

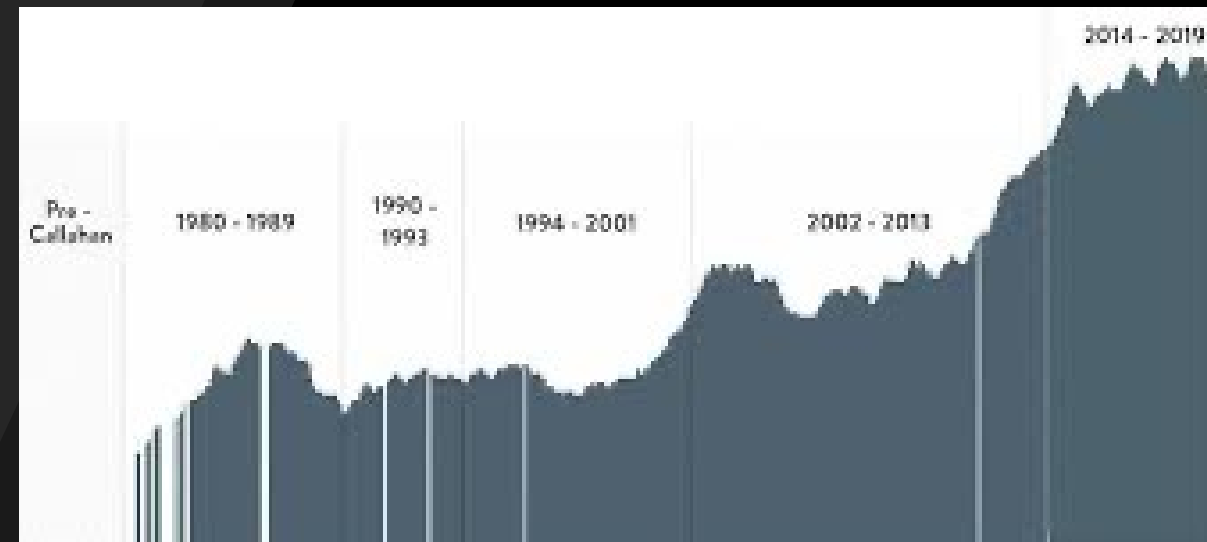
The Homeless Epidemic In America

SOC 3240 - Jaelyn Hill-Rucker



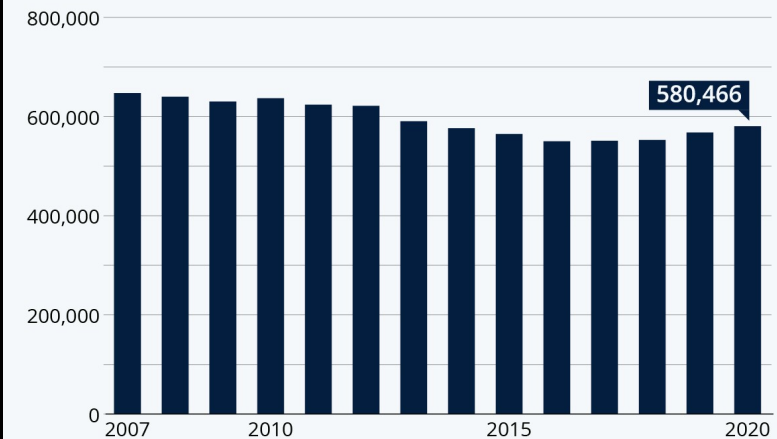
Local Statistics // Homelessness In Our Community (Introduction):

- “In recent years, homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1930s.” *
- Jamaica, Queens (right up the street from Gate 1) is one of the top ten neighborhoods in NYC with the highest homelessness population among families **
- 720,655 Queens residents & 3,124,894 New Yorkers live 200% below the poverty level
 - Note that the overall population in Queens at this time was 2,229,379
 - **IMPORTANT:** Not ALL homeless individuals are drug abusers, former convicts, lazy, or whatever other stereotypes are formed around homelessness
 - A majority of homeless individuals are workers that were laid off, parents that lost custody of their children for not having a sufficient income, families that cannot afford the cost of living, former military members, disabled and lacking resources, recovering addicts, or mentally ill



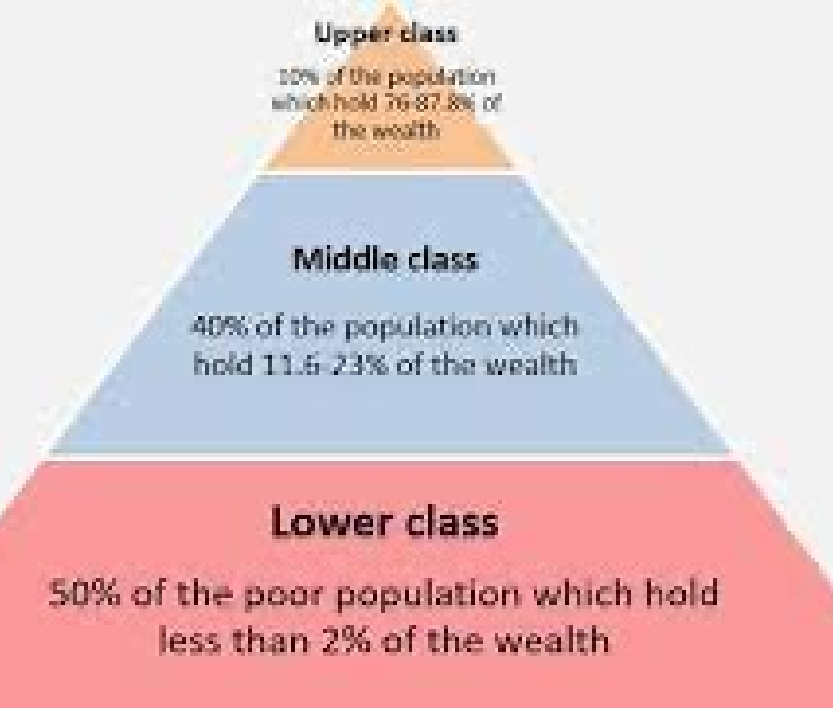
The Development Of America's Homeless Population

Total number of homeless people in the United States by year



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development





The 3 Aspects, and The How, What, and Why of Homelessness:

- 3 Aspects from the Theorists' Perspective(s): Capitalism, Social Class, and Race
- **HOW** Homeless Happens: America is **EXPENSIVE**. No matter where you are, what your job is, and who you may know.
- **WHAT**: Homelessness, by definition, is the state of being unhoused, or lacking adequate, safe, stable housing.
 - Working Americans are finding it harder and harder to support their families and maintain a roof over their heads
- **WHY**: Minimum wage and laborer wages overall are not consistent with rapidly growing inflation rates. The cost of living, requirements of daily life, and time for a family are nearly impossible to maintain today.





What Early Sociological Thinkers Would Say - Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- German activist, social scientist, and thinker
- Marx was born during the Depression period in Germany
 - There were food shortages, restricted healthcare, and displacement as a result of prior war *
- **CAPITALISM:** Before many people experienced the impacts of capitalism, Karl Marx warned of its danger and the threats in society that it could/would create
- A system designed to brutally work most simply for the benefit(s) of a few will never hold up realistically
- “The capitalist can live longer without the worker than can the worker without the capitalist” (Marx, 1932, p. 3).
- The longer that this exploitation is carried out, the worse the conflict between the classes gets - we can see this not just in the homelessness epidemic, but other social issues as well
- **SOCIAL CLASS:** When everything boils down, it will always come to those that have money because of the work of others (the bourgeoisie) and those that actually put in the work (the proletariat)
- It is worthy to note that Marx proposed the creation of one class in his Communist Manifesto. I can't confidently discuss the plausibility of creating one class given our current climate, but I can confidently say that attempting to diminish class lines and offering the advantages that the elite have to the disadvantaged provides immediate relief to this continuous cycle of class conflict



Marx Continued/Quotes From The Theorist:

- SOCIAL CLASS: “The political economist tells us that everything is bought with labor and that capital is nothing but accumulated labor; but at the same time he tells us that the worker, far from being able to buy everything, must sell himself and his humanity.” (Marx, 1932, p. 5)
- “Consequently, a section of the working class falls into beggary or starvation just as necessarily as a section of the middle capitalists falls into the working class”
 - It is within the design of capitalism to continue dumping the “bottom feeders” of each group to the bottom in order to keep the top clear
 - Consider how room, or housing, is always made for the upper middle class and elites, even if it means evicting and pushing out the lower/working class (GENTRIFICATION)
 - Example: Jamaica Avenue is now considered Downtown Jamaica, and high rises are being built in the places of former small businesses left and right
- RACE: “The labor prices of the various kinds of workers show much wider differences than the profits in the various branches in which capital is applied” (Marx, 1932, p. 4)
 - While Marx does not explicitly mention race here, I believe this still applies perfectly to the difference in the labor prices of Black workers compared to White workers



What Early Sociological Thinkers Would Say - W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963)

- American advocate, author, educator, and social scientist
- Homelessness was first considered a national issue in the United States in the 1870s, only a few years after the birth of DuBois*

A few decades later, the Great Depression struck, adding further strain

- One of the first displaced/unhoused peoples were Black

SOCIAL CLASS: According to him, there were two working classes - the White working class and the Black working class; it was not just elites in general like how Marx framed it in his theoretical works

- The White working class would do whatever it takes to remain above the Black working class
- The struggle of White workers is incomparable to the struggle of Black workers
- The struggle of Black workers is a tradition in America
- **CAPITALISM**: The government, the White working class, and centuries of consistent systemic oppression collectively delayed the possibility for Black laborers to achieve any form of an advantage

RACE: Thus, DuBois proclaimed that class has everything to do with race and the two simply cannot be separated (which contradicts Marx's solution of a single class)

- In order to understand the reason for the gap between the working class and the elites, we must understand the gap that was created by race first

In regard to homelessness, DuBois' theory would apply in explaining why the majority of homeless individuals are Black people who once belonged to the working class

- His theory would also explain how Black homeless individuals tend to be the most overlooked/less likely to be rehoused



DuBois' Study on Negro Housing/Quotes From The Theorist:

- The Philadelphia Negro & The Negro Problems of Philadelphia: a social study on how Black people were given specific geographical spaces (slum districts, as DuBois phrases it) to settle in within the city of Philadelphia, which happened to be heavily segregated and came with extremely poor living conditions.
 - **RACE:** There were other groups that faced housing segregation at the time, like Italians and Jews, but DuBois emphasizes that Negroes, and only Negroes, experience(d) a historical, prolonged, systemic type of segregation that manifests into cycles of "crime and labor, ignorance, and poverty" (DuBois, 2007, p.6).
 - DuBois says this cycle was inevitable, as a result of centuries of Black oppression (slavery)
 - Knowledge was withheld from Negro slaves which promotes ignorance (forbidden from reading and writing), their labor went uncompensated for (slaves do not receive wages), and the only method of escape was committing a crime (planning and executing an escape/running away)
 - Today, it is still extremely difficult for Black students to pursue a higher education due to ridiculously high tuition rates, Black laborers are among the lowest paid workers, and most people find relief from these struggles by committing crimes (committing fraud, stealing, etc.)
 - This pattern can still be seen in certain neighborhoods today. Most people of color in New York are housed in underdeveloped areas (similar to the underdeveloped areas of Philly)
 - Heavily minority neighborhoods tend to have the poorest living conditions, least available housing, highest crime rates, and skyrocketing poverty rates
 - It is a continuing issue because we are failing to get to the root of the problem

How Can We Apply Both Despite Their Theoretical Differences:



- Both DuBois and Marx believed in the power of the government as well as its influence over the people it controls
- Legislation shapes the everyday behavior of people
 - We now reserve the power choose the people that create our legislation - a privilege not many people would be entitled to in the times of Marx and DuBois
- If we wish to change something for a prolonged period of time, we should be/embody that change
- In addition, DuBois and Marx believed in the power of the people, especially when in numbers
 - A sense of unity is essential when transforming a longstanding social norm
- In a quest to end homelessness, I would propose the institution of the following piece of legislation...

A Solution for Today: Legislation & Community Sourcing

- The Progressive Bill:
- All American citizens, regardless of age, creed/religion, gender, race, and sexual orientation are entitled to and qualified for the benefits below:
 - Career services – networking with job recruiters to obtain a position
 - This service requires the individual to be at least 15 years of age or older (or according to each state’s minimum working age)
 - With career counselors, individuals will participate in mock interviews that will prepare them for future employment opportunities
 - Cash assistance – a monthly allowance of \$500-\$2,000
 - Allowance amount will vary based on the individual’s number of dependents (how many, if any, children they have, if they are a caregiver, etc.)
 - If an individual does not have access to direct deposit or a permanent address, they can receive their monthly allowance at a local government office
- Community closets – essentially secondhand/thrift stores where people can pick up free casual and professional attire
 - Attire would be donated by local organizations and residents, who can benefit from their donations later when filing taxes
 - Items available at community closets should include bottoms (jeans, shorts, skirts, slacks), intimates (undergarments for both men and women), miscellaneous pieces (backpacks, gloves, hats, scarves) outerwear (coats, jackets, sweaters), tops (blouses, tanks, t-shirts), and shoes (boots, dress shoes, sneakers)
- Community restrooms – recreation centers designed for all citizens to utilize showers and self-sanitization utilities
 - Restrooms will consist of hair dryers, showers, sinks, and toilets
 - Free sanitary products, shampoo and conditioner, soap, and towels will be available
 - Staff will be assigned to each community restroom to ensure the safety of all users





A Solution for Today: Legislation & Community Sourcing

- Community sleep clinics – free private sleeping pods that can be reserved for either a quick nap or spending the night
 - Blankets, pajamas, pillows, and disposable slippers will be provided for free
 - Community sleep clinic pods should undergo thorough sanitization at the end of each reservation to ensure the maintenance of cleanliness
- Counseling services (general therapy, group therapy, life coaching, mental health, support groups, etc.) – free access to certified professionals that will assist in providing any help needed
 - The type of assistance provided by counselors can include permanent housing placement support, addiction counseling, recovering from trauma, etc.
- Federal employment opportunities – job opportunities extended to all American citizens looking for work as federal employees
 - Employment opportunities might include: the maintenance of federal landmarks, working at federally funded shelters, driving a shuttle vehicle, ensuring the beautification of state and federal parks
- Financial literacy, general education, professional training, and technical skills courses – to be available and taught at public libraries throughout the country
 - Mostly afternoon and evening classes will be held to accommodate school and work schedules
 - Examples of possible classes: Budgeting 101, GED Prep, Home Economics, Public Speaking, Resume Writing, SAT Prep etc.
- Food pantries – designated centers for anyone who wishes to pick up fresh produce and non-perishable food items
 - All are invited to take whatever it is they may need
 - Entry for each person will be limited to two visits per week to ensure everyone has equal access
 - These pantries will receive fresh produce from local farms who establish partnerships with the local, state, or federal government
 - Non-perishable donations will be accepted from local organizations and people in exchange for a tax write-off
 - Operating hours should be between 5:00am and 9:00pm
 - There should be staff members on site during all operating hours to maintain organization

A Solution for Today: Legislation & Community Sourcing

- Meals on wheels – mobile meal distribution vehicles to remain at train stations for anyone seeking a hot meal
 - Breakfast to be served from 5:00am to 10:30am
 - Lunch to be served from 11:00am to 4:30pm
 - Dinner to be served from 5:00pm to 12:30am
 - Halal, kosher, vegan, and vegetarian meals will be distributed to accommodate all dietary restrictions
- Shuttle services – free buses and vans responsible for transporting individuals to and from community clinics, closets, showers, classes, and meal sites
 - Buses and vans will run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
 - Specific pick up and drop off locations are to be delegated by state and local officials
- Temporary to permanent housing – temporary loosely supervised residential dorm settings for those who do not wish to go into a shelter
 - Permanent housing details will be discussed and reviewed between housing counselors and the individual
 - Ideal placement in a permanent home would be within a 6-month timeframe
 - Permanent housing costs must be based on income
- Wellness clinics – free medical attention and physical exams regardless of insurance status
 - These clinics will offer immunization and vaccination shots free of charge
 - College students majoring in psychology/sociology/human sciences/biology/pre-med/pharmacy can possibly intern at these clinics for certification and school credit





Why This Works (Conclusion):



- This bill not only demands reform, but requires it, and addresses every aspect of homelessness in one. It also addresses issues and shortcomings in many aspects of social welfare in the United States
- It takes into consideration:
 - Clothing
 - Education gaps,
 - Emotional and mental stability,
 - Financial disadvantage,
 - Food insecurity,
 - Housing,
 - Hygiene,
 - Job recovery,
 - Physical health,
 - Race,
 - Social class,
 - The shortcomings of capitalism,
 - Transportation,
 - & Unemployment

Most social welfare policies developed in the United States are aimed at solving only a portion of the problem, which is why social welfare issues from previous decades still exist in society today, as I am sure W.E.B. DuBois would agree.

Targeting multiple local issues with a single piece of legislation provides actual tangible results that simply talking about it cannot

