

**Suburban Secrets:**  
**Homelessness in Washington County Public Parks**

Erin Scheibe

May 2015

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Degree  
in Environmental Studies, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the faculty and staff of the Environmental Studies program, especially my advisor Jim Proctor, for all the guidance and encouragement these past four years. Thank you to Asa and Lauren for providing some much needed reassurance and peer review throughout the thesis process. Finally, special thank you to my parents for supporting all my decisions and encouraging me to pursue my dreams.

## **Suburban Secrets: Homelessness in Washington County Public Parks**

### **Abstract**

In this paper I analyze the actions and attitudes of criminalization of the homeless by American cities. I am centering my attention on Washington County, the suburban communities neighboring Portland, Oregon. In Washington County, homelessness has risen in the last decade, but the social services have struggled to keep up with the greater number of people in need. If there is not enough room at the local shelters, a homeless person may have few other options than to illegally set up camp in a public park. I investigate what has led to the increase in homelessness and unauthorized camping in Washington County and how these communities and city officials have responded. In addition, I explore how illegal camping activity may impact the ecology of parks and surrounding watersheds. Methods for my research include analysis of data and statistics, interviews, and a review of relevant laws, news articles, and literature.

## Being Homeless

Rising housing costs, lower wages, and the breakdown of social safety nets have contributed to a growing number of people worldwide becoming impoverished and, in many cases, homeless. Privatization, urbanization, and corporatism are some of the global forces contributing to the problem.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Commission has reported that the number of homeless or insecurely sheltered people continues to grow in line with indicators of greater global economic inequality.<sup>2</sup> Competition among cities is intensifying to generate employment and attract businesses, but this comes at the cost to essential services provided to citizens. For example, in large cities, competition for space results in privatization of public areas and gentrification that creates ghettos of exclusion, while economically neglected cities are faced with limited revenue to deal with unemployment and the need to upgrade public services.<sup>3</sup>

We currently view income disparity and homelessness within a globalized economic context, though homeless people, previously referred to as vagabonds, have been identified since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Throughout history, vagabonds have been seen as “indeterminate” and without a “right place” to live because they do not exist in any fixed social or spatial locations.<sup>5</sup>

Bauman describes:

The vagabond does not know how long he will stay where he is now, and more often than not it will not be for him to decide when the stay will come to an end. Once on the move again, he sets his destinations as he goes as he reads the road signs, but even then he cannot be sure whether he will stop, and for how long, at the next station. What he does know is that more likely than not the stopover will be but temporary.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Amster, Randall. 2008. *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of*

<sup>2</sup> Raghavan, Chakravarthi. 2002. “Homeless, Precariously Sheltered, Continue to Grow in Number.” *Third World Economics*, March 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barak, Gregg. 1991. *Gimme Shelter: A Social History of Homelessness in Contemporary America*. New York, NY: Praeger, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 240.

Today, homeless people are often referred to as transients due to the fact that they do not stay or work in one place for very long. Their transitory qualities, as well as the fact that they are defined as being people without a “right place,” may aid the unease many feel toward the homeless, and perhaps they are an uncomfortable reminder of our own social or economic vulnerabilities.<sup>7</sup>

The root cause of and pathways into homelessness are often debated. Most argue that structural causes, such as public policies, unemployment, discrimination of those with mental illness, and housing markets, set up conditions for homelessness. Others claim homelessness is due to individual factors, such as lack of responsibility, and may even be a personal lifestyle choice.<sup>8</sup> The dominant view of the homeless largely presented by the media “is one of abjection, pathology, and/or victimization – in other words, the homeless are generally viewed as a problem in need of a solution.”<sup>9</sup> Critiques of portrayal of the homeless as a problem, something in need of repair or removal, have noted that this may deprive people of rights and autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

Homeless people are often forced to choose between a limited range of unappealing options, so denying them the capacity to exercise choice may deny them the ability to construct their identities as full citizens, and, conceivably, humans. Being without a home is argued to be an abnormal—and therefore inhuman—state to begin with because humans are regarded as place-oriented beings that require personal space that affords them privacy and safety.<sup>11</sup> For this

---

<sup>7</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Belcher, John R., and Bruce R. Deforge. 2012. “Social Stigma and Homelessness: The Limits of Social Change.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22 (8), 929.

<sup>9</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, Don. 1995. “The End of Public Space? People’s Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1), 183.

<sup>11</sup> Fitzpatrick, Kevin, and Mark La Gory. 2000. *Unhealthy Places: The Ecology of Risk in the Urban Landscape*. London: GBR: Routledge, 137.

reason, considering the humanity of homeless people means to “acknowledge the autonomy that homeless individuals exercise in a world of frighteningly limited and inadequate choices.”<sup>12</sup> A homeless life holds difficult choices to maintain survival, such as securing food, shelter, work, healthcare, and sanitation. One will often have to construct shelter from anything available. For example, in the case of the “river-dwellers” in Tempe, Arizona, camp tents, tarps, wood, rocks, and even sunbaked mud is used to construct shelter.<sup>13</sup>

One of the major difficulties the homeless face is the unavailability of toilets, and “public toilets have become the real frontline of the city’s war on the homeless.”<sup>14</sup> The homeless occupy spaces and use facilities that are equally open to everyone regardless of status, yet these public areas are shrinking in cities due to gentrification, redevelopment, and privatization.<sup>15</sup>

Considering these forces, it may be that “public space has long been a place of exclusion, no matter how much democratic ideology would like to argue otherwise.”<sup>16</sup> Public space is used as an accessible platform for communication and representation, but this interpretation of the commons as truly inclusive is often challenged.

It is only in public space that the homeless can represent themselves as a genuine part of “the public,” and this is part of the reason why these areas are so important to them.<sup>17</sup> Unlike poor people with homes, who are essentially ghettoized from dominant culture, the homeless

---

<sup>12</sup> Daniels, Wes. 1997. “Derelicts, Recurring Misfortune, Economic Hard Times and Lifestyle Choices: Judicial Images of Homeless Litigants and Implications for Legal Advocates.” *Buffalo Law Review* 45 (3), 733.

<sup>13</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, Mike. 1992. “‘Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space’.” In *Variations on a Theme Park*, Sorkin. New York: Hill and Wang, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, “The End of Public Space? People’s Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy,” 116.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

remain in plain sight, reminding society of their presence. This visibility makes them “subject to the most direct forms of official exclusion and public persecution.”<sup>18</sup> Hence, the ways in which many cities have decided to confront the homeless occupying public spaces has resulted in the criminalization of them.

Many events in the United States, especially in larger cities, provide evidence that those in extreme poverty are often punished for being poor, though being homeless or needing public assistance is not a crime.<sup>19</sup> For example, in New York City, food stamp applicants must submit fingerprints in order to apply for food stamps, often deterring the most needy from even applying.<sup>20</sup> In Seattle, city ordinances prohibit sitting or sleeping on sidewalks as well as camping in public parks. The city claims that the ordinances are not targeting homeless people, but unwanted private behaviors, yet “punishing people for performing private acts in public when they lack private places of their own situates homeless people in a highly vulnerable position of being everywhere while permitted to be nowhere.”<sup>21</sup>

Seattle is known as a politically liberal city but intolerance for urban camping suggests social bias against the poor. Anti-homeless ordinances are multiplying with supporters suggesting that laws restricting conduct in public spaces are for health, safety, economic, and aesthetic concerns.<sup>22</sup> Anatole France articulates:

---

<sup>18</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Camp-Yeakey, Carol. 2012. *Living on the Boundaries : Urban Marginality in National and International Contexts*. Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 606.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 606.

<sup>21</sup> Dooling, Sarah. 2009. “Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (3), 622.

<sup>22</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 99.

Now, by virtue of laws prohibiting conduct such as sitting or sleeping, an entire category of people is made ‘criminal’ for acts committed before the law existed. The lesson? If you want to eliminate a particular social class or subculture or deviant group, locate some behavior that is largely unique to that group and make it illegal. Or, pass laws under the guise of universal applicability that plainly impact only the target community.<sup>23</sup>

With all of this in mind, criminalization of the performance of essential life tasks is illogical and likely to fail because there is no amount of illegalization that could prevent people from sleeping. Nonetheless, criminalization of homelessness is still on the rise: “Denver City Council votes 9-4 to ban homeless camping” (Meyer 2012); “Portland camping: Mayor Charlie Hales tells police to enforce anti-camping law” (Schmidt 2013); “Homeless People Can’t Sit On Sidewalks In More Than Half Of U.S. Cities” (Goldberg 2014); “Calif. laws increasingly target homeless, sparking calls for Right to Rest” (Lewis 2015). Maybe the most famous example would be the “Safer Cities Initiative” in Los Angeles, implemented in 2006. During the first year of the program, approximately 12,000 citations had been issued for minor pedestrian offenses that often resulted in fines, which lead to arrest warrants due to the homeless’ inability to pay the fines.<sup>24</sup> The city spent around \$6 million on law enforcement and only 21% of the homeless in Los Angeles are considered “sheltered,” which is among the lowest in the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Los Angeles’ “Safer Cities Initiative” was originally called the “Homeless Reduction Strategy,” more antagonizing and specific than the newer name. A more ambiguous name may have allowed proponents of criminalization leeway to make “moral arguments... developed from

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 88. Anatole France also clarifies: “The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under the bridges.”

<sup>24</sup> Blasi, Gary. 2007. “Policing Our Way Out of Homelessness?: The First Year of the Safer Cities Initiative on Skid Row”. The UCLA School of Law Fact Investigation Clinic, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 28.



every point of view: health concerns, child safety, etc.”<sup>26</sup> A 2010 survey of the consequently criminalized homeless and poor people on L.A.’s Skid Row found:

Over half had been arrested in the past year because of the initiative, resulting in loss of housing, social services, and jobs. Nearly half said they had been physically or verbally abused by police while receiving citations for non-violent behavior like jaywalking, drinking in public, and sleeping on the sidewalk.<sup>27</sup>

Documents for the initiative crafted messages that indicated the problem is “lawlessness” not “homelessness.” Yet “there was no discussion at the meetings about lawlessness other than violations that inevitably accompany homelessness in the absence of adequate shelter or other facilities.”<sup>28</sup> Like Los Angeles, many city and county governments respond to the growing number of homeless people by authorizing the police to enact sweeps of homeless campgrounds and enforce laws against behaviors characteristic of homelessness.

In this paper I will focus my attention on Washington County, which contains the suburban communities neighboring Portland, Oregon. I investigate what has led to the increase in homelessness and unauthorized camping in public parks in Washington County and how these communities and their governments have responded. To some degree, by analyzing the situation in Washington County, I am able to draw a better understanding of what is happening in cities across the United States, if not also around the world.

---

<sup>26</sup> Blasi, “Policing Our Way Out of Homelessness?: The First Year of the Safer Cities Initiative”, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Timmons, Heather. 2015. “A Fatal Police Shooting Shows How the ‘Safer Cities’ Initiative in Los Angeles Failed Skid Row.” *Quartz*. March 2, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Blasi, “Policing Our Way Out of Homelessness?: The First Year of the Safer Cities Initiative”, 29.

## Homelessness in Washington County

As Anna Griffin points out in her *Oregonian* article titled “Struggling in the suburbs” published on February 7, 2015, the recent recession may play a large role in the rise in homelessness in Washington County. She interviews Steve Rudman, a former employee of Multnomah County’s public housing agency, who reveals that prior to the recession the policy for dealing with homelessness in the suburbs was to send the homeless to Portland where there are more services available. Now there are too many people in need. Ultimately, after the spike in homelessness post-recession, the lack of places to send people seems to reveal cracks in the social-service safety net.<sup>29</sup>

The 2013 *Washington County Issues of Poverty* report published by the Community Action program states, “For many struggling families a small amount of assistance at the right time can prevent them from falling any further behind and needing more assistance later on. The social safety net is not able to keep all who need help from falling further behind. There is not enough assistance for all who are in need.”<sup>30</sup> The Community Action Emergency Rent Assistance program serves an average of 44 households each month in Washington County, which is only about 10% of those that seek assistance. An average of 67 new families sought emergency shelter each month, and the family shelter network only has the capacity to serve 17 families at any point in time.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Washington County Department of Housing Services homeless count data summary, in 2014 there were 1,011 homeless individuals in Washington County with about

---

<sup>29</sup> Griffin, Anna. 2015. “Struggling in the Suburbs.” *Oregonian*, February 7.

<sup>30</sup> Community Action. 2013. *Washington County Issues of Poverty*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

54% (544) of those individuals being literally homeless.<sup>32</sup> This count adheres to the definition of homelessness by the Federal HEARTH Act, which includes people living in a temporary living arrangement such as a shelter or people with a residence that is not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation. The federal *Point-in-Time Homeless Count* does not include people who are temporarily sharing the housing of other people, otherwise known as “doubling up,” which the state of Oregon would normally define as being homeless.<sup>33</sup>

In Washington County, a worker needs to earn \$17.54/hour to afford<sup>34</sup> a two-bedroom apartment at the fair market rate of \$912 per month.<sup>35</sup> Yet, 47% of all jobs (142,355) in Washington County are in industries that do not pay wages sufficient to afford this housing.<sup>36</sup> In the *2013 Homeless Assessment Report*, inability to pay rent or being underemployed/unemployed accounted for 53% of the reported households’ reasons for homelessness in Washington County.<sup>37</sup> Figure 1 shows that the number of people experiencing homelessness within Washington County, Oregon increased from 787 to 1,153 people between 2005 and 2013 (a 46.5% increase). As a sign of partial recovery, this homeless count decreased from a high of 1,383 people in 2010 to 1,153 in 2013 (a 16.6% decrease).<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Washington County Department of Housing Services. 2014. *Washington County, Oregon Point-in-Time Homeless Count*.

<sup>33</sup> Washington County Department of Housing Services. 2013. *2013 Homeless Assessment Report*.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2015. “Affordable Housing.”

Affordable housing is defined as housing that costs no more than 30% of household gross monthly income.

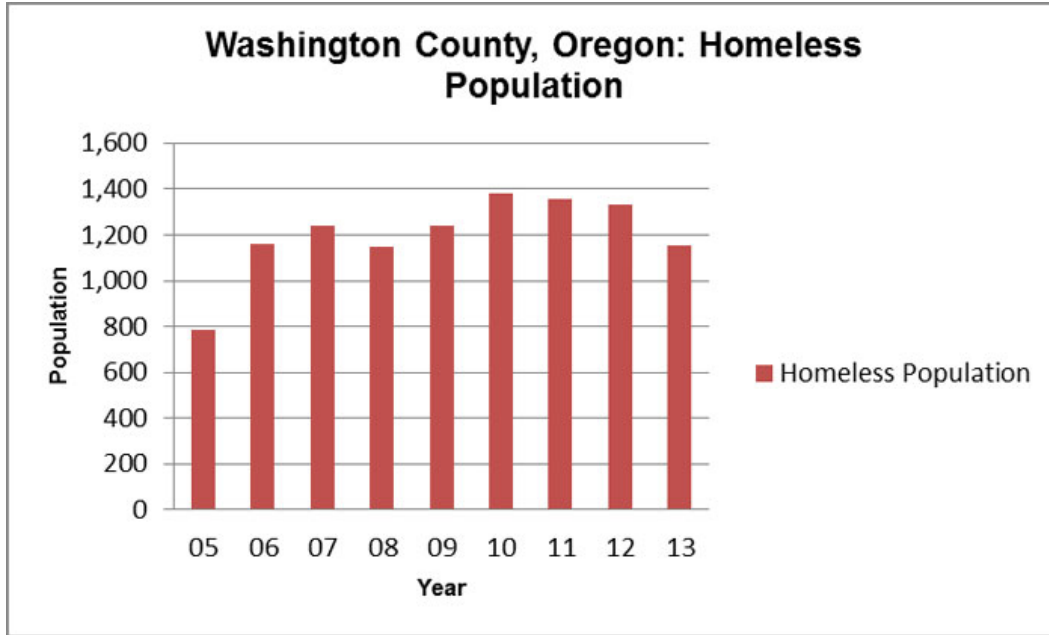
<sup>35</sup> Community Action. 2013. *Washington County Issues of Poverty*.

<sup>36</sup> State of Oregon Employment Department. 2015. “Median Wage by Job Classification Data.”

<sup>37</sup> Washington County Department of Housing Services. 2013. *2013 Homeless Assessment Report*.

<sup>38</sup> City of Beaverton Planning Division. 2015. “Homelessness in Beaverton, OR.”

**Figure 1**



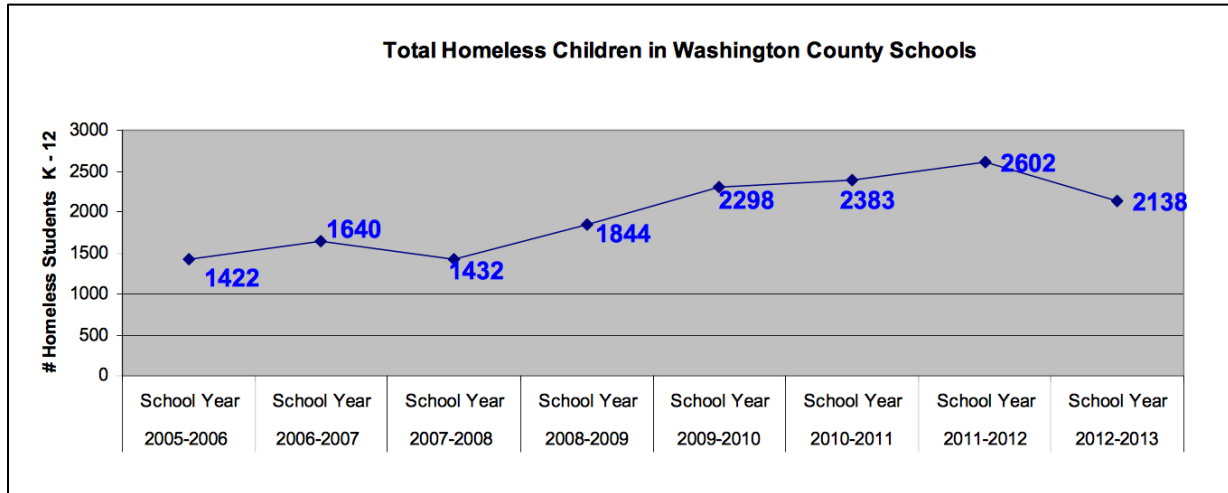
**Source: City of Beaverton Planning Division**

Another important indicator of the post-recession boom in homelessness in Washington County is the increase in homeless students, many of whom attend school in Beaverton School District. Beaverton serves more homeless students than any other school district in the state of Oregon.<sup>39</sup> As shown in Figure 2, there has been an increase from 1,422 homeless students to 2,138 homeless students between the 2005-2006 to the 2012-2013 school year (a 50% increase). Better reporting of homeless students in these districts may be part of the reason for this increase. These counts now include students whose families are “doubling up” and temporarily sharing the housing of other people.

---

<sup>39</sup> Owen, Wendy. 2010. “Beaverton School District Home to Largest Number of Homeless Students in the State Last Year.” *Oregonian*, September 24.

**Figure 2**



**Source: Washington County Department of Housing Services**

In another recent article of Anna Griffin’s multi-part series on homelessness in Portland, she writes, “Homelessness has become a fact of life throughout much of the metro area, one that will exist and expand until rents drop and either incomes or the stock of affordable housing supply rise. But where should homeless people be?”<sup>40</sup> That is the question that comes up time and time again when addressing the issue of homelessness, by police when fewer services are available for people to be transferred, and by lawmakers who must choose between seeming lawless and being anti-homeless.

Laws against camping on streets or in public parks are slightly different between each city in Washington County but they all take generally the same position. These include ordinances against camping, sleeping on seats or benches, and placing objects in public property that may interfere with free passage, as seen in Title 7: Public Peace, Safety, and Morals in the

<sup>40</sup> Griffin, Anna. 2015. “Where Should Homeless People Be?” *Oregonian*, February 7.

City of Tigard Municipal Code.<sup>41</sup> These laws against camping and sleeping in public do not specifically mention homeless people. However, because these are activities usually only homeless people perform in public, they seem to target this population. In my next section I address possible reasons for why homeless people choose to camp in public parks and how this produces an array of challenges for the public, lawmakers, parks managers, natural habitats, and the homeless people themselves.

## **Homelessness as an Urban Parks Issue**

Although illegal, homeless people continue to set up camps in public green spaces. In an interview with Bruce Barbarasch, the Superintendent of Natural Resources & Trails Management for the Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District in Washington County, he discusses,

I don't think the people who are camping in the parks want to be here any more than we want them here, but I think there are some broader societal issues at play in that people who may need services are forced into the margins which are often on the edges of natural areas.<sup>42</sup>

Barbarasch reasons that the lack of services available to the homeless largely contributes to their decision to camp in parks. However, what drives the homeless to camp specifically in parks over any other location? It's possible the relative safety and privacy of these places may influence their decision, but also the ability to be more independent.

A homeless Seattle resident claims he sets up camp to “heal his body, connect to nature and develop friendships.”<sup>43</sup> Sarah Dooling, an Urban Design and Planning professor who now teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, found through her research that autonomy, freedom, and belonging were some of the notions that the homeless claim are most important to them

---

<sup>41</sup> City of Tigard. 2015. “Municipal Code Titles 1-17.”

<sup>42</sup> Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Dooling, “Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (3): 627.

while residing in Seattle public green spaces. Despite these opinions, camping outside is not necessarily a general preference, especially in very wet winter conditions in the Pacific Northwest. Yet, over many other dwelling options the homeless could select (i.e., shelters which are often spaces of crime, constant vigilance, and religious agendas), urban green spaces may be the most appealing.<sup>44</sup>

Parks are valued by homeless people because they provide dwellings that give a sense of relief and refuge from the chaotic public sphere, but these spaces are also valued by the housed community for the same exact reasons.<sup>45</sup> Urban residents cherish public green spaces for leisure, to get away from the city, and to be nearer to more natural ecosystems and habitat for wildlife. And unlike a freeway underpass, housed citizens want to actually spend time in a city park. It follows that a housed person would not expect that homeless people, an unwanted facet of the urban city environment, could be camping there out of sight, or worse, in plain view. Discomforted park users lead to complaints, but when park crews or police force homeless campers to move, they may just be shifting a problem rather than actually solving it.

In the Springwater Corridor in Northeast Portland, usually only one or two people occupy the unauthorized campsites that police clear out, although campsites as large as 50 people have been removed.<sup>46</sup> A Johnson Creek camp even had a vegetable garden. During a cleanup on Kelly Butte, the park crews needed almost 1,000 trash bags to get rid of all of the effects and garbage.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Washington County public parks, Barbarasch claims “the amount of space [the homeless] take up in my parks, and we manage about one hundred different sites, is relatively

---

<sup>44</sup> Dooling, “Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (3): 627.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 622.

<sup>46</sup> Griffin, Anna. 2014. “As Springwater Corridor Shooting Shows, Homelessness on the Rise in East Portland.” *Oregonian*, June 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

modest” yet he believes in parts of Portland, such as Forest Park, the numbers of homeless are much higher.<sup>48</sup> He states:

There are enough numbers of people in that area that I think we’re probably seeing ecological shifts. I think we’re seeing some pollution, both human-waste related and garbage related. Those situations are really beyond the scale of what parks people can do and it’s unfair. Unfair for everyone. Unfair for the people who don’t have anywhere to be because they don’t have the services and unfair for staff who are trying to provide a good park experience for the majority of users.<sup>49</sup>

When asked about his greatest concerns regarding homeless camping Barbarasch says he tends to worry more from the perspective of fire safety and “from the safety perspective of staff or visitors who get into homeless messes. Sometimes there are needles and drug paraphernalia. Those are the bigger concerns.”<sup>50</sup> Barbarasch also worries that in some cases the homeless may not know what’s around them when they are camping. They may get into poison oak, stinging nettle or a hazardous tree area, which normally the park district doesn’t need to worry about if people are just using the trail in a traditional way.

There is also concern for crime, with some suggesting that setting up camp is not just about squatting somewhere, but also about figuring out how to obtain a livelihood, perhaps through car smash and grabs and other crimes that defy the notion that homeless people are not criminals. According to Portland Police Officer Jason Lemons,

Homelessness equals car prowls, graffiti, vandalism, all those little petty crimes that make a lot of people feel unsafe. That's why you can't just leave people alone to camp. Everyone who camps isn't an issue. Probably most people aren't. But the more people you have out here doing that, the more likely you are to have neighbors notice problems.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Griffin, Anna. 2014. “As Springwater Corridor Shooting Shows, Homelessness on the Rise in East Portland.” *Oregonian*, June 14.



What Lemons seems to deduce is the idea that disorder and crime are linked. Social psychologists and police officers have found that “if a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, street crimes flourish in spaces where disorderly behavior is unconstrained. This “broken windows” theory can be applied to the homeless camping problem in Portland and Washington County by thinking of the first homeless camper as the first broken window. Police officers may see this homeless camper, although not necessarily a criminal, as the first sign of disorder, therefore needing to be controlled before more follow.

Barbarasch disagrees to some extent: “I think graffiti is a lot like that but... I guess for us [in Washington County], I feel like a lot of the times the people who are camping out are just in a bad place in life. I don’t think they are as strategic as the ‘broken windows’ theory implies. I think they see somewhere and they say, ‘Well that looks good,’ and they are not so worried about the risks.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on further to explain,

There definitely are places that are kind of known, if you will, as being tolerant. For example, there is Department of Transportation land where I’m pretty sure the rumor has gone out among the homeless community that the DOT is just too busy to enforce the rules there. And so you’ll see homeless encampments multiply or at least stay stable in those areas. Whereas in places like park district property, they know that they will be asked to leave if they are camped there.<sup>54</sup>

Whether or not the homeless are strategic when choosing a site to camp, Barbarasch seems to be saying that a lack of law enforcement, such as on DOT land, results in more homeless dwellings. In his parks, where the laws are more strictly applied, the homeless stay away.

---

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, James, and George Kelling. 1982. “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety.” *The Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>53</sup> Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Currently, when the homeless are asked to leave a park in Washington County, they are usually referred to social services. If the police are involved, there is a requirement that social services get involved. Barbarasch claims that the judgment of parks patrol staff comes into play when police aren't called:

They decide if the person looks like someone who could really use the resource or if the person is someone who comes back multiple times. It's like, 'Oh well there's Bob again. Bob just chooses to live outside and not go to a program.' In those cases I think they just write the exclusion, tell them the rules, and ask them to please not come back.<sup>55</sup>

Barbarasch believes the best practice should be to explain to campers why they can't be there and to give them resources. This is a particularly important perspective because, without other options, homeless people are more likely to just move on to a different campsite, which is not serving anyone.

## **Homelessness as an Urban Watershed Issue**

Even when homeless camps are out of view of the public, their camping activity may have an impact on the ecology of public parks. For example, the presence of informal trails leads to significant changes in plant communities that favor invasive and ruderal species.<sup>56</sup> Setting up camp in public parks often mirrors the activity of people walking on informal trails, and arguably camping may have an even more severe impact on plant species. One additional concern of unauthorized camping regards the increase of trash and waste. For the past three years, the Golden Dragons paddling team has cleaned up the east bank of the Willamette River roughly between the Sellwood Bridge and the Ross Island Bridge in the area known as the Holgate

---

<sup>55</sup> Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Van Winkle, Jill. 2014. "Informal Trails and the Spread of Invasive Species in Urban Natural Areas: Spatial Analysis of Informal Trails and Their Effects on Understory Plant Communities in Forest Park, Portland, Oregon". Graduate Thesis, Portland, Oregon: Portland State University.

Channel.<sup>57</sup> On Saturday, Oct. 4, 2014, thinking they were well equipped for the job, they discovered the riverbank covered with more trash than the group had ever seen.<sup>58</sup>

Portland's homeless population appears to be migrating from the urban center to places where they can camp, such as this riverbank. Oregonian journalist Adrianna Rodriguez reveals,

Some are moving to better avoid the scrutiny of law enforcement. Others just can't find space in the city's overflowing shelters. The situation also helps illustrate that homelessness goes beyond societal issues. It can result in environmental issues, as well.<sup>59</sup>

Tony Bernal, director of funding and public policy at Transition Projects, claims that what the paddling team found was related to the fact that the wait for men's shelters can be around 12 to 14 weeks with about 500 people on the waiting lists at any given time. Enid Griffin, a Dragons paddler, realizes that with "a couple of rain storms, the river is going to rise and all that is going to wash right in the ocean. That's a huge thing."<sup>60</sup> The paddlers, with the help of the Portland Bureau of Parks & Recreation, hauled off the bags by Friday, Oct. 10. The parks bureau was involved because the Springwater Trail, running along the riverbank next the channel, is under its jurisdiction. The parks bureau spokesman, Mark Ross, says they plan to ask campers to leave voluntarily or they will be given written exclusions from the park; however, he says, "it's like a game of whack-a-mole. You ask a person to leave and then they come back. It's unfortunately a very prevalent problem."<sup>61</sup>

It's clear that the impacts that illegal camping activity has on the ecology of parks may be greater in areas with important water systems that can haul away pollutants. For example, human

---

<sup>57</sup> Rodriguez, Adrianna. 2014. "Growth in Illegal Camping Along Willamette River Sparks Frustration Among Environmentalists." *Oregonian*, October 14.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

and other unsanitary waste may be polluting creeks or rivers, which carry water into hydrological systems that have sensitive species. The largest homeless encampment in San Jose, CA, called “The Jungle,” believed to have held between 200 to 300 people, was removed this past December 2014 because of large amounts of human waste found polluting creeks that flow into the San Francisco Bay.<sup>62</sup>

Public officials were under pressure from neighbors and regional water quality regulators to shut down the homeless camp that stretches 68 acres along the Coyote Creek in San Jose.<sup>63</sup> The city spent \$4 million working with nonprofit partners to house as many homeless as possible, but many of the homeless suffer from addiction and mental illness which makes it harder for them to secure long term housing, especially in a location with some of the highest housing rates.<sup>64</sup> The median rent in San Jose as of October 2014 was \$2,934/month, and for the wider San Jose metropolitan area, it was \$3,163/month, which is up 16% in one year.<sup>65</sup> Hilliard Martinez, a resident of The Jungle on and off for the past 16 years states, “This is very devastating. This is my home. Now I'll have to lay down on the street, somewhere outside. I couldn't bring out all of my stuff. The rest will end up in the dumpsters, I guess. It's terrible. It's terrible for all of us.”<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Emmons, Mark. 2014. “The Jungle: San Jose Shuts Notorious Homeless Encampment.” *San Jose Mercury News (California)*, December 4, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Grady, Barbara. 2014. “Few Options for Homeless as San Jose Clears Camp.” *The New York Times*, December 5, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Emmons, Mark. 2014. “The Jungle: San Jose Shuts Notorious Homeless Encampment.” *San Jose Mercury News (California)*, December 4, 2014.

## Broader Implications, Suggestions, and Further Research

The homeless and activists for the homeless struggle against the “sanitization of space, the criminalization of status, and the societal forces that render people vulnerable in the first instance.”<sup>67</sup> The homeless are often targets of laws about urban camping, sidewalk sitting, and bench sleeping, as there is an element to those laws which prevents the homeless from occupying many public spaces at all, including parks, disallowing their opportunity to socially protest.

Unfortunately, the National Coalition for the Homeless explain:

Criminalization efforts tear our focus away from long term, permanent solutions in order to fight for the right of people who are homeless to simply exist. Our greatest victories in combating these new civil rights attacks will only secure an already inhumane status quo. With this in mind, we must build a locally-based national movement to protect the civil rights of people who are homeless that can seamlessly—even simultaneously—work to end homelessness once these discriminatory threats are eliminated.<sup>68</sup>

It is distressing, in Don Mitchell’s words, that “homeless people and their advocates are driven, in the current urban context, to argue for the right to sleep in public, to lie on sidewalks, to beg on the streets, or to shit in alleys.”<sup>69</sup>

As to why activities such as sleeping outdoors, taking up space in libraries, and panhandling are a few of the main concerns of activists: they are the limited freedoms which can still be fought for after larger rights to housing or wealth are barred.<sup>70</sup> The issues of homelessness, gentrification, privatization, and urbanization are local matters that are globally connected through origins and implications. Amster discusses:

---

<sup>67</sup> Amster, *Lost in Space: The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 170.

<sup>68</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless. 2015. “Criminalization of Homelessness.”

<sup>69</sup> Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford, 209.

<sup>70</sup> Baron, Jane B. 2004. *Homelessness as a Property Problem*. SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 569843. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 286.

As the capitalist system globalizes, it simultaneously localizes in concrete municipal regulations, development norms, and enforcement regimes. The net effect is a global order composed of homogeneous local terrains, linked literally through technologies of communication and conveyance, materially through shared economic schemes, and ideologically through values of ‘civility’ and consumption.<sup>71</sup>

Cities that may seem very different have shown that dominant trends have emerged in their handling of homelessness, which, in the end, is all linked to similar systems of spatial and social control.

And although most argue that structural causes, such as rising housing prices and unemployment, set up conditions for homelessness, some still question whether or not homelessness is sometimes due to individual factors. Many of those cited in this paper suggest that sleeping outside might, at least in some cases, be a choice. Surely someone who has no other option than to sleep outside should not be criminalized, yet if the ecological impact of camping is low, and there is a person who truly wants to live outside, then should they have the right to do so? Maybe this is a call for further scientific research, especially when we think about scale. When asked about homeless campers who live in boats or camp along the banks of the Willamette River, Bruce Barbarasch asks, “How much [waste] are they really putting in the river compared to the volume? From a scientific perspective it’s probably not that much compared to, say, the people who have bad septic systems.”<sup>72</sup> Certainly, in the case of “The Jungle” in San Jose, the scale of pollution was much greater, but at what point should water quality regulators be concerned?

As for short-term solutions, some of the homeless campers Dooling interviewed for her research suggest the creation of a program that would allow them to remain in parks while

---

<sup>71</sup> Amster, Randall. 2008. *Lost in Space : The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*, 220-221.

<sup>72</sup> Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.

working to remove nonnative vegetation. She says, “Workers would receive a living wage as employees of the parks department while implementing one of the parks department’s major ecological agenda items in urban green spaces.”<sup>73</sup> To some extent this participation would help the homeless start to establish an income, as well as evidence that they are productive inhabitants of public parks. However, this solution is insufficient in the long-term. Longer lasting solutions seem to point to increasing funding for homeless assistance programs, restructuring affordable housing systems, and addressing the economic inequalities that push so many people into homelessness in the first place.

---

<sup>73</sup> Dooling, Sarah, “Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City,” 634.

## Bibliography

- Amster, Randall. 2008. *Lost in Space: The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*. El Paso, TX, USA: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.
- Barak, Gregg. 1991. *Gimme Shelter: A Social History of Homelessness in Contemporary America*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Barak, Gregg, and Robert M. Bohm. 1989. "The Crimes of the Homeless or the Crime of Homelessness? On the Dialectics of Criminalization, Decriminalization, and Victimization." *Contemporary Crises* 13 (3): 275–88.
- Barbarasch, Bruce. Interview by Erin Scheibe. April 6th, 2015.
- Baron, Jane B. 2004. *Homelessness as a Property Problem*. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Belcher, John R., and Bruce R. Deforge. 2012. "Social Stigma and Homelessness: The Limits of Social Change." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22 (8): 929–46.
- Blasi, Gary. 2007. "Policing Our Way Out of Homelessness?: The First Year of the Safer Cities Initiative on Skid Row". The UCLA School of Law Fact Investigation Clinic.
- Camp-Yeakey, Carol. 2012. *Living on the Boundaries : Urban Marginality in National and International Contexts*. Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- City of Beaverton Planning Division. 2015. "Homelessness in Beaverton, OR."
- City of Tigard. 2015. "Municipal Code Titles 1-17."
- Community Action. 2013. *Washington County Issues of Poverty*.
- Daniels, Wes. 1997. "Derelicts, Recurring Misfortune, Economic Hard Times and Lifestyle Choices: Judicial Images of Homeless Litigants and Implications for Legal Advocates." *Buffalo Law Review* 45 (3): 687–733.
- Davis, Mike. 1992. "'Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space'." In *Variations on a Theme Park*, Sorkin. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Dooling, Sarah. 2009. "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (3): 621–39.
- Emmons, Mark. 2014. "The Jungle: San Jose Shuts Notorious Homeless Encampment." *San Jose Mercury News (California)*, December 4.



- Ferrell, Jeff. 2005. *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking, and Street Scavenging*. New York: NYU Press.
- Fitzpatrick, Kevin, and Mark La Gory. 2000. *Unhealthy Places: The Ecology of Risk in the Urban Landscape*. London: GBR: Routledge.
- Goldberg, Eleanor. 2014. "Homeless People Can't Sit On Sidewalks In More Than Half Of U.S. Cities." *The Huffington Post*, July 16.
- Grady, Barbara. 2014. "Few Options for Homeless as San Jose Clears Camp." *The New York Times*, December 5.
- Griffin, Anna. 2014. "As Springwater Corridor Shooting Shows, Homelessness on the Rise in East Portland." *Oregonian*, June 14.
- Griffin, Anna. 2015. "Struggling in the Suburbs." *Oregonian*, February 7.
- Griffin, Anna. 2015. "Where Should Homeless People Be?" *Oregonian*, February 7.
- Harter, Lynn M., Charlene Berquist, B. Scott Titsworth, David Novak, and Tod Brokaw. 2005. "The Structuring of Invisibility Among the Hidden Homeless: The Politics of Space, Stigma, and Identity Construction." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 33 (4): 305–27.
- Howard, Ella. 2013. *Politics and Culture in Modern America: Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Kelling, George L. 1999. *Broken Windows and Police Discretion*. Research Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.
- Kohn, Margaret. 2004. *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*. New York: Routledge.
- Kulp, Cyndy. 2000. "Panhandling Beggars for Solutions." *Denver Post*, January 16.
- Lewis, Renee. 2015. "Calif. Laws Increasingly Target Homeless, Sparking Calls for Right to Rest." *Al Jazeera America*, February 18.
- Macdonald, Heather. 2007. "The Reclamation of Skid Row." *City Journal*.
- Meyer, Jeremy. 2012. "Denver City Council Votes 9-4 to Ban Homeless Camping." *The Denver Post*, May 14.
- Mitchell, Don. 1995. "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1): 108.

- Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford.
- National Coalition for the Homeless. 2015. "Criminalization of Homelessness."
- Owen, Wendy. 2010. "Beaverton School District Home to Largest Number of Homeless Students in the State Last Year." *Oregonian*, September 24.
- Raghavan, Chakravarthi. 2002. "Homeless, Precariously Sheltered, Continue to Grow in Number." *Third World Economics*, March 16.
- Rodriguez, Adrianna. 2014. "Growth in Illegal Camping Along Willamette River Sparks Frustration Among Environmentalists." *Oregonian*, October 14.
- Schmidt, Brad. 2013. "Portland Camping: Mayor Charlie Hales Tells Police to Enforce Anti-camping Law." *Oregonian*, August 8.
- State of Oregon Employment Department. 2015. "Median Wage by Job Classification Data."
- Tafari, Jack. 2005. "The Ongoing Transformation of Dignity Village." *Street Spirit*.
- Timmons, Heather. 2015. "A Fatal Police Shooting Shows How the 'Safer Cities' Initiative in Los Angeles Failed Skid Row." *Quartz*. March 2.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2015. "Affordable Housing."
- Van Winkle, Jill. 2014. "Informal Trails and the Spread of Invasive Species in Urban Natural Areas: Spatial Analysis of Informal Trails and Their Effects on Understory Plant Communities in Forest Park, Portland, Oregon". Graduate Thesis, Portland, Oregon: Portland State University.
- Waldron, Jeremy. 1991. "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom." *UCLA Law Review* 39: 295.
- Washington County Department of Housing Services. 2013. *2013 Homeless Assessment Report*.
- Washington County Department of Housing Services. 2014. *Washington County, Oregon Point-in-Time Homeless Count*.
- Wilson, James, and George Kelling. 1982. "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety." *The Atlantic Monthly*.