

Relief Without A Roof

The Emergence of a Policy Discussion on American Homelessness 1980-1996

Elaine MacPherson
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AFDC:	Aid to Families with Dependent Children - War on Poverty program that amended the New Deal Aid to Dependent Children program to include aid for unemployed fathers. Welfare reform under the Clinton Administration replaced this program with TANF (Temporary Assistance For Needy Families) in 1996.
CBDG:	Community Development Block Grant - Authorized by the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 to replace community grant programs into larger consolidated grants.
CCNV:	Community for Creative Non-violence - This committee, spearheaded largely by famed advocate Mitch Snyder, relentlessly pushed for a more serious federal commitment to eradicating national homelessness, drawing much attention to the issue through various awareness campaigns, hunger strikes, and court testimony.
CHAP:	Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan - Statute outlined in Title V, Subtitle A of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, requiring cities requesting for federal funding to submit their plans for homeless assistance programs and fund allocation.
FEMA:	Federal Emergency Management Agency - Federal administration, established in the late 1970s, that claimed fiscal responsibility for the administration of federal funds outlined in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.
GSA:	General Services Administration - Federal agency responsible for researching efficacy of various administrative agencies.
HHS:	The Department of Health and Human Services - Federal agency initially responsible for oversight of the American homeless population.
HOPE:	Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere - Initiative started under the Bush administration and the leadership of HUD secretary Jack Kemp, emphasizing private enterprise as a tool for inner city revitalization.
HUD:	The Department of Housing and Urban Development - Created under President Lyndon B. Johnson's Administration, this department often assumed leadership for homelessness initiatives under Secretaries Samuel Pierce, Jack Kemp, and Henry Cisneros, respectively.
LIHPRA:	Low-Income Housing Preservation and Resident Homeownership Act of 1990 - Meant to preserve a believed decrease in low-income units that provided options to owners intending to prepay their mortgages.
NAHA:	National Affordable Housing Act of 1990- Authorized initiatives to empower low-income homeowners to pay back mortgages and provided homeless assistance.
NCH:	National Coalition for the Homeless - Organization started in 1980 to address national crises of homelessness and continues to lobby and advocate for the American homeless.
NSHAPC:	National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients - Survey responsible for counting shelter, transitional housing and other facilities in 1990s.
OBRA:	Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 - Act passed by President Reagan in 1981 drastically cut welfare benefits while cutting taxes for the richest Americans.
PHA:	Public Housing Authority - Local housing agencies responsible for mediating federal funds and initiatives with local policy implementation.
PRWOA:	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act - Passed in 1996 as Clinton's sweeping "welfare reform", resulting from the counter coalition of Congressional conservatives.
SRO:	Single Resident Occupancy - One-room unit in a multi-unit structure occupied by a single, eligible person living independently. Under McKinney legislation, homeless individuals have highest priority for occupancy in SRO units and ensure the Public Housing Authority to provide funds for rental assistance to SRO building owners who rehabilitate substandard properties.
TANF:	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families - Provision established under Clinton's welfare reform that replaced AFDC as the main form of welfare assistance.

Introduction

In a decade when sleeping bags, shopping carts and other symbols of homeless street dwelling came to increasingly shock and horrify the American public, academic Richard Ropers offered his critique at the emerging political conversation surrounding this community:

The mythology that would have us believe that the homeless are all “lazy, crazy, drugged or doped” or as President Reagan would have us believe – that the homeless freely choose their lifestyle and are simply modern-day gypsies – is nothing more than a “blaming the victim” ideology based on exaggerated stereotypes which result in obscuring the real nature and origins of this serious urban problem...how to solve this growing national disgrace of the 1980s is...to acknowledge structural unemployment caused by deindustrialization of basic industry, urban renewal, decreases in available low income housing and cutbacks in social welfare...as long as blaming the victim explanations are given for homelessness in America, social programs based on such perspectives will fail to resolve the problem.¹

Homelessness is no new phenomenon. It has existed in North America for centuries, albeit with profound transformation of both demographics and corresponding cultural labels. During the 1980s however, the harsh reality of individuals warming over street grates or huddled in sleeping bags became far more visible, shocking many Americans into sudden awareness of the phenomenon, which seemed to increase relentlessly and into full-blown crisis by the middle of the decade. This initially local observation soon exploded into a nationwide discussion by the latter half of the 1980s.

The above critique points to several prevailing ideologies surrounding not just the “disgrace” of homelessness, but of poverty in general. Drawing on the prevailing attitudes that stereotyped the homeless community, the excerpt blasts widespread use of victim-blaming, systemic structural inequalities, and urban crises. In their place, the author advocates a more critical understanding of the realities for poor and homeless Americans.

¹ United States, *The Federal Response to the Homeless Crisis: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, Ninety-Eighth Congress, Second Session, October 3, November 20, and December 18, 1984*, 830.

Discussions on homelessness today generally either assert criticism for the homeless themselves as morally accountable or call for structural reforms to what stems from a federal problem. Many Americans have drawn on moral criticisms to characterize many of the poor as dependent, and thus responsible for their plight. This stigma has strengthened an argument against providing any form of relief – be it temporary or permanent – to the homeless population generally. This notion of dependence – a trait historically assigned to both institutionalized and wandering poor since colonial America – has continued to affect contemporary homelessness ideologies and discourse toward American poor in general. This ideology will stand front and center in my analysis of lasting attitudes toward the American poor and homeless.

This thesis maps out the cluster of ideologies and analyses surrounding American poverty and how they have guided policies toward the homeless from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. Central to my analysis will be the aforementioned notions of dependence as well as the initiation of new ideas toward homelessness that took place in the height of its prevalence under President Reagan. The practices central to homelessness alleviation – consistently administered through local, private resources – relied on a very particular set of political ideas pioneered by President Reagan and members of Congress, which continued to influence both popular understanding of and succeeding policies toward the population.

Succeeding administrations drew heavily on initial approaches of private and local administration in addressing the issue of homelessness. These later approaches introduced conceptions of American poverty as implicated in urban crisis, but drew on preexisting ideas of poverty to address homelessness as another manifestation of inner city “underclass”, and bring joblessness into the mix of ideas previously present. Agency leadership under HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros made a particularly unique divergence from the previous two terms in his

explicit acknowledgement of public housing availability and affordability as a major policy goal, but largely neglected this goal in practice. Ultimately, the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations did not deviate from enduring precedents of locality, emergency funding and lack of implementation in their transforming approaches to American homelessness. Rather, the Kemp administration used the discourse of the "Underclass" to encourage private investment in the inner city, just as Reagan had sought a private sector and distinctly non-governmental solution to the problem. Clinton-era analyses instead explicitly acknowledged government's flawed neglect of critical and comprehensive policies like affordable housing provision and welfare reform in addition to relief alone. Similarly to both Reagan and Bush however, policy toward the homeless under President Clinton fell far from the promised rhetoric of policy overhaul and instead reinforced status quo provisions of predominantly emergency relief, and in amounts less than originally proposed.

Thus, while analytical approaches to homelessness transformed significantly throughout the three administrations, overall each policy on the ground proved committed to a decentralized, locally administered, privately funded and primarily relief-driven effort to alleviate homelessness. Rhetorically, each administration acknowledged the ability of the private sector to more adequately provide resources for the homeless, in lieu of what advocates most commonly called for: a strong federal commitment to subsidizing and increasing the stock of affordable housing. In reality, private initiatives seeking to address the burgeoning problem glossed over the structural analyses that both academics and advocates had assigned as the major causes of the crisis. The federal posture continuously denied public provision of affordable housing as a route to homeless relief, and further largely ignored other safety net policies - like welfare - as relevant to the phenomenon. Even in the Clinton presidency, when agency experts took an unprecedented

analytical stance toward a comprehensive approach and acknowledged the inadequacies of several programs to provide for America's homeless – like welfare and public housing - ultimate policy implementation instead prioritized the same McKinney programs of emergency relief. The policy inertia set into motion during the 1980s would prove difficult to move away from in later administrations, which ultimately implemented decentralized, locally administered, privately funded and primarily relief-driven efforts to discuss and address American homelessness.

Background: The “Wandering Poor” and Early Poverty Relief

Any discussion on contemporary American homelessness necessarily draws on the various legacies of ideologies toward the poor. Most critical to the development of an initial policy approach under President Reagan was his characterization of the poor as dependent. Reagan’s understanding of homelessness during the 1980s as personally driven – i.e. as personal deviance against an American work ethic – placed the burden of alleviation on the individual, out of government’s realm. This analysis of personal initiative framed Reagan’s initial policy approach, which very regretfully passed the law that provided the barest emergency assistance to the American homeless. This law, passed more symbolically than sincerely toward policy change, came to represent the singular and most influential approach of emergency relief as a stand-alone form of homeless assistance. Even under Clinton’s innovative analysis of homelessness as a complex and crosscutting issue, in actuality implemented policies reaffirmed the unilateral emphasis on emergency relief above all others, and excluded other preventative strategies of affordable housing or welfare provision. The roots of these practices, mired in long-standing ideologies toward the poor, lay in the initial conceptions of extreme American poverty.

Dependence and Homelessness

Initial American approaches to poverty often focused on distinguishing the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor. This popular notion, rooted in old European attitudes to poverty, endured throughout Colonial and Civil War America, and has impressively endured to this day. In the famous Elizabethan poor laws, communities in England disqualified pathologically “idle” poor from receiving aid. When settlement requirements disqualified nonlocal communities for aid, they emerged as a transient poor wandering from community to community.² These attitudes

² Peter H. Rossi, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17.

toward wandering communities persisted in both in America and Europe, deriding the 'vagrants' in Europe, migratory non-laboring 'tramps' in the post-Civil War America, and finally those who neither worked nor migrated - 'bums'.³

This established precedent of dependence as a characterization of poor Americans situates the enduring ideology within which contemporary American homelessness has been understood. Much the same way that constituents in Elizabethan England resisted initiatives intended to manage aid for the unsettled wanders of outside areas for fear that providing such relief would enable a sense of dependency on the tax-paying populations, contemporary critics of welfare for poor Americans have argued that welfare provision degrades the work ethic and drives many otherwise productive individuals into the dredges of poverty and dependence.

The initial instance of poverty policy traces back to the seventeenth century, when homelessness constituted a less visible, and yet still stigmatized population. As Michael Katz describes, initial American opponents of what was colloquially known as "outdoor relief" for the vulnerable populations – food, firewood, or money – established the American institution of the poorhouse. These poorhouses served not only as undignified institutions meant to discourage the poor from seeking relief, but also as sites of rehabilitation for those alleged inherently "idle", a common belief at the time.⁴

The American institution of the poorhouse, alongside a relief system steeped in bias against outsiders, initially established the American tradition of stigmatization for the poor that discouraged them from seeking relief. The founders of the poorhouse sought to discourage any relief-seeking poor from the institution and a lifestyle of degradation and discredit. Post-Civil War anxieties derogatorily labeled able-bodied men living within poorhouses as "tramps" to

³ Leland J. Axelson and Paula W. Dail, "The Changing Character of Homelessness in the United States," *Family Relations* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 1988): 463–469.

⁴ Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 22.

condemn their institutional relief. This critique of their character drew on an alleged widespread availability of work – a fallacy of the time.⁵

Continuing the tradition against dependence, President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation created the first instance of an American welfare state, but sought to limit the negative consequences of providing relief to displaced "able-bodied" individuals. Initial programs established to provide work relief – such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration – met over one-fifth of the population by 1934.⁶ Worried that the government should "quit this relief business", President Roosevelt sought a move away from general public assistance. With the Social Security Act of 1935, general relief constituted only one section of an act that primarily committed to work relief, retiree pensions, and categorical public assistance to the needy, blind, aged and dependent children.⁷ This vastly expanded federal role in administering welfare preserved the stigmatization of "able-bodied" poor individuals by definitively separating social security from public assistance as an earned right for a formerly employed elderly class.⁸ Communities during the Great Depression also retained the American colonial tradition of "warning out" unwanted transients, with cities like New York often spending more money on "Greyhound Relief" – bus tickets to bordering states – than on direct relief.⁹

A Changing Population

Scholarship on homelessness often attempts to categorize its repeated incidence throughout America according to demographic shift. The term "homelessness" refers to a dynamic population that has changed considerably since colonial America. Ideologies and their

⁵ Michael Katz, *Poorhouse*, 92.

⁶ James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 56.

⁷ *Ibid*, 60.

⁸ Michael Katz, *Poorhouse*, 235.

⁹ Rossi, *Down and Out in America*, 18.

corresponding cultural labels toward this changing population have likewise shifted. Scholars assert that the term 'homeless' first entered the American poverty vernacular in the nineteenth century, but only came into use much later in the twentieth century.¹⁰ In colonial times, the presence of a 'wandering poor' caused sufficient social anxiety, often reflecting a need to 'warn out' allegedly exploitative outsiders seeking to gain any sort of food or monetary relief from their transitory localities.¹¹ While many settled poor and mentally ill or disabled often resided within colonial communities, eighteenth century Americans had very little sympathy for those of similar circumstance who wandered into their communities uninvited.¹²

Transformations of the "Wandering Poor"

This initial reference to the "wandering poor" consistently transformed to acknowledge entirely different groups of transient Americans throughout the century. In his landmark work *Down and Out in America*, Rossi argues that the nineteenth century saw the rise of Skid Row, when transient homelessness became institutionalized and segregated in American cities. Formed primarily of single homeless men, these communities provided a reservoir of migrant laborers that sustained industrial economies of large-scale agriculture and railroad construction.¹³

Following this massive turning point in the American economy, the massive economic upheaval of the Great Depression greatly transformed American homelessness. Emblematic during this era of twenty-five percent unemployment, the wandering poor and desperate migrant laborers drastically increased local and transient homelessness during these years.¹⁴ Data

¹⁰ David Wagner, *Confronting Homelessness: Poverty, Politics, and the Failure of Social Policy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), 62.

¹¹ Michael B. Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 1.

¹² Neil Shumsky, *Homelessness: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood: An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC: 2012), 17.

¹³ Rossi, *Down and Out in America*, 20.

¹⁴ Rossi, *Down and Out in America*, 22; James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century*, 41.

collected by transient centers funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 – a central tenet of New Deal legislation - reflected a population largely young, single, white and male, and likewise reflected a population far too vast to occupy the Skid Rows and numerous shantytowns set up to contain them.¹⁵ Though the outbreak of World War II in the next decade absorbed many of the homeless into the armed forces and booming wartime industries, homelessness and the presence of skid row ghettos still persisted, albeit with less dense populations.¹⁶

Rossi then explains how the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the advent of a “New Homeless”, steeped in gentrification and subsequent destruction – with no replacement – of the inner-city skid rows that the extremely poor once called home.¹⁷ Far different from the “old homeless” who were largely confined to certain sections of large cities, homelessness began to primarily creep into public view by the end of the 1970s. Those who weren’t living in cheap hotels or jailed were increasingly seen sleeping in public spaces on steam grates, in bus stations and in cardboard boxes. Dubbed as the “new homeless”, this group also hosted an unprecedented number of women among them, exacerbating an already shocking image of American destitution to the media and the general public.¹⁸ Also disproportionately African American, this “new homeless” brought about in the 1980s represented what would become a national crisis worth the focus of domestic policy.

Research Goals

Drawing on these histories of dependence, transformation of and social anxieties toward the vulnerable populations, this thesis analyzes the interaction of poverty ideologies, analyses and corresponding policy actions. Throughout, my analysis will center on how policies of mental

¹⁵ Rossi, *Down and Out in America*, 23-24.

¹⁶ Ibid, 30.

¹⁷ Ibid, 33.

¹⁸ Ibid, 35.

deinstitutionalization, housing, income assistance and emergency relief in particular have ignored the realities of the American homeless population and of the American poor in general. This introduction has outlined how centuries-old characterizations of the poor first emerged in an American poverty discussion. Chapter One will draw on these familiar ideologies in the first instance of federal policy actually directed toward the homeless, focusing on the policy's implementation (or lack thereof), non-profit advocates' critique, and the overall outcome. Chapter Two will focus on changing analyses of homelessness that somewhat continued policy status quos in locality, but uniquely focused on poor urbanity to rectify a perceived crisis in inner city poverty and employment opportunity. Chapter Three will thread together these transforming discussions of morality, American inequality, and general policies of housing and income assistance within the Clinton era construction of a newly comprehensive federal approach to addressing and alleviating the issue. As implemented policy would ultimately demonstrate, transforming approaches to American homelessness generally fell to the wayside in favor of a routine reliance on emergency aid to alleviate, rather than prevent, descent into American homelessness.

Chapter One: The “Discovery” of Homelessness and Initial Policy Response

Harvey Veith, chairman on the Federal Task Force on the Homeless, once gave his summation of federal policy toward the homeless in response to advocate Mitch Snyder:

As you are aware, local governments and local providers throughout the country have taken responsibility for the homeless. The federal government will continue to assist local communities by providing surplus facilities, food and clothing, as well as medical and other commitment. The concerns that you raise in your letter should properly be directed to the DC government.¹⁹

Veith sent the letter in response to one of the many accusations Snyder had made against the federal government for abandoning any accountability for the growing number of American homeless. The quote indeed represented what would become the Reagan administration's standard reaction to the cacophony of requests for more federal aid toward the homeless: that this responsibility was a local issue, dependent on local need and local resources.

Months earlier, Snyder had staged a hunger strike in the nation's capitol to draw attention to the plight of the American homeless. He repeated this strategy several times, each time drawing attention to federal defunding for shelters and other resources for America's most needy population. In this instance, he initiated a months-long lawsuit against the federal government for its failed promise to grant \$5 million for one of DC's largest – and most dilapidated – homeless shelters to bring it back to living standards.

After the department of Health and Human Services had inspected the facility and deemed it unlivable, HHS called for the removal of its residents with no plans for their relocation. Snyder wasted no time in making the case a very publicized national issue with hunger strikes, marches to the capitol, and a suit against the federal government, ultimately

¹⁹ White House Memo, Federal Task Force on the Homeless Chairman Harvey Veith to CCNV Representative Mitch Snyder, August 1984, Box 19, OA 13795, WHORM: David B. Waller Files, Robbins V. Reagan Folder II, Ronald Reagan Library.

earning himself the status of "publicity hound" for the homeless.²⁰ The ensuing *Robbins V. Reagan* case would go on for months, in which the federal government and Community for Creative Non-Violence negotiated what an adequate "model shelter" for the homeless might look like.

This chapter will explore the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act as the initial foray into the homeless crisis, and specifically how its approach framed the debate around perceived causes to either implement – or avoid implementing – certain programs in housing and emergency relief. A highly polarized debate on the causes of homelessness between advocates and agency experts resulted in a policy stubbornly resistant to systematic change to certain housing policies in favor of a policy based in local alleviation via federal emergency funding. Most importantly, the McKinney Act's genesis in this era would profoundly affect later approaches in succeeding administrations, which would by and large maintain the McKinney as the policy status quo, despite major shifts in poverty analysis by those in power.

Growing National Consciousness of a Homelessness Crisis –

Advocates first recognized the burgeoning problem of homelessness by the early 1980s and testified to the federal government to push for awareness and response. Widespread critique of Reagan's defunding of public housing as well as his dismissal of homelessness as a federal responsibility culminated in hearings, lawsuits and testimonies before congress throughout the eighties.²¹

Activists and academics outside the political arena noted the increase in American homelessness as a cause for action. Homelessness increasingly registered in the American

²⁰ Jennet Connant and Nikki Finke Greenburg "Holiday Inn for the Homeless?" in *Newsweek* July 8, 1985, OA 13795, *Robbins V. Reagan* Series II, David B. Waller Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²¹ Foscarinis, "The Federal Response.", 160-161.

consciousness by 1984, when articles about the homeless jumped significantly.²² Actual estimates of American homelessness by the early eighties continue to vary enormously, and contentiously. The first systematic national survey of homelessness by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1980 troubled advocates, who questioned its low estimate and “snowball” strategy that projected national estimates based only on large-scale interviews in select cities. Similarly, the famous Rossi study in Chicago received criticism in its ignorance of the temporary habitation of poor Americans in rooming houses, SROs (Single Resident Occupancies) and detoxification centers.²³ In January of 1983, police detained 162 anti-Reagan demonstrators before his state of the union address. The demonstrators, most of whom worked for the famed Community for Creative Non-Violence, demanded that Congress make federal buildings available as shelters for the homeless.²⁴ The CCNV would prove to be an unrelenting force in homelessness advocacy later on, pushing extensive litigation against the Reagan administration for its alleged dismissal of American homelessness as a federal issue.

As early as 1982, few representatives in Congress started to push for a federal recognition of homelessness and directed policy. The Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban affairs first testified on the issue of homelessness.²⁵ By the mid eighties, the issue of homelessness attracted bipartisan attention, particularly from Republican representative from Connecticut Stewart B. McKinney, who grappled with several potential causes as explanations for the increasing phenomenon. Not even two years later, McKinney had initiated a bill in the

²² Peter H. Rossi, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 15.

²³ Jamshid Momeni, *Homelessness in the United States: Data and Issues* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 12.

²⁴ United, “Water, Electricity Lack Raises Doubt of UDC Building Becoming a Shelter” in United, States, *The Federal Response to the Homeless Crisis*.

²⁵ Interagency Council on the Homeless and the District of Columbia Homeless Initiative: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Third Congress, eighty-third Session, Library of Congress, 1.

House of Representatives deeming homelessness a national crisis that was impossible to ignore, emphasizing the welfare of families and children in particular.²⁶ The bill, HR 558, proposed the means of providing shelter, food and health care primarily through systems and programs already in place and funded by the Federal Emergency Management Association.

McKinney's legislative moves, paired with the general public's drive for awareness of the homeless crisis, provided the impetus for the Reagan administration to consider homelessness more seriously as a national issue. President Reagan himself was pressuring the General Services Administration to turn the University at the District of Columbia campus into a thousand-bed shelter, at the urging of the Community for Creative Non-Violence. When the GSA claimed that the building was not up to health standards due to water, heating and piping flaws, CCNV head Mitch Snyder asked the GSA to provide funds necessary to rehabilitate the resource for use as a shelter.²⁷ The trial to grant funding to this shelter, *Robbins v. Reagan*, dragged on for several months, until the GSA finally agreed to grant some money to revamp the facility.

Genesis of a Policy Discussion – the Mentally Ill and the State

As advocates and state actors started develop a policy discussion on the perceived crisis, the kernels of a contentious debate came into play, alongside the rise of one organization in particular that would soon become the premier advocate for the homeless. Estimates on the extent of the crisis written between 1983 and 1988 vary, ranging from a nationwide population of several hundred thousand to several million. The National Coalition for the Homeless, started in

²⁶ Stewart McKinney, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, First Session on H.R. 558, A Bill to Provide Urgently Needed Assistance to Protect and Improve the lives of the Homeless, with special emphasis on Families and Children, Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, February 4, 1987, 32.

²⁷ *The Washington Post*, December 22, 1981, Ibid.

1982, made the first effort to document the national problem. Currently the organization continues to contribute prolific research and publication to the homelessness crisis. The NCH estimation between two and three million vastly overshadowed the Committee on Government Operations' 1985 low estimate of 250,000.²⁸

For representative McKinney, originally nebulous understandings of homelessness soon changed to explicitly blame the state for flawed policies toward the mentally ill. In his first call for urgent relief, McKinney made clear his goal to assist the homeless, no matter what the means. By 1987 however, McKinney explicitly identified deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill as the primary cause of homelessness. McKinney proposed another bill to the house, H.R. 1479, as a proposal that sought to identify deinstitutionalized mentally ill in particular:

In the Long term, the solution to homelessness among the mentally ill is to provide housing within the community but always in conjunction with a broad continuum of mental health care. Deinstitutionalization should be encouraged, but along with increased services tailored to the needs of the patients who are released. States must be required to submit and follow through on a plan for each and every discharged patient.²⁹

McKinney's preoccupation with mental illness reflected a very real predominance of mentally ill homeless citizens. The phenomenon of deinstitutionalization started in the fifties, when states sharply cut down the number of beds for mentally ill individuals living in institutions.³⁰ Commitment laws requiring institutionalization of the mentally ill made their entrance into the system more difficult, requiring certification of two psychiatrists instead of one. This resulted largely in part of the Community Mental Health Act of 1964, which promised to fund local health centers to track released psychiatric patients within their community. When

²⁸ Alvin L. Schoor, "Will We Have Reaganvilles?," *New York Times*, *The (NY)*, August 26, 1986, Late City Final Edition edition.; States United, *The Federal Response to the Homeless Crisis Third Report* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1985), 484.

²⁹ Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, February 4, 1987, 32.

³⁰ *Confronting Homelessness*, Wagner, 107.

funding for these local centers and necessary personnel never fully materialized, most patients formally under their auspices failed to maintain their medication regimen and left previously state-led supervision. With no mediator to navigate the bureaucracy of social service, released and neglected former patients soon became particularly prone to losing state benefits.³¹

Deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill thus came to predominate discussions of American homelessness and guide its responses, but received no targeted policy to address its root causes. Despite numerous accounts of deinstitutionalization as a major cause of homelessness, no major piece of legislation sought to attack its roots specifically. As the discussion of homelessness between advocates and the Reagan administration developed, the perceptions of an adequate response to this alleged cause served as the genesis of a policy response.³²

Academic Advocacy – Structural Analyses

By the mid-eighties, academics took on the ambitious task of gauging the emerging “crisis”. Alvin L. Schoor, university professor of family and child welfare, wrote in his New York Times editorial “Will We Have Reaganvilles?” that Reagan’s unraveling of the safety net policies of social sector, in addition to factors outside of his control – including high interest rates, high unemployment and drop in real wages - formed the basic causes of increased homelessness.³³ However, he asserted mainly the general decline in income for a large portion of the population coupled with the rising cost of housing as major prerequisites for this crisis.

Predating the explosion of debate surrounding American homelessness, the Reagan administration indeed emphasized an aversion to federal income assistance. One particularly scathing piece of department literature, a white house issue brief entitled *Up From Dependency*,

³¹ Wagner, 109.

³² Wagner, *Confronting Homelessness*, 112.

³³ Alvin Schoor, “Will We Have Reaganvilles?”

summarized the President's national welfare strategy. Drafted by the Working Group on Low Income Opportunity, the report largely dismissed the problem of American poverty as "inflated" since non-cash assistance like food stamps was not routinely counted in poverty figures.³⁴ The document blames the vast federal oversupply of both cash and non-cash assistance to far too many Americans, many of whom they claim to not be poor. Citing a long list of moral disincentives that likewise plagued welfare recipients, the report concluded that federal welfare assistance both weakened families by removing the need for the breadwinner and weakened the social contract in local communities to respond to the needs of their residents by instead replacing this with livelihood via the nation's far-away capitol.

Academics and policy advocates soon discovered the difficulty of counting and defining a homeless population. In his famous study of the homeless population in Chicago, Peter Rossi introduced the ambiguity of the term "homeless", arguing that to be homeless was clearly the worst situation of poverty, but that the boundary between literal homelessness and extreme poverty was somewhat arbitrary. While lack of access to a conventional dwelling indeed constituted homelessness, Rossi's research oftentimes found that having a "conventional dwelling" was not a uniform experience, and varied according to temporality and circumstance.³⁵ More importantly, Rossi argued that the state of being homeless often fluctuated between a continuum of housed poverty, including shelters in rented hotel rooms, accommodations in various venues of cars, vans, shacks or all of the above at one time to another. Rossi also noted the discrepancy in visibility between domiciled poor persons and literally homeless, who registered far higher on the American consciousness relative to those hidden in hotel rooms.³⁶

³⁴ White House Issue Brief "Up From Dependency", 6 February 1987, WE 440762 We 001 (1 of 2), WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁵ Rossi, *Down and Out in America*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

Under the mounting pressure of this collective litigation, protest and academic critique, President Reagan adopted a persona that at least feigned growing concern for homelessness. In the spirit of awareness, or perhaps to quell mounting dissent against his administration's allegedly harmful policies, Reagan declared the week of June 25 in 1986 National Homelessness Awareness Week.³⁷ Earlier efforts in public relations to address various negative testimonies that homelessness was becoming a major national problem resulted in the Congressional allocation \$140 million FEMA.³⁸ At this point, both the federal government and its non-profit critics recognized homelessness as a growing national problem. The critical difference in their opposing approaches to homelessness lay in their understandings of both the causes of the crisis and whose responsibility it was to rectify the problem.

Dissent to the Policy Status Quo - McKinney's Idea Turns Into Legislation

As protests, scholarship and policy platform idealism interacted to address homelessness, tensions built over the past decade came to a head. The ever-present voice of CCNV advocate Mitch Snyder insisted on putting homelessness front and center as a national case for consideration. Snyder was not at all satisfied with the status quo, in which every problem in the country meant to assess homelessness was primarily funded and administered at the state or local level.³⁹

Then in 1986, the first collaboration between congressman McKinney and NCH advocated for introduction of the first homeless-specific policy into Congress: The Homeless

³⁷ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=37516>. Read more at the American Presidency Project: www.presidency.ucsb.edu <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=37516&st=homeless&stl=#ixzz1M3YkT7gt>; Ibid.

³⁸ M. Foscarinis, "The Federal Response: The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act," *Homelessness in America* (1996): 160-171., 160.

³⁹ Neil Shumsky, *Homelessness: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 234.

Person's Survival Act. Though a landmark precedent, this act never came through. Some of this legislation did make it into what became the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, calling for urgently needed assistance to the homeless, with special emphasis on families and children.⁴⁰ This legislation ultimately came to pass through both houses in Congress, and after the death of its most vocal Congressional advocate Stewart McKinney, Congress deemed it the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.⁴¹

The McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, signed into law in 1987, reflected the Reagan administration's ideological understanding of homelessness as a result of deinstitutionalization, prioritizing mental illness among the homeless as a major policy aim.⁴² The federally induced shortage in housing did not appear to policymakers to be a primary cause for the 'new homeless' that had emerged under the administration.

As a general policy platform, the Reagan administration believed homelessness to be a primarily local problem. The singular administrative effort to address homelessness as an issue before McKinney's testimonies did create the Federal Interagency Task Force on Food and Shelter for the Homeless in 1983. The charter for this task force stressed in explicit language the idea that homelessness was a local problem, and that federal agencies were not the problem.⁴³

The McKinney Act constituted the first federal response to homelessness, setting aside one billion dollars to fund state, local and private nonprofit programs to aid homeless people. Its

⁴⁰ Stewart McKinney, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, First Session on H.R. 558, A Bill to Provide Urgently Needed Assistance to Protect and Improve the lives of the Homeless, with special emphasis on Families and Children, Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, February 4, 1987, 32.

⁴¹ Neil Shumsky, *Homelessness: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 235.

⁴² United States, *Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act*. ([Washington D.C.: U.S. G.P.O. ; Supt. of Docs. U.S. G.P.O. distributor, 1987).

⁴³ Foscarinis, M. "The Federal Response: The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act." *Homelessness in America* (1996): 160–171.

passing created a new independent federal agency, the Interagency Council on the Homeless, to oversee financial aid to homeless people as emergency relief.

This federal acknowledgement of homelessness was unprecedented, since other programs specifically targeting homelessness largely reinforced preexisting programs. Earlier congressional acts did draw attention to the issue, but mainly reinforced existing laws and relied largely on federal emergency programs to administer to a scattered population. In 1983, congress appropriated \$140 million for a disaster relief program, with another \$70 million appropriated 1984. Both houses of Congress supported this Homeless Person's Survival Act, which was ultimately accepted in October 1986 as the Homeless Eligibility Clarification Act.⁴⁴ The legislation increased the homeless population's eligibility for programs like AFDC, Supplementary Security Income, Veterans benefits, Food Stamps and Medicaid, which were previously more difficult with certain legislations requiring a permanent residential among other things.⁴⁵

One other act entitled the Homeless Housing Act in 1986 did establish some small moves to focus federal money on homelessness specifically. HUD committed two small emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to dispense money allocated by the act to states, cities, localities and nonprofits.

Anatomy of the First Response –

The act's definition of homelessness literally confined its recipients to those actually residing in public accommodations, and glossed over those persons on the verge of homelessness. Title I of the act limits the program to individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, as well as those who reside in temporary residence housing, a

⁴⁴ Foscarinis, "The Federal Response", 161.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

temporary institutionalized residence, or a public/private place not designed for the accommodation of human beings.⁴⁶ Martha Burt - a prolific commentator on American homelessness - argued in several works the importance of this definition in the actual distribution of funds for homeless individuals. Arguing that an adequate attack on homelessness should encompass a holistic attack on poverty itself, Burt asserted the limitation of a literally homeless definition in its exclusion of those others imminently at risk residing in motels, doubled up in dwellings, surviving off of housing vouchers or even at-risk women receiving temporary shelter in battered women's shelters.⁴⁷

Subsequent titles of the act specify sources of funding, those responsible for delegating the funding and process by which funding reaches those in need. Title II of the act commits to establish an Interagency Council on the Homeless as an independent entity within the executive branch of the government. Title III of the act designates the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FEMA) as the main administrative body to dispense local funds, with a decentralized system of management in which mayor or other heads of local government designate sites deserving of funding.

Federal Funding for Community Action: Decentralization and Locality in the McKinney

Provisions in the McKinney Act set the precedent for what would come to be an enduring trend in homeless assistance – a policy focus on decentralizing funding to local, private entities out of the realm of federal control. The legislation required each locality to submit a CHAP (Community Homeless Assistance Plan) as a blueprint for McKinney funded programming. Though the act deemed FEMA responsible for dispersing federal funds, community leaders bore the burden of determining which local government or nonprofit private entity were qualified to

⁴⁶ Ibid, 163.

⁴⁷ Martha Burt "Homelessness: Definitions and Counts" in *Homelessness in America*, Edited by Jim Baumohl for The National Coalition for the Homeless (Phoenix: The Oryx Press, 1996), 17.

receive federal grants to provide services for the homeless. FEMA funds thus traveled a long path from the national board, to local boards who then designated the recipient local service providers. These providers then distributed grants to local community rehabilitation centers and shelters, under whose auspices the grants worked toward whichever program that site deemed critical.

Emergency Relief - Band-Aid for a Budding Problem

Funding for the McKinney relied on emergency funding under FEMA. Title IV of the act outlined provisions for housing assistance, focusing on emergency shelter and transitional housing, administered through Housing and Urban Development.⁴⁸ The Emergency Shelter Grant program under the Homeless Housing Act of 1986 likewise encouraged local governments to distribute all or part of their grants to private nonprofit organizations assisting homeless people. Some community organizations deemed these funds insufficient from the get go. The Oakland Office of Community Development, for example, argued that without continuation of these grants over the long-term, the increasing homeless population would be unsupported.⁴⁹ This Oakland CHAP called for a much higher priority of funding for homeless provisions than the act was willing to commit to.

Most critically, housing took no central issue in the titles of the act. Title V's Surplus Properties Program required that federal agencies make suitable unused or underused federally owned buildings and land available to states, local governments and private nonprofits for conversion into facilities for temporary shelter. This provision later received the most criticism from advocates on claims that though intended to increase shelter for the homeless, not only

⁴⁸ Foscarnis, "The Federal Response", 164.

⁴⁹ Oakland (Calif.). *The Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan*: (Title IV, Subtitle A of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act). [Oakland Calif.]: City of Oakland Office of Community Development, 1990.

were these initiatives by and large unfunded, but the overall hesitance to acknowledge an American crisis in low-income housing neglected any real approach to resolving the nationwide issue.

One program outlined in McKinney did seek to address shortage of low-income housing, and proved to be quite influential in housing policy for the following decade. The McKinney created the Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program for Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Dwellings for Homeless Individuals.⁵⁰ The act intended to use funds to rehabilitate surplus properties based on a national competition of applicants who could best demonstrate need for SRO dwellings and transform the housing relatively quickly and efficiently. This approach would become central to homeless provisions in later administrations.

Affordable Housing Policy and Homelessness

Just as the federal administration became increasingly comfortable with shrugging any policy responsibility for the homeless, housing policy under Reagan similarly retreated from any hard-line commitments to large-scale subsidized low-income housing. After housing became a federal responsibility under the Public Housing Acts of the 1930s, national policy took on the originally decentralized burden of states to provide and administer federally subsidized housing.⁵¹ Half a century later however, the Reagan administration severely cut funding for this federal commitment to low-income housing. One cultural treatise circulated within the Reagan

⁵⁰ United States, Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, *Report to Congress on SROs for the Homeless: Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Development and Research, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1990), 1.

⁵¹ Wagner, *Confronting Homelessness*, 103.

administration's files entitled *The Federal Government and the Family* quoted in plain terms that "Government dare not try to steer the course of the housing market."⁵²

The process of a tightening market for affordable housing thus began in the eighties. Inflation-adjusted rents and poverty rates started to rise in the late seventies and into the early eighties; by 1987, over 60% of low-income households devoted more than half of their incomes to rent.⁵³ Low-cost housing – both privately owned and subsidized – decreased dramatically; the number of low-rent apartments between 1974 and 1992 fell by one-quarter. President Reagan also slashed all federal programs for new construction of subsidized housing, while simultaneously introducing certain administrative maneuvers to limit production to that of low-standard housing for the poorest. Subsequently, Reagan shifted greater control to local subsidized housing markets so that by 1989, only one-third of eligible households received any federal housing assistance.⁵⁴

President Reagan asserted that housing should be based in private markets, not government regulations. Reagan argued that decisions made in the seventies – such as the 1968 Housing Act that backed secure mortgages to encourage homeownership – were shortsighted and optimistic, and claimed that the government's best bet was to leave housing policy to the private market. The President's Commission on Housing in 1982 asserted that, "...the genius of the market economy, freed from the distortions forced by government housing policies and regulations...can provide for housing far better than federal programs."⁵⁵

⁵² Leslie Lenkowsky, "The Federal Government and the American Family", Report Re: Children/Family, CA 104088, WHORM Office of Policy Development, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵³ George C. Galster, "US Housing Scholarship, Planning, and Policy Since 1968: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of the American Planning Association* Volume 74, Issue 1, 5-16 (8 February 2008) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944360701792231> (accessed 22 January 2013).

⁵⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 9.

Overall, housing policies resulted in huge decreases in the available stock of affordable housing for low-income residents. Aside from failed promises in surplus properties, remaining provisions of the McKinney act delineated general funds for health care, education, training and community service programs, but did not specifically explain any indication of federal regulations toward their implementation. The programs extended focused primarily on emergency relief, not comprehensive housing reform as earlier advocates had urged.⁵⁶ Though the act did make sweeping moves to address the problems of homelessness, later advocates would argue that the act made no enduring commitments to the persistent ills of homelessness. Critically absent from the act was any commitment to increased access to affordable housing through housing reform, economic security with an adequate minimum wage.⁵⁷

The World According to Ronald Reagan– McKinney as Extension of the Volunteerist State

Reagan's administration did make history by passing the first federal act – albeit reluctantly – to at least acknowledge homelessness as a national issue. However, the act served largely as a symbolic gesture to address homelessness in name only, and instead served to extend Reagan-era ideologies of locality and non-state solutions to what was essentially an individual problem. White House memos circulated by Chief of Staff Mike Deaver under Reagan's first term certainly indicated a preoccupation a negative positive image toward poverty. The memos craft administrative talking points geared toward deterring the widespread image of Reagan's administration as being "out of touch" with the nation's poor.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ United, "Water, Electricity Lack Raises Doubt of UDC Building Becoming a Shelter" in United, *The Federal Response to the Homeless Crisis*.

⁵⁷ Foscarinis, "The Federal Response", 171.

⁵⁸ White House Memo, Special Assistant to the President Private Sector Initiatives James Baker to Harvey Veith, March 26, 1984, Box 43, Homeless Issue, WHORM: Michael Deaver Files, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

Characterizations of dependence situate the administration's attitudes toward both the homeless population and poverty in general. Calling upon the long-standing American tradition of stigmatization of poor relief, the Reagan administration feared the consequences of social assistance that destroyed the work ethic of the "able-bodied" poor. By the early eighties, policy memos circulated within the white house during the Reagan administration remained overwhelmingly preoccupied with this system of relief established during the New Deal. Reagan took no time at all to establish within his cabinet a welfare agenda in his 1981 budget, which proceeded to focus on both dependency and illegitimate births as case points arguing against the welfare state.⁵⁹ Mainly conservative policymakers argued that New Deal welfare benefits – cash, food stamps, Medicaid, housing and others – stabilized poorer populations to the extent that they worried less about avoiding pregnancy before marriage.⁶⁰

In addition to moral conceptions of dependence among the poor, the administrative staff pursued the theory that many homeless in America were so by choice. The "personal choice" theory saw much dialogue within Reagan's cabinet, such as in one memo addressed to Mike Deaver stating:

I recently visited a shelter for the homeless in Denver...where the attached editorials were published. The articles point out that many of the people living in shelters are there because they choose to be, which is concurrent with the Administration's thought and with what I found at the Denver shelter and others I have visited. I thought you might be interested in passing this along with the president.⁶¹

Herbert Block's cartoon parodied this characterization in 1984. The caption--"Strange how some choose to live like that instead of choosing to be rich like us" referenced Reagan's political belief

⁵⁹ Ron Hastings, *Work Over Welfare: The Inside Story of the 1996 Welfare Law* (Washington D.C., Brookings Institute, 2006), 5.

⁶⁰ Ron Hastings, *Work Over Welfare*, 7.

⁶¹ White House Memo, Special Assistant to the President Private Sector Initiatives James K. Coyne to Mike Deaver, April 9, 1984, Box 43, Homeless Issue, WHORM: Michael Daever Files, Series IV, Ronald Reagan Library.

that homeless people were homeless by choice, lacking in personal initiative to pull themselves out of poverty.⁶²

Alongside personal choice, Reagan's diagnosis of homelessness cited mental illness and alcohol and drug dependence as primary causes. In one policy briefing entitled *Homeless Issue* in 1984, the authors explicitly deliberate the federal government's role in providing assistance to the "chronically homeless" population in America. The roughly twenty-page document concludes that the largely "mentally ill, alcoholic or otherwise drug dependent population... [disable] themselves from joining the mainstream of society and conventional forms of social service assistance."⁶³

Reagan put much faith in the power of American voluntarism to dismiss the issue of homelessness from federal policy concern. In the same *Homeless Issue*, the authors state that historically, non-profit providers – including churches and the Salvation Army – principally aided the homeless. The report suggests that this focus should continue, at the community level.⁶⁴



"STRANGE HOW SOME CHOOSE TO LIVE LIKE THAT INSTEAD OF CHOOSING TO BE RICH LIKE US"

February 3, 1984

⁶² Herbert Block, *Herblock Through the Looking Glass*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1984), 125.

⁶³ Homeless Issue Policy Brief, 1984, Box 43, WHORM: Michael Deaver Files, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

The non-profit institutions responsible for managing McKinney funding soon complained of the inadequacy of emergency aid to form the primary response to homelessness. In a separate policy briefing, also drafted in 1984, the authors diagnosed a predominantly mentally ill homeless population as the most deserving of aid – emergency aid in particular. Their plan of attack to care for those mentally ill, in particular those afflicted by multiple disorders, included a basic three-tiered strategy that prioritized emergency aid through the state as a bureaucratic apparatus to link those most in need with the local services deemed responsible for them.⁶⁵ In the *Robbins v. Reagan* trial, advocates from the Community for Creative Nonviolence pressured the Reagan administration to provide adequate funding to keep a D.C. shelter open to the homeless or to provide alternative housing and “effective analysis of the homelessness issue” throughout D.C. by the facility’s closing. The trial documents the reaction from representatives from the D.C. based Community for Creative Non-violence, which argued that decentralizing responsibility for homeless populations to shelters as emergency institutions not only overwhelmed their capacity, but also limited funds to that of private sources alone.⁶⁶

Reagan remained stalwart in his insistence that private sources could adequately manage the homeless within their own communities, however. This *Robbins v. Reagan* trial dragged on for several months, in which Reagan insisted on the value of a nexus of voluntary private organization to achieve major relief campaigns for the homeless. Early on in his first term, Reagan made clear to the American public the moral obligation for citizens to “look out for the needy” and “show they care” through their voluntary commitment to community-driven social

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Policy Brief “The Homeless: Background, Analysis and Options”, 15 August 1984, Homeless issue 2, Box 143, WHORM: Michael Deaver Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁶ Second Declaration of Dixon Arnett, Robert Robbins, et al., *Plaintiffs v. Ronald Reagan et al. Civil Action no. 85-1963*, 21 August 1984, *Robbins v. Reagan I* (3), OA 13795, WHORM: David Waller Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

movements in the advocate periodical "The Volunteer", expressing the capacity for citizens to "solve public problems through private actions".⁶⁷ He made this policy aim clear to his colleagues as well, sending a letter to the governors stressing the need for private American enterprises to take on the burden of involvement in community affairs.⁶⁸ Specifically, Reagan asserted that as a mainstream initiative, this volunteer movement could compensate for the federal cutbacks in providing community services.⁶⁹

Post- McKinney – Failed Promises

Even in the required annual report to Congress under Section 102(a) of the McKinney, records indicated that of the \$1.7 billion authorized for the act, only \$1.1 billion actually went to McKinney programming.⁷⁰ Analysis showed that from the act's inception to the fiscal year 1989, the majority of the funding committed to food and shelter, growing from around \$220 million to \$300 million by 1989. Contrastingly, health expenditures remained below \$150, with education and job training expenditures virtually nonexistent, at a meager \$10 or so million each year.⁷¹

Conclusions – McKinney Act Programming as the New Status Quo

Reagan's administration made history by passing the first federal act – albeit reluctantly – to at least acknowledge homelessness as a national issue. However, the act served largely as a symbolic gesture to address homelessness in name only, and instead served to extend Reagan-era approaches of locality and non-state solutions to what was essentially deemed an individual

⁶⁷ Periodical, "The Volunteer", Spring 1981, WE 437875, WE 047385, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁸ Letter, Thomas I. Storrs to Jesse Helms, 4 September 1981, WE 049525, WE 437875, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁹ Editorial *Wall Street Journal*, "Who Will Answer Reagan's Call for Volunteers?" 2 October 1981, WE 049796, WE 437875, WHORM Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁷⁰ United States. Homelessness: McKinney Act Programs and Funding Through Fiscal Year 1990: Report to the Congress/[Washington, D.C.] : The Office ; [Gaithersburg, MD (P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg 20877)]: U.S. General Accounting Office [distributor, 1991], 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

problem. President Reagan's conceptions of a volunteerist state as the ideal source of social stability situated these proposed solutions in local relief for the national problem. For the next administration, many of the decentralized strategies of community-focused action continued, but with an shifted focus on homelessness to a more urban-centered understanding of American poverty in general. Similarly to Reagan's, the following administration would analytically emphasize the private sector as main source of stability and investment for the homeless and for inner-city poor in general. The critical difference, however, would prove not to be drastic change in practice – which mostly reauthorized McKinney funding for localities – but the rhetorical shift to inner city revitalization for homeless alleviation. As the statistics later demonstrated, these rhetorical commitments to market-based strategies for homeless alleviation rarely materialized, unlike the widespread extensions of McKinney Act emergency aid programming, which proved to be the most enduring approach to homeless relief.

Chapter Two: Growing Focus on the American Homeless as the “Underclass”

Upon his nomination to new HUD secretary by President George H. W. Bush in late 1988, former football quarterback Jack Kemp made the following statement:

I have an audacious faith that together we can help recapture the American Dream for our distressed inner cities and those who live in poverty and despair. George Bush has reaffirmed the goals of the 1949 Housing Act, to help create the conditions in America for every family to have decent and affordable housing. He recognizes the appalling tragedy of homelessness, and joblessness. He has asked for full funding of the McKinney Act and a private enterprise job creation strategy for our nation's inner cities and urban areas...it is absolutely necessary and possible, I believe, to gain consensus on a public-private partnership to wage war on poverty.⁷²

Though slightly divergent in approach, this statement in many ways reified the previous term's policy approach to homelessness. Kemp emphasized inner city opportunity first and foremost in his framing of homelessness, but ultimately called for methods outside of the federal government to address these inequities. In his acknowledgement of joblessness, Kemp analyzed the issue of homelessness not simply in terms of personal choice as Reagan did, but rather as the result of widespread poverty within America's inner cities, in which poor Americans lacked access to adequate jobs due to the lack of private investment necessary to fuel them.

In putting forth a new analysis that emphasized widespread joblessness, Kemp deviated from the previous administration's emphases on personal choice and deinstitutionalization. However, his solution to the problem – attracting private investment into the city as a job creator – extended the fundamental continuity under Reagan to rely on private sector initiatives to address the national incidence of homelessness. Kemp situated his emphasis on private enterprise for the depressed inner city in the context of a separate and preexisting academic discourse on urban crisis, which had started decades previous but had launched itself into the public

⁷² Transcript, Nomination of Jack Kemp to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Box 246, Folder 2, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.

consciousness by the late 1980s. Kemp observed this national preoccupation with decaying inner cities as a venue to posit his ideas of private investment as an adequate solution to address inner-city decay and jointly, homelessness.

This chapter explores the overall continuity of homeless assistance policy under Kemp's leadership that had been established by the McKinney, but in the context of a markedly divergent focus on inner-city poverty and the urban "underclass". Though Kemp reframed the debate surrounding homelessness in that of urban poverty and lack of adequate enterprise, ultimately a focus on private economic revitalization resulted in policies largely consistent with the McKinney approach. McKinney programs continuously relied on decentralized administration of predominantly emergency relief funding, and further, Kemp's call for private investment critically resigned any federal commitment to addressing the urban crisis, let alone to that of homeless provision or federally subsidized housing.

New Approach to the "Nation's Shame" - Continued Criticisms of Relief over Prevention

In practice, policies of local emergency relief established under McKinney prevailed over policies proposed to attract private industry to revitalize the inner city and its homeless populations. In March 1989, the Office of Policy Development and Research under HUD conducted a national survey that concluded America's efforts to shelter the homeless was very much a grassroots campaign, strongly characterized by volunteerism and joint public-private partnerships.⁷³ Private, non-profit groups aided by many volunteers reportedly ran nine of every ten shelters with McKinney funds. The conservative mood under President Bush continued to stress this locality and voluntarism in addressing the needs of the homeless through its extension of McKinney Act programming. These extensions and continuous emphasis on locality and

⁷³ A Report on the 1988 National Survey of Shelters for the Homeless, [Washington, D.C.?]: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, Division of Policy Studies, [1989], foreward.

emergency relief demonstrated the profound inertia the McKinney Act had imposed on any following policies toward the American homeless.

Kemp's leadership somewhat revamped the approach toward America's homeless by minimally addressing the crisis in inner city housing, reversing the long-standing trend under Reagan's administration to both defund and ignore it completely. His proposed solution, however, continued to posit private investment in lieu of any federal commitment. While President Bush did not accept that the Reagan administration's policies were at all to blame for homelessness, he did place the issue of front and center in his domestic policy, unlike the much resented but obligatory stance President Reagan took on the issue:

The Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Bush's leadership and my stewardship is committed to helping to find ways to end the appalling tragedy of homelessness. I look forward to working with you to find ways to provide not only a "safety net" of basic shelter, but also an "opportunity ladder" to help pave the way to permanent housing, health care, job training and independence for those most in need of assistance.⁷⁴

The Reagan-era's widespread perception of homelessness as a crisis continued throughout the Bush administration, during which many commentators as well as both President Bush and Jack Kemp regarded the phenomenon as the "Nation's Shame."⁷⁵

Proposed federal responsibility for low-income housing didn't stand a chance under the Bush administration. Prolific scholar on homelessness Martha Burt insisted that public and private efforts preferred to aid rather than prevent homelessness. She observed correctly; the Bush administration's budget for 1991 proposed to reduce federal assistance for low-income

⁷⁴ Homeless Assistance Programs. [Washington, D.C.?] : U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1989, forward.

⁷⁵ "'Opportunity Society' lures Kemp abroad" 20 December 1988, Box 246, Folder 2, Library of Congress.

housing by more than 4 percent.⁷⁶ Additionally, Burt observed that the administration had failed to report back on existing subsidies for low-income housing. Many private owners in the sixties and seventies had received federal subsidies contingent on their agreement to rent to low income tenants. The General Accounting office reported that instead, more than half of these 1.9 million units had been rented out to people with higher incomes, leaving significantly fewer low-income apartments in a subsequently much tighter low-income housing market.⁷⁷

Consistent with established sentiment against federal accountability, Kemp insisted that non-government solutions could address this lack in affordable housing. Private programs like the H.E.L.P. for the Homeless program in New York under Andrew Cuomo's leadership best exemplified what Kemp termed as an "empowerment strategy." Based on an approach centered on individual responsibility, privatized social services, and tenant ownership and management, this NY centered initiative stressed that volunteerism indeed outmatched the government when it came to actual administration:

Conservatives talk a lot about volunteerism, as one thousand points of light. But who provides the electricity of all these lights? The government should. The government's role should be to write the check and stand out of the way – let private nonprofit groups do the programs.⁷⁸

Despite Burt's major criticism, that continuously pushed federal housing as a central issue, volunteerism allied with personal investment persisted as major policy motives for alleviating homelessness. Kemp's new focus on inner city revitalization framed homelessness as an issue of joblessness that prevented affordability for housing, rather than a lack of affordable housing stock itself.

⁷⁶ David Stoesz, *Small Change: Domestic Policy Under the Clinton Presidency*, (White Plains: Longman Publishers, 1996), 92.

⁷⁷ "Kemp's Quest: to revitalize US inner cities", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 December 1988, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 2, Library of Congress.

⁷⁸ "Now For the Good News: A Homeless Project That Works" in *Secretary's News Report, Focus: Housing the Homeless*, 8 January 1991, Box 246, Folder 7, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.

Public Housing as Private Enterprise: HOPE Legislation and an Inner-City Discourse

Maintaining the previous administration's stalwart resistance to increased federal spending on housing, HOPE (Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere) legislation provided the centerpiece of Kemp's approach toward inner-city poverty as a localized and privately funded policy approach. The opening statement to HOPE 3's proposed provisions states the legislation's ideal purpose:

Homeownership is the classic path to the American dream...a fundamental building block of prosperity in America. HOPE grants will tap the creative energies of nonprofit groups by providing funds for training, seed capital and mortgage assistance, and will provide low-income families with access to assets, private property and opportunity.⁷⁹

Calling on homeownership as the major goal of "the American Dream", this statement asserts the stress on local – critically ignoring federal – capabilities to making homeownership possible. This homeownership, achieved through better access to opportunity, likewise avoids the question of how responsible the federal government should be in addressing the available stock of low-income housing. In addressing the need for "seed capital", Kemp highlights his goals for private investment as the primary means for funding this provision of opportunity.

By 1992, various acts emerged alongside HOPE legislation that departed from a focus purely on private enterprise to maintain the housing stock. The Low-Income Housing Preservation and Resident Homeownership Act (LIHPRH) reaffirmed a minimal federal commitment to preserving low-income housing, and addressed its decline with legislation to both preserve its existing stock and provide options for residents to prepay their mortgages.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁹ United States, Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Homeownership Opportunity for People Everywhere, Hope 3: Single-Family Homeownership*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1992), 1.

⁸⁰ United States, Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, *Preservation of Affordable Housing: HOPE II: Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1992), 1.

National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 similarly sought to expand federal funding for both housing down payments and rental assistance, albeit with some partial assistance from private funding.⁸¹ The HOPE policies under Kemp overall strayed away from these practices, and instead prioritized private enterprise as the primary means of bring necessary investment back into the inner cities.

“Opportunity Society” – The Kemp Agenda for Housing Revival

Maintaining the previous administration’s stalwart resistance to increased federal spending on housing, President Bush argued that more could be done about homelessness than an augmented affordable housing budget. Instead, the administrative approach drew on a blend of both the public and private to revitalize depressed cities, which was understood as the locus of the homelessness problem. President Bush espoused this formula as “Opportunity Society”, which understood depressed areas not as hopeless ghettos, but as what he called “Enterprise zones” in which the government could provide incentives to draw developers. Originally pioneered in Great Britain and embraced by President Reagan, enterprise zone policies under Kemp drew on previous practices under Reagan in which government offered business certain incentives to relocate to poorer areas, such as decreased minimum wage, tax rebates, and waiving of certain occupational health and safety standards.⁸² Kemp thus advocated the use of federal de-regulation of inner-city tax policies to invite private enterprises to bring jobs along with them, as his primary strategy of urban revitalization and restored employment opportunity.⁸³

⁸¹ Low Income Housing Information Service (Washington, D.C.), and National Low Income Housing Coalition (U.S.), *National Affordable Housing Act of 1990: briefing book*. (Washington, D.C.: Low Income Housing Information Service, 1991), 3.

⁸² David Stoesz, *Small Change: Domestic Policy Under the Clinton Administration* (White Plains: Longman Publishers, 1996), 91.

⁸³ Beattie, “Haven’t you heard? We don’t live in slums anymore. They’re called ‘enterprise zones.’” in *Daytona Beach News Journal*, 1992, Box 246, Folder 1, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.



The new idea of "Opportunity Society" focused additionally on investment potential to introduce housing to depressed areas. As the most visible victims of a perceived urban crisis, the homeless gained Kemp's attention, as did as the disappearance of 4.5 million low-income units since 1973. Enterprise zones represented the site of a new "opportunity" for the American dream, where government support for deregulation could invite jobs and housing via private investment in depressed areas where dilapidated public housing deteriorated or ceased to exist completely. Ideally, this investment would allow public housing residents to gain a stake in their own communities and in their own future through the introduction housing competition in the private market, and subsequently more widely available job and living opportunities.⁸⁴

Kemp blamed barriers to private enterprise – in the form of government regulation - for inner-city poverty. Citing the postwar era's erosion of the urban economic base as initial culprit for the deteriorated inner city, Kemp advocated for a restoration of the economic base of inner

⁸⁴ David O. Maxwell, "Remarks by Bush and Kemp at News," *The New York Times*, 20 December 1988, Box 246, Folder 2, Library of Congress.

cities to fuel economic growth and subsequently job creation via entrepreneurial capitalism.

"Without jobs and an equity share in the system," Kemp argued, "poor people can hardly be expected to afford decent housing. Employment is the first step out of poverty, but government has...acted as a barrier separating would-be business men and women from entrepreneurship and creativity."⁸⁵

Kemp structured his enterprise zone policy to rectify this alleged government sponsored "destruction" of the American entrepreneurial spirit by getting rid of burdensome tax rates and government regulation. Centered on increased tax incentives for new businesses, like the reduction of the capital gains tax, Kemp sought to reward risk takers who invested in distressed areas by decreasing government regulation.⁸⁶ According to Kemp, this would invite businesses and private housing projects, critically serving the very poor and homeless with opportunities for employment and increased access to affordable housing.

LA Riots, Homelessness and the Urban "Underclass"

Besides the growing public frustration with the national spectacle of widespread homelessness, the Bush Administration felt pressure of another kind that added to the sense of urban crisis. The LA Riots of 1992, resulting from the excessive beating of African American resident Rodney King by multiple policemen, catapulted much of Los Angeles into chaos. The destruction that ensued put much pressure on the administration to address the issue of the nation's deteriorating inner cities. In one article written in May of 1992 entitled "Action, before more cities burn", the author lamented that despite the Los Angeles riots' symbol as a warning of nationwide social peril, many Washington politicians seem content to ignore the "agony of the

⁸⁵ Jack Kemp, Policy Review, "Tackling Poverty: Market-Based Enterprises to Empower the Poor", Box 246, Folder 2, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

nation's inner cities", and the huge disadvantages faced by its minority occupants.⁸⁷ Many commentators speculated that the Bush administration's new focus on urban decay reflected a preoccupation with garnering the Black vote.⁸⁸ The very visible chaos of rioting in Los Angeles prompted not only a visit from Bush himself, but also a newfound reception to Kemp's ideas that focused revitalizing America's depressed urban centers.⁸⁹



Kemp drew on preexisting conceptions of the urban "Underclass" to frame the LA riots and widespread shame of homelessness to frame his policy focus on inner city revitalization. Namely, he manipulated this discourse to reify his analysis that private – not public – investment into these urban centers comprised the most effective solution. Whether or not these policy motivations meant to garner the African American vote as some speculated, many commentators remarked on Jack Kemp as a pragmatic and idealistic politician who came to advocate for a

⁸⁷ Editorial, *The Plain Dealer*, "Action, before more cities burn" 19 May 1992, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 9, Library of Congress.

⁸⁸ "Can Kemp's doctrine help house the poor?" *The San Diego Union*, 7 May 1989, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 1, Library of Congress.

⁸⁹ Danziger, "So I said Urban Crisis? Nothing my pal Jack Krump can't take care of!" in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Box 246, Folder 1, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.

noted “underclass” of poor inner city dwellers. Contemporary newspapers speak of how liberals and conservatives alike welcomed his concern with the plight of inner cities, sporting headlines like “Kemp rises from LA Riot’s ashes” and even the nickname “The White Knight of the Underclass” in one article describing his visit to the Kenilworth-Parkside Housing project in 1991.⁹⁰ Many conservative and liberal commentators praised Kemp as purposeful and energetic HUD secretary compared to his predecessor Samuel Pierce, whose position demonstrated little commitment to addressing housing as a factor in homelessness.⁹¹

Kemp’s unprecedented focus on the inner city as the focal point for homelessness certainly did not come out of the blue. At this time, growing national consciousness – with academic focus in particular – strove to define, articulate and advocate for what was increasingly referred to as the urban “underclass”. While Kemp indeed established a newfound analytical center on inner city housing as the focal point of homelessness, the term “underclass” had already started to gain momentum in the 1970s, when discussions of inner-city poverty drew on older notions of the poor as socially isolated and deprived of adequate access to social and economic opportunity.⁹² A theory of spatial isolation emerged that explained the underclass’s dislocation from job and housing opportunities that had historically relocated elsewhere. Namely, this theory explained how specific housing policies constructed these zones of underclass life.⁹³

⁹⁰ “Kemp Rises from LA riots’ ashes”, *The Richmond News leader*, 20 May 1992, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 9, Library of Congress; “Jack Kemp: The White knights of the Underclass” in *Our Voice In Today’s World* September 1991, Volume 2, Issue 10, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 8, Library of Congress.

⁹¹ Editorial, “Conservative or not, Kemp is the perfect choice for HUD job,” 22 December 1988, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 2, Library of Congress.

⁹² Michael B. Katz, “The Urban Underclass” as a Metaphor of Social Transformation in *The Underclass Debate*, 5-11.

⁹³ David W. Bartelt “Housing the Underclass”, in Katz, 119.

In this decade, Secretary Kemp thus reframed the homelessness debate in inner city turmoil instead of personal choice or state-led deinstitutionalization as previous representatives had done. Though housing reformers in nineteenth and twentieth centuries had long before noted the congested and unsanitary conditions of urban slums and resultant demoralization of the poor that have persisted into contemporary discussions of poverty, Kemp appropriated these discussions for his own interpretations of "opportunity society".⁹⁴ Kemp embraced what had become a revamped dilemma of contemporary urban poverty, in which a burgeoning underclass seemed to have been rediscovered by scholars as more than just a periodic problem, but a result of several decades of urban crisis in a new form of concentrated poverty.⁹⁵

Several scholars attempted to paint a picture of this new underclass that partially encompassed the homeless as victims of decades-long processes of increasingly exclusionary housing policy. Had Kemp's preoccupation with the Los Angeles riots of 1992 reflected these new emphases on the underclass as critical to American homelessness? As scholars observed, the color of the underclass in inner cities was increasingly black, product of a relatively new association with massive migration of African Americans into Northern and Midwestern cities after World War II.⁹⁶ The practices of segregation, urban renewal and gentrification critically implicated race in the issue of urban crisis and homelessness, and secretary Kemp had sought to address this idea head on.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Michael Katz, *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5-9.

⁹⁵ Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Structures of Urban Poverty: The Reorganization of Space and Work in Three Periods of American History" in Katz, *The Underclass Debate*, 116.

⁹⁶ David W. Bartelt, "Housing the Underclass" in Michael Katz, *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 126.

⁹⁷ David W. Bartelt, "Housing the Underclass" in Katz, *The Underclass Debate*, 120.

The "Underclass" debate, prior to Kemp's urban approach, focused on the roles housing policies, segregation and deindustrialization had in shaping the history of the "destruction" of American inner cities. Scholars noted how policies of exclusion in the housing market and changes in employment patterns rearranged the inner city, relocating jobs from inner city industry to the service sector instead, often in FIRES (finance, insurance, and real estate) to the more prosperous suburbs. In many American cities, the decline in economic opportunities within the city and concomitant increase of them in suburbs led to increased unemployment of poor black communities within the city. Similarly, lending practices of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation appraised housing in racial and ethnic terms early on, on which later FHA used maps to determine in lending policies.⁹⁸ Perhaps in ignorance of the complexity of these factors, Kemp interjected into the public debate of the underclass to attack joblessness through a structural approach of inner-city revitalization via private enterprise.

As an issue of inner-city poverty, homelessness in this era thus took on a new dimension of "underclass" characterization. Scholar David Bartelt once asked, "How is it that the Homeless so nearly resembles the social characteristics of the underclass?" and concluded that exclusionary practices of the housing market indeed prevented any investment of affordable housing in increasingly isolated areas.⁹⁹ One 1988 Los Angeles Times article explicitly referenced these instances of exclusion in inner cities, in which one poor resident and head of a major housing project criticized Kemp's urban policy that exclusively focused on joblessness and not enough on housing. As manager of the Kenilworth-Parkside Housing Project in D.C., Kimi Gray urged President Bush to lower income rents for public housing from thirty percent of

⁹⁸ Ibid, 133.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 118; 156.

gross income to twenty-five.¹⁰⁰ In the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, President Bush made the last-ditch effort to visit riot-stricken areas to assess the poor communities' needs directly. Sparked largely by his visit to Los Angeles a week after the riots had started, President Bush ultimately embraced Kemp's emergency initiatives – ignoring the structural analyses posed by academics – for reinvigorating urban areas: primarily enterprise zones and welfare reform.¹⁰¹ As far as one author was concerned, the Los Angeles riots served as a warning of nationwide social peril that many Washington politicians –including Bush – seemed content to ignore before their culmination had resorted to nationwide rioting. Alongside this turmoil, the administration perceived homelessness to be unsustainable and dangerous to American cities. In response, Bush addressed the urban crisis with an all-too familiar procedure, by crafting a post-riot aid package.¹⁰²

Incidentally, one of Kemp's last contributions as HUD secretary culminated in an extreme version of his original understanding of both the causes of homelessness and the role of HUD in responding to it. Kemp maintained the theory that introducing democratic ("enterprise") capitalism to the inner city "pockets of poverty" could singularly provide both employment and housing opportunities for the poor. However, in one draft entitled *Liberating the Poor from HUD's House of Privilege*, Kemp smears HUD itself as a bureaucratic mess, riddled with corruption, wasted money and disillusion. Rather than continue to subsidize low-income housing via HUD, Kemp argues that the American public abolish it entirely in order to decrease regulation and allow the private market to play the foremost role in establishing low-income

¹⁰⁰ Editorial, "Republicans and the Black Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, 1988, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 6, Library of Congress.

¹⁰¹ "Kemp Rises from LA riots' ashes", *The Richmond News leader*, 20 May 1992, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 9, Library of Congress; "Jack Kemp: The White knights of the Underclass" in *Our Voice In Today's World* September 1991, Volume 2, Issue 10, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 246, Folder 8, Library of Congress.

¹⁰² "Action, before more cities burn", *The Plain Dealer*, 20 May 1992, Jack Kemp Papers, Box 256, Folder 9, Library of Congress.

housing to those who need it most. Further, Kemp argues plainly that homelessness is first and foremost an issue of mental illness, and that HUD should allow HHS absorb the majority of homeless assistance programs.¹⁰³ Though this document replaces Kemp's original approach to joblessness with mental illness as the primary causes of homelessness, it also highlights the most durable theme of his contribution to federal involvement in homeless alleviation. Upon his exit from the agency, Kemp most bitterly despised its role period in what he thought should be the private market's provision of resources for America's most economically vulnerable. This approach to homelessness, and poverty in general, prevented any potential for HUD or any other agency to initiate policies that subsidized a stock of affordable housing for poor Americans.

Conclusions – A Return to Emergency Funding

Whether out of exasperation at the crisis of homelessness or disillusion with the ineffectiveness of HUD to alleviate it, Kemp remained loyal to conservative priorities of private involvement in urban policy. The leadership of Secretary Kemp overall maintained the previous administration's stalwart resistance to increased federal spending on housing, and argued that private funding could revitalize depressed cities especially through job creation, which they perceived to be the root of the homelessness problem. Secretary Kemp thus established a newfound policy approach on the inner city as the focal point of homelessness, reframing the homelessness debate in inner city turmoil instead of personal choice or state-led deinstitutionalization. Ultimately however, Kemp preserved the state's consistent denial of federal subsidies for affordable housing as an adequate approach to American homelessness. Most importantly, the Bush administration maintained emergency relief via extensions of the McKinney as the most enduring approach toward alleviating American homelessness.

¹⁰³ Jack Kemp, "Liberating the Poor From HUD's House of Privilege", Box 246, Folder 7, Jack Kemp Papers, Library of Congress.

Chapter Three: Change or Continuity?

We must address the problems that render people homeless in the first place rather than focusing simply on getting them off the streets for the night. That is why I have designated addressing homelessness as my number one priority.¹⁰⁴

The election of Bill Clinton in 1993 provided homeless advocates with a hopeful, but ambiguous, message about poverty in America. Clinton tried to raise public consciousness on homelessness and concurrently emphasized the need to fund social programs like Head Start toward empowerment of poorer Americans.¹⁰⁵ However, Clinton also ran against Independent candidate H. Ross Perot and Republican incumbent President Bush on the somewhat similar poverty platform to avert long-term, costly public assistance to the poor.

This contradictory posture seemed less of a concern when Clinton appointed Henry Cisneros to Secretary of HUD, who eagerly prioritized homelessness as HUD's most pressing issue. Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, the first year of his appointment witnessed a personal and urgent call for a reformed policy toward the homeless just outside his office door. In the winter of 1993, one homeless woman named Yetta Adams, well known to the shelters in the DC area, lay down on a bench to sleep in front of the HUD office. Already suffering from poor health and diabetes, Adams died in the thirty-degree cold of night, directly in front of the office door of Henry Cisneros.¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, Cisneros dreamed big but acted small in homelessness policy. Cisneros attended Adams' funeral as a sign of respect, but managed overall to follow largely in part with the established inertia of McKinney policy programming, changing the analysis of homelessness greatly, but practice only minimally. Early on in the Clinton administration, Cisneros framed

¹⁰⁴ Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness. (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1994), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 228-229.

¹⁰⁶ Stoesz, *Small Change*, 101.

homelessness markedly differently from other administrations in his analysis of it as a problem stemming from several cross-cutting issues. Advocates lauded this approach, which sought to more comprehensively analyze homelessness as a result of several interacting policies and to formulate a more streamlined approach to preventing and resolving it. However, ultimately this comprehensive approach – focusing uniquely on rehabilitative services and permanent affordable housing in addition to emergency relief – saw little implementation.¹⁰⁷ Particular influence from Andrew Cuomo of New York pioneered this idea of comprehensive assessment, drawing up state initiatives to serve as the model for a revived national strategy. This comprehensive front certainly differed greatly from analyses under Reagan or Bush in its consideration of factors beside personal choice or market failures alone. However, this comprehensive push ended up being half-hearted, slow, and unimplemented, as had the previous and overwhelmingly rhetorical policies of emergency relief.

Perhaps most unique about the Clintonian approach to homelessness was the explicit acknowledgement of the low stock in affordable housing, promise to meet the need to increase it, and ultimate inability to do so due to insufficient funds and disorganized programming. The Clinton administration largely mimicked previous administrations' tendencies to use sweeping rhetoric to make widespread commitments to policy change, and ultimate fail to follow through in reality. However, no previous administration had explicitly acknowledged lack of housing in their analyses of homelessness. The *Priority: Home!* Plan, drafted months into Clinton's presidency, made the unprecedented emphasis on a collective approach – based largely in part on acknowledging the inadequate supply of affordable housing for the poor – to more effectively prevent homelessness, rather than use emergency relief to address its symptoms after the fact.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ David Stoesz, *Small Change*, 101.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Hombs, *American Homelessness*, 92.

In practice, Clinton's version of homeless policy did not match his promises. Instead, earlier practices emphasized community-based solutions and concomitant decreases in direct federal assistance for housing occurred.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, major expansions homeless grants and housing vouchers in the Section 8 program occurred alongside the decrease in direct federal housing.¹¹⁰ Housing programs serving low-income households fell \$856 million below fiscal year 1994 levels, which Clinton explained away as an effort to cater to conservative Democrats and Republicans who placed deficit reduction as a priority in budget policy. Even more problematic was the ushering in of HOPE VI policy under Clinton, which severely distressed the supply of low-income housing through a misguided approach to poverty deconcentration that essentially gentrified existing lower income housing to meet the needs of a more lucrative higher income housing market.

At the same time, Clinton's leadership in poverty issues would reveal how American homelessness was seemingly divorced from other issues of poverty. Clinton committed to addressing American homelessness broadly and focusing on a comprehensive strategy to eradicate it. However, he also promised to those who voted for him, that if elected, he would "scrap the current welfare system and make welfare a second chance, not a way of life."¹¹¹ The emphasis on eradicating homelessness on the one hand, and gutting welfare on the other, demonstrated a perception of homelessness that did not link the poverty of welfare recipients with their inability to afford housing. Consequently, many advocates would argue, Clinton-era poverty policy provided no real chance, without an adequate safety net, for poor Americans to on the verge of homelessness to access low-income housing.

¹⁰⁹ Courtney C. Cronley, "Unraveling the Social Construction of Homelessness," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* Volume 20, Issue No. 2, 319-333 (2010) DOI: 10.1080/10911350903269955, 326.

¹¹⁰ Stoesz, 103.

¹¹¹ James Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 217.

Gutting the safety net critically affected those poor Americans either at-risk of or already experiencing homelessness. Clinton requested for some vast social investments, including Head Start, unemployment benefits and most importantly his extension in 1993 of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which he promised to more than double the funding to make as large as AFDC or food stamps.¹¹² However, in practice, Clinton catered to moderates calling for a complete reorganization of welfare under his Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This chapter will demonstrate how this approach acknowledged the need for a comprehensive approach to homelessness, but instead defunded both the public provision of affordable housing and the social safety net, which collectively would have proven critical to the maintenance of incomes high enough for accessible housing. Taken together, Clinton's aggregate policies toward the homeless in fact avoided comprehensive assistance, and instead focused primarily - via McKinney extension - to provide homeless assistance through emergency aid to decentralized localities.

Some Gains: A Comprehensive Attack

We must address the problems that render people homeless in the first place rather than focusing simply on getting them off the streets for the night. That is why I have designated addressing homelessness as my number one priority.¹¹³

Speaking on behalf of the Interagency Council on the Homeless and HUD, Secretary Henry Cisneros committed to enact a sweeping approach to homelessness that was distinct in its recognition to focus on prevention over alleviation. This approach was indeed unique in both content and character; less than four months after his inauguration, Clinton required the council to report back with a plan for a coordinated strategy that acknowledged the government's flawed role in increasing homelessness, and the means by which it could be rectified. Specifically, the

¹¹² Stoezs, *Small Change*, 104.

¹¹³ *Priority, Home! : The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness*. (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, 1994).

objective was a comprehensive approach to homelessness focusing on emergency shelter, rehabilitative services, and permanent affordable housing.¹¹⁴

Some gains in a coordinated aid strategy began to emerge under Cisneros's leadership. According to information gathered by the NSHAPC (National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients) the actual number of homeless assistance programs available in 1988 increased greatly by 1996. In particular, increase in the number of specific programs (i.e. transitional housing) went beyond emergency shelter to focus primarily on programs geared toward certain demographics like the disabled.¹¹⁵ McKinney funding was central to this transformation in homelessness provision; new types of programs included in McKinney enabled construction of transitional housing and permanent housing, until the total stock of these services in 1996 actually matched the total stock of homeless shelter system in 1988. Shelters and soup kitchens also multiplied/expanded their services in the 1990s.¹¹⁶

The National Coalition for the Homeless continuously advocated for policy change in 1993, asserting the roots of American homelessness still as manifestations of declining social safety net and affordable housing policies. One briefing of policy recommendations prepared by NCH reinforces previously held notions of income stagnation among the poor and middle class as well as a decline in low-income housing stock as major causes.¹¹⁷ The document argued that those reliant on government assistance became especially vulnerable when more state and local budget cuts occurred in 1991, particularly when low-income housing became increasingly competitive. For those who were mentally ill, without health insurance, recovering substance

¹¹⁴ David Stoesz, *Small Change*, 101.

¹¹⁵ Martha Burt, et. al, *Helping America's Homeless: Emergency Shelter or Affordable Housing?* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2001), 243.

¹¹⁶ Martha Burt, et. al, *Helping America's Homeless*, 245.

¹¹⁷ National Coalition for the Homeless (U.S.), "Ending Homelessness: Policy Recommendations for the Clinton Administration" (Washington, D.C.: National Coalition for the Homeless, 1993), 1.

abusers or affected with AIDS, or suffering from accidents or serious illness, bouts of homelessness became common once they were pushed over the edge.

This document presents the question: was Clinton-era homeless assistance policy either a continuation of or departure from the status quo? While progress toward more specific policy targets of transitional housing indeed occurred, what had been left out of the administration's policy? Most notably, this document suggests that homeless agency was virtually absent from all representation. The document strongly suggests that the homeless and very poor should be represented on the Interagency Council on the Homeless; some 1992 McKinney Amendments did already implement "empower" changes that required the participation of homeless people in the decision-making structures of programs receiving McKinney funding. This report urged that this should be a high-up priority for new HUD secretary Henry Cisneros as well.¹¹⁸

Cisneros's HUD Leadership: The Continuum of Care Model

Organized systems of programs providing for homeless people did emerge in several cities. Before the Continuum of Care Model came about, initial McKinney funds were never structured to administer a complete service system for homeless provisions, and predominantly emergency grants funded eligible communities to do with them as they saw fit. Agencies responsible thus let participating communities delegate funds however they please, with little oversight or organization.¹¹⁹ In the 1980s, mostly missions, soup kitchens and other predominantly religious organizations used independently raised funds and McKinney grants to run homeless assistance programs. No comprehensive system existed; the only real "outreach" function comprised of cops identifying public drunks for either the drunk tank or toward temporary shelters. There were also few programs geared toward transitional housing.

¹¹⁸ NCH, "Ending Homelessness", 2.

¹¹⁹ Martha Burt, et. al, *Helping America's Homeless: Emergency Shelter or Affordable Housing?* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2001), 267.

By the early 1990s however, some American cities sought a more structured approach, and began their own campaigns to organize demographic statistics of recipients into fledgling databases for service reference. One New York City commission pioneered the first semblance of what would become a continuum of care approach, in which different community agencies collaborated to provide a comprehensive system of provisions for the homeless community.¹²⁰ The federal government soon followed this example. The Interagency Council of the Homeless had included the Continuum of Care idea earlier on in the administration, and continued to provide McKinney funding as an incentive. By fiscal year 1994, HUD had revamped its old system of McKinney funding from a national competition based on individual agency grants to that of a holistic jurisdiction-centered approach. The Block Grant method for funding had existed throughout the entirety of homeless legislation, starting under the McKinney Act.

Rather than granting individual agencies funding based on their submission of a CHAP, a new Continuum of Care Model emerged, and required a jurisdiction-wide collaboration among providers who would use federal McKinney funds to craft an interagency nexus of services for the homeless. The burden shifted from one local agency alone to entire community's network of homeless providers – be they food banks, overnight shelters, or other agencies – to utilize outreach and inter-network connections to locate and recruit homeless citizens for provision.¹²¹

Discovery of Homelessness as a Nexus of Several Issues

This newfound necessity for jurisdiction-wide compliance reflected a new comprehensive trend of homeless assistance within cities. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros embraced a new campaign against homelessness that sought to streamline all services into one centralized administration. Cisneros observed that the McKinney

¹²⁰ Burt, *Helping America's Homeless*, 269.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

Act had relied on funding from several different departments: Housing and Urban Development, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, Education, and Labor.¹²² To evolve from this previous interagency strategy, Cisneros crafted his own vision for homeless assistance in the direction of his own model program, the D.C. Initiative of the Homeless. Cisneros's main goal sought to restructure the federal and local relationship in addressing homelessness. Though he did continue significant private sector participation, he advocated for an approach that saw homelessness as a complex problem that the private sector alone could not solve.

Other advocates praised this approach, and the administration indeed made some headway in funding more diverse programs for homeless assistance. Nan P. Roman, VP of Policy and Programs National Alliance to End Homelessness and National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, acknowledge the importance in understanding homelessness as a cross cutting issue. Roman likewise called for an adequately comprehensive approach that would involve the several federal agencies like AFDC, SSI disability, child care services, health care services and housing, central to the process of homeless provision. Noting the president's record request of \$753 million for FY 1994, - four times '87 amount - in supportive housing programs, Cisneros showcased the administration's comprehensive provision through appropriate support of relevant programming: the combination of decent, safe, sanitary and affordable housing with disability assistance. Cisneros believed that this zoned in on the ultimate problem of permanent housing, for those disabled or not.¹²³

¹²² United States. Homelessness McKinney Act programs and funding through fiscal year 1990: report to the Congress / [Washington, D.C.] : The Office ; [Gaithersburg, MD (P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg 20877)] : U.S. General Accounting Office [distributor, 1991], 6-7.

¹²³ Senator Donald Riegle, Homelessness in America: Field Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Third Congress, First Session, April 23, 1993, 13.

Though never enacted, the Housing Choice and Community Investment Act of 1994 proposed to congress an example of more comprehensive legislation toward the homeless population. According to Cisneros, the bill set out an ambitious agenda to reduce homelessness, improve public housing, expand affordable housing, enforce fair housing and further empower communities to strengthen themselves.¹²⁴ The act's failure to pass symbolically alluded to what would become an overall theme in Cisneros's proposed policy: that for the most part, the visions of comprehensive solutions often manifested in policy status quos of emergency-centered aid.

A Recurring Theme: Relief Over Prevention

Perhaps had more homeless agents advocated for their own policy need, meaningful practices would have followed. However, continuity from earlier legislation manifested in the symbolic nature of promises for a more coordinated strategy, that abandoned both rehabilitative focus and funding of affordable housing. To the extent that programs had emerged to outreach to the homeless beyond emergency shelter, practice overwhelmingly maintained decentralized administration established under McKinney in lieu of a coordinated assortment of preventative strategies. The new emphases on federal responsibility for coordinating a streamlined and comprehensive attack on homelessness formed the centerpiece of ideology, but fell to the wayside of existing practices that continued to let localities research, determine and apply for their own federal aid. Additionally, the Clinton administration announced a \$2 billion cut in HUD funding for housing assistance, nearly cutting in half the \$4.2 billion already available.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Henry Cisneros, Housing Choice and Community Investment Act of 1994: Joint Hearings before the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, One Hundred Third Congress, Second Session on Identifying the Needs of Our Nation's Cities and to Examine the Administration's Proposed Ambitious and Comprehensive Agenda to Revitalize Communities and Create Real Opportunities for Residents, April 28 and May 3, 1994, 2.

¹²⁵ Stoesz, *Small Change*, 101.

Analysis of McKinney funds spent during the first three years of Clinton's administration reveals the primary commitment of funding to emergency programs over housing. According to agency total charts, spending on "Shelter Plus Care" – devoted to those housed in temporary shelters – received more funds than those in both Supportive Housing and Section 8 SRO (single resident occupancy) programs combined.¹²⁶ One report, sent to Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy Carol Rasco, analyzed the impact of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act on several American cities. Entitled, "Homelessness: McKinney Act Programs Provide Assistance but Are Not Designed to Be the Solution," the report explicitly addressed accusations against the Interagency Task Force of lack of funding and overall lack of policy commitment. Suggestions for improvements incidentally included no long-term policy proposals for homelessness prevention but rather short-term initiatives like establishing a monthly newsletter, interagency publications and the sense that the council should, "...let the world know what will continue to be done."¹²⁷ As the later homelessness memo described, however, this effort was largely undermined by the policy inertia of continued emphasis on emergency funding and local administration of the act's provisions.

Continuous Threats to Program Funding

Overall, all programs under McKinney continuously received funding cuts. Congressman Bruce Vento already introduced legislation to provide supplemental funding for McKinney by 1993 after much emergency funding had already been cut. The Emergency Shelter grant program lost over \$20 million, while the Emergency Food and Shelter Program lost \$5 million. Congressman Vento also added the Safe Havens and Rural Homelessness programs

¹²⁶ Ibid, Worksheet C.

¹²⁷ Memorandum, Keith O. Fultz to Carol H. Rasco, 31 May 1994, Clinton Presidential Library.

were included in the NAHA, but received no FY93 funding from Clinton. Massive funding shortages also affected Section 8 housing, a program critical for low-income renters.

Public Housing in the Private Market - Section 8 Housing for Homeless Individuals

Section 8 housing emerged as a new form of housing assistance that provided incentives to lower the rents for low-income households in lieu of direct construction of low-income housing. This program, started in the 1970s, transformed the federal role in housing provision by incentivizing the private sector to keep rents at affordable levels, rather than directly building low-income housing.¹²⁸ Since the government merely provided rental subsidies to the landlord and favorable tax treatments for housing investors, oversight replaced land lording as the federal government's main role in the housing market. Under this program, a building owner who rehabilitated a substandard property for SRO - single room occupancy - units received guaranteed rental assistance for the tenants.

Originally codified under Title IV of the McKinney Act, extensions of this program continued under Clinton as a fundamental form of low-income housing assistance, and likewise fundamental approach to homeless alleviation. Staying true to McKinney fashion, the local authorities played the central role in paying rental assistance funds to building owners. The local Public Housing Authority (PHA) delegated McKinney funds to local building owners through annual contracts, and paid the owner the difference between the fair market rent of a unit and the portion payable by the tenant. These PHAs submitted applications for the funds, which were

¹²⁸ David Bartelt, "Housing the Underclass" in *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 151.

awarded based on a basis of nationwide competition. No single city or urban county could receive more than ten percent of the funds available.¹²⁹

By the early 1990s however, NCH advocates had pointed out that shortages in Section 8 housing certificates severely compromised people on the edge of homelessness. Most McKinney transitional housing programs required participants to engage in job training or other self-sufficiency activities, but then would have trouble finding housing when faced with little prospects for getting Section 8 certificates.¹³⁰ In their list of policy recommendations, the NCH argued that people coming out of transitional housing programs administered by McKinney funding receive priority for these tickets. In addition to the expansion of available Section 8 housing, the NCH stuck to its long-term argument that that at minimum, the low-income housing market should be increased from 4.5 million units to 10 million units.

Hope VI Housing Policy: Deconcentration and Dislocation

Overall, housing policies under Clinton continuously failed to meet the promise of expansion in the low-income sector. Section 8 housing had met flawed implementation since its design to enforce low-income housing construction, only really *encouraged* building owners to rehabilitate substandard properties for low-income renters.¹³¹ Another policy, aimed similarly at the private market to increase low-income housing stock, resulted in HOPE VI of 1993. HUD drafted HOPE VI as an effort to replace the nation's worst public housing projects with lower density and higher quality developments, complete with varied services to meet the needs of these revamped communities. Congress pushed the National Commission on Severely Distressed

¹²⁹ United States. HUD programs and services for the homeless under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77). [Washington, D.C.?] : U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, [1987], 5.

¹³⁰ NCH, "Ending Homelessness", 5.

¹³¹ United States, Homelessness McKinney Act Programs and Funding Through Fiscal Year 1990: Report to the Congress, 23-25.

Housing (NCSDH) to press the issue, and found 86,000 public units – 6% of the 1.4 million units nationally – “severely distressed” in terms of serious crime rates, barriers to managing the environment and physical infrastructural deterioration.¹³²

Urban Renewal as a Trend – Destruction, not Replacement

Though the federal administration imagined HOPE VI as an innovative program drawn on principles of community enrichment, in reality the objective itself ran alongside a preexisting trend of urban and renewal and gentrification that had already taken place in major cities by the early 1990s. Since the 1970s, housing provision for lower-income households came increasingly under private and market-based approaches, starting with the provision of housing vouchers for individual households to purchase from the private sector, in what was presumably a growing market. Cutbacks in federal funding for the public housing sector in the decade afterward reinforced this trend toward the private sector, continuing under the Clinton administration to “reinvent the government” as a more compatible with the private sector.

These processes provided the setting in which HOPE VI carried out. Ultimately, the rule stipulating for one-for-one replacement of demolished housing units was repealed in 1995. Tough policies like the One-Strike rule that evicted households with one members involved with drugs or felony crime selectively prevented the necessary construction of replacement homes, and subsequently encouraged higher-income households to remain or move into developments. Similarly, the increase in vouchers for homes in the private market via tenant-based assistance increasingly moved out households with extremely low-incomes (less than 30 percent of area median). This 30 percent threshold defined which housing was designated as “affordable”.

¹³² Diane K. Levy, “Re-Envisioning Public Housing: HOPE VI and the U.S. Federal Government’s Role in Public Housing Provision” in Marilyn Thomas-Houston, *Homing Devices: The Poor as Targets of Public Housing Policy and Practice* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., Lexington Books), 22.

Deconcentration of Poverty

HOPE VI championed the de-concentration of poverty as one of its main initiatives, drawing on the scholarship documenting the negative effects of poverty concentration. Several other programs preceding HOPE VI similarly employed methods of deconcentration, such as those in Lake Parc Place in Chicago that mixed residences of low-income and very low-income. The objective outlined by HOPE advocates sought to counter the negative effects of isolation, publicized by scholars such as William Julius Wilson, that had engaged with underclass debates in the decades previous. Ideally, by developing housing for low to middle incomes, providing social services in the newly vacated area, and taking previously isolated poorer families into safer and better served areas, new residents could be better integrated into a new and more prosperous economy and likewise achieve some strides social mobility.¹³³

For most former residents however, lack of commitment to the actual construction of low-income residents prevented them from being able to move back in. Various studies found that anywhere between one-quarter to one-half of proposed HOPE reconstruction projects were not implemented, and that even in instances of successful reconstruction, only partial subsidies funded them. Housing vouchers provided the planners of HOPE program with the ability to skip over this construction, since a housing authority could relocate households without needing an equivalent number of hard units. The result of these policies was a devastating loss of low-income housing, starkly in contrast to original goals set out in the Clinton administration to increase this supply.

Reinvention or Maintenance of the Status Quo – The HUD Blueprint for Reinvention 1994

Though meant to convey an image of change, The 1995 Blueprint for the Reinvention of HUD presented policies not of reinvention, but of instead a continued emphasis on

¹³³ Ibid, 25.

community-based solutions.¹³⁴ Market preferences in community investment carried on extended the policy of enterprise zones as a strategy for rebuilding communities' economic bases.¹³⁵ The HUD Blueprint for Reinvention planned to massively cut funds to assisted housing: the "... deepest cuts of any cabinet agency affecting cities" according to journalist Cameron Whitman.¹³⁶ Whitman pointed out that the consolidation of pre-existing block grants into three major ones outlined in the blueprint did not clarify which level of government would manage, receive, administer and distribute the block grants. These nebulous strategies would affect three HUD services critical to the homeless – the Community Opportunity Fund, Affordable Housing Fund and the Homeless Assistance Performance Fund.

The Interagency Task Force on the Homeless established under the McKinney deliberated this action in the proposed 1995 Fiscal Year budget. The task force decided to consolidate these funds, and published their minutes with the symbolic title, "CLINTON ADMINISTRATION HIGH PRIORITY ON HOMELESSNESS."¹³⁷ The document seeks to outline the administration's clear prioritization of the issue, based on its thirty-four percent increase in proposed funding for federal homeless spending from Fiscal Year 1993. While Congress approved only a twenty-five percent increase in this funding, the increase in requested spending proved the highest ever for targeted homeless assistance.¹³⁸ This policy served as a symbol for what had become a routine strategy under the Clinton administration, to deviate greatly, if not entirely, from proposed policy.

¹³⁴ Courtney C. Cronley, "Unraveling the Social Construction of Homelessness," 324.

¹³⁵ Henry Cisneros, State of Urban America: Hearing Before the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, United States Senate, One Hundred Third Congress, first session, on the issues of the conditions of our nation's cities and urban communities across America, April 28, 1993, 30.

¹³⁶ Cameron Whitman, "Despite Deep Cuts, HUD Budget Plans More Direct City Funding," *Nation's Cities Weekly*, 13 February 1995, Volume 18, No. 7, 9.

¹³⁷ Meeting Memorandum, Joseph Firschein to Carol Rasco, Secretary Henry Cisneros, Secretary Donna Shalala and Secretary Jesse Brown, 9 August 1994, Interagency Council on the Homeless.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

The Declining Safety Net: Policy to "End Welfare as We Know It"

Likewise, the policy promise to assess homelessness comprehensively omitted welfare provision as a major factor of homeless assistance. The policy promise to approach homelessness interactively fell to the wayside when the Republican congressional takeover pushed Clinton to restructure the social safety net that would have proven critical to the maintenance of incomes high enough for housing. Clinton committed to his promise to reform welfare into a system that prioritized equality of opportunity - i.e. work - over the equality of an adequate safety net.¹³⁹ This manifested, as indicated by its title, as the landmark policy against dependence in the Clinton-era poverty approach - the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

This major policy change resulted from widespread and continuous sentiment against welfare as the perceived culprit of poor dependence. Starting with the Republican take over of Congress in 1994 and followed by encouragement from President Clinton, a coalition of Republicans led by Congressmen Newt Gingrich sought to propel an entire new policy platform, coined the "Contract With America". This platform called for five basic tenets, under which welfare was sure to undergo drastic transformation; the plan idealized individual liberty, economic opportunity, limited government, personal responsibility and security at home and abroad.¹⁴⁰ Chief among these concerns for the vision of a new America was the need to curb illegitimacy – an alleged result of AFDC payments that seemed to incentivize single-mothers to have more children for increased cash benefits.

The debate between conservative and liberal congressmen boiled down to a resultant law virtually identical to that drafted by Gingrich and the coalition. By 1993, plans were in the works

¹³⁹ Patterson, 244.

¹⁴⁰ James Gompel *Legislating the Revolution: The Contract With America in its First 100 Days* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 17.

to cap any growth in funding for poverty entitlement programs at 2%.¹⁴¹ Other provisions made drastic cuts: those who did not establish paternity with their children faced decreased benefits, most resident aliens were denied benefits as well as the transfer of several nutrition programs to the states as block grants. Lastly, in order to live up to the promise to “end welfare as we know it” and transform the system from that of permanent dependence to temporary assistance, Clinton signed off on limiting welfare benefits to only two years consecutively and five years total.

In simultaneously committing to end homelessness as well as “welfare as we know it”, Clinton effectively divorced poverty from homelessness in his allegedly comprehensive approach to the issue. Advocates would later argue that in reality, lack of adequate income in addition to lack of affordable housing formed the most consistent characteristic across most groups of homeless people.¹⁴² By 1998, experts at a national homelessness research symposium had concluded that the inherent ideological aversion against the dependent poor had manifested in the PRWORA to punish the most economically vulnerable Americans:

While other industrial nations have maintained a broad commitment to social provision for their citizens...the United States has long questioned the motives and deservingness of its poor. In fact, Americans have reduced their national commitment through various welfare reform measures and retrenchments...The American approach to public assistance has traditionally been based on a critical evaluation of deservingness, rather than on a broad commitment to assisting the economically disadvantaged. The current withdrawal of public support has occurred in the face of compelling evidence that the distribution of income has become increasingly inequitable since the mid-1970s...since we as a people are not committing the funds necessary to provide subsistence resources for the poor, we understand that they will continue to be hundreds of thousands of homeless persons on any given night...If the political will were present, homelessness could be eradicated, or at the very least, very markedly reduced.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ James Gompel, *Legislating the Revolution*, 81.

¹⁴² Neil Shumsky, *Homelessness: A Documentary and Resource Guide*, 271.

¹⁴³ Robert Rosenheck, Ellen Bassuk, and Amy Salomon, “Special Populations of Homeless Americans,” *Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homeless Research*, ed. By Linda B. Fosburg and Deborah L. Dennis. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Interagency Council on the Homeless, 1999, in *Homelessness: A Documentary and Resource Guide*, 283.

The assertion that lack of "political will" prevented an adequate response to American homelessness appeared true. With no concrete efforts to follow through with the original policy platform commitments of expanded affordable housing or a more coordinated strategy, advocates and the homeless alike had little reason to expect widespread policy changes after a decade of consistent status quo approach. Just as rhetoric of adequate emergency relief had failed to materialize under Reagan and likewise urban economic opportunity under Kemp, the Clintonian promise for a streamlined attack on the crosscutting issue of American homelessness never followed through. In its place, decentralized relief continued, retreating yet again from any federal provision of affordable housing. In fact, Clinton-era housing policies had by and large catered to the needs of the private market, ultimately lowering the stock of available affordable housing by essentially replacing existing lower income housing with more lucrative higher income housing. Overall, the rhetoric of increased access to affordable housing never materialized, and relief prevailed over prevention. As far as the Clinton administration was concerned, homelessness continued to exist as a stand-alone experience of extremely deviant poverty, in which income vulnerability seemed to play little part.

Summary and Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, the most durable approach to homelessness from 1980-1996 denied the need for a federal commitment to providing adequate access to affordable housing for low-income Americans, and subsequently to the homeless. The genesis of the McKinney Act in 1987 resulted in a policy heavy on emergency relief and scant in federal strategies of prevention. Reauthorizations of the act since its passing have fundamentally retained these methods of emergency aid, while actual implementation of the required fund allotments has continuously fallen short.

While analytical approaches to homelessness did transform significantly throughout each administration, policies on the ground consistently committed to a decentralized, locally administered, privately funded and primarily relief-driven effort to alleviate homelessness. Rhetorically, each administration emphasized the ability of the private sector to more adequately provide resources for the homeless, in lieu of what advocates most commonly called for: a strong federal commitment to subsidizing and increasing the stock of affordable housing. In reality, private initiatives seeking to address the burgeoning problem glossed over the structural analyses that both academics and advocates had assigned as the major causes of the crisis.

Reagan's administration made history by passing the first federal act – albeit reluctantly – to at least acknowledge homelessness as a national issue. However, the act served largely as a symbolic gesture to address homelessness in name only, and instead served to extend Reagan-era emphases on locality and non-state solutions to what was essentially deemed an individual problem. The act committed primarily to emergency aid, and as advocates later pointed out, barely lived up to promises of funding for rehabilitation of unused buildings and shelter support. President Reagan's preferences for a volunteerist state as the ideal source of social provision

situated these proposed solutions in local relief for the national problem. As later manifestations of homeless provision would demonstrate, this formula for assistance profoundly endured.

Leadership of HUD Secretary Kemp under the Bush administration shifted the focus from accusations of personal choice or state-led deinstitutionalization to a more urban-centered understanding of American poverty in general, but continued to emphasize the private sector as main source of provision for the urban poor and homeless. While inner city destitution formed the foremost analytical framing of homelessness, actually implemented policies mostly reauthorized McKinney funding for localities rather than deregulation toward needed private investment. These rhetorical commitments to market-based strategies for homeless alleviation, situated in the preexisting preoccupation with the urban "underclass," rarely materialized, unlike the widespread extensions of McKinney Act programming, which continued as the most reliable form of homeless relief. Additionally, the leadership of Secretary Kemp maintained the previous administration's stalwart resistance to increased federal spending on housing as an adequate solution to the problem.

The federal posture continuously denied public provision of affordable housing as a solution, and further ignored other safety net policies - like welfare - as relevant to the phenomenon. Even in the Clinton presidency, when agency experts took an unprecedented analytical stance toward a comprehensive approach and acknowledged the inadequacies of public housing and welfare, ultimate policy implementation instead prioritized the same McKinney programs of emergency relief. Later Section 8 provisions and HOPE VI policies, in addition to welfare reform in 1996, defunded both the public provision of affordable housing and the social safety net, and collectively destabilized what advocates considered critical to the affordability of housing and eradication of homelessness. Taken together, Clinton's aggregate

policies toward the homeless reified policy inertia set up by McKinney a decade earlier, which focused primarily on strategies of emergency assistance to decentralized localities in lieu of preventative policies of income and affordable housing provision.

In conclusion, the policy inertia set into motion during the 1980s proved difficult to move away from in later administrations, which ultimately maintained decentralized, locally administered, privately funded and primarily relief-driven efforts to discuss and address American homelessness. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act stands as a testament to the incredible legislative and advocacy effort of many individuals, who demanded that the federal government take accountability for an increasingly desperate – and stigmatized – population. These calls to action forced a reluctant government into policy creation, and even with the stubborn resistance to implement required funding, established the precedent that the government had some responsibility to its most economically disenfranchised. Later framings of the issue in terms of the urban “underclass” only reified the existing notion that private initiatives, irrelevant to public responsibility, could and should be held responsible. While the Clinton administration did employ some sense of accountability for homelessness, the wholesale decrease in federal funding for low-income housing, paired with the assault on income assistance via welfare reform, sent the message that the homeless remained a population of their own, apart from the necessity of safety-net provision endemic to mainstream American poverty. All in all, the McKinney has stood alone as the foremost conception of a federal response to American homelessness. Contemporary approaches by the administrative powers that be will decide whether to maintain this routine emergency response, or embrace an alternative reconsideration of the systemic – and increasingly threatened – programs capable of preventing the descent of those most economically vulnerable into homelessness.

Epilogue: Contested Understandings of Contemporary Homelessness

Plenty of critics – both inside and out of the political system – have continuously questioned the relief-only response to homelessness, and opposed its continued implementation. In 1992, then senator Al Gore from Tennessee acknowledged the well intended, but ultimately insufficient, provisions outlined in the renewed McKinney Act:

“(McKinney) is an essential first step toward establishing a national agenda for action to eradicate homelessness in America...No one in this body should believe that the legislation we begin considering today is anything more than a first step towards reversing the record increase in homelessness.”¹⁴⁴

Opposition to status quo policies in homeless provision has always existed alongside the profound inertia of the McKinney Act. Additionally however, continuing stigmatizations of the American poor in general have made progress toward more comprehensive strategies difficult.

Attacks on the Homeless

Federal legislation toward the homeless, as far as this thesis is concerned, has largely reinforced notions of homelessness as an extreme condition, either disconnected from the necessities of welfare or affordable housing, or further as the result of personal deviance. Throughout major cities in the United States, the public engaged in its own backlash against local homeless populations, staging anti-homeless rallies and widespread support for their criminalization in public spaces. Demonstrations in Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica and New York vocalized a frustrated resentment toward the visible occupation of the homeless in the public space, and sought to ban their presence in transit stations, shanty-towns and busy streets.¹⁴⁵ States nationwide also increasingly sought to disgorge their municipalities of the general benefits often instrumental in providing aid to single people not in families that qualify

¹⁴⁴ National Coalition for the Homeless, “Ending Homelessness: Policy Recommendations for the Clinton Administration” (January 1993: Washington, DC), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Wagner, *Confronting Homelessness*, 123-129.

for AFDC.¹⁴⁶ Just as states like Massachusetts, Michigan, California, Illinois, Ohio and New Jersey were eliminating general assistance, recipients of this aid increasingly experienced inability to pay rent.¹⁴⁷

Counterattacks for Awareness: Economic Rights as Human Rights

In response to the widespread attitudes responsible for these stigmatizations, and the federal policies mean to enforce them, advocates have initiated widespread campaigns of awareness and policy literacy. Since the passing of the PRWORA, multifarious advocacy campaigns have emerged to engage the general public with American homelessness and its associated discourses. Namely, what has become known as the "Housing First" Movement has continued to emphasize lack in stock of affordable housing as the primary systemic cause of homelessness, and that increased access to affordability forms the best solution.¹⁴⁸ Premier advocacy groups today, like the 100K Homes Campaign, coalesce to declare permanent housing as the only lasting solution to prevent homelessness.¹⁴⁹

These movements have positioned housing into the public homelessness discussion as a preventative strategy, alongside the prevailing focus on emergency aid, hunger and shelter strategies of response. Despite the 1949 Housing Act's stated goal for a decent home for every American family, advocates like Maria Foscarinis continue to assert that the movement most deeply committed to this principle has found itself alienated from a sincere federal assessment of its own housing approach.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 141.

¹⁴⁸ Shumsky, *Homelessness*, 346.

¹⁴⁹ 100,000 Homes Campaign, "Ending Homelessness Manifesto", <http://100khomes.org/read-the-manifesto/housing-first> (accessed 2 March 2013).

¹⁵⁰ Katz, *The Underclass Debate*, 123.

Foscarinis continues to assert true systemic change in several poverty policies as the step to prevent and ultimately end homelessness in the United States. Taking the Housing Act's promise a step further, Foscarinis advocates for policy change to make decent and affordable housing a human right. She asserts that a paradigm shift that takes economic rights seriously can better address economic justice to mobilize effective poverty policy.¹⁵¹

Homelessness Beyond Housing

Advocates today know that most critically, homelessness is not an issue of housing policy alone. Though fundamentally important, housing policy interacts with a confluence of others that affect poor Americans. Barriers to welfare benefits, low wages and others interact with the low availability of affordable housing to constrain accessibility to homeownership. As Foscarinis succinctly asserts, affordable housing has a dual approach: one of adequate supply and the other of benefit provision adequate to offset the constraints of a low wage.¹⁵² Only when we fully consider the interaction of these policies in perpetuating poverty and limiting access to homeownership, Foscarinis contends, can we move forward with effective policy to address it. In addition, consideration of economic rights as essential to civil rights can mobilize policy to frame homelessness as a human rights crisis, and accordingly promote a more serious discussion of potential federal initiatives to counter recent policy trends.

¹⁵¹ National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, "Homelessness and Poverty in America – Real Solutions" http://www.nlchp.org/hapja_solutions.cfm (Accessed 13 March 2013).

¹⁵² National Coalition for the Homeless, "Employment and Homelessness" July 2009, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/employment.html>, (Accessed 13 March 2013).

