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## Homelessness: An Overview

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*Amos House*

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# Homelessness

## An Overview

*Jim Tull*

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*The homelessness crisis in the United States has reached epidemic proportions as the diversity of the homeless population expands to the point where it resembles the general population. The deepest and most long-standing cause of homelessness is poverty, but there are other forces as well, including the severe shortage of affordable housing (particularly due to urban renewal); deep funding cuts at the federal, state, and local level; the policy of deinstitutionalization; the Vietnam war; and unemployment. A new public policy approach to homelessness is needed, one which addresses these multiple forces and is grounded in the assumptions that housing and a decent standard of living are rights and entitlements. There are several elements to this fresh approach which, taken together, require a fundamental mobilization of political will.*

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**I**t has been said that a frog immersed in a beaker of boiling water saves itself by immediately jumping from the beaker, but left in cold water that is gradually warmed, the same frog adjusts to the changing temperature until it boils to death. Our country, like the frog who learns to tolerate an intolerable predicament to the point of its own demise, is ignoring the ballooning crisis of homelessness — and the poverty that underlies it — at its own peril. Incredibly, some of our cities have come to resemble what we commonly think of as the Third World. Many of the streets of New York City, for example, can be compared to those of Calcutta, India.

In some areas the plight of our cities — and their homeless — is even deeper than some of the poorest places overseas. Commenting on the warehousing of homeless families in the welfare hotels of New York, Jonathan Kozol writes, “Although I have spent a great deal of time in recent years in some of the most desolate, diseased and isolated areas of Haiti, I find the Martinique Hotel the saddest place that I have been in my entire life.”<sup>1</sup>

Much of this sadness, I think, lies in the spiritual poverty and demoralization that plagues many of the homeless in our country, where most people are relatively well off and place a premium on individualism and economic standing, and where the resources needed to solve the problem are so accessible. Too often at the

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Amos House men's shelter, in Providence, Rhode Island, I have witnessed the evaporation of a man's dignity and sometimes even his sanity while he searches for another job, having become homeless. Our temporary hospitality tries to shore up a person's sense of self-worth, but the homeless face too many obstacles to their own survival. There is more to having a home, particularly the support it provides, than those of us who have them are able to appreciate. "Even phone-booth vacancies are scarce in New York City. As in public housing, people are sometimes obliged to double-up. One night I stood for an hour and observed three people — man, woman and child — jammed into a single booth. All three were asleep."<sup>2</sup>

Homelessness is first of all a horrifying experience for anyone to suffer; second, it is an acutely intolerable social condition, like the frog's boiling water, that the rest of us have for some reason permitted to grow and grow.

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### **Counting the Homeless**

The homeless have been studied by many researchers, and the nature and scope of the problem has been carefully documented. Nevertheless, the single unanswered question is, How many homeless are there in the United States? No one knows. The shelter population is easily counted, but the only effort to count all the homeless nationwide was that carried out by the Census Bureau in 1990. The census count of homeless people on the street, however, was so low and the counting method so ineffective that the bureau was forced to disavow its tally as a useful count of the population.<sup>3</sup> The count was 230,000 people. But as early as 1983, the Department of Health and Human Services estimated 2 million homeless.

Aside from the total number of homeless, however, the fact that the homeless population continues to increase in many of our nation's major cities at an annual rate of 25 percent is cause for alarm.<sup>4</sup> With no relief in sight, even a conservative count of the current population will snowball year to year at this rate. Equally sobering for many who cling to stereotypes is the staggering number of homeless families in our country. One third of our cities' homeless are families with children.<sup>5</sup> In Rhode Island, nearly one in four people seeking shelter are children under twelve.<sup>6</sup> This trend is distressing not only because of the harm caused by homelessness to these children, but also because any war on crime and drugs will be beside the point as long as hundreds of thousands of children in our country are growing up with no home.

Neither is homelessness an exclusively urban phenomenon. Recent attention has been drawn to the increasing number of homeless people, mostly families, in rural America. One survey estimates that 20,000 people are homeless in Ohio's rural areas alone.<sup>7</sup>

Another stumbling block to achieving a thorough count of the homeless, and one reason why public response to the crisis remains so weak, is that most homeless people are "hidden." The Census Bureau might count only shelter and street residents as homeless, but many people are inclined to seek out friends and family when they lose their housing rather than go to a shelter. Unless an indefinite welcome is extended by the hosting friend or family, this doubling-up arrangement is precarious. Many others live in cars and abandoned buildings, and still other homeless people are holed up temporarily in detox wards or prisons, driven there sometimes by homelessness itself and unemployment. I consider people in any of these circum-

stances homeless. They are hidden and uncounted, but their plight adds substantially to the national tragedy, which otherwise amounts for some of those more fortunate to little more than the inconvenience of having to sidestep a sleeping body on their way to work.

Finally, any account of the homeless problem must include mention of those who live on the brink of homelessness. They cannot be counted as homeless but many will become homeless. Of this group, the most identifiably vulnerable are those who face the threat of homelessness simply because they cannot afford their current housing. Basing affordability on the 30 percent of income standard used in federal housing programs, one study found that the cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment (about half of all renter households require an apartment with two or more bedrooms) was unaffordable by over one third of renter households in every state and over half of all households in six states, four of which are in New England (Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont).<sup>8</sup> In Rhode Island, a household must earn \$22,000 to afford a two-bedroom apartment. And while families struggle to keep their housing, those having to relocate for one reason or another are forced to pay two or three months' rent up front just to move in. Of those on the edge who have managed to avoid homelessness, it can be said that they have been impoverished by escalating housing costs.

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### **Why So Many Homeless: Clarifying the Issues**

While there are certainly competing perspectives on what has brought on the current crisis, there is also some confusion surrounding the problem. The first popular perspective considers the homeless themselves to be the source of the problem. Alcohol and drug abuse, financial irresponsibility, mental illness, divorce, and reproductive habits are among the personal behaviors causing homelessness, according to this view. The more conservative version of this view looks at the problem as a public nuisance to those who aren't homeless and offers solutions that clear the homeless from view and harm. It is generally a response that relies on courts, prisons, and mental institutions and is based on the premise that the homeless are to blame for their predicament and do not deserve a sympathetic response. The more liberal version, while recognizing that some groups and individuals are disadvantaged from the outset, also identifies the homeless themselves as the source of the problem, but offers a more compassionate response that calls for giving personal assistance to homeless families and individuals. The homeless aren't as blameworthy, yet this version does not seriously fault the social structures of their wider communities.

A second perspective attributes the homeless problem to our country's social structures and the values and priorities that sustain them and looks to solutions that include shifting government priorities in the short term and creating fundamental, long-term changes in our political and economic structures. This article focuses on the political causes of, and solutions to, homelessness that reflect this broader perspective.

There is, of course, a real sense in which the truth lies somewhere between these two perspectives. An individual homeless person, for example, might have lost his housing because the rent was too high due to the shortage of low-cost housing and because he spent too much money on alcohol. Those who interpret the problem



solely in terms of personal deficiencies fail to recognize the interplay between the social and personal causes of homelessness. An analogy might be drawn to musical chairs to help expose the error. The second perspective attributes the rise in homelessness during the 1980s primarily to the severe shortage of affordable housing, a product by and large of social policy. There are not enough housing units for everyone. Like musical chairs, a game with eleven contestants competing for ten chairs and a loser who is either slow or unlucky, the housing crisis has meant that some are left on the street. They are left out because they are less desirable tenants, for whatever reasons, than others on the waiting list, or because of bad luck. The first perspective does not address the homeless crisis as a whole, but only the question of why some people are homeless and not others. If a city intersection is missing stop signs, some drivers are destined to collide. We can conclude that a particular driver was intoxicated or not paying attention, or we can put up stop signs and attend to people's driving habits as a largely separate issue.

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### **The Right to Housing**

In choosing, as I do, to approach homelessness as a social or political rather than a personal problem, and in making a distinction between perspectives one and two, I assume that the state is obligated to ensure that the basic housing needs of its residents are met. Many perspective one advocates deny that the community is obligated to house its residents, or even its "citizens." While these advocates might concede the musical chairs mistake, they quickly argue that the supply of housing is legitimately a function of free market forces, not government policy. This was Ronald Reagan's position and policy (although he had no problem with the states taking compensatory action in the face of his massive cuts in federal housing aid). With the Housing Act of 1949, Washington announced its goal of providing adequate housing for all American families, but significantly stopped short of declaring that housing is a right and entitlement.

Regarding the question of the right to housing in the context of today's homeless epidemic, there are at least three different positions that can support the view that the problem is primarily one of public responsibility and policy: (1) housing is a natural or human right; (2) housing is not a natural right but should be a legal right because living without housing or without adequate housing is unpleasant for those who have to endure it and has negative repercussions for everyone else; (3) housing is not and should not be a right of any kind and is not a government responsibility, but since the government got into the housing business decades ago and gradually invested up to \$32 billion annually in housing as of 1980, any dramatic downshifting in this growing commitment will cause intolerable dislocation, including widespread poverty and homelessness.

I believe that a community is obligated to provide all residents decent, safe, and affordable housing that is based on current standards and available resources in the community. In the United States today, certain minimal standards of decency are widely accepted, so that, for example, living in a multifamily house is considered adequate and living with rats is not. Undeniably, this nation is capable of ensuring that all its people have housing that measures up to accepted standards. In short, housing is a basic human right, given the housing capacity and relative styles and standards accepted within a community.

Homelessness did not become a cause of widespread concern until the mid-1980s, yet a number of elements contributed to the current crisis that predated the Reagan/Bush period. They are all tied to public policy decisions made at the state, local, and national levels of government. Three of these contributing forces are noteworthy: deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill; urban renewal; and the Vietnam War. These developments, coupled with the housing crisis of the 1980s, interconnect with and overlap one another.

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### **The Mentally Ill Homeless**

Deinstitutionalization became a public policy trend in many states during the 1960s. The policy aim was to reduce dramatically the number of patients cared for in mental health institutions, transferring care for them to community mental health centers (CMHCs), where they could be served on an outpatient basis. The policy evolved in response to, among other things, reports of inhumane conditions within existing institutions, the introduction of psychotropic medication capable of regulating behavior outside the hospital, a social and legal trend toward mainstreaming mental health patients and protecting their right to refuse treatment, and the opportunity for states to shift financial responsibility for the mentally ill to the federal government (through new programs such as Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid).

The policy achieved its first objective: in the thirty years since 1955, the number of patients in public mental institutions was reduced nationwide by a startling 79 percent (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> The second goal, which was to provide sufficient care for discharged patients, failed miserably and helped produce an onslaught of homeless people with severe mental illness. Even after this policy's failure was clearly demonstrated, state institutions continued to empty their beds and close down so that the state's financial burden for patients could be shifted to the federal government.<sup>10</sup>

Among the nation's homeless, roughly 30 percent suffer from severe mental illness.<sup>11</sup> The ongoing policy of deinstitutionalization has been a major cause of this tragedy. Although CMHCs were funded to provide the care that was no longer given in hospitals, many of the promised centers never materialized and the care given by those that did proved inadequate. Some of the reasons are the following.

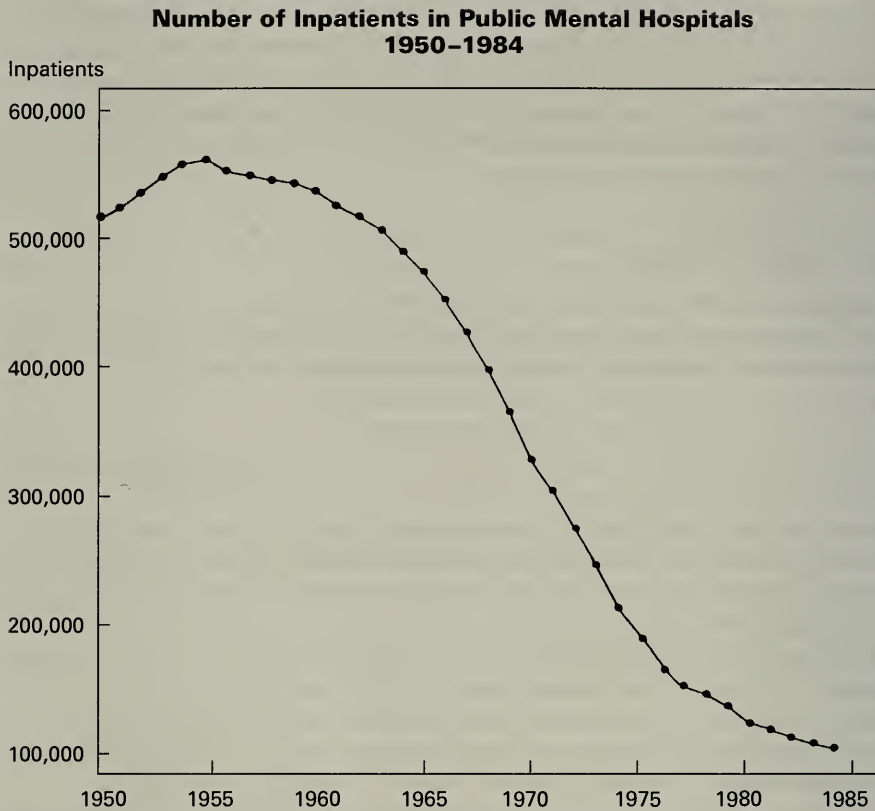
1. The lack of coordination and cooperation between the hospitals discharging patients and the CMHCs expected to care for those discharged.

2. The tendency of many CMHCs to shift their marketing focus from the severe mentally ill to white middle-class patients with personal problems who could pay for counseling (in many places, including Providence, the centers actually changed their name and location to attract the new clientele — see Figure 2).

3. The inability of many patients to conform to outpatient treatment schedules and other demands along with the inadequacy of medication to substitute for residential care.

4. The lure of private practice, which drained too many psychiatrists and other mental health professionals away from treating the poor and severely ill, despite the federal subsidies most professionals received to provide such treatment in completing their training.

Figure 1



Source: Fuller Torrey, *Nowhere to Go* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 219–20.

In the massive shuffle of people from hospitals to the CMHCs, many people fell through the enormous cracks created by deinstitutionalization. They became completely lost in the mental health care system and often ended up in prison or on the street.

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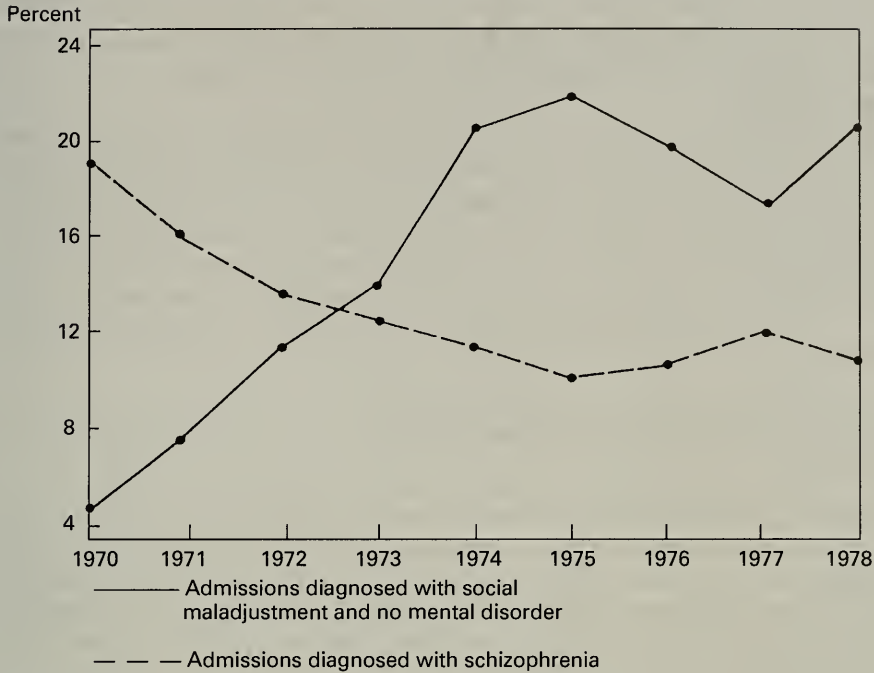
### Urban Renewal

Although deinstitutionalization has been a common target of blame for the homeless crisis, other forces contributed to this process before the Reagan-Bush years. One was the conversion of low-cost housing units to some other purpose, beginning in the 1970s and accelerating again in the late 1980s.

Urban renewal (or redevelopment) and highway projects often meant the large-scale destruction of low-income housing units. To make their cities more attractive, state and local officials often applied legal means and invested public funds to replace tenements with upscale apartments, civic and convention centers, office buildings, and roads. Roughly half a million low-rent housing units were lost in the process during the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Single-room-occupancy units (SROs) were hardest hit because their image contrasted most sharply with the upscale designs of city plan-

Figure 2

**Percent of Admissions to Community Mental Health Centers with Diagnosis of Social Maladjustment and No Mental Disorder versus Schizophrenia, 1970-1978**



Source: Fuller Torrey, *Nowhere to Go* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 219-20.

ners. Between 1970 and 1982, approximately 1,116,000 SRO units, nearly half the total supply, were lost.

Many mental health patients discharged from hospitals from the early 1960s on were able to find this kind of housing if they could not live with their families. The availability of SROs saved deinstitutionalization from its meanest effect: massive homelessness. Although many patients *did* become homeless during the early years of deinstitutionalization, and many who survived in SROs did not receive adequate treatment, the crisis of the homeless mentally ill that we experience today is the by-product of deinstitutionalization and a housing shortage. Put another way, urban renewal squeezed many onto the streets.

Behind the redevelopment steamroller came the dislocating effects of gentrification and speculation. The former involved the conversion of neighborhoods from low-income to middle- and upper-income households; the latter was the practice of buying and selling property simply to profit from rapidly changing market conditions. Often the two forces act together. For example, an investor might cash in on recent public renewal investments in an area, purchase low-cost property, renovate it for the new, higher income residents moving to the renewing neighborhood, and earn higher rents or sell at a profit. The result was displaced low-income persons and inflated housing costs.



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## **The Vietnam War**

Deinstitutionalization, together with the disappearance of SROs, left many people homeless who did not have the personal resources to live independently or to compete for available housing. Compounding this was the war in Vietnam. While mental institutions were discharging patients in droves, the war produced an inordinately high number of returning veterans scarred with psychological and substance-abuse afflictions.

Veterans represent a disproportionately high percentage of the homeless population, with estimates ranging from 23 to 33 percent. At least 10 percent of the homeless are Vietnam era vets. The unwillingness of the government to effectively meet the mental health and substance-abuse needs of returning veterans is the tragic result of public policy decisions. The fact that so many Vietnam veterans remain homeless is, in part, the result of the damaging and lingering effects of war and the failure of existing veteran support services to adequately meet these veterans' very serious needs.

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## **The "New" Homeless: Changing Demographics in the 1980s**

During the post-World War II years of economic expansion and rising affluence, Americans came to associate homelessness with the relatively few number of skid row alcoholics who roamed the streets in certain neighborhoods of large cities. Typically, they were older men, and aside from vagrancy ordinances and the like there was little public policy response to their plight. These people did not attract much public sympathy.

By the late seventies and into the eighties, however, whole new categories of people became homeless until the homeless population as a whole began to resemble the population of the nation, which is where we are today. In the late seventies and early eighties, young men who were not directly affected by deinstitutionalization or the war were the next category of homeless to be added to the swelling ranks. These new homeless — a disproportionate number of whom were African-American and Hispanic — fell into the streets because of unemployment. As with the other homeless, these unemployed men could not compete for the dwindling supply of affordable housing. Single women were also beginning to appear at shelters at an increasing rate, particularly as victims of domestic violence.

But homelessness did not attract widespread public concern until the mid-1980s, when the numbers began to increase dramatically, with women and children and families constituting the latest categories. By 1986, according to a survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 28 percent of the homeless in twenty-eight of our nation's largest cities were families with children and 15 percent were single women.<sup>13</sup> By the end of 1990, families with children comprised half of all those seeking shelter in Rhode Island; 27 percent of homeless Rhode Islanders were children under eighteen.<sup>14</sup> In addition to unemployment and the absence of mental health services, the Conference of Mayors report cited the scarcity of affordable housing for low-income people as the most frequently identified cause of homelessness. There is a consensus among homeless advocates that this crisis of affordable hous-

ing, which began in the 1970s and rapidly accelerated in the 1980s, is the most responsible cause for today's homeless epidemic.

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### **The Impact of Reaganomics**

It is one thing to lose one's job, income, and then housing, and quite another to find oneself homeless simply because one's housing has become unaffordable and other available housing is also out of reach. This predicament doesn't require a loss of job or even a change of income, but merely a change in landlord or a short-term financial crisis, such as theft. This is one reason why many women with children have joined the bulging homeless population. Public financial support for poor families (AFDC and other assistance) was previously enough at least to maintain a residence. Now, any family living under the poverty line is vulnerable to homelessness. This is the first time since the Great Depression that this condition has plagued our country. In other words, to be poor is reason enough to be homeless.

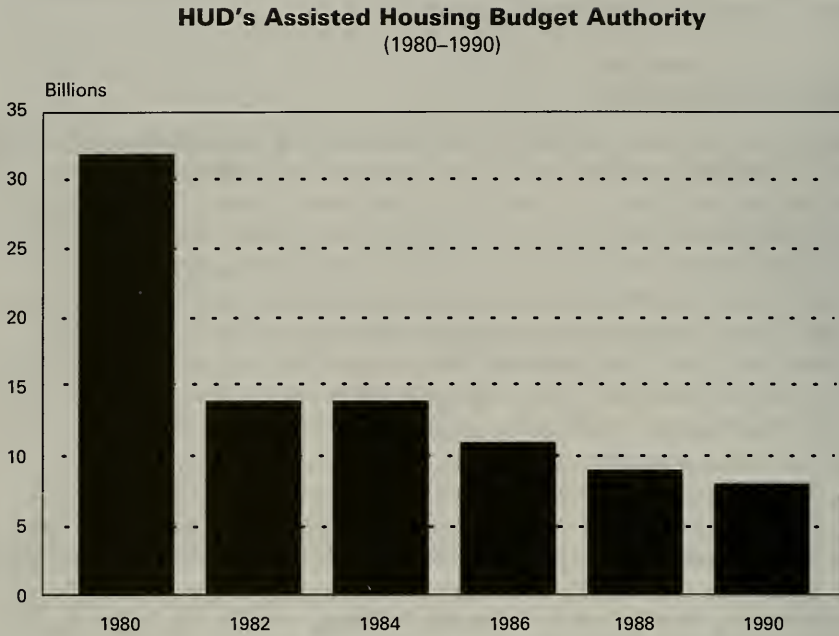
If a severe shortage of affordable housing is the current primary cause of homelessness, the Reagan/Bush administration's housing policies were responsible for creating this shortage. But other administration policies, particularly with respect to taxation, which directly and indirectly produced a substantial transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, thus leading to greater poverty and a weakened ability to maintain rent payments, also meant homelessness for many families and individuals. Family income decreased while housing costs increased.

Public housing, as we know it today, first appeared as part of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 in response to the Depression. The federal government's commitment to public housing was significantly strengthened by the Housing Act of 1949, when the number of households in the postwar years was dramatically increasing. This act established the goal of creating "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." Since then, Washington has steadily allocated resources to meet this goal, creating subsidized housing for low-income people up to the current level of about 5 million units. Public housing has been a steadily growing (aside from a slowdown during the Nixon administration), bipartisan commitment, on which the country as a whole and poor people in particular have come to rely.

But in 1980, the federal government led by Ronald Reagan abandoned housing as a responsibility. From 1981 to 1989, government support for low-income housing was slashed from \$32 billion per year to \$7.5 billion, a drop of 80 percent in real dollars (see Figure 3). That this is more of an abandonment than simply a decrease is reflected in the cancerous HUD scandals that drained billions from what little remained in the department's housing budget. Nobody seemed to care. In the words of one senior HUD official in 1985, "We're getting out of the housing business, period."<sup>15</sup>

During the 1970s, as the urban renewal steamroller eliminated low-cost, private, nonsubsidized housing, the federal government stepped up its housing initiative to compensate for this loss. But into the 1980s, this public assistance was cut off, and the availability of low-income housing began to drop off dramatically (Figure 3). By 1980, about 170,000 new subsidized units were being produced annually; by 1990, the number had fallen to 25,000 a year. The private sector continued to serve the better-off in the population; for example, less than 8 percent of all new private multifamily housing produced in 1986 rented for less than \$300 a month. These trends

Figure 3



Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Information Bulletin*, 1990.

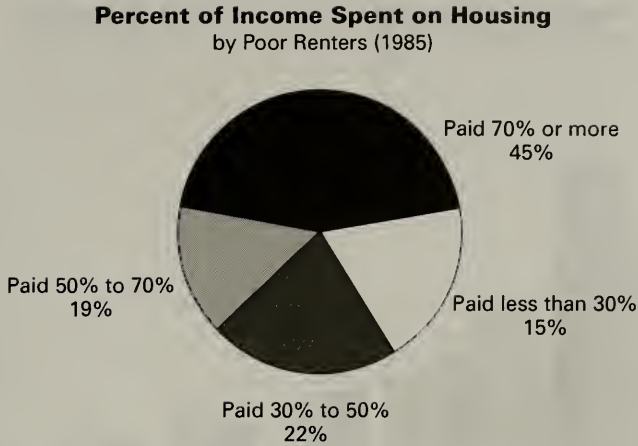
resulted in a severe net loss of low-income housing. By the late 1980s, over half a million low-rent units were being lost annually. About 2.5 million people were being displaced from their housing every year.<sup>16</sup>

The dwindling supply of low-cost housing due to the sudden withdrawal of federal resources, combined with a serious, recessionary slowdown in private construction in the early 1980s, not only displaced poor people onto the street, but further impoverished those who still had housing. Low-income people have been forced to pay an increasingly higher portion of their income on housing as they compete for apartments. The decrease in available housing units translated into skyrocketing rents. By the mid-1980s, nearly one half of all low-income households were devoting over 70 percent of their income to housing (see Figures 4 and 5). In Rhode Island, for example, I know many individuals who hand over their entire General Public Assistance check to their landlords every week. During the past decade, average rents in Rhode Island increased by 153 percent and home prices by 165 percent, while household incomes grew by only 93 percent. One estimate places the number of overcrowded households in Rhode Island at more than 4,000, another sad reflection of the housing crisis.<sup>17</sup>

The effects of the recession on the private housing industry also were felt by most middle-income households through increasing housing costs. Rents were going up and rising home purchase prices were making homeownership out of reach for many who would ordinarily have become homeowners. This further burdened low-income people as the cycle of gentrification, speculation, and displacement took its toll on poor neighborhoods, particularly in the Northeast during the late 1980s. Many middle-class Boston-area residents, for example, were looking to rent or purchase housing in the Providence area to escape prohibitive Boston



Figure 4



Source: National Low Income Housing Information Service, *Information Bulletin*, 1990.

housing costs. The result was heightened competition for housing, higher housing costs, and further displacement.

During 1987 and 1988, a frenzy of speculation wreaked havoc on the low-income housing market. Investors were selling off property, with various degrees of added improvement, at enormous profit. Many of the properties affected were converted to condominiums or high-cost rentals. Clearly the effect of speculation itself on the cost of housing, and not the housing shortage by itself, increases the rent burden of poor people and leads to displacement and homelessness.

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### The Poor Get Poorer

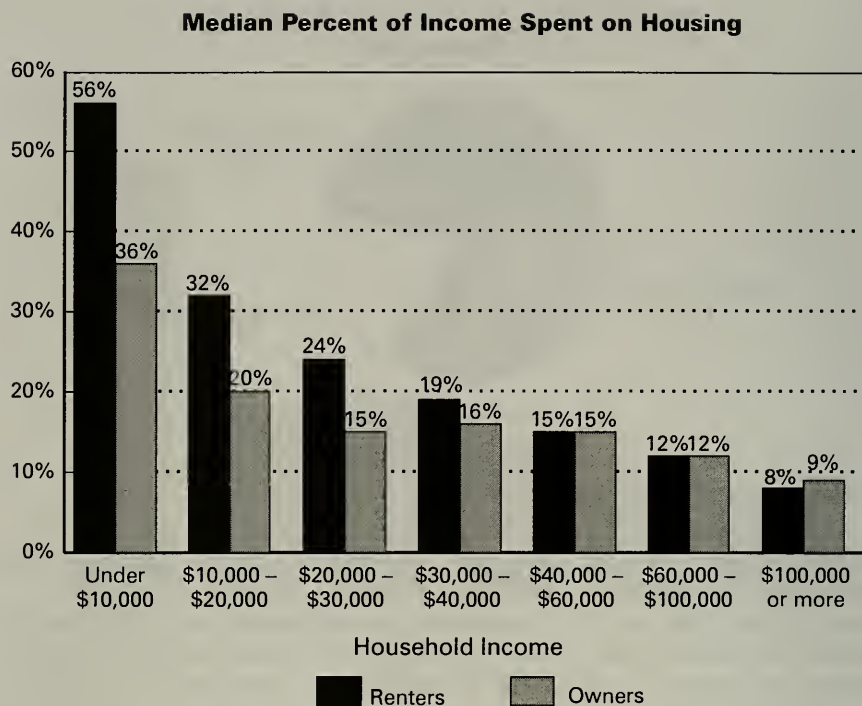
In addition to, and in some ways independent of, the housing shortage and increasing rent burden on the poor, more individuals fell into poverty during the past decade, and those already impoverished suffered further decline. Even as private housing construction picked up in the late 1980s, little of it was affordable for those most in need. By 1990, there was actually a glut in high-priced housing in some regions. Thus there persists a painful gap between the cost of available housing and the ability of many in desperate need of housing to pay for it.

Today, 32 million people are living below the poverty line in the United States compared with 25 million in 1981. Of these, 12.6 million are children, representing about one child out of five. This represents a 2.2 million increase in child poverty since 1980.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, this substantial increase in poverty occurred alongside continuous economic growth between 1982 and 1989. Not everyone suffered a decline in spending money. While the poor were worse off at the end of the decade, the wealthy enjoyed a windfall (Figure 6).

Two primary factors contributing to the increase in poverty were the recession of the early 1980s, together with changing employment requirements, and a government policy that consistently favored the well-off at the expense of the poor. For many, the recession came and then gave way to good times, but many others never recovered. One reason is that the recession dealt another strong blow to the coun-



Figure 5



From *A Place to Call Home* (1991 edition)

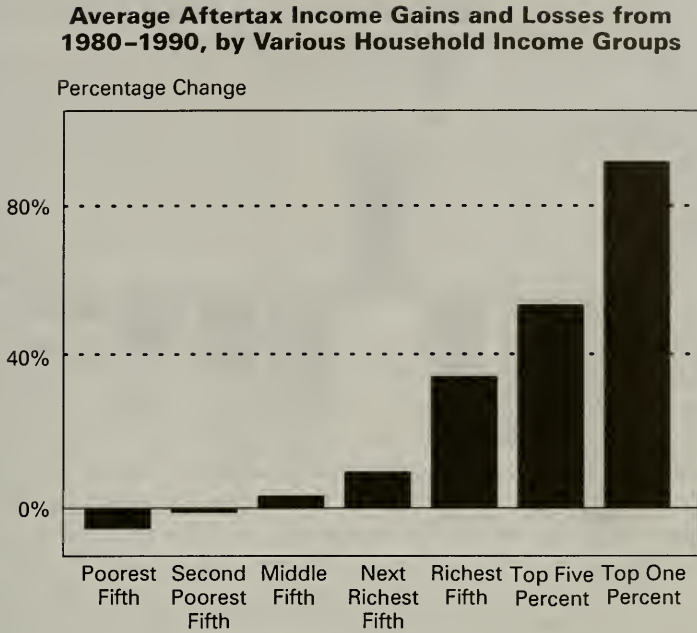
Source: *Roundup*, newsletter of the Low Income Housing Information Service, no. 146, December 1991–January 1992.

try's competitive position in manufacturing industries and the economy shifted more into high-tech and service industries, displacing workers and increasing demand for skills they didn't have. Between 1981 and 1986, approximately 2.2 million workers each year were dislocated from their jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>19</sup> The demand for production line work and unskilled labor never rebounded after the recession. Many workers who lost their jobs never found another one or resorted to minimum-wage employment. Many of these found themselves homeless.

In another public policy blunder, the government not only failed to compensate for this massive dislocation, it enacted policies that further impoverished the employed poor and recently unemployed. Between 1980 and 1988, for example, the real value of the minimum wage dropped by 31 percent.<sup>20</sup> In the same period, the percentage of hourly wage earners whose income was insufficient to support a family of three above the poverty line rose by more than 50 percent.<sup>21</sup>

As the gap between rich and poor widened, those falling into the poverty camp came increasingly from the ranks of the employed. By 1990, nearly one in four of the homeless received income from part- or full-time employment. This new category of homeless, which included families with children, elicited a response of shock and/or sympathy from much of the housed public, helping to generate attention to the crisis in the late 1980s.

Figure 6



Source: Congressional Budget Office

Source: National Coalition for the Homeless, *Safety Network* 9, no. 9 (September 1990).

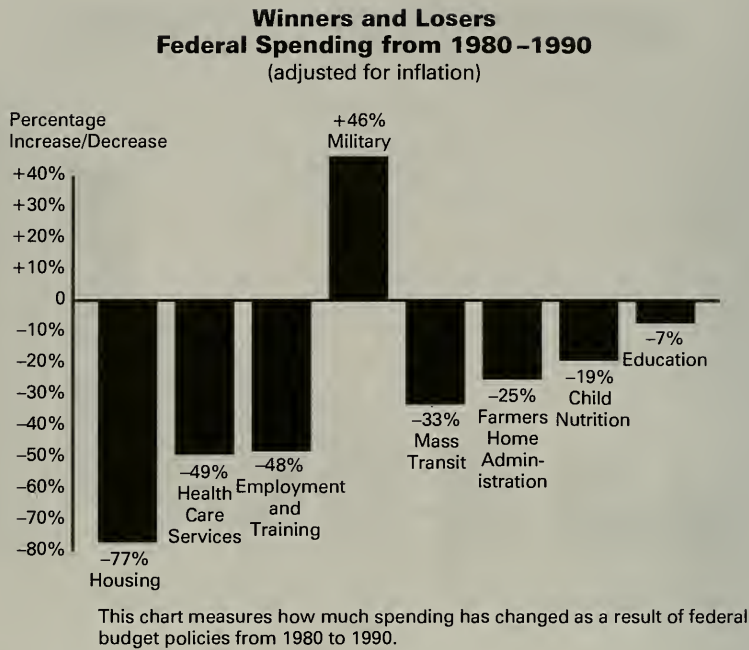
Ronald Reagan's response to the problem was to deny that there were poor and homeless people in America and push through a series of measures that resulted in more poverty and more homeless people. Directly affecting the poor were the government's massive cutbacks in human needs programs such as housing. Federal cash payments to low-income families with children, for example, dropped by 21 percent during the decade.<sup>22</sup> With tax, deregulation, and other policy initiatives, the Reagan administration succeeded in enriching the well-off while pumping billions into the military. The end result was a massive transfer of resources from the poor to the affluent and from human services to the Pentagon (Figure 7). When homelessness is viewed as a consequence either of a housing shortage or a household income shortage, the cause is clear: it is poverty.

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### The Twenty-year Solution

Various means have been employed by the federal government over the years to provide low-cost housing for the poor. One method frequently used is to offer subsidies to private developers who in exchange agree to rent the housing to low-income people at a set rate and for a specified time period (for example, thirty years). As public policy, this approach has proved flawed in many respects although it has retained its appeal among elected officials. One major weakness is that it is shortsighted. What happens when the contract expires and the private owner is permitted to convert the use of subsidized units? Contracts for many such

Figure 7



Source: Jobs with Peace Campaign, *Fact Sheet* (Boston, February 1990).

units, built in the late sixties and seventies, are now beginning to expire, opening the door for conversion and displacement. The number of units that are vulnerable to conversion in the current decade is alarmingly high. As contracts between developers and the government expire, the former are free to pay any remaining mortgage debt and change the use of their units; others will default on their loans. According to a study conducted by the National Low Income Housing Preservation Commission, without government intervention about 38 percent of all private, subsidized housing units will be lost by the year 2002 through early payment, 43 percent through default, and 19 percent will not change use. The total number of lost units will be about 523,000.<sup>23</sup>

If this prediction becomes a reality, the effect will be a catastrophe of monumental proportions. Instead of solving the homeless problem in this decade, yet another category of people will be added to the already swelling homeless population. There are two signs of hope indicating that the unwanted effects of expiring contracts will be mitigated, though they are unlikely to be prevented entirely without radical government intervention. One sign is the current market glut for upscale housing. This, of course, is but a temporary safety valve, but at least for the moment there is little incentive in many regions of the country for owners to pay and convert their developments to condominiums or high-rent apartments. The other sign is that since the commission's study, Washington has in fact intervened. As an amendment to the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, Congress included measures, primarily in the form of incentives, to reduce the chance that low-income housing units will be converted to other uses.



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## **Yes, But Not in My Backyard**

Although the current housing crisis stems primarily from federal policy decisions, state and local governments have also contributed to the problem. They have never been the major sources of funding for subsidized housing, a role traditionally assumed by the federal government, but they have often discouraged its development and fueled the poverty cycle by such means as exclusionary zoning ordinances and decisions and by lax enforcement of fair housing regulations. Both of these forces severely limit where poor people, especially poor minorities, can live and where low-income housing or residential support programs for homeless people or those with special needs can be located.

For example, Barrington, Rhode Island, passed an ordinance prohibiting multiple-unit dwellings (Barrington also outlawed hanging laundry on an outside clothesline!). The town of Foster requires a minimum of five acres to build a house, with no provision for cluster housing that is combined with large open space tracts. These regulations essentially exclude low-cost housing and low-income people. Similarly, the zoning hearing process is used to block low-income housing, shelters, and residential support programs. In Providence, Travelers Aid was forced to turn back a federal grant award for a runaway youth residence because the residents of the neighborhood where the program was to be located successfully pressured the zoning board to deny the needed variance. While there are legitimate reasons to deny access to a project in many cases, and neighborhoods should have some degree of control, programs are sometimes rejected on a wholesale basis, leaving them either clustered in the same (low-income) neighborhoods or without a home at all.

In addition to discouraging needed low-cost housing developments, shelter, and support programs, these actions perpetuate the ghettoization of poverty. Low-income housing projects, group homes, residential drug and alcohol programs, and shelters all wind up in the same neighborhood or in certain designated areas (for instance, Rhode Island located its emergency homeless shelter in the state's large prison complex). Ghettoization fuels the cycle of poverty, and the segregation of rich and poor people encourages the former to neglect the needs of the latter. And more poverty and neglect mean more homelessness.

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## **Ending the Crisis: Government Responds to Pressure**

When the Reagan-Bush team signaled the end of the federal government's role in meeting housing and other human needs, it expressed a philosophical conviction concerning the purpose of government. If housing and other human needs are to be responded to by the public sector at all, the view goes, the job is best left to the states and municipalities. Moreover, many feared that the administration's budget slashing would severely strain budgets at the state and local levels, thus leading to desperate attempts to mend the torn safety net. But these fears proved to be for the most part unfounded, because at the height of the nation's economic boom in 1988, many state budgets were posting comfortable surpluses. In fact, Rhode Island taxpayers were receiving token rebates from their magnanimous state government. During this period fiscal collapse was averted at the state and local levels not because the responsibilities relinquished by Washington were easily absorbed at these levels, but because little effort was made to absorb them. Now, of course, the



recession and the profligacy of the 1980s are causing enormous fiscal hardship in many states, including Rhode Island.

The homeless crisis was first recognized and responded to by ordinary citizens and private organizations. In addition to private programs aimed at getting people off the street and meeting the more urgent needs of the homeless, national and local organizations and coalitions gained momentum in pressuring for public intervention in the crisis. Of necessity perhaps, the demands brought by advocates gradually escalated from treating the conspicuous effects of homelessness to addressing the root causes. The public sector has slowly and inadequately followed along by responding to these escalating demands.

In the early 1980s, an acute and obvious need to get people off the street inspired activists to demand that state and local governments provide emergency shelter services to bridge the expansive gap left by the efforts of private groups. Gradually, public shelters began to appear. In desperation, often under court order, states and cities took to placing homeless people, particularly families, in private hotels, paying the going rate — and sometimes much more. The “welfare hotels” in New York City are probably the best known examples of this policy. The horror stories depicting conditions in some of these hotels are matched only by the insanity of the public policy decisions and procedures that created and maintained them.<sup>24</sup> Although more recently the court ordered people moved out of these hotels, New York continues to pay private hotel owners as much as \$2,300 per month to house a homeless family.

The public policy response at the state and local levels — to provide emergency shelter for the homeless — was mirrored at the federal level. Federal funds for emergency shelter became available in 1983 through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program and then again in 1987 through the Stewart McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. The latter has since been expanded beyond emergency shelter services into such areas as transitional housing, but both programs represent attempts by Congress to mitigate the effects of housing policy decisions it ratified just a few years earlier. Our elected officials found themselves in the embarrassing position of causing homelessness and trying to alleviate it at the same time. Their attempts to relieve the crisis not only skirted the real source of the problem, but the amounts appropriated for both programs were dwarfed by the large chunks taken away from housing and other human needs programs.

The citizen movement to end homelessness gained momentum through the 1980s as more and more people became aware of the vast and growing number and startling diversity of people without homes. As state authorities gradually began to accept responsibility for providing emergency shelter to keep people off the streets, advocates in larger numbers shifted their focus to some of the problem’s causes — most notably, affordable housing. The national affordable housing movement — and public concern for the homeless in general — reached its peak strength in 1989, which helped to cause a turnaround in Washington’s housing policy. The National Affordable Housing Act (NAHA) of 1990 was clearly a product of public pressure. The day before a mass demonstration in Washington on October 7, 1989, members of the House leadership met with homeless advocates and promised to push through legislation that was reduced over the following year to NAHA. President Bush thus had little choice but to pay some attention to the scandal-ridden Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The scandals were embarrassing and

Bush's appointment of Jack Kemp to head the department, reestablish its credibility, and make something of it again, translated into a fresh start for housing policy.

The Bush administration, however, attempted to drag its feet, in spite of enormous public pressure, on the grounds that cleaning up HUD was all it could do for a while. This was not the time for new programs or re-funding old ones. Moreover, the "new direction" in housing favored by the administration emphasized the conversion of public housing tenants into owners rather than confronting the immediate crisis of homelessness and the acute shortage of affordable housing. In the meantime, the president answered critics by backing full funding of the McKinney Act. Although Bush's support for both homeownership and the McKinney program represent an improvement over the Reagan administration's refusal to address the housing problem, it also signifies that his own administration has not recognized in a substantive way the catastrophic effects of Reagan's failed housing policy.

Because it felt the heat of public concern a little more closely, Congress moved to revitalize the nation's housing policy. Though far from the comprehensive five-year legislative package supported by advocates, NAHA represented a small first step in reviewing the federal government's role in housing. The act incorporates the administration's Homeownership Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE) program and other homeownership initiatives, enhances state and local spending authority and flexibility, sets aside funding for community housing developers to build capacity, and maintains or consolidates pre-existing housing programs such as new public housing construction. NAHA also includes measures designed to prevent the loss of subsidized housing due to expiring contracts and conversions. Owners are offered financial incentives to maintain the current use of their units with a right of first refusal given to any qualified buyer willing to maintain the existing use, should the owner reject the incentives offered. This solution is costly and fails to prevent all conversions, but at least it reflects a willingness to deal with the problem.

The spending authority attached to NAHA for fiscal years 1991 and 1992 constitutes a significant increase, but just as the act was passed in the wake of mounting public activism, Washington's subsequent refusal to match the authorized amounts with actual appropriations evidently reflects what appears to be a diminishing public concern for the homeless. When the president and Congress allocated a mere \$1.3 billion in additional funds for existing housing programs in NAHA's first year (fiscal 1991), offering no money for any of the act's new programs, congressional leaders promised substantially higher appropriations for fiscal 1992. But this promise has not been fulfilled. Although the new NAMA, HOME, and HOPE programs received funding, the total appropriation in 1992 dropped from \$9.3 to \$8.8 billion. Not only is compassion and activism waning, but a conservative backlash of public hostility and intolerance has surfaced in many quarters. Follow-through on NAHA has been frustrated by Bush's insistence on funding homeownership instead of increasing the supply of low-cost housing and Congress's precarious commitment to housing as a priority. As one indicator of this declining commitment, Congress voted in the spring of 1991 to transfer \$250 million from an existing public housing program to the controversial space station project.

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## **Underlying Policy Principles**

Perhaps the solutions to homelessness offered by the federal government and many of the states thus far can be categorized as “too little too late” followed by “unkept promises.” If government intervention has yet to fulfill its share in tackling the problem, it has mitigated its effects by sheltering many people and housing a few more. But underlying public policy with respect to homelessness in this country are at least three working principles that require illumination and change. The first, best known as the trickle-down theory, that is, that accumulated wealth eventually trickles down from the few to the many, is a conscious principle of public policy. The second, tied closely to this theory, involves subsidizing private for-profit ventures to provide housing. The third principle involves waiting to address a social problem until its meanest symptoms become intolerable and then treating only those symptoms, which is a bad public policy habit.

To the extent that the trickle-down theory was ever real in the United States, wealth and benefits have not trickled down in the current situation affecting homelessness. While it is true that homelessness has historically increased during recessions and depressions in the economy and then abated, the increase in poverty over the past decade has basically defied traditional boom-and-bust cycles and therefore represents a changing dynamic. For example, our nation’s current homeless epidemic has steadily ballooned through two recessions and two periods of economic prosperity.

Focusing on the most recent years, it was the conviction of both conservatives, like Bush and Reagan, and many liberals that at least most of the poor and homeless would somehow be taken care of as prosperity and economic expansion continued to serve the better-off. Consequently, as a matter of policy, elected officials in Rhode Island chose to reap the harvest of good economic times by investing public money (from all three levels) in upscale development projects rather than in low-cost housing and other urgent community needs. For example, to attract business and improve the appearance of downtown Providence, officials went for a \$25 million project to move the river flowing through the city and create an office park. This project is half completed and the city is about to dig ground for a convention center project, also in the downtown area, having relocated the bus terminal to an inconvenient spot on the edge of town to make way. Now that the state and city are reeling from record budget deficits and a recession is upon us, these projects have lost some of their glamour and may not be completed. And it is unlikely that they will have a measurable impact on the homeless problem.

The recent boom-and-bust cycle has been particularly nefarious because rather than causing trickle-down effects, the good times seemed to drain resources from the poor, creating more poverty and homelessness. Much of the investment of the 1980s, typified by junk bond trading, was phony rather than genuinely productive, satisfying personal greed through consumption rather than human needs through the creation of jobs and housing. Trickle-down assumptions, made by government officials as a matter of ritual, were not applicable.

The second principle, subsidizing for-profit enterprises to provide housing, is a more aggressive application of the trickle-down theory. While the more conservative trickle-down policy approach depends on free-market forces to take care of social needs, the more responsive version prefers to feed private industry and investors



with public funds to facilitate the downward flow of benefits. This mode has been the predominant vehicle employed by government in housing people in recent decades. Many people, including many poor people, have been housed through this method over the years, but as a principle of public policy, it is only marginally more enlightened than the free-market approach and equally unjust.

There are many ways in which private profit is subsidized by the government to produce more housing or facilitate homeownership. But when all the housing subsidy dollars are added up, from all government programs and provisions, it should alarm the average person to find that our nation's wealthy are subsidized to a much greater degree than are poor people. A major example of this inequity is the archaic policy of allowing all homeowners to deduct property taxes and mortgage interest from their federal returns. These deductions, first provided during the Civil War, have succeeded in facilitating homeownership, but radically changed economic conditions since World War II (particularly inflation) have transformed this benefit into a windfall monster. By 1990, the federal treasury was losing an astonishing \$50 billion a year to homeowners, about five times the amount allocated to HUD for low-income housing; one third of this amount went to taxpayers with incomes exceeding \$100,000. While over 75 percent of Americans earning over \$100,000 receive federal housing assistance, only 20 percent of low-income households in the country receive housing aid of any kind, the lowest percentage of all industrial nations.<sup>25</sup> Although it retains social value for a limited purpose, the homeowner deduction can thus be seen as another contributing cause, albeit indirect, of homelessness. It has drained resources from the poor to the rich (particularly during the 1980s), encouraged homeownership at the expense of rental housing production, and contributed to dislocation and escalating housing costs as buildings are quickly traded or converted from affordable to upscale residences.

Public housing policy has also relied very heavily on private for-profit developers and mortgage credit sources to produce and maintain subsidized housing for low-income people. This widely accepted practice is defended on the ground that everyone benefits. But in weighing the relative benefits that accrue to private business and well-off individuals compared to the low-income tenant, one finds it difficult to see how poor people are the policy's intended beneficiaries. Not only does the process pay out an inordinate portion of public funds (officially intended to house low-income people), to private for-profit organizations, but reliance on profit-oriented players leads to the kind of costly bind we are now in with expiring contracts. In passing the National Affordable Housing Act, Washington found no way out of this bind other than to offer costly incentives to keep the housing affordable.

The third principle that animates much of how government responds to social crises is the tendency to respond too late and the failure to confront causes. Long-term urban renewal projects, like the Providence river relocation project, may appear to reflect long-range thinking, and when these projects are touted for the jobs they will produce and other trickle-down benefits they will create in the community, they appear to be addressing urban problems at their source. To a degree, the projects do benefit people in need by providing short-term job opportunities, but meeting the basic needs of poor people becomes a by-product of secondary, almost incidental, significance in a planning process that serves primarily wealthy investors and the mayors and governors.



More to the point is how government has refused to acknowledge the real causes of homelessness — when it concedes there is a problem at all. Typically, the response is short term, but the temporary becomes permanent, thus perpetuating the cycle in need of fundamental remedial action. Temporary emergency shelters seem to be opened as if a hurricane just blew through town and everything will be back to normal in a short while. More drug and alcohol detoxification beds are added to existing wards to handle the rising demand caused by homelessness. In Rhode Island, the largest state housing project in the past three years has been at the state prison, where overcrowding has forced the courts to levy fines against the state. One would think that a homeless person is more likely to commit a crime and take up expensive prison space than a person living in a stable, affordable home. The same is true for substance abuse. Yet at all levels of government, officials launch crusades against crime and drugs that typically rely on the courts and prisons, overlooking such obvious systemic factors as unemployment and the shortage of affordable housing. This pernicious public policy habit not only fails to address causes and thereby fails to solve chronic social problems, but it costs taxpayers a lot more money in the long run. Decent, low-cost housing is expensive, but not when compared to prisons.

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### **Ending the Crisis: New Directions**

There is a multitude of untried and underutilized remedies for the homeless crisis — many of which are creative, potentially effective, or proven — to support the conclusion that ending homelessness is a matter of political will. The recent backlash against the homeless themselves, which has led to repressive local ordinances against loitering and panhandling (even sleeping!), reflects not only intolerance, but also a frustration that we have not yet solved the problem or that the problem is hopelessly intractable. Clearly, the collective “we” have not adequately resolved the crisis, giving rise to a well-grounded frustration, but the elimination of homelessness is within our reach if we are willing to change our collective priorities. I am convinced, therefore, that the challenge of eliminating homelessness is primarily one of generating enough political will. Indeed, the way is open and the choices are many.

The foregoing analysis suggests that many policy changes are needed, but overall, attention needs to be paid to three broad and overlapping categories: housing, support services, and unemployment and poverty. To end homelessness, the public must see to it that a sufficient amount of decent, stable, affordable housing is made available, that adequate support services are provided for homeless persons while they are homeless, in transition, and in permanent housing, and that poverty and unemployment are eliminated.

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### **Housing the Homeless**

Therefore, in my view, a new federal housing policy that intends to eliminate homelessness must include these components.

1. Housing should be regarded as a right, much as it is in many industrialized and developing countries throughout the world. Housing programs should be entitlement programs.

2. This means a substantial increase in public funds, particularly at the federal level. An indication of the minimum commitment required is reflected in the Mickey Leland Housing bill introduced, but not passed, in 1990. This measure authorized an expenditure of \$125 billion over a five-year period. The principal source of new housing funds would likely be the military; such a transfer of funds would also yield more employment if weapons programs were targeted for cuts.<sup>26</sup> The savings and loan and bank bailout programs should also increase affordable housing by selling off residential assets to housing nonprofits at discounted rates. Finally, billions could be devoted to low-cost housing if homeowner tax deductions are curtailed.

3. The for-profit sector, as it participates in housing production at all levels (credit, development, management, ownership, and so on) should be more tightly regulated to increase the availability of affordable housing.

4. Beyond these regulatory measures, which have immediate application, the most important long-term goal should be the transfer of ownership and control over low-income housing from the private for-profit sector to the communities in which the housing is located (social control). For example, a community may be represented by a nonprofit land trust or housing developer, a limited equity cooperative, or the state or local government. Social ownership and control can take many forms and does not necessarily mean government ownership and control. Two promising vehicles that have become increasingly available to apply social control at the local level and outside of government are nonprofit housing groups and community land trusts. Both are private, operate on the energy of people in the community who want to see land and housing used for the common good, are monitored by government regulations, and earn no profit. First, it will permit a more efficient use of public funds intended for those in need by minimizing the cost of private profit in the housing production and management process. Second, social control will stabilize housing for those who are currently vulnerable to landlord action and displacement that appears arbitrary. Third, social control will allow for continuous affordability because affordability rather than market opportunity is the prime criterion for transferring ownership on use of housing units. Fourth, it represents a clear alternative to the principle of might — or wealth — makes right in determining the distribution of such necessities as housing.

5. Developing and managing subsidized housing should be decentralized. Creative, local housing solutions, including multisector partnerships, land trusts, and cooperatives, have emerged as coping devices during this period of scarce federal funding. This approach should be continued and encouraged. Federal funding can most effectively take the form of direct one-time grants that pay for property acquisition and construction/rehabilitation, permitting nonprofit developers to operate debt free and apply rents to maintenance expenses alone.

6. Fair housing is as important as more housing in combating racism, poverty, and homelessness. Low-income people, especially minorities, do not enjoy the freedom either to remain where they are living or to move where they want to move to the extent other people do. Nationwide investigations continue to reveal that African-Americans and Hispanics seeking to rent or purchase homes in predominantly white neighborhoods are subject to discriminatory treatment about 50 percent of the time. Fair housing requires strict enforcement and strengthening of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and other existing legislation and that each community — and city neighborhood — share in the provision of affordable housing and support programs.

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## **More Than a Home: Support Services**

If this country were to reach the goal of providing every person in need with a safe, decent, stable, and affordable home, it would be a great achievement. But this would not in and of itself end homelessness; it would only substantially reduce it. Illnesses such as schizophrenia, drug addiction, and pathological violence, or simple deficiencies in education and health care still make it difficult or impossible for some to keep their housing. Moreover, because homelessness has a damaging effect on a person, and on family units, support services are essential for people who have become homeless if they are to keep their housing. The longer they are left on the street and in shelters, and the more people who become homeless, the more support services will be needed to repair the damage.

In considering what services to offer and how to offer them, policymakers should apply these two principles: because homelessness is basically a housing issue, services should be provided in conjunction with housing, and services, publicly and privately offered, should be vigilantly coordinated, probably by state or city human service departments, to minimize duplication and assure continuity of care.

Adequately serving the needs of the severely mentally ill is a major challenge. Past mistakes, almost universally acknowledged, still need to be corrected. We need more residential care homes — group homes that provide close personal and medical supervision and care, homes that provide lay supervision in conjunction with CMHC outpatient services. We also need more opportunities for visiting care available for those stable enough to live in independent housing. Although most of the homeless mentally ill can be cared for by these arrangements, more flexibility is needed to hospitalize involuntarily those who are very sick and not meeting their survival needs in the community.

Drug and alcohol abuse are equally challenging problems. The “war on drugs” must be urgently redirected toward education, treatment, and the cessation of imported drugs. Particularly, additional beds are needed for residential detoxification, treatment, and halfway support.

Finally, we need to provide a wide array of services tied to housing projects in addition to mental health and substance-abuse treatment. These services might include family counseling, group and individual therapy addressing domestic violence, job counseling, day care, nutrition, health and home skills education, and case management. Many of these services should be available on site, especially in larger housing projects and developments.

Homelessness seems like an intractable problem, leading many to conclude that it has become a permanent feature of our society. If homelessness poses a major challenge to public policymakers, which it does, it will be a bit easier to handle, at least at the superficial level of getting everyone into a house, than will the older and larger problem of poverty that feeds homelessness. In turn, poverty is both a cause and effect of alienation and marginalization, which are deep seated and have historical roots. The articulation of a new public policy must incorporate an understanding of this to effectively address the root causes of homelessness.

The process of forging this policy has begun spontaneously at the grassroots level. Progress is made whenever a tenant group buys or acquires management control over their development or when a housing nonprofit acquires a city parcel with a



house, places the parcel under a land trust, and converts the house to a limited-equity cooperative. These are probably the most real and hopeful signs of positive change. Yet public policy change requires a broader-based movement at the local and national levels. Elected officials are often the last to adopt the kinds of proposals outlined here. Moreover, until there is new leadership in Washington, any progress will be slow and frustrating.

A movement for change requires the education and political mobilization of ordinary people to generate the political will needed to affect policy. While the growing diversity of the homeless population has inspired many to respond compassionately and participate in public demonstrations for housing, advocates must educate these supporters to go beyond the myth of the deserving poor. This attitude, fed by the media, sets up a class system among the poor and homeless that ignores the common roots of all poverty and homelessness.

As pressure for change trickles up to policymakers in Washington, what is called for here is clearly something on the scale of a Marshall Plan, a scale of change that will inevitably cost a degree of disruption for many. As it stands, I fear we can count on a measure of upheaval ahead of us if we choose to stay the current policy course. Even without upheaval, the status quo policy has proved to be a failure, with mass homelessness, crime and violence, poverty, and drug abuse providing some of the most conspicuous evidence. It is not working, and a fundamental departure is urgently needed. 🐼

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## Notes

1. Jonathan Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children* (New York: Crown, 1988), 30.
2. *Ibid.*, 76.
3. For a report and commentary on the Census Bureau's controversial count of the homeless, see *Safety Network*, a newsletter of the National Coalition for the Homeless, no. 5 (Washington, D.C., May/June 1991).
4. Figures are based on a survey conducted in twenty-eight cities across the country. U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1990* (Washington, D.C., 1990).
5. *Ibid.*
6. Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board, "The Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project — Phase II" (Providence: United Way of Southeastern New England, June 30, 1990), 7.
7. National Coalition for the Homeless, *Safety Network*, no. 4 (April 1991): 2.
8. Cushing Dolbeare, "Out of Reach" (Washington, D.C.: Low Income Housing Information Service, 1989).
9. Fuller Torrey, *Nowhere to Go* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 140, 219–20. Torrey's book provides a critical, comprehensive analysis of deinstitutionalization and the resulting problem of the homeless mentally ill.
10. In addition to Torrey's critique, a more recent report published by the National Institute of Mental Health (a federal agency created in 1946 to facilitate and otherwise improve the provision of mental health services nationwide) includes many of the criticisms of deinstitutionalization mentioned here. "Deinstitutionalization Policy and Homelessness" (Washington, D.C.: NIMH, May 1990).

11. U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report*.
12. American Institute of Architects, "Housing the Homeless," conference proceedings, 1985, 10.
13. U.S. Conference of Mayors, *The Continued Growth of Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty in America's Cities in 1986* (Washington, D.C., 1986).
14. Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, "Interim Report on Homelessness in Rhode Island," January 1991.
15. Kozol, *Rachel and Her Children*, 12.
16. Homelessness Information Exchange, *Homewords* 3, no. 4 (Washington, D.C., April 1991).
17. Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation, "Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy," preliminary draft (Providence, 1991), 8.
18. Children's Defense Fund, "Children in Poverty" (Washington, D.C., June 1991).
19. Bureau of Labor Statistics, cited in *Homewords*.
20. See *Homewords*.
21. Children's Defense Fund, "Children in Poverty."
22. Ibid.
23. National Low Income Housing Preservation Commission, "Preventing the Disappearance of Low Income Housing" (Washington, D.C., 1988), 43.
24. Kozol's *Rachel and Her Children* offers a graphic critique of the New York welfare hotel system.
25. Peter Dreier and John Atlas, "Defund the Mansions," reprinted in the *Providence Journal*, May 18, 1991. A good case in favor of reforming the current tax policy is also made by Cushing Dolbeare in "The Low-income Housing Crisis," in *America's Housing Crisis*, Chester Hartman, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan, 1983), 60–75.
26. Weapons programs are relatively poor job producers. According to a 1976 Bureau of Labor Statistics study, a billion dollars invested in defense industries generates approximately 75,000 jobs compared to 100,000 jobs in construction, 138,000 in health care, and 187,000 in education. Cited by the Boston Study Group in *The Price of Defense* (New York: New York Times Books, 1979), 293.