behavior without targeting homeless people per se. Yet there are many addicts, alcoholics, and people with untreated mental illness who are not on the streets assaulting people

because they have a place to live, regular meals, and some amount of economic stability.

And then there are those who are the “undeserving” homeless, the “homeless by choice” whose presence may include musical performances of varying levels of accomplishment, games of hackie-sack, and social congregations all of which do tend to disturb merchants. But again, creating laws to regulate their behavior or to remove them from the downtown area is not generally viewed as an attack on homeless people because these people commonly are not included in the accepted definition of homelessness because they are perceived to have made a lifestyle choice.

Given these political gradations of homelessness, it is possible for civic leaders to insist these laws do not target homeless people even when many of the laws were modeled after those intended to reduce the visibility of homeless people in other cities. There is also a level of simple contradiction in the way city council members discuss the ordinances which may be related to Lerner’s just world theory. Kennedy, for instance, acknowledged that the laws were “stupid” and described how, in previous years, council had refused to adopt similar laws because they were more or less repressive. Yet he describes protests against these laws as unfounded. Even among service providers, protestors were derided, “if they’re getting assistance, why are they bitching? It’s like spitting in the face of those who are giving to you.”

With Kennedy, as with others, the desire for self-justification shows the pull of morality but the same impulse leads to a profusion of rationalizations. The fundamental source of moral obligation is our own sense of identity and relatedness, not the vulnerability of others. So where one’s identity as a progressive might motivate certain actions to respond to



the needs of disenfranchised people, one's inability or unwillingness to include certain groups of people as equal community members inhibits such action.

### *Field Work: Part II*

#### *Conceptions of the American Dream and Social Justice*

By examining the moral philosophies of civic leaders it is possible to understand why these individuals believe their actions are the best moral responses to homelessness. There are many individual differences which account, in part, for personal responses to homelessness; however, these responses tend to reflect a collection of values shared by society. In Santa Cruz, California, the collectivity of shared values is generally perceived to be to the left of mainstream America.

Although Santa Cruz is a predominantly white, middle-class community, in many ways it is a far distance from the embodiment American ideals represented by a heterosexual family with two children, a house with a picket fence, and two cars in the garage. In its bizarre split personality as a tourist resort and college town, Santa Cruz, to a large degree, embodies a youth culture, despite its history as a retirement community. Perhaps more than anything, Santa Cruz is a place where people come for a change of venue: either to relax on vacation or to study at the university or to get away from the faster pace of surrounding cities. In this sense, Santa Cruz, more so than other cities, is constantly infused with new ideas and may be less committed to carrying forward historical

ideals than it is committed to creating new ones. How then do the civic leaders of Santa Cruz describe something so central to the history of the country as the American Dream?

For three of those interviewed (Rittenhouse, Mathews, and Coonerty) the answer was much like that one might find in any town: a home, a family, a chance for their children to succeed, plenty to eat, and a minimum of hardships. Although Mathews noted that she believes children are no longer sure of success and Coonerty thinks the American Dream is becoming more difficult to attain—all three persons believe in the viability of the American Dream as they described it.

Three other people interviewed (Beiers, Delgado, and Weston) defined the American Dream exclusively in terms of the ability to find satisfying employment: “Having the opportunity to pursue whatever gives you a sense of worth,” “being able to create a degree of financial security and personal freedom,” and “having a job with some dignity,” represented the core of the American Dream to these three people who each subsequently endorsed the Dream as alive and well.

Mike Rotkin took a more historical view and defined the American Dream as the ability of a person to move from poverty into economic affluence through their own hard, unskilled work. For Rotkin, unskilled labor—the ability to make one’s fortune with a shovel and sweat—was the keystone. This dream, the dream of his grandfather, he declared, is dead. Scott Kennedy, like Cynthia Mathews, believed the American Dream meant that the next generation would be better off than his own. However, where Mathews defined this as one failed piece of the whole American Dream, Kennedy exclusively defined the American Dream by the chances for increasing success of future generations. He and Rotkin were the only

people interviewed who believed the American Dream is a relic of the past.

This shared belief in the American Dream is central to the philosophical, economic and cultural underpinnings of the United States. In a nation that lacks shared ethnic or religious traditions, belief in the American Dream provides a sense of cohesive social identity. At its core is a belief in inclusion. It is a belief that everyone can succeed. Belief in this myth remains strong even in Santa Cruz. The visible presence of thousands of people who are economically destitute, the high rate of unemployment, under-employment, and poverty have not significantly loosened the hold of the American Dream on local civic leaders. Rather the presence of such economic inequality seems to strengthen individuals sense of separateness by reinforcing their belief that they deserve what they have earned.

Home ownership has long been a standard component of the American Dream. In many ways, home ownership provides a tangible sense of achievement and security as well as a sense of belonging. Seven of the eight people interviewed owned their homes, six of those eight believed the American Dream, in some form, was attainable.

In Santa Cruz especially, home ownership often provides a more tenuous sense of security than in other parts of the country. The inflationary rise of real estate prices drove the cost of a 1200-square-foot house which sold for \$29,000 in 1970 to \$250,000 in 1994.<sup>9</sup> Many people who currently own homes in Santa Cruz would be unable to buy a home on today's market. This may be true for at least half of those people interviewed. Therefore it might be reasonable to expect home ownership to produce less confidence in the American Dream than in other places of the country where home ownership provides a more secure place in the

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<sup>9</sup>These figures are based on the author's home.

configuration of success. The following table draws the relationships among home ownership, belief in the American Dream and belief that all people are entitled to housing.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Home Owner</b>	<b>American Dream</b>	<b>Housing, A right?</b>
Katherine Beiers	yes	yes	yes
Neal Coonerty	yes	yes	yes
Robert Delgado	no	yes	no
Scott Kennedy	yes	no	yes
Cynthia Mathews	yes	yes	as a goal
Louis Rittenhouse	yes	yes	no
Mike Rotkin	yes	no	as a goal
Eleanor Weston	yes	yes	no

As Table 4 shows, only three of the eight people interviewed believed that housing should be a basic right for all people. Mathews' and Rotkin's qualified responses seemed to indicate a philosophical agreement, which would be a part of "a perfect world." For Rotkin, the practical consideration of cost (Who's going to pay for it?) prevented him from being able to flatly support an individual's right to housing. Mathews' reservations were not clearly articulated.

Although versions of the American Dream may vary according to individual perception and generational concerns, fundamentally, the

American Dream, like the Protestant Work Ethic, is devoted to the belief that in a just world, people who work hard and behave deservingly are rewarded. In the days of Mike Rotkin's grandfather, unskilled labor comprised a substantially larger part of the labor market than it does today. In that sense, the American Dream of an unskilled laborer "making it" represented everyone's dream. Similarly, the contemporary modifications of the American Dream which see success in terms of material gain alone, may reflect the aspirations of a more diverse workforce.

Only Scott Kennedy discounted the viability of the American Dream completely and his reasoning is quite interesting. The belief that one's children would surpass one's own material success has been a popular corollary of the American Dream, but never a cornerstone. While many of Kennedy's generation, Cynthia Mathews for instance, recognize this particular change in the economic circumstances, most do not discount the entire American Dream as a result. In today's market, very few people who work full-time in Santa Cruz will ever be able to afford to buy their own home in Santa Cruz unless assisted by some other funding. More often, contemporary youth, seeing that they cannot attain their parent's level of success, as modest as that may be, are more inclined to discount the American Dream while their parents are challenged to reconcile their love for the children with their beliefs about deservedness.

The findings of quantitative research done for this thesis (included as Appendix B) revealed a strong correlation between home ownership and attitudes toward equal wealth. The interviews showed a strong correlation between home ownership and belief in the American Dream but attitudes toward poverty were less clear. In order to clarify the relationship between the American Dream and attitudes toward wealth and poverty, a series of

direct statements were developed for the second half of the interviews. These statements, to which interviewees responded, reflect the ideological cornerstones of the American Dream, belief in a just world and the Protestant Work Ethic. In addition, questions specific to homelessness were added. Table 5 provides both the questions and a collective assessment of responses. On occasion, individuals were uncomfortable with providing true or false responses and were given the option of elaborating on their points of view, hence some answers are qualified. In a few instances, individuals began by saying a statement was both true and false and after some explanation summarized it as basically true or basically false.

<b>Table 5 Beliefs About Poverty and Wealth</b>	
Life is basically fair and people generally get what they deserve.	6 False 2 True
Most homeless people in Santa Cruz were not local residents when they became homeless.	4 False 2 True 2 Don't know
By pouring money into homeless shelters and programs we are destroying people's willingness to pull themselves together.	5 False 3 True to some extent
Free enterprise and competition are what made this country great.	3 False 4 True 1 Ambivalent
Anyone who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.	3 False 4 True 1 Ambivalent
There's no such thing as a free lunch for anyone; you get what you earn and that's the way it should be.	4 False 4 True
Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.	3 False 5 True (qualified)
Cities which offer first-rate services for homeless people become magnets for transients.	3 False 5 True (qualified)

### *A Question of Fairness*

Belief in the American Dream often leads individuals to conclude that life is fair—despite the visible presence of inequality. Three questions in this section of the interview directly relate to perceptions of fairness:

Life is basically fair and people generally get what they deserve.

Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.

There's no such thing as a free lunch for anyone; you get what you earn and that's the way it should be.

A majority of civic leaders agreed with the conclusion that life is basically fair. Similarly, five of the eight people interviewed expressed the belief that wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability. Each of the five people qualified their response to say that it is not always but most often evidence of such; the noted exception was the case of inherited wealth. The responses to these statements, both individually and collectively, seem to imply a belief that people deserve the economic circumstances which they have. However, problematic inconsistencies appear when responses are compared with less direct questions in other parts of the interview.

While a majority of people were confident of life's fairness and quite comfortable in assigning personal ability to the accumulation of wealth, no one was entirely comfortable in assigning personal responsibility to poverty. Civic leaders expressed apparently conflicting beliefs that life is fair and that poor people are not to blame for their poverty. Logic tells us that if the world is fair and people are poor, that poverty is compatible with fairness—a tenet of capitalism reflected in the American Dream. If poverty is fair, poor people must somehow “deserve” their economic plight, not necessarily because they are “bad” people but because they are lacking either in skills, intelligence, or “moral fiber.” One can't quite blame an individual for a lack of intellectual acuity yet individuals easily see such a person's poverty as justified.



In responding to questions in the first half of the interview, only two people, Coonerty and Weston, believed that poverty was a sign of personal failure and each hurried to explain what they meant by personal failure. "I think people make decisions that are wrong decisions, said Coonerty, "and [they] have consequences, but it's just a part of a very complex picture." What kind of wrong decision might someone make? Coonerty provided the example of a woman who marries, becomes a homemaker and does not create a credit or work history for herself. Indeed, many such women face homelessness when their marriages fail. A second example Coonerty provided was that of poor decisions driven by substance abuse. In both of these situations he believes there is a degree of personal responsibility for making poor choices but sees that responsibility as only a part of the picture of homelessness. Similarly, Weston had a difficult time defining "personal failure." Weston framed the problem this way: "If I say that it is not the result of personal failure than you must have been some kind of victim and I don't perceive it in that kind of either/or sense. I perceive it as a failure of the system and a failure of the individual to recognize the failure of the system and deal with it appropriately."

Delgado, by contrast, did not believe that poverty was a sign of personal failure; however, his explanation gave him common ground with Coonerty and Weston but with a slightly different emphasis. "There's always gonna be the haves and have nots," said Delgado. Likening Smith-Corona's recent bankruptcy claim to homelessness, Delgado explained: "Yeah in one sense that is personal failure [they didn't see it coming] but in another sense, hey they can't help it that somebody else came along with a better mousetrap." It seems that in Delgado's thinking the individual is not blamed, though he or she has been outsmarted. Personal decisions are

only a small part of the larger picture and inevitably, someone needs to be at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. For Delgado, poverty for some, is clearly part of an overall scheme of fairness.

This line of thinking may reflect an unwillingness of public figures to outwardly blame poor people for poverty; it may reflect multiple definitions of fairness; or, it may reflect a level of philosophical abstraction essential to liberal capitalism which sees poverty for some as "fair." More contradictions were brought to the surface as the interviews continued.

The even split of responses regarding the proverbial "free lunch" indicates further ambivalence about the fairness of life. Responses were equally divided regarding the statement: "There's no such thing as a free lunch for anyone; you get what you earn and that's the way it should be." Four people believed this statement to be true and four believed it to be false. Among those who believed this statement to be false, two people believed that the wealthy enjoy many "free lunches" while two others believed it was the poor who were indulged by the system. It would seem contradictory that one could see life as basically fair and yet believe that some people are given unfair advantages. However, the construction "basically fair" may provide leeway for some unfairness to exist as long as it is contained within certain parameters; consequently no conclusive analysis can be derived from this question/response.

### *Beliefs About Homelessness*

In the first half of the interview, when asked indirectly about the composition of the local homeless population, there was an overwhelming consensus that most homeless people were not long-term local residents when they became homeless. Some people clearly believed that homeless

people traveled to Santa Cruz for warmer weather or better social services, others believed that people with fragile resources and limited abilities soon became homeless after moving to Santa Cruz. Table 5 includes three questions that focus on beliefs about the responses of homeless people to social services:

Most people in Santa Cruz were not local residents when they became homeless.

Cities which offer first-rate services for homeless people become magnets for transients.

By pouring money into homeless shelters and programs we are destroying people's willingness to pull themselves together.

In the second half of the interview there was much more ambiguity in the collective attitudes toward homeless people than in the first half of the interview. When presented with the statement "Most homeless people in Santa Cruz were not local residents when they became homeless" two people said that it was a true statement, two were unable to answer at all and four said the statement was false. In light of the overwhelming consensus that "most people were not local residents when they became homeless" this response seemingly presents a strong level of cognitive dissonance. The directness of this question may have made some people uncomfortable and account for the discrepancy when compared with their earlier, more narrative descriptions of the transient nature of homeless people. None of the individuals appeared to recognize that his or her response in the second half of the interview contradicted a previous response in the first part of the interview.

By contrast, responses to the statement: "Cities which offer first-rate services for homeless people become magnets for transients" reflected sentiments that were consistent with those given in the first half of the interview. Considering how closely related these questions are, the difference in the consistency of responses is remarkable. The first question regarding the resident status of homeless people demands a knowledge of homeless people, as opposed to programs whereas the next question demands a knowledge of programs, not people. This is consistent with the fact that most civic leaders are not familiar with homeless individuals but through their roles as civic leaders are acquainted programs designed to serve homeless people. Consequently they might have been more comfortable answering direct questions which drew upon their knowledge base while evading the other issue of residency. Yet it is important to note that in a less direct answer-response mode, individuals were quite willing to fill-in the gaps in their knowledge with beliefs that were consistent with their political ideologies. This is consistent with analysis of homelessness on a national level and a primary reason why information regarding homelessness is so intensely politicized.

Five people expressed qualified agreement with the statement: "Cities which offer first-rate services for homeless people become magnets for transients." Although a majority of people expressed agreement with this statement in general, their beliefs differed regarding the cause and the extent of this phenomena. For instance, some who agreed with this statement saw it as a reason to either eliminate, reduce or restrict services while others saw it as an unimportant yet inevitable consequence of being the county seat.

Few people believed that services such as shelters and other programs

destroyed an individual's willingness to pull themselves out of poverty. Five people declared this point of view to be false while three found it to be true. Those who believed the scenario to be true, generally added it was important to have programs that helped people out of poverty rather than supporting only those which maintained people in poverty. This response is consistent with the belief that social services in Santa Cruz are working well and may reflect individuals' political and philosophical beliefs rather than personal experiences with homeless people.

#### *A Question of Merit*

Two questions related directly to constructs of a competitive meritocracy: "Free enterprise and competition are what made this country great" and "Anyone who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding." Individuals' marginally endorsed these statements: in both cases four people found them to be true, three people believed them to be false and one person was undecided. The values of hard work and competition have been heralded ramparts of the American Dream; the belief that these statements are true is consistent both with a conception of life as basically fair and with constructions of the American Dream. But more important perhaps was the level of ambivalence expressed in the responses to these statements. Both of these questions produced undecided responses and neither reflected a clear majority point of view.

Although a majority of people believed that life is basically fair, it seems that individuals were less confident that hard work would be rewarded with success. Everyone believed that one's chances for success were increased, but not guaranteed, by hard work. So it would seem that in a fair world it is possible to work hard and not succeed. As these contradictions

mount, it begins to appear that individuals have many definitions of fairness. Another possible explanation is that the “unfairness” that happens to other people is an acceptable aspect of a “fair” world. The latter perspective is consistent with the perception that efforts to aid homeless people are a matter of goodwill and generosity and not a matter of entitlement. Such a theory is completely consistent with Piven and Cloward’s earlier work and supports the quantitative research described in Appendix B.

Regardless of how one names beliefs about deservedness and undeservedness, those who have attained success within the economic system as it exists, tended to have negative attitudes toward policies and philosophies designed to equally distribute wealth among the entire population. This resistance to equally distributing wealth assumes a belief in the relationship between personal agency and worldly success. Disparate incomes are thought to be acceptable when there is a pervasive belief that society is a meritocracy. Hence a majority of civic leaders described the world as basically fair despite the prevalence of systemic poverty.

Free enterprise and competition were frequently noted as being both the strength and weakness of this country and many people elaborated on the uncomfortable dilemma posed by conceptions of greatness: Is this a great nation? Why is it a great nation? The statement provoked enough ambiguity to make it useless in its present form but representative of an intriguing area for future exploration.

#### *A Conflict of Rights?*

The second half of the interview also contained open-ended questions regarding philosophical or political issues evoked by the presence of

homeless people. Once someone becomes homeless their daily habits, needs and concerns change dramatically. Does this shift in living circumstances throw the rights of homeless people into conflict with the rights of business owners or housed residents? Responses to this question were complex; many people offered double-edged answers such as this: “No. The rights of homeless people are the same as anyone else’s rights . . . but if it comes down to panhandling or peeing in my doorway there’s a problem. No one has the right to interfere with commerce.” To many of those interviewed, sitting on the sidewalk, leaning against a building and panhandling are not fundamental *rights*, such as the right to a fair trial, but instead are considered to be *behaviors* which become problematic when they interfere with commerce. This apparent distinction between behaviors and rights creates an important gray zone in the discourse about entitlement and homelessness. Panhandling to gain a living is considered by many interviewed to be a “behavior,” not a right; whereas, it is considered the “right” of a merchant to conduct his or her business to earn a livelihood. Indeed several merchants expressed frustration and anger that panhandling is, in fact, considered by the courts to be protected speech—a right. Again, community leaders argued that it makes no difference if the person sitting under a store window is homeless or wealthy, the behavior is unacceptable because it interferes with commerce. However, it should be noted that a homeless person and a wealthy person, though both engaged in sitting on the sidewalk, will each affect business differently because the offense is not taken by the act of sitting but by the presence of poverty.

According to Coonerty much of the conflict between the interests of homeless people and merchants is not tied to rights or to law but to an unspoken social contract. Such unspoken contracts generally pertain to

codes of conduct, simple behavior codified by historical circumstance. Such contracts have survived as unspoken agreements, rather than as laws, because no harm to persons or property is committed if someone's behavior deviates from the norm. Now it would seem that what must be considered is a *potential* harm to *commerce*. While people who deviate from social norms do not harm people or property, their presence potentially can harm business.

Rittenhouse described the problem as one inherent to the concept of public space. He offered this example: a person can loiter all day long on a public sidewalk without actually, technically breaking the law and yet he or she by doing so is upsetting other members of the community. "The laws and the courts have taken us to a point where we can no longer deal with these issues," said Rittenhouse, "because this individual's right to intimidate another person [by his or her presence or actions] is virtually a civil liberty." According to Rittenhouse, the downtown, because it is a public space, is plagued with social problems and as a consequence, businesses cannot compete with area shopping malls. The solution Rittenhouse sees ahead is for the city to lease the downtown to the business community. This would mean there would be public access to all streets for residents of the city but that the business community would be able to dictate appropriate behavior on those streets—just as in shopping malls. The primary barrier to this solution, Rittenhouse contends, is the fact that cities would be admitting failure by leasing the streets to the business community.

Historically, the downtown or commercial district of any town has been a public space shared by merchants and residents and controlled by local



government. It has been a market place of ideas as well as goods. Without public space to serve as the center for development and maintenance of community the structure and experience of society, our social associations, would be changed fundamentally. Historically, community has included the social associations of all people, not just those a dominant class finds desirable. While such right to associate in public spaces has long been abused by the dominant society, privatizing public space would provide a legal mandate to discriminate against those considered to be undesirable influences on commerce. To eliminate a shared public arena would at a minimum limit freedom of assembly and freedom of speech of residents who would shuttle between the private sphere of their individual homes and private commercial districts. Most likely such a social restriction would also limit political access and involvement by fragmenting the mix of personal, commercial, social, and political forces which comprise a community.

# Discussion

## *Overview*

The hypothesis of this research asserts that a long standing devotion to civil liberties and the competitive prosperity they endorse, has created a social environment in which it is increasingly difficult to perceive homelessness as a violation of a social contract—except, perhaps, to the extent to which the presence of homeless people interferes with commerce. The literature review revealed that while many white Americans enjoy the highest standard of living on earth, the living standards for African American and Latinos approximates that of people in the poorest of economically developing nations. Of those workers who can be tracked through federal systems, one-third are living in poverty (Schwarz & Volgy, 1992) and nearly half of all female-headed households live in poverty (Committee on Ways and Means, 1993). The gaps between rich and poor continue to grow and the desperate poverty of those who become homeless commonly is accepted by society without expression of moral outrage.

In Santa Cruz, as in the rest of the nation, the local economy continues to develop service industry and upper echelon jobs with little or nothing between the two extremes. Compounding the problem of earning a living in Santa Cruz is the lack of affordable housing; fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$719.00 per month and landlords typically require first, last, and deposit in order for a renter to move into a rental unit. While homeless people have been living in Santa Cruz for more than

fifteen years, in the last ten years the numbers of homeless people have vastly increased. No longer are homeless people easily characterized as “drunks” or “bums.” Contemporary homelessness encompasses a broad range of people including women, children, and families whose only common denominator may be extreme poverty.

Research on homeless people largely has fixated on demographics, as if some personal characteristics would be discovered that could explain the rising numbers of visibly homeless people. Yet this quest for demographics has been unable to produce anything so basic as a count of homeless people on which all or most can agree. Experts calculate a national population of homeless people to be between 324,000 and several million. Similarly in Santa Cruz, local civic leaders estimate the homeless population to be between one and three thousand; yet community services providers estimate only 500 homeless people living within the city of Santa Cruz and 3,000 living within the county. From the interviews, it would seem that in part, this need for numbers and categories takes on enormous importance because the homelessness of a single individual, under any circumstance, is not considered a cause for public intervention.

Most civic leaders believed that Santa Cruz, a city of more than 50,000 people, had “more than its fair share” of homelessness. This was believed to be largely the result of homeless people relocating to cities which offered the best services and least restrictive laws. Conceptually, the belief that homeless people will relocate to more beneficial environments seemed to support other beliefs that Santa Cruz was being victimized by homeless people. It also was compatible with the belief that not all homeless people were equally deserving of assistance.

Kluegel's work (1987) indicated that a strong, national belief system regarding poverty remained constant despite economic changes which increased or decreased levels of poverty. The hypothesis of this thesis asserts that the belief system which Kluegel referred to but had not identified could be the American Dream. Belief in the American Dream constitutes a national identity which holds poor people responsible for their plight and entices a consumer-driven culture to acquire that which is held just beyond reach—regardless of the state of the economy.

Belief in the American Dream leads individuals to believe that every individual is capable of achieving economic stability, if not prosperity, if he or she is willing to work hard. Both the literature review and the quantitative research predicted that individuals who have achieved the American Dream, as represented by home ownership, would be disinclined to support government intervention to equalize the distribution of wealth. This was borne out in the interviews where, in a progressive community, only three of the eight civic leaders interviewed were willing to claim housing as a right for all people. However it should be noted that the parameters for this study were quite narrow; consequently the ability to generalize from this study is limited.

While most civic leaders (six of eight) expressed the belief that life is generally fair, only two people believed that poverty was a sign of personal failure. At first glance this seems to contradict Weber's Protestant Work Ethic and Lerner's just world hypothesis. Since a majority felt that life is basically fair and that wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability, it would seem logical that poverty should be attributed to personal failure of some sort, but it was not. This may indicate some other construct, belief, or factor at work. It is

possible that because of the public positions held by those being interviewed, that responses which carried unpleasant public images (such as blaming poor people for their poverty) were avoided whenever directly possible. It also may be that the individuals' analyses of poverty and wealth were unequally informed and that they each did hold conflicting beliefs. Another possibility is that since poverty was considered to be such an inherent part of a "fair" society that blame was not perceived to be an appropriate response; it may be, for instance, that as in Christian theology, the poor are believed to be a permanent feature of the social landscape and should be pitied but that efforts to remove poverty are futile. There are enough contradictions within the interviews to warrant more research.

If Lerner's theory of a just world produced more questions than it answered, Ryan's work (1984) helped to address the polemics of a progressive, caring community which refuses effective intervention. While responses to rising homelessness have often been creative in Santa Cruz, producing such programs as the Homeless Garden Project, they have also included or emphasized programs designed to minimize the visible needs of those who are homeless such as the Day Resource Center and the Host Program. This combination of approaches has helped to reinforce the social and economic partitioning of society. Fundamentally, the response of civic leadership has lacked a radical analysis that could lead to social change which would alleviate homelessness. Civic leaders, invested as "caretakers of the system" have produced only those programs and services which leave the "system" fundamentally unchanged. Although the 1994 Council of Mayors identified unemployment, low wages, and insufficient public assistance as the core

issues needing to be addressed in order to begin to eradicate homelessness, none of the responses made by the civic leadership in Santa Cruz included efforts to address these issues or to pressure state or federal government to address these issues.

At any point in history it is possible to identify marginalized people who have been treated harshly or not seen as full members of society. Such suffering often elicits pity, sometimes aid, but it never elicits social change. This is also true in Santa Cruz where distinctions were made between that to which homeless people were believed to be entitled and that which they were granted through the goodwill of others. The California municipal court system has ruled that homeless people are not entitled to the right to sleep because homelessness is “not necessarily an involuntarily acquired quality.” Similarly, conservative civic leaders often expressed resentment that “undeserving” homeless people were entitled to any level of public assistance—even food stamps. Because Santa Cruz, historically, is considered to be a progressive community, such beliefs might be expected to be more pronounced in other cities with a stronger conservative element.

Much of the discourse on homelessness in Santa Cruz revolves around the concept of deservedness: who is truly homeless versus who is simply choosing to be homeless? Consistently, civic leaders described the most “deserving” homeless people in Santa Cruz, the “truly” homeless, as those who are less visible and more grateful than their counterparts. It was widely believed that “truly” homeless do not offensively panhandle or sit on street corners; similarly, they accepted what was offered to them and did not demand more. Whereas the “undeserving” homeless were people who disrupted daily life with aggressive behavior, political

organizing, or sometimes just their stubborn presence. Most civic leaders felt that they and other affluent residents were in fact the victims or potential victims of these “free loaders.” This aspect of their response is consistent with Weber’s Protestant Work Ethic and Lerner’s just world belief in that poverty is attributed to personal rather than systemic causes.

As one would expect, perceptions of homelessness affected the way leaders approached interventions to homelessness. Those who described homelessness as most problematic for the city and merchants developed responses that emphasized law enforcement and containment while those who perceived homelessness as more problematic for those living in desperate poverty developed responses intended to address the most visible needs of homeless people. No response targeted lifting people out of poverty, either because poverty was not perceived to be the universal cause of homelessness, or because poverty was believed to be too broadly systemic for a city government to address, or both.

Overall, civic leaders tended to evaluate programs and services as working very well even when those programs or services were unable to reasonably meet the most basic needs of homeless people. It seems that a significant factor in the way programs were evaluated was the impact the program had on visible poverty in the commercial district. Those programs which helped to remove homeless people from downtown streets were consistently highly rated by civic leaders as serving homeless people well.

If the devastation of the 1989 earthquake rendered much of chronic homelessness invisible, the subsequent gentrification of the city refocused attention on those who were visibly poor. The city’s tentative economic re-emergence from the earthquake destruction combined with a stronger

collaborative relationship between merchants and council members created an environment in which the city council was no longer able to resist efforts by local merchants to have a restrictive set of ordinances enacted to control “undesirable” behavior in the commercial district.

The civic leaders continue to express the belief that these ordinances, referred to as the Downtown Ordinances, do not target homeless people even though homeless people were more likely to panhandle or sit on the sidewalks downtown than other people who have jobs and homes. Selective perceptions regarding who was “truly” homeless and who was not created an environment in which it became possible to refer to all those directly affected by the ordinances as not “truly homeless.” Here Lerner’s theory of rationalized perceptions to justify one’s self image as a good person comes into play and allows a progressive community to maintain its image in light of behavior that would contradict it.

Similarly civic leaders claim the camping ban is a “non-issue” that does not have harmful affects on homeless people while in effect it criminalizes their status as homeless persons and supports the fear and distrust that more affluent members of society often feel toward those who are visibly poor.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Homelessness does not strike a specific, homogeneous population nor do individuals necessarily respond in the same way to the trauma of becoming homeless. Desperate poverty can be experienced by all types of people. Consequently, it is impossible to talk about homeless people as



comprising a monolithic population with a shared set of values or demographics. In fact, it is nearly impossible to find agreement on something so basic as the number of people who experience homelessness in a given year. Yet it is precisely this sort of information which policy makers frequently seek when attempting to develop a coherent response to the rising visibility of desperate poverty.

In the absence of consistent and reliable information about homelessness, civic leaders are forced either to abandoned their efforts to assess homelessness or to synthesize a wide range of conflicting information, using their best judgment to fill in the gaps. To address the needs of homeless people irrespective of demographics one must be willing to see the homelessness of any person, in any circumstance, both as a fundamental wrong that needs to be corrected and as a civic priority. For the most part, civic leaders have been unable or unwilling to do this and, as a consequence, have pursued assistance programs based on demographic assessments of homelessness without the benefit of necessarily accurate or comprehensive information. In these circumstances, any response to homelessness is vulnerable to the attack of those who subscribe to a different set of "facts."

As a result of such limited information, commonly held beliefs about poverty and fairness have become inordinately powerful influences in determining both the perceptions of and responses to the plight of visibly homeless people. For instance, the level of confidence that a majority of civic leaders expressed in the belief that the "truly" homeless are socially invisible is possible because it is philosophically congruent with their beliefs about poverty; there is no factual confirmation that people who are visibly identifiable as homeless are not "truly" homeless. Conceptions of

homeless people and of the programs designed to assist them often become skewed by interpretations that seem to replace or refute factual information. Indeed, beliefs about poverty and fairness may contribute to the difficulty researchers have in exploring the demographics of homelessness. For example, those with politically conservative agendas have tended to count lower numbers of homeless people in general than those with progressive political agendas. In the absence of comprehensive, accurate demographic information, whose interpretation is to be trusted as authoritative? Academicians, merchants, council members vie among each other over “the facts” while the discourse is led farther and farther from the reality of men, women, and children, living on the street and eating out of dumpsters.

The public discourse on homelessness largely has become filled with rhetorical images of the “deserving” poor (a single woman with two kids) which are pitted against images of the “undeserving” poor (single white men). Even those who are believed to be the “deserving” poor are not believed to be so deserving that they have the right to *demand* anything from the system. Goodwill may be offered but it cannot be demanded.

Despite the nation’s dedication to a constitutional democracy, rights and liberties have always been contingent upon society’s conceptions of deservedness. American civil rights have never made any pretense of guaranteeing economic justice; in fact, our national conception of constitutional rights made it possible to *own* other human beings. Hence, slaveholders could write that “all men are created equal” without being bothered by any apparent contradiction; in their view, and in the views of the dominant society, Africans and African Americans were not deserving of status equal to whites and white women were not counted as peers to

white men. Our history brims with narratives of discrimination because we consistently have failed to recognize the universal worth of being human and have instead so qualified the meanings of humanness and equality that political expediency rather than moral commitment dominates most conceptions of rights and obligations. Yet, the move from the “we” of affinity to the “we” of humanity is a necessary transition in any quest for community that looks outward rather than inward. A moral commonwealth is created, in essence, by treating the stranger with the respect one would accord to acquaintances.

But contemporary society lacks a strong base of fundamentally shared moral values; instead, Americans cling to a philosophical perspective nurtured and developed by capitalism. As a consequence, conceptions of the American Dream fuel much of the discourse on deservedness—a discourse which has displaced serious discussion on the inevitable production of poverty in the American economy and has facilitated a shift in public attention away from the needs of those who *experience* homelessness to the needs of those who experience the *presence* of homeless people. The American Dream continues to pervade American thinking largely because, for some people, most predominantly the white middle class, the economy still provides many opportunities and comforts. But are we to be responsible for only our own individual good or also for the common good?

Private rewards often obscure how much we, as citizens, have lost control of the society in which we live. Individuals who pass homeless people on the street know that whatever their response to a homeless person, whether they smile or not, provide spare change or not, they still will walk away, leaving the person without necessary shelter. Surely this

challenges what it means to be a good person in the absence of a good society. Society, as it exists, demands a kind of moral numbness.

The presence of homeless adults and children also challenges the confidence more affluent individuals place in society. For a kind and caring person to be confronted with the homelessness of another person is to challenge one's beliefs about fairness and success—if the person in poverty does not deserve his or her fate, then perhaps anyone, including oneself, could suffer such poverty. On the other hand, if the American Dream is viable and anyone who works hard can succeed, then this poor person must be responsible for his or her fate . . . but simple awareness tells us that such blame is often wrong. The conclusion most civic leaders seem to have drawn is that poverty is an inevitable component of life, even in a fair world. Therefore individuals are not necessarily to be blamed for their own poverty but neither is the system to be indicted harshly. Civic leaders for the most part were able to accept poverty as an unfortunate reality that calls upon their goodwill and charity but not as a violation of basic entitlements deserving of protest. None of the council members believed that their actions, now or in the future, would lead to the eradication of homelessness.

Being unable to advocate for fundamental social change, those in positions of power at best are able to advocate for a system of triage which prevents poor people from starving and businesses owners from complaining. While some responses might provide support or solace to homeless persons, no response changes the circumstances of their homelessness.

In Santa Cruz, one is likely to encounter homeless people while shopping on Pacific Avenue; here, the dissonance reverberates as the

invitation to spend extravagantly on luxury items is contrasted with the presence of people begging for money for a sandwich or a pack of cigarettes. Merchants have rattled with anger upon seeing homeless people ask their patrons for the leftover change from purchases or meals. Perhaps rightly, merchants have feared that the easiest solution available to consumers is to choose not to return and thereby avoid such a painful and awkward experience. Laws, such as those delineating how far from a business doorway one must stand if panhandling, reflect an effort to protect merchants and their customers from such confrontations.

Progressives on the city council were able to persuade themselves that the ordinances drafted by Neal Coonerty “were not about homelessness” despite the reality that the laws directly affect the daily lives of homeless people by regulating loitering, sitting, and panhandling. By subscribing to the belief that “truly” homeless people do not engage in offensive forms of panhandling, sitting on the sidewalk, and the like, city council was able to pass ordinances which solidified its relationship with the downtown business community without compromising the appearance of its progressive ideology.

Believing this to be a fight for the city’s survival, merchants fought relentlessly to control the sidewalks of their storefronts but simultaneously denied that for some homeless people this was also a fight for survival, that the ordinances were seemingly the last possible assault on individuals who had lost everything. It is true that not all people on the streets are desperately poor, but if the primary function of the moral order in any society is to protect inherently precariously values against competition from the easy, the cost-effective, and the often urgent alternatives, such order eluded civic leadership.

It is true that some people have been frightened by thugs who harassed them for money—behavior that long has been illegal. It is also true that some people are simply afraid of the presence of homeless people. Existing laws better enforced and educational programs could have averted the loss of basic rights associated with public space. Some ideals, such as the preservation of the public space, are especially precarious because they require a sensitive awareness and also compete directly with more urgent or seductive alternatives. It is this competition between an elusive but possibly higher good and more definite or more immediate satisfactions that generates many of the moral failings of society. Santa Cruz, in this sense, is one of many cities which, when confronted with a complexity of perceptions and realities, chose a more expedient route.

Motivated by “enlightened self-interest” civic leaders sought to improve the commercial atmosphere by lessening the amount of visible poverty through the development of services such as the Day Resource Center and by increasing legislation to control the presence of those who remained in commercial areas. It seems the visibility of poverty and the negative impact such visibility has on profit margins, rather than the poverty itself, motivated the most prominent civic concerns between 1989 and 1994.

The strong belief that the city, in an effort to help homeless people, is spending all of the money possible, on the best programs and services possible, prevents council members and merchants from facing the reality that the existing programs and services really do not serve the needs of homeless people very well at all. Whatever shortcomings are acknowledged, are believed to be unavoidable in a task that is considered impossible by nature. The system perpetuates itself via another agency and

no one involved in the system seems to benefit as much from the services as area merchants or those administering the program—which is not to say that some good is not being done. Food programs and the Homeless Garden Project, for instance, provide direct, tangible assistance. Similarly, the campground for homeless people [a dirt lot behind the River Street Shelter] has been highly rated among homeless people as a successful service because it provides a safe place to stay without the health and safety risks associated with staying in shelters. Some good services are being provided yet there is no evidence that the needs of homeless people are being provided for adequately.

Civic leaders expressed pride that Santa Cruz offers some of the most progressive responses to homelessness in the nation. While this may be true by national comparison, ineffective services and restrictive laws characterize much of the response of the civic leadership in Santa Cruz to homelessness. This is the consequence, not so much of an emotion-driven effort to force homeless people from Santa Cruz, as the inevitable result of civic leadership in pursuit of self-interest. Self-preservation, in its narrowest sense is an ever-present, if often hidden, item on everyone's agenda. For homeless people self-preservation is a daily drive to find adequate food, shelter, and safety; for city council members it means preserving their reputations and careers, for merchants their businesses. Unfortunately, the human propensity to equate self-preservation with maximizing individual short-run benefits is a steady source of moral regression. It has often been said that the most subtle and insidious form of moral weakness is the disposition to justify what is harmful in the name of what is good. It would seem that in Santa Cruz as elsewhere, myopic self-interest is the driving force behind such a disposition.

The primary form of a moral argument is a request to see oneself in the position of another person. However, everyone interviewed believed they were capable of doing that, in fact had done that, by being able to identify friends or acquaintances who were homeless. Yet the state of homelessness for an upper-middle class person who faces bankruptcy, or a middle-class person who lost his or her home in an earthquake, is qualitatively different from the experience of people who are targeted by services and affected by ordinances. Most importantly, people who fall into homelessness from the bottom economic tier of society tend to lack the sense of possibilities, hope, sense of entitlement and resourcefulness that formerly wealthy counterparts take for granted. This false sense of familiarity with homeless people on the part of civic leaders contributes to perspectives and analyses which are inappropriate to the circumstances they wish to address.

Services and legislation designed to lessen the visibility of homeless people contribute to the set of public fears they claim to be allaying. They reinforce the class segregation of society and leave everyone with their worst fears about poverty and poor people. Why should anyone feel unsafe in the presence of visibly poor people? Why do we need laws to protect us from the economic stratification endemic to this economy?

The answer to each of these questions is clear. Fundamental social change is the only response which can address the economic and moral contradictions we live with currently. However, the natural correlate of socialization is a mind loyal to the goals of the dominant society. An elaborate system of rationalizations made available to individuals through the process of socialization allows individuals to participate in an economy that produces devastating poverty, encourages us to blame or ignore the poor, and prevents us from considering options for intervention.



Belief in the American Dream insulates citizens from the injustice each perpetuates as part of this system. It is impossible under capitalism to create abundant wealth for some without creating poverty for others. Unwilling to risk potential opportunities and comforts in order to create fundamental social and economic changes that would eradicate homelessness, most people drift between meager generosity and numbness or anger when confronted with the growing presence of homeless people.

Civic leaders made a decision to gentrify Santa Cruz in its rebuilding, a decision to create upscale boutiques catering to the discretionary dollars of wealthy individuals. This decision is far more likely than the cardboard "Peace Vigil" of "WonTon" Jacobs to have contributed to the stress of Santa Cruz's economic recovery. By pursuing higher rents and higher profits, the city and merchants effectively have kept away businesses which would draw the day to day shopping of local residents—a steady but less dramatic source of income. Economic affluence of the standard hoped for could be achieved only with the social control of visibly poor people. In the process of gentrification, the city established an arena in which the presence of visible poverty became more threatening to commerce than it otherwise might have been and a business community which is intensely susceptible to economic recessions and downturns. The gentrified affluence of Santa Cruz was achieved by *socially* displacing those individuals who were suffering from economic displacement.

In 1989 the city of Santa Cruz sealed its fate of economic fragility by rebuilding the commercial district with tourists rather than residents in mind. But there are other alternative paths that still can be pursued regarding the public response to homelessness which would reduce the moral quandry and begin to address the needs of homeless people. Among

such actions is the need to reduce the public fear and loathing of poverty. Criminalizing behaviors associated with the desperately poor serve only to exacerbate existing concerns among residents. Education and community work projects that pay a living wage and enable housed and homeless people to work side by side would go a long way to reducing public fear of homeless people while providing much needed jobs and skills. This type of project could be funded by the money saved on law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Imperative among actions is a response which addresses not only how to aid those who are homeless now but how to prevent such desperate poverty in the future. The crisis of homelessness can be resolved only by providing jobs with decent wages, affordable housing, and quality day care supplemented with affordable, accessible, and effective treatment for chemical dependency and mental health issues. Clearly, this is not the agenda of a local governments yet local governments could play a major role in transforming state and federal government. Cities, rather than debating who deserves help and who does not, or arguing over the best way to get visibly homeless people out of the commercial district, could unite with activists and service providers to demand substantive governmental and economic change. There is historical precedent for such action. Many of the federal social service programs we have today evolved from the protests of the 1930s.

It has been argued that such relief programs reflect a governmental effort to subvert the systemic economic change demanded by a mass movement of workers inclined toward socialist and communist solutions to the social and economic problems of the 1930s. Certainly the economic problems which characterize the late twentieth century, like those of the

1930s, are endemic to the basic system of corporate capitalism. The U.S. class structure is anchored to an economic and philosophic perspective which appears unable tolerate the comprehensive changes needed to eradicate desperate poverty. Economic reform within the established system will not solve the crisis of homelessness any more than the civil rights and feminist movements solved the problems of discrimination and inequality. Fundamental social change was avoided when the dominant class of white men accommodated women and people of color in the existing system—for which the dominant class continues to set the rules. Similarly, we do not need more mobility between classes but more equality among classes, as Michael Harrington once noted.

To *overcome*, rather than ameliorate the homelessness, poverty and economic instability that characterizes the U.S. economy it is essential that individuals begin to think in terms of changing the social contract. Human suffering must come to be understood as a problem demanding a solution. Change will come either when poverty becomes an intolerable condition for the nonpoor or when the poor themselves are able to form a power base. Since homeless people lack the basic resources (such as telephones and mailing addresses) with which to organize, a national movement exclusively among the nation's most poor seems implausible at best. Even on a local level, the support of non-homeless individuals was essential to balance the daily survival needs of homeless people against the demands of organizing to protest the Downtown Ordinances. Yet the fact that some of the protestors were not homeless was used by media, merchants and government officials in Santa Cruz to publicly challenge and undermine the legitimacy of the coalition protest. To the extent that these efforts

shaped the thinking of many middle-class residents, they succeeded. The political history of cross-class alliances is full of uneven success yet it seems to be the most viable strategy for homeless people.

It seems clear that any successful movement for social change will be a movement of alliances: poverty which results from exploited labor shares an intimate connection with racism, sexism, and homophobia. A lesson can be taken from the 1930s when workers fell in line with divisive business tactics by allowing unions to be divided among the trades (thus separating their interests by jobs rather than retaining unity as a working class) and by continuing to draw exclusionary racists and sexist divisions within the unions.

Such an alliance must include not only the poor and disenfranchised, but also the working and middle classes. Inherently this must be a radical, rather than liberal alliance: the mythology of the American Dream is so deeply embedded in society that some level of economic marginality is essential to breaking free from the dominating myths. It is this radical base of personal experience, rather than political ideology, which could develop solidarity and a sense of community by replacing the isolation of moral numbness with an ethic of caring which grows out of lived experience and is grounded in relationship and response rather than in abstract principles.

The fundamental source of moral obligation is both an individual and communal sense of identity and relatedness, yet standard conceptions of community commonly exclude those who are most vulnerable. Any efforts to end homelessness must expand existing notions of community as well as address economic needs. When we protect the rights of the most vulnerable, we protect that which is vulnerable in each of us. When we

elevate the bottom, we all rise. The process of coalition building is both plausible and necessary—with clear and bold leadership from the radical Left, it also could become possible.

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<sup>10</sup>References include first names whenever possible because the author believes gendered perspectives often affect research.

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## Appendix A

City	FMR 1-bed. apt. <sup>11</sup>	FMR/Min. Wage <sup>12</sup>	Unempl. Rate <sup>13</sup>	Max. Potential SSI <sup>14</sup>	Max. Potential AFDC <sup>15</sup>	Max. Gen. Assist. <sup>16</sup>
Philadelphia	\$565	76.7%	6.3%	\$551	\$691	\$215
Portland	\$444	60.3%	4.1%	\$530	\$753	\$268
Raleigh	\$469	63.7%	3.3%	\$529	\$567	N/A
Reno	\$512	69.5%	5.0%	\$554	\$640	N/A
Sacramento	\$505	68.6%	7.2%	\$603	\$821	N/A
San Diego	\$553	75.1%	7.6%	\$603	\$821	N/A
San Francisco	\$808	109.7%	5.9%	\$603	\$821	N/A
Santa Ana	\$716	97.2%	6.0%	\$603	\$821	N/A
Santa Cruz	\$719	97.6%	N/A	\$603	\$821	N/A
Santa Monica	\$695	94.4%	8.3%	\$603	\$821	\$303
Seattle	\$528	71.7%	4.7%	\$549	\$804	\$339

Table excerpted in part from *No homeless people allowed: A report on anti-homeless laws, litigation and alternatives in 49 United States cities* (p. ix) by National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 1994, Washington, D.C.: National Law Center. Adapted by permission.

<sup>11</sup>Number represents Fair Market Rent in dollars/month for a one-bedroom apartment in the metropolitan area in which the city is located. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Federal Register, September 28, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> FMR divided by \$736.66 (Federal Minimum Wage of \$4.25/hour X 173.3 hours/mo.) HUD's threshold for affordable rent is 30% of income. This table is meant to be illustrative; some localities have a higher minimum wage than the federal standard.

<sup>13</sup> Statistics for September 1994, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>14</sup> Maximum potential combined SSI and Food Stamp Benefits per month for aged individuals living independently by state, January 1994. *1994 Green Book*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>15</sup> Maximum potential combined AFDC and Food Stamps Benefits per month for a one-parent family of three persons by state, January, 1994 *Green Book*, pp. 366-367.

<sup>16</sup> Maximum monthly General Assistance Benefits for one person, Center on Budget Priorities, National General Assistance Survey, 1992. Some levels may have changed since 1992. Eureka level is from October 1994. Stoeples, Jim, Redwood Legal Assistance.

## Appendix B

### *Quantitative Research and Analysis*

*Based on the 1991 GSS Database<sup>17</sup>*

The work described in this quantitative research views the Protestant Work Ethic, belief in a just world and the American Dream as metaphors for a class experience. This hypothesis posits that, regardless of how one names these beliefs about deservedness and undeservedness, those who have attained “the American Dream” will have negative attitudes toward policies and philosophies which are designed to equally distribute wealth among the entire population. This resistance to equally distributing wealth is not based on simplistic principles of greed but assumes a belief in the relationship between personal agency and worldly success. Disparate incomes are thought to be acceptable when there is a pervasive belief that society is a meritocracy. The experiment combines the categories home ownership and the belief that hard work is the key to getting ahead (fundamental ideals of the American Dream) with class and sex to predict attitudes toward equal wealth. That is, home ownership, belief that hard work is the sole key to success, male sex and middle and upper class standing correlate negatively to attitudes toward equal distribution of wealth.

This study expands upon the work of Lerner, McDonald and Rubin and Peplau, yet it differs from previous work in two important ways. First, this

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<sup>17</sup>This research experiment is based upon the most recent General Social Survey available.

analysis is based upon the responses of a range of adults from the GSS rather than college-aged adults or college students and consequently provides the ability to more accurately test for a range of social differences known to be correlated with age such as income and home ownership. It is also the first experiment to study attitudes toward equal wealth as correlated to significant representational aspects of the American Dream.

### *Methodology*

The five variables used in the experiment are derived from five questions administered by the survey to 1517 respondents. By selecting questions which correlate to fundamental aspects of the American Dream, it is possible to see how these measures correspond to beliefs about the desirability of equally distributing wealth among the general population. Belief in the American Dream, like belief in a just world and the Protestant Work Ethic, leads individuals to the conclusion that those who are rich deserve to be rich while those who are poor deserve to be poor.

Home ownership and the belief that hard work leads to success are two cornerstones of the American Dream. Self-identified social class as it represents one's personal achievement is also reflective of confidence in individual agency over circumstance. Sex, the fifth variable selected, while having little to do with the American Dream, is shown in some of the literature to be too significant a variable to ignore. The questions from the GSS Codebook, as administered to the respondents, follow in Table B-1.

<b>Table B-1</b> <b>GSS Questions</b>
<p><i>Getahead</i></p> <p>Some people say that people get ahead by their own hard work; other say that lucky breaks or help from other people are more important. Which do you think is most important?</p> <p>Hard work most important 1  Hard work and luck equally important 2  Luck most important 3  Other 4  Don't know 8  No answer 9</p>
<p><i>Eqwlth</i></p> <p>Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and poor. Here is a card with a scale from 1 to 7.</p> <p>(The card scale begins with 1 being the response that government should reduce income differences and 7 being the response that government should not work to reduce income differences.)</p>
<p><i>Class</i></p> <p>If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belonged in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, the upper class?</p> <p>Lower class 1  Working class 2  Middle class 3  Upper class 4  No class 5  Don't know 8  No answer 9</p>

<b>Table B-1</b> <b>GSS Questions (cont.)</b>
<p><i>Dwelown</i> (Do you/does your family) own your own (home/apartment), pay rent or what?</p> <p>Own or is buying 1 Pays rent 2 Other 3 Don't know 8 No answer 9 Not applicable BK</p>
<p><i>Sex</i> Male 1 Female 2</p>

In order to run a multiple regression using these questions as variables several categories were collapsed and recoded. Dwelown and getahead were recoded to dichotomous variables. Dwelown simply became "own (1)/not own (2)" whereas it was necessary to collapse the first two categories of getahead, "hard work" and "hard work and luck," into "1" leaving "luck only" as "2." Sex was recoded to a dummy variable with male = 1, female = 0. There were a total of 636 male respondents and 881 female respondents. In general, the frequency distribution after recoding looked quite normal. There were, however, a disturbing number of missing cases for dwelown, getahead, and eqwlth: 544, 538 and 530 respectively, or slightly more than one-third of the total respondents in each of the variables. Any analysis with such high levels of missing data is troublesome, since it is not immediately clear whether or not the missing values are random. A simple

check for randomness could have been done by dividing the groups into two (one with missing data and one with complete data) to examine and compare their distributions. Unfortunately, circumstances did not allow for such a check. A pairwise selection of cases was implemented in order to obtain results from this regression. One potential problem with such a selection is inconsistency; significance levels must be viewed with caution.

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**Table B-2**  
**Multiple Regression**

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Multiple R           .29311  
R Square             .08591  
Adjusted R Square   .07803  
Standard Error       1.80096

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	4	141.44901	35.36225
Residual	464	1504.96139	3.24345

F = 10.90266           Significant F = .0000

Equation Number 1   Dependent Variable   Eqwlth

Variables in the equation

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T
Class	.507893	.132710	.172074	3.827 ( $p < .0001$ )
Getahead	-.124189	.250001	-.022109	-.497 (N.S.)
Sex	-.593599	.169004	-.156214	-3.512 ( $p < .0005$ )
Dwelown	-.554660	.177019	-.141069	-3.133 ( $p < .0018$ )
(Constant)	4.069932	.587845		6.923 ( $p < .0000$ )

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*Results and Discussion*

Analysis of the regression shows class, sex, and home ownership all have highly significant correlations with the dependent variable, equal wealth. Home ownership, net of all other variables, has a strong negative correlation toward the concept of government reducing great inequalities in wealth either through taxing the rich or assisting the poor. As predicted, home owners are less likely to support a redistribution of wealth than renters. This extends previous research in this area by broadening the scope of significant independent variables to include home ownership. Home ownership is only one fundamental sign of success in the American Dream. Other similar components are worth exploring. For instance, what is the relationship of "ownership" in general, rather than wealth, to attitudes of equal wealth.

As predicted, men are negatively correlated to the dependent variable. This is consistent with MacDonald's (1972) findings, though much stronger—perhaps because of the larger sample size for men ( $N = 636$ ) and women ( $N = 881$ ) and perhaps because an interaction effect between age and gender. (MacDonald's study was confined to college students whereas this sample was drawn from a population of ages 18 to 89.) It is unlikely that the explanation for this result will be found in a narrow class analysis. Rather, it seems more plausible that the significance levels of sex in this experiment reveal more about the philosophical socialization of men which tends toward a rule-based system of justice (whoever earns it, keeps it) and that of women which tends to rely more on a relational-based standard of justice (whoever needs it should, have it). The data warrant further investigation into the specific role of sex.

The positive correlation between class and attitudes toward equal



wealth, indicates that as one's class status rises, one is less likely to support government redistribution of wealth. Conversely, those who belong to lower classes are more likely to support such redistribution. The mean of the class sample falls at 2.49 with a standard deviation of .64, placing most people in the GSS sample solidly in the working and middle classes, as one would expect.

Interestingly, the beta scores for class, sex, and dwelown are quite similar, suggesting comparable levels of importance to the dependent variable in this context. The strong significance levels for each of these variables alleviates some of the initial concern regarding missing cases.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the variable "getahead" proved to have no significant relationship to equal wealth. Perhaps part of the explanation lies in the fact that the question allowed only for possibilities of luck and hard work rather than providing a more inclusive response with possibilities such as inheritance and social connection as they pertain to getting ahead in life. It may also be that "getting ahead" in life was interpreted by respondents to be broader than economic considerations and therefore has no direct correlation toward attitudes about equal wealth. It remains the least clearly defined of all the variables in this study.

A highly significant  $F$  statistic, due in part to the large sample size, is supported by robust  $t$ -scores and reinforces the importance of the correlations. Unfortunately,  $R^2 = .08591$  indicates that the variables in this experiment account only for about eight percent of the variation in the dependent variable. Despite the significance of the variables in the regression, clearly important variables have not been considered. Other factors included in the GSS which could have been included are education, income, and age. Education and age were omitted in this study because

previous research showed no relationship between education and age to attitudes about wealth. This may be because previous samples were drawn too narrowly from student populations. The absence of income as a category is a naive oversight. Each of these variables warrants investigation to substantiate the hypothesis. While some very interesting correlations were discovered which have the potential to produce an original analysis of the relationship of the American Dream to attitudes of equal wealth and helping the poor, the correlations may fade in significance as other more significant variables are brought into the equation.

The visibility of poverty has changed so dramatically in the last fifteen years it seems unlikely that any externally valid research concerning contemporary attitudes toward wealth and poverty could be constructed from questions from the GSS 1972-1986 Codebook. In addition, better questions could be constructed to quantify aspects of the American Dream as represented in tables in this paper. The only conclusion that can be drawn from this experiment with confidence is that it warrants more research. Perhaps considering the constraints of this project as an initial research experiment that can be claimed as a modest success.

# Appendix C

## *Interview Questions for Field Work*

This is a two-part interview. Although the first part includes very detailed questions about homelessness, I am not expecting anyone to be an expert on homelessness. I am interested in your ideas, opinions, and knowledge because of your role in the Santa Cruz community, not because I have expectations of specific expertise.

### Part One

1. Who do you think is homeless in Santa Cruz? How many people do you think are homeless in Santa Cruz? In the country?
2. What are some of the causes of homelessness that you can think of?
3. How long do you think people generally remain homeless?
4. Do you think homelessness is a problem in Santa Cruz? In what ways do you find it to be problem in this community? Do you think it is more of a problem here than in other places? Why or why not?
5. What services, programs, or opportunities are available in the city of Santa Cruz for homeless men, women, and children? How well are they working? Why?
6. Where has your information about homelessness in Santa Cruz come from? What people, groups, or periodicals? Your information about services?

7. In what ways or contexts do you encounter homeless people?
8. Have you ever known someone who became homeless in the course of your relationship? Do you have personal friendships with any homeless people?
9. If you have seen 100 of the 3,000 homeless people in the county, where do you think the others are? Why are they less visible?
10. What do you imagine a typical day to look like for a homeless person?
11. Do you think the experience of homelessness affects a person psychologically? How so?
12. Does the presence of homeless people disturb you? Why or why not? What is the single most disturbing thing about encountering homeless people downtown? Second most?
13. What course(s) of action, if any, have you taken as a response to homelessness? What convinced you to take the course of action that you did? What impact do you think your action had?
14. Did you consider any alternatives to your chosen course of action? What were they?
15. Have you experienced any response from the non-homeless public (either businesses or residents) as a result of your action(s)?
16. Why do you think the Downtown Ordinances were passed? Do you think they have been successful? Why or why not?
17. As a result of the ordinances, homeless people are not allowed to sleep or loiter downtown. Can you name a few places where they can legally hang out, socialize, or sleep? Given the numbers of homeless people in the City, where do you think most homeless people sleep? Spend their days?

18. Have you ever been homeless or was there ever a time in your life when things could have really fallen apart if you didn't get the right kind of support?

## Part Two

1. What does "the American Dream" mean to you? Do you believe in it? Why or why not?
2. Some people feel that extreme poverty in this country is largely the result of personal failure(s). Would you agree? Why or why not?
3. Do you perceive the rights of homeless people to be in direct conflict with the rights of business owners or local residents? How so?
4. The United Nation's Convention on Human Rights defines food and shelter as basic human rights to which all people are entitled. Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? Why?
5. Would you say that these statement are true or false:

Life is basically fair and people generally get what they deserve.

Most homeless people in Santa Cruz were not local residents when they became homeless.

Many people suffer extreme poverty through absolutely no fault of their own.

By pouring money into homeless shelters and programs we are destroying people's willingness to pull themselves together.

Free enterprise and competition are what made this country great.

Anyone who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.

There's no such thing as a free lunch for anyone; you get what you earn and that's the way it should be.

Wealth and success are evidence of hard work and personal ability.  
Cities which offer first-rate services for homeless people become  
magnets for transients.