

## Chapter 2

### The Construction of Trash and Skid Row

*Indigent transients heading for California today were warned by H. A. Carleton, director of the Federal Transient Service, "to stay away from California."*

*Carleton declared they would be sent back to their home States on arrival here due to closing of transient relief shelters and barring of Works Progress Administration work relief in the State to all transients registered after August 1.*

*"California is carrying approximately 7 percent of the entire national relief load, one of the heaviest of any State in the Union," said Carleton. "A large part of this load was occasioned by thousands of penniless families from other States who have literally overrun California."*

*Carleton estimated the transient influx at 1,000 a day.*

Los Angeles Herald-Express, August 24, 1935

*"A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being."*

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*

In 1984, my aunt Hazel, with her husband John, opened up a group home in South Central Los Angeles. My aunt was the head academic counselor for Locke High School in Watts for over 20 years, and John had just recently established a Baptist church with himself in the role of pastor. They stated they wanted to do "the good work" in the community. The 1980s represented a dramatic increase in child welfare cases and foster care placements in California due to a growing number of incarcerated mothers and an increased exposure of children to substance abuse.<sup>1</sup> A majority of these children were African-American males between the ages

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<sup>1</sup> Chipungu, SS, and TB Bent-Goodley. "Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care." National Center for Biotechnology Information. Winter 2004. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15072019>.

of 6 and 17. These were the children that were unadoptable. In its 20 years of operation, the group home housed no less than 10 boys a day with many staying for over 5 years.

The group home became a family business with nearly every one of my aunts and uncles working there in some capacity in its 20-year operation and it being the location for all Thanksgiving dinners. I spent most of my childhood afternoons here playing with the boys. It was an eight-bedroom labyrinth with a large staircase in the back of the house that led to a door that let you out right in the heart of Crenshaw. It was the place that I got into my first fight, where I learned to cook, where I met my first friends, brothers Anthony and Jimmy. From the ages of 4 to 9, these were my best friends. A pair of half-brothers, they were placed together in any foster home they went to. Their mother and father were both addicted to crack cocaine and were arrested for possession. They were in the child welfare system since they were 2 years old. Jimmy was named after Anthony's father and attempted to be protective of his brother.

I remember times when they were forced to fight on that back staircase by the other boys. There, fists flinging into each other's skin, their limbs vibrated on contact with each bounce off the stairs. They would hug each other after every fight, their bodies in close contact as their heads faced the door. In 1989, the boys left the group home. I remember being allowed to go with my father to drop them off at their sister's house. They were going to finally be reunited with the rest of their family. Three years ago I saw Jimmy again. My father introduced him to me at the Midnight Mission in Skid Row. He had been in and out of jail for the last ten years and was going to try to get clean and better in Skid Row.

Last month I saw Jimmy again, he was just getting out of jail again and was in the Weingarten program and excited. I asked him about Anthony. He said that he hadn't seen his brother since 1999. He said that when we dropped him off in 1989 his life went to hell. In that

same house his older sister's husband would go on to molest his youngest sister for 5 years. When he and his siblings finally had the opportunity tell someone, their sister disowned them, and they were put back into child welfare but this time separated. When they turned eighteen, they were put out of the system and had to find their own way. After being arrested for drug possession, Jimmy was sent to jail and was released into Skid Row in the late 90s. He has been back and forth from jail and Skid Row for a majority of his adult life. When I ask him again about Anthony, he looks at me, shakes his head, and says, "When they kicked us out, we had nowhere to go; we had nothing. Everyone treated us like trash. I have not seen or heard from my brother since 1999. I think he died a long time ago and no one even cared."

This chapter is devoted to the formulation of trash as a racial, gendered, and political concept. I argue that within the context of urban city centers, trash refers not merely to the refuse of material objects and substances but expands to include bodies, temporalities, and practices. This chapter looks at the historical construction of trash in Los Angeles' downtown and attempts to demonstrate the degree to which the concept of trash has been used to frame homelessness in a manner that links certain bodies and identities to materiality and practices of waste removal and management or the lack thereof. The performative utterance of declaring a place or practices or particular bodies unsanitary (trash) is a rhetorical strategy of neoliberalism, which then enables the area to be "cleaned up" and, in the name of cleaning it up, appropriated by developers and city officials interested in using those areas of the city to promote for-profit ventures. I argue that sanitary practices of the street inspire laws designed to eliminate those practices from public view.

I define *sanitary practices of the street* as traditional bodily and consumer practices performed with used matter in public spaces. In this case, it is matter that is being reused or

repurposed and becomes externalized when performed on the streets by certain gendered and racial bodies. An overt example of this is the use of shopping carts by homeless individuals. What once was an article confined to a certain purpose (carrying of food and/or consumer items) or location (shopping mall, grocery store, etc.) is now repurposed as a semi-permanent mobile container of supplies and personal objects. An item that is inherently a vehicle of consumerism and one-time use becomes an object closely linked to personhood, survival, and reuse. The (re)use of shopping carts, clothing items, open-air bartering spaces, hygienic materials, and bedding are examples of items and practices that are performed on the streets by homeless individuals and become identified as sanitary practices of the street when done outside of traditional spaces like the home or work space. These practices are part of the larger category that I name *visible practices of poverty*. While we tend to think of these practices as “dirty” or idiosyncratic or “crazy” or otherwise socially inappropriate, embarrassing, or shame inducing, I name them sanitary practices in order to acknowledge the agency of these people and their capacity for self-care despite the lack of infrastructural support.

### *Homeless Dumping on Skid Row*

Doctors at College Hospital diagnosed Steven Davis as suffering from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and schizoaffective disorder. Doctors at the Costa Mesa mental institution prescribed him numerous drugs to deal with paranoid delusions that had led to an earlier suicide attempt.

But that didn't stop the hospital from hauling Davis into a van and driving him more than 40 miles north to downtown L.A., where they dropped him off outside the Union Rescue Mission. When mission officials complained to the hospital, the

van returned and drove Davis a few miles south to another shelter. Davis wandered away without ever entering.

Davis turned out to be the key to uncovering what Los Angeles prosecutors described as the largest case of homeless dumping they've investigated to date. In a settlement announced Wednesday, the L.A. city attorney's office said that College Hospital had dumped more than 150 mentally ill patients on skid row -- long a magnet for the region's most vulnerable citizens -- in 2007 and 2008.<sup>2</sup>

As the city of Los Angeles engaged in a housing and policing strategy that attempted to undo the containment policies of homelessness in the downtown since the late 1980s, mental hospitals, juvenile facilities, and state-run incarceration centers still treated Skid Row as a place to send their unwanted. The ultimate irony is that these institutions serve as places where the unwanted of society are sent. In 2014, a Glendale hospital agreed to pay \$700,000 in civil penalties to settle a lawsuit accusing it of dumping a homeless patient on Skid Row.<sup>3</sup> Another 2014 lawsuit alleges that a woman with a history of mental and physical health problems was dumped in front of the Union Rescue Mission on Skid Row from a hospital van with the name of Tri-City Regional Medical Center. That's the former name of Gardens Regional Medical Center, a fully accredited, not-for-profit acute-care hospital. The patient was allegedly dressed in paper hospital clothes and had no money, identification, or medication, and no arrangements were made for shelter.<sup>4</sup> In 2007, the broadcast journalism show *60 Minutes* investigated several cases

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<sup>2</sup> DiMassa, Cara Mia, and Richard Winton. "College Hospital to Pay \$1.6 Million in Homeless Dumping Settlement." *Los Angeles Times*, April 09, 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/09/local/me-homeless-dumping9>.

<sup>3</sup> Holland, Gale. "Glendale hospital to pay \$700,000 in skid row patient-dumping suit." *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Abram, Susan. "Hospital accused of dumping mentally ill woman on Los Angeles' Skid Row." *Los Angeles Daily News*, April 29, 2015.

of homeless dumping, detailing narratives of patients dropped off in the middle of the night in Skid Row with only a hospital gown and no forms of identification or means to contact family.

As the cases above and the narrative at the beginning of this chapter attest, Skid Row serves as a grounds in which moral, health, gendered, sexual, economic and racialized abject bodies are placed through the means of NIMBY politics. NIMBY, an acronym for "Not in My Backyard," describes the phenomenon in which residents of a neighborhood designate a new development (e.g. shelter, affordable housing, or group home) or change in occupancy of an existing development as inappropriate or unwanted for their local area. NIMBY politics are simply containment and exclusion strategies for unwanted abject bodies and practices<sup>5</sup>.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva<sup>6</sup> (1982) examines the concept of abjection and how it has been utilized to describe the societal exclusion of certain bodies and identities from spaces and discourse. The abject is the repressed and literally unspeakable force that linger inside a person's psyche. The abject serves as a contrast to Lacan's "object of desire." The object of desire allows a subject to coordinate his or her desires, thus allowing the symbolic order of meaning and intersubjective community to persist, whereas the abject is radically excluded and represents the place where meaning collapses."<sup>7</sup> It is neither object nor subject; the abject is situated, rather, at a place before we entered into the symbolic order. The abject is situated at a place of the primal or animalistic. For Kristeva, abject bodies are bodies that represent death and waste and are symbolically and physically removed from society.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/affordable-housing/nimby-not-my-backyard>

<sup>6</sup> Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S. Roudiez. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg. 2.

Feminist and Queer theorists have taken this concept to examine the practices and discursive ways feminine and queer bodies have historically been what Barbara Creed<sup>8</sup> (1993) states as “constructed as ‘biological freaks’ whose bodies represent a fearful and threatening form of sexuality.” This positioning of women and queer bodies as abject has important implications for not only the construction of identities but the material boundaries imposed on these bodies. Judith Butler<sup>9</sup> (1993), in *Bodies that Matter*, describes how bodies are subjected to a normalization process that never fully reaches the essence of the norm itself, in that case, “sex.” This oxymoron of an ideal norm is actually inherent to the status of the norm itself as it corresponds to both a social construction describing a majority of behavioral and material characteristics and an ideal in the sense that nobody can actually incarnate absolutely the norm. Butler uses the notion of abjection to describe “those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life that are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject.” The abject constitutes precisely this excess considered as waste by a system that can find an economy with it.<sup>10</sup>

Sexual and racialized bodies are excluded from society and placed in the zone of abjection, which is Skid Row. The LGBTQI community is adversely affected, with 70% of the homeless youth served by agencies identifying as LGBT (Williams Institute, 2012). 60 % of Skid Row residents are African-American males. In addition Skid Row also is the home of sizable populations of the mentally disabled, the drug-addicted, parolees, and former members of the child welfare system. These are populations that other communities refuse to house and, in turn,

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<sup>8</sup> Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Lambert, Leopold. "# PHILOSOPHY /// Normative Bodies vs. Abject Bodies: A Small Reading of Judith Butler." *The Funambulist Magazine*. July 19, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://thefunambulist.net/2012/07/19/philosophy-normative-bodies-vs-abject-bodies-a-small-reading-of-judith-butler/>.

place in Sid Row. Due to lack of resources these bodies must perform sanitation practices visibly. Practices of these individuals are considered abject, and any abject practice these bodies perform (shitting, pissing, bleeding, etc.) further alienates them from “normal,” “clean” society.

The homeless body is a political and historical construction that is now aligned with trash-based practices. These bodies begin as migratory subjects that are excluded due to perceived economic, racial, physical, sexual, cultural, and moral contamination. Historically, homeless individuals represented agentic migrant workers who were unwanted and turned away, and this view and subsequent policies of homelessness have transformed homelessness into a construction of non-agentic populations who are de-institutionalized and dumped in Skid Row. Issues of agency and mobility are thus seen as an inherent enemy to the creation of a homogenous city center. When these excluded bodies become fixtures in these centers, they serve as visible reminders of “otherness” present in the construction of the city.

Los Angeles tried to contain these bodies through isolation policies centered on the creation of service center ghettos as suburbs, exurbs, and institutions sent their unwanted persons to be contained in Skid Row. Skid Row became a human dump yard. As resources dwindled in Skid Row, the sanitation practices of these individuals became more visible. Abject practices of shit, dirt, and reuse of objects became aligned with these bodies. These bodies remained. As the Los Angeles downtown shifted towards a constantly moving consumer body, these bodies remained.

The homeless body represents an immobile body, a body that represents long-forgotten practices of the city. A city that smells. A city that has dirt. A city that has non-human animals that aren't house trained cats and dogs. A city that is used and is reusable. The homeless body becomes a body that uses the city. Anybody. The homeless body represents a body that must be



regulated and cleaned. It is a historical body marked by its temporality. Loitering laws and acceptable city practices are directed at homeless individuals. Any individual that attempts to use the city in a non-regulated way risks becoming a homeless body, a criminal body. The city now represents static constant movement, a picture on a grey 99 cent postcard of blurry limbs and no faces with a large building backdrop. It is not meant to be used, only to be played with and in. The people that use it are trash that must be cleaned. Historically, city governments and urban police forces have criminalized these practices in order to control the mobility of certain racial and economic classes. Anthony still has not been found. No one even cared; he was meant to be lost. The city, I think he died a long time ago, and no one even cared.

Since 2007, a new public health sanitation framework has emerged. Public health officials monitor, inspect, and declare particular areas of the city “unsanitary.” The declaration of particular neighborhoods as unsanitary carries the power of a performative utterance, initiating cleanup effort and urban architectural changes that limit the capacity and mobility of homeless residents. What is more, the designation of an area as unsanitary carries symbolic meaning with particular social implications. By framing the environment of Skid Row as a collection of unsanitary practices, it marks specific bodies as not having the agency to care for themselves. Because the working assumption is that residents do not have the capacity for self-care, they are denied the infrastructural resources to perform socially-accepted practices of sanitation. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This line of thought has created a political environment in which Skid Row residents are forced to rely on city-issued cleaning services in the form of Operation Healthy Streets and are denied basic sanitary resources. This is an environment where the different permutations of trash, property, and being are performed on and through the bodies of the homeless residents. What I call sanitary practices of the street acknowledges the capacity

of homeless populations to perform self-care, even if their practices do not uniformly reproduce socially-accepted ideas about and practices of sanitation and self-care.

### *Historical Construction of the Homeless Body*

One of the major questions that followed me on this project was why Skid Row? What is it about this area that creates a space for homelessness to exist and not other spaces in the city, state or nation? Why is homelessness so condensed in this space and not spread out to other spaces in the city? In order to answer these questions I realized I had to learn how Skid Row as a space of homelessness came into existence. While doing this research I realized that homelessness and the homeless identity as we currently view it came to be through historical occurrences that seldom had any relationship to domicile living. In order to understand the construction of Skid Row, I needed to understand the historical and cultural construction of homelessness.

This section sets out to analyze the historical American construction of the homeless body and homeless subjectivity. Historically, homelessness has not been an issue of housing but of bodies that are transient and/or do not fit within a work force. This iteration of the productivity of the body and its relationship to homeless subjectivity has transformed into one that equates homelessness with issues of migrancy and its politics of physical and cultural contamination through the framework of dirt and sanitary practices. In the United States, the earliest iteration of what we may call homeless subjectivity appears in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of the railroad. Young men would find temporary work laying railroad tracks. When the work was done, they would illegally ride the trains from city to city looking for temporary work as

farmhands in rural areas or factory workers in urban centers.<sup>11</sup> Originally called “hobos,” these young men were defined by their constant mobility and limited existence in an emerging industrial economy that relied on worker fixity. This class of individuals were primarily composed of Civil War veterans who were unable to find work after the war. The railroad tracks became makeshift veteran’s halls for men looking to replace a gun in their hand for a hoe.

Soon the population composition of the hobo began to change when in the late part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century America suffered a severe economic meltdown caused by overexpansion driven by railroad speculation. Major companies such as the Northern Pacific Railway, the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway declared bankruptcy.<sup>12</sup> A public panic to cash in paper currency for gold, a subsequent depletion in the country's gold reserve, and bankers calling in their loans to private industry as the value of the dollar continued to decline led to a domino effect in which home and business loans defaulted, resulting in the closing of 500 banks, taking their depositors' life savings with them. During this time unemployment soared. The nation’s roads and railways were filled with the unemployed searching for a better life. The newly unemployed joined the hobos, panhandling their way across the country in search of jobs.<sup>13</sup> The hobos, and the subsequent response to them in the Progressive Era, mark the first instance of homelessness and transiency as a national issue.

The Progressive Era is noted as a period of political and social reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A response to the economic turmoil and political corruption that marked post Reconstruction America, progressive politics focused on the problems caused by emerging

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<sup>11</sup> Bryson, Bill. *Made in America: An Informal History of the English Language in the United States*. New York: Avon Books, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Timberlake, Richard H., Jr. "The Panic of 1893." In *Business Cycles and Depressions: An Encyclopedia*, edited by David Glasner and Thomas F. Cooley. New York: Garland Pub., 1997.

<sup>13</sup> "Hobo 1894: Hard Times in America." *Hobo 1894: Hard Times in America*. 2014. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/hobo.htm>.

industrialization such as poverty, women's suffrage, and moral ineptitude. To solve these societal ills, the movement focused on education, economic regulation that focused on disbanding business monopolies, and a movement towards efficiency in all sectors of society. It is this move towards an efficiency model that delineates 19<sup>th</sup>-century informal tactics of assisting transient populations to the regulating and formal systems of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and 21<sup>st</sup>-century models. Efficiency in the Progressive Era is noted as a move towards modernization of the political structure but also the body of the worker and citizen. The industrial efficiency model of scientific management called Taylorism was lauded as providing a model in which performance of different areas in political, business, and social systems could be quantified and therefore judged on its efficiency compared to its counterparts. To fight the ills of industrialization, an industrialization model of production and management was used.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, homeless and transient individuals were considered a local and often rural problem. But as cities began to grow and an influx of formerly rural citizens began to look for jobs in the emerging manufacturing industries, the issue of people living without shelter became an urban problem. To cope, the jailhouses of growing cities often allocated space for non-incarcerated individuals who needed shelter for the night.<sup>14</sup> The Progressive Era marks a city and industrial response to the formerly rural and now urban problem of transiency. This is an interesting change in spatial perspective as we will see later when we discuss how current issues of homeless populations are only noted as an urban issue with rural homelessness rarely acknowledged.

During this period, charitable organizations, mostly religious, built "lodging houses" to address shelter needs. "In exchange for shelter, food and prayer services, lodgers were required

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<sup>14</sup> Kusmer, Kenneth L. *Down & Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

to perform what was known as a ‘work test’, consisting of several hours of manual labor, such as breaking stone or cutting lumber.”<sup>15</sup> The application of work to housing served two functions of the Progressive Era efficiency model: economic and moral. The stone and wood produced would be sold and generate the funds necessary for the maintenance of the lodging. The “work test” was used to single out individuals whose work ethic and morality did not measure up to the new industry standards of sufficient worker labor.

Twentieth century industrialization marks an era when work ethic and moral fiber began to be linked. The dichotomy of “deserving” versus “underserving” began to emerge. The work test was believed to identify the “deserving,” those willing to work but temporarily unable to secure employment. The “undeserving” were labeled as tramps and relegated to traveling illegally on railcars and lived in semi-permanent camps outside the legal and moral purview of municipalities. This group was looked down upon in disdain for what was understood to be a shunning of modern industrialized existence through a refusal to work.<sup>16</sup> During this period, housing insecurity resulted largely from economic insecurity and temporary marginalization from work and was understood in these terms.<sup>17</sup> The number of people seeking shelter at lodging houses fluctuated with economic downturns and upswings as well as with seasonal cycles of agricultural and industrial production. Lodging-house administrators were tasked to identify and eliminate those among shelter-seekers with morally inferior tramp sensibilities. By the beginning of the 20th century, municipal-run lodging houses emerged alongside those that were privately run. The system of placing individuals into the groups “deserving” and “undeserving” in regards

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pg. 74

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. pg. 75

<sup>17</sup> Rossi, Peter H. *Down and out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

to lodging would prove to be a defective yet oft-used model during the crises of the Great Depression.

### *The Modern Construction of Homeless Subjectivity*

I want to forego the oft-discussed geopolitical, economic factors and climate that comes with analysis of the Great Depression and present a non-hell-and-brimstone reading of this era of American history, one that focuses on the creations that arrive from this crisis. In this case we will look at the construction of informal community networks that were created during the Great Depression and instances in which the state, in a period of crisis, reifies and creates itself as a performative state. I argue that before Roosevelt's New Deal, which arguably helped the conditions of most Americans, there was a crisis-born potentiality of a new structure of American communities and that it is this form of potential community and personhood, which is in fact historically-rooted, that the residents of Skid Row are attempting to continue.<sup>18</sup> This point will be made at length in Chapter 4, but this current chapter will build the foundation of this critique.

It is during the Great Depression that sanitation and criminal activity began to be linked, almost like a precursor to the broken windows theory. Hoovervilles were the sites where this connection and the subsequent conflicts surrounding it were played out. These communities were self-sustaining and provided an alternative living arrangement for bodies considered unwanted by main stream society. The sanitary practices of the street and ability to survive under ruthless conditions are similarities that Hoovervilles share with the Skid Rows of today. Response by the state to withhold and deny resources is also one of the key factors these communities share and

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will be discussed in depth later in the chapter. What interests me about Hoovervilles and current homeless encampments is the varying aggressive actions used by the state to disband these communities.

I argue that it was when late Depression-era Los Angeles economic policies highlighted a push for tourism and industry by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce that a contradictory and violent strategy began to emerge, a strategy that reflected a larger national strategy regarding issues of poverty and poverty-based practices. An anti-migrant strategy focused on limiting, criminalizing, and eventually forcing relocation for Mexican-American, Asian-American, and Dust Bowl populations. These policies laid the foundation for the environment that led to sanitation battles in the 1980s and 90s and began to become articulated politically and physically in the *Lavan v City of Los Angeles*<sup>19</sup> case. The continued push by the city for policing of sanitary practices of the street is linked to the beginning of the revitalization movement in the downtown area in the early 2000s. Led by the city's new police chief, William J. Bratton, Los Angeles took steps to crack down on these practices by its homeless population.

The Depression of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century marks a beginning of a transient homeless population. The Great Depression of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks a moment when transiency of the homeless population in America changes into an issue of fixity. It is this issue of fixity that is at the heart of the issue of homelessness and the city and one that caused the federal government to intervene during the Great Depression. Fixity reifies a spatial dynamic in which boundary and place are articulated in fixed performances of personhood in unfixed places. Fixed performances of personhood can be defined as normal, everyday personal behavior, emotions, and actions

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<sup>19</sup> *Lavan v City of Los Angeles* (United States District Court for the Central District of California September 05, 2012).

performed in spaces where such acts are socially and politically regulated. As we will see, the Great Depression created communities of these fixed performances in traditionally regulated spaces.

The Depression era impacted homelessness not only in sheer numbers but also demographically. Women, families, African Americans, and middle-class persons became vulnerable to mass homelessness. While single men gathered in previously established transient lodging houses and Skid Rows, newly homeless families had to build shanty towns on the outskirts of cities. The shanty towns were called Hoovervilles in cutting reference to Roosevelt's predecessor President Herbert Hoover. The largest such Hooverville was in St. Louis, Missouri with as many as five thousand residents on the riverfront just south of the MacArthur Bridge, now site of the iconic Gateway Arch.

Hoovervilles were makeshift communities made out of discarded materials and non-economically viable work such as scavenging. Members of the community went into the city during the day to find food and odd jobs such as washing windows and picking up coal along the railroad tracks for heat for cooking or heat for keeping their homes warm. Their homes were tiny, sometimes made out of orange crates or crushed cars or wood. Members of these small communities relied on cooperation and a sharing of resources to secure survival. Some Hoovervilles received donations from markets and food suppliers and railroad companies who, in many cases, owned the land that Hoovervilles sprouted up on and allowed these communities to stay on the land. Often entire families lived in the Hooverville, and the children even attended community-created schools. These schools were taught by former teachers who had lost their jobs. Previous expertise and a sharing of goods were used to create a semi-egalitarian community that could be defined as *communitas*.



Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* is helpful in explaining the development and importance of the type of community that Hoovervilles represent. *Communitas*, according to Turner, is a relatively structureless society that is based on relations of equality and solidarity and is opposed to the normative social structure<sup>20</sup>. *Communitas* arises from a liminal period when society and identity are without structure. Victor Turner describes liminality as a threshold between two points of reference. For Turner, liminality represents a space and time that connects two physical, social, religious, or psychological constructs in everyday social drama or a culture's religious rituals.

The concept of liminality is drawn from the concept of rites of passage developed by Arnold Van Gennep.<sup>21</sup> Van Gennep describes the rites of passage as a three step process involving "separation, margin and aggregation<sup>22</sup>," a pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stage. The pre-liminal stage represents an initial separation from social reality, a symbolic marking of distancing; the liminal stage represents an ambiguous phase in which it is connected to the past, present, and future but isn't connected to the past, present, or future, a place where social constructs are temporarily unstable; and the post-liminal stage represents the passage of states and a return to social reality and obligations.<sup>23</sup>

Turner utilizes Ganeep's theory and extends the concept of the liminal. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are both betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.<sup>24</sup> Liminal beings are often marked as different.

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<sup>20</sup> Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Pub., 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Gennep, Arnold Van. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 94

<sup>23</sup> Turner, Victor W. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 96

Liminal personage offers an interesting social dichotomy in that the liminal phenomena reveals a social bond that is gone and has not yet occurred and has yet to be fragmented and pulled apart.

Social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experiences of high and low, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. *Communitas* gains its meaning through the deconstruction of this normative order. *Communitas*, according to Turner, is the ultimate vision of a culture. While ideal, this form of society is often temporary. For Turner, societies must maintain a balance between *communitas* and structure in order to survive. This balance generally takes the form of a cycle in which structure is temporarily suspended during rituals that reignite a sense of *communitas* in various ways depending on the type of ritual. For example, “religious vision becomes sect, then church, then a prop for a dominant political system, until *communitas* resurges once more, emerging from the spaces of freedom often found in betwixt-and-between situations.”<sup>25</sup> Liminality and *communitas* are temporary and structurally limited, and according to Turner, they both dialectically serve to reaffirm the existing social order.

Edith Turner<sup>26</sup> (2012) notes that the first example of *communitas* is the “spontaneous *communitas*.” Spontaneous *communitas* is a feeling that comes unexpectedly and unites various individuals. “It defies deliberate cognitive and volitional construction and is at the opposite pole to social structures, that is, the role sets, status sets, and status sequences consciously recognized and regulated in society and closely bound up with legal and political norms and sanctions.”

After spontaneous *communitas* a cycle of *communitas*/structure/*communitas* ensues.

*Communitas* can enter society through three phases: a liminal period of social change of status,

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<sup>25</sup> Turner, Edith, and Victor W. Turner. "Performing Ethnography." *The Drama Review* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 32-50.

<sup>26</sup> Turner, Edith L. B. *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

such as the changing of job positions, adolescence, students, and people at times of disaster. Marginality, people who live near the edges of structured society whose group of origin, the so-called inferior group, they look to for *communitas* while live in the structured positions of society. Most activists, writers, artists, and philosophers reside in this category. The final category includes those from beneath structure who are labeled as ‘inferior.’ These are usually women, the poor, minorities, children, and native groups. Hoovervilles are examples of *communitas* that arise through the liminal period of the Great Depression in which economic change led to a change in stature and status for their inhabitants. It is in this liminal phase that Hoovervilles are created as egalitarian, structureless (or anti-structure) societies. Hoovervilles represent a diverse and complicated response to conditions of poverty and homelessness that point to potential alternative practices and communities.

I am making the claim that Hoovervilles are sites of potential *communitas* located in communal living spaces. I am hesitant to explicitly call Hoovervilles sites of *communitas* and wish to focus on their potentiality in that it represents an alternative egalitarian society based on subsistence needs. By focusing on this potential, we displace Hoovervilles and Hooverites as being historically-situated and can look at these communities as a set of performances and practices by their residents *and* the state. Hoovervilles are responses to a lack of social services with the *unhygienic* conditions of many of these sites due to intentional actions by local and state governments to provide resources to these sites, requiring their residents to enact sanitary practices of the street. The Los Angeles Hooverville was founded by the homeless on a five-acre vacant lot near Firestone Boulevard and Alameda Street, adjacent to the downtown. As we will see with the current Hooverville-like conditions of current-day Skid Row, this Depression-era Hooverville was torn down due to health reasons.

We are unable to make historical claims about the feel of these Hoovervilles due to lack of personal narratives and slanted coverage of these communities by journalists and researchers of the time, labeling the men and women living in these towns as dirty, uncouth, and criminal. These descriptions were linked to the economic and racial background of the Hooverville residents where fear of growing ethnic populations was situated in communities' attitudes toward Hoovervilles. One example of this is seen in a June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1935 *Seattle Times*<sup>27</sup> article titled "Pair Stabbed at 'Houseparty' in Shacktown," detailing a stabbing in a Hooverville community. The following is an excerpt from Joey Smith's<sup>28</sup> (2012) analysis of Hooverville media coverage of the event:

A "huge Negro with a gold tooth" stabbed two other black men on June 24th, 1934 at the climax of a "house" party. The author, while being hesitant on calling the shacks "houses," shamelessly gave a monstrous depiction of the black attacker and of "King George's Palace"—the home of the victim whom the author mocked through a liberal usage of italicization and apostrophes. These exaggerated, almost barbaric descriptions were central to the sensational journalism style that helped to widen the gap between white civilization and the rowdy blacks, who represented only a sliver of the Hooverville community at 29 out of a total 700 men in the spring of 1934.

Smith argues that violent and criminal exploits dominated coverage of Hoovervilles with race serving as a key descriptor, which acted to distance Hoovervilles and their residents from

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<sup>27</sup> "Pair Stabbed at 'Houseparty' in Shacktown." *Seattle Times*, June 22, 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Joey. "A Tarpaper Carthage: Interpreting Hooverville." *Interpreting Hooverville*. Spring 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. [http://depts.washington.edu/depress/hooverville\\_seattle\\_tarpaper\\_carthage.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/depress/hooverville_seattle_tarpaper_carthage.shtml).

the rest of a city's citizenry. The effect of this is a racialization of class, where poverty and homelessness are situated along racial lines. Still, their exploits were heralded throughout the *Seattle Times*' coverage of Hooverville, with their race used to demonstrate their distance from white society and explain their propensity for a barbaric, homeless existence.

In addition to the racialization of class and homelessness, Hoovervilles were condemned for their unsanitary conditions. As discussed above, building material and goods were often reused or taken from the garbage, and toilets and sanitary practice spaces were limited. Cities refused to build additional bathhouses for homeless residents and slums. In addition to ceasing construction, cities discontinued maintenance on the public bathhouses that were available. Due to this lack of public service, Hoovervilles had no means of trash removal or sanitary spaces. Hoovervilles began to be overrun by trash and disease. These conditions helped to further the outlook of Hoovervilles as not just dangerous spaces but unsanitary spaces. To combat these conditions, many Hoovervilles developed local governments that addressed the needs of these communities and attempted outreach to the larger community to get these needs addressed.

In discussing Hoovervilles, it is important to note that not all of these communities were the same or utopian in nature, with issues of segregation, racism, sexism, and classism reflected in many of these communities. Hoovervilles are not linked geographically or historically to the Skid Row of today but are linked through specific practices, the capacity of their residents, and state-based actions against the continued existence of these communities.

The homeless population of this period differed from previous eras as single women composed a larger share of the homeless than in earlier eras. This was in part because of their increased participation in urban labor markets after World War I. When the war ended, single wage-earning women had a higher rate of unemployment than men in the early 1930s. In

addition, homelessness among African Americans also increased during the Great Depression. Until World War I, black homelessness was relatively rare. This changed when 500,000 African Americans migrated from Southern States to the North for jobs in the emerging industries in urban areas. Racial discrimination in the North meant black workers were more vulnerable to economic downturn. As a result, blacks in the North suffered higher rates of homelessness in the general population, making up between 15 and 27% of urban shelter residence in 1931.

Even with high rates of homelessness and poverty amongst women and the African-American population, these issues were not addressed until media began documenting the plight of “respectable” white men who became homeless. The most famous instance of middle-class white male economic distress was the “Bonus March” and the subsequent creation of the largest Hooverville in the United States just outside of the federal core of Washington D.C in 1932. On June 15<sup>th</sup> 1932, 43,000 marchers—17,000 World War I veterans, their families, and affiliated groups—gathered in Washington D.C to demand cash-payment redemption of their service certificates. Service certificates were awarded bonuses to qualified veterans based on a long-standing statute that awards veterans payment for the difference between what soldiers earned and what he could have earned had he not enlisted.

The roots of the march began on May 15, 1924, when President Calvin Coolidge vetoed a bill granting bonuses to veterans of World War I, saying "patriotism... bought and paid for is not patriotism." Congress overrode his veto a few days later, enacting the World War Adjusted Compensation Act. Each veteran was to receive up to \$500 for domestic service and \$625 for international service.<sup>29</sup> Amounts of \$50 or less were immediately paid. All other amounts were issued as Certificates of Service maturing in 1945. This 20-year wait period was the rallying

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<sup>29</sup> Dickson, Paul, and Thomas B. Allen. *The Bonus Army: An American Epic*. New York: Walker & Company. 2006.

point of the march with Bonus Marchers demanding immediate cash payment of their certificates. On June 15, 1932, the House of Representatives passed the Wright Patman Bonus Bill, which would have moved forward the date for World War I veterans to receive their cash bonus, but on June 17 the US Senate defeated the Bonus Bill by a vote of 62-18. For two months, the marchers lived in a Hooverville on the Anacostia Flats, demanding action from President Hoover. These Hoovervilles were tightly controlled, and in order to live in the camps veterans were required to register and prove they had been honorably discharged.

On July 28, 1932, Attorney General William D. Mitchell ordered the police to remove the Bonus Army veterans from their camp. When the veterans moved back into it, police drew their revolvers and shot at the veterans, killing two. The U.S army intervened the next day by marching on the Bonus Army with fixed bayonets and tear gas. The U.S infantry entered the various erected camps in the city, evicting veterans and their families. When the Bonus Army fled, President Hoover ordered the assault stopped. General MacArthur, commanding the U.S infantry, chose to ignore the president and ordered a continuing attack. In all, 55 veterans were injured. In the two years that the Washington D.C veterans' Hooverville existed, over 1000 veterans and 70 police officers were injured in various skirmishes.

While Hoovervilles represent informal responses to the national crises of homelessness, the homeless epidemic of the Great Depression led way to a more formal response in the economic and political expansion of local municipal services and charity organizations. In the early 1930s, rescue missions and wayfarers' lodges, the primary charitable institutions of Skid Row, were overpopulated and had to turn away thousands of individuals and families looking for services. Municipal authorities faced similar dilemmas and strains on their resources. Local municipalities scrambled for shelter space and also for new policies to accommodate the growing

homelessness emergency. Vacant buildings were pressed into service, and most large cities provided case work and other services for the homeless in addition to food and shelter.<sup>30</sup> The formerly rigid and punitive policies that defined charities and homeless services in the earlier part of the century persisted in some places but in larger cities met resistance. In New York City, a statute that limited stay at a shelter to five days a month was changed after a thousand homeless and unemployed people marched in protest against the policy.



*Figure 1. A depression-era soup line, shown in the 1930s. – Chicago Tribune archive photo*

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<sup>30</sup> Levinson, David. *Encyclopedia of Homelessness*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004.



One of the biggest issues in addressing the issue of homelessness was the migrancy of many citizens attempting to find work and services in different states. Many laws entitled only legal residents of the state to receive any form of public relief. With the millions of persons crossing state lines during the Depression, homeless transients were in need of federally-funded relief. The Federal Transient Program (FTP) was established under the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) in May of 1932. The Federal Transient Program was designed to provide states with assistance for their growing transient populations. The FTP defined transients as anyone who had lived in a state for less than one year. The local homeless were served under a state's general relief fund.

The initial FERA program was established under the Hoover administration and gave loans to the states to operate relief programs. The Federal Transient Program under Roosevelt was an expansion of FERA in that it allowed the government to run and finance municipal shelters. In smaller communities the federal government contracted with private charities, hotels, and restaurants to feed and house the transient community. FTP-run shelters and work camps provided recreation, education, medical care, and work relief. Single women and families were not permitted in these FTP-run shelters and instead were given private housing and apartments in hotels. Some of the key motives of FTP and later New Deal policies were the protection of women, the bolstering of nuclear family life, and the promotion of masculine breadwinning.<sup>31</sup>

In September 1935, the Roosevelt administration began phasing out the FTP and other direct relief programs under FERA in favor of a second New Deal that shifted policy toward public works, and policies directed at the unemployed, persons of old age, children, and the disabled. FTP was eventually eliminated due to arguments by opponents within the government

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pg. 188

that stated that the transient camps developed under FTP caused a disruption of the American nuclear family. Opponents argued that the camps separated men from their normal role of breadwinning in that men would become so well-accustomed to receiving money for limited labor that men would never return to their proper families and work. The move away from FTP policies to public works initiatives attempted to shift focus from alleviating immediate suffering to helping struggling households remain intact. Most cities and states in the US focused on reevaluating current policy and social welfare statutes and utilized the Federal Transient Act to deal with the burgeoning unemployed and homeless population with their citizens directed their frustration towards an inept federal government unable provide relief.

During the Great Depression, California represents an alternative timeline in which the state was equally affected but differed from its national peers through its use of two overt strategies, advertisement and jingoism. California attempted to mask the economic downturn of the Great Depression through increased national advertisement for tourism and relocation, offering those willing and able to relocate increased job offerings and better living conditions. In addition, California, Los Angeles specifically, enacted a local and state government-based jingoism that centered on linking the state's economic downturn to issues of out-of-state migrancy and immigration of Mexican-Americans and Asian-Americans with no consideration of the latter groups actual American citizenship.

During the early stages of the Great Depression era, entertainment and industry were increasing throughout California with Los Angeles being at the center of this boom. In fact, Los Angeles County was the most productive farming county in the US.<sup>32</sup> But as the Great Depression continued into the early 1930s, unemployment in the state rose. Of the 700,000

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<sup>32</sup> Leader, Leonard Joseph. *Los Angeles and the Great Depression*. New York: Garland, 1991.

jobless people in California in June, 1932, fully half were residents of Los Angeles County.<sup>33</sup> In order to combat the growing economic downturn, Los Angeles went on the offensive by attempting to market itself as the promised land of Depression-era despair.

Los Angeles attempted to showcase its economic resolve in the face of growing international turmoil by hosting the 1932 Olympics. This event is worth noting for its ostentatiousness due to the fact that no other city even made a bid to host the Olympics. Many nations and athletes were unable to pay for the trip to Los Angeles. In fact, fewer than half the participants of the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam returned to compete in 1932. Even US President, Herbert Hoover, skipped the event. In addition to this event, Los Angeles would go on to open, in a four-year span, LAX international airport, The Greek Theatre in Hollywood, and the Griffith Observatory as ways to further enhance tourism to the city.

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<sup>33</sup> Surls, Rachel A. "From Cows to Concrete: A History of Los Angeles Agriculture." ANR Blogs. July 16, 2009. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=3050>.

5 Scattered Over Balance of Coast States

8 Concentrated in Los Angeles Area

An Added Market of 2,627,562 People in California, Oregon & Washington... Since 1920

## 8 OUT OF EVERY 13 CAME TO LOS ANGELES AREA

Eliminating those who were born on the Pacific Coast 2,627,562 actual or potential customers you formerly served in other parts of the country, moved to California, Oregon and Washington in the ten years between 1920 and 1930 ... (see U. S. 1930 Census).

62% of this new and additional Pacific Coast market (1,643,881) — or 8 out of every 13 — came to the immediate trading area of Los Angeles ... 38% (5 out of every 13) scattered over the entire remainder of the 3 Pacific Coast States... which includes all that territory north of Los Angeles' area to the northernmost limits of Washington.

Manufacturers who would command this great Western Market will at once appreciate the advantage of locating their Pacific Coast plants in Los Angeles County where the greatest concentrated population in the entire West may be most economically served.

**Industrial LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

Address: Industrial Dist.,  
Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce,  
Los Angeles, California

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*Figure 2. 1930s Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Advertisement*

During this period national and state policies were framed around issues of securitization and economic and culture contamination in which transiency was the focus that this strategy revolved around. The early stages of these policies began in 1931 when the Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed an ordinance that forbid begging in the downtown business district. The law was proposed by the Downtown Business Men's Association, the group that would later

become the Central City Association.<sup>34</sup> Forbidden was "soliciting for alms," the wearing of "placards calling attention to ailments," the carrying of "cups or receptacles for the deposit of coins," and the blowing of "horns or instruments to attract attention," according to the LA Times. The maximum penalty for this misdemeanor offense was a fine of \$500 or six months imprisonment. A much bigger change came on March 27, 1937, when Mayor Frank Shaw signed a revision that applied the anti-begging statute citywide.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1930s, business leaders attempted to revitalize the downtown area, but due to the Depression and Dust Bowl, an influx of Midwest migrants began to appear in California and took residence in and near the downtown area in the hopes of obtaining work in the remaining factories and fields. A program to construct camps for these many migrants streaming in to California was begun and abandoned by the state government in 1935 but was quickly taken over by the Resettlement Administration. "Even with the assistance of the Federal Government, Californians feared the additional expenses for welfare relief and public education. As a result, Los Angeles 'declared war' on these many emigrants by implementing the 'Bum Blockade' in February, 1936. Usurping California's state powers, Police Chief James E. 'Two Gun' Davis, with the support of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, many public officials, the railroads, and hard-pressed state relief agencies, dispatched 136 police officers to 16 major points of entry along the Arizona, Nevada and Oregon borders, with orders to turn back migrants

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<sup>34</sup> Richardson, Eric. "79 Years Ago: L.A. Bans Begging Downtown." 79 Years Ago: Los Angeles Bans Begging in Downtown Business District. June 22, 2010. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://blogdowntown.com/2010/06/5444-79-years-ago-los-angeles-bans-begging-in>.

<sup>35</sup> LAMC 41.59(b) forbids soliciting in an "aggressive manner," defined as approaching someone in a way that is likely to make them fearful or intimidated, intentionally touching them or their vehicle without their consent, blocking their path, using violent or threatening gestures, persisting in following them after they have said no, or using profane, offensive or abusive language.

with no visible means of support.”<sup>36</sup> Visible means of support were classified as clean looking clothes, small family unit, and able-body. At the California-Nevada line near Reno, a white billboard showed a baton-wielding, blue-uniformed cop with his palm thrust out near an imposing red "STOP!" sign and the phrase "Los Angeles City Limits."

California believed that they had the power to impose immigration restrictions due to legislature and the California Supreme Court being on record as declaring that a State has a right to protect itself against the spread of crime, pauperism, or disturbance of the peace by closing its borders to migrants not self-supporting. The Supreme Court decision read "it may be admitted that the police power of a State justifies the adoption of precautionary measures against social evils [...] a State [...] may exclude from its limits convicts, paupers, idiots and lunatics, and persons likely to become a public charge [...] a right founded [...] in the sacred law of self-defense [...] it has never been doubted that a State has the power, by proper police and sanitary regulations, to exclude from its limits paupers, vagabonds and criminals, or sick, diseased, infirm or disabled persons, who were likely to become a public charge." This law was specifically designed as an anti-Okie restriction, one that conflated mobility, identity and sanitary practices in its effort to create order via a series of exclusions from the political body. It is within this anti-migration, anti-other political and cultural framework in which dependency gets legally defined as waste or trash. Personhood then becomes based on self-sufficiency, and persons unable to visibly demonstrate this capacity are deemed undesirable, unwanted, and ultimately the body becomes equated with trash in the sense of "uselessness," a wasted human resource, or economic non-viability.

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<sup>36</sup> Weiser, Kathy. "The "Bum Blockade" - Stopping the Invasion of Depression Refugees." The "Bum Blockade" - Stopping the Invasion of Depression Refugees. December 2013. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/ca-bumblockade.html>.



Figure 3. Kathy Weiser. *Jobless Men Keep Going*, by the Chamber of Commerce.

The visual practices of monitoring migrants and the performance of “acceptable” destitution became a means through which the restriction of mobility was enacted. Sturken and Cartwright<sup>37</sup> (2009) state that practices of looking are not passive acts of consumption. By looking at and engaging with images in the world, we influence the meanings and uses assigned in the images that fill our day-to-day lives. The act of looking reflects the ability of state-run institutions to determine which bodies are allowed within its borders. If individuals do not resemble idealized versions of citizens and, in this case, urban center employees and consumers, they were deemed unacceptable and were permitted from entering California. The looking done on the borders was utilized to enforce a homogeneity of the Los Angeles population, one that

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<sup>37</sup> Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

avored white, well-dressed, middle-class, Protestant workers. Young, poor men and women with disheveled clothing from the Dust Bowl were deemed unacceptable to enter the border. The look of destitution became a means of exclusion. Only individuals who matched the aesthetics of the idealized version of the Los Angeles citizen met the standards of acceptable destitution. This type of “acceptable destitution” can be seen inversely today with complaints about transient individuals with cell phones and clean clothes. In contemporary society we expect “our” poor to look “poor.”

In *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg<sup>38</sup> (1993) outlines the type of monitoring and categorization in the slum clearance project in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Leeds. Tagg notes how photographic evidence was used to raise philanthropic support for the project. The specific way of looking acts as an act of separation and exclusion in that we observe destitute individuals as objects of improvement so that they might properly operate within an economic system. When these destitute populations do not behave as disenfranchised passive objects and actually display agency and similar consumer practices of the looker, the looker begins to pathologize the destitute person as not hard-working and unworthy of sympathy. It is through these acts of looking and framing of poverty that “acceptable destitution” can operate as performance that can lead to inclusion or exclusion of certain populations.

Supporters of the Bum Blockade declined to state that economic differences were at the heart of the problem and instead focused on the cultural deficiencies of migrants. Through the "racialization" of class, supporters of the Bum Blockade "contended that migrants lacked the work ethic and moral character to become part of the Los Angeles community. This racialization

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<sup>38</sup> Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.



of class took hold because of the already established nationalism of the Southern California region. Angelinos were able to perceive outsiders in a racial sense because of the deep-seeded regionalism that shaped their identities. Being white American citizens was not enough to travel unimpeded into California.<sup>39</sup>

California has historically banned migrants from its borders. The Chinese were the first group targeted in the late 19th century. Anti-Chinese sentiment had existed in California since the mid-18th century. One of the first anti-immigrant policies was The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed by the Federal government in 1882, which barred Chinese immigration and prevented the naturalization of the Chinese already in America. The Japanese were impacted in the early 20th century. David Kearney, an earlier advocate of Japanese exclusion, said in 1892 that "Japs [are] being brought here now in countless numbers to demoralize and discourage our domestic labor market and to be educated [...] at our expense."<sup>40</sup> Mexicans were excluded in the 1930s. At the onset of the Great Depression, "the federal government sponsored and supported the mass expulsion of [Mexican] immigrants." It was reported that "a total of 3,492 Mexicans left on repatriation trains from San Bernardino between 1931 and 1933, primarily in 1931, at the height of the formal repatriation movement."<sup>41</sup>

The Bum Blockade was planned and established shortly after the failed passage of the Jones-Redwine Bill in the State Senate and developed with two lines of defense against potential migrants. The first line was in Los Angeles and included arresting and fingerprinting vagrants

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<sup>39</sup> Giczy, Hailey. "The Bum Blockade: Los Angeles and the Great Depression | Giczy | Voces Novae: Chapman University Historical Review." The Bum Blockade: Los Angeles and the Great Depression | Giczy | Voces Novae: Chapman University Historical Review. Spring 2009. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://journals.chapman.edu/ojs/index.php/VocesNovae/article/view/20/94>.

<sup>40</sup> Daniels, Roger. *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> Guerin-Gonzales, Camille. *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

and beggars.<sup>42</sup> Upon arrest, vagrants were given the option of forced hard labor in a rock quarry or deportation over the state line. The officers conducted vehicle and train searches, and at the state line they were deputized by the local law enforcement agencies to continue the fingerprinting campaign that had begun back in the city. Treatment of migrants already in Los Angeles consisted of numerous arrests by the Los Angeles Police Department along with jail time. Those arrested on vagrancy charges were often fingerprinted and deported to the state line. These mass deportations were part of a larger deportation movement during this time period. Instead of Okies, Mexican-Americans were the focus of these arrest.

In the 1930s, the Bureau of Immigration launched intensive raids to identify aliens liable for deportation. These raids mark the repatriation period of American history in which the federal government rounded up people of Mexican ancestry from across the US and sent them to areas in Central Mexico. More than 60 percent of the displaced were American citizens. The federal government believed that removal of undocumented aliens would reduce relief expenditures and free jobs for native-born citizens. In addition to federal raids, cities and counties began pressure to repatriate destitute Mexican-American families. “In one raid in Los Angeles in February 1931, police surrounded a downtown park and detained some 400 adults and children.”<sup>43</sup> The threat of unemployment, deportation, and loss of relief payments led tens of thousands of people to leave the United States. In all, more than 400,000 *repatriados*, many of them citizens of the United States by birth, were sent across the US-Mexico border from Arizona, California, and Texas. Texas' Mexican-born population was reduced by a third. Los Angeles also lost a third of its Mexican population.

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<sup>42</sup> *Los Angeles Times*. March 15, 1936

<sup>43</sup> Mintz, Steven. *Mexican American Voices: A Documentary Reader*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

The Dust Bowl migration policy and Mexican-American repatriation marks a continuation in a series of large-scale immobilization campaigns in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that were directed towards transient groups in the nation that began with the “Great Migration” of African Americans from the South to the Midwest. Local citizens forced businesses to reach out to interstate officers to stop the exodus of African Americans from entering their cities and gaining employment in emerging industries. As city centers began to emerge, the interests of local business communities in accordance with municipal interests of ethnic homogeneity impacted interstate migration inside and outside formal jurisdiction. What makes the race and class-based migratory policies unique is that this supposed jurisdiction reached beyond city borders to state lines. The city’s border is no longer based on geographical lines but is expanded when necessary to meet local needs.

The next battle occurred in the 1960s when the hippie population descended upon downtown Los Angeles and the Hollywood district. All of the loitering laws on the book today were crafted during a four-year period of 1964 to 1968 to regulate this population.<sup>44</sup> I argue that the hippies represented an aggressive visibility. As homelessness in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was

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<sup>44</sup> SEC. 41.18. SIDEWALKS, PEDESTRIAN SUBWAYS – LOITERING. (a) No person shall stand in or upon any street, sidewalk or other public way open for pedestrian travel or otherwise occupy any portion thereof in such a manner as to annoy or molest any pedestrian thereon or so as to obstruct or unreasonably interfere with the free passage of pedestrians. (Amended by Ord. No. 137,269, Eff. 10/21/68.)  
 (b) No person shall loiter in any tunnel, pedestrian subway, or on any bridge overpass, or at or near the entrance thereto or exit therefrom, or at or near any abutment or retaining wall adjacent to such entrance or exit, or any retaining wall or abutment adjacent to any freeway, street or highway open and used for vehicular traffic, or adjacent to that portion thereof used for vehicular traffic, or on any public property in the proximity of such bridge, overpass, or retaining wall or abutment. Sec. 41.18 has not been preempted by State Legislation encompassing loitering offenses. Gleason v. Municipal Court (April 1964), 226 Cal. App. 2d-226 ACA 701.  
 (c) No person in or about any pedestrian subway, shall annoy or molest another or make any remark to or concerning another to the annoyance of such other person, and no person shall commit any nuisance in or about such subway.  
 (d) (Amended by Ord. No. 137,269, Eff. 10/21/68.) No person shall sit, lie or sleep in or upon any street, sidewalk or other public way. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to persons sitting on the curb portion of any sidewalk or street while attending or viewing any parade permitted under the provisions of Section 103.111 of Article 2, Chapter X of this Code; nor shall the provisions of this subsection apply to persons sitting upon benches or other seating facilities provided for such purpose by municipal authority or permitted by this Code.

defined by the figure of the “hobo” and practices of constant migration and temporary work, this second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about a limited mobility of the homeless population.<sup>45</sup> As the “hobo” represented a national figure of new urban industrial life and mobility, the hippie represented a failed economic and political figure, one who literally stood in front of industrialization and commerce. As the homeless population shifted from predominately white males to African Americans and Latinos, this form of aggressive visibility remained, and its regulation increased.

“The cycle went something like this: Residents moved out of cities and stopped using their public spaces and streets. The only people still walking them were deemed riffraff: the homeless, jobless and, officials feared, gang members and prostitutes.”<sup>46</sup> Cities have taken away benches and have intensely regulated other gathering places. Loitering has become a practice associated with the homeless population. Normal bodies and citizens no longer loiter in cities. The practice of immobility became exclusive to the homeless; the city no longer is defined by its gathering tendencies but through surveillance of bodies and constant movement. Stillness is problematic. Stopping, lighting a while, raises suspicion. “It’s almost like we created a word that celebrates the fact that we’ve forgotten how to design cities,” says Dan Burden, the executive director of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute. “When we can create a place that’s so void of human life because people don’t want to go there, then this natural surveillance that occurs when people feel comfortable going there and watching over it themselves disappears.” By criminalizing these bodies, the homeless

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<sup>45</sup>DePastino, Todd. *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

<sup>46</sup>Badger, Emily. "What Makes a Public Space Good for Democracy?" CityLab. August 13, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2012/08/what-makes-public-space-good-democracy/2916/>.

population and their practices become able to be regulated. These practices and bodies are then displaced within cities. These bodies become associated with trash.

*The Battle of Trash and Sanitation on Skid Row*

General Dogon: Mr. and Mrs. Jones were a couple. Both of them were homeless. They had severe mental disabilities, and they had physical disabilities. They had a lot of physical problems. And so, what had happened was, every time they walked their bodies would just break down, and they had to stop and sit down. And when they had to stop and sit down, cops would be there, right? And they would either ticket them or arrest them...the city was criminalizing these folks because they had nowhere to go, and their bodies would break down, and they couldn't help it.<sup>47</sup>

One of the striking things about entering Skid Row is the amount of trash on the ground. With no trash cans or urinals to be found, many of the residents and visitors of Skid Row or left to empty their trash on the streets and to use a seldom cleaned public street bathroom or find a restroom at a private business. This existence of trash and smells of urination and shit stands in stark juxtaposition to constant street cleaning trucks and trash cans of the downtown shopping district two blocks away. Why was there such a lack of sanitation resources in one area compared to the next? It was after interviewing several members of LA CAN that I learned about

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<sup>47</sup> General Dogon (Skid Row activist) in discussion with the author, July 2014.

the battle of sanitation resources on Skid Row and how this issue impacts not only the physical conditions of the space but also the legal and cultural aspects of it.

This next section analyzes the implementation of Operation Healthy Streets that emerged in the spring of 2012 when the Los Angeles County Health Department issued a report citing immediate public health risks in the downtown community of Skid Row.<sup>48</sup> The report cited high instances of: feces, urine, hypodermic needles, and rodent infestation in the area. Due to the report's findings, the city government of Los Angeles along with neighborhood business leaders, created a task force called Operation Healthy Streets to implement "cleanup sweeps" in this area. These sweeps attempt to remove waste from the streets in areas downtown, as well as limit the causes of the sanitization issues, the practices of the homeless population. The campaign was met with increased pressure from law enforcement in the area, which targeted loitering, shopping carts, open drug use, and waste. The case study details attempts by local activists and allies to contest this targeted campaign and the ongoing legal battles around this issue. The section focuses on the impact of these spatial policies and practices and concludes with analysis of aesthetic policies that Skid Row activists, specifically LA CAN classify as the "Dirty Divide"<sup>49</sup> where beautification and hygienic interventions (increase in trash services, use of public restrooms, tree planting, and park renovations) are enacted in the business district of downtown Los Angeles but are not implemented in the Skid Row area, leaving the residents to be targeted

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<sup>48</sup> Gorman, Anna. "Health Dangers from Feces, Needles on Skid Row Are Cited." Health Dangers from Feces, Needles on Skid Row Are Cited. June 04, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/06/health-code-violations-found-on-skid-row.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Los Angeles Community Action Network. *The Dirty Divide in Downtown Los Angeles A Call for Public Health Equity*. Publication. March 2013. <http://sites.uci.edu/humanrights/files/2013/03/The-Dirty-Divide-in-DTLA.pdf>.

by law enforcement for not complying with the newly-regulated spatial policies.



*Figure 4. Operation Healthy Streets Workers. LA Downtown News. Photo by Gary Leonard*

In the spring of 2012, the Los Angeles County Health Department issued a report citing immediate public health risks in the downtown community of Skid Row.<sup>50</sup> The report cited high instances of feces, urine, hypodermic needles, and rodent infestation in the area. The community of Skid Row is composed of the highest population of homeless individuals in a concentrated

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<sup>50</sup> Los Angeles Department of Public Health. *LA County Public Health Report on Skid Row*. Report. May 21, 2012.

area in the nation. Due to the report's findings, the city government of Los Angeles, along with neighborhood business leaders, created a task force called Operation Healthy Streets to implement "cleanup sweeps" in this area. These sweeps attempt to remove waste from the streets in areas of downtown, as well as limit the causes of the sanitization issues, the practices of the homeless population.

The creation of this task force was one in a long line of sanitation efforts by the city of Los Angeles. One year earlier in 2011, the city of Los Angeles implemented a trash removal policy for downtown streets. The policy aimed to remove what they considered debris that caused health and safety risks for residents and visitors of the area. Neighborhood and homeless advocates claimed that this policy was intentionally targeting the homeless population in this area. Homeless resident's carts and other belongings were confiscated and thrown in trashcans if the individual was not present. Advocates claimed that this policy was an infringement upon personal property. Homeless individuals organized by Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) filed a lawsuit in federal court, claiming that homeless people's constitutional rights were being violated when police took and destroyed their unattended items.

The *Lavan v. City of Los Angeles* case contained claims from eight homeless individuals living in the Skid Row area that allege that since February 2011, the city, through the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Bureau of Street Services, has confiscated and destroyed the personal possessions they temporarily left in public spaces in order to use the restroom or eat a meal, among other things. The claim alleges that the City of Los Angeles seized and destroyed Plaintiffs' property in violation of the Fourth Amendment's protections against unreasonable searches and seizures and the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause. In court testimony, Tony Lavan stated, "I then walked . . . to take a shower at the Union Rescue



Mission. I was gone a total of approximately 20 to 25 minutes at the most. As I was walking back . . . I ran into [Plaintiff Smith] . . . [who] told me that the police were there and that the [property] was being taken and crushed. I ran back . . . [m]y [property] was already destroyed.”

The city argued that “property in a public place that is evidence of criminality may be seized under the plain view exception to the Fourth Amendment.” In short, the possessions of the plaintiffs pointed to them being homeless, which according to the city of Los Angeles was reason for probable arrest. The city went on to argue that “[i]t is well established that individuals who leave items in public places do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in them.”<sup>51</sup> The city asserted that all homeless property is abandoned if its owner is not near it. For the city, possessions entail an element of privacy; if an object is in public, it does not constitute a possession but trash. In other words, to be homeless, your possessions are under constant threat to be seen as not only not yours but trash. Therefore, the Fourth Amendment does not apply to homeless individuals if their property is considered trash. The city goes on to state, “the homeless have an expectation of privacy in their property when they are near it. When they walk away from it, the expectation of privacy dissipates,” and the property can be considered abandoned.” This policy compels homeless people to be ever-vigilant about their belongings. It would produce a kind of anxious paranoia, I would think. Fear of leaving the cart to go to the bathroom because it might not be there when you return. It is such a sharp contrast to residential practices. If you leave your plants and furniture out on your balcony or hula-hoop or bike out in the yard or on the porch and somebody nabs it, you call the police. It is as if in the absence of real estate or abode, the homeless person’s body acts as property/ marks territory in a manner that establishes belonging.

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<sup>51</sup> While this argument brings up very troubling issues of scoptic governmental policies and public/private policy that must be addressed we will bracket that conversation for chapter 4

The plaintiffs would go on to win a civil ruling in 2014, but no legal precedence was made from the case. The US District Court issued an injunction barring the city of Los Angeles from taking abandoned property without giving potential owners the chance to claim it or to retrieve it from another location within 90 days.<sup>52</sup> This injunction barred police officers from removing these items, giving a win to homeless residents and advocates. This injunction set the stage for a response from the local government.

The city immediately appealed the ruling, and officials stated that “the injunction not only leads to health risks, but that it empowers people to store endless belongings on the street and ends up encouraging them to sleep in sidewalk encampments instead of seeking social services.”<sup>53</sup> So, that this policy is in the interest of the homeless is the subtext. In 2012, city officials requested a public health survey from the Los Angeles County Health Department about the conditions of streets and residence in Skid Row. The report suggested the implementation of city-run sanitation programs for the area to remedy widespread health risks. City officials claim that the health report is evidence of the need to remove the debris from the streets and created a task force in the Department of Public Works called Operation Healthy Streets to combat the sanitation issues. The city seized this opportunity and began to remove trash and debris from the streets and, according to activists, refused to adhere to the injunction that was in place.

According to Operation Healthy Streets spokesperson Patrick Butler the program “includes an intensive, multi-day cleaning of the poverty-stricken neighborhood's streets and sidewalks as

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<sup>52</sup> Dolan, Maura. "Court Rules That L.A. Can't Destroy Homeless People's Property." Los Angeles Times. 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/05/local/la-me-0906-homeless-lapd-20120906>.

<sup>53</sup> Vaillancourt, Ryan. "County Orders City to Clean Up Skid Row." Los Angeles Downtown News. May 31, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. [http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/county-orders-city-to-clean-up-skid-row/article\\_4e1d71cc-ab72-11e1-88d1-001a4bcf887a.html](http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/county-orders-city-to-clean-up-skid-row/article_4e1d71cc-ab72-11e1-88d1-001a4bcf887a.html).

well as power washing and disinfection, which necessitates the removal of all items from the affected public rights-of-way.”<sup>54</sup>

Led by the city’s new police chief, William J. Bratton, Los Angeles took steps to crack down on its homeless population. Efforts included enforcement of Municipal Code section 41.18(d), which provided that “[n]o person shall sit, lie or sleep in or upon any street, sidewalk or other public way,” except during parades and upon benches. Violation of section 41.18(d) was punishable by a fine of up to \$1000 and up to six months’ imprisonment. Though the ordinance had been on the books since 1968, it had only rarely been used. In 2002, police officers acting under the section’s authority began sweeping the Skid Row area daily.

In February 2003, the ACLU led a suit in federal district court on behalf of six homeless individuals living in Skid Row. The plaintiffs sought an order permanently enjoining the City of Los Angeles, Police Chief Bratton, and Captain Charles Beck from enforcing section 41.18(d) between 9:00 pm and 6:30 am. Two of the plaintiffs, Robert Lee Purrie and Stanley Barger, had been convicted of violating the ordinance. In addition, Purrie had lost many of his belongings during his arrest. The other four plaintiffs, Thomas Cash, Edward Jones, and Patricia and George Vinson, had been cited for violating the section. The plaintiffs alleged that the City was criminalizing the status of homelessness, a violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution as well as similar protections of the California Constitution. The district court granted summary judgment in favor of the City of Los Angeles, finding that the ordinance criminalized *conduct* rather than status. This ruling was later overturned on a 2-to-1 decision. The conduct of the homeless community was defined but its practices of trash, not

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<sup>54</sup> Lloyd, Lauren. "Operation Healthy Streets' Starts Power Washing, Disinfecting Skid Row Today." LAist. June 19, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. [http://laist.com/2012/06/19/operation\\_healthy\\_streets\\_starts\\_power.php](http://laist.com/2012/06/19/operation_healthy_streets_starts_power.php).

outward criminal conduct, but the practices of their possessions. The 2-to-1 majority concluded its discussion with the following query: “If there is no offense for which the homeless can be convicted, is the City admitting that all that comes before is merely police harassment of a vulnerable population?”

The city argues that the practices of the homeless population and residents of Skid Row are unhygienic. The city claims that the homeless population is enacting these unhealthy practices of their own volition and need intervention, but the city fails to account for the fact that it has historically refused to provide basic services that may curb these practices from occurring on the street. The Skid Row community has long struggled to secure public amenities, and community health risks have been high in recent years. The homeless are prevented from access to enclosed spaces like public restrooms because it is assumed that those spaces will be used as cover for criminal activities. Once the restrooms are removed from these communities, the homeless are then criminalized for performing practices and bodily functions in public that are not supposed to be seen by others, or at least by strangers. This represents a classic double bind. If the homeless go behind closed doors, they are criminalized. If the homeless are publicly visible on the street, they are criminalized. It is as if the goal were their total annihilation. In the LA CAN report regarding the issue, they state:

Unlike their more affluent neighbors in the western parts of Downtown who have adequate trash cans and ample access to restrooms and water, Skid Row residents have a dearth of these items. Ironically, Skid Row residents are deprived of these basic necessities under the guise of “public safety.” The rhetoric of the state, in regards to basic sanitation, has become a message shrouded in criminal behavior and intent. Restrooms have been characterized as “havens for criminals” to justify

their removal. As referenced throughout this report, the City of Los Angeles has long played dangerous games with the health of Skid Row residents. Over a number of years, Los Angeles has led efforts to remove trash receptacles, porta-potties and just about anything else that could provide a bit of humane comfort to those marginally housed. In addition to the basic issue of lack of trash cans and trash collection, homeless people's property has often been characterized and treated as trash— adding insult to injury. The LAPD has employed a strong-arm approach, basically treating all possessions of homeless residents as trash, thereby illegally seizing and destroying it. Therefore, the issues of “trash” in the Skid Row community have been seen as more complex than they need to be. The solution is actually very simple: people's property can and must be protected while also providing receptacles and collection for actual trash.

Skid Row advocates call this division of sanitary resources between Skid Row and the larger downtown community in which Skid Row is left woefully under resourced. Recently, the City of LA's Bureau of Sanitation has stated that it will remove three tons of trash from the streets.<sup>55</sup> In September of 2014, the Los Angeles City Council devoted an extra \$2.2 million to the effort, spearheaded by District 14 Councilman Jose Huizar. The funds helped pay for a massive outreach campaign that included city and county health and housing service providers and sanitation workers. A month earlier a joint city-county sweep of Skid Row to provide sanitation and social services identified more than 100 homeless people in need of

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<sup>55</sup> Zassenhaus, Eric. "LA's Homeless: Skid Row's Epic Clean-up by the Numbers." Southern California Public Radio. September 11, 2014. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.scpr.org/news/2014/09/11/46648/la-s-homeless-skid-row-s-epic-clean-up-by-the-numb/>.

immediate medical and mental health care. Sanitation workers removed 3.5 tons of waste, 184 syringes and needles, 63 razor blades, and eight knives. They also cleaned up feces and urine at hundreds of locations and delivered 13 bags of personal belongings to 90-day storage centers. The interesting aspect of this increased attention to the trash practices of Skid Row residents is that for over 50 years Skid Row has served as the dumping ground of people for California and the nation.



*Figure 5. Skid Row City Limits Mural. Wikimedia Commons*

### *Trash*

Trash has become the defining physical indicator of Skid Row in scholarly analysis, reporting, and law.<sup>56</sup> In fact, trash visually marks the border that separates Skid Row from the economically “viable” areas and “upwardly mobile” residents and business people of downtown Los Angeles. In order to fully understand the implications of trash, we must first establish a working definition.

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<sup>56</sup> Skid Row is recognized as one of the only defined homeless community by the U.S Supreme Court in its ruling of *Jones v. City of Los Angeles* (9th Cir. 2006), which established the boundaries: Third Street to the north, Alameda Street to the east, Seventh Street to the south and Main Street to the west.

On April 9, 1940, Arthur Kosted was awarded patent number 2,196,914 for his invention of the shopping cart.<sup>57</sup> As the automobile has shaped the contours and mobility of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century downtown and city center, Kosted's shopping cart has redefined the way property and individual mobility practices are imagined and performed in these areas. For many homeless residents in large metropolitan areas around the world (or in the US), shopping carts carry not only mosaics of memories, life-sustaining supplies, and futurity but also political, ethical, and criminal implications through the city along the circulatory routes of its sidewalks. The shopping cart is a microcosm of downtown LA and other places like it. It is the site of a struggle over use, the appropriate use, of space as for profit/consumption or for mobile habitation. These carts contain what the LAPD considers trash.

The theoretical conception of dirt, waste, and the modern condition owes a great deal to the work of Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*<sup>58</sup> (1966). In *Purity and Danger* Douglas analyzes the ideas of pollution and taboo in different societies. Douglas defines dirt as a thing that is out of place. Douglas asserts, "Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder." Regulations on dirt, pollution, and practices impart an order on society. It attempts to eliminate any ambiguity that may threaten its existence. Order implies a limited kind of use and correct choices or organizations. On the other hand, disorder threatens patterns but also has the potential to recreate order.

For Douglas, dirt is a spatial problem, a question of not *what* stuff is but *where* it is. "Dirt," writes Douglas, "is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as *ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.*" Rejecting things brings order.

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<sup>57</sup> Grandclément, Catherine. "Wheeling One's Groceries around the Store: The Invention of the Shopping Cart, 1936-1953." In *Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart*, edited by Warren James. Belasco and Roger Horowitz. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger; an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Praeger, 1966.

*Displacing things is a sign of order taking place. Dirt is only dirty in certain places, when it is out of its correct position. Just as feces, for example, is considered dirty when it is in our kitchens but not when it is in our bodies, so it is that our classification of waste depends on the location of objects.*<sup>59</sup>

In this discussion of dirt I am hesitant to presuppose that contents that are considered trash are “dirty” or entirely out of place within a social order. Trash, I argue, is *in and out of* social orders. I look to the work of several scholars who attempt to problematize Douglas’ work in relation to discussions of trash. Gillian Whiteley<sup>60</sup> (2011) in her analysis of art’s historical and present appropriation of junk within our eco-conscious and globalized culture takes this concept of dirt from the ritual implications of Douglas and concludes, “All dirt is relative. Clearly, ‘matter out of place’ is ‘trash’ in one diverse modality of living – and treasure – or matter *in place* – in a different interlinked, coeval one.” Trash becomes dirt in place, a creation of another spatiality.

This creation of a different modality challenges order. Sophie Gee<sup>61</sup> (2010) looks at this concept of waste and notes that it differs from dirt due to waste containing an excess and not displacement of content: “Waste, even if it does not putrefy, is abject because it is characterized by misplaced, animating excess [...] Waste is a form of pollution, marked as such by having participated in a process; that process is one wherein substance stops being acceptable or even valuable and becomes unwanted or taboo. This is important because as Mary Douglas pointed out in *Purity and Danger*, pollution exists when a substance has crossed a border and become

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<sup>59</sup> Viney, William. *Waste: A Philosophy of Things*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Whiteley, Gillian. *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Gee, Sophie. *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-century Imagination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.



threatening to the system to which it now, improperly, belongs.” Trash becomes a thing not out of place but in a place where it does not belong. This shift brings about an ambiguity of place and space that must be reconciled.

William Viney in his analysis of rubbish extends this discussion and offers us a useful description of trash. For Viney, trash is matter “marked by a separation from the purposive and teleological temporality of human activity.” Trash does not signal a spatiality but a temporality: “These are things or places that lack the anticipation of utile and temporal ends, they linger, they remain, they are time’s leftovers.” I would like to extend this definition to include practices in addition to matter. The way matter operates without temporal ends is through their dislocated and excess performative practices. If dirt is spatial and waste is excess, then trash is the combination of these two that comes about through the dislocated temporal performances of excess matter practices in displacement. Through practices of people dumping, the historical rhetoric of migrancy as a performance of unwanted bodies and economies in public spaces, and use of refuse by residents of Skid Row and its streets, Skid Row and its residents are linked with, and in some cases equated with, trash.

If Skid Row is considered a place of trash, we must not look at trash as static matter but as something that is dynamic through displaced spatial practices. Traditional practices of matter become externalized when performed on the streets of Skid Row and become taboo due to spatial displacement. If the people and practices of Skid Row are considered a threat to the city and thusly unwanted, these sanitary practices of the street become performances of existence and resistance. The people of Skid Row are symbolically treated like the human waste products of capitalism. Rather than Marx’s readily exploitable workforce, these are the people who are not or are no longer readily exploitable, and yet they remain and dare to make themselves stubbornly

visible within sight of and on the doorsteps of consumer capitalism or places of legitimate economic exchange. Since they no longer factor within this economic system and are displaced from traditional consumer practices of material possessions, their belongings are considered trash. Their belongings become disposable the moment their owner is not standing guard. Since their existence within capitalism is considered negligible in the public space, their belongings are considered trash when they are not part of the economic flow.

Continued attempts to corral these practices has created a legal and political genealogy of trash regulations that don't remove the matter but instead criminalize<sup>62</sup> and make invisible the bodies and material practices that are considered out of place when enacted on the street. Efforts to remove homeless residents have increased to areas outside Los Angeles, shaping the architecture, technologies, and mobility of people in cities. In the spring of 2014, it was reported that metal spikes were installed outside a block of luxury flats in London to deter homeless people from sleeping there.<sup>63</sup> Public seating in various global cities has now been altered to detour homeless individuals from sleeping in public spaces: There are "benches with vertical slats between each seat, individual bucket seats, large armrests between seats, and wall railings that enable leaning but not sitting or lying, among many other designs. There are even benches made to be slightly uncomfortable in order to dissuade people from sitting too long."<sup>64</sup>

A growing number of cities are restricting and outlawing the homeless population by attempting to eliminate daily acts of homeless living—sleeping, eating and panhandling in

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<sup>62</sup> Will discuss in-depth in Chapter 3

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, Anna. "'Homeless Spikes' Installed outside London Flats." *The Telegraph*. June 07, 2014. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/property/cities/10883541/Homeless-spikes-installed-outside-London-flats.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenberger, Robert. "How Cities Use Design to Drive Homeless People Away." *The Atlantic*. June 19, 2014. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/how-cities-use-design-to-drive-homeless-people-away/373067/>.

public. In 2012, Los Angeles approved a ban on camping in city parks.<sup>65</sup> Philadelphia<sup>66</sup> and Sacramento<sup>67</sup> have imposed bans on publicly feeding people living on the streets of their city. In Denver,<sup>68</sup> eating or sleeping on another person's property is also illegal. With over 100 new anti-homeless laws passed in the past 3 years a “war on the homeless” is burgeoning in America’s cities.

In an attempt to subvert many of the statutes and architectures that attempt to alter public space into anti-loitering, anti-homeless spaces, some activist, artists, designers, and architects have converted and created (re)usable public items. These items represent convertible, inflatable, and portable innovations that alter potential dwellings and spaces to be (re)usable. Such architecture includes urban benches that convert into homeless shelters, inflatable dwellings that run on the waste air of buildings, and mobile urban furniture that doubles as shelter and storage. What is interesting about these projects is that they utilize the same techniques and processes that homeless populations have historically used to survive: bricolage. Bricolage refers to the creation of one object through the piecing together of various found objects. We can see how bricolage was utilized in the old Hooverilles in the creation of dwellings made from wood and other found objects. Additionally, bricolage refers to the use of objects that possess one meaning in the dominant culture but are acquired and given a new, often subversive meaning. The shopping cart

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<sup>65</sup> Zahniser, David. "Council Aims to Thwart New Occupy Protest at L.A. City Hall." Los Angeles Times. June 07, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/07/local/la-me-0607-occupy-tent-ban-20120607>.

<sup>66</sup> Lin, Jennifer. "Advocate for the Homeless Objects to Philadelphia’s Feeding Ban." Philadelphia Inquirer. June 02, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. [http://articles.philly.com/2012-06-02/news/31960250\\_1\\_homeless-indoors-addictions-and-mental-illness-homeless-individuals](http://articles.philly.com/2012-06-02/news/31960250_1_homeless-indoors-addictions-and-mental-illness-homeless-individuals).

<sup>67</sup> Brewer, Steven. "Sacramento Police Disrupt Homeless Feeding, Arrest 3 at ..." Fresno People’s Media. December 16, 2014. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://fresnopeoplesmedia.com/2014/12/sacramento-police-disrupt-homeless-feeding/>.

<sup>68</sup> Simmons, Sarah. "Denver Police Now Enforcing Homeless Camping Ban." The Denver Post. June 04, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016. [http://www.denverpost.com/ci\\_20780986/denver-police-now-enforcing-homeless-camping-ban](http://www.denverpost.com/ci_20780986/denver-police-now-enforcing-homeless-camping-ban).

becomes a subversive tool of mobility in the face of growing limitations of possessions and space. It is not only the ability to (re)use discarded items, it is the ability to use discarded people to form a generative community that is at stake when we view trash as a perishable entity instead of a potentiality.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter we analyzed the construction of Skid Row and its historical relationship to cultural signifiers of trash and homelessness. We first look at the issue of homeless dumping and relate it to the issue of containment of unwanted bodies that society deems as excess. Skid Row has long been a space where communities across Los Angeles placed bodies and identities that are not wanted. These identities are traditionally criminal, disabled, queer, poor, black and brown and suffering from addiction. We then analyzed how this practice of dumping unwanted bodies has expanded from the city of Los Angeles to California as a whole and also encompassing other states in which mental patients and released convicts are placed in Skid Row.

In order to understand how Skid Row has become this dumping ground, the construction of homelessness and homeless space had to be analyzed. In this chapter we looked at the construction of homeless from its early iteration in the early 19th century and the emergence of the railroad and subsequent migrant workers that followed these tracks for work. Homeless subjectivity changed after the civil war when out of work veterans created makeshift communities along these railroad lines, travelling from place to place looking for work. The progressive era of the early 20th century changed this perception of the out of work worker to a homeless identity that was marked by issues of lack of moral character and work ethic. Industrial era capitalism made homelessness an issue of 'deserving' vs 'non-deserving' of help. Eventually

the homeless of this time began to make their own communities and develop Hoovervilles, which I argue are the historical predecessor of Skid Row.

Homelessness became connected with identities of displaced communities. From Okies to Mexican-American to Chinese-American. A connection of homelessness to Taylorism era capitalism gave way to a connection of homelessness to migrancy. We then observed how the social welfare system of the 1960s through the 1980s contributed to the emergence of Skid Row as a containment space of migrant, minority, disabled and alternative bodies and identities. This containment era ended in the late 1990s due to the emergence of neoliberal policies within cities that stressed private investment and control of urban centers.

This new era of neoliberalism and gentrification is attracting new capitalistic friendly bodies to occupy this space. To contribute to this, private and government policies has stressed an elimination of homeless bodies and practices. This is seen in the contestation of property, practices and existences of homeless individuals in Skid Row and the downtown area. The Lavan case, Operation Healthy Streets and hostile architecture of many of the new buildings in downtown Los Angeles highlight the growing battle over the existence and development of Skid Row. The Dirty Divide report developed by LA CAN and the alternative consumer practices of Skid Row residents show the historical strategies of intervention and survival against these top down constructions of Skid Row. Historically, homelessness and who we consider to be homeless is related strongly to communities and bodies that the state considers unnecessary. They are discarded subjectivities placed as barriers to progress. These discarded bodies are related to issues of trash, its containment, subsequent elimination and resistance from these populations.

In a move that shows the continued fight over stuff and trash in public space, in the summer of 2015 the LA City Council overwhelmingly approved two ordinances that encourage the seizure of homeless people's property when it is deemed to be "stored" on sidewalks or in parks while a move to evict homeless people themselves could follow later this year. The proposal defines "stored" property as property that the city has deemed to be stored. With this move, the city can now define what is considered property. These laws impact the homeless population today but hold long-lasting implications for the ways public space can be inhabited in the future. These sanitary practices of the street are not revolutionary but hold a potential for alternative ways in which we can use and view the city. As legislation attempts to conform the city into a linear mobile site of consumerism, we must look at ways in which we can literally trash and reuse the city for our bodies and identities. For the homeless population what is at stake is much higher; it is existence. Trash marks, trash defines, trash lives.