

Homelessness in the United States is a Crime of Neo-liberal Imperialism

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The wealthiest nation in the world cannot house its own people. Capitalist greed has eroded the stock of affordable housing, while bankers' servants in government have systematically demolished public housing. State "homeless" programs blame the victims, assuming "that people experiencing homelessness are in some way individually inept."

"Murdering and brutalizing people sleeping in public space is this system's primary response to its homelessness problem."

The problem of homelessness in the US is a crime of the capitalist system. Since US capitalism entered its last stage of neo-liberal imperialism beginning in the late 1970's, the US ruling class has waged an all-out offensive on the working class and poor. Gains won through collective working class struggle in the early to mid-20th century went straight to Washington's chopping block beginning in the 1980's. Over the same period, the social necessity of housing became a lucrative market for speculative financial capitalists looking to turn a quick profit through predatory mortgage lending. The combination of these racist and exploitative practices has created a permanent and growing homelessness problem for the working class and poor in the so-called richest nation-state empire on the planet.

Homelessness has its roots in the 77 percent decrease in HUD (Housing and Urban Development) funding instituted by the Reagan Administration in 1983. Federal dollars for new low-income housing units were stopped. The remaining funds were invested in "homeless programs" legislated into official policy through the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1987). This Act reinforced the racist and anti-poor ideology of neo-liberal imperialism. Instead of building new public housing units, Washington diverted funds into state and locally "targeted" emergency shelters, transitional programs, and "supportive services" as defined by the Act. Each "homeless" program rested on the assumption that people experiencing homelessness were in some way individually inept. It was implied (and enforced) through these piece-meal services that what people experiencing homelessness needed was a reduction in personal "defect" rather than a home to live in.

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Perpetual reductions in federal housing assistance and the shift to targeted homeless policies paved a clear path for finance capital to consolidate its rule over the housing market. Not only did imperialist banks red-line neighborhoods through racially discriminatory mortgage lending and create the conditions for the financial collapse of 2008, but the same financial institutions were also began their move to privatize public

housing in collaboration with Washington. In 1992, Congress funded a program called Urban Revitalization Demonstration (URD), which in 1999 became the HOPE IV program. This program was advertised as a renovation project for public housing units. However, it was clear that both programs were Washington's policy excuse to demolish existing public housing units at the request of the capitalist class.

Racism, as usual, justified the displacement of the poor. Advocates in Washington claimed that HOPE IV would alleviate "concentrated poverty" in US cities, comforting white hopes of displacing the Black community for resettlement and gentrification. Since 1995, 150,000 public housing units have been lost to demolition or sale and 300,000 project-based section-8 units have closed due to private ownership opting out of contracts with the Federal government. For the last three decades, the ruling class's war on the poor and working class has created a growing sector of displaced persons who can neither afford privately owned houses and apartments nor access disintegrating subsidized housing programs. This is the primary cause of homelessness in the belly of US imperialism.

Recent counts conducted yearly of individuals experiencing homelessness in the US have totaled around 3.5 million. This number does not include families and only counts the number of emergency shelter beds and individuals sleeping on the streets in one particular day of January. Meanwhile, there are eighteen million vacant homes in the US. To put this atrocity in perspective, capitalist Bill Gates has enough accumulated income to purchase every home in the city of Boston. Instead of ending the assault on public housing, opening vacant homes for the millions of people sleeping on the streets or shelters, and jailing the bankers responsible for both the austerity and foreclosure crisis, the US imperial state has criminalized homelessness with deadly consequences. Police harassment, public humiliation, and in the case of the UK and Canada, concrete spikes in public spaces are daily punishments for being homeless in the US. In 2011, Kelly Thomas was homeless when he was beaten to death by a swarm of police in Fullerton, California. This year, Albuquerque police murdered a homeless man, lethally shooting him outside of his outdoor encampment. The rulers of US neo-liberal imperialism have made it clear that murdering and brutalizing people sleeping in public space is this system's primary response to its homelessness problem.

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What allows the atrocities that stem from homelessness to occur is neo-liberal imperialism's racist ideological foundation. Austerity, privatization, militarized policing, imperialist war, and economic "globalization" are all guided and justified by white settler racism. This diseased mentality conditions white superiority into the fabric of US imperial society. Poor and working class people are taught by the neo-liberal imperialist social structure to hate themselves and, for the white working class, to see all social safety net programs as a "hand-out" for Black Americans and darker skinned peoples who "choose" to live off "the system." Such neo-liberal, racist ideology distorts the facts and divides poor and working class people from each other. Under these conditions, homelessness is normalized to the extent that many people experiencing it are more likely to blame Black people and immigrants for their plight than the US capitalist power structure responsible for the problem.

I work with people experiencing homelessness everyday. And each day, I see how the

ideological and material conditions of US neo-liberal imperialism have stunted the political development of the very people experiencing homelessness. Many people I work with do not believe they deserve the right to a home. This is a crime. Washington and the corporate ruling class are the guilty culprits. Neo-liberal imperialism possesses zero ability to address the housing crisis it created. For the working class and poor subjected to homelessness, this means that the US ruling circle will not stop its ideological and economic assault until the *people* stop it. Housing is a human right but it won't be until we have power to make it so.

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