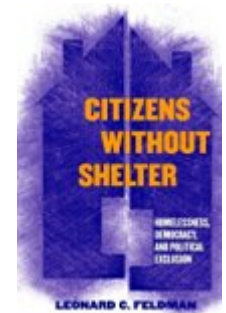


**Leonard C. Feldman.** *Citizens Without Shelter: Homelessness, Democracy, and Political Exclusion.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. x + 185 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-4124-0.



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In an era of "quality of life" campaigns resulting in public-sleeping bans and police raids on homeless encampments, many observers of the plight of the homeless feel conflicted over developments in urban policy. The discourse around homelessness frequently returns to tired distinctions between the "worthy" and the "unworthy" poor, triggering charitable emotions and feelings of personal guilt and subsequent generosity, without challenging the broader meanings of political and economic inequality in America. The rhetoric adopted by many liberals looking for ways to bring the homeless into the nation's economic and social mainstream often inadvertently echoes that of "compassionate conservatives" calling for "tough love" and behavior modifying programs for the poor. Attempting to balance the provision of social services to those in need with options respecting the rights and dignity of homeless individuals, anyone proposing a "solution" to the "problem" of homelessness enters a minefield of opposing goals and complex motivations, all too often rooted in the politics of fear.

*Citizens Without Shelter* offers an extraordinarily lucid and provocative analysis of these themes. An interdisciplinary project grounded in political theory, it draws upon sociological theory, representations in the popular media, legal history and theory, and public policy debates around homelessness, while maintaining rigorous historical specificity. Leonard Feldman develops a complex theoretical argument informed by empirical evidence and crafts a richly detailed and highly readable text.

Feldman poses the key question, "Is there an underlying structure or process that links compassion with compassion fatigue, and permits the relatively easy slide from calls to *eliminate homelessness* to calls to *eliminate the homeless*?" (pp. 5-6). While previous scholarship has recognized the "social control" inherent in social welfare endeavors and acknowledged the fact that the propertied classes are partially constructed through their very difference from the homeless, Feldman explores the explicit and implicit connections between liberal and conservative approaches to

homelessness through close analysis of policy developments and discourse.

The author develops a theoretical model depicting representations and understandings of homelessness at the intersections of two axes, one spanning the "sacred" to the "profane," the other the "free" to the "unfree" (pp. 6-7). These intersections allow him to unpack various visions of homelessness in a nuanced and systematic fashion, characterizing them as variations on themes such as "sacred unfreedom" (as in the situation of the pitiable, helpless beggar depicted in appeals by charitable organizations) or "profane freedom" (as in the case of the outlaw renegade choosing to sleep on the streets as framed by proponents of punitive city ordinances). Throughout the text, he returns to this model while analyzing the role of homelessness in sites ranging from the popular film *The Fisher King*, to key court cases and politicians' arguments.

Feldman challenges traditional analyses of homelessness, arguing, "it is time to pry homelessness loose from its usual frame as a social problem and to see the state and sovereign power as deeper causes, not as superstructural with respect to others" (p. 15). Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's idea of "bare life," as opposed to political existence, Feldman argues "the political exclusion of homeless persons is a constitutive exclusion" (p. 18). In response, he seeks to complicate, pluralize, and refocus discussions of homes and their meanings as they shape dialogues over shelters, encampments, and city streets.

Feldman usefully analyzes urban policy, situating the recent shift from vagrancy laws to anti-homeless ordinances in a broader transformation in the nature of the public sphere. As the post-industrial state no longer requires the labor of many individuals, he argues, the debates over "idleness" that formerly dominated discussions of homelessness are found increasingly in the realm of welfare reform. The homeless become the subjects of debates focusing instead on their role as

impediments to consumer activity. The 1972 *Pachristou v. City of Jacksonville* case, in which the Supreme Court struck down a vagrancy ordinance as vague and anachronistic, forms a pivotal point in Feldman's analysis, as a move from critiques of "conspicuous consumption" on the part of "idle" beggars to the protection of the non-homeless consuming public. The author remains skeptical of simplistic interpretations of the new ordinances as punishing the homeless for their conduct rather than their status, finding their actions, however necessary, increasingly categorized as choices. Tying these developments to the "rollback of the liberal welfare and regulatory state," Feldman offers a sobering portrait of the contemporary scene (p. 48).

The chapter, "Redistribution, Recognition, and the Sovereign Ban," presents an especially provocative examination of the conflicts over recognition of the rights of homeless individuals. Although many policy analysts and service providers characterize homeless activist movements as, at best, pointless, and at worst, counter-productive to the struggle to acquire needed funds and programs for the poor, Feldman frames such tensions as largely overdrawn. "Where a 'recognition' politics is aimed against a set of punitive policies that seek to deny homeless persons the very right to exist, 'legal recognition' is not identity politics run amok but rather the struggle for political inclusion in response to the ban on bare life. The fundamental and necessary first step in combating the injustices of homelessness is establishing citizenship" (p. 86). While others have used homelessness as "the absurd outer limit to a politics of identity recognition," the author posits such recognition as central to the development of political inclusion" (p. 88). Feldman's work here offers a cautionary note to those quick to dismiss such movements at their first suspicion of "identity politics," urging a more rigorous contextual analysis considering the ways in which

homeless people participating in activist movements reestablish their roles as citizens.

In the wake of the era of the SRO hotel, Feldman sees, as did Charles Hoch and Robert Slayton, a lost opportunity for affirmative community building among the homeless (and near homeless) who gathered in dwellings that, while substandard in many regards, provided them with needed access to services and social contact. Drawing on the work of Michael Walzer on the differentiation of spheres and Hannah Arendt on connections between the household and the public realm, Feldman urges a move away from a society divided between those with homes and those without. Instead, he urges a pluralization of the notion of "home" that would resist twentieth-century idealizations of the nuclear family and its residence. A diverse range of housing forms, including residential hotels, publicly subsidized private programs, and other models of residence, he argues, would combat such a needless dichotomy. Concluding with a call for the development of a new "ethic of dwelling," Feldman effectively challenges those with homes to consider the frequently arbitrary distinctions drawn between their behavior and the actions of the homeless.

Feldman could further develop his analysis of the meaning of housing forms through deeper consideration of the shifting demographics of homelessness in the contemporary era. Even as the SRO faded from view, the "new" homeless population that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s was, as he notes, increasingly comprised of women, children, African Americans, and Latinos. Considering the implications of the changing age, gender, "race," and ethnicity of homeless individuals as well as their family groupings could complicate the discussion of both homeless policy and appropriate housing forms.

Feldman's argument about the relationship between the meaning of "home" and the scope of political inclusion complements that of another recent work, historian Todd DePastino's *Citizen*

*Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (2003). The visible presence of homeless white men, DePastino argues, profoundly shaped understandings of "home" and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship from the close of the Civil War into the postwar era. In essence bracketing the modern welfare state, these new works lend insight into the wide-ranging influence of homelessness, less a marginal subtopic of poverty history than a theme central to the development of American politics and culture.

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