

Current Comments

Of Beggars, Bagladies, and Bums

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If you travel enough, you can't fail to encounter beggars of one sort or another. The term "beggar" generally brings forth the image of a rather unsavory individual. But I suspect most people have rather ambiguous feelings about them. It is precisely this ambivalence that professional beggars prey upon. After all, upon encountering a pathetic-looking beggar, most of us at one time or another unconsciously think: "There but for the grace of God go I."¹

When I was about seven years old, my family moved from a ghetto in the East Bronx to what seemed to me like a paradise in the West Bronx. (For our foreign readers, the Bronx, which derives its name from its early Swedish settler Jonas Bronck, is one of New York City's five boroughs.² One linguistic curiosity of this borough is that you never say you live in Bronx, but rather you live in *the* Bronx. Candace Kuhta, the librarian for the Museum of Bronx History, tells me this is because the area is bisected by the Bronx River.³ Formerly, when people referred to this area they referred to the river.)

The part of the West Bronx in which I lived for about ten years had trees, a wonderful public library, and was within walking distance of that mecca of American youth—Yankee Stadium. It was also within walking distance of the Bowery, at least for those beggars and "bums" hungry enough to walk the ten or so miles in search of food. So it was not at all unusual for unemployed men to wander into the better neighbor-

hoods of Manhattan and the Bronx hoping to panhandle some money or obtain some other type of handout. The well-known depression song "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"⁴ isn't easily forgotten by my generation.

My mother was often the prey of these panhandlers and beggars, some of whom were legitimate—and some of whom were not. I'll never forget the time a man in tattered clothing came to our apartment door. (In those days, we were never afraid to open it.) When I opened the door, the stranger said, "I'm hungry. Can you spare a nickel for a cup of coffee?" I went into the kitchen and told my mother. She immediately prepared the fellow an enormous bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich. We put it in a paper bag with a few cookies, which I victoriously handed, with a nickel, to the man. A half hour later I went outside to walk the dog and found the sandwich in the gutter. I was shattered.

Over the years, I've met many other people who were hungry and I have not let my earlier experience blind me to the fact that people often find themselves in desperate circumstances. New York City has always been a magnet for the desperate and destitute. So it's not surprising that you encounter so many characters there. When in New York City, I'm often asked by strangers for money. Whenever possible, I ask if they're hungry, and if they are, I march them into the nearest cafeteria for some food. I can't imagine that anyone goes through life finding food in this sort of

way, but the literature tells me I'm wrong. Some people, in fact, believe that they cannot, or should not, earn a living in socially approved occupations. Others are too ill or socially maladjusted to live any other way. So they beg.

While many people do turn to begging in times of dire financial need, particularly during periods of economic and social upheaval, a few of the beggars you encounter may well be professionals. These are the people who, throughout the ages, have practiced a number of "tricks of the trade" to engender the sympathy, and obtain the money, of gullible and generous folk.

The tactics used by some operators can be quite daring. For example, one fellow I encountered in New York City told me he needed \$2.18 to attend a funeral in Long Island. Passing him later the same evening, I saw an elderly lady give him the money he needed. When I passed the same spot the next day, he was still trying to obtain the money for his alleged trip to Long Island.

Having encountered so many beggars, I've become curious about how they end up on the streets, and how they manage to survive once there. In reviewing the large body of literature on the subject, I was impressed by the fact that they've been around, in one form or another, for thousands of years. Of course their reasons for turning to begging and the methods they use to survive vary from generation to generation and from culture to culture.

Historically, begging has been condoned by most religions. The early Christians believed charity was a means of expiating sin, and the Buddhists considered almsgiving one of the tasks that a would-be Buddha must practice in order to attain enlightenment.^{5,6} In the eleventh century, the practice of begging by monks—popularized by St. Francis of Assisi's order of begging friars—brought "begging into almost the status of a sanctified calling."⁶

During medieval times, secular events such as wars, famines, the cessation of feudal bonds, and the enclosure of land for livestock drove many people to begging. And the Black Death, which swept throughout Europe during the fourteenth century, again added to the beggars' ranks.⁶ Various vagrancy and poor laws were enacted to outlaw begging, but these were largely ineffective, partially because there was no centralized enforcement authority and partially because almsgiving was still considered a Christian virtue. With the sixteenth-century Reformation, however, came a philosophical rejection of almsgiving. The reformers, particularly the Calvinists, believed, "The poor had only themselves to blame for their poverty, and to give to able bodied beggars was to give to one whom God himself would not favor."⁶ (p. 24)

The change of heart accompanying the Reformation was reflected in a number of religious writings that examined the art and moral state of the beggar. Even prior to this period, false beggars were attacked in such classics as the fourteenth-century poem *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*.⁷ One of the most interesting treatises about beggars was the *Liber Vagatorum*, or *The Book of Vagabonds and Beggars*, written by an unknown author about 1509 and released by Martin Luther in 1528.⁸ This book features a list of schemes, such as pretending pregnancy or displaying false handicaps, which are practiced to this day. The book *Narrenschiff*, or *Ship of Fools*,⁹ is a catalog of beggars written by the German satirical poet and lawyer Sebastian Brant during the sixteenth century. A beggar in sixteenth-century Russia is presented as a slightly mad, religiously revered person in the coronation scene of the nineteenth-century opera *Boris Godunov*.¹⁰

During the late eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution added to the beggars' ranks by throwing many people

out of work. Cities grew during this period, providing more anonymity than smaller towns, and became magnets for beggars who, in these dense surroundings, came to develop new and creative methods of begging.

Homelessness, the phrase now used to describe the condition of "bagladies," skid row individuals, street people, and other vagrants, became a major problem in the US after the Civil War. At that time, many soldiers, experienced in foraging for food and shelter, decided they would rather stay on the road than return home. This group eventually merged with the transient workers, or "hobos," of the early twentieth century. They "rode the rails" between jobs, and lived in "jungles" or enclaves of hobos near railroad tracks.¹¹ The term hobo has an uncertain origin and has been in use since the late nineteenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.¹² *Webster's* suggests it may be derived from "ho, boy,"¹³ for the way in which these transients were addressed by their employers. The "navvies" of Canada and the UK and the "swagmen" of Australia, like the hobos of the US, were instrumental in building the railroads and working the mines, cattle ranches, and lumber mills of their respective countries.¹¹

During the winter months, or when out of work, these hobos often lived in the skid row districts in cities, taking odd jobs or living off past wages. The term skid row is actually derived from the skidways, or log roads, used for transporting timber in the forests of the US Pacific Northwest. The term was first used to describe the Seattle area where lumbermen wintered, but came to apply to similar enclaves where single, homeless men went for lodging, food, and entertainment.¹⁴ These hobos were joined on skid row by "tramps," defined as migratory nonworkers, and bums, defined in the US as people who stay in one area without working.⁶

The number of transient workers increased dramatically in the US during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as men and boys, unable to find work in their hometowns, took to the road after jobs. During this period many people also stayed at home, becoming the apple sellers and panhandlers I remember from my youth. Interestingly, a 1937 article in *Literary Digest* correlates the severity of the depression with the number of panhandlers arrested in New York City during the 1930s. Arrests totaled 4,942 in 1932, dropping to 2,136 in 1936, probably because the US was just beginning to pull itself out of the depression at this point.¹⁵ In this same city, a number of organizations were established to isolate the really needy beggar from the professional beggar who simply didn't want to work. In a scheme fairly reminiscent of one proposed by Louis Paulian, in his 1897 classic *The Beggars of Paris*,¹⁶ the Welfare Council of New York City investigated individuals picked up for mendicancy and provided honest victims of misfortune with reference cards to appropriate social service agencies. Individuals rearrested for begging were often given drastic sentences.¹⁷

The number of hobos and tramps in the US has declined throughout the twentieth century. Who, then, are the homeless people of the late twentieth century, and why are the agencies and institutions established for their relief unsuccessful?

A popular myth characterizes these people as "drunken bums," possibly even professional people brought to ruin by alcohol or drug addiction. This myth is clearly untrue. Several researchers conclude that only about one third of the people on skid row are severe alcoholics.^{18,19} So, while alcohol may be instrumental in putting a person on the street, and drinking in small groups called "bottle gangs" is a major form of social interaction among skid row peo-

ple,²⁰ a number of other factors are also responsible for the existence of skid row individuals, street people, beggars, and the like. Summarizing what numerous social workers and sociologists have found, M.E. Hombs, of the Washington, DC-based Community for Creative Non-Violence, cites such causes as: "1. Double-digit inflation, especially as it impacts on fixed incomes; 2. Unemployment, particularly among minority youth, where the rate is between 40 and 60 per cent; 3. The abysmal failure of the nation's mental health system; 4. The widespread shortage of affordable housing; 5. The breakdown of traditional social structures, relationships and responsibilities; 6. The effects of inflation, recession and depression, coupled with the increasingly conservative mood in the country and a corresponding decline in social spending."²¹

A number of different categories of individuals fall within the general framework of the homeless. In general, they have no economic, political, or personal power. Barbara I. Larew, Jewish Family Service of Tidewater, Norfolk, Virginia, reports that they often "have health problems, which include emotional and physical disfigurement, poor hygiene, and the need for periods of hospitalization, detoxification, and emergency medical services; incarcerations for petty thievery and disorderly, deviant behavior is also common. Their death rate is high...."²²

Skid row men, and sometimes women, are people who often live in the skid row areas of cities, working at such unskilled jobs as dishwashing and busing tables. They are generally the oldest group identified and may include retired individuals who can't live on pensions.²³ Street people are usually younger transients. J. Baumohl and H. Miller, University of California, suggest that this group, although they generally don't work, is better off educationally than skid row residents, having attended high

school and sometimes a few years of college.²⁴

Another group of homeless people is comprised of individuals released from mental institutions under the Community Mental Health Centers Act (CMHCA) of 1963.²⁵ This act was designed to "mainstream" mentally handicapped individuals into communities, but the counseling and outpatient services provided under the act have been inadequate, and many of the patients released now live on the streets. Many of these former patients have become the bagladies known to American city dwellers. These are women who wander the streets and subway and railway stations, wearing several layers of clothing and carting around their belongings in shopping bags.²⁶

Skid row people are the most extensively researched of the homeless population, possibly because they are the easiest to identify, and possibly because they represent the most stable and long-standing group of homeless people. In addition, a number of US cities have undergone urban renewal in the past 30 years and the skid row area has become a major target in their efforts to remove urban blight.

In a recent study, skid row is characterized as an area near a city's central business district, where land is being held for future expansion.²³ Skid row people migrate to this area because it is close to the downtown industrial and commercial jobs requiring unskilled labor, as well as near cheap transportation, and the "main stem," or area used for panhandling. The commercial and residential enterprises in this area include "cubicle" hotels—often buildings divided into small rooms by thin walls and chicken wire—cheap traditional hotels, rooming houses, bars, rescue missions, cheap restaurants, liquor stores, fee-paid blood donor agencies, day labor agencies, and, sometimes, social service agencies, police stations, and

health clinics.²³ Skid rows are found in the US, Canada, and to a lesser extent the UK.¹⁹

A number of sociologists studying the skid row population have lived among these people, sleeping, eating, and working with them. Theodore Caplow, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, used such an approach in his studies of transience in the late-1930s,²⁷ and of the skid row populations of New York City²⁸ and Minneapolis.²⁹ In reading such studies, you get a fairly vivid picture of the skid row person during the period the study was made. For example, Caplow describes the transients of the 1930s as "mature but young," and says they became transients "because of unemployment, the desire to travel, family disorganization, petty crime, trouble with a woman, ill health. By far the most frequent reasons given are economic pressure and wanderlust."²⁷

Samuel Wallace, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in his classic report on the Minneapolis study²⁹ directed by Caplow, *Skid Row as a Way of Life*,³⁰ says that the skid row individual of the 1960s was drawn from three basic groups, and finds that wanderlust played less of a role among these people than among the population Caplow studied. Most, he says, were men who had been forced to travel a great deal due to their occupations as migratory workers, lumberjacks, soldiers, and seamen. A second group consisted of welfare clients—people "displaced" and "dispossessed" by unfortunate circumstances. Finally, he described the third group as "aficionados" (devotees)—"the wanderers, the alcoholics, the petty criminals, the fringe members of society at large."³⁰ (p. 165)

During the 1960s, D.J. Bogue, University of Chicago, also identified a number of distinct groups of skid row individuals, including aged poor, alcoholic derelicts, physically disabled people on public assistance, destitute men

out of work and without funds, and bums and "mission stiff" who are capable of working but prefer to live off missions.³¹ According to B.A. Lee, Vanderbilt University, the majority of skid row people are now older, low status, unattached men.³²

Although urban renewal and the declining need for unskilled labor brought about a 58 percent decrease in the size of skid rows in 41 US cities from 1950 to 1970,³¹⁻³³ most sociologists agree that the number of skid row-like individuals has not declined. They theorize that a number of smaller skid rows may be developing as small pockets in working-class and commercial districts, that the people who occupied these areas have become dispersed throughout the general population, or even that new skid row areas may be developing to replace those converted for higher income use through urban redevelopment grants.²³

Since skid rows are declining as geographic entities, many sociologists have adopted the concept of skid row as a particular status or life-style.²³ To be a skid row person is to be poor, to live without family, to live in extremely low-cost housing, to have a great probability of coming to police attention for behavior related to alcohol use, to be vulnerable to victimization—such as having Social Security checks stolen—and to have superficial social relationships.²³

Most skid row people hold short-term jobs, usually obtained through day labor agencies in skid row areas, and panhandle (a word that may stem from the positioning of the forearm when extended for begging¹³) when out of work. L.U. Blumberg, Temple University, notes that most skid row individuals have reached a point of destitution due to some final event in their lives, such as loss of a job, death of a family member, or rejection by their family.²³

A new group of skid row people may be emerging, according to one study.²³ This group is loosely labeled as street

people, and is comprised of younger individuals, including more women than are found on skid row. These people, though of a higher social class than skid row people, are often unskilled, disoriented, lame, or addicted. Since they often stop in their travels in university towns, they are often confused with the hippies of the late-1960s and early-1970s. To this day, street people live in such former hippie enclaves as Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco; Berkeley, California; and Boulder, Colorado. Street people rarely work, panhandle for spare change, and, according to Steven P. Segal, University of California, Berkeley, and Baumohl, "hang out on the street, using the sidewalks and parks of the city as the living rooms most cannot afford...."³⁴ In touring street people areas in 1974, Blumberg found most were white, with the majority of nonwhites being American Indians.²³

In a study of Berkeley-area street people,³⁵ Segal and his colleagues found that 22 percent of the young vagrants participating in a food project had been hospitalized for psychological problems. In this study of "space cases," as they're called by other street people, the authors found that such street people usually don't carry through on treatment plans due to their transience, negative attitudes toward agencies, and, often, the inappropriateness of services offered. As with street people in general, they are often on the move to escape commitments and obligations of close relationships, and to leave behind failures and pejorative social judgments. Like most homeless people, they are proud of their independence and anonymity and are reluctant to provide the type of personal information social service agencies require. Additionally, they do not have a home address where they can be reached, and usually are not willing to go through all the bureaucrat-

ic red tape required when dealing with these agencies.³⁵

Another group which Blumberg identifies as pre-skid row are categorized as people in flight. Focusing on a sample of people who used the services of the Travelers Aid Society of Philadelphia (an agency that provides social services to transients), Blumberg characterized these people as older than the street people. About half the people questioned were in flight from prosecution for legal offenses such as vagrancy, panhandling, and public drunkenness.²³

The most visible portion of the homeless people in the US are former inmates of mental hospitals, whom I mentioned earlier. This country's CMHCA,²⁵ passed in response to then-President John F. Kennedy's call for community care for the mentally ill, was intended to "mainstream" these mentally ill patients into "halfway" houses, their homes, or supervised apartments. From there, they were expected to receive treatment in small clinics or community mental health centers set up under the act. At the time this act was passed, Kennedy predicted the number of patients under custodial care would drop by at least 50 percent. In fact, between 1963 and 1977 the number of patients in state and county hospitals declined from 505,000 to 159,000.³⁶ Unfortunately, the problems of the released inmates have been too complex and numerous for the health centers set up under this act. People have opposed the establishment of centers and halfway houses in their neighborhoods. Patients who might have been institutionalized are in and out of hospitals, never staying long enough to bring their illnesses under control. In sum, funding has been inadequate to meet the needs of the mentally ill. D. Wickenden writes in *New Republic* that, as a result of this act, "The hallucinating schizophrenic who was straightjacketed in the

hospital at the turn of the century may now be wandering down Broadway, panhandling, rummaging through garbage cans, and muttering weird incantations."³⁶

In a comprehensive study of street people in New York City, Columbia University graduate students Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper conclude that poor mental health makes it difficult for these people to meet the requirements of social service agencies.³⁷ Similarly, Lee reports that the CMHCA is responsible for the growing number of mentally ill residents of skid row.³² Like the space cases described by Segal and colleagues,³⁵ these people are unable to provide the information and show up at the meetings required by social service agencies. Additionally, many prefer living on the streets to the deplorable and confining conditions of public shelters.

In the preface of A.M. Rousseau's grippingly illustrated book *Shopping Bag Ladies*,²⁶ A.K. Shulman suggests that this practice of deinstitutionalizing, or "dumping," mentally ill people may account for many of the bagladies found in the US. The term baglady originated in state mental institutions, where patients would cart their belongings around in paper bags for fear other patients would steal them.

While many of these bagladies are probably former mental patients, there are others who have landed on the streets through loss of their husbands, families, or parents. They simply may have no place else to go. Alcoholism and drug addiction may also be responsible for their condition, as may fires, crimes, evictions, illness, and the loss of a job because of old age. These women, at least 4,000 of whom are believed to live in New York City, sometimes wash and sleep in public restrooms. They sometimes show up in hospitals, or missions and shelters, when ill, the weather is very bad, or they need a good meal.

Apparently, many of these women avoid the flophouses and cheap hotels frequented by skid row men due to the high rate of crime in these lodgings. They feel safer on the street. Much of their bizarre behavior is caused by lack of sleep, since they are often awakened and asked to move when they stop to rest.²⁶

Of course, homeless people can still be found throughout the world. Nels Anderson, University of New Brunswick, Canada, points out that as long as you have a competitive society, "some percentage of the people have got to be at the bottom. There's no escaping that."³⁸ So, while they may represent the "bottom level culture" of all societies, their reasons for being homeless and the methods they use to survive differ with the social, economic, and philosophical climate of their countries.⁶ For example, several recent articles on beggars in India,³⁹ Mexico,⁴⁰ and Ireland⁴¹ discuss the effect industrialization has had upon beggars. Describing a scenario reminiscent of that in England during the Industrial Revolution, these authors address the migration of laborers and beggars to industrial centers, the land reforms that displace people from their homes and rural livelihoods, and the effects social reorganization has upon beggary. As with beggars in more industrialized countries, many of these beggars have an aversion to social agencies, preferring instead panhandling and other forms of begging that give them control over their incomes and lives.

While beggars in most countries appeal to the donor's pity or gullibility, beggars in Sri Lanka and other Buddhist and Hindu countries still use the age-old appeal to religious sentiment. In his review of the beggars of Sri Lanka, Nandasena Ratnapala, Sri Jayawardenapura University, points out that there is still not as much social stigma attached to begging there as in the West.⁵ The Bud-

dhist system of karma, in which good acts ensure future well-being, still influences people in several countries to give alms to the poor. Although it's also against the law in the USSR and Eastern Europe, beggars are seen on the suburban trains and in cities in those countries. Many of these people are, in fact, alcoholics.⁴²

Poverty and addiction, or some other condition over which a person has no control, appear to be responsible for most cases of homelessness in the US.²³ Working-, middle-, and upper-class people are generally insulated from the streets by money and personal relationships. "Friends, employers, unions, kin and charity organizations are more likely to be able and willing to support retirees, the socially inept and addicts who are not destitute," Blumberg notes. "But the poorer one is, the more likely that an event which would be taken care of easily by the wealthy or manageably by the middle class will eventuate in Skid Row or Skid Row-like residence."²³

As I mentioned before, although social services are available to these people, less than 50 percent are believed to receive government assistance.²¹ Often they are too disoriented to deal with a bureaucratic maze. According to Segal and colleagues, "In their relations with community service institutions, they expect to be hassled, discredited and delayed, in the end receiving nothing, and perhaps losing their freedom."³⁵ Often the money they do receive from these agencies is inadequate. Rather than living in the unsafe residences they can afford, they simply live on the streets. Similarly, many will spend what money they do receive on food, rather than rent. Larew points out that most social services are "geared toward either religious evangelism or rehabilitation, with an emphasis on gaining employable skills." These two goals, she explains, "conflict with the transients' inability to look beyond the next meal or bed."²²

This acute need for systems for caring for the mentally ill, as well as for funds for doing so, is reflected in the fact that one of the most highly cited documents we retrieved in researching this essay was a book by Segal and Uri Aviram, Tel Aviv University, reviewing the conditions at community mental health centers in California and offering suggestions for improving care.⁴³

The majority of research that has been done on homeless people has focused largely on alcoholism and skid row. Not surprisingly, the only "hot" research front identified in clustering our *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (*SSCI*[®])⁴⁴ data base that is relevant is exclusively concerned with the effect of the Uniform Alcoholism and Intoxication Treatment Act⁴⁵ on this population. This model act, which has been passed by more than half the states in the US, decriminalized public intoxication and, under funding provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), provided detoxification programs for public inebriates. The core cited documents in this cluster^{18,31} proved quite useful in researching this essay, as did the citing documents. We updated this cluster by doing a co-citation search and found additional documents that were used in this essay. Most readers will probably recognize the concept of co-citation clustering from my earlier essays on the subject,^{46,47} as well as from my description of our new *ISI/BIO MED*[™]⁴⁸ system which can be searched by these clusters. Co-citation searching involves entering the names of two authors, or articles, and retrieving only papers that have cited both of these authors or papers. All the source documents we retrieved by doing a co-citation search on the two papers that originally comprised the core of the alcoholism cluster are shown in Table 1. Individuals who would like to try a co-citation search through *SCISEARCH*[®] or *Social SCI-*

Table 1: Documents co-citing Bahr and Bogue in *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[®]), 1969-1981.

- Laufer W S. The vocational interests of homeless, unemployed men.
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- Lee B A. The disappearance of skid row. *Urban Aff. Quart.* 16(1):81-107, 1980.
- Lee B A. Residential mobility on skid row: disaffiliation, powerlessness, and decision making.
Demography 15:285-300, 1978.
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J. Stud. Alcohol 37:382-92, 1976.
- Room R. Comments on "Uniform Alcoholism and Intoxication Treatment Act."
J. Stud. Alcohol 37:113-44, 1976.
- Rooney J F. Employment and social integration among the skid row population.
Sociol. Inq. 47:109-17, 1977.
- WARD J. Towards being down without being out: self-help on skid row.
Aust. J. Soc. Issues 12:255-65, 1977.

SEARCH[®] should consult a paper on this subject by Howard D. White, Drexel University.⁴⁹

Two books that may be of interest to readers who would like to further investigate homelessness are *Liquor and Poverty*²³ by Blumberg, Shipley, and Barsky and *Vagrancy, Alcoholism and Social Control*¹⁹ by Archard. The 1978 Blumberg book has been cited about ten times according to SSCI, and the Archard book five times since its publication in 1979. *The Hobo*,¹¹ written by Anderson in 1923, is considered the earliest sociological study of this population, and is still highly cited, having been cited 70 times since 1966. Although it is clearly impossible to identify here all the important literature in this field, some of the classic documents identified by our reviewers include Wallace's *Skid Row as a Way of Life*,³⁰ Bogue's *Skid Row in American Cities*,³¹ and the ethnographic study *Stations of the Lost*⁵⁰ by Jacquelyn Wiseman, University of California, San Diego. All these works have been extensively cited—50 to 75 times each. Our citation searches on these books yielded a number of articles that proved useful in writing this essay.

An interesting unpublished manuscript, written by Blumberg for a fest-

schrift for Anderson on his ninety-fifth birthday, assesses the influence *The Hobo* has had on a number of publications as well as on the direction research on homelessness has taken since 1923. Blumberg considers both explicit citations to *The Hobo* and references to this book in the text of these publications.⁵¹

While the academic literature—particularly during the 1960s and 1970s when urban renewal grants were being made—includes many studies of the skid row individual, papers on other homeless people are noticeably lacking. Beggars, in particular, seem to be absent from recent studies, although sociologists point out that many homeless people turn to panhandling when out of a job, in need of a drink, or unable to obtain help from social service agencies.

Most of the US research on homelessness has been funded by such organizations as the National Institute for Mental Health, NIAAA, and local agencies concerned with urban renewal. The authors of articles on homeless people are affiliated with universities throughout the world, although universities such as Temple in Philadelphia, Washington in Seattle, McGill in Montreal, Northeastern in Boston, Rutgers in New Jersey, and University of California in Berkeley

predominate. Since most of the people who do this type of research are sociologists, many of whom are actually focusing on alcoholism, the literature in this field appears primarily in sociology and alcoholism journals. These include *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, *Social Problems*, *Social Forces*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Sociology and Social Research*, all of which are covered in *SSCI* and *Current Contents*[®]/*Social & Behavioral Sciences (CC*[®]/*S&BS)*. The *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* is also covered in *Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]), and in the *Life Sciences* and *Clinical Practice* editions of *CC*. When writing my earlier essay on alcoholism, I found *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* to be one of the most important journals reporting alcohol research.⁵²

In addition to sociologists, many of these publications were authored by social workers from shelters and missions for the homeless. The best-known of these are the Travelers Aid Society, Goodwill Industries, and the Salvation Army (known as the "Willy" and "Sally" by those who take shelter there). Although a few government agencies do run shelters for these people, the majority are sponsored by religious organizations.

The homeless person lives in appalling conditions and it doesn't look like

his life will be getting better in the near future. Massive cuts made in the US mental health and social services budgets preclude any additional aid to these people. And cuts in funding for social science research will, of course, mean that their plight won't be investigated. Unfortunately, the economic conditions that brought about these cuts in the US federal budget are prevalent throughout the world. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the homeless in other countries face a more positive future. So, while I would like to end this essay on a more optimistic note, I must conclude that, until money becomes available for their support and for research on their situation, the problems of the homeless will continue. Compared to the total population, their numbers are small. It seems inevitable that our complex technological society must produce some people who can't cope—many temporarily and others forever. Those who provide them with help should indeed be encouraged. After all, there are so few of them and so many of us.

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