

THE PARADOXICAL DISCOURSES OF MARGINALIZATION:
THE FUNCTION AND RESISTANCE TO
THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS

by

NEAL ANDREW ELLIS

JASON EDWARD BLACK, COMMITTEE CHAIR

NIRMALA EREVELLES
MEREDITH BAGLEY

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2015

Copyright Neal Andrew Ellis 2015
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Though communication and media scholars have dealt at length with the content of mediated discourses that disenfranchise the homeless community and how those texts affect the homeless, the continued marginalization of the homeless invites continued study as to why the stigmatizing discourses occur. Specifically, this thesis sought to find the reasoning behind mediated narratives about the homeless that disenfranchise an already subordinated population. By relying on mythic, narrative, and critical rhetorical theory, this study interprets mediated discourses about the homeless to find an overarching narrative that is used to homogenize the entire homeless population with a stigmatizing over-arching narrative structure. This project defines the *myth of homelessness*, which is the overarching narrative that provides the domiciled community with a constructed (and inaccurate) view of the homeless, which serves as cognitive guidance to oppress the homeless population.

After creating and defining the myth of homelessness, newspaper articles from *The Tuscaloosa News*, *Weld for Birmingham*, and *The Birmingham Voice* are assessed for the ways in which the myth of homelessness is enacted. Using a critical rhetorical approach, this thesis argues that narratives from both dominant sources and from homeless ally sources operate within the myth of homelessness, which blames the homeless for their situation and creates a paradox wherein they are expected to remove themselves from homelessness but are also stripped of personal agency. Defining the mythic structure that constitutes public and private discourse about the homeless has implications concerning resistant discourses and mythic theory.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Leslie Ellis, who helps me sort through my own thoughts and without whom this project would have never come to fruition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis process, while meant as a capstone of research, has also been an exercise greatly contributing to my growth as a more fully human being. I wish to acknowledge those professors, mentors, and friends who have pushed me to become more than I saw in myself. First, I do not know how I could have gotten through this process without the help of Dr. Jason Edward Black. His leadership in writing and teaching have been personally inspiring, not to mention the hours upon hours he spent working through my drafts and calming me as I felt the burden of insecurity. Both Dr. Black and Dr. Meredith Bagley guided me through the sometimes murky waters of rhetorical criticism, a field with which I was completely unfamiliar, with incredible scholarly direction and personal support. In addition to Drs. Black and Bagley, Dr. Robin Boylorn and Dr. Beth S. Bennett all have contributed in their own way to teaching me the value of marginalized voices, which sparked my desire to write for and about the homeless population.

I would also like to give my deepest thanks and respect for Dr. Vickie Ellis, who has been a constant voice of encouragement from the moment I set foot on the campus of Oklahoma Baptist University as an undergraduate student until now. She first taught me how to research, supported me through graduate admissions, and most importantly, spent hours discussing ideas with me (as if I were her peer). I admire and attempt to emulate her diverse scholarly knowledge, interpersonal ability, and genuine care for the people around her.

Further, I owe this entire project to my friends in Shawnee, Oklahoma who inspired me through their stories and friendship. I met many righteous individuals who were experiencing

homelessness, but particularly Percy, Terry, Mark, and Gary showed resilience, faith, and genuine care for others in the face of misfortune and mistreatment from others. I thank God and will never forget the moments I spent breaking bread with them.

Lastly, I would not be where I am academically, personally, or spiritually without my family or my best friend and love of my life, Leslie Ellis. I do not deserve my family's unconditional support, but their constant grace and love has been something I cannot imagine living without. And finally, Leslie, thank you for finding reasons to stay up late with me as I tried to finish thesis chapters, exploring the magic of coffee with me, and encouraging me when I wanted to give up. Thank you for being someone I can look up to as a model of both hard-work and unending compassion. Thank you for dreaming; something I will keep doing with you as long as I live.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
1. INTRODUCTION	1
a. Plan of Study	5
2. PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOMELESS COMMUNITY	7
a. Media Representations of Homelessness	8
Themes of Stigma—Choice, Disorder, Danger, and Deviance	8
Time of the Year	12
Voice	13
Diversity	16
b. Social Implications of Media Representations	19
Legal Impact of Media Representations	19
Public Perceptions and Social Outcomes	22
c. Myth of the American Dream	24
3. METHODS SECTION	30
a. Social Constructionism	33
b. Narrative and Myth	36
c. Plan of Action	39
4. LOCATING THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS	41

a. The Character	45
b. The Journey.....	48
c. Implications of the Myth of Homelessness.....	54
5. THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS IN ACTION.....	58
a. Tuscaloosa News: Vincent Haneman III.....	59
b. The Weld: Jerome and Eric.....	66
c. Revisiting the Mythic Structure	77
6. RESISTANT VOICES: COMBATING THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS.....	82
a. Revising the Mythic Character.....	85
b. Reifying the Journey	90
7. REINVENTING THE MYTHIC STRUCTURE.....	100
a. Results of Study	100
b. Creating Resistant Discourses.....	104
c. Mythic Theory and Criticism	106
d. Directions for Future Research.....	107
e. Conclusion.....	109
8. REFERENCES	111
9. APPENDIX A: THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE: INAUGURAL ISSUE: WINTER 2012 ARTICLES	116
a. Director’s Corner By: Unnamed.....	116
b. Vendor Spotlight By: Charles Ridley	117
c. Friends of the Houseless By: Hunter Davis	118
d. What Makes a House a Home By: Hunter Davis	119
e. “The Intersection” By: Hunter Davis, AVAIL	121

f. Byl’s Book Blog...”Same Kind of Different As Me”	122
g. Death Row Article By: Unnamed	123
h. Occupy Article By: Unnamed.....	124
i. Seeking Refuge in a Street Paper.....	126
j. Transitless By: Butch Ferrell	128
k. Dogwood Winter By: Drew Pomeroy.....	130
l. Open Your Eyes to Recovery By: Donald Broadnax	130
m. Owe No Man By: Unnamed	131
n. There’s Courage in the Sea of Cowardice By: Unnamed.....	131
o. The Birmingham Voice: Vendor Code of Conduct	132
10. APPENDIX B: THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE: FALL 2012 ARTICLES	133
a. Director’s Corner By: Unnamed	133
b. Letter from the Editor By: Unnamed	134
c. 4 th Annual Homeless Summit: Center-spread.....	135
d. 4 th Annual Homeless Summit: September 22, 2012	136
e. A Woman’s Story from the Streets By: JaNeen Gandy	137
f. Ask An Addict By: Bud Smith	139
g. Alice Westery, Social Worker for DHR: Interview.....	141
h. Vendor Voice: Tommy A.	143
i. From the Blue-Eyed Spider: <i>Continued from May Issue</i> ...By: Unnamed.....	145
j. I Remember When...By: Unnamed.....	147
k. Plants vs. Pollution A Not-So-Fictional Short Story By: Elizabeth Camp.....	148
l. Amos & Friends: Mommies & Daddies Come First! By: Benyamin.....	149

m. Street Smarts By: Sarah McCune	150
n. Bus Riders' Update By: Lawton Higgs	152
o. Cooper Green Mercy Hospital Article By: Unnamed.....	154
p. Street Art: 3 Feet By: Thomas Little.....	156
q. Exclusive Interview with His Holiness the Dalia Lama By: Danielle Batist	157
r. Collaboration with God: A Response to Matt Lacey's Sermon	160
s. Love.....	160
t. There is something I have to tell you By: Marie Burnett	161
u. Intelligente By: Amun Re Nysut Yashua.....	163
v. Look Up By: John Wright Jr.....	164

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Duane Taylor, 24 years old, was described in a *New York Times* article as an independent student at a community college in Seattle who was also working a job (Saulny, 2012). After being laid off and subsequently finding and losing two other jobs, Taylor was forced to endure a “low[er] standard” of employment and accepted a position at a local Jack in the Box fast food restaurant, which did not pay enough to secure his housing. In the end, Taylor was forced to live on the streets (Saulny, 2012). After hearing about Duane’s journey into homelessness (and perhaps similar stories) many people might express empathy toward a working student who was unable to secure shelter. However, when a news broadcast shows a person sitting under a bridge with ragged clothes and poor hygiene, the initial reaction might often be to wonder: “what is wrong with that person? Why is it that she/he is unable to secure housing? Is this due to substance abuse, mental illness, physical disabilities, or just plain laziness?” These initial reactions speak to the problematic cultural assumption typically held about the homeless population: most people in poverty brought it on themselves. The widely held understanding of homeless people as dangerous, deviant, and unable to contribute socially or economically motivates the exclusion of people experiencing life on the streets (Remillard, 2012; Mitchell, 1997). Therefore, we may imagine that Taylor, a seemingly hard-working student and employee, is an extreme outlier of the homeless community, or he must have difficulties socially, ethically, mentally, or related to substance abuse and addiction. This exhibits the widespread assumption

that people who are homeless are all, to some extent, disorderly, deviant, and personally responsible for their situations.

Because the popular judgments of the homeless community are shrouded in distrust, pity, and contempt regarding personal fault, there are very few times, as Summers (2008) stated, that members of middle-class America actually hear from homeless individuals themselves. Rather, Summers argued that homeless populations are rarely allowed a voice, and therefore, are represented through a middle class perspective (p. 34). Rarely do members of the larger public experience conversations with homeless individuals and learn about factors that lead to their homelessness, but are informed by media outlets. U.S. Code described homelessness in general terms as “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” which includes many more people than just those living on the streets. Homeless people can be living out of supervised public or private housing (shelters, temporary housing), abandoned buildings not fit for human habitation, a place where eviction is eminent (within 14 days), or those who are fleeing domestic violence (Homeless Assistance). Despite the many living situations and causes of homelessness there tends to be a disconnect between how homelessness is defined and how the larger public views the population. Experts studying the situation of homelessness argue that social and economic factors are at the root of homelessness rather than individual defects (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Remillard, 2012; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013), while public opinion tends to blame individuals. Often the specialists in any field do not speak directly to the public, just as homeless individuals do not speak directly to middle Americans, but rather everyone suffers the news media as a mediator. According to Richard Campbell and Jimmie Reeves (1989), the mission of any reporter is to “take specialized knowledge and transform it into common sense” for public consumption, acting as a mediator that relays a

message “as natural, as the way things are” (p. 25). Largely, it is through the news media that common narratives of homelessness emerge and frame public perceptions of the community. It is, therefore, important to understand the how media outlets represent the homeless community.

While stigmatizing perceptions of the homeless are disconcerting in and of themselves, the larger issue arises as those stigmas provoke oppression of the homeless population. In an analysis of television content, Shields (2001) stated that “standard news frames construct the homeless as deviants; fortifying the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 194). As the boundary between homeless individuals and the larger population grows more distinct rhetorically, material effects begin to develop that discriminate against people living without shelter. White (1985) theorized how “we constitute ourselves as individuals, as communities, and as cultures, whenever we speak,” and one way he noted that this social creation occurs is through the language of law (p. 690). As the discourse about the homeless shifts toward evermore damaging and stigmatizing language, so too do the laws which are major aspects of communities shift in ways that are meant to discipline people without shelter. Mitchell (1997) argued that current anti-homeless laws “have roots in long-standing ideological or cultural concerns about the relationship between the deviant poor and the up-standing bourgeoisie” (p. 306). He continued by summarizing the intention of these laws: “to control behavior and space such that homeless people simply cannot do what they must do in order to survive” (p. 307). The link between rooted stigmas found in discourse about the homeless and laws that produce oppressive, and even life-threatening, situations for the homeless community is foundational to this study.

Because the rhetoric about and around homelessness provides the foundation for the population’s marginalization, it is this project’s goal to understand the ways in which the dominant public constructs the homeless community through discourse. Through an

understanding that “reasoning may be discovered in all sorts of symbolic action—nondiscursive as well as discursive (p. 1),” Walter Fisher (1984) argued that narratives (“words that have sequence and meaning,” p. 2) provide a medium for reasoning and are “meant to give order to human experience” (p. 6). However, Kerry Owens (2007) criticized Fisher’s work by explaining “the narrative paradigm cannot enable us to make a choice when two or more narratives are equally coherent” (p. 2). Accordingly, as an extension to Fisher’s narrative paradigm of communication Owens contended that, while narratives do establish meaning, it is only as “several individual narratives combin[e] to create mythic structures” that human reasoning can be understood (p. 2). Therefore, retold narratives become cultural myths that “take on rhetorical force,” “provide the basis for human reasoning,” and “guide human actions” (p. 3). In mythic analysis, narratives are still essential, but must be assessed within the conceptual framework of the encompassing story (or overarching myth).

Rhetorical criticism provides a lens through which mythic structures and narratives can be assessed for the ways in which they provide audiences with logical ideas and actions. The critical element of this analysis seeks to understand the ways in which mythic structures give reasoning for marginalization of a population, in this case the homeless community. In an attempt to enact a critical rhetorical critique, which as Shugart (2006) described, “identifies invisible and anonymous strategies for control that are embodied within public discourse,” I ask whether common characteristics in mediated narratives about the homeless that can be labeled as a mythic structure? If so, I also attend to the function of that myth within public media, and finally, in an effort to understand how the homeless population is resisting stigmatizing discourses, I attempt to find the extent to which media produced by the homeless and ally organizations resist or normalize the stigmatizing myth of homelessness. With the mythic

paradigm as a foundation of this study, I contend that a homeless myth exists and shapes the social construction of the homeless population. Furthermore, rhetorical criticism of popular texts shows the influence of the mythic structure on the ways in which those in positions of power exclude people living without shelter. Ultimately, the creation of the myth of homelessness, through mediated narratives, has implications not just for the ways in which society views and interacts with the homeless but also for the material support and service given to some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

Plan of Study

The disenfranchisement of the homeless population is commonly examined in scholarship, especially the analysis of news coverage about the homeless. However, the continued marginalization of the homeless community in physical spaces as well as mediated social spaces invites study of the ways that exclusion occurs. We can begin to understand more deeply the mediated representations of the homeless by analyzing the narrative structures that combine to form the myth of homelessness. Subsequently, accessing the myth of homelessness provides a better understanding of how homeless individuals with various personal narratives are merged into the same stereotype that works to exclude the entire homeless population from life among the larger public.

Throughout my thesis I approach this topic and answer the above questions through the following organizational schema. In Chapter One I introduce the topic and purpose of my study as well as the research questions, justification, overall argument, and the artifacts that will be the subject of my critical analysis. Chapter Two provide a thorough understanding of the relevant literature pertaining to mediated representations of homelessness along with societal implications of the media constructions. Specifically, I address the literature on mediated representations of

the homeless, including the stigmas attributed to the homeless, the voice of the homeless in news coverage, and the lack of diversity in common representations. Additionally, I provide the literature pertaining to the social perceptions of homelessness, both through the legal impact of homeless representations and the material ways the homeless community is excluded through negative public perceptions. Finally, I articulate the tenor of social constructions of reality specifically through the mythic paradigm and discuss the myth of the American Dream, which contributes substantively to stereotypes of homelessness through the centering of capitalistic ideologies.

Following, Chapter Three describes a combined method of critical rhetoric and mythic criticism that is used to analyze dominant and resistant mythic structures of the homeless. Chapter Four exposes the dominant perspective of homelessness (the myth of homelessness) by specifying the stereotypical character and the journey through the overarching narrative that shapes the public's understanding of homelessness. In Chapter Five, I use a few case studies from local papers, *The Tuscaloosa News* and *Weld for Birmingham*, to unpack the myth of homelessness and how it represents people living on the streets and the ways in which the mythic norm provides reasons and action for the exclusion of the homeless (Owens, 2007). Chapter Six analyzes narratives from *The Birmingham Voice*, a homeless media source that is authored and distributed by the homeless community. Throughout this particular chapter I better comprehend the extent to which mythic structures of understanding are being challenged and if the advocacy group publishing *The Birmingham Voice* is pushing back dominant ideologies. Finally, Chapter Seven provides a discussion of the findings of my analysis as well as the implications for the study and future research that could continue to demystify the myth of homelessness.

CHAPTER 2

PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOMELESS COMMUNITY

During a study on mediated frames of homelessness in popular news, Shanto Iyengar (1990) discovered a prominent link between the ways in which news stories characterized homelessness and who was responsible for the social problem. The author argued, “beliefs about who or what is responsible for poverty vary considerably, depending on how poverty is framed” (pp. 34-35). Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Manrique, and Zatakia (2006) similarly claimed that the framing of the media’s coverage of a story can shift public opinion drastically. News outlets have the power to create “an illusion of popular consensus,” which, in the case of homeless issues, often leads to a reproduction of dominant ideologies that devalue and stigmatize the homeless population (p. 2). The misconstrued coverage has led to a popular misunderstanding of homelessness that is an incomplete version of the U.S. government’s definition, “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (Homeless Assistance). Anyone in a shelter, on the street, or fleeing domestic violence is seen as homeless from the U.S. government’s perspective, but that does not match the representation in media outlets or most people’s conception of homelessness. Overall, the effects of media sources on the public’s constructions of social reality are well documented (Summers, 2008; Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, & Goin, 2011) and justify a discussion about the various ways in which popular news media cover and intertwine the narratives of homelessness into dominant myths about the population. This chapter presents a discussion of the media representations of the homeless and the social implications of the negative representations, as well as an overview of the myth of the

American Dream. Each theme is foundational to the exploration of a overarching narrative of homelessness, which I deem the myth of homelessness.

Media Representations of Homelessness

In a continuing effort to demonstrate the extent to which narrative framing matters, first the mediated representations of the homeless community are discussed in terms of how homelessness is constructed through stigma. Then, literature about when the homeless community is given media attention is outlined, followed by studies that establish the marginalization of the population through those who are interviewed for stories about the homelessness. Finally, studies that address how the diversity of homeless population is approached in mediated forms are explored. The stigmatizing messages that are produced and reproduced by popular media outlets is well documented in scholarship (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Shields, 2001; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013), and it is important to understand the content of those messages. Interestingly, rather than shedding light on unsheltered people in times of shifting social landscapes for the homeless (changes in policy or funding), the popular media mentions the homeless when the weather becomes cold and forgets about the issue after winter. The media are much more likely to discuss homelessness when there are people sleeping outside in the dead of winter than when the legal and economic landscape changes the lived experience of the homeless population. Additionally, while news narratives produce negative stereotypes of homelessness they also misrepresent the voices and identities of homeless individuals in order to reproduce narratives that fit into the common framing of homelessness.

Themes of Stigma—Choice, Disorder, Danger, and Deviance

In a study of the rhetoric of and about homeless youth, Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, and Brokaw (2005) discussed the power of being labeled as a homeless person. The

youth experiencing homelessness avoided (if possible) the label of “homeless” because of the larger ideologies that work to stigmatize the population. The stigmas not only mark a person’s identity, but also play out in the “day-to-day activities of agents” in the realm of social interactions (p. 312). According to Harter et al., the visible signs of stigmas matter less than the social construction shrouding the label of “homeless,” which is why homeless youth would rather become invisible than be labeled by such as stigmatizing attribute. The authors noted how “stigmatization is instantiated through value-laden discourses that often devalue, shame, and disgrace youth without homes” and homeless people in general (pp. 322-323). Specifically, through their research Harter et al. found that homelessness carries with it the stigmas of “incivility” (p. 322), “danger” (p. 313, 317), and “deviant” (p. 307).

Scholars have also determined the ways in which mediated representations of homeless narratives work within dominant understandings of homelessness. A common trope throughout mediated narratives of homeless individuals is one that assumes the people themselves are responsible for their homelessness and therefore could alleviate their situation if they so choose. Summers (2008) critiqued documentaries about homeless youth as “replicating earlier discourses and explaining the [homeless youth] in terms of choice” (p. 39). In an analysis of news images of homeless individuals, Remillard (2012) found that the ways in which individuals were constructed made “homelessness itself seem reductively a matter of choice” (p. 8). Max Rose and Frank Baumgartner (2013) discovered similar conclusions in a longitudinal study of media stories, where news “focus[ed] on the individual, as opposed to the system,” which scholars argue is the more legitimate cause of people becoming homeless (p. 43). Additionally, Campbell and Reeves (1989) argued “the major socioeconomic problem of homelessness which requires collective participation for resolution often plays out in the news as isolated personal problems

demanding individual correction (p. 23). As Iyengar (1990) expressed, “from the perspective of [news media], poverty is clearly an individual-level rather than a societal phenomenon” (p. 22). When mediated narratives of homeless are broadcast, systemic issues, such as housing markets, governmental funding, and economic failures, are “rarely cited as having any kind of causal influence” on the community of homeless (Shields, 2001, p. 205). As Summers stated, “this notion of poverty as lifestyle and choice” (p. 43) and the individual responsibility that it assumes, relieves any public or systemic burden for the lack of housing.

While the notion of choice and individual responsibility is prevalent throughout news coverage of homeless narratives, stigmas of disorder, danger, and deviance are also common characteristics produced about homelessness. Remillard (2012) addressed the extent to which images of homeless individuals were attributed with disorder as opposed to images of politicians, experts, and laypeople who were represented as orderly. The space that homeless individuals encompass, according to Barbara Schneider (2012), is seen through mediated framing as “another world,” apart from the civil setting that the rest of the citizenry exist within. The danger motif is present throughout homeless narratives (as told by the media) and promotes public fear of those without homes. Campbell and Reeves (1989) expressed the threat of homeless individuals to communities whose social knowledge operates from the dominant myth of homelessness: “their presence, in itself, comes to constitute a kind of violence” (p. 39). A myth, according Owens (2007), stems from a fusion of numerous narratives and provides a basis for human reasoning (p. 3). Therefore, common ideologies about the homeless used by members of the general public, whether accurate or misconstrued, serve as a means for decision-making.

The ideological framework used to understand homelessness also functions to stigmatize street people as deviants. The articulation of homeless individuals as deviants “re-affirms the

boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’,” and, in practice, excludes the homeless community from social existence (Shields, 2001, p. 216). The narratives that construct the homeless as deviant are widespread in news media discourse (see Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Summers, 2008; Harter et al., 2005) and illustrate ways in which the homeless community is a danger to the social fabric of “civilized” life. The characteristic of “homeless as deviant” promoted through the dominant understandings of homelessness justifies the criminalization of that community as a way of halting social deviance (Mitchell, 1997).

Stigmatizing characteristics of the homeless are interwoven in the narratives that are told about them. Part of the constructed reality about homelessness asserts that it is an individual’s deficiency that leads them to the streets and their personal choice where or not to work their way back into ‘normal’ society. Because the onus is shifted onto the individual, society does not have to take responsibility (or guilt) for the plight of the homeless. Similarly, the stigmas of disorder, danger, and deviance operate socially as a way for communities to avoid and remove the homeless into institutions of confinement (such as prison and mental facilities). Lastly, according to Schneider and Remillard (2013), our ideological view of homelessness is so stigmatized that, even when articulating “caring statements” about the homeless, language is constructed in a way that continues to stigmatize the population. Media narratives construct how the larger public perceives homeless individuals, and the negative stigmas of living on the street have material effects for the lived experience of homeless individuals. Assessing these broad studies about media representations of the homeless community pronounces the ways in which the dominant myth of homelessness works to stigmatize individuals. The media continues to construct homeless narratives that reinforce dominant ideologies of homelessness, which belittle the personhood of the homeless by fortifying social stigmas.

Time of the Year

The previous discussion of the stigmatizing force of the dominant understanding of homelessness is essential, because that framing has material implications for the lives of the homeless community. However, in order to fully understand the media's reproduction of the mythic structure of homelessness, it is also important to recognize when news outlets mention people experiencing homelessness. Because the issue of homelessness (and the homeless themselves) are often found at the margins of society, it would seem that media coverage would only follow major events concerning homeless individuals, or legal and political actions that severely effect the homeless community.

However, through a study of news coverage in the United States from 1980-1993, Todd Shields (2001) found that "news coverage of the homeless depends far more on the time of year than changes in the number (or plight) of the homeless" (p. 200). In a similar study of Canadian media coverage of the homeless, Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, and Goin (2011) discovered that "media tend to more intensively report on homeless issues in winter seasons" (p. 625). Though the themes of content were statistically comparable, the overall number of stories related to the topic of homelessness increased during the colder times of the year. Shields presented the implications of the increased mediated narrative of homelessness in the winter months:

In this type of frame the media permit viewers to sympathize with the homeless, but fail to provide information pertinent to rectifying the problem. Surprisingly, besides the 'cold-weather' frame, the newscasts rarely presented stories depicting the nightmare of being homeless. The implicit message is that being homeless is

difficult during the cold weather, but otherwise unworthy of media attention. (p. 201)

People are reminded in winter months that there are some people who must sleep on the sidewalks, but are not confronted with the systemic failures that cause homelessness and can only be changed by the intervention of society as a whole.

Another spike in news coverage of the issue of homelessness, according to Shields (2001), was during holidays. The framing of homelessness (as a topic) during holiday coverage mainly “prais[ed] kind acts of generosity by individuals assisting the homeless” (p. 200). These narratives are told with community members as the central figures and the homeless are in the background. The plight of the homeless, causes of homelessness, or related policies are rarely, if ever, discussed in holiday narratives. Overall, it is beneficial to understand the timing of news coverage of homeless narratives because it is a clue as to how the media constructs dominant mythic elements. Written subtly into the representations of homelessness is the idea that it is only a truly difficult life-style when the weather becomes cold or when charitable giving becomes more frequent.

Voice

While dominant perceptions of homelessness construct individuals experiencing a life on the streets, there are scholars who have found ways in which those commonly held narratives could be displaced. Neff, Barker, and Cornwell (2008) provide insight into the process of *One Homeless Night*, an “experiential and service learning” opportunity for the larger public regarding the homeless community (p. 22). The authors found that community members were positively impacted by “hearing [a] homeless teenager communicate his personal story in person” (p. 23). A reversal of the dominant understanding of homelessness occurred through the

telling of a new narrative from the experience of a homeless individual. Voice is an important aspect of self-identifying in a larger community, but one that homeless individuals have, sadly, been denied. Whether by intentional invisibility because of the stigmatizing label of ‘homelessness’ (as seen in Harter et al. 2005) or being denied expression in personal narratives in media discourse, there are not many ways members of the homeless community can vocalize narratives that counteract the dominant understanding of poverty. In fact, Shields (2001) observed the media’s “tendency to report on the homeless without permitting them homeless to speak” (p. 214). McKerrow (1989) expressed various ways in which members of a ruling class dominate through rhetorical tactics. He argued that power is maintained in part through the “social structures of discourse” in which there are “restrictions on who may speak, how much may be said, what may be talked about, and on what occasion” (as cited in McKerrow, p. 93). The unwillingness of mediated outlets to allow homeless individuals to voice their opinions, as empowered and affluent citizens do, continues the discursive censorship of the homeless and perpetuates the idea that they have nothing to contribute. All too common is the trend in media coverage where homeless individuals are rarely allowed to voice opinions, and when they do, their personal experience is given less regard than the knowledge available to anyone through common sense (Campbell & Reeves, 1987).

In some ways, the media’s propensity for excluding homeless voices in their broadcasts is better than another common trend in media discourse. That is, often when homeless individuals *are* allowed to voice opinions through the media their comments are often framed in such a way that it “contributes to their social exclusion” (Schneider, 2012). In their media analysis, Campbell and Reeves (1987) explained the hierarchy of discourse in news coverage of an event surrounding the homeless community. While the discourse of reports and “experts” assumed the

place of dominant discourse, even the personal experience from the central homeless individual in the coverage was framed in “the irrational realm of nonsense” (p. 34). Schneider’s study of quotations from popular newspaper stories about homelessness addressed the sources of content in media articles. While the reliance of expert opinions in popular media is irrefutable, homeless individuals were, in some instances, allowed to comment about their individual experiences of homelessness. However, because homeless individuals are rarely allowed to comment on anything other than “the personal reality of homelessness,” quotations about the systemic causes never have the opportunity to arise, so “it is not surprising that [the homeless] are quoted speaking primarily about individual solutions” (p. 78). Schneider correctly concluded how certain types of quotations from the homeless can work to individualize the causes of homelessness.

The debasement of homeless voices is problematic, but it is not just disgrace that homeless people endure. Whether by silencing homeless voices and removing their rhetorical agency or intertwining their comments into the dominant power structure’s version of reality, media representations “promot[e] a particular narrative of homelessness” that marginalizes the entire homeless community (Schneider, 2012, p. 84). Even in the discussions about homelessness, the people living without shelter have little power vocalizing their ideas or experiences without their words being transformed by mediated sources. It is apparent by the lack of access given to the homeless community that they are, what Wander (1984) described as, a *third persona*: someone “whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence” (p. 210). The homeless community’s rhetorical power has, thus far, been negated in a way that “extends beyond the ‘text’ to include the ability to produce texts, to engage in discourse, to be heard in the public space” (Wander, p. 210). Therefore, an essential component

to the social rejection of homeless individuals, as McKerrow (1989) argued, is the communal rejection of discourse from a homeless individual's viewpoint, which would allow members of the larger community to understand the world in a new way. Overall, in order to rewrite the common narrative of homelessness that marginalizes the community and combat their social exclusion, Schneider argued that the voice of the homeless community must be heard by those who reproduce the dominant discourse.

Diversity

As previously discussed, the dominant understanding of the homeless community carries many stigmas and inaccurate frames about the reality of homelessness, but it all tends to center on a person who carries the label of "homeless." We have discussed the various characteristics of the mythic homeless individual reproduced by popular media and how news outlets reproduce the common narratives; the last element in the media's construction of homelessness is the actual person experiencing life on the streets. Evaluating the identity of the central character of the dominant constructions of the homeless provides a deeper understanding about who is imagined in the public consciousness when discussing the issue of homelessness.

Before a word is even uttered in popular news, homeless individuals often lose aspects of their identity. Remillard's (2012) analysis of newspaper images found that, through the visual theme of disorder, homeless individuals had "typical markers of identity, such as name, gender, and ethnicity" erased from their mediated existence. For instance, Remillard noted the juxtaposition between ordered and disordered homeless subjects (of which there were far more disordered subjects): "'ordered' homeless subjects were named in 78.7% of the data, whilst the inverse was true for 'disordered' homeless subjects, who were unnamed in 76% of the data" (p.

18). Other scholars agree with Remillard about the lose of identity markers for homeless people when entering public or mediated spaces (Kawash, 1998).

Mediated coverage of homeless issues consistently refrain from including identity markers, which allows narratives about the homeless to be easily integrated into the dominant character of homelessness—the single, adult male (Harter et al., 2005). According to Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, and Goin’s (2011) study of newspaper articles almost 70 percent of news coverage “did not differentiate between the specific populations affected [by homelessness]” (p. 630). The detachment of homeless identities from the bodies of homeless shown in mediated representations allows viewers to disregard the personhood of those suffering on the streets.

While the detachment of individual identity traits in news coverage is prominent, in the instances when homeless individuals are recognized, Shields (2001) argued, “the demographic characteristics of the homeless presented on television contrast sharply with academic accounts” (p. 194). Scholars have indicated very similar notions of the media’s commonly depicted homeless individual: a middle-aged, single male (Harter et al., 2005; Richter et al., 2011; Shields, 2001; Fang, 2009). While subjectivities of gender, martial status, and age are fairly consistent attributes of the mythic character created by the media, the label of ‘homeless’ is “full of racial undertones” (Fang, p. 12; see also Iyengar, 1990, p. 35). As argued by Rose and Baumgartner (2013), “the media’s disproportionate tendency to show welfare recipients as blacks...has led directly to public misconceptions of the poor and a decrease in public support” (p. 25). The central character in the imagination of most people when they think of homelessness is the “poor black man” (Fang, 2009).

The last prevalent characteristics in popular media, as observed by Shields (2001) in his longitudinal assessment of network news, were “veterans and those labeled mentally ill,” who “accounted for over 80%” of all homeless individuals shown by the networks (p. 203). Although these two identity markers are common among homeless individuals, there are, nonetheless, overrepresented in media representations. While the media’s attention is focused on poor black men, veterans, and the mentally ill, “the most vulnerable within the homeless population...were not well identified” (Richter, Burns, et al., 2011, p. 630). There is uncertainty regarding the reality of homeless individuals in specific identity groups because, as Harter et al. (2005) stated, many individuals avoid being counted in the homeless censuses. However, it is commonly understood that the predominant characteristics of the single, adult male is an inaccurate depiction of the diversity of the homeless population. While there are certainly occasions that news media reveals the presence of homeless individuals who are not in line with the common attributes of homelessness (homeless youth, family, college graduates, employed individuals) the figure that is most often shown when discussing the homeless is the poor, single, middle-aged male who is personally at fault for his failure.

Because the growing rate of homelessness among “youth, women, and families is nearly absent from newscasts,” (Richter et al., 2011, p. 630) the dominant framing of homelessness continues unchallenged. The common narrative of homelessness is evident through the presentation of scholarship that assessed mediated representations of the homeless. The dominant ideology presented by the media depicts a single middle-aged man who is personally responsible for his situation because of his innate deviance and disorder. This constructed individual is then stripped of his license to voice opinions about his own predicament and portrayed as a name-less homeless body.

Social Implications of Media Representations

The ways in which media outlets frame homeless narratives has little relevance unless there are material affects of the constructions. Scholarship demonstrates, however, that the dominant representation of homelessness does shape the lived experience of homeless individuals in both a legal and public manner. First, the negative stereotypes ascribed to the homeless community, as produced by the media, have legal implications through laws that restrict public spaces available to the homeless and limit political agency (Fang, 2009; Mitchell, 1997). Moreover, the material effects of the dominant public's understanding of homelessness also excludes people with the label 'homeless' from public citizenship because of the stigmas entwined with the ideology surrounding homelessness (Schneider & Remillard, 2013; Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005). Through the media's reproductions of homelessness, the general public and policymakers around the United States are inculcated with the ideology shrouding homelessness, from which these two types of social exclusion are produced.

Legal Impact of Media Representations

In a study of almost 50 years of media coverage on poverty in the United States (from 1960 to 2008), Rose and Baumgartner (2013) discovered a relationship between the mediated frames of poverty and governmental spending on the 'war on poverty.' Ultimately, the authors found that "the tone of media coverage was a significant predictor of government spending on the poor" (p. 41). This study's significance cannot be overstated; there is a direct link between the media's construction of homelessness and government action. Specifically, Rose and Baumgartner found that "media portrayal shifts steadily toward a more negative stance and,

about 10 years later, government policy responded with a similarly timed and gradual decline in generosity” (p. 42).

Moreover, Rose and Baumgartner (2013) are not alone in their findings. In a shorter study of network news framing, Iyengar’s (1990) findings “convey significant policy implications” (p. 36). He argued that, as constructions of homelessness found individuals personally responsible for their situation (which, as observed previously, is the dominant narrative), there would be consequential decline in public support for welfare. In essence, Rose and Baumgartner’s data showed a gradual negative reframing of homeless individuals by media, and they argued that “policy has followed the framing” (p. 43).

Matters of funding are not the only way in which policy has become drastically anti-homeless; on a more localized level of government, policy-makers have restricted the movement and occupy-able space for homeless individuals. Don Mitchell (1997) explained at length the ways in which, through restrictions on public space at a local level, homeless individuals “cannot do what they must do in order to survive without breaking laws” (p. 307). The ‘quality of life’ ordinances enacted in many cities across the United States (which prohibit actions such as loitering, sleeping, begging, or sitting in certain public spaces) are specifically targeted toward displacing homeless residents. According to Fang (2009), most cities enact such laws as a method of civic “development by displacement,” which removes the homeless in order to provide economic and social renewal for the rest of society.

The negative narratives commonly reproduced by dominant sources of ideology justify the displacement of deviant, dangerous individuals. However, because homeless individuals cannot retreat to privately owned places, the expulsion from and criminalization of public space leaves nowhere else to go. Mitchell expressed the situation of homeless individuals well: “When

such anti-homeless laws cover all public space, then presumably the homeless will simply vanish (p. 310). Jeremy Waldron (1991) summarized the egregious nature of anti-homeless legislation; “it is one of the most callous and tyrannical exercises of power in modern times by a (comparatively) rich and complacent majority against a minority of their less fortunate fellow human beings (p. 301-302). Through the regulation of public space, homeless individuals often “suffer processes of exclusion and isolation,” because the regulations are predominantly enforced on homeless people (Remillard, 2012, 24-25).

The legal injustices suffered by the homeless community are extensive, but the community is also stripped of its political and social agency to change their social position. Political agency is an important aspect of communal life, but the stigmatization of the homeless and the criminalization of space “serve to negate homeless people of functional citizenship” (Remillard, 2012, p. 6). Scholars across disciplines underscored the link between policies of restricting public space and important aspects of citizenship (Middleton, 2014; Mitchell, 1997; White, 1985). Wander (1984) argued in his synopsis of the third persona, that public actors often negate certain audiences from public life. His theory resonates with the homeless population as Wander stated, “operating through existing social, political, and economic arrangements, negation extends beyond the text [of the rhetor] to include the ability to produce texts, to engage in discourse, to be heard in the public space” (p. 210). Ultimately, as Michael Middleton (2014) explained, “restricted access to public space severely limit, at best, and eliminate, at worst, spaces for homeless persons to participate in the political life of their community or to exert what Fred Evans (2008) described as ‘substantive citizenship’” (p. 123). As media-produced narratives influence policy, so too do those policies affect the political agency available to the homeless community. As Mitchell (1997) argued, from the public’s perspective “the rights of

homeless people do not matter...simply because we work hard to convince ourselves that homeless people are not really citizens in the sense of free agents with sovereignty over their own actions” (p. 321). The legal oppression faced by the homeless population is ever growing as more cities establish laws that outlaw actions necessary to survive, however, homeless individuals are also left with very little social or political agency and thus continue to be persecuted under current stigmatizing ideologies and material abuse.

Public Perceptions and Social Outcomes

Based on the aforementioned literature about mediated representations of homelessness, mediated constructions of reality produce (and reproduce) the dominant myth of homelessness, which is then digested by policy-makers and the larger public. Because mediated discourses are dominant forces in the process of defining social reality, entire communities are implicated. Through White’s (1985) lens of socially constitutive rhetoric, there are bound to be connections between legal and public understandings of the homeless community because both are interpolated in the perpetual process of constructing social ideologies. Therefore, like the literature that described the media’s effect on legal structures, scholars also catalog the impact of media representations on public perceptions.

Rarely does one individual have the opportunity to grasp every aspect of any public situation (whether economic, political, or social, etc.) without information from outside sources. Members of the public rely most heavily on information from mediated sources for social knowledge; therefore, as Iyengar (1990) established, “in the area of public affairs, which considerations are more or less accessible depends heavily on prevailing patterns of news coverage” (p. 21). Communities rely on these “powerful vehicles” of public information, which frame and construct events for viewers. Especially in terms of defining and depicting

homelessness, mediated images serve as the public's main source of knowledge. Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, and Goin (2011) argued that "without the media, the majority of the public will form their opinion by the occasional experience with homeless panhandlers on street corners," so communities look to mediated sources for a broader outlook on the problem of homelessness. Because of their reliance on mediated information, public perceptions are shaped by the media's dominant construction concerning the homeless (p. 621).

Social perceptions of homelessness draw from the stigmas of homelessness, which produce public fear and are implicated by legal action taken against the homeless. Through prominent stigmas of deviance and danger, the presence of homeless individuals among the rest of society produces fear. In an assessment of homeless youth narratives, Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, and Brokaw (2005) quoted one person's acknowledgment of the public's fear of the homeless: "When I pass a woman at a shopping mall, a lady will look at me, pull her purse close, clench their grip on it, or they will step further around" (p. 313). Many individuals who identify as a minority experience similar situations, reminding us that the stigma of fear is not specific to the homeless community, but it is one that is strongly held against the community.

Another strongly held social outcome is caused by the legal restrictions of public space targeted at the homeless community. Harter et al. (2005) defined the "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) discourse, which is common among community members. Essentially, the assumption is, "if it's not in my backyard, if it doesn't affect people directly, they either don't want to believe it or that it's just somebody else's issue" (p. 316). When public places become restricted places for the homeless, community members never have to confront the issue of homelessness in person. Individuals can continue to adhere to the common understanding that homelessness isn't prevalent because of the reproduction of NIMBY discourses. There is a dangerous cycle

working against the welfare of the homeless community: as policy-makers force the homeless community to become less visible (often for aesthetic purposes according to Mitchell, 1997), NIMBY discourse escalates in communities, which, in turn, reduces the amount of funding given because of the apparent lack of homelessness.

Public perceptions, which are extracted from mediated narratives, uphold the stigmas associated with homelessness through public fear of homeless individuals and reproduction of NIMBY discourse. Along with the legal exclusion experienced by the homeless community, negative public perceptions stemming from mediated constructions of the dominant mythic construction of homelessness are the material outcomes experienced by the homeless community. Mediated discourse is a powerful vehicle in the production and creation of social knowledge and has shaped the dominant myth of homelessness. As Owens (2007) argued, socially constructed myths “provide the basis for human reasoning,” and “serve as the communicative expressions of social reality” (p. 3). It appears, in terms of the people experiencing life on the streets, our socially constructed reality removes key aspects of individuals’ of social identity, citizenship and personhood, and passes the burden of homelessness back onto those who are in the midst of it.

Myth of the American Dream

As Makus (1990) argued, “meaning is ideologically constructed within the level of complex social formation” (p. 503). She echoes Hall’s theoretical idea that ideologies are often unified in a web of understanding, and that as rhetorical critics our job is to peel back the layers to understand the larger ideological structures (p. 503). Owens (2007) argues that larger ideologies, similar to what Makus described, are mythic constructions of social realities established through the convergence of historical and cultural narratives. In the United States,

one myth that is interwoven into the fabric of life and captivates and drives the nation is the vision of the American Dream. President Bill Clinton (1993) enunciated the essence of one of the United States culture's most well known ideographs, when stating

The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one—if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you. (para. 7)

Jennifer Hochschild (1995) reinforced President Clinton's notion of the American Dream, claiming that, "unconsciously presumed" (p. 18), The American Dream promises that everyone can pursue their dreams with reasonably anticipated success and that people are rewarded by the "marketplace according their talents and accomplishments," which, for Americans, equates to a meaningful existence (pp. 19, 21). The myth of the American Dream and its promise of success is a source of hope for the citizens of the United States. The ideal narrative, which is supposedly possible for everyone in the context of a free capitalistic system, includes a hard-working, moral, and capable individual rising from poverty to wealth through opportunities provided by the free market. However, in an analysis of Oprah's persona, Dana Cloud (1996) conceived of the American Dream as "the story of individual triumph over humble beginnings," but "the success myth is continually belied by the realities of class, race, and gender stratification in a capitalist society (pp. 115-116). Because mythic structures emerge from retold yet distinct narratives that hold similar characteristics, the American Dream myth, however unlikely it is for individuals, has been popularized through discourse and found its way into the social doctrine of American life.

One of the functions of the American Dream as a national myth is that we culturally associate wealth with competence and ability with wealth under the assumption that every rich

person's narrative includes a self-made prosperity. The inverse is also true, as Cloud (1996) stated, in that this myth "interpret[s] poverty and hardship as individual or family failures and success exclusively as individual triumph" (p. 116). Remillard (2012) acknowledged that the cultural texts of a capitalistic ideology assume that "the system is inherently fair and merit based," which propagates contempt for impoverished citizens (p. 26). In reality, many individuals experience homelessness due to "the failures of the capitalist economy to provide citizens with basic necessities of employment, housing, and health care," but that reality does not correspond with the American Dream myth and is, therefore, regularly disregarded in social discourse (Ritchie, p. 3).

Richard Hughes (2003) described the context of capitalism and the way in which Americans' mindset of social Darwinism contributes to the social opinion of others. The wealthy are seen as competent, capable earners of their fortune; meanwhile, those with little wealth are thought to have nothing to contribute economically or socially. Sonja Foss (2009) reiterated this social hierarchy by describing the Marxist connection between rhetoric and material existence. When the appreciation of life is tied into "what one owns," it is simple to classify the billionaires of the world as more valuable than people who sleep with their head on the sidewalk (Hughes, p. 149). By interrogating the assumptions of the American Dream myth we find that a human's social value in a capitalistic system is inextricably tied to wealth, ownership, and material goods.

Not only does the discourse inherent in the American Dream myth help establish a society that considers the wealthy ultra-valuable, but there is also a moral component tied to its mythos. The constructed narrative of the larger public is that the impoverished are in some way morally inept: addicts, convicts, deviant, all together dangerous (Middleton, 2014; Shields, 2001;

Summers, 2008; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013). In fact, Hughes (2003) described the earliest and continual ideological notion of wealth and morality in an American context:

The righteousness of a single individual will win God's favor in the form of material blessings, while laziness, drunkenness, and immorality on the part of a single individual will earn God's curse in the form of poverty. (p. 130)

Consequently, capitalistic cultures are more likely to value the wealthy and consider them morally upright, while those who have no material property are framed as dishonorable and inept social agents. Essentially, because the American Dream myth rhetorically constructs a social reality that elevates the wealthy to a status of competence and virtue and frames impoverished individuals as immoral deviants, there are material consequences that impact everyone in the community to the extent to which they are identified more closely with the wealthy or impoverished.

Not only do the wealthy gain advantages for keeping their amassed wealth through countless systemic loopholes, but under the mythic structure of the American Dream, narratives that propagate impoverished individuals as deviants provide legitimate justification for limiting the rights of the homeless population for the sake of the upper-class' (financial) well-being. Anyu Fang (2009) described the enactment of laws geared toward the removal of street people because municipal governments could not afford for real estate values to decrease, so the poor, who lose important aspects of citizenship due to the dominant perception (see also Mitchell, 1997; Middleton, 2014; Remillard, 2012), were removed for the sake of the government's wellbeing. In a more general understanding of legal consequences for the homeless in the United States, Don Mitchell (1997) chronicled the increasing interest cities have in protecting economic growth by removing homeless individuals from consumer places "so as to assure their continued

viability as sites for capital accumulation” (p. 313). For the prosperity of individuals who own the means of production, communities invent ways of criminalizing those in the margins of society in order to remove obstacles for financial gain. Instances such as these display the material implications that narrative and mythic structures have in the lived experience of the destitute. Not only are the identities of the homeless community devalued through social ideologies, but the mythic construction of homelessness has physical implications in terms of available space, political agency, and criminality.

The previously discussed scholars provided evidence for the negative implications of the myth of the American Dream on the poor, to which Cloud (1996) expanded upon to include how the myth is perpetuated and sustained in an American context. In her analysis, Cloud reveals how the ruling class, who receive systemic benefits from their position, encourages the individualistic nature of the American Dream by “redefining oppression as personal suffering and success as individual accomplishment” (p. 119) and “obscures the limits of mobility” (p. 123). By conveniently glossing over the structural privileges inherent for those in positions of power, the ruling class compels the oppressed to overlook any societal change that might shift the power dynamics.

Using the work of Foucault (1977, 1988), Cloud (1996) and McKerrow (1989) argued that in order to maintain a powerful position, the ruling class provides hegemonic discourses that are accepted and define the social environment for the dominated. As an example of one such discourse that maintains the hierarchy of power, Cloud outlines how token individuals from the subordinate group are allowed to rise through the oppression they face and join the ruling class. When a supposedly exceptional individual is able to obtain power, Cloud argued that their “persona is appropriated by the dominant ideology of liberalism and inscribed in public texts in

such a way as to perpetuate individualist myths and lessons necessary to liberalism and capitalism” (p. 123). Within the context of the American Dream myth as it relates to the homeless, Cloud’s understanding of tokenism is helpful, in that tokens allow “interpret[ing] success and failure as a matter of individual responsibility regardless of one’s structural location” and the blame for homelessness falls onto the homeless individuals themselves (p.133). And because the American Dream is indeed a hegemonic discourse, McKerrow argued, “a person cannot escape from the influence of dominant actors, even though the discourse of the latter involves no overt attempt to censor or to entrap the dominated” (p. 94). Although the homeless population is marginalized by the discourses of the American Dream, it is difficult to break free from an ideology so deeply entrenched in the culture’s mindset.

The myth of the American Dream, a foundational source of reason for those in the United States, interprets the ruling class as competent, hard working, and morally upright. While at the same time, people experiencing oppression are rhetorically framed as individually responsible for their situations. Especially in terms of the homeless population, the mythic structure of the American dream has important implications for people’s lived social experience. While society’s upper-class obtains continual systemic advantages, the homeless community is stripped of many functions of citizenship through social and legal discourses.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS SECTION

The homeless community is consistently at the margins of society in a very material way and is held in that position rhetorically. The one-sided relation of power provides a means through which the dominant class can manipulate social, economic, and judicial systems in ways that are personally advantageous and marginalize the poor. According to Foucault (1988), “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it,” making both the domination of those in marginalized positions and the continued privilege of those in power a function of discursive tactics (p. 101). For example, popular discourses often demonize those in poverty and fashion homeless individuals as cautionary tales, or what Wander (1984) named a third persona, which is “the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming” (p. 210). The discourse asserted about and experienced by the third persona audience (the homeless population in this case) serves to discipline society to act in opposition to the supposed behavior of the condemned group. Just as Foucault understood how discourse could erect power relations that oppressed communities, Wander aptly observed how language “carries with it the potential to spell out being unacceptable, undesirable, [and] insignificant” (p. 209). In theory and practice, power relations are created and sustained through discourses that punish individuals who venture outside socially acceptable behaviors or opinions.

While dominant social discourses are influential and can marginalize groups, Foucault’s (1988) theory of power relations allows for both dominant and resistant discourses. He argued that while “discourse transmits and produces power” it also “undermines and exposes it, renders

it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). In fact, if power is built and maintained through webs of discourse that the dominant class uses to construct a social reality, then resistance exists when individuals recognize flaws (or gaps) in the constructed reality. As Phillips (2002) detailed Foucault’s work and the possibility of resistance, he argued that “the antecedent gaps within networks of power are not only spaces for emergence, but must also be spaces of invention; spaces within which the possibility of new actions can be imagined” (p. 332). Similarly, McKerrow’s (1989) application of Foucault through his *critique of domination* acknowledged that power is exercised discursively “at all levels of society, within and between its institutions, groups and individuals” and that “the task of a critical rhetoric is to undermine and expose the discourse of power in order to thwart its effects in a social relation” (p. 98). McKerrow argued for criticism of “discourse as it contributes to the interests of the ruling class” in order to expose the functions and maintenance of power (p. 93). The type of critique McKerrow called for entails observing the apparent methods creating power through “non-discursive affirmations and sanctions,” the “rituals wherein power is expressed,” and “institutionalized rules accepted and used by the dominant class to control the discursive actions of the dominated” (p. 93). Calling attention to the noticeable forms of domination is crucial, as they sometimes go unscrutinized, however, there are deeper rhetorical sources of power, which McKerrow also discussed.

Along with the more obvious forms of domination, McKerrow (1989) also warned that, because resistance often comes from within the dominant structures, “actions oriented toward change will tend to be conducive to power maintenance rather than to its removal” (p. 94). Therefore, McKerrow called for a second and parallel criticism, a *critique of freedom*, which calls the critic to be constantly questioning the hierarchy of power; “a self-reflexive critique that

turns back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relations” (p. 91). McKerrow rightly understands that power can manifest in obvious form (critique of domination), however, his critique of freedom calls for rhetorical theorists to dig into the spaces where marginalization might seem unlikely. For instance, while it seems unlikely that dominating discourse could come out of institutions set on helping homeless individuals, this thesis will point to the ways in which that can be a source of control and oppression for the homeless community. Foucault’s theorizing has been clearly applied to critical rhetorical studies for the purpose of uncovering the means by which social discipline marginalizes communities and understanding how dominated groups resist the ruling class.

Throughout this thesis a critical rhetorical approach is used to confront the invisible social structures that control and marginalize homeless individuals and to understand the ways in which those discourses of power function. In order to do so, first the myth of homelessness is established as a socially constructed reality and its characteristics are defined, then narratives about homeless individuals from news media are thematically analyzed in an attempt to display the ways in which the myth informs public perceptions of the homeless. Throughout the analysis McKerrow’s (1989) critique of domination is applied to the uncovered myth as means of understanding how it functions in the social conception of the homeless population. While the larger public employs a stigmatizing myth of homelessness, McKerrow’s critique of freedom is utilized in a second analysis to observe if (and how) the homeless community resists the dominant myth in their own mediated news outlets, or, as McKerrow warns, if they maintain the underlying ideologies that stigmatize the population, rather than removing the problematic visions of the homelessness. Before exploring the discourse there must first be a discussion of

the theory of social construction and the development of the mythic paradigm, which found the argument for a dominant homeless myth and the resistance of the homeless population.

Social Constructionism

Kenneth Burke (1968) argued, through his theory of symbolic action, that reality is understood by way of language. Because, as Burke stated, symbols and the symbolized are clearly distinct, there is space for interpreting reality through the particular use of discourse. In a discussion about the homeless, Burke's assumption of the symbolic nature of language is particularly important because it indicates that current ideologies are socially constructed. Therefore, the common stigmatization of the homeless community is not the only way through which the homeless community can be interpreted. Because reality is not taken for granted (but constructed through symbols), the dominant perceptions of individuals experiencing homelessness as deviant and lazy are not necessarily an accurate framing of reality, but just the most common perception (Rose & Baumgartner, 2013, p. 29).

Similar to Burke's critical program, Stuart Hall's theories of ideology assume that "social knowledge is created discursively" and that dominant forms of discourse often limit the ways of understanding a community's full complement of voices (Makus, 1990, p. 497). Furthermore, Foucault's (1977) theory of power maintained that discourse provides the conduit for preserving social relations of power that subjugate those in poverty to the ruling class. Although society is continually enveloped in meaning-making, there are sections of the general community that have more discursive power than others. According to Foucault, power is enacted in various ways. Early in his theorizing, Foucault conceptualized power dynamics through his understanding of the penal system, specifically the idea of the panopticon. Describing prison systems through history, Foucault presented the transition from physical torture to constant observance in order to

reform individuals. The shape of the panopticon, a cylindrical prison structure, allowed for guards to constantly observe all prisoners from a central location. Regardless if guards were watching prisoners, Foucault maintained that this form of punishment and reform manipulated prisoners based on the possibility of being watched. For Foucault, the constant observation from sources of power produced reform, whether it was in the institution of the prison, school system, or factories. Although this concept from Foucault isn't the central theme for this thesis, the institutionalization of the homeless is an important factor. The control and reform coming out of the institutions of shelters, and various agencies focuses on individual reform often through personal oversight and control.

Later shifting his understanding in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1988) chronicled the discourse around sexuality and the ways in which those discussions functioned in terms of power relations. The shift from power as a specific place and space, to the codified enactment of power through rhetoric is integral to the ways in which the homeless are marginalized socially. Similar to Foucault's discussion of sexuality, rhetorical constructions constitute how the domiciled community understands how the homeless population lives, how the individuals act, and segregate the group entirely through discourse. Because public understanding is based on social construction, the way any issue is rhetorically created shapes audiences' opinions. In fact, in an analysis of televised media's representation of race and class Shugart (2006) argued, "the mainstream media function as an ideological apparatus of dominant interest...to hegemonic ends" (pp. 83-84). A similar notion is applied in this argument: general mediated sources (and the public that subscribes to those sources) operate in conjunction with the ruling class' ideology, which marginalizes the homeless community. Therefore, with Foucault's theory, that discourse is the basis of power relations and resistance to power, this thesis will analyze forms of discourse

that create the power relations between the domiciled and the homeless. Phillips (2002) articulated Foucault's understanding of power structures through the metaphor of a web with many interwoven strings, and where there are gaps in the web, resistance can be made possible. Understanding the specific power-dynamics of both the dominant discourse about the homeless and any resistant discourse is essential if emancipatory work is to be done by, for, and with the homeless community.

Many scholars have discussed the power of media outlets in the rhetorical construction of the homeless community (Shields, 2001; Summers, 2008; Remillard, 2012; Schneider, 2012), and it seems as though news media, more than any other body, have the power to define what constitutes the characteristics of homelessness for many members of society. Specifically, Campbell and Reeves (1989) determined that the discourse of dominant news networks "relocate[d] the problem of homelessness" so as to avoid "confronting the broader social conditions that produce the homeless" and extending dominant myths about the homeless. Similarly, Remillard studied the images used in media coverage about the homeless and discovered that visual markers of disorderly conduct were typically used as a frame for understanding the homeless community. That visual construction had material implications for homeless individual's "apparent and theoretical capacities of identity" (p. 29). It is apparent that, through mediated constructions of the homeless, most Americans' understanding of the reality of homelessness is created. Social constructionism, as outlined by Burke (1968), Hall (as cited in Makus, 1990), Foucault (1977/1988), and many other scholars has substantial implications for the homeless population, especially since the constituents of the population are rarely able to offer alternative frames of understanding.

Narrative and Myth

Burke's (1968) description of symbolic action is the initial theoretical step necessary for Fisher (1984) and the narrative paradigm, which "is an incorporation and extension of Burke's definition of 'man' as the 'symbol-using animal'" (p. 6). Fisher's argument that stories themselves can be means for persuasion and rationality brought to rhetorical criticism a means for understanding various ways in which audiences could be persuaded. As publics form opinions on "any ethic, whether social, political, legal or otherwise" narrative is always involved (p. 3). Stories then, are forms of reasoning that "give order to human experience" (p. 6). Fisher also conceptualized the ways in which humans judge "good reasons" when narratives conflict: through "narrative probability" (seen as a logical story) and "narrative fidelity" (the extent to which individuals have seen similar stories in their lived experience). While some stories are more reasonable than others and should therefore be adopted, Fisher's theory does not explain why, in some instances, rational communities reject stories with more narrative probability and fidelity in seemingly irrational moments.

While the narrative paradigm provides critics a new understanding of stories' abilities to be more persuasive than traditional logical argumentation, Kerry Owens (2007) criticized Fisher's theory in terms of the individual rationality available to audience members who hear competing narratives. Moreover, Owens continued by establishing a paradigm that supersedes the narrative paradigm, "the mythic paradigm" (p. 2). The essential argument of Owens is that, in order for narratives to have the power of social construction, they must combine into larger frameworks of myth that are adopted extensively by a culture. The mythic understanding of social construction allows for individual narratives to intertwine into a larger system of ideology from which "the acceptance or rejection of certain assertions [is] based" (p. 3). However,

Rowland (1990) established a debate about the use of mythic criticism, where he argued for “a narrow functional/structural approach to myth” (p. 101). Rebuttals of Rowland’s view of myth emerged from many scholars (Osborn, 1990; Solomon, 1990), summarized by Rushing (1990) who argued “that the real danger lies in reducing this infinitely rich field of study to a unidimensional one, and in confining critical insight to what is empirically verifiable” (p. 147). Therefore, as Owens included similar standards imposed in Rowland’s narrow view (the notions of myth as story and as functional), he ultimately deviated from the narrow approach arguing that myths, “emerging from history, culture, and narrative” provide an ideological foundation within which publics form identity, morality, and social reality (Owens, p. 3). Additionally, Sutton (1997) contended that “narrative must help citizens solve problems which do not lend themselves to rational solutions” (p. 211). Essentially, the position of this thesis is that dominant myths are so culturally embedded that they are normalized as a way of knowing and engrained so deeply socially as to become common sense for the public.

Mythic reasoning is evident as Campbell and Reeves (1989) discussed the news coverage of Joyce Brown, a homeless woman who was taken from the streets and institutionalized against her will, in terms of the way in which social knowledge is created regarding the event. Their method of understanding the Joyce Brown story, when compared with Owen’s (2007) theory of the mythic paradigm, reveals an adaptation of the mythic paradigm through similar conceptual frameworks. Their study contrasted common sense knowledge (comparable to mythic norms) with expert knowledge (logical rationale) as two sources of social understanding. Campbell and Reeves defined “common sense” as a way of knowing through primary experience (or individual narrative) that connects to the historically ritualized understanding of reality that is “not subject to tests of internal coherence” (p. 24). As long as an individual’s experience is able to fit inside

the larger construct of common sense, it is not subject to scrutiny. Campbell and Reeves contended that reporters, being the gate-keepers to the public's information, are tasked with "tak[ing] specialized knowledge and transform[ing] it into common sense" (p. 25). Essentially, Campbell and Reeves depict a situation in which news reporters extract rational, formal logic from specialists in a field and attempt to fuse the information into dominant mythic structures that are culturally prominent in the minds of the larger public.

Campbell and Reeves' (1989) explanation of the Joyce Brown coverage and the importance of common sense knowledge underscore the importance of communal myths that aid in understanding specific events. The meaning of individual narratives is only accessible when situated within socially prevalent mythic norms. In a study of interpersonal discussions about the homeless, Ritchie (2009), as Campbell and Reeves, asserts that common stories are important for a public's social reality. According to Ritchie, through the retelling of similar individual stories a group will come to understand their social reality through a certain frame. If these scholars had the language of the mythic paradigm, their studies would revolve around the convergence of individual stories into a socially prominent mythic structure. When situating individuals in their American context, which has consistently blamed the homeless for their fate, it is clear why news outlets reproduce narratives that construct the homeless as deviant, lazy, and dangerous (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Campbell & Reeves, 1989). With an understanding of the ways in which societies construct and reinforce dominant ways of knowing through story-telling and myth-making, any change in the perception of the homeless population, as Owens (2007) would likely argue, could not come from logical persuasion but from a re-envisioning of the mythic structure of homelessness itself. By moving through the connections between Burke's (1968) theory of symbolic action, Fisher's (1984)

narrative paradigm, and Owens' (2007) theory of the mythic paradigm, which builds from the previous two scholars, it is clear that socially constructed realities exist through the telling and retelling of individual narratives that create overarching mythic structures, which are fundamental for human reasoning, guide action, and "serve as the communicative expressions of social reality" (Owens, p. 3).

Plan of Action

In the following analysis, first, Owens' (2007) mythic paradigm provides the foundation for the structure of the myth of homelessness. Defined through the scholarship that has quantitatively analyzed homeless narratives in news outlets for various characteristics. Rowland's (1990) first tenet of mythic construction was that "myths are stories," and as such, I first define the central character of the story and then outline the journey of the character. Both elements, the character and journey, are essential to the overarching narrative as it informs public perception. Second, in Chapter Five, McKerrow's (1989) critique of domination, along with other rhetorical theories (Wander, 1984; Shugart, 2006; Cloud, 1996; Makus, 1990) is applied to homeless discourses from news outlets in order to reveal how the stigmatizing myth of homelessness functions to discipline the public to actively marginalize the community. The goal of this chapter is to present the widespread myth of homelessness through which the public understands the homeless community and to display its rhetorical power through particular mediated sources. Because mythic structures can only be viewed in terms of the fusion of many narratives, a few mediated representations of homelessness are analyzed to display the rhetorical connection between the specific narratives. Specifically, newspaper articles from Birmingham, AL (*Weld for Birmingham*) and Tuscaloosa, AL (*The Tuscaloosa News*) are evaluated to understand the functions of the myth of homelessness.

In the final analytic chapter, Chapter Six, texts published in *The Birmingham Voice*, a street paper written by the homeless or those close to the community, are analyzed using McKerrow's critique of freedom and Phillips' (2002) spaces of invention, in an attempt to understand if homeless individuals are resisting the popular myth of homelessness and if the resistance is actually upholding the hegemonic ideology that works to marginalize all people who experience homelessness. Ultimately, the first analysis seeks to uncover the systems that subordinate homeless individuals and leave them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The purpose of the second critique is to take a critical view of the narratives told by homeless people themselves and either praise the removal of stigmatizing themes or suggest alternative themes for homeless people's mediated narratives that might replace the current myth of homelessness.

Generalizing the findings of rhetorical criticism can be difficult as power structures shift and evolve in different places and times; therefore, the artifacts compiled for investigation are specific to the southern United States, specifically Alabama. In addition, the news outlets themselves are distributed to local communities, rather than regional or national audiences. Because homeless individuals often interact around local hubs of support (whether public or private), the oppression that is often faced comes from the daily discourse and discipline in the shelter or on the sidewalk from members of the larger public, as well as municipal laws executed by local law enforcement. Analyzing local artifacts allows for an investigation of the local relations of power that suppress homeless people in their daily experiences. Perhaps the means of oppression faced by the homeless population being studied in the following chapters resonate with other communities around the nation (and I suspect they do, based on larger studies of homeless treatment in national media outlets), but this is an account of the ways in which community discourse implements the myth of homelessness within their local populations.

CHAPTER 4

LOCATING THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS

In an article published in 1997, Don Mitchell, a legal scholar, discussed anti-homeless legislation and the various ways in which it is enacted and the implications for members of the homeless community. Over a decade later, in 2009, The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) partnered in a report on the growing trend of criminalizing the homeless through locally authorized measures (i.e. no loitering, sitting, or sleeping on sidewalks, and other quality of life ordinances). Again, in 2010 the NCH and the NLCHP outlined actions taken by local municipalities that heavily affected homeless individuals, this time discussing varied prohibitions against sharing food with homeless people and enacting zoning restrictions to food safety restrictions. These measures do very little to stop criminal activity, but are actually, as Mitchell argued, “not about crime prevention; more likely it is about crime invention” (p. 307). Without private places to go, people experiencing homelessness who are not allowed to lie down, use the restroom, or sit in public spaces are forced to choose between committing a crime and performing behaviors central to their very existence.

One of the biggest reasons such laws are implemented is similar to the cases of gentrification occurring across the United States; there is more money to be made if homeless individuals are not seen in the city. Fang (2009) summarized the motivation aptly, “commercialization went hand in hand with criminalization” (p. 4). The real issue, then, is how governments reason through decisions that devastate an already marginalized group? According

to Schneider's (2012) content study of newspaper quotations about the homeless, experts rarely mentioned any choice available for the homeless. Rather, homelessness is largely caused by systemic difficulties for the lowest class of citizens. Additionally, Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, and Goin (2011) noted that "poverty researchers cite the withdrawal of federal government funding from housing policy as one of the significant causes of homelessness," and not individual factors (p. 631). Because homelessness for many people is caused by a number of circumstances, many of which are out of their control, the harsh laws implemented against them seem unwarranted in such a powerless social position. The following chapter provides insight as to how citizens, communities, and governments reason through the mistreatment of the homeless. Many scholars denounce the idea that individuals generally cause their own homelessness and instead offer that the reason behind homelessness is societal at its base (Lyon-Callo, 2000; Mitchell, 1997; Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Schneider & Remillard, 2013; Shields, 2001). However, by combining many of these themes into one ideological structure, I argue that what drives people's decision-making about the homeless is what I term the *myth of homelessness*, a rhetorical construct that marginalizes the homeless through stigmas embedded in narratives.

Most media scholars agree that news coverage shapes the ways in which society understands issues of the day (Summers, 2008; Tompsett et al., 2006; Iyengar, 1990). Makus (1990) described the state of communal reality central to Stuart Hall's theory of ideology, arguing "that no natural consensus exists, but rather that meaning is socially constructed" (p. 497). Mediated narratives from dominant news sources are one medium for these social constructions and functionally create a picture of communities. Because, as Iyengar argued, "the influence of the media on public opinion can be significant" (p. 21), when attempting to uncover

socially held beliefs, searching through print media can give an impression for the ideas circulating in various communities. It is especially important to reach into media archives as the perceptions of the homeless are being established. On this point, Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, and Goin (2011) note “without the media, the majority of the public will form their opinion [of the homeless community] by the occasional experience with homeless panhandlers on street corners” (p. 621). Summers (2008) agreed, stating that because middle-class citizens rarely interact with the homeless their knowledge of the community comes through second hand sources, mainly the news. By reviewing the various ways in which scholars have discussed media about the homeless, the overarching myth (an encompassing narrative emerging from similarities between many narratives) of homelessness can be deciphered.

In his construction of the mythic paradigm Owens (2007) defined a myth as “an encompassing story emerging from several specific narratives” (p. 2). As social narratives are told repeatedly, the primary characteristics are drawn together to establish the overarching myth. In exploring Hall’s ideological theory, Makus (1990) argued, “the legitimacy of an ideological claim depends on...[if] they are represented as what is transparent, inevitable, and wholly natural” (p.498). Therefore, once a mythic structure is established as the ‘natural’ perspective, its accuracy frequently goes unquestioned, so much so that the myth, as Owens argued, becomes “the basis for human reasoning” (p. 3). Similarly, Hughes (2003) argued that “myths function at an unconscious level for most Americans” (p. 8). People judge the truth of statements, facts, and/or stories on the basis of whether they can be encompassed within the related mythic structure. While myths provide structure and a basis for rationalization, Sutton (1997) argued that they are, at the same time, “malleable as the situation dictates,” and can therefore be used in various circumstances as a foundation for reasoning. For instance, the American Dream myth is

generally considered being able to achieve what one desires based on one's morality, effort, and merit (Cloud, 1996).

Myth is flexible in various ways: if the character was a woman, if a man lucked into fortune and was able to keep hold of it, or if someone climbs the proverbial ladder using immoral strategies, each person is still described as 'achieving the American Dream' and so their lives are encompassed by the socially held myth. Firmly held mythic structures will retain their validity even as minor details shift, because the major aspects of the myth are continually rooted in social narratives. In terms of exceptions to ideological structures, Cloud (1996) argued that we should "guard against overplaying small moments of contradiction...in a social system and ideological frame that has been relatively effective at containing the impact of [contradictions]" (p. 199). While myths allow for adjustments in the details, the major arch of the myth stays intact and serves as a guide for moral and rational decision-making.

My argument is that the myth of homelessness is so engrained in the fabric of society that it has become a common sense narrative that directs people's reasoning regarding those living on the streets. Because mythic structures revolve around a single narrative arch, there is an archetypal figure (or character) that is central to the story, as well as the plotline (or journey) that is told. The myth of homelessness allows for the mistreatment of people living on the street because of the construction of the character and the journey through the myth. In the following chapter I unpack the myth of homelessness by first discussing the attributes of the generalized character that appears in the narrative and then uncovering his journey into homelessness, both of which provide citizens with rationale to mistreat individuals that can be identified as homeless. In order to justify a newly defined myth, I combine scholarly assessments of mediated narratives of the homeless to craft the characteristics of a singular encompassing myth that, as

Owens (2007) stated, can only emerge from the fusion of many individual narratives. After summarizing the myth of homelessness through the character and journey of the homeless person, implications are derived from the comprehensive narrative.

The Character

Most people, if they imagined a ‘typical’ homeless person, would probably envision a bearded old man sitting with dirty clothes on the street. Additionally, many might imagine him with mental and/or physical disabilities or perhaps as a military veteran panhandling for support. This is where the myth of homelessness begins, with the character that is most commonly imagined in the mind of most domicile citizens. What Owens (2007) argued about myths in general is true for the homeless myth: narratives with similar characteristics that are told often can merge into one sweeping story. When broadcasts or print sources examine the issue of homelessness or when middle-class Americans interact with someone living without shelter it is often the most visible homeless individuals who are present, which acts as an over-representation for the larger community (Takahashi, 1997). In the following section, the main character in the myth of homelessness is fleshed out through intersectional identifiers, or the multitude of traits through which someone can be marginalized such as gender, race, class, ability, etc. (Crenshaw, 1991).

The intersectionality of the character in the homeless myth is of importance because her or his traits are irrevocably entwined with the journey on which we imagine her or him to be. Oftentimes, this character appears as a man. Looking at the historic implications of homelessness, Fang (2009) noted that “men have always been more visible than women” and are seen as more of a threat to society than women as well (p. 12). While discussing the hidden homeless (homeless youth), Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, and Brokaw (2005) quickly

contrasted the unseen youth with the most visible homeless sub-group currently, single men (p. 306). Shields (2001) corroborates the dominance of the gendered view of homelessness when he studied news constructions of the population, stating, “the media present a portrait of the homeless that is comprised overwhelmingly of single males...television news coverage greatly downplays the extent to which women, children, and single mothers have become victims of homelessness” (p. 202). With very few representations of children, women, or homeless families, the perceived homeless character is a single, older male.

Historically, the tramp or hobo persona signified a white male, but, according to Fang, the term ‘homeless’ is “full of racial undertones” because more currently “it is people of color in particular who are the most visible on the street” (p. 12). The merging of historical and current images allows for the mythic homeless man to be racially ambiguous (either black or white), but regardless he is alone and therefore separated from any family that he might have had. While intersections of sexuality are of great importance especially to LGBT youth, who are overrepresented for at-risk youth (Durso & Gates, 2012), sexuality is rarely an issue in the mythic structure of homelessness because the single male is not represented with a partner or in a place where acceptable intimacy usually occurs. For all intents and purposes, this makes the character sexless. Overall, the central figure in the myth of homelessness is a single, older male without companionship who is either white or black and at the bottom of the economic hierarchy.

Aspects of identity are not the only features at work in the homeless myth; there are also personal stigmas that follow people living without shelter because of ideological constraints. In most cases the homeless situation is discussed in personal terms, as if the person who is destitute is personally deficient or disordered. According to Rose and Baumgartner (2013) increasingly mediated frames of homelessness turned from charitable notions to themes of ‘laziness’, which

became “the single largest element of the debate by the early twenty-first century” (p. 30). The term ‘homeless’ has historically been distinct from the self-inflicted plight of the hobo, however, Schneider and Remillard (2013) argued that since the 1980s the issue of homelessness is “increasingly presented as a result of personal deficiency” with no distinction between those without shelter (p. 105). Discourse is not the only method of reinforcing personal deficiency. In fact, the ways that the media displays homeless individuals through images reinforces the understanding of personal disorder (Remillard, 2012).

The common traits that make the central character of the myth of homelessness personally deficient for public interaction are not only disorder and laziness, but also mental illness and addiction. In their investigation of news coverage of the homeless Campbell and Reeves (1989) argued, “the label of mental illness places the destitute outside the sphere of ordinary life” (p. 39). The authors continued by acknowledging the common features ascribed to the homeless by media sources: “homelessness is primarily attributed to personal deficiencies, drunkenness, and mental illness” (p. 39). The increased framing of street people as personally deficient (Shields, 2001; Lyon-Callo, 2000; Fang, 2009) has had an impact on public opinion. As Tompsett et al. (2006) documented, domicile people typically figure that homeless individuals are mentally ill. Remillard (2012) summarized the traits appended to the homeless population aptly by stating that society has “reframed homelessness in the explicit terms of personal deficiency—be it, addiction, mental illness, or lack of personal motivation” (p. 26). As the mythic character representing the homeless community comes into full view it is clear that destitute, old, single man is blamed for his unfortunate place on the street.

The character at the heart of the myth of homelessness has been established through scholarship that outlines various perceived traits of the homeless. Not only are there intersecting

aspects that marginalize the personhood of the homeless (class, race, and companionship), but also they are seen as personally dysfunctional through laziness, mental disability, or addiction. Wander's (1984) metaphor of negated audiences holds true for the homeless as well; if the ideal citizen is the one who achieves economic and social power, the homeless are framed as the "silhouette" or shadow of success, "the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming" (p. 209-210). However, this homogenous view of the homeless population could not be further from reality. Kawash (1998) argued that "race, gender, sexuality, age, and class...are important factors in who becomes homeless," but those identity markers are sidestepped in representations of homelessness (p. 323). Although the solitary homeless caricature does give insight into the mistreatment of the entire population, it is not the full picture. Therefore, as Owens (2007) tracked both the man and the journey of Martin Luther King Jr. in order to discover his mythic structure, the myth of homelessness must comprise a journey through which the homeless character lives.

The Journey

Just as the group of people without shelter is made up of a variety of personalities, Kawash (1998) argued that each person experiencing homelessness has different circumstances leading to their lack of shelter and whether or not their unfortunate situation remains. However, the myriad factors are rarely cited in popular discourses about the homeless. In fact, the single most common discursive characteristic in the narrative is that the homeless lead themselves into their situation. Rather than focusing on external factors that lead people into poverty, society tends to support the discourse of individual choices leading to homelessness. Rose and Baumgartner (2013) argued, "the focus on the individual, as opposed to the system, may be one of the most important elements of the general ideological ascendance of neoliberalism," which

blames and reduces funding for the impoverished (p. 43). Just as the myth of homelessness (the ideological frame through which people perceive the homeless) marginalizes the character based on personal attributes, so too is the journey into homelessness a source of alienation. The scholarship that has assessed the quantitative data surrounding narratives of homelessness in popular discourse described the common mediated understanding of the journey into homelessness as a 'choice' by those in poverty. This section will contribute aspects of the mythic journey of the homeless persona. Specifically, the perception of the journey as a 'choice' makes the homeless simultaneously (and ironically) responsible and irresponsible, and constructs them as dangerous, disorderly, and ill suited for life in community in the public's imaginary.

The myth of homelessness is a constructed narrative built from popularly retold pieces of many different stories, so while the entire narrative functions as a unit, there are segments that contradict each other. While assessing the journey that takes place with the homeless myth, it has become clear that members of the public have created a paradox wherein, they blame the homeless through rhetorically invoking their ability to make 'choices' but then remove them from public life through a discourse that does not allow for personal agency. The former is employed to personally condemn the homeless for their position and to make them responsible for alleviating their suffering. The latter is a discourse of control that strips the dehousing of agency and calls for institutional governance over the individual, not just claiming the homeless as foolish with their agency, but incapable of possessing any agency in the first place. Neither the rhetoric of individual responsibility nor the discourse of powerlessness and control are useful for assisting the homeless population. In fact, these conflicting discourses about how to *fix* the homeless person (whether agencies should expect the homeless to work their way out of poverty or whether someone needs to guide them out) remove any discussion about systemic issues that

cause homelessness. While choice is often the first and most common discourse used in the journey of the mythic character to explain their despondent state, the other discursive layer of control denies any power or agency for the homeless person.

Blaming the homeless is a common occurrence in popular discourse, and is based on the individual framing of poverty (See also Summers, 2008; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Richter et al., 2011; Lyon-Callo, 2000; Fang, 2009). In their longitudinal study of media coverage, Rose and Baumgartner (2013) described the current trend of news to depict “the poor as individually responsible of their problems” (p. 43). The themes used to place the blame of homelessness on individuals ranged from criminal activity, cheating, and laziness to disability and slum living (Rose & Baumgartner, p. 29). The individual nature of the themes relays a message of homelessness caused by choice, which is also a trend in Summers’ (2008) analysis, when he argued that the documentaries he studied showed “poverty as lifestyle and choice” (p. 43). Remillard’s (2012) analysis of mediated images of the homeless aligned with the “longstanding social notions that frame the causes of homelessness in terms of individual deficiency and deviance” (p. 29). While studying the framing of poverty, Iyengar (1990) found that “poverty is clearly an individual-level rather than a societal phenomenon” (p. 22) and continued to argue that “to be held responsible for some outcome is to be seen as a *cause* of the outcome” (p. 23). Essentially, he asserted that when media discusses the individual nature of poverty (as is common practice), the individuals are the ones who are seen as causing their poverty. Therefore, the mythic journey of the homeless begins with the individual’s choice(s), and whether the homeless person makes a foolish mistake or thoughtful and reckless choice, they are framed as the initiators of their circumstances.

Because the dominant discourse portrays the homeless as choosing their plight, they are expected to remove themselves from poverty. Campbell and Reeves (1989) described the situation, stating, “social problems demanding collective engagement are reduced to personal problems requiring private remedies (p. 39). Along with the mediated framing of poverty, the collective belief in the American Dream, as Hochschild (1995) argued, drives citizens to expect the homeless to lift themselves through sheer force of will. When this bootstraps mentality is employed through mediated discourse, it leads the domiciled to fear those who do not or cannot conform to the culture that values material success. Both Hughes (2003) and Hochschild relay the American notion that success is seen as the product of virtue and poverty of immorality. Therefore, the structural barriers that keep the homeless from material success also stigmatize their character. Remillard (2012) described the images of the homeless in news coverage as disorderly and deviant. Similarly, Summers (2008) reported how street youth would avoid the label ‘homeless’ in order to “pass as normal rather than deviant” (p. 307). Marin (1987) outlined the perceived inherent depravity of the homeless by arguing, “the homeless, simply because they are homeless, are strangers, aliens—and therefore a threat. Their presence, in itself, comes to constitute a kind of violence; it deprives us of our sense of safety” (p. 44). Whether being depicted as mentally deficient, a substance abuser, or lazy (Fang, 2009; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013), common public discourse places the onus on the homeless individual to personally rectify poor choices before remove stigmas of danger and deviance. During the mythic journey of homelessness, the personal agency essential to the idea of choosing homelessness not only ruins the reputation of the individual, which in turn threatens people in the domicile community, but it also implies that in order to gain long-term shelter the houseless individual needs to reverse his journey and choose to live a more virtuous life.

Although the theme of choice situates the responsibility of rectifying homelessness in the individual's hands, there is another incongruous discourse about alleviating homelessness. Campbell and Reeves (1989) discussed the nonsensical presentation of homeless voices in newspaper articles, describing the framing of quotations from street people as "the incoherent snatches of language...that are outside the bounds of both expert knowledge and common sense" (p. 25). The homeless are framed in such a way that the conflation of homelessness and mental illness are profound. Because the presented thoughts of the homeless are "condemned or absurd ideas, of obsolete knowledge," institutions of control are established to manage the individuals (Campbell & Reeves, p. 25). Schneider and Remillard (2013) discovered that public perceptions follow the mediated logic, where the housed community "identif[ies] homeless people as incapable of being responsible, independent agents" (p. 105). Kawash (1998) corroborated this idea by expressing the assumption of local communities: "homeless people are not stable and dependable political operatives" (p. 321). The juxtaposition between expecting personal reform and discounting personal agency becomes clearer now: society expects the homeless who 'chose' their poverty to revise their personal deficiencies, but does not believe they are competent or socially capable enough to do so.

Subsequently, unsheltered individuals lose any public credibility as capable citizens, the response to which, according to Kawash (1998), is not to help but to control the homeless population. When news media (followed by the public) "relocates the problem of homelessness mainly in the domain of madness" (p. 33) as Campbell and Reeves (1989) suggested, institutionalization has been the common solution. Fang (2009) and Mitchell (1997) both discussed the degree to which criminalization and imprisonment has become an option for policymakers trying to deal with the homeless. Shelters serve a similar function of social control,

as Lyon-Callo (2000) described in his experience within a shelter. He argued that a disease model of homelessness was utilized in which social workers (as doctors) diagnose and treat the individual's inherent problem causing their homelessness. The treatment of dysfunction through institutionalization is presented through mediated images, where Remillard (2012) found a correlation between dehousing people and shelters. The mythic journey of homelessness inevitably leads into institutions of control, where there might be a turning point because the dominant establishment is able to correct the individual issues of the mythic homeless character. If reformed and stable, the homeless person can be seen as cured of their dysfunction, but those who are not are destined to continue being homeless because of their personal choices.

The perceived journey of homelessness has an incongruence at its center: the homeless are active in their choices to become homeless and expected to pick themselves up, but are not capable of recovery and social connection. Schneider and Remillard (2013) summarized the conflicting thoughts in their discussion of social discourse of aid for the homeless,

Participants shift responsibility to do something about homelessness to the homeless person who is expected to take appropriate actions and use the provided resources to alleviate their state of homelessness. In other words, bundled with the act of good will is a judgment about how such gifts should be received and used by the homeless person. It is at this point of the story that the second, more unsettling discourse appears. Given the frustration with and mistrust toward homeless people to be adequately able to take responsibly, participants express a desire to control how assistance is provided and used (p. 104).

In the myth of homelessness, the journey that centers on personal causes of homelessness brings contradictory expectations for improving their state: whether the homeless should be left alone to

pull themselves out or institutionalized to improve their chances of living a ‘normal’ life. No matter which is employed homeless individuals lose aspects of their humanity. They are either marginalized for being immoral in their choices that lead them to homelessness, or they are incompetent and need to be controlled for their own benefit. While aspects of the journey marginalize the homeless community, it also steers the discourse toward personal deficiencies instead of societal and economic issues that are at the root of homelessness.

Implications of the Myth of Homelessness

Overall, the *myth of homelessness* is a broad storyline, which, like many mythic ideologies, “function at an unconscious level for most Americans” (Hughes, 2003, p. 8). It begins with the character (a caricature of the most visibly homeless individuals), represented as an older, single, man who is racially white or black. The lonely male is often depicted as personally disordered with shabby clothes living on the sidewalk, which removes many aspects of familial network, sexuality, or educational background. The journey of the homeless myth often details the individual’s choices that left him with nothing. By calling attention to the traits that supposedly caused the homeless state, whether it is a veteran’s mental struggles, personal laziness, or substance abuse, he is branded as immoral, dangerous, and incompetent, without useful social skills and striped of all personal agency. If the journey ends with the individual ascending from their destitution (aided or unaided), the negative stigmas can be removed and the once unsheltered person returns to civilized life. However, as long as the individuals remains homeless, little can be done in the mind of many Americans that will restore the pieces of his humanity. This myth of homelessness is the main narrative arch, which is reinforced through mediated discourses, and presents the way in which Americans perceive homelessness.

While some of the implications of the mythic ideology have been discussed (i.e. being outcast because of perceived danger, immorality, laziness, or personal deficiency; marginalization through lost aspects of social status), two broader social implications exist that should be addressed. First, because of the prevalence of the theme of choice throughout the mythic arc, the social distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is continually reestablished. Schneider and Remillard (2013) provided an example of the distinction between deserving and undeserving from the discourse of a member of the public: “the speaker immediately does judge, quickly dividing the deserving from the undeserving poor, in this case the seemingly able-minded homeless person from the mentally ill homeless person” (p. 108). The authors then explained that the participant judged the able-minded homeless person based on the understanding homelessness as a decision, stating, “come on, get out and get a job” (p. 108). When homelessness is labeled as a personal choice, it warrants judgment based on the American ideologies of meritocracy and social Darwinism. As Hughes (2003) explained, Americans believe that a capitalist society will reward hard work with material success, and the most capable individuals will flourish under within a competitive system. Therefore, those who are in poverty because of individual circumstances did not compete hard or well enough and deserve their position. Summers (2008) stated the social problem with defining people as deserving their poverty, arguing that “a discourse that explains their poverty in terms of choice...removes any need for social action” (p. 37). Rose and Baumgartner (2013) verified that statement with their statistics on governmental aid, finding that as news coverage became increasingly focused on personal deviance political funding decreased. While it is clear that homelessness is a social problem in need of communal attention, the personal framing of homelessness removes any desire for collective support.

While the previously discussed consequences of the myth involve the exclusion of the homeless population from domicile communities, another implication is that the homeless themselves take on the socially constructed stigmas of the myth. The development of people labeling their personal faults as the cause of homelessness is, largely, a hegemonic discourse. Gramsci's notion of hegemony, as defined by Cloud (1996), articulates how power is negotiated, and asserts that while the ruling class promotes an ideological structure for its own benefit, the subordinate group consents to the marginalizing structure and takes an active role in its reification. Richter et al. (2011) argued that from a critical theorist perspective "the press is seen as the dominant ideology that frames issues from the point of view of the corporate leaders" (p. 629). The mediated construction of the myth of homelessness serves as the dominant ideology that marginalizes the homeless community, but then is reified through the discourse of many people without shelter. As Lyon-Callo (2000) observed the discourse between social workers and the homeless within shelter settings, he witnessed the hegemonic myth at work, arguing that the practices meant to help people reform actually "make the homeless person into a new kind of self-blaming and self-governing person" (p. 341). Through an analysis of quotations in newspapers Schneider (2012) found that "homeless people are more likely to be quoted identifying individual causes for their homelessness" even though "experts are more likely to be quoted citing societal causes" (p. 78). Finally, Harter et al. (2005) presented the impact of the label of 'homeless' and the stigmas it produces, and finally stating that "if you're told that long enough, you'll believe it" (p. 312). Not only does the myth of homelessness impact the ways in which the domicile community perceives people without shelter, but also considerably effects how the homeless understand their own life decisions. Lyon-Callo relayed an example of a woman under these self-blaming circumstances:

Ariel was full of self-blame and, consequently, was quite angry and upset over her situation...Ariel's feelings of anguish would be manifested in her sometimes losing her patience with a fellow guest [of the shelter], becoming distraught, crying, and feeling unable to concentrate at times. She was clearly in a great deal of emotional pain. (p. 339)

When the homeless believe in and apply the mythic structure to their own life it can produce an imagined past, where people revise the interpretation of their choices post hoc because they feel that their life 'fits' in the dominant narrative of homelessness.

When the myth of homelessness dominates the social reality of domicile communities it actively marginalizes those experiencing life without regular shelter. By labeling the cause of homelessness as personal, society judges those in poverty and distinguishes between the deserving and undeserving poor, which alleviates the inclination for public assistance. Also, when the dominant construction of the homeless is propagated not only do the domicile stigmatize the needy, but the homeless blame themselves and attribute their negative life events as personal failures causing emotional distress. The mythic structure has widespread implications and is prevalent in most discourses surrounding the homeless community. The following section will critique three distinct narratives about homeless people and reveal the explicit and subtle ways in which the individuals are marginalized through the ideological framework and rhetorical deployment of the myth of homelessness.

CHAPTER 5

THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS IN ACTION

Critical scholars Nakayama and Krizek (1995) and McKerrow (1989) all stress the importance of naming the ideological structure through which power is exerted. In a general sense, the *myth of homelessness* provides a name and single system by which the exclusion of people living without shelter can be understood. However, when seen in specific cases of news articles about homeless individuals, the marginalizing process becomes more evident and pronounced. The following section offers critical rhetorical analyses of narratives of three people experiencing homelessness and the various ways in which their narratives have been adapted to correspond with the myth of homelessness. While each person is distinct and their varying levels of social success differ, the dominant ideological structure is used to justify the exclusion of those experiencing homelessness. Because discourses of power have material implications (McKerrow, p. 102), leaving the exclusionary practices linked to the myth of homelessness unexposed provides no assistance to one of the most socially and economically marginalized communities in America. The stigmas of homelessness, which are often taken as common sense, are revealed in the subsequent section by mapping the presence of the myth of homelessness in each of the following narratives.

Throughout this chapter, I deconstruct two narratives of homeless people published in the media outlets through a critical rhetorical lens. Using mainly McKerrow's (1989) critique of domination, along with other critical rhetorical theorists (Wander, 1984; Cloud, 1996; Shugart, 2006; Makus, 1990), two local, community newspaper articles, one from *Tuscaloosa News* and

the other from *Weld for Birmingham*, provide a sense of what the myth of homelessness looks like in rhetorical action. While explaining the ways in which the myth of homelessness informed the mediated narratives, the tools of critical rhetorical analysis uncover how the myth functionally takes away many humanizing elements of homeless individuals. In a final conclusion, I review the characteristics of the newly proposed homeless myth and trace the ways in which they function rhetorically in narratives and in people's everyday lived experiences.

Tuscaloosa News: Vincent Haneman III

For someone who might have never written about his own life, the story of Vincent Haneman III will live forever in the archives of a local newspaper, *The Tuscaloosa News*. But it was not written on his own terms. Author Ed Enoch (2014) charted Haneman's life for a human-interest piece after Haneman's death, which situates his life within a particular narrative. Far from being a criticism of the author, this analysis is meant to reveal the ways in which an individual story about Haneman revolves around the marginalizing myth of homelessness. Throughout Enoch's telling of Haneman's life, the dominant mythic structure is both explicitly and subtly present, which, ironically, removes many aspects of the protagonist's humanity. Using a critical rhetorical approach, the article will be analyzed for the ways in which the myth of homelessness "contributes to the interests of the ruling class" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 93) by framing Haneman's life as something to avoid.

Within the first few paragraphs of Enoch's (2014) article, his central figure was molded into the prototypical character at the center of the myth of homelessness. From the title, "A Life of Drugs, Schizophrenia, Cancer, and Homelessness ends in a kind of peace," elements of the myth have already been forged before the reader moves into the text. Coupled with the article title was a picture of Haneman in hospice care, a feeble representation of the 63 year-old, white

man. With only a few belongings to his name, including not much more than “a pair of permanent markers to make signs for begging” (para. 2), Haneman’s material situation living as a beggar on the street was made clear as the article commenced. Along with the standard conception of the old, white, poor homeless man, Enoch regularly addressed his character’s familial estrangement, talking to his brother for the first time in a decade only days before dying in the hospital. Haneman’s narrative was one of a lonely existence, even though near the end he had a few friends. However, the two women who befriended him were more of a “maternal” presence (para. 25), buying him a hotel room once a month or so, and acting as “Haneman’s guardian angel” (para. 8). True companionship was lacking in the story, and Haneman was clearly set as the single, older, male, the most visible type of homeless individual. Men like Haneman then become emblematic, and their identifiable traits represent the perceived inner disorder pushing them into homelessness. The homeless myth continued to influence this narrative beyond the aspects of identity, and displayed the personal faults embedded in the overarching homeless caricature.

As exposed by the title, the personal stigmas of drug abuse and mental illness are not only pronounced from the start, but are also coupled with the seemingly imminent life of homelessness. At the outset, readers get a sense that the person they are reading about is the one they see living on the street, and determine that he does not occupy similar public or private spaces as themselves; he is identifiably “other.” Haneman’s personal deficiencies include, not only mental illness and drug abuse, but also, according to the narrative, an apparent lack of motivation and poor health habits. Enoch (2014) described Haneman as “an affable transient suffering from paranoid schizophrenia who chain-smoked Pall Mall blue 100s and drank cheap beer and gas station coffee” (para. 9). The extent to which Enoch implied Haneman acted outside

the expectation of 'normal' citizenship is meaningful to make those who did surround him all the more 'angelic'. The author quoted a woman who had spent time with Haneman in his last months, stating, "I just had a feeling about him that he was special. That he couldn't live in a normal world" (para. 14). Many of these personal inadequacies contribute little to the article except as it alienates Haneman from those around him and there are no allusions to the social and structural difficulties that might have lead to his unfortunate situation. In terms of Haneman's mental disability, Sandahl (2003) argued that most people with general disabilities face being "discriminated against in housing, employment, and education; stereotyped in representation... and isolated socially, often in their families of origin" (p. 26). In general, the personal flaws attributed to Haneman, which place him outside normality, functionally uphold social conventions by, what McKerrow (1989) described as, the "act of excommunicating those who fail to participate in or accede to the rituals" that "contribute to the interests of the ruling class" (p. 93). Haneman's biological and personal attributes did not contribute to the social or economic capital in way that benefited the dominant class, which is punishable by the material exclusion he experienced.

The character of Vincent Haneman III, constructed by Enoch (2014) and those he interviewed, was a standard representation of what is expected in most mediated depictions of the homeless. Subsequently, the journey he embarked on, steeped in illicit behavior and incivility, also aligns with the myth of homelessness. While the article did not flow chronologically through Haneman's life, in order to recognize the way in which he was portrayed the following report will chronicle starting from his brother's description of their youth. Charles Haneman, the estranged brother, was the main source for Vincent's story until about a year before Vincent died. The article implied that Haneman's home life was not the

cause of his derelict conditions, stating that he “had a normal upbringing in a loving family” (para. 44). In fact, apparently Haneman “was once a diligent student [and] fastidious in his appearance” (para. 44), which implies the lack of both qualities in his latter years. Setting Haneman in the realm of normal in his early year allows for the contrasting of his current state, proving that he was not a product of his environment, but of his choices.

As a late teen, which is around the age when most people with schizophrenia begin to show symptoms (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015), Haneman began to change, “he grew distant and his behavior became erratic” (Enoch, 2014, para. 50). The true nature of Haneman was revealed as “you found out a whole different world about Vincent” (para. 44) in following section when Enoch detailed the illicit behaviors including grand theft auto, drug addiction, and imprisonment. In addition to unlawful actions, the story’s protagonist is interpreted as idle and negligent. His brother described him, stating, “it was like a switch went on and he didn’t want responsibility for anything” (para. 51). Vincent’s brother continued stating that after dropping out of high school and starting his transient lifestyle, “from about 18 to 19, he started that dive” (para. 55). What is not written in the text is a common judgment about the Protestant work ethic summarized by this narrative from William Lawrence:

One [farmer] picks up his spade, turns over the earth, and works till sunset. The other turns over a few clods, gets a drink from the spring, takes a nap, and loafes back to his work. In a few years one will be rich for his needs, and the other a pauper dependent on the first. (as cited in Hughes, 2003, p. 128)

The American public does not offer grace to those who seemingly squander opportunity, and when Enoch and his sources account for Haneman’s life they see wasted chances. The stigma of

personal laziness is threaded through Haneman's narrative as a contributing factor for his poverty.

Not the least of the choices about Haneman include those threatening social order, specifically one instance that is mentioned when his mother "woke up with him at the end of the bed with a knife from the kitchen" (para. 59), a jarring revelation for any reader. However, the cultural mystery and mistreatment of mental health/illness allows for the rhetorical shift constituting Haneman as dangerous. The rhetorical shift constituting Haneman as uncontrollable and dangerous is aided by the social mystery/mistreatment of mental health. With the repeated offenses, communities cast people out with the assumption that their incivility does not correspond to the ideal citizen. While there may have been a measure of sympathy as the article began, once a reader understands the criminal choices made and the fact that his parents "did love him and really never stopped, even though they were afraid of him" (para. 72), Haneman becomes a figure whose personal faults do not warrant social inclusion. Mental illness, poverty, and danger are once again conflated within a narrative of homelessness, causing any reader to mistrust those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Even if the author was attempting to validate the life of a homeless man through his article and humanize a social outsider, the narrative was more damaging to his reputation because of the focus on negative traits leading to a lonely, homeless existence.

It was clear from the article, tainted with unaccepted behaviors, that when he lived making his own choices little good occurred. As Haneman is portrayed with the stigma of madness (see Campbell & Reeves, 1989), outside control is the only way in which he would be able to find comfort. Enoch (2014) presented the two forces that controlled Haneman's last days. First were the "maternal" women who checked him into the hospital (during his battle with lung

cancer) and reconnected him with his distant family. The audience does not know if those were Haneman's wishes (he had continually turned down hospital visits because of the cost), but they are presented as what was obviously the best option, and something Haneman would not have done himself. What is even more interesting is that the women helping Haneman were framed as the virtuous aide for the needy. Shields (2001) observed a similar pattern, stating "[the broadcast] provided the appearance of news coverage of a political problem while actually praising volunteer efforts, ignoring governmental/systemic actions, and strengthening accepted ideologies" (p. 210). The supporters have a valued position in the discourse because they took responsibility for another human's life, but at the cost of Haneman's own dignity and agency and without addressing ways in which people like Haneman could be better provided for.

The final way in which Haneman is controlled at the end of his life is through an institution of care. Enoch reported, "On Dec. 20, Haneman agreed to move to the hospice after Standifer was able to get him a referral" (para. 28). Again, while the discourse points to Haneman as the agent, it is not he who decided to go to the hospital or who referred him to hospice care (a choice that effectively halted the battle against his physical illness). Remillard's (2012) description of institutions being a place where the homeless are seen as orderly (as opposed to their normally disordered state) holds true for Haneman's final days in hospice care. In fact, his passing shortly after being admitted was unsurprising to the social workers who stated, "it is not uncommon to see someone in such pain linger—too uncomfortable to die" (para. 67). The article made it clear that the institution provided a stable environment where "he overcame his restlessness and relaxed" and died (para. 66). While life on the street is framed as unhealthy and undesirable, it is also a space in which those who occupy it have no level of rest, not even the lasting rest of death. In fact, the article that shaped Haneman, as a homeless man, to

be socially abnormal also framed his death as something outside the norm. The final words of Enoch's title indicated that Haneman's life "ends in a kind of peace" or, perhaps more precisely, something that is unnatural but fitting for his character. The exclusion of the myth of homelessness comes full circle in the final moments of Haneman's narrative when the socially isolated man was apparently resting in a lesser state of peace than others.

When assessing Enoch's (2014) article about Vincent Haneman III, the myth of homeless is pervasive and accounts for the ways in which Haneman is actually characterized in a way that marginalizes him in memoriam. On its face, the rhetorical decision to write about an old, white, single homeless man made it easy to compress the multiplicity of one life into the dominant ideological narrative. Not only does this narrative shape Haneman personally into an uncontrollable man, not willing to integrate into the common social order, but it also perpetuates the long-held cultural stigmas held about the homeless. Makus (1990) argued that in the process of socially constructing realities, "for the consensus [idea] to be legitimized, events and practices must be defined in a way that makes them appear to represent the natural order of things" (p. 498). When writing about those in poverty, mediated sources commonly represent the stigmas of the homeless as natural, or as common sense, as Campbell and Reeves (1989) described it.

Throughout the narrative, Enoch portrayed Haneman's situation as almost inevitable based on his characteristics and life choices. The representation reifies a dominant understanding of the 'deserving poor': the poor life choices in Haneman's life will eventually catch up to you and erase any chance of the successful future, of which Americans so often dream. This narrative functions in many ways—as a way to show the good deeds of a few women and giving a vision of the gentleness of hospice caretakers—but one of the most prominent is the cautionary tale. By characterizing Haneman's character and journey in such an unpleasant way, the explicit message

shows the difficulty of making ‘choices’ that lead to homelessness, and the implicit implication is to avoid. The domicile must avoid both the personal characteristics that (supposedly) caused Haneman’s homelessness and the people in poverty themselves because of their disorderly existence.

The Weld: Jerome and Eric

Unlike *Tuscaloosa News*’ article about Vincent Haneman III, the *Weld for Birmingham*, a local, weekly Birmingham newspaper, published an article about two homeless men (Jerome and Eric) using different services that helped them “overcome obstacles of homelessness and addiction” (Owens, 2014, p. 16). Near the end of the article, after the two men described how they were able to become settled through the use of aid, it became clear that the narratives were meant to help raise awareness of services during the holiday season when, as one organization director stated, they “receive 60 percent of [the mission’s] donations for the year” (p. 19). While the goal of this article is likely to broaden the audience for charitable giving, the way in which Owens (2014) tells the stories of Jerome Dunson and Eric Phillips when poverty is most emphasized socially (Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, & Goin, 2011) draws on many of the elements of the dominant ideological formation of the myth of homelessness. By closely assessing the narratives, the mythic elements defining the homeless characters and the incongruent expectations of people alleviating their homelessness are distinguished in the discourse.

Beginning with the title’s context of a struggle with homelessness, the two central figures are named and labeled as “Jerome Dunson, a middle-aged African-American Birmingham native, and Eric Phillips, a middle-aged white man also from Birmingham” (p. 17). Along with the explicit mark of being middle-aged men, the implicit context in this newspaper column

comes from the first image of a tent under a low bridge surrounded by piles of trash. The omission of any significant relationships in the article, besides those at the institutions of care, provides an assumed single status in the eyes of the readers. What designated the men within the myth of homelessness were their personal traits that provided an obvious reason for homelessness. Jerome “has been homeless on and off for the last 10 years” (p. 17) due to his disability, while Eric struggled with more than just “an alcohol addiction. It was an addiction to the party lifestyle. It was all-encompassing” (p. 18). These specific traits paired with the stents of homelessness gave both men the status of ‘chronically homeless’, which Fang (2009) described the “most visible type” of homeless individual (p. 8), and the type that are commonly imagined by domicile citizens. Although Jerome and Eric were both tied into the character in the homeless myth, the difference is that they currently have a stable housing environment. While that fact will be important as the analysis of their journeys through homelessness are assessed, the characters within the narratives (past-Jerome and past-Eric) were conventional mythic representations of people living without shelter: the single old man who has a personal trait that has reduced him to social and economic poverty.

Even though the audience reads about two men who were able to move out of poverty, the personal defects that Owens (2014) presented as the cause of their homelessness provide the foundation for the marginalization of the entire homeless community. The factors that supposedly lead the two men to homelessness (disability and addiction, respectively) are some of the first adjectives used to describe them. The introductory labels provide signposts for readers, effectively ‘othering’ Jerome and Eric and separating them from the ‘normal’ public. Instead of pointing to any systemic causes of homelessness (affordable housing, discrimination, access to health care, etc.), the article contributes to the already dominant opinion that impoverished

citizens have some innate or habitual problem that is at the root of their destitution. While Eric's addictions are easier ammunition for people who want to blame the individual because they are framed as immoral actions, Jerome's disability still functions to exclude him from the general citizenry, albeit in a different way. Schneider and Remillard (2013) described the way in which many citizens react to the labeling of homeless disability, arguing that it "serves to absolve homeless people of responsibility as they are victims of a situation that is understood to be beyond their control, but nevertheless one that significantly differentiates them from 'normal' domiciled people" (p. 107). The discourse constitutes Eric as deserving of his homelessness because of his poor habits, where Jerome was undeserving because his disability is beyond control, however, both are pushed to the margins of society and their agency and power are stripped from them. For both men the mythic concept that attributes homelessness to personal issues scarred their past, but it also recentered the prominence of the individual origin of poverty.

Throughout the narratives, both are intertwined with the theme of choice, but, as with the personal defects of character, are reported differently with their own implications on the homeless community. As a homeless person with disabilities, Jerome discussed his time without shelter with a sense of agency that seems absent in studies of other disabled individuals. However, it was not the ability to move in and out of poverty, but the freedom to shift from shelters to streets that he chose. For Jerome "anything is better than having to fight for a bed at a shelter—even living outside" (Owens, 2014, p. 17). Street living is compared several times to sleeping in shelters and claimed to be the better option, "[Jerome] Dunson seems to revel in his time spent living under the bridge, and said he understands why people choose to live on the streets instead of jumping around to different shelters... 'Outside you are free,' [Jerome] said" (p. 17). While it is important to understand the stress of staying in shelters, the construction of living

under bridges is reminiscent of the hobo/tramp freedom of choosing to be poor travelers instead of rooting in a community (Schneider & Remillard, 2013, p. 98). To many readers, an easy response might be, ‘if he doesn’t like staying under a roof just because he’s with other people does he really deserve his own place?’ In fact, Owens’ extended discussion of Jerome’s preference to the streets over shelters neglects that he was talking from, as Schneider (2012) suggested is common for quotations from the homeless in newspapers, “the personal reality of homelessness” (p. 76). Owens’ rhetorical decisions in the article reinforced Jerome’s preference for the streets over shelters with multiple quotations about the freedom of the streets, while critiquing shelters for having “strict regulations” (p. 17). For readers with limited knowledge of the unpleasantness of shelter environments, Owens’ framing of Jerome’s comments makes living under a bridge seem like a choice of liberation from materiality, instead of the result of an absence of alternative safe spaces to sleep. In terms of intersectionality, the street is also an option that might not be chosen by homeless people who are not large, older men.

The troublesome rhetorical choices that emphasized Jerome’s agency in staying away from shelters were upended when discussing his current state. The other interviewee, along with Jerome, was Jerome’s caseworker, Dana Ulrich, who helps people with disabilities who are also homeless. She was particularly present when Owens (2014) transitioned into the discussion about general homeless trends and appropriate solutions for the city’s most disadvantaged population, which is in keeping with common trends of ‘experts’ interpreting the experiences of homeless communities (Schneider, 2012; Campbell & Reeves, 1989). Not only does Ulrich provide most of the generalizations and all of the solutions for homelessness, but she is also depicted as the working arm of the institution of control. The article addressed how Ulrich “arranged for [Jerome] to move into an apartment with the Salvation Army” and also “helps him

to balance his finances and makes sure he is staying out of trouble” (pp. 17-18). Jerome’s life seems to be stable, but the author made it clear that Ulrich (and subsequently the institution she represents) was the reason behind it. The discursive shift from Jerome’s individual agency while on the street to the need for constant care is swift, and brought about by his life’s steadiness. It becomes clear that a person who is homeless and disabled has insufficient ability to order his or her life and is in need of an institution of control. While Owens noted, “There is a mutual respect between the two of them,” Ulrich is positioned above Jerome in a position of power and control. Therefore, if Jerome does not align with the normative behaviors by “staying out of trouble” (p. 18), among other things, there will be some form of discipline.

Throughout the narrative, the myth of homelessness is present in the personalized explanation of homelessness, as well as the necessity of control, and assumed incompetence, in order for Jerome to be relieved of his destitution. The unique feature of Jerome’s story is that, although the feature of disability normally renders the individual personally incapable, he felt a sense of choice within his homeless existence. However, by omitting any description of personal authority and establishing Ulrich as his parent figure who monitors his behavior, Owens (2014) removed the space for empowerment and Jerome ultimately loses the sense of agency he expressed having while living on the streets. While Ulrich did address the “housing first” solution to homelessness (which understands the difficulty of homeless people pulling themselves out of poverty), because the article presented the personal causes of homelessness, the systemic roots of homelessness were never address. Additionally, the stigma of incompetence and need for control, which is a feature of the myth of homelessness, encourages social exclusion because the homeless are represented as people incapable of making decisions essential for full citizenship.

Within the myth of homelessness two incongruent expectations exist: that homeless people should “take appropriate actions...to alleviate their state of homelessness” (Schneider & Remillard, 2013, p. 104), but they are incapable of making beneficial decisions. While Jerome’s journey, as represented in the article, demonstrated his agency within the realm of homelessness to choose (what many people might think to be the wrong decision of rejecting a roof), in order to ascend homelessness he was ultimately constrained to be monitored in an institution of control because of his continual need for assistance due to his disability. Eric’s story is presented through the same incongruent expectations; however, the discursive account of his past revealed Eric’s propensity for poor decisions, until an institution held him accountable for pulling himself out of poverty. The narratives suggest that Jerome and Eric were both guided out of their homeless state, but while Jerome is framed as a person in continual need, Eric’s relief came from a “focus on character building” and removing the ineptitude and immorality that led him into homelessness.

Eric’s journey is paralleled with the origin narrative of the organization that “saved” him (Owens, 2014, p.18). The founder and namesake for the Jimmie Hale Mission (JHM) was “the town drunkard” who “got so down and out that he climbed up to the top of one of the buildings...and he was going to jump off” (p. 18). Before taking his own life he had a religious experience and turned his life around and founded the mission to help others. The basic assumption of the organization mirrors their founder’s experience and one of the cultural stigmas of homelessness: people in poverty have some “underlying issues,” and the mission’s outlook, as stated by their executive director, is that “if we are just giving people a free ride, we’re not really addressing the real issue” (p. 18). Eric testified to this assumption of the causes of homeless

stating, “it wasn’t just alcohol addiction. It was an addiction to the party lifestyle. It was all-encompassing...this place saved me” (Owens, 2014, p. 18).

Many readers would find it difficult to criticize the unified verification of the source of homelessness by an ‘expert’ and a person who was recently on the street. However, Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, articulated by Cloud (1996), “refer[s] to the process by which a social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters through the production and distribution of ideological texts that define social reality for the majority of the people” (p. 117). As people struggling with homelessness submit to shelter programs, similar to the JHM, that requires counseling among other courses, the discourse is often a disease model where the supervisors pinpoint personal characteristics that the client needs to change. In terms of the interactions between social agents and those who are marginalized, especially in the shelter setting where people have to undergo personal character diagnosis, Makus (1990) asked a critical question, “who has the power to define whom, and in what interests the definitions are offered (p. 498). When homeless individuals show up at JHM and are given the choice between rejection or allowing councilors to define their personal weaknesses that led them to homelessness, it is difficult to make the choice that is personally affirming but life-threatening. Lyon-Callo (2000) argued that within shelters “the actual practices, even of noncompliant homeless people, remain enmeshed within the hegemony of the discourses of deviancy” (p. 341). The rhetorical constructions of personal causes of homelessness are so common and taken-for-granted, that homeless individuals (such as Eric) adopt the belief, even if it is the source of their domination.

The journey for Eric, as with Jerome, began with the acceptance of personal traits that led to poverty and led through the incongruent discourses that expect the homeless to pull themselves from their bootstraps but push them into the realm of irrationality. The JHM, where

Eric went to ‘recover’ from his poverty, emphasized the coexisting tension between bootstraps discourse and irrationality. Owens (2014) clearly reported that in order to stay at the mission, homeless individuals had to undergo a type of character revision, essentially being forced to admit to having deficiencies in order to use the services. Eric even goes as far as to state that “for a lot of these people, the next two stops are either jail or death” (p. 19), implying that many of the homeless people staying cannot survive long on their own. The myriad defects causing homelessness require control and management in order to reverse the immorality of a broken character. According to the Mission director, “all we ask of the people that come here is to be cooperative and to be manageable. If they aren’t ready for the extended program, what we tell them is to come back whenever they feel ready” (p. 18). In terms of controlling the behaviors of unsheltered people, JHM turns away people in need who do not comply with their behavioral standards, exhibiting their empowered position over the homeless community that uses their services. McKerrow (1989) described dominant groups’ affirmations of power thusly; “its role as ruler is sanctioned, in a negative sense, by the ultimate act of excommunicating those who fail to participate in or accede to the rituals” (p. 93). The supervision of the extended program is presented as necessary in order to polish the disreputable character of those staying at the shelter, and is an explicit display of their power to control and a reminder of the hierarchical position of the homeless.

Although the people experiencing homelessness are constructed with personal deficiencies that need management from institutions of control, the Jimmie Hale Mission merely gives the impoverished population individual tools with which to pull themselves out of homelessness. The mission’s extended stay program, consisting of “16 weeks of counseling, job skills training, and Bible courses” (p. 18), seems like a beneficial investment in the personal

capital of people during their time in the shelter. However, the discourse surrounding the program is one that assumes the worst of people living without shelter. Owens (2014) quoted the director of the mission stating, “We let people stay here seven days a month, and I’ll tell you why. We don’t want to be enablers for them” (p. 18). Owens reports:

JHM [Jimmie Hale Mission] hopes to help those who walk in by attempting to address the underlying issues, and that by letting people stay for extended periods of time, the mission believes it can do more harm than good in many cases. (p. 18)

While the program necessitates institutional oversight and control, the mission, as is common from the larger public according to Schneider and Remillard (2013), “shifts responsibility to do something about homelessness to the homeless person who is expected to take appropriate actions and use the provided resources to alleviate their state of homelessness” (p. 104). Unlike the organization that provided housing services for Jerome, the JHM is reluctant to provide too many services for the homeless for fear that they may not work hard enough to pull themselves up out of homelessness.

Through the services they provide in the extended stay program (counseling, job training, Bible classes), the enrolled homeless individuals are expected to have similar life changing decisions that their founder (and Eric) did, but without sustained physical and residential support. Wander’s (1984) theory of the Third Persona explained a way of understanding ideology through the omission of “other characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing things” (p. 209). He argued that “what is negated through the Second Persona [the ideal audience] forms the silhouette of a Third Persona—the ‘it’ that is not present” (p. 209). Through the services offered and the expectations for procuring the resources, the members of the JHM (and their success story, Eric) are calling the homeless population to become people with the characteristics of

morality, religiousness, independence, and usefulness. Wander would have critics understand what is negated in the JHM's discourse, which in this case is the perceived status of the homeless community as immoral, economically and physically dependent, and socially incapable. Wander defined the implications of this type of rhetorical maneuver for the group "being alienated through language" (p. 210):

The moral significance of being negated through what is and is not reveals itself in all its anguish and confusion in context, in the world of affairs wherein certain individuals and groups are, through law, tradition, or prejudice, denied rights accorded to being commended or, measured against an ideal, to human beings. The objectification of certain individuals and groups discloses itself through what is and is not said about them and through actual conditions affecting their ability to speak for themselves. (p. 210)

Within an individualistic capitalist society, Hochschild (1995) noted that the assumption is, people are rewarded "in the marketplace according to their talents and accomplishments" and "anyone who works hard can go as far as he wants" (p. 21). The JHM standard, by which homeless people are measured, confirms these bootstraps mentality present in the myth of homelessness and further negates people who are not able to be completely self-sufficient, regardless of the cause of their need.

This vision of the model citizen rejects the individuals that are socially and economically disadvantaged through aspects of identity (lower class, people with disabled, children/teens, women, veterans, LGBTQ). Intersectionality, once again, comes into play in Eric's narrative. The expectation to find shelter, work, and a stable environment, with the only aid from the JHM coming in the form of food and aspects of education, was possible for Eric (a white, adult, straight, able-bodied male). However, would people of color, women, or queer folks fair as well

with discriminatory employment tactics? Moreover, children or people with dependents would likely struggle finding stability at JHM. There are only a few people who have the possibility of accomplishing the standard required in Owens' (2014) article, and Eric's success story was picked to highlight the mission's merit. Throughout the discourse surrounding Eric's journey, the ideal that he is told to aspire to, creates a rejected audience and further excludes the homeless population that cannot attain the ideal.

Eric's journey through homelessness, permanently interlaced with the JHM, began by initially defining him as a reckless deviant in need of a controlling force in his life. However, while his character was being altered he was sent out to pull himself from his homeless state with infrequent material support from the mission. Not only is Eric labeled as a naturally deviant when entering the mission, but the classification also projects generalizable characteristics of unruly and irresponsible behavior for the entire homeless population. As in the myth of homelessness, the expectation for homeless people to individually reconstruct their life cements the American Dream notion that "recode[s] social problems as individual solutions" and "bolster[s] the idea that personal transformation is not hampered by class structures" (Winn, 2000, p. 95). Overall, Owens' (2014) individualistic framing of both Eric's character and journey through his time at JHM constructed a picture of homelessness that both further stigmatized and excluded the homeless population in the eyes of domiciled communities.

Throughout Owens (2014) article about the two men, themes associated with the myth of homelessness remove aspects of agency and social inclusion for people living without shelter. The way in which Owens narrated Jerome and Eric's stories reproduced the commonly held notion that the homeless are in need of a domiciled person or an institution to manipulate their character and/or to govern their actions (see Schneider & Remillard, 2013). While both men are

currently housed, their representations give the public some perspective as to the life of a person experiencing homelessness.

Though the narratives are different than that of Vincent Haneman III, in that they can both be seen as escaping their destitution, because both representations reinforce mythic elements of the character and journey of the homelessness they are guilty for further entrenching stigmatizing representations of the homeless in the minds of the wider public. McKerrow (1989) argued that discourses of domination (like the mythic structure of homelessness) are particularly difficult to overturn because “actions oriented toward change will tend to be conducive to power maintenance rather than to its removal” (p. 94). Even though Owens might have intended to spotlight a communal need, the article reifies the continued social exclusion of the people without homes through the discursive structure of the myth of homelessness.

Revisiting the Mythic Structure

The homeless population, who are consistently excluded (legally, socially, interpersonally, and economically) because of their stigmatized position, have little agency in the way in which they are constructed as a population. Historically, the American Dream mythos provided the reasoning to label the impoverished as immoral and lazy (Hughes, 2003; Hochschild, 1995). Just as Owens (2007) proposed a mythic structure of Martin Luther King Jr. “as a variant to the timeless myth of the hero’s quest” (p. 4), the *myth of homelessness* functions as a variant to the American Dream myth. While the two myths share similar individualistic Western principles of morality, work ethic, and agency, the homeless often find themselves framed as lacking compared to the ideal successful citizen. Consequently, the narratives of Jerome and Eric have a positive outlook on the current status of the two men because of their successful rise out of homelessness. However, Haneman’s death was inferior to others’ because

he died outside of realm of normality, as a homeless man. The mythic structure of homelessness is present in the social discourse of media coverage, as well as everyday rhetoric, and functionally suppresses the homeless and pushes them to the margins of society.

The myth of homelessness operates through narrative, and is composed of the character of perceived person as well as their journey living on the street. The most visible type of homeless person, and therefore the figure in the mythic structure, is a single, older male most likely with some type of disability or abuse issue and in shabby clothes sleeping outdoors (Fang, 2009; Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005; Shields, 2001). Even though the diversity of the homeless population is substantial in terms of intersectionality (Kawash, 1998), with homeless families, children/teens, LGBTQ, veterans, abilities, education levels, etc., when the homeless are called forth rhetorically, the mythic ideal serves as the emblem for the entire population. Issues arise with the singular envisioned identity of the homeless, because often the causes of homelessness and the solutions are attributed directly to the individual, especially in public discourse (Schneider & Remillard, 2013; Iyengar, 1990; Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013). In the narrative of Vincent Haneman III, his deviance and laziness was reported as the cause of his poverty, however, a woman or LGBTQ youth fleeing from domestic violence could not be framed as personally responsible for their homelessness. Intersectionality also matters for the homeless in terms of finding options for survival and managing without a stable environment. Though disabled, Jerome felt comfortable sleeping under a bridge in part because he is a large, middle-aged male, where a homeless family might feel more exposed or unsecure. The representation of the character in the homeless mythic structure as a single older male with character defects has a variety of implications including the ability to blame them for their situation, and the expectation for them to manage without support.

As characterized previously, the mythic journey of the homeless centers on the theme of choice. The narratives about people without shelter often begin by describing the choices that caused their poverty, and then move into the choices they need to make to rectify their situation. However, as seen in the literature about homelessness, there is incongruity in the expected ability of the homeless (Schneider & Remillard, 2013). Similar to the American Dream myths, homeless individuals are required to pick themselves up and overcome poverty through perseverance of will. However, the social stigmas of ineptitude demand that impoverished people are placed in institutions of control, which for the homeless includes shelters, prisons, and social agencies (Remillard, 2012). The mythic narrative holds that, in institutions of control, if people are able to pull their life together and adopt the practices of domicile citizens then they are included socially. Shugart (2006) described the implications of maintaining a poor status, stating, “not transcending [humble origins] is inscribed as failure, decadence, lack of discipline, and virtually criminal” (p. 96). Not only are the homeless blamed for a poor socio-economic status, which is largely influenced by structural factors, but are also held responsible for a lack of social mobility. Stuart Hall’s theory of ideology contested the democratic promise of social enfranchisement as it refers to constructed realities, stating, “Those who remain outside of the consensual center are socially defined as deviant. By thus stigmatizing those outside its consensus, dominant society encourages conformity to its norms” (Makus, 1990, p. 497). Because the homeless are represented as making the choice to remain outside the norm, the stigmas of deviance and social incompetence become the natural label for the entire unsheltered population.

While many scholars describe the social and systemic issues that cause homelessness, the mythic structure that personally blames the homeless for their situation justifies the requirement

of controlling their behaviors in an attempt to ‘reform’ the people. The juxtaposed requirement for individuals to ascend, but needing management because of inability, creates the conditions for two types of control. First, just as Eric was personally reformed while at the Jimmie Hale Mission (JHM), Foucault (1977) chronicled the physical discipline used in prisons to provide reform. Similarly, Jerome had to report to his caseworker for inspection about his life style (“to balance his finances”) and behavior (“staying out of trouble”). While this form of physical control is not necessarily as violent as Foucault would have imagined, it is the applied force of an outside force to control the behaviors of those in a subjugated position.

The other form of control that the mythic journey elicits is Foucault’s conception of “psychological discipline and control” (Shugart, 2006, p. 83). Foucault’s (1977) metaphor of prison surveillance functioned “by making people aware that the slightest offense was likely to be punished” (p. 58). In the JHM, Eric was taught that his old behaviors were foolish, immoral, and irresponsible and that he must change his behaviors in order to ascend from homelessness. Eric’s idea that life “caught up with me,” promotes a form of self-regulation, because if he does not follow his new path, life might, once again, discipline him. McKerrow (1989) contributed to this concept, stating, “ruling class does not need to resort to overt censorship of opposing ideas, as these rules effectively contain inflammatory rhetoric within socially approved bounds” (p.93). In her interpretation of Foucault’s theory, Shugart (2006) argued “the object of discipline...is to produce subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile bodies’ to safeguard and bolster the sovereign authority that metes out said discipline” (p. 93). Both Jerome and Eric, since the time of the article have risen from homelessness by the aide of their respective institutions and were quoted as a mouthpiece of the controlling institution. Although Haneman did enter into an institution of control (hospice care) his life is less celebrated because he did not become docile and fall in line

with dominant cultural expectations. The psychological control about which Foucault theorized is at work in the myth of homelessness, when domiciled citizens manipulate the behaviors and frame of mind of people without shelter.

The myth of homelessness, from the character to the journey, has negative implications for people who are labeled as homeless. One of the largest hurdles for the homeless population and their allies is to overcome the framing of poverty as a personal issue. Not only does the individualistic frame of homelessness generate blame and stigmatization for people, but also justifies the use of institutions of control. Like many socially constructed realities that are “endowed with a perspective of naturalness and inevitability that renders alternative constructions unimaginable” (Makus, 1990, p. 498), the myth of homelessness serves as a strongly held hegemonic discourse that is reified by both the domiciled and homeless, even though it contributes to the domination of people experiencing life on the street. If humans are indeed, as Owens (2007) argued, “*homo mythic*” (p. 2) where “myths provide the basis for human reasoning” (p. 3), the mythic structure of homelessness, as it currently functions, needs revision.

CHAPTER 6

RESISTANT VOICES: COMBATING THE MYTH OF HOMELESSNESS

Through a study of homelessness, Daly (1996) argued that “by exercising our power to name, we construct a social phenomenon, homelessness, the criteria used to define it, and a stereotype of the people to whom it refers” (p. 9). The previous chapters defined the dominant views of street people by outlining the *myth of homelessness* and the ways in which the myth function in mediated forms to name, stereotype, and subjugate individuals. By constructing one overarching narrative, the dominant culture provides a generalized homeless character and continually reasserts the stigmatized journey into homelessness. However, street newspapers provide resistant voices from “homeless or formerly homeless people, as well as individuals linked with the homeless community” who attempt to reclaim political and social space through the distribution of street newspapers designed for spreading awareness and supporting the homeless community (Appendix A, p. 118). This resistant medium for the homeless is, according to Dodge (1999), “produced by homeless people and their advocates... and sold on the street by homeless vendors” who make a small profit from each paper sale (p. 60). As “a mechanism for advocacy and an effort to change politics that favor the rich and powerful” one such street paper was established in Alabama, *The Birmingham Voice* (See Appendix B, p. 135).

In order to rewrite the common narrative of homelessness that marginalizes the community and combat their social exclusion, Schneider (2012) argued that those who reproduce the dominant discourse must hear the voices of the homeless community. In his

conceptualization of the power of rhetoric, Rufo (2003) theorized, “rhetorical acts *perform* power, negotiating its distribution” and that “rhetorical power concerns itself first and foremost with the authority of naming” (p. 82). By tapping into the power of self-naming, the homeless of Birmingham, Alabama had an opportunity to begin the emancipatory work of redefining how people understand homeless people and their experiences. Street newspapers like *The Birmingham Voice* (or *The Voice*) exist as grassroots organizations that not only “demonstrate a commitment to recognizing and supporting often neglected social change efforts” (Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, & Carson-Stern, 2004, p. 415), but provide employment opportunities for homeless individuals to vend the paper on the streets. As vendors interact with the domiciled community, Torck (2001) argued that both the interactions (“buying setting”) and the paper’s content (“reading setting”) yield occasions for the unsheltered to resist the dominant understandings of homelessness (p. 375). As the homeless community and their allies begin to articulate resistant discourses, the domiciled community is confronted with both written and corporeal rhetorical forms. When discussing social movements, Enck-Wanzer (2006), argued that “when we consider the verbal, visual, and corporeal forms of discourse and how they come together...we [see] an intersectional rhetoric that resists hegemonic norms” (p. 193), which makes both the “buying setting” and the “reading setting” important for investigation of liberating rhetoric.

Scholarly analysis provides conflicting accounts of the social change provided by street papers (Novak & Harter, 2008; Torck, 2001), which Harter et al. (2004) referenced in their discussion of the “tensions that emerge between organizing for survival and social change” through street papers. Just as Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) found that “many texts contain both hegemonic and emancipatory messages” (p. 78), *The Voice* offered discourse that resisted and

consented to the dominant understanding of homelessness. While the voices expressed in the street paper often resisted certain ideological stigmas, at no point did any of the homeless contributors or their allies provide fully emancipatory discourses.

Although *The Birmingham Voice*, as a street paper and an organization, is no longer operational, the few documents that did circulate on the streets of Birmingham provide a counterpart to the previously analyzed discourse located in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, Alabama. Just as the *Tuscaloosa News* and *Weld for Birmingham* distributed articles to a localized audience (including the stigmatizing articles previously critiqued), the *Birmingham Voice* produced resistant discourses about the homeless catered to the Birmingham community because, generally, the stigma of homelessness is manifested most often in local communities. While the street paper is not accessible in online form nor is it still currently circulating, the staff's original columns (in word document form) from two of the issues have been compiled for analysis. The initial issue, printed in the winter of 2012 (See Appendix A) and the final issue from the fall of 2012 (See Appendix B) were made accessible by a co-founder and contributor of *The Voice*. The available *Birmingham Voice* publication documents will be analyzed for the ways in which they reinvent and/or reestablish the myth of homelessness and how the discursive “recharacterization of the images changes the power relations and recreates a new ‘normal’ order” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 100). With the assumption that Harter et al. (2004) and Sanchez and Stuckey's (2000) findings hold firm, both hegemonic and liberating discourses emerge from Birmingham's street paper. Ultimately, through the homeless vendors' engagement with the housed community and the text of *The Birmingham Voice*, the standardized mythic figure shifts into a more diverse and active narrative character. However, those same modes of communication offer few changes for the mythic journey of homelessness, which remains

entrenched in dominant themes where homelessness is blamed on personal flaws and people are expected to work independently to alleviate their impoverished position.

Revising the Mythic Character

Discourses surrounding homelessness are dominated by a prevailing mythic structure that constructs people without housing as deviant, disordered, and unfit for social inclusion. The stigmatizing language is constructed in narrative form, comprising the central figure (a single, older male) whose journey into homelessness was caused by poor individual choices/traits and who needs personal restoration in order to ascend from his or her inferior position. Consequently, this limited understanding of homelessness provides justification for the social exclusion of people living without shelter through both policy and everyday social interactions (Owens, 2007). However, by giving a voice to the marginalized homeless communities all over the world, street newspapers attempt to reverse the stigmatizing images of the homeless. In one Alabama city, *The Birmingham Voice* published newspapers that highlighted homeless expression through narratives and poetry, as well as promoting “poverty-related political issues and free expression” (Dodge, 1999, p. 60). Although the organization generated “both hegemonic and emancipatory messages” (Sanchez & Stuckey, 2000, p. 78), through the corporeal acts of vendor interactions with the domiciled (when they would sell *The Voice*) and the content of the paper itself, significant acts of resistance were made possible for the way in which the character in the myth of homelessness is understood.

One of the major goals of *The Birmingham Voice*, according to the paper’s editor, was “to protect and encourage the human encounters [between the homeless and domiciled] spurred on by the paper’s presence on the street” (Appendix B, p. 136). During the interaction between the two divorced communities, the assumption of most housed individuals regarding the

intersectional identity-markers of the homeless are justified, because, as Novak and Harter (2008) described of many street papers, “most vendors are African-American and male” (p. 397). One of the goals is to supply “a viable alternative to panhandling” (Appendix B, p.135), so, in general, the homeless individuals who vend the papers are the people that Fang (2009) and Shields (2001) argued were already the most visible, creating an over-representation of single, male vendors. Homeless sub-populations that are less able to take advantage of the opportunity to work as a vendor for the paper (as homeless youth, single parents, women, or the disabled) are not able to make the personal connections with the housed and their individual stories might go untold. Therefore, while creating personal encounters is a beneficial goal for *The Voice*, those connections are still limited to the mythic homeless character.

However, while the housed community might not interact with a diverse population of vendors, the content of *The Birmingham Voice* provided various illustrations of a heterogeneous homeless collective with various needs. Many of the personal narratives that spotlight members of the Birmingham homeless community were about the lives of women on the street. JaNeen Gandy recounted her story as a mother of two who survived “loneliness and anxiousness...suicidal thoughts. Unemployment. Anxiety attacks. Homelessness” and a history of domestic violence (Appendix B, p. 139). Various other pieces in the poetry section presented the outlook of homelessness by women who were able to speak to the issues that faced the entire community, not only restricted to describing the hardship of other females (Appendix B, p.162).

While some of the homeless contributors discussed the diversity of people living without shelter, like homeless families and children (Appendix A, p. 125), many of the domiciled writers and local advocates of the homeless community spoke about the marginalized communities that normally get little attention. In an analysis of social movements, Stewart (1999) defined

people/organizations who ally with marginalized peoples as “other-directed.” During an interview with an other-directed individual that was published by *The Voice*, Alice Westery described the situation facing homeless teens. In her years working as a DHS social worker, she found that “regardless of age, people lose support systems” (Appendix B, p. 143). Westery discussed the broken systems of care that initiated “a rapid influx of young people coming back and needing assistance” because of their homeless situation (Appendix B, p. 143). Even more specifically, she self-designated as “an advocate for the [homeless] LGBT (Lesbian Gay BiSexual and Transgender) population because those are my babies, too” (Appendix B, p. 144). In a general sense, *The Voice* published texts showing “that each individual has a story” and attempted to “locate individuals exactly where they are in their story” (Appendix A, p. 120). The importance of conveying the truly diverse nature of the homeless population is important as it resists the larger public’s ability to fashion each person’s life stories into the standard, stigmatizing narrative.

The other traits that allude to the social deficiency of the mythic character of homelessness (such as laziness, personal disorder, mental illness, and addiction) are reified and refuted through the business connections of the vendors and the content of *The Birmingham Voice*. Many of the personal testimonies from homeless contributors acknowledge the dominant stereotypes of mental illness and addiction. Some of the writers even reinforce the dominant ideologies, like one article that read, “its not hard to lose your mind when you are on the streets feeling alone” (Appendix A, p. 125), suggesting that experiencing homelessness for long enough, everyone develops some level of insanity. Many of the other features include addictive themes—whether sexual addiction (Appendix B, p. 139), substance abuse (Appendix A, p. 125), or alcohol addiction (Appendix B, p. 141)—which could lead readers to assume the cause of

homelessness is often an addictive personality. While the various narratives include an over-representation of addictive and mentally ill houseless individuals, mental health and addiction are both treated carefully in their own columns. In an “Ask an Addict” interview, the abnormality of addiction is admonished along with criticism of the dominant understanding of the homeless, stating, “often times people associate an addict as homeless or if a person is homeless then automatically they are an addict. That is definitely NOT TRUE” (Appendix B, p. 141). Although some of the articles in *The Birmingham Voice* perpetuated dominant notions of the homeless as mentally ill and/or addicts, there were segments dedicated to undermining the stigmatizing mythic character of homelessness.

Other than encouraging “human encounters” between the housed and houseless, the paper is meant to provide work for the vendors. Unlike other street sales, the law protects those who sell newspapers based on the 1st amendment right to freedom of the press. By creating a job that can be done on the streets, not only are vendors educating citizens about their situation, but, according to the paper’s director, “the honorable street vendors of the *Birmingham Voice* are agents of freedom” (Appendix A, p. 118). As “agents of freedom,” members of the homeless community show their ability to enter into the public sphere of political activism, a place in which they have previously been excluded (see Mitchell, 1997). Not only does the act of selling papers provide political agency, but Novak and Harter (2008) also found that “vendors’ speech patterns reflect what most individuals would consider a ‘real job’” (p. 401). One vendor mentioned the effort spent with vending, “if I have any spare time on my hands, I put it to good use by selling the paper” (Appendix B, p. 145). Through their opportunity to sell *The Voice*, vendors can actively critique the stigma of laziness and personal disorder placed upon them by domiciled members of the community. By entering into social interactions, initiating democratic

acts, and showing the will to actively work, when vendors communicate with the housed in the public sphere “vendors encourage audiences to accord them the respect due ‘normal’ citizens” (Harter et al. 2004, p. 417). As Enck-Wanzer (2006) described, “the intersection of images, words, and actions from an entire community of individuals formally mimics an articulation of collective agency that finds strength in the articulation of a ‘people’ rather than any particular person” (p. 191). The collective agency of the vendors, while not a true representation of the community, helped reduce the stigma of dominant ideologies.

Many of the texts in *The Birmingham Voice* provided a politically critical view of dominant powers and sought change, especially to issues affecting the homeless community (Appendix A, p. 126, 130; Appendix B, p. 154-157), making those supplying the paper political agents of change. Coupled with their “claim, kind, and respectful” demeanor (Appendix A, p. 118) the sales interactions between vendors and their customers liberate the homeless community from the negative characteristics of dominant discourse. Readers of *The Voice* might not visibly see the diverse community of unhoused individuals, but the paper’s content provided multiple segments eradicating the homogenous view of the population. Overall, Novak and Harter’s (2008) argument holds true for *The Birmingham Voice*: “[the paper] is helping to connect people, allowing vendors to liberate themselves, and in turn, showing [domiciled] populations that vendors are ‘okay’ that they ‘have something to say’ and are ‘intelligent’” (p. 407). Both in terms of explaining the diverse intersections of identity and combating the stigmas of mental illness, addiction, laziness, and social incompetence, *The Voice* allows the homeless and their allies to liberate people experiencing life on the street from their social suppression by providing the power of rhetorical expression.

Reifying the Journey

In keeping with the personal stigmas attached to the individual in the myth of homelessness, the perception of homelessness as an individual ‘choice’ is a recurrent theme that belittles people living on the street and trivializes the issue of homelessness. Rose and Baumgartner (2013) discovered a link between the framing homelessness as an individual issue and the ever-diminishing governmental support for those impoverished communities. Not only are the homeless blamed for their inferior social and economic position, but domiciled citizens, institutions or care, and even the homeless themselves assume the solution to homelessness revolves around the personal resolve to work hard, act morally, and gain intellectual training (Lyon-Callo, 2000; Schneider & Remillard, 2013; Remillard, 2012; Campbell & Reeves, 1989). Throughout the text there were moments where the theme of ‘choice’ was questioned, however the act of vending and the content of *The Birmingham Voice* did not focus on removing the hegemonic discourse of personal blame associated with their impoverished state. As McKerrow (1989) theorized, “the possibility of change is muted by the fact that the subject already is interpellated [*sic*] with the dominant ideology” (p. 94). Harter et al. (2004) summarized street papers’ ineffective resistance as it concerns deeply rooted ideological assumptions:

Rather than questioning ideological systems of power and domination, the entrepreneurial spirit of [street papers], consistent with the hegemonic rhetoric of welfare-reform and poverty in general, offers a formula for temporary relief from the symptoms of deeper social, political, and economic inequalities. (p. 418)

While the street paper provided a legitimate and respectable form of work for the vendors and called attention to some issues of immediate political importance, *The Voice* functioned within

the dominant ideology of capitalism and individuality, which perpetuates the myth that people experiencing homelessness are the cause of their plight and are in need of personal reform.

When articles are written in standard news form, *The Voice* tends to mirror dominant newspaper illustrations of homelessness; however, when poetic form is used, the distinct form creates a space for readers to entertain alternative views of poverty. With more emotional power, poetry allows for persuasiveness that formal logic and individual narratives cannot achieve.

Drew Pomeroy, a homeless contributor, vocalized the strain of homeless nights, writing:

There's your common dirty ground / Winter bones shudder dry and screaming... They wear crowns of knitted wool like kings of cold, and darkness is a season / They suffer together – shared cigarettes / And tasted smoke bleed deep into skin, hair, and eyes / With nothing to give, they've given / Everything they have. (Appendix A, p. 132)

Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) described the notion of implicit emancipatory possibilities arguing that viewers are called to “participate vicariously” and “step aside from themselves [which] potentially opens them to new experiences” (p. 85). The poetic description by Pomeroy characterized the difficulty of destitution during the coldest part of the year when readers would be able to empathize with and consider the people trapped in the elements. The final notion in the poem that people living on the street have “given everything they have” implies struggle for basic survival. The imagery provides a means through which the domiciled readers can begin to understand the difficulty of living without shelter.

Additionally, Harter et al. (2004) described a virtue of the poetic approach to representing the homeless; the text “allows the reader to receive multiple interpretations and meanings and to create his or her own meaning” (p. 415). JaNeen Gandy depicted her story in way in which no particular event explicitly caused any others: “There were some bad things. Sexual abuse at age

seven... Feelings of not being wanted by my mother and father... Sexual addiction... Frustration. Not knowing. Swearing. Alcohol” (Appendix B, p. 139). By presenting her life through individual events, Gandy helped readers begin to understand the myriad factors in a single individual’s story and allowed the domiciled to navigate the implicit connections themselves. Using a different approach, Marie Burnett explicitly walked through the shame-filled journey forced upon members of the homeless community. Poetically exploring dominant features of homeless exclusion, such as personal blame of homelessness, economic depravity, and controlling forces, Burnett critiqued various issues facing the homeless. Readers were forced to deal with the difficult questions that the homeless often ask themselves: after receiving “your county funded / fully subsidized / chemical lobotomy / you will wonder... if the gov’t [*sic*] can give me \$2,000 / of pills to crawl into night and day... WHY am I sleeping on broken glass?” (Appendix B, p. 163). The vivid imagery and format of the text shifts readers from a third person to the central figure in the discourse. Furthermore, Burnett explicitly addressed the accusation of self-inflicted poverty, stating, “They will say...that your subconscious mind / has you blind folded / that you enjoy your suffering / that you made yourself sick... that you have only yourself to blame” (Appendix B, p. 163). Through poetic form, the voices of the homeless community are afforded the opportunity to resist stereotypes, stigmas, and dominant understandings of homelessness.

While few writers speak holistically to the problematic nature of dominant ideologies, each piece allowed housed citizens to understand the thoughts and emotions of the homeless. Enck-Wanzer (2006) claimed that resisting oppressive systems included “declin[ing] the opportunity to mimic the form of the oppressor’s rhetoric” (p. 176). Within these poetic

renditions, the homeless told their story in a novel way, which allows potential domiciled allies to comprehend the homeless experience in a richer way.

Unfortunately, artistically written texts are far outnumbered in *The Birmingham Voice* by articles written in the standard fashion of newspapers columns, which tend to reproduce dominant themes of personal blame and individual solutions. Even in discursive tactics intended to dislodge elements of the myth of homelessness or advocate for beneficial policy changes, the overarching mythic element of personal choice is consistent. A moment of personal reflection in the “Director’s Corner” column revealed the cause of challenges faced by the author, “some self-inflicted, some the consequences of bad choices” (Appendix B, p. 135). During one of the street spotlights, a vendor confessed, “I decided that I would rather do drugs, drink, and basically ‘buck the system’ than live a normal, productive life” (Appendix A, p. 125). There are ways to focus on the struggle of addiction without complete self-blame, which allows members of the larger community to stigmatize the entire homeless population. Once again, reinforcing the hegemonic ideology through narrative, a columnist recounted hitchhiking with a band of vagabonds, stating, “This was the life they chose. It was their decision... They were homeless” (Appendix B, p. 147). Although there are a few individuals that “play hobo,” as the writer articulated, expressing the playfulness of homelessness in *The Birmingham Voice*, a street paper created for homeless “empowerment, employment, and expression” (Appendix B, p. 136) is most likely a poor editorial decision as it reinforces the stigma of choice and belittles the stressful and strenuous nature of living on the street.

The general indication that poor choices resulted in poverty is made clearer through another repressive theme that arose from *The Birmingham Voice*; the belief that personal immorality results in poverty and homelessness is pervasive throughout the text. Donald

Broadnax poetically proclaimed the sinful nature of impoverished citizens, writing, “Brothers and sisters going at each other’s throats,” “children cursing and fighting,” and “fathers disgusted because they’ve lost all their pay, gambling, drinking, or some other sinful way” (Appendix A, p. 132). Willing all of these sinful groups to “turn [their] lives around” because “your disease is cunning and baffling and will destroy you someday. Unless you find a higher power” (Appendix A, p. 132). Essentially, Broadnax attributed poverty to morality/religiousness, which provides the housed population to exclude the homeless based on their inability to meet the moral standard of communal life. Broadnax was not alone in his connection between homelessness and immorality. Whether suffering from addiction (Appendix B, p. 141), abuse (Appendix B, p. 139), economic adversity (Appendix B, p. 145), or even isolation (Appendix A, p. 125), many of the authors established a distinct shift of fortune when they became more religious. The self-reflective image before finding God coincided, in many cases, with the lowest point of material despondence. Both Hughes (2003) and Hochschild (1995) detailed the American ideal linking morality to material success, which is perpetuated through text in *The Voice*. Granted, religious affiliations can provide hope and/or purpose (not to mention *The Voice* was housed and produced in a church building), but presenting a religious shift as the primary turning point in the journey through homelessness reifies the immorality of the current homeless population, sustains the inactivity of homeless activism, and negates widespread societal change. Whether by editorial choice or hegemonic consent, the homeless are depicted as making personal and sinful choices that lead them directly into their homeless state, rather than understanding homelessness as a societal problem.

In addition to the discourse that reinforced the mythic ideology of personal causes of homelessness, the various forms of support or advocacy published in *The Birmingham Voice*

presented solutions on an individual basis rather than calling for systemic transformations that could alleviate homelessness altogether. The paper's content mirrors the organization's plan to aid the homeless through meaningful employment. One interviewee discussing recovering from addiction stated, "if you have the will, determination, and desire you can find the way" (Appendix B, p. 141). One of *The Voice's* vendors, Tommy, mentioned that he was "trying to save and get a place" and if he's "not working or doing work related things, then [he's] looking for work" (Appendix B, p. 141). Tommy continued by reifying the American Dream faith in work ethic, "try your best, try your hardest at whatever you do" (Appendix B, p. 141). Aspirations for the American Dream were pervasive throughout the discourse. Charles Ridley, another *Voice* vendor dreamed that he "might get rich sellin' newspapers" (Appendix A, p. 119). Even though many of *The Voice* contributors have experienced the ruthlessness of a capitalistic system, they continually consent to the hegemonic ideal that hard work eventually pays. Novak and Harter (2008) expressed that "if and how we financially support ourselves and our families, remain deeply woven in the construction of our identities (p. 399). While providing an avenue for employment is beneficial for the homeless in terms of self worth, there was little indication that the organization was willing to tackle the much deeper seeded issues of meritocracy and self-reliance.

Two major aspects of the mission of *The Birmingham Voice* are employment and the corporeal interactions as vendors sell their papers to the housed. The organization functions much like an institution of control, where the homeless are taught professionalism and expected to act in specific ways in order to receive the financial benefit of selling *The Voice*. In terms of the current ideological landscape, the opportunity for people living without shelter to obtain employment provided "a source of income and self-respect" (Torck, 2001, p. 372) because of the

increased level of economic independence. However, the consequence of trying to instill an entrepreneurial spirit results in a staunch meritocratic mindset in the homeless community and the assumption that the homeless are responsible to lift themselves out of poverty. McKerrow (1989) argued that once interpolated in a system of dominant discourse it is difficult to think outside of the ideological structure. *The Voice* reflects McKerrow's theory, in that, the aid provided to the homeless (employment) is consistent with the protestant work ethic and bootstraps principles where economic advancement is crucial. The organization is not redefining what it means to be homeless for everyone; rather, it is establishing a social hierarchy within the homeless community that conforms to the larger social structure. Consequently, Novak and Harter (2008) explained that, once vendors began their employment, the street paper vendors began to stigmatize panhandlers, calling them "cupshakers" and citing their "aggressive" panhandling and "crazy" looks as "threats to their economic livelihood" (p. 402). Just as members of the homeless population are often criticized by the housed community for laziness and social inability, the divide between working and panhandling homeless individuals created similar hierarchical tensions. The reinforced American notion of meritocracy and capitalism become the backdrop to street paper sales rather than ideologies that are being opposed.

The mythic journey of homelessness is reinforced throughout the discourse in *The Birmingham Voice* and the organizational structure of employment. Although the street paper breached topics that would ease the condition of the homeless population (such as public transit, the occupy movement, and the public hospital's health care program), their depiction of the journey of homelessness included personal blame, the need for moral reform, and the necessity to join the capitalist economic system. Harter, Edwards, et al. (2004) expressed this concern with the system of street newspapers generally:

The debate about homelessness specifically and poverty in general continues to be primarily waged in terms of self-sufficiency and character flaws rather than in terms of structural causes for poverty including the absence of a real system of social welfare and an adequate minimum wage. (p. 122)

The Voice, and other street papers like it, took a reactive approach, interested in improving the current homeless population for the domiciled middle-class (a noble task, indeed), but neglected a proactive approach at attempting to enact social norms and policies to prevent (or reduce the number of) people from living without shelter. Employing vendors is a tactic to help the homeless achieve the expectations that upper classes placed on them, to “get yourself a job” and “clean yourself up” (Appendix A, p. 125). The current model of street papers, which stresses homeless employment and professionalism, are, as Wright argued, “just another small business to help a few people, salve the conscience of the privileged, and maintain conditions as they currently exist” (as cited in Dodge, 1999, p. 61). Overall, clients and readers of *The Birmingham Voice* likely walked away from the paper with similar assumptions about the journey of the homeless individuals they encountered as their preconceived notions.

In accordance with organization’s aim of being “a mechanism for advocacy and an effort to change politics” and “a holistic approach to houselessness” (Appendix B, p. 135), there were many emancipatory elements functioning to restructure the *myth of homelessness*. By including a survey of homeless voices and using segments to explain the differing situations of people living without shelter, including children, LGBTQ individuals, families, people with disabilities, and women, *The Birmingham Voice* struggled against the homogeneous character in the mythic structure of homelessness. Additionally, the street paper was able to defuse the dominant stigmas attached to representations of the homeless, such as mental illness, addiction, laziness, and

personal disorder, by exposing the housed community to members of the homeless population through the transaction of *The Voice*. The interaction between vendors and readers allowed vendors to present themselves to the larger public as agents of political change as well as socially capable members of society, both of which represent an embodied criticism of the central tenets of the mythic character of homelessness.

However, the street paper appeared so inculcated in the theme that blames individuals for their homelessness that few liberating discourses emerged from the articles. McKerrow (1989) summarized the inevitable struggle against hegemonic ideologies, arguing that “actions oriented toward change will tend to be conducive to power maintenance rather than to its removal” (p. 94). Editorial choices and the discourses of the homeless and their allies reproduced the dominant understand of the self-inflicted and immoral journey into poverty. Consequently, the solution presented to help the homeless, gainful employment, reinforced the need for people to literally work their way into the middle-class. Without offering criticism of societal structures keeping the homeless and impoverished in a subjugated position, the aid draws upon the hegemonic expectation that people should find individual solutions to their problems.

By establishing a paper-vending employment opportunity, *The Voice* provided a much-needed form of income for the current homeless population, but the organization did not establish any critical voice for the significant systemic issues that are the roots of homelessness. If advocacy organizations do not make a concerted effort to change the mythic journey of homelessness, the future homeless population will suffer from the stigma of personal blame and the bootstrap expectation to individually struggle out of poverty. In their discussion of emancipatory possibilities, Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) argued that “directly challenging hegemonic codes is not sufficient to affect the persistence of those codes. They must also be

replaced with another set of interpretive codes” (p. 85). Because, as Harter et al. (2004) discussed, “dependence on support beyond one’s self has been the rule rather than the exception in American history” (p. 418), advocacy organizations need to establish “ongoing conversations in which the ‘myth’ of self-reliance is questioned, [and] ‘interdependence’ is normalized” (p. 423). Overall, *The Birmingham Voice* questioned the stereotypical character found in the myth of homeless, but offered little critique of the journey that is taken in the dominant narrative. Without offering an alternative narrative, the mythic structure persists and advocacy efforts connected to issues on the periphery of homelessness (public transit, health care, etc.) function, as Marie Burnett eloquently wrote, like a “bag of pills / *not meant to cure / only to assuage* [emphasis added] your hunger / for decent affordable permanent housing” (Appendix B, p. 163).

CHAPTER 7

REINVENTING THE MYTHIC STRUCTURE

Throughout the study I have defined and examined the *myth of homelessness*, the ideology by which the homeless community is labeled, stigmatized, and removed from social and political spheres. In his work on American myth, Hughes argued, “myths are essentially invisible and must remain invisible unless we name them, bring them to consciousness, and explore the way they have functioned,” (p. 8). Taking up Hughes’ call, this thesis set out to name and uncover the ways in which the homeless population has been excluded, exploited, and harmed through rhetorical constructions. Fundamentally, I argued that, media members fashioned narratives about the homeless using the aforementioned mythic ideology, which stigmatized homeless identities and condemned their personal narratives. This chapter commences with an overview of each chapter’s central findings and the thesis’s overall argument. Subsequently, the analyses are developed into implications for the emancipatory possibilities available to the homeless community and their ally organizations as well as for scholarly understanding of mythic theory and criticism. Finally, limitations are discussed along with avenues for further development of theoretical, rhetorical, and practical studies of homelessness and people experiencing life without shelter.

Results of Study

The initial motivation for this thesis was a questioning of the justification for the mistreatment of people experiencing homelessness through exclusionary communal policies and everyday interactions. In order to understand the reasoning behind homeless exclusion, the

mythic paradigm was adopted as a foundational ideological frame, by which constructed realities are understood through the firmly rooted narratives of a society (Owens, 2007). A mythic approach was used in gathering and defining the myth of homelessness, which was used for the discursive analyses of dominant and peripheral mediated texts. The ensuing overview of each chapter will build into implications for both the homeless community and mythic rhetorical scholars.

At the outset, Chapter Two introduced the prototypical framing of the homeless population, which, because middle-class Americans rarely interact with the homeless, is derived from mediated sources (Summers, 2008; Richter, Burns, Chaw-Kant, Calder, Mogale, & Goin, 2011). Additionally, social implications of the mediated frames established a general perception of the effects negative framing has on the homeless population through exclusionary legal avenues and stigmatizing public judgments. The second chapter concluded with an overview of the myth of the American Dream in order to understand a construct that is at the core of American social hierarchies.

In order to establish a critical rhetorical lens through which mythic criticism could occur, Chapter Three first discussed the forms that power takes in society. Foucault (1977/1988), McKerrow (1989), Wander (1984), and Phillips (2002) provided a foundation for the material ways in which dominant discourses subjugate lower classes, but also offered a critical lens that allows for resistance of the ruling class and invention of new social power structures. Although previously mentioned, this chapter provided a justification for the use of social constructionism, which led to the use of mythic theory. Owens' (2007) approach to the social construction of reality expanded upon Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, arguing that narratives only achieved rhetorical force "as the result of the fusion of several individual narrative" (p. 2) and, thus,

creating a mythic structure. By identifying the function of power in society and the possibility of socially constructed realities, the mythic paradigm gains access to function as the “basis for human reasoning” (Owens, p. 3).

Beginning with Owens’ (2007) general understanding of mythic creation, Chapter Four combined the traits from quantitative scholarly assessments of homeless narratives into an overarching narrative termed the myth of homelessness. As a first step in creating analytical space, rhetorical scholars (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; McKerrow, 1989; Rufo, 2003) established the importance of naming the locations from which power emerges. For the homeless, I argued that the myth of homelessness is a naturalized ideology that produces discourse and justifies actions that exclude and harm people living without shelter. The culturally held narrative established an archetypal figure (the main character), a homeless man who is single, middle-aged, and personally disordered because of mental illness, laziness, or substance abuse. In addition, I argued that the myth of homelessness produced a common narrative arc (the journey) where the homeless supposedly fall into their position through personal causes, and have paradoxical expectations to both pull themselves up by their own power but be incapable of making positive decisions. The tension created by the ruling class, wherein the homeless have agency in their declining social status, but none once they are homeless, allows for increasingly negative perceptions. The mythic narrative ends when the homeless individual is placed in an institution of control, whether a shelter, prison, training program, or hospital where the goal is personal reform. The myth of homelessness provides a single ideological system by which the exclusion of people living without shelter can be understood and from which criticism can commence.

Chapter Five critiqued the ways in which the narratives in local Alabama newspapers utilized the myth of homelessness in order to rhetorically frame the lives of the homeless through stigma and justify the social exclusion and hostile treatment of the homeless. The case studies of the *Tuscaloosa News* and *Weld for Birmingham* fulfill the essence of the myth of homelessness, by attributing homelessness to the individual's moral, economic, and social failings and by promoting personal reform through institutions of control along with bootstraps metaphors. With the power to define (or reinforce) the dominant understanding of homelessness, the two newspapers not only created discourse that marginalized the homeless, but the people experiencing homelessness internalized the stigma and began to consent to and perpetuate the hegemonic ideology.

Street people and allies of the homeless community notice the rhetorical power of dominant narratives; therefore, Chapter Six analyzed the attempts of *The Birmingham Voice*, a street newspaper written by and about the homeless, to reshape the myth of homelessness and allow the homeless to self-define their identities and situations. Operating through vendor interactions with the public and through the newspaper's content, *The Birmingham Voice* ultimately produced both emancipatory and hegemonic discourses about the homeless. By creating an environment in which the homeless vendors were able to interact with the public and providing space in the paper for homeless contributors to share their stories, the paper was able to resist representations of the mythic character and establish a more diverse representation of the homeless, both in terms of identity and personal agency. However, *The Birmingham Voice* reified the dominant ideology through a reproduction of personal blame as well as organizational discourse that renewed homeless subjectivity around economic advancement, personal work

ethic, and reformed character qualities established in the vendor code of conduct (Appendix A, p. 134).

The mythic description and rhetorical analyses emerged in response to questions about the social reasoning behind the exclusionary practices of the homeless population. Ultimately, I argue in this thesis that the myth of homelessness is the justification by which people living without shelter are socially excluded and controlled through institutions of reform. Through the definitional work of creating the myth of homelessness and assessing its functionality in dominant and resistant texts, implications can be drawn for both the homeless community and mythic theory and analysis.

Creating Resistant Discourses

The recently-designated myth of homelessness is a comprehensive system through which dominating discourses are made clear. Just as Nakayama and Krizek (1995) outlined the invisible locus of power in whiteness discourse as a preliminary step for scholars to “begin to mark and incorporate whiteness into [their] analyses and claims” (p. 305), the exposition of the myth of homelessness provides the initial step for redefining and resisting the devalued position of the homeless. The physical, social, and political exclusion of the homeless population is justified through entrenched ideologies; therefore, liberation also occurs at the discursive level where reasoning takes place. Phillips (2002) argued that power structures, including those that marginalize street people, are created through networks of discourse and therefore, resistance “emanates from gaps within the lines of intelligibility” (p. 331). Throughout the analytical chapters, I have implemented a critical approach to uncover where the myth of homelessness provides “points of uncertainty” (Phillips, p. 338) that can be exploited. The homeless population and their allies can continue to identify what Phillips called “the antecedent gaps within networks

of power” (p. 332) for the purpose of inventing new subjectivities, both through the representative character and the imagined journey of the homeless.

However, the analysis of *The Birmingham Voice* suggested that even discourses intended as “a mechanism for advocacy” (Appendix B, p. 135) struggle to fully resist the hegemonic ideologies about the homeless community. One major difficulty is that the deep-seeded myth of homelessness can be seen as a counterpart (or necessary opposite) to the myth of the American Dream. Both ideologies are intertwined with the capitalistic, competitive, and individualistic nature of American economic practice, making personal praise of the wealthy and the stigmatization of the poor all the more difficult to deviate from. While citizens strive to achieve the American Dream, the myth of homelessness depicts the homeless as “the summation of all that you and I are told to avoid becoming” (Wander, 1984, p. 210).

Although comprehensive resistance may seem impossible, organizations whose goal is to remove social stigmas and integrate the homeless into civic life can still provide discursive resistance through a reworking of the power structure. During a discussion of the liberating aspects of vendors delivering politically critical street papers, Novak and Harter (2008) argued that “we can not deny the power of small acts of resistance with dominant systems” (p. 409). In fact, vending papers does provide homeless individuals with a sense of self-respect (Novak & Harter, p. 399) and creates a dialectical moment for the paper consumers where homeless identity and subjectivity are questioned. While the mythic character was given space for new identities to emerge, ally organizations should pay close attention to the individualized journey of homelessness to insure that common themes, upheld by the American Dream and Homeless myths, are challenged. Similarly, Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, and Carson-Stern (2004) urge street papers to “contribute to ongoing conversations in which the ‘myth’ of self-

reliance is questioned, [and] ‘interdependence’ is normalized” (p. 423). Creating discourses that maintain societal interdependence and showcase the systemic injustices that lead to homelessness both challenge the standard journey of the myth of homelessness and liberate the homeless from social exclusion.

Mythic Theory and Criticism

Using Owens’ (2007) theory of myth as a foundation, this study uncovered a socially held mythic narrative and displayed the rhetorical power of mythic ideology and its material affect in the lives of the homeless through exclusion, discipline, and reform. Within the larger conversation of mythic criticism, this study provides an argument for a broad definition of myth and a heuristic for criticism. Initiating a debate about the use of mythic criticism, Rowland (1990) approaches the discipline with a narrow understanding where “critical judgments be backed by reference to specific texts or to a well-known societal mythology,” functionally limiting discussions of resistant narratives (p. 113). However, Osborn (1990), Rushing (1990), and Solomon (1990) responded to Rowland’s limited approach describing it as too confining, summarized by Rushing, the “[Rowland’s] definition of myth is logically contradictory and unnecessarily exclusive...and his implications for the doing of criticism privilege strict observation over creative interpretation” (p. 147). A broad reading of mythic analysis holds to Rowland’s tenets that myths have narrative composition and provide an alternative to strict logical reasoning. Founding this study on a creative interpretation of mythic application invites scholars, as Osborn observed, “to play with an idea, to strain a term to its outmost boundaries of defensible meaning...in order to make discoveries, to create new meaning” (p. 121). Future scholars might adopt similar adaptations in order to push theoretical understandings and create fresh analytical lenses.

Additionally, this thesis provides mythic scholars a critical method through which unnamed mythic structures can be uncovered and unpacked for their social implications. Owens (2007) summarized the discourse of Martin Luther King, Jr. and shaped it into mythic form using the myth of the hero's quest, resulting in an over-arching narrative that summarized the ideological beliefs of King and served as a guide to African-American leaders. Similarly, I summarized the popular discourse about the homeless and arranged the myth of homelessness into a narrative structure that justified actions of those who embraced the myth. Instead of taking Rowland's (1990) approach of gathering texts with "well-known societal mythology" (p. 113), I founded my mythic structure on social narratives that had been interwoven to create a firmly held ideological construction that has consequences for the community. This approach was employed to understand the process through which communities create overarching narratives that produce what Fisher (1984) called "good reasons" for various actions (p. 7). Scholars could use this approach to explore stories created to deny access to trans* individuals or to label African-American males as 'angry black men' in order to justify confinement. Understanding dominant structures of power is necessary if marginalized groups are ever to gain inclusion. Moreover, attention to mythic ideologies is a major access point to the social locus of power, and thus, can help create opportunities for resistance.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis has explored the dominant understanding of people experiencing homelessness by identifying the myth of homelessness and analyzing its function in the narratives of both dominant and street newspapers. Although the analyses aimed at fully exploring the rhetorical situation of the homeless, the limitations of the study range from broadening the textual base of criticism to rethinking the unique position of homelessness as an

aspect of identity. Given the circumstances in which *The Birmingham Voice* produced so few papers and did not provide broad accessibility, future studies could expand the textual base of resistant discourses to larger street papers, such as *Street Sheets* in San Francisco, California or *StreetWise* in Chicago, Illinois.

Additionally, beneficial exploration could emerge from rhetorical analysis of the relationships street paper vendors have with various communities. My discussion of *The Birmingham Voice* characterized the paper as an institution seeking personally to reform its vendors because of the mandatory vendor code and punishment for misbehavior with clients. Because the papers are usually run by domiciled allies of the homeless, an assessment of the vendor – management relationship could explore the power dynamic between the two parties as well as the extent to which street papers seek to control behaviors of the vendors who work for the organization. Continuing, I argued that the interactions between the vendors and their clients provided an important opportunity for self-definition; however, a future study could also assess the extent to which the vendors are granted that opportunity or exercise its rhetorical possibility to produce resistant discourse.

Finally, a theoretical limitation to the study of homelessness is the unique nature of homeless identity. Unlike many aspects of identity studied by critical scholars (such as race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability), homelessness occupies a rare space in which the person embodies the stigmatized position but would likely aspire to seek removal from their homeless circumstance. Instead of striving for self-empowerment and liberation for people in similar circumstances, as seen in the discursive reappropriation of feminist, LGBTQ+, and “crip” rhetorical strategies (Shugart, 1997; Sandahl, 2003), the homeless state can be seen as temporary compared to other aspects of identity, which might impact the willingness of homeless or once-

homeless individuals to invest in a long-term resistant movement. Because homelessness is both a marker of current identity and an embodied position, ally organizations must acknowledge the tension between alleviating the undesired physical space without labeling the individual occupying that space as undesirable. Furthermore, scholars should attend to the rhetorical tension as the homeless and their allies seek to establish an empowered homelessness identity while still seeking to remove people from a physical homeless position.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the investigation of mediated narratives of the homeless revealed a powerful mythic structure that shapes public and private discourse, as well as governmental and organizational policy. After addressing implications of this study and areas of future study, I wish to return to the material implications of living without shelter. The social and economic systems functionally exclude the homeless from participation and in some cases threaten the life of those on the street. In Shawnee, Oklahoma, where I first noticed the mistreatment of impoverished citizens, policies that require job applicants to provide a phone number and local address deny access to people living without housing. Additionally, shelter access is reserved for the people with extremely low incomes reducing the incentive to work more than a few hours a week for fear of being left on the streets. Moreover, in the small Oklahoma town, the homeless have more to fear than nights on the street as there is a history of hostility toward the homeless, one altercation which led to the death of Alan Branscum from blunt force trauma (Morava, 2015). The economic, social, and physical destitution endured by homeless populations all over the United States can be linked to the reality of the myth of homelessness, which dehumanizes people without stable housing and removes the population from functional citizenship. Harter et al. (2004) provided a valuable reminder to the domiciled community, “depending on support

beyond one's self has been the rule rather than the exception in American history; however, our discursive practices continue to perpetuate a 'myth' of self-reliance" (p. 418). The individualistic idea of self-reliance might be one of the most damaging notions for the homeless population in terms of the personal blame for homelessness, as well as the expectation that the homeless pull themselves out of their inferior social position. My hope is that this study contributed a conflicting narrative to dominant understandings of homelessness and provided a moment of reflexivity for the way in which the domiciled interact with people experiencing homelessness.

REFERENCES

- Burke, K. (1968). Dramatism. *International encyclopedia of the social sciences*, 7(1), 445-452.
- Campbell, R. & Reeves, J. L. (1989). Covering the homeless: The Joyce Brown story. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6(1), 21-42.
- Charland, M. (1987). Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the People Québécois. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73(2), 133-150.
- Clinton, B. (1993). Remarks to the Democratic Leadership Council. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>
- Cloud, D. L. (1996). Hegemony or concordance? The rhetoric of tokenism in “Oprah” Winfrey’s rags-to-riches biography. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13(2), 115-137
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, Identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Daly, G. P. (1996). *Homeless: Policies, strategies, and lives on the street*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dodge, C. (1999). Words on the street: Homeless people’s newspapers. *American Libraries*, 30(7), 60-62.
- Durso, L. E. & Gates, G. J. (2012). *Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund.
- Enck-Wanzer, D. (2006). Trashing the system: Social movement, intersectional rhetoric, and collective agency in the Young Lords Organization’s garbage offensive. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92(2), 174-201.
- Enoch, E. (2014, March 22). A life of drugs, schizophrenia, cancer and homelessness ends in a kind of peace. *Tuscaloosa News*. Retrieved from <http://www.tuscaloosanews.com/article/20140322/NEWS/140329893>
- Evans, F. (2008). Citizenship, art, and the voices of the city: Wodiczko’s the homeless projection. In E. G. Isin and G. M. Nielsen (Eds.), *Acts of Citizenship* (pp. 227-246). London, England: Zed Books.
- Fang, A. (2009). Hiding homelessness: ‘Quality of life’ laws and the politics of development in American cities. *International Journal of Law in Context*, 5(1), 1-24.

- Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs* 51(1), 1-22.
- Foss, S. K. (2009). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice* (4th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *The history of sexuality*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Harter, L. M., Berquist, C., Titsworth, B. S., Novak, D., & Brokaw, T. (2005). The structuring of invisibility among the hidden homeless: The politics of space, stigma, and identity construction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.
- Harter, L. M., Edwards, A., McClanahan, A., Hopson, M. C., & Carson-Stern, E. (2004). Organizing for survival and social change: The case of *Streetwise*. *Communication Studies*, 55(2), 407-424.
- Hochschild, J. (1995). *Facing up to the American dream: Race, class, and the soul of the nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Homeless Assistance, 42 U.S.C. § 11302.
- Homeless Voice, The (2014, November 2). Homeless Voice Services: About Homeless Voice. Retrieved from www.homelessvoice.org/about/
- Hughes, R. T. (2003). *Myths Americans live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Iyengar, S. (1990). Framing responsibility for political issues: The case of poverty. *Political Behavior*, 12(1), 19-40.
- Kawash, S. (1998). The homeless body. *Public Culture*, 10(2), 319-339.
- Lyon-Callo, V. (2000). Medicalizing homelessness: The production of self-blame and self-governing within homeless shelters. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 14(3), 328-345.
- Makus, A. (1990). Stuart Hall's theory of ideology: A frame for rhetorical criticism. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54(4), 495-514.
- Marin, P. (1987, January). Helping and hating the homeless: The struggle at the margins of America. *Harper's Magazine*, 39-49.
- McKerrow, R. E. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. *Communications Monographs*, 56(2), 91-111.
- Middleton, M. K. (2014). "SafeGround Sacramento" and rhetorics of substantive citizenship. *Western Journal of Communication*, 78(2), 119-133.

- Mitchell, D. (1997). The annihilation of space by law: The roots and implications of anti-homeless laws in the United States. *Antipode*, 29(3), 303-335.
- Morava, K. (2015, January 15). Defendant pleads guilty in death of homeless man. *The Shawnee News-Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.news-star.com/article/20150112/News/150119937>
- Nakayama, T. K. & Krizek, R. L. (1995). Whiteness: A strategic rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81(3), 291-309.
- The National Coalition for the Homeless and The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. (2010). *A place at the table: Prohibitions on sharing food with people experiencing homelessness*. Washington, DC.
- The National Institute of Mental Health. (2015). Schizophrenia. Retrieved from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia/index.shtml>
- The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and The National Coalition for the Homeless. (2009). *Homes not handcuffs: The criminalization of homelessness in U.S. cities*. Washington, DC.
- Neff, S.G., Barker, G.G., & Cornwell, T.L. (2008). Experiential learning and social impact: The communication effects of the one homeless night event on participants' attitudes and perceptions of homelessness. *Conference Paper--International Communication Association*.
- Novak, D. R. & Harter, L. M. (2008). "Flipping the scripts" of poverty and panhandling: Organizing democracy by creating connections. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36(4), 391-414.
- Osborn, M. (1990). In defense of broad mythic criticism: A reply to Rowland. *Communication Studies*, 41(2), 121-127.
- Owens, C. (2014, December 18). A tale of two struggles: A look at two men who overcame obstacles of homelessness and addiction. *Weld for Birmingham*, 16-19.
- Owens, K. (2007). Myth making as a human communication paradigm: The case of Martin Luther King Jr., and the civil rights movement. *American Communication Journal*, 9(3), 1-13.
- Phillips, K. R. (2002). Spaces of invention: Dissension, freedom, and thought in Foucault. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 35(4), 328-343.
- Remillard, C. (2012). The disorderly sight of homelessness: Media images, homeless subjects, and public space. *Conference Papers—International Communication Association*, 1-34.
- Richter, S., Burns, K.K., Chaw-Kant, J., Calder, M., Mogale, S., & Goin, L. (2011). Homelessness Coverage in Major Canadian newspapers, 1987-2007. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 36(1), 619-635.

- Ritchie, L. D. (2009). Metaphor, narrative, and social reality in a conversation about homelessness. *Conference Paper—International Communication Association*, 1-30.
- Rose, M., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2013). Framing the poor: Media coverage and U.S. poverty policy, 1960-2008. *The Policy Studies Journal*, 41(1), 22-53.
- Rowland, R. C. (1990). On mythic criticism. *Communication Studies*, 41(2), 101-116.
- Rufo, K. (2003). Rhetoric and power: Rethinking and relinking. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 40(2), 65-84.
- Rushing, J. H. (1990). On saving mythic criticism: A reply to Rowland. *Communication Studies*, 41(2), 136-149.
- Sanchez, V. E., & Stuckey, M. E. (2000). Coming of age as a culture? Emancipatory and hegemonic readings of *The Indian in the Cupboard*. *Western Journal of Communication*, 64(1), 78-91.
- Sandahl, C. (2003). Queering the crip or crippling the queer?: Intersections of queer and crip identities in solo autobiographical performance. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 9(1-2), 25-56.
- Saulny, S. (2012, December 18). After recession, more young adults are living on street. *The New York Times*, Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Schneider, B., & Remillard, C. (2013). Caring about homelessness: How identity work maintains the stigma of homelessness. *Text & Talk*, 33(1), 95-112.
- Schneider, B. (2012). Sourcing homelessness: How journalists use sources to frame homelessness. *Journalism*, 13(1), 71-86.
- Shields, T. G. (2001). Network news construction of homelessness: 1980-1993. *Communication Review*, 4(2), 193-218.
- Shugart, H. A. (1997). Counterhegemonic acts: Appropriation as a feminist rhetorical strategy. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 83(3), 210-229.
- Shugart, H. A. (2006). Ruling class: Disciplining class, race, and ethnicity in television reality court shows. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 17(2), 79-100.
- Solomon, M. (1990). Responding to Rowland's myth or in defense of pluralism: A reply to Rowland. *Communication Studies*, 41(2), 117-120.
- Stewart, C. J. (1999). Championing the rights of others and challenging evil: The ego function in the rhetoric of other-directed social movements. *Southern Journal of Communication*, 64(2), 91-105.

- Summers, J. (2008). Televising homelessness: Television documentary and homelessness in New Zealand. *Communication Journal of New Zealand*, 9(1), 31-45.
- Sutton, D. (1997). On mythic criticism: A proposed compromise. *Communication Reports*, 10(2), 211-217.
- Takahashi, L. M. (1997). The socio-spatial stigmatization of homelessness and HIV/AIDS: Toward an explanation of the NIMBY syndrome. *Social Science and Medicine*, 45(6), 903-914.
- Tompsett, C. J., Toro, P. A., Guzicki, M., Manrique, M., and Zatakia, J. (2006). Homelessness in the United States: Assessing changes in prevalence and public opinion, 1993-2001. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(1/2), 47-61.
- Torck, D. (2001). Voices of homeless people in street newspapers: A cross-cultural exploration. *Discourse and Society*, 12(3), 371-392.
- Waldron, J. (1991). Homelessness and the issue of freedom. *UCLA Law Review*, 39(1), 295-324.
- Wander, P. (1984). The third persona: An ideological turn in rhetorical theory. *Central States Speech Journal*, 35(4), 197-216.
- Winn, J. E. (2000). Moralizing upward mobility: Investigating the myth of class mobility in *Working Girl*. *Southern Communication Journal*, 66(1), 40-52.
- White, J. B. (1985). Law as rhetoric, rhetoric as law: The arts of cultural and communal life. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 52(1), 684-702.

APPENDIX A

THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE: INAUGURAL ISSUE: WINTER 2012 ARTICLES

Director's Corner

By: Unnamed

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment of the United States Constitution

Welcome to the Birmingham VOICE—Birmingham’s first street newspaper. You hold in your hand a dream 15 years in the making.

Street papers are a worldwide phenomenon and represent a global movement. In short, a street paper is a publication sold on the streets by individuals, who were, at one time, marginalized and disenfranchised. Distributed in more than 30 countries, street newspapers employ approximately 250,000 homeless and formerly homeless men and women from South Korea to San Francisco. In general, the content of each paper is provided by homeless or formerly homeless people, as well as individuals linked with the homeless community.

The vendors of the VOICE are the news. As a fellow journalist friend of mine puts it, “The news is not just numbers, facts, and places, but faces and people in communities like ours. WE are the news.”

According to the United States Supreme Court, freedom of the press is the right not only to print the news but also to distribute news in public. Simply put, the sale of news is not to be restricted. There is freedom for the news of the people. Though Birmingham law criminalizes peddling and panhandling on sidewalks and in the public right-of-way, newspapers are to be made freely available. Therefore, the honorable street vendors of the Birmingham VOICE are agents of freedom, armed with the constitutional right to sell their papers from public sidewalks.

The Birmingham VOICE vendors must go through orientation and training in addition to agreeing to the vendor code of conduct you see on this page. They are required to wear official VOICE identification badges, stay out of the street, stay off private property, and treat all with respect. The freedom of the press does not excuse aggressive vending or rude behavior. Our vendors vow to be calm, kind, and respectful.

Feel free to contact us when you have a good experience with one of our vendors and when it’s not such a good encounter. Give us feedback – we’d love to hear from you. I encourage you to seek out our vendors on various street corners in City Centre. My hope is that our homeless and formerly homeless friends and partners exercise their right to distribute the Birmingham VOICE with dignity and honor.

Welcome to our story.

Vendor Spotlight: Charles Ridley

"I'm from Birmingham. My dad was retired from the Navy. He was a steel worker. I have five sisters and one brother. They're spread out all over. My little boy's mama died about four years ago on the bus. She had a heart attack. I've been dealin' and copin', and I'm remarried now. I have two kids-- a girl and a boy. They live in Cleveland, Ohio. I'm getting ready to go see them this summer if they don't get down here before I get up there. If my real-estate business hadn't gone bust, I'd probably be living up there."

"I been vending on the corner of 5th and 20th by Regions since 1975. It's fun sometimes. You meet people you can be friends with. It's nothing I was plannin' on doing the rest of my life, but, you know, it's good. You don't make a lot of money vending. Some days you don't make any money but it's about meeting people."

"I'm a reader. I read a lot. I just go and buy the books so I can take my time. When I'm not downtown I'm readin'. That and I'm a sports freak. I was disappointed Alabama won. I think they backed themselves into the national championship. When it was 12-0 I knew Alabama had won. I just turned the game off and turned on a basketball game."

"Yesterday was brutal. I put plastic bags in my shoes, you know, to help with the wind. Because when it gets cold, I think, "Oh my God. I don't see how those Occupy people are stayin' down there." When Occupy first got here, they were really hard to deal with but now they know where I stand. We have an agreement."

"I'm working on several projects, and this [the street paper] will be one of the ways I'll be able to make more money and do what I need to do and get closer to my family. I'm anxious and excited about what it's gonna be. I'm looking forward to reading it and seeing what people think about certain situations. That's the cool thing, reading a product that you're a part of."

"The average person needs to understand what other people go through. They need to understand that people fall on hard times. You might not have fallen on hard times but other people have, and people need to stop being so insensitive. I see a lot of insensitivity around here when a person walks up to someone and says, 'I'm homeless.'"

"I had to sell off stuff. This was about six years ago. We recovered from it. We're still in a tight spot but we learn to cope with it. We had to move because I lost my business. I had a small real-estate business, and everything went bust. It was that and being on disability. It won't be forever. Who knows? I might get rich sellin' newspapers. I'll get to raise my kids and be happy, and that's all I want. I just want my family to be happy."

"I make being in this wheelchair all good. I make it a joke. I used to tell me brother all the time, "I have an advantage over you." He'd say, "Yea, what's that?" I'd say, "I don't have to mow the yard, take out the trash, or go to war."

Friends of the Houseless

By: Hunter Davis

Co-Founder and President of AVAIL: Friends of the Houseless

With many missions, shelters, and organizations located in the Birmingham area - a new organization has emerged and found itself at the center of many stories throughout the houseless community. While being involved in the houseless community for more than two years, AVAIL: Friends of the Houseless just finished its first official year as an organization. AVAIL strives to alleviate houselessness by assisting individuals to reach their fullest potential while in a houseless season. AVAIL's work is founded upon a relational perspective - understanding that each individual has a story. AVAIL's purpose is to insert itself into these houseless stories. The organization is able to do this successfully by focusing on three acting verbs: advocate, cultivate, and locate.

Advocate. Through social media, speaking engagements, and publications (primarily a book published by its two founders, who are Samford graduates), AVAIL seeks to raise awareness about the houseless community, its individuals, and the stories and needs that come out of the community.

Cultivate. At the center of this action verb is AVAIL's desire for community growth - both within the houseless community and between the housed and houseless. Through utilizing work projects such as camp cleanups, reality tours, and meal sharing, AVAIL is able to cultivate community growth on a regular basis.

Locate. Seeking to become involved in the stories of individuals in the houseless community, AVAIL locates individuals exactly where they are in their story (spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially) and walks with them from that point forward.

At this point in their mission, a major platform for AVAIL is an urban farm located in the West End of Birmingham. At the urban farm, AVAIL is able to grow food that is used both in meal sharing and distribution to 20 houseless individuals through their H2H (housed to houseless) growing program. The H2H program pairs 20 houseless individuals with 20 housed individuals who have sponsored a growing area for the houseless individual's produce. While this helps to bridge the gap between each community, AVAIL Urban Farms also provides food and jobs for houseless individuals.

With the Urban Farming program, meal sharing, and continual involvement in individual stories, AVAIL has been able to begin the shifting of perspective both in and toward the houseless community. AVAIL's next step is to be placed in a more permanent building situation in order that it might be able to provide a day shelter service. AVAIL hopes that this would not only provide a space for relief from the elements, temptations, and sufferings of the street, but a space for training of life-skills and community.

If you are interested in becoming involved with AVAIL or finding out more about its mission, feel free to visit AVAIL at its current location (2300 First Avenue North), website (www.houselessness.org), or call at 205.202.9729.

What Makes a House a Home?

By: Hunter Davis

Co-Founder and President of AVAIL: Friends of the Houseless

What is a home? What is a house? What is the difference between these two words? And for those that find themselves lacking a dwelling space with four walls, how should they be identified?

Home: a space where family, friends, and familiarity reside. It is the intangible aspect of one's dwelling place, that aspect which brings comfort and relief to a living situation.

House: the four walls in which one resides for a prolonged period of time. It is the tangible aspect of one's dwelling place, that aspect which keeps provides warmth and safety from the elements.

While for centuries we have labeled those not living within four walls homeless and attempted to place them in a house, our adjectives and definitions have not aligned. If one is homeless without friend or family-then we must indeed place them in a home, but if one is without a house (houseless) we must find them housing.

We have found, during our tenure in the community that lives outside of the standard four walls, that most houseless individuals are not lacking family, friends, or even a typical routine, but rather they lack the typical and safe living structure of four walls in which so many of us are fortunate to dwell. Therefore, at our organization we have decided to identify these individuals as houseless rather than homeless.

This shift in perspective and terminology has primarily been welcomed. We believe this language provides an opportunity for individuals to more positively identify themselves and the season that they are currently living. Positive identification is something that most of us desire. Because society negatively portrays the houseless season, we seek to offer a renewed hope and belief in a positive identity to a community that desperately needs it. Furthermore, this shift in terminology is a more accurate term as well. A large amount of individuals have felt that "houseless" more precisely defines their season. In addition, after feeling misidentified for so long, "houseless" offers a sense of found identity and understanding of the season in which individuals are living. .

And while we believe that this is accurate for a majority of those that find themselves in a season without four walls, Avail also seeks to work with individuals who are lacking both a house and a home. Our job is to ensure that we help provide at least one (home) if not both (house and home) to these individuals in need. In order to do so effectively, it's as easy as looking at the difference in spelling of "h-o-U-S-e-l-e-s-s" and "h-o-M-E-l-e-s-s." The difference in spelling? US vs ME. Someone who finds themselves in a season without four walls will merely be houseless with an "us" mentality, while someone with a "me" mentality may find themselves not only houseless but homeless as well. As previously mentioned, houselessness is the lacking of a dwelling place with four walls, and with an "us" mentality in which one strives to work together with friends and family (whether biological or situational) these individuals may remain

as houseless rather than homeless. However, if one takes to a “me” mentality in which one strives to survive and live in solitude, houseless and homeless will most likely be appropriate identifications for their season.

Furthermore, for those desiring to volunteer or work within the houseless community, an “us” mentality will be much more effective than a “me” mentality. For if we try to individually bring change to those who live without four walls, the lacking of home might still exist. While, if we approach the issue with an “us” mentality, working together to alleviate this season, we will likely find ourselves providing both a sense of home and a house.

So, as we live, work, and volunteer together in the community that lacks four walls, may we approach it with a collective “us” mentality in order that we might address the more important issue at hand- home!

"The Intersection"

By: Hunter Davis, AVAIL

As I sat under the overpass amidst dirt, bugs, things discarded and forgotten, I began to reflect upon our actions and feelings as humans. I had spent the last hour crawling around on the concrete with dirt seeping into the cracks of my knees and cockroaches dancing around my small hands as I tried to grab as much substance as I could to place in trash bags. While I was cleaning up around this particular houseless man's home I found a pamphlet that said, "Jesus Cares About You." To be completely honest, given the circumstances, I found this pamphlet ironic. Not because Jesus doesn't care about the houseless, rather the complete opposite. I found it ironic, because it was probably discarded by some passerby driving over the overpass. Perhaps, it was given to a houseless man or woman by a Christian they would never see again.

I listened to the cars buzzing over our heads and looked at the dear houseless son of God sitting next to me who had worked so hard to clean up his home with us. I let the beautiful presence of God cover my heart in that moment. The pamphlet was right. Jesus does care about the houseless, and so should we.

There is a need to sit in story with the houseless and fellowship with them. We need to let the houseless know that they are important, that they are not alone, and that they are valued as human beings and friends. I felt the overwhelming embrace of God as I picked up bottles, clothes, and various items in this man's living area. I know that I felt God's presence, because this is where we are called to go.

We are called to the spot where brokenness meets beauty. We are called to go to the place where our filth meets His cleansing mercy. We are called to go to the place where those living under the overpass intersect the road of our scattered lives. We are called to go to these places, because this is where God is. While we are on this journey of life, may we remember to take time and look under the overpass. Not only will we find our sisters and brothers in Christ, but we may just find God in the process.

Today there weren't just three men and one woman sitting under an overpass, there were five. As I sat next to this houseless man listening to him share some of his heart and story, I knew that God was sitting right in between us, loving on his sons and his daughter.

Byl's Book Blog...
"Same Kind of Different As Me"
Ron Hall & Denver Moore with Lynn Vincent (Thomas Nelson
Publishers)
By: Unnamed

There is nothing like witnessing another person's epiphany – especially as it relates to homelessness. For those who have lived the life, telling the story is simply a part of the human experience. Whereas, for those who've never experienced homelessness, their reaction is one of shock and awe when confronted with "those people".

"Same Kind of Different As Me" is about a modern-day slave, an international art dealer, and the unlikely woman who bound them together. It's a literary dance between a dangerous homeless drifter who grew up picking cotton in virtual slavery, an upscale art dealer accustomed to the world of Armani and Chanel, and a gutsy woman with a stubborn dream.

The story, a New York Time's Bestseller, is intriguing, enlightening, and engaging. Prejudice, homelessness, sickness, suffering, forgiveness, and faith collide. This true tale begins with Denver chronicling his first experience speaking to a "white woman" – a truly kamikaze act. Denver alludes to his 30 years working the fields like a slave when, in fact, the institution of slavery ended during his grandmothers youth. Talk about Juneteenth.

Ron Hall is a product of a lower-middle class upbringing but rose to prominence in the art trade. His description of the homeless is summed up in this statement, "We were careful about posting prices or keeping too much inventory on-site, as a good number of derelicts had not yet been around to move to their new accommodations under the freeway to the southeast. Greasy and smelly, several came in each day to cool down, warm up, or case the place. Most of them were black and I felt sure they all were alcoholics and addicts though I had never heard their stories – I didn't really care." Terms like "colored folks" and "nigger town" pepper the text.

Then, we meet Deborah, Ron Hall's wife. Her life and ministry is chronicled in the book, and it is clear that her strong relationship with God leads to the spiritual transformation of Denver and the subsequent development of his strong and impassioned personal relationship with God.

The death of Deborah is viewed through the metaphorical reflection of John's Gospel. "Truly, truly I say unto you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains by itself, alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24) Because of the life she lived, countless men, women, and children – the least of these – experienced empowerment and advancement. Denver experiences a "calling" on his life and goes forth with this encouragement from Ron. "Just tell 'em I'm a nobody that's tryin' to tell everybody 'bout somebody than can save anybody."

This is a must read. It is definitely a story of faith, fortitude, and friendship.

Death Row Article

By: Unnamed

Life for me on the streets was an experience I will never forget. No matter how hard I try to get that time of my life out of my head, it's there. I am afraid it always will be. I have seen and endured some of the most horrible things, things that the average human being can't even imagine. Unless a person experiences life on the streets, or takes a walk down to the trenches that street people call home, one will never really get an idea of what it is like.

The life I chased landed me on the streets. I decided that I would rather do drugs, drink, and basically "buck the system" than live a normal, productive life. I ended up hiding from the law for lil' petty crimes. I knew that if I went to jail I wouldn't be able to do what I loved doing at the time - staying high. I thought I could just blend in and hide out with the homeless on the streets, when actually I stuck out like a sore thumb.

At first, I knew nothing about survival on the streets. I thought it was just about finding a dry, warm place to bed down at night. Little did I know the mental struggle. It's a life of trying to maintain sanity and fighting off the elements of the environment. Once you get into that world, everything you've ever known is just a memory. You are a social outcast! You see, a large percentage of society looks down on and even cusses the homeless in this country. I guess they see the homeless as less than human. Yet, in reality, the majority of homeless people are just as productive in society as anyone else.

I've seen entire families with children who for whatever reason fell on hard luck and ended up living on the street. Instead of holding out a helping hand, too many people will automatically think, "Look at those lazy bums. Get yourself a job. Clean yourself up."

Instead of assuming the worst, why not walk up and hold out a hand? You would be surprised at how friendly and eager to talk to someone the homeless are. You will probably come across people who weren't as fortunate as I was. I got off the streets before I lost my sanity. It's not hard to lose your mind when you are on the streets feeling alone and the highlight of the day is when you run across a deli store dumpster that just threw away the lunch special.

Let's work together and save the sanity of a fellow human being. Walk up and shake a stranger's hand. Become a friend. Believe me, a friend is what people want most. I know. I was one of them.

Occupy Article

By: Unnamed

The brilliance of Stephen Colbert and his political counterparts is in the clever repackaging of conservative talking points. Colbert exposes underlying intent. In this campaign season, he has applied his wily methods to our political process and exposed America's willful ignorance regarding not just the way, but the reason corporate interests use money and influence to strip our democracy bare.

Colbert employs one of the ultimate spinmiesters in American politics today, Frank Luntz, to show the methodology behind taking reprehensible ideas that are opposed to the best interest of the vast majority of Americans and making Americans want to vote for it. Upon gathering negative feedback from a focus group of discontented citizens asked to respond to the idea that "corporations are people," Luntz deduced, "It's not that corporations are people. It's that people are corporations."

To understand this profundity, one must understand the meaning of corporation or rather the purpose of a corporation.

Corporations exist for one reason: to shield members from liability. Yet, the purpose of a corporation is to make money. Period. It is the legal obligation of a corporation to make as much money as possible. Likewise, if "people are corporations," then the purpose of a person's life is to make money, a single-minded devotion that lends benefits regardless of the consequences.

If people are corporations, then the question is as follows: What is the purpose of our corporate lives? If people are corporations and benefit in the same way, then why put rules and constraints on corporations? Who wants to enact regulations when the direct beneficiaries, the people, are the players?

Moreover, the seemingly accepted repackaging of the old adage, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps," may be more chillingly catching because of the way people like to see themselves. When surveyed, most people usually admit to having plenty of flaws, but still they believe themselves to be good people. If most people are good and people are corporations, doesn't that mean that most corporations are good?

Yet, time and again, corporations have proven to be not good and moreover utterly immoral.

There's the trap.

According to Webster's dictionary, amoral refers to "being neither moral nor immoral, lying outside the sphere to which moral judgments apply, and lacking moral sensibility."

Questions of morality do not concern corporations, and there are no standards for, restraints on, or principles regarding how corporations proceed in making money. There never will be unless citizens require corporate entities to adhere to a shared ethical system.

Imagine a nation of people unconcerned with ethics, unrestrained in their pursuits. In other words, imagine a nation full of sociopaths, defined as “a person who lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience.”

People tend to instinctively have a general sense of moral responsibility and social conscience. Universal law codes prohibit murder, rape, maiming, etc. In addition to the basic idea that human life is worth something, there is a general fear of repercussion. It begs the question: How many human beings would trust some dude arguing for the right for people to kill in order to reach an end? It is doubtful many people would think, “Yeah, I like that guy. He seems highly intelligent and altogether stable.”

Understand that when corporations via privately funded political puppets argue against having to obey regulations, essentially the argument is for free reign to do whatever means justify the end.

Perhaps it's a sad commentary, but the validity of this argument is based on a recent study that indicates that there is little trust amongst socioeconomic groups in societies where there is high income and wealth inequality. Since this finding profiles America, the thought that “people are corporations” should be just creepy enough to provide the proper snap into reality. Corporations don't care about you.

Seeking Refuge in a Street Paper
Abridged and originally published by the
Street News Service. © www.streetnewsservice.org

Marian Oshoshor does not like to talk about the reasons that took her to Austria. The Nigerian street paper vendor is cheerful and lively; she prefers to talk about her costumers and how much her German has improved since she arrived - she even offers to sing because "if you have a heavy heart, music is the best healer."

She grew up in a Yoruba family (a West African ethnic group) on the Niger delta, who lived from agriculture and fishing. When the time came, Marian knew she would be subjected to female genital mutilation since no woman in the village was spared from this traditional practice. She was afraid because she knew that many girls died during the procedure. She asked a journalist to help her escape - she couldn't guess at the time that she would one day end up working in the newspaper industry herself.

Tapiwa Chemhere has a different story, one of violence and poverty, but a common thread remains: fear. He escaped with his family from Zimbabwe in 2005.

"I lived in the city, but it was very violent," he said. "You were forced to support the main party, and if you didn't they would bomb your house or kill you."

Tapiwa's mother decided it was no longer safe for them to stay in Zimbabwe and escaped with her four children to Australia. Their story is far from being exceptional: the economic meltdown and repressive political regime of Robert Mugabe have led to a flood of refugees. An estimated 3.4 million Zimbabweans, a quarter of the population, had fled abroad by mid 2007.

A family of costumers

Coming to a new country might save people from a potentially dangerous situation but it is not, by any means, a magical solution for all problems. Many people struggled before and even during their work as street paper vendors. Marian was told she had only one option to make money: "Every person I asked how I could survive here said 'you have two options - prostitution in Prater, or prostitution at the West station.' But selling my body was not an option for me," she said.

Isaac Nwankwere's problems started right upon arrival in Austria. He escaped from Nigeria, trying to flee from a violent uncle. The local church found the possible, although quite irregular, way to take him out of the country: they smuggled him onto to a ship.

Even though the country was a bit different from what he expected - no sunny beaches or rugby fans - Isaac was happy to be in Europe. But adapting to the Austrian way of life was a challenge during the first period has a street paper vendor.

"When I started selling the Augustin [street paper] I was a black man in a country of white people, and the norms of conduct, everything was different from what I had seen before in

Africa,” he said. “I approached my customers the way I was used to in Nigeria. I put on a lot of pressure. After two or three complaints found their way to the Augustin office, I changed my behaviour. Since then there have, luckily, been no complaints. The Austrians are very, very nice people, very kind.”

Marian, who works for the same street paper, shares the feeling. The Nigerian refers to her regular costumers as “family.” And she has her reasons for it.

“One man brings me tea almost every day, because I have to protect myself against catching a cold, he says,” she said.

Marian has almost 10 pairs of gloves at home because people assume that African women are more vulnerable to the cold. A teacher gave her what she considers her “biggest gift:” she paid for German lessons so that Marian could improve her language skills.

On the other side of the globe, in Australia, Tapiwa got in touch with street paper, The Big Issue Australia, and soon started selling the magazine. He said the costumers play an important role in supporting street paper vendors in difficult times.

“I work for my customers,” he said. “Some say, ‘I’ll see on Thursday,’ so I make sure I’m there. I would like to thank my customers for helping me out. Sometimes, if you chat with someone selling the street paper, it makes our day. It makes us feel very encouraged.”

Transitless

By: Butch Ferrell

In 1952, Birmingham trolleys and buses came every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays. This was the old Birmingham Transit Company (BTC) whose only enemy turned out to be affluence. In the 1960s, as the Baby Boomers came of age and began to drive cars, the poor became increasingly transit-dependent, and the privately-owned BTC went out of business. In turn, the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority was formed in 1971, and the MAX serviced a large number of the Birmingham populace. Issues surfaced on the day MAX was born, and it's been on a backwards trajectory ever since!

One of the reasons public transportation is a sorry wreck in the state of Alabama is because it seems that the general public does not give a Tinker's damn about it. Also, it seems that most people are unaware of the value and many benefits, both economic and social, that a competent transit system will bring to ALL citizens.

In Alabama, instead of emancipation, it seems oppression is a cornerstone of the state constitution that shackles the poor. Though they are full citizens, the homeless are denied equal opportunities to compete and achieve, in a just and fair way, their hopes and dreams. Quality education, employment, and mobility are out of reach. Perpetual inaction makes the homeless appear weak, unorganized, and impotent. When in truth, they have the potential to become a powerhouse for constructive change.

The unemployment rate among these people is extremely high, and most do not even have a place to call home. It is uncomfortable to observe the propagation of injustice when society chooses to sidestep issues that would improve the situation for the homeless or indigent. Inaction says that people support the dehumanization of the poor and impoverished.

The homeless share this societal bondage with their identical twins, the Bus Riders. The difficulties of these two groups so mirror each other that their biggest dissimilarity might be that the riders have more rooftops. Alabama would be right to serve all its citizens according to their needs rather than their wealth. Improving the transit system in Alabama will improve the lives of not only the homeless and those who routinely ride the bus, but also every other person and business in this state. Transit touches everybody and everything positively. Yet, peculiar prejudices act as a barrier to economic and social benefits.

If the identical twins were to join forces, combine resources, and develop a smart strategy, the transit express would gain momentum and roll forward toward progress. When this happens, people will witness the improvements in everything from traffic congestion to pollution, and they will incredulously question why transit alternatives were ever denied.

Grassroots efforts dedicated to the transit revolution will bring upward mobility to the homeless and the faithful bus riders, as they will one day be able to go wherever they need to go whenever they need to be there. The key, of course, is a permanent, dedicated funding source. In turn, the benefits will be a society profoundly changed by the tremendous economic

developments combined with the betterment of people's lives.

Once a dynamic transit system is finally running and reaching all citizens, new growth will mean new jobs and will necessitate even more transit reform, which will then lead to sustainability.

Dogwood Winter
By: Drew Pomeroy

There's your common dirty ground –
winter bones shudder dry and screaming
winds swallow the noise
of pavement pulsing above;
suicide-high
ceilings held without walls,
buttressed like a slag cathedral
choked with tobacco incensed prayers.
Twisted cans aluminum multiplies
pieces of spent addiction, sacramental
in the dirt naked like dogwood petals
dancing across a sidewalk
downtown, wasted.

They wear crowns of knitted wool like kings of cold, and darkness is a season
they suffer together – shared cigarettes
and tasted smoke bleed deep
into skin, hair, and eyes
looking down –
With nothing to give, they've given
everything they have.

Open Your Eyes to Recovery
By: Donald Broadnax

I hear of children dying from not enough to eat,
Mothers in turmoil because of bills they can't meet.
Fathers disgusted because they've lost all their pay,
Gambling, drinking, or some other sinful way.
Brothers and sisters going at each other's throats,
Because one or the other is on acid or coke.
Mothers get pretty for a night out on the town,
Because their husbands haven't come home or simply couldn't be found.
Children cursing and fighting because they can't have their way, Can't you see its quite simple:
their lives have gone astray?
Why don't we stop all this nonsense, turn our lives around. Turn our heads toward the sky
instead of the ground.
Your disease is cunning and baffling and will destroy you someday. Unless you find a higher
power, there is a debt you will pay.
It doesn't matter how much wrong you've done. Just find a higher power and be willing like me.
Just follow a few simple suggestions and open your mind. Things will get better, and you'll be at
peace in time.
Come join our fellowship, and we can do it together. Don't go at it alone. You will get better.

Owe No Man
By: Unnamed

What does it profit a man to gain the entire known world and lose his own soul? Alexander the Great conquered the entire known world, and then there was nothing left for him to conquer. He died a drunk!

What does it profit America to conquer the entire known world and lose its own soul? How much money will it cost America to lose its soul? Alexander the Great was not trillions of dollars in debt, and if he were; do you think he would pay?

Remember, "You shall loan to many nations and not borrow." "Owe no man is from the "Good Book." "In God We Trust" is on the back of a dollar bill!

There's Courage in the Sea of Cowardice
By: Unnamed

A man who was successful in dealing with Mule-Teams was asked by General Booth of the Salvation Army how he managed the stubborn creatures so well. He said, "When the mules stop and won't go on I just pick up a handful of soil and put it in their mouths. Of course, they spit it out, but as a rule it changes their mind state and they start on again."

The same method is being used on people today in order for people to get what they want. The only difference is that today people are spitting words out of their mouths and complaining among themselves instead of being a team and taking a stand!

In the words of General Brasidas, "What creature so contemptible but may have its Liberty of it will fight for it!" On the day before a great battle an officer asked the commanding general for permission to go and see his father who was at the point of death, the general saw through the officer's pretext and said, "Go honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long on earth. No one but a coward dares to boast that he has never known fear!"

the birmingham VOICE

St Paul United Methodist Church, 1500 6th Ave N, Birmingham, AL

Vendor Code of Conduct

1. As a respected member of the Birmingham VOICE team, I will be respectful to others while selling the VOICE and any time I represent the VOICE.
2. I commit to being sober while representing the VOICE in public and will refrain from drug, alcohol, or tobacco use while vending.
3. I will not panhandle or hustle while I am representing the VOICE, nor will I sell any other product while selling the VOICE. While tips are encouraged, I will not ask for tips.
4. While selling the paper, I will always wear my VOICE-issued, official badge with my picture and name displayed visibly. I will not loan my vendor badge or sell papers to another vendor.
5. I promise to respect the VOICE staff, as well as, my fellow VOICE vendors, viewing them as friends not competitors. I will keep myself from all forms of violence and will bring any disputes or complaints to the Birmingham VOICE office.
6. I agree to sell only on public property, and if confronted I will calmly and peacefully educate the person on my first amendment rights.
7. I will not sell my papers on another vendors space, and if confronted by another vendor or panhandler I will either agree to share space or go elsewhere. I will not fight.
8. I understand that I am a valuable member of society, as well as the VOICE team, and will, within my power, be a catalyst for hope in and among the homeless community.

I _____ understand that by signing the vendor code of conduct I am agreeing to live by these rules while selling papers for the Birmingham Voice and if I break these rules I may lose my privilege to sell for the Birmingham Voice.

_____ Date
_____ Signature
_____ Agent of the Birmingham Voice

APPENDIX B
THE BIRMINGHAM VOICE: FALL 2012 ARTICLES
Director's Corner
By: Unnamed

From the inception of The Birmingham Voice, I must admit I've experienced a myriad of challenges--some with positive results, others not so positive, some self-inflicted, some the consequences of bad choices, and others simply the result of growing older. Through it all I've learned to make the test times count. I experienced being housed, houseless, and once again homeless. I plunged into deep despair, desperation, exasperation, and also hope. I've run an emotional gauntlet.

As the director of the Birmingham Voice, I would love nothing more than to fill this column with flowery words about how good life is and exhibit a pillar of strength in all circumstances, but I'm tired of facades. What I can offer is hope and faith--the two things I hold onto dearly. Hope, faith, and God's grace and mercy have enabled me to experience a time of phenomenal growth in all aspects of my life--personally and professionally. Tough times will come, but tough times don't last. I encourage you to not simply go through a situation but grow through it.

When I was living in Chicago, I had a preacher friend from Trinidad named Reverend Telesford. One of his favorite sayings was, "See Jesus in every situation." That statement was his charge, and it has served me well over the years. I challenge you to try it. Whether housed, houseless, or homeless, see Jesus in every situation. To my friends of other faith traditions, see the good in every situation. Always seek the lesson to be learned from the God of your understanding.

Our city and region stands at the precipice of decision. Do we go on with business as usual with our same misplaced priorities that continue to perpetuate civil and human rights injustices? Will our historical, civil, and human rights organizations take a proactive rather than reactive role in current struggles? What role will newer, well-meaning organizations play to seek positive change and empowerment?

Many times I've been asked why we publish The Birmingham Voice. In answer to this, I could give you our slogans and mission statement. Yet, quite simply, we publish the Voice as a means to reach the hearts and minds every citizen in Birmingham. It is a mechanism for advocacy and an effort to change politics that favor the rich and powerful. It a push toward a holistic approach to houselessness.

The Birmingham Voice is also a viable alternative to panhandling. Encourage those who choose to panhandle to stop by our offices and vendor training at St. Paul United Methodist every Tuesday at 10 am. The address is on the opposite page in our information. As always, thank you for your support.

Letter from the Editor

By: Unnamed

In this age of digital media conglomerates, people often question the success of our efforts to establish a quality, sustainable print media outlet here in Birmingham. Honestly, we question ourselves. If alternative print media is dying out and The Birmingham News is shifting to a digital, web-based platform, then are all our efforts in vain?

We think, no. Despite a long list of challenges and potential setbacks, we are still here. Better yet, we are still dreaming. We must never cease envisioning a better world realized through sharing encounters with people, not virtual people, real flesh and blood. It is only when we come face-to-face with “the other” that we become more human. It is our hope that through collaboration, storytelling, and street vending we can transform people’s ideas about the world and experiences foreign to them.

Street news media is unique. It stands to survive this digital shift by claiming the print world and the virtual world. The International Network of Street Papers (INSP) lists 122 editions in 40 countries worldwide. Some papers like The Contributor in Nashville, TN have experienced great success in the last couple of years by increasing publication from 12,000 to 60,000 in less than one year. Now, public demand is so high that The Contributor is printing twice every month in order to sustain the ten percent of the houseless population it contracts to sell the paper.

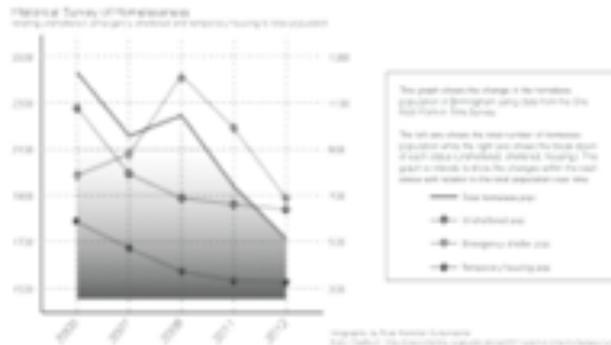
Still, other street publications such as Street Wise in Chicago are riding the digital wave. According to an article published by the INSP in May 2012, “The digital street paper will enable homeless vendors to offer their customers two options - print or digital - priced equally. To retain the crucial vendor-buyer contact on the streets, customers choosing the digital version will buy an access card with a QR code which can be scanned or entered onto smartphones, tablets or desktop computers. The device will then download a digital edition containing all the content from the magazine. With lower production costs and print output, the digital street paper will increase efficiency.”

We at the Voice are trying to place our feet in both camps. In addition to providing job opportunities for the houseless community, our main goal is to protect and encourage the human encounters spurred on by the paper’s presence on the street. We are embracing the changing times. Yet, we are staying true to our mission and goal: empowerment, employment, and expression.

4th Annual Homeless Summit: Center-spread

How Far Have We Come?

Visualization of the 2012 Point in Time Survey



Fourth Annual Homeless Summit

September 22, 2012

The fourth annual Birmingham Homeless Summit was on September 22, 2012 at the Church of the Redeemer. The turnout this year was impressive with over eighty attendees, six keynote speakers and nine breakout sessions. This was the biggest summit yet, with great reception and interaction from the community. All of this progress and growth is due to the persistent efforts of the Coalition of the Homeless.

The summit opened with a musical performance from our very own community members Jim Turpin and Lisa. A guest performer Jim Foster joined them to sing a few songs. The trio was followed up by Rev. Matt Likely, pastor at the Church of the Redeemer, who shared a moving story about real justice and justice for the homeless. One of the more powerful moments was when he said, "Justice is not passive. Justice is proactive. We have to claim the truth. Today we have much work to do. Tomorrow we have much work to do."

The keynote speakers included Jim Walker of HUD, Michele Parley of One Roof, Jeremy Walker of Equal Access Birmingham, our very own Hope Hamilton Schumacher of The Birmingham Voice, Renee Etzel of US Services, Rachel Johnson of We Are Here, Inc., Al McCullough and Victor also spoke, giving the community support and encouragement.

Take notes from the summit keynote speakers were rich and helpful. Jim Walker shared the vision of HUD and gave a charge to apply for assistance. Michele Parley shared about a number of services that exist in Birmingham, but really focused on the necessity of asking, "If you don't ask you're not going to receive. There is no one out there looking for you to give you services. However, there are many services from which you can benefit" said Parley.

Hope Hamilton Schumacher gave a very insightful and powerful talk about what it means to be a vendor for The Birmingham Voice and how vendors can get started with no personal expense except for their time. She also spoke regarding the news of the paper and its dependency on the homeless community. A number of individuals were really inspired by this and decided to share their personal stories as well as sign up to become vendors.

The summit ended with meal sharing and a final word by Matt Lucas. Overall the summit was a success! Many learned about services and received encouragement from the community. Others received vital services needed for the new year. The Birmingham Voice left with great hope for the future and a new vendor named Terry Watson Spry!

4th Annual Homeless Summit
September 22, 2012
From the Center-spread

The 4th annual Birmingham Homeless Summit was held on September 22, 2012 at the Church of the Reconciler. The turnout this year was very impressive with over 80 attendees, 4 keynote speakers and numerous breakout sessions. This was the biggest summit yet, with great reception and interaction from the community. This all is due to the steady growth of the Coalition for the Homeless.

The summit opened with a musical performance by our very own community members Jim Trumpower and Lisa. A guest performer Jim Frazier joined them to sing a few songs. The trio was followed up by Rev Matt Lacey, pastor at the Church of the Reconciler, who shared a riveting story about real justice and justice for the homeless. One of the more powerful moments was when he said, "Justice is not reactive. Justice is proactive. We have to claim this truth. Today we have much work to do. Tomorrow we have much work to do."

The keynote speakers included Jim Walker of HUD, Michelle Farley of One Roof, Jeremy Walker of Equal Access Birmingham, our very own Hope Hamilton Schumacher of The Birmingham Voice, Rene Elliot of VA Services, and Rachel Jackson of We Are Here Too.

Take aways from the summit keynote speakers were rich and helpful. Jim Walker shared the vision of HUD and gave a charge to apply for assistance. Michelle Farley shared about a number of services that exist in Birmingham, but really focused on the necessity of asking. "If you don't ask you're not going to receive. There is no one out there looking for you, to give you services. However, there are many services from which you can benefit." said Farley.

Hope Hamilton Schumacher gave a very insightful and powerful talk about what it means to be a vendor for The Birmingham Voice and how vendors can get started with no personal expense except for their time. She also spoke regarding the nature of the paper and its dependency on the homeless community. A number of individuals were really inspired by this and decided to share their personal stories as well as sign up to become a vendor.

The summit ended with meal sharing and a final word by Matt Lacey. Overall the summit was a success. Many learned about services and received encouragement from the community. Others received vital services needed for this next year. The Birmingham Voice left with great hope for the future and a new vendor named Terry. Welcome Terry!

A Woman's Story from the Streets

By: JaNeen Gandy

There were lots of good things.

Church upbringing. Singing in the choir. Family reunions. Trip to Montreal. Dance school at age three. Jazz. Tap. Ballet. Headstart. Learning how to ride a bike. Learning how to rollerskate. Learning how to double dutch. Listening to the classics-Earth, Wind, and Fire, The Commodores, Heatwave, Frankie Beverly, Marvin Gaye, The Temptations, The Jackson Five, Jackie Wilson, and James Brown. The evolution of Hip Hop in the 70s. Good times with my friends. Ansoma High School Pom Pom Squad. Graduating High School in 1990. Graduating from College with a B.A. in Social Welfare in 1994. My marriage to a military man. Birth of my Jonesha Marie Cochran. Birth of my Jayliyah Nicole Cochran.

My divorce. My experience working as a group home worker in Fayetteville, NC. My experience as an adult basic education instructor. My experience working in a daycare. My experience working in a church as a group worker, a praise dance instructor, and dancer. Dating a creative man. Breaking up with the creative man. Songwriting--Gospel, Country, and R&B. Marriage to my twin babies' daddy. Divorcing my twin babies' daddy. Gaining more knowledge of my race. Birth of my twins Josiah David Gandy Kelly and Joanna Kate Gandy Kelly. The day I walked away.

There were some bad things.

Sexual abuse at age seven. Sexual abuse at age nine. Feelings of not being wanted by my mother and father. Feelings of loneliness and anxiousness. My first divorce. My second divorce. When it happened. That man. That bad choice of a man. Sex. Pregnancy. Abortion. Miscarriage. Tricked by hazardous penetrating venom. Sexual addiction. Temptation. When it happened. When that creative man happened. Watching pornography.

Sex. More sex. Escape. Losing Section 8. Twin babies' daddy running from the police. Cheating on my ex-husband. Depression. Suicidal thoughts. Unemployment. Anxiety attacks. Homelessness. Leaving my kids with my mom. Finding out my daddy might not be my daddy. Bought a lemon. Domestic violence. Betrayal. Hotel living. Lost my license. Kicked out of the shelter. Exhaustion. Frustration. Not knowing. Swearing. Alcohol. The mornings after. All the days before I walked away.

This is a new day.

October 29th was a breakthrough day. There were miracles. Blessings. There were rides to the bus station. An extra \$20 from a lady at church. My children. Healing. Thank God. Honesty. Vulnerability. Moving to Birmingham. The Lovelady Center. Jessie's Place. Counseling. Praying for wholeness. Praying for a godly man. Receiving a godly man. Patience. My kids are healthy. God is so good. I know the Lord forgives. My children. Grateful. Moving forward. Sin means the end. Good means God. Stay focused. Keep my mind on God. Find a career that lets me be a mom. Transportation. My kids. On God's path. Faith. God first. Me second. God's Path. No more straying. Life. Living. Forgiving.

Ja-Neen Gandy's life experiences through homelessness and sexual addiction, depression, and thoughts of suicide have helped her embrace the joys of life, love, womanhood, and mothering. Ja-Neen is no longer homeless, and though life is still a struggle, with the love of God, her newfound love of self, her children, a godly man, and her extended family, life progresses day by day. Woman, thou art loosed, free, and absolute.

Ask An Addict
By: Bud Smith

Q: Who is an addict?

A: Well more than likely you are not or you would not be asking the question. All jokes aside, according to Webster's Dictionary, an addict is a person with a habit so strong that he/she cannot easily give it up! Addiction can be a lot of things: drugs, sex, alcohol, gambling, and food just to mention a few. For me the definition is simple, once I start I cannot stop on my own free will. Heck, I probably qualify for all of the above and then some! Addiction can and will consume you.

Q: What sets the addict apart from a "normal" person who uses/drinks with moderation?

A: What is moderation? Hey, are you calling me abnormal? I resent that remark. But the definition of normal depends on who you ask! An abnormal person's definition is definitely different than someone who is really normal. You can classify people into two groups--those who can and those who cannot. Those of us who cannot, and we know who we are, are mentally obsessed and physically addicted. We develop an abnormal reaction to the substance when we use. One is too many and a thousand is not enough!

Q: How low do you have to go before you hit a "rock bottom" ?

A: Well one thing's for sure, you do not have to become homeless. Often times people associate an addict as homeless or if a person is homeless then automatically they are an addict. That is definitely NOT TRUE. Everybody's "rock bottom" is different. Only you can decide. Some people fall further than others. Personally, I was on a downward spiral that lasted 33+ years before I made a decision to quit. I definitely fell a long way. It can be as simple as the shame that you have, and for others it may mean losing everything.

Q: How long does recovery last?

A: Well, I do not know about you, but my addiction lasted 33+ years. I am not dumb enough to think I can fix myself with God's help overnight! Recovery for me will last a lifetime. I lost the first half of my life to addiction. Why should I think that recovery should have a time limit? Once I think I got it, that is when I will be in real trouble!

Q: What are the "odds" in staying sober?

A: Well, I would not bet against me! (A former addiction) Honestly, the cards are stacked against us and statistically the success rate is very low. They say less than one in ten will make it in the long run. Yet, if you have the will, determination, and desire you can find the way.

I am an infant in recovery. Two hundred and twenty two days and counting clean and sober when this article hits the press. I am definitely not out of the woods by any means, and I have much more to learn about being sober. Never say never, anything can happen. I only hope that with a power greater than myself and the guidance and tools that I have been given I have a better than average chance of success.

My prayers go out to those of "us" that have not yet found their way into some form of recovery.

Do not give up hope! I am not a spokesperson for any particular organization. My comments are part of the collaborative effort of a few.

If you wish for your Voice to be heard, please contact me ask-an-addict@thebirminghamvoice.com. Please submit your questions, comments or concerns. If you did not like my answers, then tell me! It will not be the first or last time that I have had controversy. Lord knows, when I was in addiction I had more controversy or commotion than peace. Hey, I am not perfect, progress rather than perfection is my motto!

Til next time (God Willing),

Bud S., a Grateful Recovering Addict!

Bud Smith is working hard at becoming a permanent vendor with the Voice. He is diligent and hardworking and sells The Voice at events and venues in and around Birmingham.

Alice Westery, Social Worker for DHR: Interview

By: Unnamed

Have you always lived in Birmingham?

Alice: I was born and raised in Birmingham, AL, but I haven't always lived here. I lived in the Bay Area in Richmond, California. I was able to experience different cultures. So, coming back home was a culture shock. I noticed not much had changed in the late 70s. I found out that the world was different, but it wasn't that much different. In 2003, I changed careers to social work. I went to UAB and graduated as a licensed social worker. I did my internship at the Department of Human Resources. After that, I applied for independent living program where I got the chance to work with young people between the ages of 14 and 21. That's what I do now.

Finding Her Calling

Alice: There are many people who pass through the system and exit or age out of the system at the age of 21. There is a program for 14 to 21 year olds but after 21, there is not a continuum of care here in the state of Alabama. There is nothing private or federally funded in order to make sure these young people continue to transition positively. Therefore, if they're not equipped, if they're not ready, if they haven't taken advantage of every opportunity, support systems and everything, they can become homeless. I found out that due to economics, due to society, and due to cultural issues, regardless of age, people lose support systems. So you got young people on the streets who have not only been systematized by the system but those who come from families that still cannot cope with the factors involved, whether it be the emotional, psychological, physical, or gender based. So basically my population, the population that I serve, is between the ages of 19-26 and grew up in the care of the system. I started working at DHR in 2004, I saw a rapid influx of young people coming back and needing assistance after the age of 21 for shelters and so forth.

Getting Started

Alice: So I started searching trying to find resources within the state of Alabama, and the only thing I found was Hope House, which closes at 5 pm and functions as a day shelter. What about that gray area? It's not a black and white issue. I'm concerned with the in between. Some people act as though these people don't exist but they do because I know them. In 2007, I started doing private assistance by giving incentives like bus passes. I was not incorporated. Still, I joined different organizations and committees and advocating for the homeless with the Community of Affairs Committee in the city of Birmingham. I started going to the CAC meetings and telling them about the homeless population. Metropolitan Birmingham Services for the Homeless, now called One Roof, is run by Michelle Farley. One Roof works for continual care for the chronically homeless. She advised me by saying, "Alice, what you need to do, you need to become a 501(c)3 if you really want to help, if you really want to advocate." I am always one for listening to good advice especially when I don't know. She took me to someone who knew more than me and that was Ruth Cosby down at Safe Life. Ruth helped me understand that my heart was in continual care. I'm a "What's Next? Person." After you get me off the street, give me a shower, and some extra clothes and an extra meal, then what?

Working With a Vulnerable Population

Alice: I do a lot of advocacy with human trafficking and work with a population that is at-risk. Even before human trafficking was punishable by law, I was involved. It was one of the reasons why I became involved this population of youth became my population. Young people are vulnerable for prostitution--male and female. Also, I'm an advocate for the LGBT (Lesbian Gay BiSexual and Transgender) population because those are my babies, too. People who don't understand cannot identify. First thing that they want to do is annihilate and segregate. When people don't understand people they like to get it away from them as quickly as possible. It's a full circle. To advocate we have to collaborate. We've got to partner. We can't have our little spots anymore, and we can't have a our little turfs. If somebody asks what can be done? Go with the 10 year plan. The plan is already there. It's been there.

Providing a Home for Homeless Youth

Alice: Through Youth Towers, at some point in time, we may be able to furnish the housing as far as home,s but I've still got to have other people come in such as community workers and social workers who actually do the wraparound services. There's a need for all of that. We will need houseparents. Houseparents that will actually stay there on the premises to make sure the place isn't torn up and that they don't disrupt the neighborhood so bad that they put us out. There also needs to be a faith basis--not to push a particular faith upon the individual but to be a supportive team so we offer an alternative solution. We exist to give an alternative solution to the powers that be and systems. Because systems cannot raise and nurture a human being. I know that they have been given the responsibility and accountability, but due to economic cutbacks and things, they are not the resources that are necessary in order to change lives. They only keep things the way they are or depreciate things even more because it was never set up or generated to change lives.

How did you first start getting involved with all of this? How did your heart become invested?

Alice: It's ironic that I was born right across street from DHR. I can remember how people were depending on the system. People didn't really know DHR even existed. Even if you are poverty-stricken, people didn't just drop off their kids at DHR. So, when I saw that there was such a large population almost 1300 children, and I had to get involved. Some of these children were like my children, and it broke my heart. Some of these children looked to me for guidance and advice and mentoring. I felt accountable. I was indirectly a part of this problem. The kids came up with Youth Towers, and even though a lot of people didn't care about it, it's still going. Only God knows what it will be one day.

You mentioned your faith. Is that foundational for your work?

Alice: My work is culturally learned and spiritually motivated. I wasn't born a Christian. I was born a Muslim. I am a born again Christian. Because of that, I have a lot of understanding. When you have sought, you seek and seek deeply. I see things in a totally open way. In an unconditional way. I'm not a religious person, but I am very spiritual. My faith is my motivation. To love my God and to love my neighbor are my concerns.

Vendor Voice: Tommy A.

Where are you from?

Cadillac, Michigan

When did you move to Birmingham?

About 2008. I was working, and I ended up here because of an incident that happened with my boss. Basically he assaulted me and withheld money from me. So, I ended up staying in Birmingham. I'm just trying to make here instead of going back home.

I remember the first time I met you and you mentioned to me that the situation you find yourself in happened when you lost your cell phone. Could you talk more about that?

It was a bad year. My father died. I lost my relationship, my home, my food stamp card, and my phone. It seemed like everything that was important to me was lost. It was a bad time. Now, I'm starting to slowly get back on my feet. I'm trying to save and get a place of my own, a room for rent, something like that.

Why are you selling The Voice?

I sell the paper so I can have money to eat, a place to live, and something to do. I go out and see if I can make a few dollars instead of sitting around wasting time. If I have any spare time on my hands, I put it to good use by selling the paper. Basically, when I have no work, I can go out and make a few bucks.

What are your hobbies?

Work related hobbies like working on houses, remodeling, and roofing. Basically, my trades, things I can do skillfully, are my hobbies. I want to learn how to do glass cutting art on windows and mirrors.

What part of town do you live in?

I stay over by Princeton hospital on the West End. Unfortunately, I don't have a home.

When you are not selling papers, where do you hang out?

I'm not really a hang out sort of person. If I'm not working or doing work related things, then I'm looking for work. If I don't have work, I'm talking with people about work, trying to start my own business. I had a business in Michigan. I'm a networker. A lot of my networking came to a stop when I lost my phone. It was impossible to stay connected with people I met.

Do you like football?

I like watching professional football. I don't watch a lot of college football. The Detroit Lions are my home team. So, I try to root for them and watch them whenever I can. Unfortunately, in Alabama, they don't play a lot of Lions games.

Anything you would like to say to someone who is down on their luck and doesn't know what to do?

Basically, I would say try your best, try your hardest at whatever you do. Give it to God. If you

are stuck in a rough situation, pray and start a relationship with God. Most of time, you'll find that God will pull you through, and you'll be able to get to the other side. When I started being homeless in Birmingham, I started my relationship with God. This seems to take a lot of my worries and frustrations away.

Any thoughts or words for Voice readers?

The paper is a good idea. A lot of people see the positive aspects and the things it does to help.

Tommy is a permanent vendor at the corner of 20th Street South and 7th Avenue. Tommy also sells The Voice at various venues and events that come to Birmingham. Look for the big yellow permanent vendor badge. He earned it by selling over 300 papers.

From the Blue-Eyed Spider: *Continued from May Issue...*

By: Unnamed

I hired a crew. I spent all summer, finished her roof, and roofed three or four more houses. Like I said, I was doing okay. My crew was dogging me for money, which was fine. They helped me make money. So, I helped them.

Long story: I was staying in a town that was a main railhead. I met people that lived by choice on the rails. Some were writers. Some were lawyers. Some had gold cards. Most did in fact. This was the life they chose. It was their decision. They were all members of the "Rail Riders of America." They were homeless.

When I finished the summer and went back to my hometown, I shoveled snow for people and trimmed bushes to make money. I got a job remodeling an old bank. The man that bought it made it into a computer store. I built three apartments upstairs and one big main one downstairs. I built all of this by myself and worked all winter.

Well, I couldn't find any help, and he kept dogging me on my pay. So, come spring, I had enough!! I met this girl (woman) online and decided I would try playing hobo like the people I met in Boone, Iowa at the railhead. So I called my father and had him get all my stuff from my little apartment and take me to Boone. I had an old army duffel bag filled with about 80 pounds of clothes, computer programs, food, etc. I talked to a good friend who was an engineer on the Union Pacific. He told me, "Don't ride the boxcars like you see on T.V. Ride the rear unit (the rear engine)." He said, "How many engines do you see on most trains?" "Well most of the time, three or four," I said. "Correct. The rear unit is the best place to be, and let the engineer know you are on board." There are only two people that run a train--the engineer and I can't think of the other one's title. They never leave the front. Well, sometimes they visit other units.

It was the most interesting trip I ever made! The engines had a room with a toilet and a fold-down sink. That's where I did my laundry. Everybody told me it was illegal, but they let me ride anyway. I hopped the train in Boone, Iowa and the engineer came back to the rear unit and gave me some magazines to read and \$20. I refused the money, but he insisted from Boone to Davenport, Iowa. I changed trains at Davenport, then on to Chicago. From the Windy City, to Indiana.

In Indiana, I had no idea where I was. I could see a filling station about three quarters of a mile away across a field. So, while the train was stopped, I crossed the field to call my father and asked the attendant where I was. Me being an idiot I didn't bring a map on a cross-country voyage. I was going on a shoestring and a prayer. My father looked at a map and told me I was halfway there. That meant at least three more days riding the rails.

I asked a yardworker which train was going south. He showed me a train that was going south. I got on the rear unit and fell asleep at once. The seats fold back into little cots. It was day four or five. Changing trains and not knowing where you are at any time, hardly any sleep, etc, well that will wear a person out fast!

I made it to Tennessee. A black engineer told me, "You can't be on this train!" I said, "Okay, I will get off." He said, "Stay put." I hunkered down thinking he was going to get the bulls (the railroad police). Me being on a journey from the north I only brought cold-weather clothes. Tennessee in April is very warm! So I was sweating profusely. The next thing I hear is, "Heads up!" Then, there was a 5 pound bag of ice flying through the open window. Ahh, much relief. Ice water and a pillow of ice wrapped in a shirt that the engineer flung through the window.

Off-again. Clickety-clack down the rails...

I Remember When...

By: Unnamed

It was before Nintendo and video games. I would lie in the fern garden on the north side of the house. This was when *Lost in Space* was on T.V. I used my imagination with an old spark plug as a spaceship and little green army men as the crew. I spent hours outside at the river or in the woods picking wild berries. Skipping stones on the river was one of my favorite pastimes. I never went to the river without a fishing pole and a tacklebox. When it was raining, I would still go outside and make rafts from popsicle sticks and float them down the gutter. If we stayed inside, my brother and I played with little green army men and set up little forts with woodblocks and shoeboxes. I would be at one end of the hall, and my brother would be at the other end. We would shoot our marbles at each others forts and army men and whoever knocked down the most would win.

Like I said this was before Nintendo and Xbox and computers. Our imagination was our entertainment. I remember when... If you have a "remember when" please submit to yourstory@thebirminghamvoice.com

Plants vs. Pollution
A Not-So-Fictional Short Story
By: Elizabeth Camp

Hi. My name is Marigold Flowre Valee. I live in Meadowvale, which is a nice little valley surrounded by forest. Unfortunately, we are overshadowed by this horrid factory that is called International Toys, Inc. I think a better name for it would be International Pollutants, because all day, everyday, it spits out carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and who knows what other toxins and pollutants into the air. Thank goodness we're surrounded by all those trees. They get rid of a lot of pollution for us, and we can usually manage the rest.

One day, while I was minding my own business and soaking up the sunshine, the side of that awful factory burst open and this wave of dirty, polluted water came rushing from it. Fortunately for me, I am a young plant and therefore was swept up by the roots, preventing me from drowning under all of that nasty stuff. By the time the wave abated, human rescue workers had rushed out to the field, hoping to save all the pretty flowers. After they took care of Meadowvale, they followed the wetness until they found me and some other youngsters who had been uprooted. Then we were transplanted into a rehabilitation center for plants. There, I learned that we plants are essential to preventing air pollution, which was why the factory was built next to Meadowvale in the first place.

After a few weeks at the rehabilitation center, I was ready to return to Meadowvale. During that period of time, I trained myself to fight pollution. Next time there was an outbreak like that wave, I vowed to help fight it.

One month later, I had my big chance. All of a sudden, the pipes that let out the pollutants exploded. Half a second later, the air was filled with a mass cloud of the usual pollutants, plus extra smog and metal pipe fragments. But this time, I was ready. I pulled in the pollutants and spat the oxygen back out. All around me, other flowers were doing the same. We couldn't do anything about the pieces of pipe, though, except grab them with our roots and pull them underground. Eventually, they will disintegrate. That was my first pollution battle. Since then, there have been many more, and each time, plants come out as winners!

Amos & Friends
Mommies & Daddies Come First!
By: Guest Columnist, Benyamin

You may read this title and cringe a little bit or maybe even a lot! Don't stop reading. I promise I have something to say, and you want to read it. I haven't been in this world very long, but I know mommies and daddies will often go without to make sure we have everything we need and as much of what we want as they can give us. I've learned from my mom that healthy, happy parents make for happy, healthy children. Sometimes, it's good to think about yourself. We know you love us no matter what! So, go get a massage, have a vacation, or even a staycation! If you're on a budget like my mom, then sign-up at livingsocial.com. Mom says they always have good deals.

I was born September 6, 2011! By the time I was six months old, my mommy was worn out. I wouldn't sleep through the night and woke up to nurse every two-to-three hours. My godparents asked my mom if I could stay the night. She was a little worried about it and thought I'd miss her too much and that she'd miss me too much. She let me go anyway. She packed enough milk to last 3 days even though I was going for less than twenty-four hours! Mommy and daddy dropped me off and went to enjoy a night on the town as well as a night of unbroken sleep. Although it was hard for my mommy, it was the best thing she could have done for me. Mommy was refreshed and energized when she came to pick me up. Because of that, she was able to tend to my every need. We even went on a hiking trip that day. I had so much fun! Now mommy understands she has to take care of herself first. Then, she can give me the care she knows I deserve. After all, I'm an amazing little boy!!

Think of something you want to do for yourself without your child(ren). Do it! Sometimes my mommy buys me snacks and other things just because she loves me. You should buy yourself something just because you love yourself! I bet you're an amazing parent just like my mommy and daddy! Get your favorite snack from the store. You're worth a silly five dollars. Buy the shoes, shirt, or pants you've been eyeing. See, it's not as bad as it sounded in the beginning, huh? Take care of yourself first so we can get the best care possible. My motto is: Mommies & Daddies First!

Street Smarts
By: Sarah McCune

I have never been homeless. I learned about the difficulties that challenge Birmingham's homeless community through my education at Birmingham-Southern College, which included service learning projects at First Light Women's Shelter and an alternate spring break spent serving at Highlands United Methodist Church. Both of these experiences ended with a sense of frustration. Receiving served food gave individuals a basic necessity, but I wanted to do more.

Despite my experiences, I have not lived a homeless existence. My faith tells me that I have a purpose and can make a difference in the lives of others, but I frequently find myself doubting my own abilities. How could one person do something with a substantial and measurable impact?

If I had come to The Birmingham Voice before the month of January 2012, then I would not be working on this publication. I would have fallen into the same traps and let my questions and doubts prevent me from taking on a task. Why do something that frustrates you to the point of cynicism? Fortunately, I came to The Birmingham Voice after January when my college chaplain and his wife mentioned The Birmingham Voice needed some assistance in getting the word out. My faith was stronger, and I was on a path to seminary--path forged quite fast and unexpectedly. I found out most of the staff went to church with me. I told them I wanted to help and started copy editing during the church service. I read the poetry and articles in the first issue and was reminded why I write.

Writing is not about perfection, but about doing one's best to represent a situation to the best of his or her ability.

My faith was restored. I volunteered as much as possible, and one day on my way to a staff meeting I started to mentally put myself in another person's shoes. I played out a scenario in my head: what if I was a vendor and had to walk from the Southside to the Northside? I did not know how long it would take me, if I would make it to work on time, what obstacles would come my way. So, I just started walking.

8:30 am

I wake up and roll out of bed. I throw on some clothes, fill up my water bottle, grab some food, and head out the door. I can already tell it is going to be a hot day, but I proceed. I walk from 14th Street South to 19th Street South. I listen to music as I walk, but as I look at my feet I notice the disrepair of the sidewalks. I feel like a couple of times I am going to trip and mess up my knee, but I try to avoid the really uneven places. I alternate sidewalks depending on the tree coverage; every bit of shade I can find in middle of this Alabama summer is a relief. I notice abandoned buildings and think they would be places to get shade and crash for the night if nobody were to catch me. I wonder if one of the six churches I see serves food, offers cold water, or provides beds for the night. I constantly watch for cars and wonder if they will give me the right-of-way when the pedestrian sign lights up. I quickly learn that just because I have the right-of-way doesn't mean cars will not continue to go. I am glad to see all the hospitals in case

something happens to me, but I have no way to pay for a doctor visit let alone an emergency room.

I am a few blocks from the office when I pass Railroad Park on my right. A Brandon Heath song, "Give Me Your Eyes," comes on my Pandora Station. The lyrics hit me over the head, "All those people going somewhere/Why have I never cared? /Give me Your eyes for just one second/Give me Your eyes so I can see/Everything that I keep missing/Give me Your love for humanity/Give me Your arms for the broken hearted/The ones that are far beyond my reach?/ Give me Your heart for the one's forgotten/Give me Your eyes so I can see." As I am listening, I notice a few men under the bridge seeking refuge in the little bit of shade the bridge covering provides. A cop smokes his cigarette with two guys at the end of the bridge and I wonder about their lives. I keep reflecting on this song as I arrive at the office. Is it just a corny contemporary Christian song or is there something profound in its simplicity?

9:26am

I arrive to St. Paul United Methodist Church and exhaustion has set in from the walk. I think to myself that I have never been homeless and imagining what it is like to be homeless will never do adequate justice. Service learning projects taught me to be empathetic, but I know that most of the homeless community in Birmingham is "just beyond my reach." There will be efforts by some to keep homeless individuals separate from the rest of us, but I can change my own behavior and attitudes. I think at least now I am not letting frustration prevent me from making change, even if it is small change. For now I stand strong having a "heart for the ones forgotten and a new pair of eyes to see."

Sarah McCune is a freshman at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She is a valuable member of the Voice staff and can be reached at sarah@thebirminghamvoice.com

Bus Riders' Update

By: Lawton Higgs

My name is Lawton Higgs, Sr., and I am a Birmingham Bus Rider. I am a volunteer organizer related to Greater Birmingham Ministries working to building a strong organization of bus riders committed and equipped to fight with discipline and dignity for first class fixed route bus based public transit in Jefferson County Alabama. I want all the homeless and marginally homeless people in Jefferson County to join us in this work.

There are over 30,000 of us in this situation and together we can win some real concrete improvements in our lives. To be all that we want to be we have to have a better, more dependable public transit system that takes us where we need to go and gets us there on time. MAX is not meeting our transportation needs.

For almost twenty years, I had the privilege of serving you as the organizing pastor of Church of the Reconciler. You taught me how important public transportation is for you to survive. You also taught me how bad MAX is. Together we can do something about this. We can fight with discipline and dignity for a public transportation system that enables us to thrive.

My wife Nancy had back surgery on July 24 at UAB Hospital. The surgery was successful, and we thank God. Yet, her recovery has been slow. So, you haven't seen me on the bus in the last two months, because I am home bound caring for her. She will be well again soon, and you will see me on the bus again in the months ahead.

Martin Luther King, Jr. taught us that politics is about who gets how much of the income, housing, education, transportation, and many other things. So, we have to turn our numbers into a strong organization that votes for political leaders that will support quality public transportation. Each of us knows at least 3 other people who are not homeless or marginally homeless. 100,000 votes can make a real difference!

Public Transportation is funded by our tax dollars. Only 9% of the money used to run MAX comes through the fare box on the bus. The other 91% comes from our taxes. It is elected public officials, mayors, city councilors, county commissioners, state representatives, and senators that decide how public tax dollars are spent. If they know that they have to increase funding for public transportation to get elected and to stay in office, then they will increase funding for better public transportation provided by MAX.

The Birmingham Bus Riders, by the strength of our numbers, we are going to teach our politicians this basic fact. So join up, register to vote, and talk up what we can do if we work together to make this concrete improvement in our lives by improving public transportation. Speak up when the current service provided by MAX is less than excellent. We must fill out a Comment/Complaint form for every problem we experience. Turning in these complaints is an expression of power that we must claim in addition to our voting power. The Comment/Complaint forms are available at the Ticket/Information Window at Central Station. Pick up some and carry them with you and document, time, route #, bus # for each incident of

service that is less than first class. Then turn in the form at Central Station Ticket/Information Window. MAX will only provide the level of service we expect of them. So let us not accept anything less than first class service. There are some leaders at MAX who will work with us to improve service, if we will let them know what is wrong or broken. Take the time to fill out the Comment/Complaint form. Also let them know we appreciate what they do that is first class.

A good number of us dependent bus riders have smart phones. If you have one, you can be trained to become a citizen journalist that reports on the real time conditions, needs, and viable hopes we share as Birmingham Bus Riders. The Sociology Department at UAB has agreed to train Birmingham Bus Riders for this work. We can become skilled in the use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other forms of social media to increase our personal power to build transit justice and create another Alabama.

Please give me a call 205-613-1858, or email me at reconumc@aol.com, and I will sign you up for training.

Bus Riders are powerful resourceful people. We have to be in order to get by in oppressive Birmingham and with the current poor public transportation we have available. So let's organize and build a strong voting, vocal organization of bus riders to win some concrete improvements and lead to a better MAX. We can do it! Birmingham is our Holy Land! Let's make it a place of access to the resources and relationships we need for abundant life.

Your friend and servant,
Lawton Higgs, Sr.
September 16, 2012

Cooper Green Mercy Hospital Article

By: Unnamed

On March 25, 2012, Jefferson County Commission President, David Carrington wrote, “Although immediate attention to this problem is needed, any new indigent health care model must be thoughtful and complete. A rushed approach, focused simply on getting a solution, instead of getting the right solution, could very well ensure another financial and/or quality crisis down the road to the detriment of patients and taxpayers alike.”

We agree. We also know that Cooper Green patients are taxpayers as well. However, less than six months after this article was posted, that is exactly what is happening to Cooper Green Mercy Hospital. Everything is rushed. In August, the County Commission, with Carrington leading the way, voted to close inpatient and emergency services at Cooper Green without a proper transition plan in place. Now, the Commission is scrambling to have “something” in place by December 1, 2012.

Jefferson County has fulfilled a community commitment to meeting the health care needs of the poor since 1888. A report by Dr. Max Michael, Dean of the UAB School of Public Health and former member of the Cooper Green Mercy Hospital medical staff, and Martin Novak, President of Nowak and Associates Inc., a health care and business consulting firm with nearly 40 years of experience in the health care industry, summed it up eloquently when he stated, “Jefferson County stands at a pivotal point, and the future of the thousands of citizens who depend upon the existing health structures for their medical needs is at stake. The Alabama Legislature and the Jefferson County Commission have an opportunity to maintain historic commitments and obligations to providing health care for the poor by transitioning to a new progressive, accessible health care delivery system. This opportunity gives Jefferson County the chance to embrace powerful forces of change sweeping across the nation’s health care system – changes that are built upon a foundation of improved access, enhanced quality, and cost savings.” Instead of working toward a more comprehensive solution to the problem, the County has honed in on a quick fix and displayed an utter disregard for public health and an absolute contempt for public outcry.

Cooper Green Mercy Hospital is the only hospital in the state of Alabama that is not governed by a separate and independent Health Care Authority. Rather than consider the transition of Cooper Green’s governance to an HCA, the County Commission has decided to dismantle the hospital. Even Dr. Michael agreed that an HCA would be the best model. “The optimal organizational model to assure maximum flexibility and operational transparency is an independent Health Care Authority (HCA). In fact, the current operations as a department of County government within the Jefferson County Personnel System limits the flexibility required in a modern, rapidly-evolving health care system.” The Proposal also states: “This transformed health care system will improve the health and well-being of the maximum number of medically indigent residents through a sophisticated, coordinated system of health care services that is fully integrated into the existing health care systems and institutions.” Inexplicably, the establishment of a Health Care Authority appears to have been summarily dismissed by the County. Although the County Commission has adopted the “Hub & Spoke” model as proposed

by Dr. Michael and Mr. Novak, they have ignored the main point of the Proposal: “To ensure continuity in meeting the historic commitments and obligations for health care for the poor, a modern and innovative health care delivery model must be governed by an independent Health Care Authority to allow the needed flexibility for effectiveness and efficiency. The HCA will be dedicated to increasing access to health care services with an emphasis on primary care, improved quality of care as measured at both patient and community level, and cost savings.”

We implore the Jefferson County Commission to act in the public’s interest and first move forward to establish a Health Care Authority to govern Cooper Green Mercy Hospital. Then it will be the responsibility of health care professionals to manage and improve indigent health care in Jefferson County for the long-term.

Street Art: 3 Feet

By: Thomas Little

Reprint from *Magic City Post*, magiccitypost.com

Come by Five Points on any given day and you may see some interesting artwork decorating the restaurant-lined scenery. Freshly painted images of cosmic horizons and fantasy worlds stand in the sun to dry. Follow the rattle and hiss of spray cans and you'll find the artist at work: Jarrett Palmore, a.k.a 3 Feet Deep.

"I'm looking for my own peace and prosperity," says 3 Feet, who maintains a modest lifestyle through the sale of his paintings. "I paint because I like to bring people art, and I sell the paintings to make a living."

Having lived around Five Points for the past two years, 3 Feet has made a way for himself doing what he loves. "It's enough to get by," he says. "I've lived on the streets for a while, but I can live in a hotel or with friends when I need to."

Painting has provided 3 Feet with a way to express himself among the ever-flowing crowds and communicate with others when talking one-on-one isn't an option. "I want to bring positivity to Southside," he says. "I try to perpetuate good feelings and appreciate what God gives me. I want to share it."

To create his spray paint images, 3 Feet utilizes a variety of resourceful tools including Frisbees, bottle caps, scrapers, and whatever else may produce a desired effect. The end result is often a far-out scene from another world with pyramids, waterfalls, and textured moons. "These tools get covered in dry paint after using them so long," he says. "That changes the picture they make. It happens over time."

In his two years in Five Points, 3 Feet has begun receiving special requests for murals in various venues and homes, as well as art for trucks, guitars, clothing, and skateboards. His work has also been featured at Birmingham Jams, where he performed a few songs along with other musicians in a showcase of artists from around the city.

While checking out his artwork in the circular seating near The Original Pancake House, visitors often ask how 3 Feet got his name. "When I was young, I ran so fast people said I had three feet," he says.

3 Feet says local artist Al O'Brien taught him to paint using acrylics before he passed away several years ago. "Southside was always a creative place," he says. "Al was a big part of that." Known by residents as the "Fountain Painter," O'Brien served as part of 3 Feet's inspiration to paint for the people around him and add to the beauty of his community. 3 Feet is willing to share his skills with anyone interested in painting, and encourages others to be creative with whatever life has given them. "Someone can teach you how to paint," he says, "but you have to come up with the vision."

If you're interested in checking out 3 Feet Deep's art, he can be reached at 205-907-6727. Also look for him next time you're in Five Points.

Exclusive Interview with His Holiness the Dalia Lama

By: Danielle Batist

Excerpts from the full article originally published by the
International Network of Street Papers (streetnewsservice.org)

Many of our 12,000 street paper vendors in 40 countries around the world are or have been homeless. The Buddha was homeless for the biggest part of his life, and you, like many of your people, have spent most of your life in exile. What does homelessness mean to you?

“For people without a home, it is almost like they have no basis from which to conduct their lives. They have no anchor. That is very sad. But from a larger viewpoint, I would say that this whole planet is our home. The individual may be in a difficult situation, but he is still part of the society of humanity. I think it is innate to human nature that if someone is going through a difficult time, there is some kind of willingness to help out of a sense of concern that we have. So from that viewpoint, for homeless people their direct home is no longer there, but the big home is still there. So people who are homeless should not feel desperate. On some level, I am also homeless. But being homeless sometimes is useful, because you realise that in many places you can find a new home. If you have just one home, in some way you can get stuck in that.”

In recent years we have seen within the street paper movement many new people becoming vendors as a result of the global recession. People haven't got enough money to live on or lose their jobs and end up on the streets. What do you feel about austerity measures introduced by governments to tackle the crisis?

“This is a very complicated situation. Immediately, I think governments have the responsibility for the country as a whole, so sometimes maybe these measures are necessary. But if you take an overall view, the real causes of the present difficulties started with the past governments and some companies. I think, without a proper plan in place, they are simply concerned about immediate profit and are not concerned about the long-term consequences. From that level, of course not seeing it from an individual person, but government or organisations which have the responsibility, the results now are due to their own actions. Only now, when difficulties have come, they put some sort of restrictions in place. It is complicated. Either way, for thousands of people, their livelihood is almost zero, which is really very, very sad. Very sad. But then, how to handle these things, I don't know.

Two or three years ago, one newspaper, I think in Mexico, reported of one family whom, because of the economic difficulties, had to abandon their dog. The dog was now truly homeless. There was a picture of the dog and he looked very sad. Now really nobody took care of him. When I saw that picture, I myself almost felt some kind of hopelessness. Taking that to a human level, you can certainly see how life has become more difficult.

However, whenever I meet people who are in a difficult situation, I always share with them, in spite of a lot of difficulties, as a human being you should keep self-confidence and work hard. Due to certain difficulties, if you completely lost your self-confidence, hope and will, then inevitably difficulty will continue and it will lead to real disaster. So it is very, very essential to

keep hope and determination.”

When people fall upon such hard times, including in your country, how do you manage not to let feelings of anger, frustration or hatred take over?

“Our emotion is a master check through our intelligence. On an intellectual level, we analyse each situation. If a situation is as such that we can overcome it, there is no need to worry. If there is no way to overcome a situation, there also is no use in too much worrying, as usually worry brings frustration and frustration brings anger. It is therefore always better to try not to worry too much. The emotion itself cannot do that, but with the help of human intelligence we can do that. I think whether God-created or nature-created, emotions are sometimes very troublesome. So God or nature also provided us with a kind of counter-balance, which is human intelligence. When animals face a problem, they almost crash and black-out. But us human beings, because of our intelligence, we have a way to judge and measure our response. That is my view.”

INSP street papers often cover issues that would otherwise go unreported. What stories regarding your own country are the most important ones that need to be told?

“As for the Tibetan issue, it is that the very nature of the Tibetan struggle is strictly non-violent and very much in the spirit of reconciliation. Therefore, our struggle needs worldwide support. It must succeed, because if it fails, it will encourage those people who carry a different method, including force and violence. Also, some aspect of the Tibetan story is not just a political matter, but an environmental issue. The Tibetan Plateau [part of the Himalayas] plays a greatly important role in global warming. Nearly all major rivers in that part of the world rise on the Tibetan Plateau, so the preservation of Tibetan ecology is not only in Tibetan people’s interest. More than one billion people’s lives depend on these rivers. Another top priority is the preservation of Tibetan culture, which is a culture of peace, a culture of non-violence and compassion. It is not only an ancient culture, but also one that is very relevant in today’s world. We live in an increasingly materialistic world, which is all about consumerism. And there are moral problems which sometimes lead to violence, particularly among the youth. Whenever they face problems, the response of some of them has become more violent.”

Our street paper vendors around the world face different kinds of social and economic difficulties, but when asked what the hardest thing about their situation is, their answer is often the same: the feeling of loneliness. A search party recognised you as the 14th Dalai Lama when you were two years old; you spent your childhood amongst adults in monasteries and faced the huge responsibility of protecting your people from foreign invasion and being their spiritual leader at age fifteen. With your experience of loneliness in your life, what advice would you give to them?

“In my own case, if I only think of myself as ‘I am a Tibetan’ or ‘I am Buddhist’ that in itself creates a kind of distance. So I say to myself: ‘Forget that, I am a human being, one of the seven billion human beings. By saying that, we immediately become closer. If people put the

emphasis on their situation by thinking 'I am poor', or 'I am homeless' or 'I am in a difficult situation', they put too much of an emphasis on a secondary level. I think that this also is a reality, but still another reality is that we all are human being, one of the 7 billion human beings on this planet. I know that in a practical sense that might not be of much help, but emotionally, it can be very helpful."

For the full interview, visit www.streetnewsservice.org/news/2012/july/feed-336/exclusive-interview-with-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama.aspx

Collaboration with God: A Response to Matt Lacey's Sermon
Found Poem

By: Steve, Sunshine Gang, Church of the Reconciler

God is the window into my loving heart
my shining star
my sparkling river
of currents heading many places
Like angels of white and gold:
with hands raised high
Giving thanks to heaven.
God takes me to
my everlasting glow
spinning in circles of passion
my love for children
teaching them the responsibility of reading
and leading
wherever they go.

Love

Found poem: the words of Derick Hamby, Donald Falls, Adam Burns
JC and the Sunshine Gang, Church of the Reconciler

Love conquers all worries, all fears
all sorrows, all despair
all obstacles, all problems---
everything--
love is strong.
Yet love is gentle
sparkling
like the church in your heart
surrounding you
with grace, mercy,
and forgiveness
through you
all about you
like Spirit Divine.

There is something I have to tell you
By: Marie Burnett

They will say
that you can't see it, but,
"the safety net is right there!"
They will say
that you don't want to see it
that your subconscious mind
has you blind folded
that you enjoy your suffering
that you made yourself sick
that you are pretending not to see
that you have only yourself to blame
and you better agree before dinner or
no services for you!

And you will leave the office,
the clinic, the conference room,
the researchers interview
or your exam with
a pmd or an md or an Inp
who practices on you
a new one every 6 months
who you will train
who will test their skill
on your mind and body
so their student loans
will be forgiven.

You will go to the pharmacy
across town
the only one who fills
these kinds of rx
and get your free supply
of trazadone, flouoxetine, lorazepam,
hydrocodone, lyrica, abilify,
sequel, trileptal, risperadol,
Celexa, welbutin, Ritalin, thorazine
and every other new drug
not quite ready for market
that still needs testing
on the population
and as you walk away
from the counter
with your bag of pills
not meant to cure only

to assuage your hunger
for decent affordable permanent housing
you will hear the cashier say,
"\$2000.00 worth of medicine for free
and I have to pay full price!
Is this California
or Cuba?"

And you, with the few neurons
still firing in your head
after you self administer
your daily dose
your county funded
fully subsidized
chemical lobotomy,
you will wonder:

"HmMMM.
If the gov't can give me \$2,000.00
of pills to crawl into night and day,
why do I have to sleep in the ER,
my old car, in a tent, under the stars,
in a jail, in a psych ward, at a bus station,
on public transportation, with 100
strangers on cots in a sanctuary
or 1000 at the decommissioned Army Base,
or under an over pass,
or on a bed of wet grass?
WHY am I sleeping
on broken glass?"

And before long
it will be your own voice
that has something to tell you.
You may begin to believe
it is what you need to hear
it is a necessary step forward
in recovering from
being homelessness
after several years
you will begin to believe
it was your own bright idea.
It will be your own voice
telling you now that,
"The fault is with you"

INTELLIGENTE

By: Amun Re Nysut Yashua

My Conscious Mind State
Is far from the average comprehensive
I write Prophetical Thesis
In composition
Expressing myself is a Relief
From my troubling Thoughts
That needs to be applied and Spoken
To the Masses
As I address solutions
To a decline Nation
I congregate Authentic Activist
Into Congregations
I could Concentrate
Among Chaos
My Mind is open to Foreign Thoughts
I'm here to release you from the Box
That have entrap humanity into Enslavement
Now your Sons and Daughters on the Corners of every Pavement
Wondering while, Seeking assistance
Not for cultivation
But, for pleasurable satisfactions
From their low Desire
Light the Chakra Fire
Within your Solar Plexus
I'am a Book of Life
Analyze the Index
Knowledge is Infinite
Only fools think they know it all
Arrogance, Oppression and Selfishness
Causes Individuals to fall
Into a Bottomless Pit
That crowd with Parasites
Unlike the Top
Take heed to what I Write

Look Up
By: John Wright, Jr., (c) 1990

Look up.
Beyond where you are
And how you feel.

Look inward.
For strength. For power.
For determination.

Look back.
For experiences
From which to draw wisdom.
Look forward.
To those you love.
To those who love you.