Chapter 3

The Homeless Shelter and the Nineteenth-Century Poorhouse: Comparing Notes from Two Eras of "Indoor Relief"

•Dennis P. Culhane

> Miserable, poorly managed, underfinanced institutions, trapped by their own contradictions, poorhouses failed to meet any of the goals so confidently predicted by their sponsors. (Katz, 1986, p. 3)

AS PUBLIC EXPENDITURES FOR THE PROVISION OF SHELTER TO HOMELESS men, women, and children continue to grow (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1989), so does public anxiety over the fate of these institutions and their residents (Steinfels, 1992). Expectations that shelters would reduce the visibility of homelessness and rehabilitate their clients have been replaced by concerns that shelters are ever-expanding bureaucracies lacking direction and purpose (Roberts, 1991). Governmentally prescribed needs-tests, behavioral standards, and caps on length of stay have seized the initiative from homeless advocates who have attempted to establish "open door" policies on shelter (City of Philadelphia, 1990b; Morgan, 1991b; Spolar, 1991). Indeed some cities, such as Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., have reversed earlier commitments effectively protecting an unconditional right to shelter and have reduced ("downsized") nightly shelter capacity (Culhane, 1992; Spolar, 1991). Other cities, such as New York, have likewise confronted open resistance to new shelter development (Morgan, 1991a).

The problems confronting homeless people and the officials charged with their protection are not new. They echo those from other periods in American history, when private and public welfare organizations built congregate facilities for the purpose of "poor relief." Poorhouses and almshouses as well as their descendants—prisons, asylums, and municipal lodging houses—have faced similar crises in public confidence, questions about

their social utility, and concerns over their burdensome cost. Yet the impulse to institutionalize the poor has found a receptive audience throughout American history.

That history is the subject of a book by Michael Katz (1986), *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America,* in which he traces the continuing contradictions and deficiencies of the American welfare system to the early nineteenth century. According to Katz's research, poorhouses were created to deter people from seeking cash assistance from local welfare authorities, thus ostensibly balancing concern for the poor with the preservation of the work ethic. Katz argues that the current debate over welfare "dependence" and the "underclass" is a refashioning of this time-worn theme, although he concludes that this debate has always had more of a basis in politics than in the exigencies of life at the margins of the labor economy.

Such historical perspective has been lacking in contemporary discussions of homelessness and the adequacy of shelter provision. Hopper (1990) has conducted one of the few historical analyses of the current shelter system, based on the legacy of New York and Chicago lodging houses. His study links the growth and contraction of homeless shelters throughout the last century with dynamics in the labor market, the capacity of families to support unemployed members, and gaps in unemployment assistance. Hopper argues that shelters have historically perpetuated the demoralization they sought to end by ignoring the economic nature of homelessness and by favoring punitive methods both for determining "worthiness" for assistance and for rehabilitation.

Building on that work, this chapter uses the history of the nineteenth-century poorhouse, as described in the first chapter of Katz's text, to compare and contrast its historical context, functions, and structure with those of the contemporary homeless shelter.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF POORHOUSES AND HOMELESS SHELTERS

In the poorhouse era, as in our own period, the transforming power of the economy forced a major reorganization of traditional social relations, creating new forms of poverty, and public anxiety about the impact of lost industries, lost wages, and lost ways of life. In the early nineteenth century it was the widespread introduction of waged labor that radically redefined the relationship between workers and the products of their labor. The development of manufacturing technologies eroded the position of independent ar-

tisans, displacing young and old workers alike. Economic development was uneven, characterized by significant temporal and regional variations. Katz (1986) describes the unsteady and seasonal nature of work, how workers were often forced to migrate great distances to find employment, and the vulnerability of the working class to the frequent, periodic depressions. Wages were at best inadequate. Katz cites a calculation from 1828 based on the costs of goods that revealed that a household in which two adults were employed full-time, year-round, could not meet even the "bare bones budget," the conceptual equivalent of today's "poverty level." The threat of illness haunted most families, as even a short-term affliction could send a family into destitution. Unskilled workers, many of them newly arrived immigrants, flooded urban labor markets. As Katz (1986) observes, "the availability of work for every able-bodied person who really wants a job is one of the enduring myths of American history. In fact, work was not more universally available in the early and mid-nineteenth century than it is today" (p. 6).

Whereas industrialization, urbanization, and European immigration transformed the United States in the early nineteenth century, in the latter half of the twentieth century the country experienced a very different but equally significant set of transforming forces that were near-inversions of their nineteenth-century counterparts: deindustrialization, suburbanization, and black urban migration. Important signs of these structural shifts began to emerge dramatically around World War II. Indeed, a literature has developed that explicitly links many of these postwar structural changes to the recent growth of homelessness (Burt, 1992; Hopper & Hamburg, 1986; Hopper, Susser, & Conover, 1985; Stern, 1984).

Beginning in the 1950s, the movement of manufacturing from central cities, first to the suburbs and then beyond our national borders, led to a steep decline in the absolute and relative share of manufacturing employment in urban centers. In its place arose a two-tiered service economy, with relatively stable work at high wages for the better-educated population, primarily from the suburbs, and relatively unstable, temporary and part-time work at low wages for the unskilled laborers, primarily from the cities (Harrison & Bluestone, 1988). Philadelphia, for example, had lost 18 percent of its 1950 employment base by 1980, with particularly devastating losses in the manufacturing sector (a loss of 210,590 jobs). The surrounding suburban counties, however, saw a 170 percent increase in their employment base. The relative prosperity of the Philadelphia suburbs resulted in a 23 percent higher median income, by 1980, with only 46 percent of the city's unemployment rate (Summers & Luce, 1987).

The inequities that emerged between the city and its suburbs were des-

tined to have a racial character, as Philadelphia's African American population increased threefold, from 220,000 or 11 percent of the population in 1950 to 630,000 or 38 percent in 1980. As African Americans urbanized, job opportunities suburbanized—a pattern repeated in many cities throughout the United States. Correspondingly, the unemployement rate for young black men has grown to twice that of whites nationally, a measure that conceals the equally significant declines in labor force participation among black youth (Wilson, 1987). And as unemployment has increased among African Americans, so has the economic insecurity of the unemployed. By 1988, only 32 percent of unemployed workers received unemployment benefits, the lowest proportion since the program was initiated during the Great Depression, and less than half the rate only thirteen years earlier (75 percent in 1975) (US Employment and Training Administration, Washington, D.C., January 29, 1993). Even low-wage workers with full-time jobs are more likely to be poor, as the value of minimum wage fell from 118 percent of the poverty level for a family of three in 1967 to 68 percent of the poverty level for a similar family in 1990 (McCambridge, 1992).

As jobs and people suburbanized, urban unemployment grew, and wages and benefits declined, housing costs continued to grow. Consequently, the rent burden (defined as the percent of income devoted to rent) increased by 28.7 percent from 1970 to 1988 (Burt, 1992). Cushing Dolbeare (1991) reports that the "affordability gap" for the poorest fourth of American households (defined as the shortage of units renting at 30 percent of income) grew fivefold from 1970 to 1991. The differential impact by race of these combined pressures on housing affordability is especially dramatic. Consider that in Philadelphia, the median proportion of income spent on rent by black households rose from 22 percent in 1970 to 53 percent in 1988, while it remained relatively stable for whites, growing from 21 percent to 26 percent (Dolbeare, 1988).

The social and economic transformations of the early nineteenth and late twentieth century occurred under very different historical circumstances. Structural shifts in the economy of both eras exposed unmet needs and increased the demand for public assistance. With the emergence of new forms of poverty and with the growing demand for "poor relief" in urban centers, a debate raged in both periods about the merits of public assistance to the poor. Unfortunately, the change in historical circumstances was not accompanied by a change in the underlying attitudes about poverty and its victims. Stale arguments, failed policies, and, ultimately, an atavistic institutional form were resurrected to cope with the deepening impoverishment of American cities.

ATTACKS ON WELFARE
("OUTDOOR RELIEF")

Poor relief in the beginning of the nineteenth century primarily took the form of cash assistance, or "outdoor relief." It was funded and distributed through local public authorities (thus with great regional variation) only to those with a demonstrated need—those with no family available to care for them in their homes. Pauper children were frequently taken from their parents, and placed with farmers and artisans agreeing to train and house them. Some of the poor were auctioned to the lowest bidder who would care for them. As demand for relief grew under the combined pressures of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, so did the tax burden of paying for relief, a fact that did not go unnoticed by taxpayers (people often received a separate tax bill for poor relief) and politicians. Searching for an explanation to the growing "poor rates," Katz (1986) explains that commentators cited the obvious forces of urbanization and immigration, but "even more, they stressed the role of intemperance . . . the real villains were existing public poor relief practice and the indiscriminate generosity of private charity" (p. 16).

The attack against outdoor relief was based on the premise that it encouraged idleness and undermined the work ethic. It interfered with the calculus of wages based strictly on the supply of labor and was proof to the working class that one could live a comfortable life without hard work. According to some observers, outdoor relief was an invitation to the able-bodied poor to become beggars. Critics furthermore claimed that it destroyed character and weakened its beneficiaries. They lamented the impersonality of outdoor relief and the class antagonism it promoted. Katz (1986) notes, however, that amidst all their commentary, critics were not concerned with ending poverty, only with determining how to save the "truly needy" from starvation, while keeping the "fake needy" lined up for work: "Indeed it is only a slight exaggeration to say that the core of most welfare reform in America since the early nineteenth century has been a war on the able-bodied poor: an attempt to define, locate, and purge them from the roles of relief" (p. 18)

Reformers set about trying to define behavioral categories of the poor so that poor relief could be distributed more discriminately (and cheaply). They tried labels such as the "impotent" versus the "able" and the "permanent poor" versus the "temporary poor." As markers for these attributes proved elusive, they turned increasingly to moral categories, such as the "worthy" versus the "unworthy" poor, and made a distinction between poverty and pauperism (poverty results from "misfortune," pauperism from "shameful indolence").

The debate over poverty has not fundamentally changed since the 1820s,

and neither have many relief practices. Poor relief in the United States is still administered by local authorities, with great variation from state to state, and is dispensed only to those with demonstrated need (means-tested). Welfare recipients are scrupulously monitored for compliance with arcane and bureaucratic regulations, frequently intended to compel people to work at low wages (Piven & Cloward, 1971, 1982), and are portrayed by critics as morally corrupt persons with little desire for work or for financial independence (Mead, 1986, 1992; Murray, 1984). Attacks on welfare, such as those launched under the Reagan administration, reduced eligibility for cash assistance among single-parent households, the disabled and the working poor (Katz, 1989; Piven & Cloward, 1982; Zinn & Sarri, 1984). States have participated in this assault by allowing the median purchasing power of welfare benefits to deteriorate against inflation 43 percent from 1970 to 1992 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992); by allowing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the disabled to decline nearly 50 percent against inflation from 1975 to 1989 (Burt, 1992); and, furthermore, by eliminating some programs altogether. Most significantly, many states have either stopped, reduced the monthly allotment for, or severely restricted eligibility for general assistance (GA), the welfare program most likely to benefit single homeless persons and others not covered by federal unemployment insurance or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Burt (1992) reports that in 1987 seventeen states offered *no* general assistance of any kind, that in nine states it was provided only in large urban counties, that in fourteen states it was available only to "unemployables," and that in only seven states was it available statewide, even to "employables." Where GA is available, its value has, like AFDC, lost ground to inflation, forcing people to "choose between necessities" (Burt, 1992, p. 105).

Consider the case of Pennsylvania. In 1982, legislation was introduced and passed by Governor Richard Thornburgh categorically excluding "employables" from receiving GA for nine months out of the year (Act 75). Despite its low value (GA beneficiaries received $96 every two weeks in 1988), GA was perceived as a deterrent to work. Thus Act 75 required the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare to determine who among GA applicants were "transitionally needy" (i.e., employable) and to restrict them from receiving cash benefits for most of the year. Cash grants were subsequently restricted for 68,000 Pennsylvania residents deemed unworthy under the law. A study of the law's impact found that 81 percent of those cut from GA had no income from employment at the time of follow-up; that the post-Act 75 reemployment rate for GA recipients was no different from the pre-Act 75 reemployment rate; that the number of beneficiaries who experienced losses of their homes, utilities, cars, and/or furniture due to the inability to pay bills

and debts went from a projected 9,044 prior to Act 75 to 17,612 after implementation; that 42 percent reported having to use emergency shelters, food, and clothing programs; that 45 percent were living with relatives or friends and were unable to contribute to household expenses; that 33.2 percent were in "indentured relationships," receiving food and shelter only in exchange for working for the provider of that food and shelter; and that fully 25 percent experienced worse health after the implementation of welfare "reforms" (Advocacy Committee for Emergency Services [ACES], 1984). The period following GA reforms saw the capacity of the Philadelphia shelter system increase by more than 2,000 percent (Culhane, 1992), with demand for shelter being highest among single adults under the age of thirty-five who constituted nearly half of all shelter residents in 1988 (Ryan, Bartelt, & Goldstein, 1988).[1] The link to homelessness would appear obvious. As Katz (1986) has observed for the nineteenth century:

> The years when public officials and charity reformers complained most about an increase in tramps coincided with the general cutback in outdoor relief throughout the country. Most tramps, in fact, were men in their twenties and thirties who had been on the road a relatively short time looking for work. (p. 51)

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF "INDOOR RELIEF"

Disconcerted by the rising costs of outdoor relief and its administration, nineteenth-century reformers advocated replacing cash assistance with the poorhouse, believing it to be a cheaper alternative and a deterrent to outdoor relief. Katz (1986) cites the case of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where "with the opening of the poorhouse, 'their applications' [for outdoor relief] had 'almost entirely ceased.' Once people knew 'that every Pauper must be removed to the Poor House, many causes combined to prevent their application for assistance' " (p. 23).

Poorhouses were expected to be more than cost-efficient deterrents to cash assistance. Developing as part of a more widely held belief among nineteenth-century reformers that new institutions could improve society through their impact on individual personalities, "poorhouses shared in this rehabilitative vision; they would suppress intemperance, the primary cause of pauperism, and inculcate the habit of steady work" (Katz, 1986, p. 11). Sponsored by a combination of public and private interests, poorhouses reflected the imperatives of the new wage economy for a disciplined work force, capable of "steady, punctual, and predictable labor" (Katz, 1986, p.

12). They could presumably transform behavior and character, converting people from idleness to industry through make-work, forced labor, and discipline. Even pauper children were believed to benefit from poorhouses, where they too could be more adequately prepared for a life of labor.

However, as Katz (1986) notes, the poorhouse was "stamped" with irreconcilable contradictions:

> The almshouse was to be at once a refuge for the helpless and a deterrent to the able-bodied; it was supposed to care for the poor humanely and to discourage them from applying for relief. . . . The almshouse was to be both a voluntary institution, entered with no more coercion than the threat of starvation, and, in some cases, a penal institution for vagrants and beggars. . . . If the almshouses worked, the aged and infirm would be held hostage to the war on able-bodied paupers. . . . In the end, one of these poles would have to prevail. . . . In essence, social policy advocated shutting up the old and sick away from their friends and relatives to deter the working class from seeking poor relief. (p. 25)

The able-bodied poor were a persistent problem for poorhouse officials, and their ranks swelled with economic downturns. However, rather than attending to the structural nature of the poverty driving poorhouse utilization, relief reformers believed that better classification was the key to improving poorhouse efficiency. But the dynamic reality of working-class life and the lack of clear criteria by which to separate categories of the poor thwarted reform efforts: "Working class experience was a continuum; no clear line separated the respectable poor from paupers. This is why all attempts to divide the poor into classes and all policies based on those divisions ultimately failed. In no instance was the failure more spectacular than in the history of the poorhouse" (Katz, 1986, p. 10).

In contrast to the nineteenth-century experience, the expansion of the shelter system in the 1980s was not always as explicitly tied to welfare "reforms," although some states (Michigan, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania) did trade increases in shelter expenditures for cuts in general assistance benefits. Nevertheless, the growth of this system and its design reveal a set of assumptions that is similar to those of the poorhouse. Organizationally, the mixture of public and private support for shelter has resulted in a range of local approaches to shelter financing and management. Not-for-profit voluntary associations, many of them religious charities, were among the first to respond to the growing visibility of the homeless problem in the early 1980s. However, as data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development ([HUD] 1989) indicate, public sector revenue accounted for 65 percent of the dollars spent on shelter in the United States by 1988. In many cities, such as in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, most voluntary shelter organizations eventually became contract entities of city and state governments.

Again, consider the case of Philadelphia. In 1982, Philadelphia had a small, loosely organized system of private shelters with an estimated total capacity of 250 beds. By 1988, the system had grown to 5,600 beds, with nearly all administered and funded through a centralized public shelter authority, and reimbursed, like hospitals on a per diem basis (Culhane, 1993). Until 1988, shelter contracts were literally "put out for bid," or awarded to the lowest bidder (as in the poorhouse era) often with little regard for the adequacy of the facilities or services rendered. A centralized shelter referral system allowed the City of Philadelphia to subcontract shelter for the disabled and elderly population in smaller facilities, particularly in boarding homes. However, as demand for shelter among families and young, "able-bodied" men increased in the mid-1980s, the city government was forced to respond quickly, opening six large congregate shelters with capacities exceeding 200 beds each.

By their program design (or lack thereof), most shelters are no more than temporary resting places, focused primarily on the immediate material needs of their clients and providing little in the way of social services. The City of Philadelphia reports that fewer than half of its shelters provide any on-site social services (City of Philadelphia, 1990a). Shelters require residents to leave in the early hours of the morning (around 6 A.M.), typically justified by the argument that shelters should not promote "dependence" and should encourage "work-seeking" behavior. Many shelters likewise have limited lengths of stay, such as two weeks or one month, also to discourage "dependence." As in the poorhouse era, however, the goals of reducing dependence (deterrence) and promoting rehabilitation have often been in conflict. For example, a study of a large congregate shelter for men in New York found that the official shelter policy of "discouraging settling in" severely limited the effectiveness of mental health and substance abuse programs that required a stable client base for their success (Gounis & Susser, 1990).

While professing a goal of self-sufficiency for their clients, few shelters have the resources to enable a person to gain stable employment. None of the more than fifteen facilities visited by this author between 1986 and 1989 in Boston or Philadelphia had established procedures for assessing individuals' capacity for work or need for employment assistance. Although there is often a suspect affinity between shelters and some temporary labor agencies,

most shelters have no employment programs.[2] Activists from the Union of the Homeless in Philadelphia waged a campaign early in their organizing effort simply to persuade shelter administrators that clients *wanted* to work. In a 1987 interview one of the activists, Ronald Darnaby, described that some shelter providers had a contradictory attitude that insulated them from such challenges: "Shelters justify doing as little as possible for clients by believing that, on the one hand, we are helpless, and on other hand, that we should be able to help ourselves. We lose either way."

Shelter reformers are more recently promoting shelters' rehabilitative functions. Like poorhouse reformers, shelter reformers have had to embrace the hope of better classification by promoting specialization for subsegments of the population, such as the mentally ill or substance abusers (Culhane, 1992). But while a rehabilitative vision continues to guide shelter reformers, the potentially higher cost of a rehabilitative system could leave a deterrence orientation in place. Ironically, it may also force some recognition that providing rehabilitation services, while helpful to the currently homeless, is likely to do little to reduce the future demand for shelter.

THE FAILURE OF POORHOUSES AND THE SHELTER SYSTEM

Eventually, the optimism of nineteenth-century reformers with institutional responses to social problems waned: "Mental hospitals did not cure; prisons and reform schools did not rehabilitate; public schools did not educate very well; and poorhouses did not check the growth of outdoor relief or promote industry and temperance. A preoccupation with order, routine, and cost replaced the founders' concern with the transformation of character and social reform" (Katz, 1986, p. 25). The conditions of the poorhouses—poorly constructed, crowded, noisy, filthy, and foul smelling—were evidence that little of worth could be accomplished within. Katz (1986) cites one observer who noted that within poorhouses, good health was an "impossibility." Management problems with poorhouses proved formidable. Administrators and suppliers conspired to inflate orders and overcharge. The trials of management drove even well-intentioned overseers to brutality, as the typical "keeper" "was sent 'a miscellaneous assortment of the diseased, defective and incapable,' and told to care for them without 'the proper facilities'. . . . 'He becomes brutal unconsciously, and almost in self-defense. After a few years, he does, without question, things that would have seemed absolutely awful to him when he first entered his duties'" (p. 27). Overseers of the poor

were often recruited from the class just "slightly superior" to the inmates. However, over time, they attempted to forge a professional identity, with their own "organizations, journals and training procedures" (Katz, 1986, p. 27).

Within poorhouses, inmates did the most of the work to sustain them, virtually running the larger facilities. Katz (1986) reports that in Philadelphia's poorhouses, inmates even formed their own organizations, and ethnic tensions would often erupt between competing groups; inmates peddled small goods to one another while the guards sold "drugs, fruits and candy" (p. 28). Even liquor was "easily available," whether doctors prescribed it as medicine, inmates stole it from the physicians' supplies, or the staff smuggled it in. At one facility Katz (1986) writes that the purchase of an average of one-half gallon of liquor per admission was authorized. "This easy availability of liquor, of course, defeated attempts to curb the intemperance thought to be the major immediate cause of pauperism" (p. 29).

An observer of poorhouse procedures in the nineteenth century lamented that there was a "laxness" in discharge policies, and that "the door swings outward or inward with the greatest of ease." Accordingly, poorhouses did less to churn out reformed persons than to become a "temporary refuge for the degenerate poor" (Katz, 1986, p. 29). Critics even feared the creation of a class of almshouse "recidivists." Apologists for the poorhouse, on the other hand, attributed its failure to the helpless, long-term dependents who occupied it. But Katz (1986) notes that they "knew perfectly well that poorhouses were full of able-bodied men" (p. 87). Indeed, two patterns of poorhouse utilization were documented: the first and dominant pattern, consisting of younger, able-bodied people who used the poorhouse for less than six weeks, accounted for approximately three-fifths of poorhouse admissions, while the second pattern, consisting of the "helpless and elderly" who stayed for a year or more, was characteristic of between one-fifth and one-quarter of poorhouse admissions (see Katz, 1986, p. 90). Thus, for most, the poorhouse functioned as a temporary refuge in times of crisis and was not a permanent residence.

Once again, much of the poorhouse's problems were blamed on poor classification, with one commentator calling it a "dumping ground" (Katz, 1986, p. 29). Criminals, the insane, children, the elderly, and those whose only offense was being poor were all lumped together in the same institutions. Observers were especially disturbed by the conditions for the mentally ill, found nude in their cells, covered with "the long accumulated filth of their occupants" (Katz, 1986, p. 30). Children too were cause for concern, as their improper care was likely to create a new generation of poorhouse dependents. However, the separation of the poor into different facilities was rarely

ittempted, primarily because of the increased cost associated with the repli-
:ation of facilities and administration.

Even the goal of converting the poor with disciplined labor was eventu-
ally abandoned, as administrators discovered that finding or creating enough
work for inmates cost more than the labor was worth. Nevertheless, some
poorhouses continued to require senseless labor on treadmills and farms be-
:ause work had moral value and, more importantly, deterred people from
staying in poorhouses. Discipline in poorhouses developed a penal charac-
ter, with inmates convicted of minor offenses forbidden to speak to one an-
other, denied meals, or forced to labor. Poor relief policy in general con-
founded crime and poverty, given that "extreme poverty among able-bodied
men itself was a crime that justified their detention" (Katz, 1986, p. 31).

The rehabilitative goals of poorhouses were ultimately sacrificed because
they were supposed to *reduce,* not increase, expenditures on poor relief. In
the end, deterrence "won," because offering rehabilitation, work programs,
and medical care would have driven up costs considerably. But this was a
qualified victory, as deterrence only prevailed in becoming the guiding *prin-
ciple* of poorhouse practice. In fact, poorhouses did not succeed in deterring
applicants for outdoor relief nor in reducing overall expenditures on poor re-
lief. Contrary to the predictions of poorhouse advocates, it cost more to sup-
port a person in a poorhouse than on outdoor relief: "trapped by their con-
tradictory purposes, undercut by poor management and inadequate funds,
poorhouses never could find useful work for their inmates or offer the old,
sick, and helpless, not to mention the able-bodied unemployed, much more
than a roof and escape from death by starvation. Nor did they reduce pau-
perism or cut the cost of poor relief. In fact, despite the diffusion of poor-
houses, the volume of outdoor relief continued to grow" (Katz, 1986, p. 35)

Shelters have not fared much better, becoming crowded, and in many
cases, deteriorating facilities, long since abandoned for other purposes, where
the poor are herded into one line after another for small cups of juice, a
squeeze of toothpaste, and a ritual delousing in a congregate shower room.
As with poorhouses, shelter managers have been accused of corrupt and ex-
ploitative practices. Investigative journalists in Philadelphia (Maryniak &
Gerhart, 1987) discovered that one of the city's largest shelter contractors
(with contracts equal to $1.4 million a year) had formerly been in prison for
Medicaid fraud associated with his operation of a nursing home. The nursing
home, closed by the Board of Health, was later reopened as a homeless shel-
ter, and continued to operate with numerous violations of health and safety
regulations noted on official inspection records. Maryniak and Gerhart
(1987) found that inspection reports cited substandard living conditions
throughout the shelter system: "immobile client being kept in room";

"roaches, mice and rats"; "electrical wires hanging"; "strong urine smell throughout building"; "unclean food equipment and contaminated food"; "too many beds in one room"; "excessively hot water"; "patients deprived of medication"; "17 hours between breakfast and supper"; "unrefrigerated insulin"; "no doors or other privacy"; "no locks on bathroom doors"; "feces on bathroom floor." Two boarding homes "lost state personal care home licenses because residents allegedly were physically abused by other staff members or live-in relatives of staff members" (p. 4). Four facilities were cited for crowding too many people into rooms. Owners accused of overcrowding complained that they were only trying to serve all of the people sent to them by city officials, who, they argued, were well aware of their capacity. Human service officials of Philadelphia acknowledged that because of the desperate need for beds, contracts with shelters were canceled only when conditions were found "life-threatening" (Maryniak & Gerhart, 1987).

Homeless people in Philadelphia have accused shelter managers of abdicating management of the facility to insensitive "counselors" ("guards," according to the clients) (Culhane, 1990). Experienced as the "overseers of the poor," these guards typically have much more direct contact with residents than do shelter managers. In Philadelphia, most are young men, often drawn from the neighborhoods around the shelters, from which many of the shelter residents come as well. Indeed, guards are often recruited from among shelter residents. It is not uncommon for guards and clients to know one another or one another's families. This common background, combined with the desperate impulses of a large, poor client population, combine to increase the likelihood of underhanded collaboration between staff and clients. Thus, some staff are accused of dealing drugs in the shelters, of turning a blind eye to drug dealing and loan-sharking, and of letting client groups control the facility "from inside." Similar observations have been made by Kostas Gounis and Ezra Susser (1990) regarding the conditions in a New York City shelter. The authors describe a "marginal affinity" between guards and clients; a perceived path of "upward mobility" from client to guard in the shelter hierarchy; and relatively "autonomous territories" within the shelter for guards, client-workers, drug dealers, and prostitutes.

Given that most work in shelters is done by shelter residents, typically for small rewards such as an extra sandwich, a cigarette, or juice, favoritism and "power cliques" can develop among clients and guards regarding work and the rewards of work. In some shelters, clients are even asked to work for little or no compensation under the banner of a work readiness program. Gounis and Susser (1990) reported on one such work program in a shelter for homeless men in New York, where resident workers received $12.50 per

week, a wage viewed by some as "slave labor" (p. 238). Some shelters even provide explicit noncash privileges to client-workers, such as a bed in a room with fewer people or even a private room. Privacy is thus used as a form of reimbursement.

Although the living and working conditions surrounding shelter life suggest that shelters are not rehabilitative environments, it is difficult to evaluate them on this basis alone. Unlike poorhouses, shelters do not have the explicit mandate to deter people from outdoor relief. Nor have they been charged with a great rehabilitative purpose, although some reformers and advocates are increasingly likely to make such a claim about their potential. However, with a fair amount of consistency, a goal of shelter policy does appear to be aimed at reducing both the length of stay and "dependence" (see Culhane, 1992). And, superficially, they may be successful.

Consider that in Philadelphia in 1990, 16,350 people (including 4,743 children) were admitted into the public shelter system, although its average daily capacity was 2,699 beds.[3] Based on these and other data, I have calculated (Culhane, 1993) that the annual rate of turnover in Philadelphia's shelter system was 6 persons per bed in 1990, and that the average length of stay was 60 nights per person per year (cumulatively, with not necessarily continuous stays). Given that the city's housing relocation assistance funds were limited to assisting 1,200 households that year, most people apparently left the shelters without receiving any formal housing assistance. Preliminary analyses of shelter utilization data in Philadelphia suggest that, as with poorhouses, there are two primary patterns of shelter use, the dominant being short-term stays of forty-five days or less (more than half of all admissions annually), with a small but visible minority with stays of six months or more (10%–15% of all admissions annually). However, evidence that people use shelters episodically over the course of the year and that as many as one-third of shelter residents have had prior homelessness episodes suggests that shelter exits are not always toward improved living circumstances. And, as in the poorhouse era, this recidivism has concerned some shelter managers, who feel that the frequent exits demonstrate that many homeless people have alternatives in the community, or that they are simply using the shelter system to avoid rent and to support drug habits. Regardless, these data and those reported elsewhere (Culhane, Dejowski, Ibanez, Needham, & Macchia, 1994; Sosin, Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990) support an emerging picture of "homelessness" as the periodic use of shelters to supplement unstable residential resources in the community. While shelter conditions may deter long and continuous stays, they probably do not deter people from applying for shelter, because a poverty of choices, not shelter availability, is driving shelter utilization.

Like poorhouses, shelters have not proven to be cheap alternatives to welfare. It has bewildered some that a shelter system like that in New York City spends as much as $53,000 annually to shelter a homeless family and $18,000 annually to shelter a single adult (Mayoral Commission on Homelessness, 1992). One could cover the annual rent for five or six families for every one family kept in shelter for a year. Yet, system managers recognize that if homeless families and individuals were automatically given rent subsidies instead of shelter, the shelters would be emptied one day only to be filled again soon after. Recall that the high turnover rate found in Philadelphia's shelter system suggests that the population of "near homeless" is at least five times that of the nightly census in just one year's time. Thus, the line of people who would similarly request housing assistance, and who could show that their existing housing was substandard or unaffordable, could grow quite long. For this reason, deterrence, not rehabilitation, has been and is likely to remain the guiding principle of shelter policy.

Although some shelters may be providing more and improved social services, it remains the norm that public shelters provide minimal assistance, and that shelter systems are more committed to *not* fostering dependence (thus to deterrence) than to promoting independence. There are of course exceptions, dedicated to the dignity and independence of their clients, but as Katz (1986) notes with regard to the poorhouse era, "whether some poorhouses chose compassion over deterrence in the mid-nineteenth century . . . is not the main point. Most poorhouses offered few comforts or attractions. By the close of the century, dread of the poorhouse was virtually universal" (p. 34).

WHAT HISTORY, WHAT FUTURE?

Poorhouses proved to be expensive failures at deterring applicants for relief. Observers could not help but recognize that they accomplished so little at such great expense (Katz, 1986). So reformers set out to transform the poorhouse by siphoning off segments of the population to other institutions and leaving the poorhouse with the care of the aged and infirm. New state facilities for the "chronically insane" were constructed, and while county poorhouse officials were reluctant to have their power over the poorhouse population usurped by the state, eventually the mentally ill, along with many "aged senile persons," were transferred to the care of state hospitals. Children, including those who had parents willing to care for them, were sent to state reform schools and orphanages as part of a policy of family break-up, intended to end the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Even children

with parents who were not in poorhouses but who felt that they could not adequately care for them were sent to orphanages and reform schools.

The presence of the able-bodied in poorhouses inspired fierce attacks on their eligibility for aid. Just as their receipt of outdoor relief was viewed as undercutting their incentive to work and rewarding their idleness, so was their inclusion in poorhouses with more deserving categories of the poor— the aged and infirm—seen as an irresponsible endorsement of their derelict life style. Proposals were offered to create a separate system of "industrial almshouses," leaving the poorhouses for the sick, aged, and otherwise help- less. However, county superintendents took more cost-efficient routes to weeding out the able-bodied by relying on medical knowledge to distinguish categories of eligibility, by applying a strict work test, or simply by having able-bodied "tramps" arrested. Ejected from the poorhouse, the able-bodied were forced to resort to begging and living on the streets. Police stations were eventually opened to the new "homeless," allowing them to sleep in cells or on the floor. "By the 1890s, thousands of homeless men (called 'lodgers') slept in police stations every night" (Katz, 1986, p. 94). In Columbus, Ohio, more people slept in police stations than in poorhouses. Observers noted that sleeping conditions were wretched. By the end of the nineteenth century, re- formers had mounted a campaign to end police station lodging. It was to be replaced by lodging houses and flophouses, designed explicitly for the pur- pose of offering cheap lodging to the "wayfaring" population. Public, or "municipal," lodging houses as well as those run by private charities were also erected. According to Katz (1986), "all of them inherited the mixed goals of the poorhouse: shelter, punishment, deterrence" (p. 96). And, gen- erally, they inherited the unsanitary, crowded, and filthy conditions of their predecessor.

As children, the mentally ill, and the able-bodied poor were removed or excluded from poorhouses and placed in separate institutions, the poorhouse was slowly converted into a home for the elderly and infirm. Reformers were successful in stimulating the expansion of new, more specialized institutions, further reducing the need for poorhouses over time. The transfer and exclu- sion of demographic groups from poorhouses were never complete, but the era of indiscriminate congregate care for the entire class of paupers appeared over. "In the end, however, [reformers] did not solve the real problems they had identified; they simply displaced them" (Katz, 1986, p. 91), transferring to other institutions both the residents of poorhouses and their legacy of neglect.

What future awaits the shelter system? Recent reform strategies seem similarly inclined to create subsystems of care for various populations among the homeless. Two reform proposals, The Way Home, by the Mayoral Com- mission on Homelessness in New York City (1992), and The DC Initiative,

by a collaborative of HUD and the District of Columbia (1993), share the vision of replacing the indiscriminate care of shelters with specialized "transitional housing" targeted to troubled families, the mentally disabled, substance abusers and people with employment and training needs. While this policy would likely improve services for the currently homeless, it is limited by failing to account for the dynamic nature of the homelessness problem and to address its underlying causes.

As noted, recent research suggests that most homeless people use the shelter system on a short-term or intermittent basis, and that the population who uses shelters is far larger than identified previously. More than 3 percent of New York City's and Philadelphia's populations have used shelters in the last five years (Culhane et al., 1994). In contrast, the assumption of the transitional housing, or enhanced shelter models is that the homeless population consists of a fairly stable set of persons over time. Rather than emphasizing a reduction in the incidence of homelessness, this approach aims to alleviate the problem primarily by moving people who are currently homeless through a system of specialized housing programs. Unfortunately, this could to lead to a significant *increase* in the daily size of the emergency housing system, while doing nothing to reduce the rate at which people become homeless.

By expecting homeless (and nearly homeless) people to enter transitional housing programs in order to access housing assistance and social services, and by requiring people to stay in shelters for specified periods before they are eligible for such assistance, reformers could create a system with perverse incentives for long shelter stays and for the "dumping" of clients into shelters by other social welfare and mental health agencies. It risks creating a secondary public health, welfare, and housing system, with potentially lower standards of care, while failing to address the deficits of the existing health, welfare, and housing systems that drive the utilization of shelters. Increases in shelter admissions and shelter stays will by necessity require increases in the capacity of the emergency housing system. Judging from history, the resulting increase in costs and utilization would likely lead shelter system managers to restrict eligibility for shelter or to discourage people from entering shelters. This could further the dominance of a deterrence over a rehabilitation orientation in the structure of emergency services and undermine the whole reform effort.

To avoid the contradictions inherent in this approach, an alternate set of assumptions and a corresponding set of strategies would need to be considered, some of which were outlined in the Clinton administration's federal homelessness plan (Interagency Council on the Homeless, 1994). Recognizing the structural and dynamic nature of homelessness, the fundamental

problem for policy-makers is not how to improve the efficiency and quality of shelters, but how to prevent people from needing them. This requires a better understanding of the social contexts in which homelessness is produced, including the neighborhoods and households from which homeless people come. Unfortunately, while the vulnerabilities and characteristics of homeless people have been well documented, much less is known about the places that have failed to remain "home" for them, and future research should seek to understand the specific factors associated with that ecology. However, it can be reasonably assumed that poorer neighborhoods, with substandard housing, inadequate services, and concentrations of unemployment and crime, are likely to have a greater incidence of homelessness than other neighborhoods. If this is the case, a strategy designed to assist people in avoiding shelters and living more satisfactory lives in the community would, most fundamentally, require a broadening of access to resources in those communities.

Rather than attaching more services to shelters alone, resources might be better targeted by improving the quality and accessibility of housing, jobs, and services in distressed neighborhoods, not only for people who find themselves homeless but also for people who are struggling to avoid it. This would include short-term interventions designed to alleviate the impact of temporary economic and domestic crises, and long-term interventions designed to strengthen the capacity of communities to house, employ, and serve their members adequately. The provision of crisis and respite services for people with mental illness and their families, residential treatment for people with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders, and in-home support and advocacy services for people with disabilities would greatly help with reducing the risk for homelessness among vulnerable adults who otherwise face the continuous threat of a housing emergency. Similarly, improved services for families with domestic or financial crises, including bridge loans, relocation assistance, and support services, would help many families with emergencies avoid the disruptions of homelessness. However, without a long-term revitalization strategy that includes jobs and housing assistance, short-term interventions alone are unlikely to achieve a sustained reduction in the frequency of housing emergencies in poor communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reformers of the shelter system should heed the lessons of history. Like the poorhouse, the shelter system will likely defy attempts at reform. Subpopulations may be displaced, once again, from one miserly insti-

tution to another, but the underlying structural problems, unless addressed directly, will remain and will continue to generate demand for emergency housing. Inhumane conditions in shelters may make shelter reform compelling, but because shelters and shelter conditions do not cause homelessness, reformers should not make the mistake of assuming that by fixing shelters, they are going to remedy the problem. Reform efforts should not ignore the lack of housing, employment, income, health care, and social services for poor people with *homes,* for it is only by improving the quality of life and availability of resources and services for people with homes that the flow of people into shelters can be reversed. Failing this, we are consigned to repeat the shameful legacy of poorhouses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. The Pennsylvania legislature and Governor Robert Casey passed another round of GA cuts in 1994, reducing eligibility for cash grants for the "transitionally needy" from 3 months every year to 2 months every 2 years (for a total of approximately $420 every 2 years), and to extend the presumption of "transitionally needy" status to adults *over the age of 45.*
2. Most of the large shelters for single men in Philadelphia and Boston either have a day labor agency a short distance from the shelter, or a day labor agency hires vans that come directly to the shelter to pick up recruits. Recruiters will typically look the crowd over, picking the most visibly "able" people first. The jobs usually involve covering for absenteeism in cafeterias and small manufacturing settings. Other work is of a short-term, even high-risk nature. For example, day laborers are hired for demolition jobs, dock work, or temporary industrial tasks that would take other employees off their routine jobs. In most cases, agency policy mandates turnover in job assignments to discourage recruits from becoming permanently hired. Such practices by one day labor agency in Philadelphia, Arrow Employment, led the Philadelphia Union of the Homeless to wage a strike against the agency. Another source of work for homeless people in Philadelphia is farm labor. In the summer and fall, three buses leave from a specified location not far from one of the large shelters for men and take people to New Jersey farms, where they are employed to pick fruits and vegetables. Another employment agency in Philadelphia sends people from the shelters to work for the summer in hotels and resorts in the Poconos.

3. The Philadelphia shelter system had its bed capacity cut from 5,400 beds in 1988 to 2,700 in 1990 because of the city's fiscal crisis. Shelter administrators instituted new requirements on clients and providers, details of which are explained elsewhere (Culhane, 1992).

REFERENCES

Advocacy Committee for Emergency Services. (1984). *Act 75: The hidden impact.* Philadelphia: Author.

Barlett, D. L., & Steele, J. B. (1992). *America: What went wrong?* Kansas City, MO: Andrews & McMeel.

Blau, J. (1992). *The visible poor: Homelessness in the United States.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bluestone, B., & Harrison, B. (1982). *The deindustrialization of America: Plant closings, community abandonment, and the dismantling of basic industry.* New York: Basic Books.

Burt, M. (1992). *Over the edge: The growth of homelessness in the 1980s.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation/Urban Institute Press.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (1992). *Selected background material on welfare programs.* Washington, DC: Author.

City of Philadelphia. (1990a). *Comprehensive homeless assistance plan.* Philadelphia: Office of Services to the Homeless and Adults.

City of Philadelphia. (1990b). *Protocol: Services for and expectations of persons in temporary and permanent housing.* Philadelphia: Office of Services to the Homeless and Adults.

Culhane, D. P. (1990). *On becoming homeless: The structural and experiential dynamics of residential instability.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston College.

Culhane, D. P. (1992). The quandaries of shelter reform: An appraisal of efforts to "manage" homelessness. *Social Service Review, 66*(3), 428–440.

Culhane, D. P. (1993). The organization and utilization of the shelter system in Philadelphia: Estimating average length of stay and annual rate of turnover. *Journal of Health and Social Policy, 4*(2), 55–78.

Culhane, D. P., Dejowski, E., Ibanez, J., Needham, E., & Macchia, I. (1994). Public shelter admission rates in Philadelphia and New York City. *Housing Policy Debate, 5*(2), 107–140.

Dolbeare, C. (1988). *Housing in Philadelphia: A report for the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.

Dolbeare, C. (1991). *Out of reach: Why everyday people can't find affordable housing.* Washington, DC: Low Income Housing Information Services.

Dugger, C. (1991, September 4). Benefits of system luring more families to shelters. *The New York Times,* p. A1.

Gounis, K., & Susser, E. (1990). Shelterization and its implications for mental health services. In N. L. Cohen (Ed.), *Psychiatry takes to the streets: Outreach*

and crisis intervention for the mentally ill. (pp. 231–255). New York: Guilford Press.

Grunberg, J., & Eagle, P. F. (1990). Shelterization: How the homeless adapt to shelter living. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry, 41*(5), 521–525.

Harrison, B., & Bluestone, H. (1988). *The great U-turn: Corporate restructuring and the polarizing of America.* New York: Basic Books.

Hopper, K. (1990). Public shelter as a "hybrid institution": Homeless men in historical perspective. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(4), 13–30.

Hopper, K., & Hamburg, J. (1986). The making of America's homeless: From skid row to new poor, 1945–1984. In R. G. Bratt, C. Hartman, & A. Meyerson (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on housing* (pp. 12–39). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hopper, K., Susser, E. & Conover, S. (1985). Economies of makeshift: Deindustrialization and homelessness in New York City. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development, 14,* 183–236.

Interagency Council on the Homeless. (1994). *Priority home! The federal plan to break the cycle of homelessness.* Washington, DC: Author.

Johnson, K. (1992, February 6). Weiker proposes big spending cuts: Connecticut would join move to cut back welfare. *The New York Times,* pp. A1, B6.

Katz, M. (1986). *In the shadow of the poorhouse: A social history of welfare in America.* New York: Basic Books.

Katz, M. (1989). *The undeserving poor: From the war on poverty to the war on welfare.* New York: Pantheon.

Kondratas, A. (1991). Ending homelessness: Policy challenges. *American Psychologist, 46*(11), 1226–1231.

Maryniak, P., & Gerhart, A. (1987, February 17–19). Bed, board and big bucks: Who's profiting from the homeless. *Philadelphia Daily News.*

Mayoral Commission on Homelessness. (1992). *The way home: A new direction in social policy.* New York: Office of the Mayor.

McCambridge, R. (1992). *Giving to end homelessness: A study of national philanthropic responses to homelessness.* Boston: The Boston Foundation.

Mead, L. (1986). *Beyond entitlement: The social obligations of citizenship.* New York: Free Press.

Mead, L. (1992). *The new politics of poverty: The non-working poor in America.* New York: Basic Books.

Morgan, T. (1991a, October 2). New York planning homeless shelters across city. *The New York Times,* p. A1.

Morgan, T. (1991b, September 27). Shift in view on housing all the homeless. *The New York Times,* pp. B1, B2.

Murray, C. (1984). *Losing ground: American social policy 1950–1980.* New York: Basic Books.

Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. (1971). *Regulating the poor: The functions of public welfare.* New York: Pantheon.

Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. (1982). *The new class war: Reagan's attack on the welfare state and its consequences.* New York: Pantheon.

Roberts, S. (1991, October 28). Crackdown on homeless and what led to shift. *The New York Times*, pp. B1, B4.

Ropers, R. (1988). *The invisible homeless: A new urban ecology*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Rossi, P. (1990). *Down and out in America: The origins of homelessness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ryan, P., Bartelt, D., & Goldstein, I. (1988). *Homelessness in Pennsylvania: How can this be?* Philadelphia: Institute for Public Policy Studies, Temple University.

Sosin, M., Piliavin, I., & Westerfelt, H. (1990). Toward a longitudinal analysis of homelessness. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(4), 157–174.

Spolar, C. (1991, August 12). Two shelters for homeless close in DC. *Washington Post*, pp. D1, D4.

Steinfels, P. (1992, January 20). Apathy is seen toward agony of the homeless. *The New York Times*, pp. A1, B7.

Stern, M. (1984). The emergence of the homeless as a public problem. *Social Service Review, 58*, 291–301.

Summers, A. A., & Luce, T. F. (1987). *Economic development within the Philadelphia metropolitan area*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (1989). *A report on the 1988 national survey of shelters for the homeless*. Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the District of Columbia. (1993). *The DC initiative: Working together to solve homelessness*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Planning and Development.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zinn, D. K., & Sarri, R. C. (1984). Turning back the clock on public welfare. *Signs, 10*(2), 355–370.