

A Eulogy for Homelessness

Delivered at the Jazz Funeral for Homelessness New Orleans, Louisiana June 18, 2004

Written by Kevin Lindamood and Lauren Siegel of Baltimore, Maryland

Friends, we are gathered here this afternoon to bid farewell to homelessness. With hearts heavy with human suffering and souls weary from lack of resources, we have traveled from distant lands to share a brief time to mourn together in this space. From crowded inner-cities we have come. From suburbs and rural areas we have come. By plane, bus, car, train and even by foot we have traveled, leaving health clinics and shelters and streets and abandoned buildings and houses and families to imagine together the “death” of homelessness.

For nearly three decades we have seen homelessness flourish, leaving men to wait in long lines at missions and labor pools, leaving women and children huddled under bridges and wrapped in blankets in cardboard boxes, slowly crushing the bones of our most vulnerable friends and neighbors without health care, leaving their bodies depleted from untreated diabetes or HIV, their hands and feet amputated from interminable nights in bitter cold weather, their lives forgotten and taken too quickly.

Homelessness is survived by its mother “Poverty,” its father “Lack of Affordable Housing,” and its grandmother, “Ms. Placed Priorities.” Homelessness leaves behind its brothers – “Income Disparity,” “Incarceration,” and “Low Wages” – and its sisters, “Addiction,” “Domestic Violence,” “Mental Illness,” and “Lack of Health Insurance.”

Homelessness also leaves behind other surviving relatives – the countless billions of dollars spent on quick emergency fixes and massive social programs while homelessness only continued to gather strength; it leaves behind “apathy” and “compassion fatigue,” restrictive zoning ordinances and “NIMBYism,” “poor discharge planning,” “civil rights violations,” “zero tolerance policies” and the “criminalization” of those forced to live out their lives on the streets.

Hopefully, each of us will survive homelessness. But we will only do so with a renewed commitment to the creation of a future without it. We will only survive homelessness when collectively we demand a right to housing. We will only survive homelessness when we prevail upon those who create public policy to guarantee comprehensive health insurance for all. We will only survive homelessness when we have effectively organized to ensure not a “minimum wage,” but a “living wage.” We will only survive homelessness when we have built a movement strong enough and large enough to divert misspent revenue and wasted resources to new national priorities created by the people and for the people, when human needs take priority over corporate needs, when social justice has not perished, but has prevailed upon the earth.

Friends, we must organize now, for the relatives of homelessness, we are told, are plotting a swift and sure resurrection.