

# The Homeless At Christmas

*A Growing Number*

by Malcolm A. Pharr

As we embark on a new year we must face one of the nation's greatest fears. No, not Aids. Although 1987 has been a year in which this dread disease has touched a huge segment of the populations lives, there are still other tragedies that face us.

It is estimated that some three million people are living on park benches, doorways, alleys and vacant buildings. The majority of these homeless, unaccounted for, individuals are Black and Hispanic between the ages of 20-40 years old. The males outnumber the females, but the latter is increasing at an alarming rate. The numbers which are growing at nearly 30% per year are enormously heterogeneous.

Cities such as New York City, Chicago and Houston have large numbers of homeless people which have been displaced mainly because of declining job rates and federal cutbacks due to the Reagan Administration.

In New York City, families constitute 60% of the homeless population with children occupying the fastest growing group at 11,000. The homeless

problem in Chicago is related to the closing of steel mills and other major businesses. Houston blames its growing number on the closing or decline of the oil industry. America appears to be heading in the direction it was in during the Depression Era (1920's). When people lost their means of support (jobs) they eventually lost their pride and within time their dwellings. This caused a drastic increase in homeless.

**The road down to this level is short and narrow. It does not take long to get on EMPTY.**

The "hidden population", as it is sometimes called, is not quite so hidden in these large metropolitans, but in cities such as Winston-Salem if one does not look closely he will think it does not exist. When one lives in Buena Vista, British Woods or even off Carver Rd. and works at R.J.R. or Hanes, or maybe downtown, as opposed to uptown, they may also miss our second most fear.

But for one who lives in East Winston or works out of a vehicle... they realize that the problem of homelessness is real... not a B-Movie or something on an HBO special. For those of you who believe it does not exist visit the Soup Kitchen on Patterson Avenue-Northwest Blvd. at 11:45 a.m. and see some of those sad faces with few life traces, with empty lives and stomachs likewise. Black people

visit the Crisis control Ministry and see our young brothers and sisters out-of-spirit and out-of-hope.

These people, who have nothing as far as material possessions go are not only the ignorant or mentally ill... they are persons in the street who have the mentality to make an impact on society. They are those who could take either my job or yours. They are dead spiritually and only alive

in body. The road down to this level is short and narrow. It does not take long to get on EMPTY.

One of the major causes for this crisis has been a decline in low-income housing. Over 1 million units of single-room occupancy housing — representing 47% of the nations total were torn down between 1970 and 1980. It is reported that some 2.5 million people lose their homes every year through evictions and other factors.

There is a trend of tearing down low-rent housing and building high rise office space and parking lots. Cities are selling out their citizens in order to attract potential investors and neo-Black and white "yuppy-types".

The Reagan Administration's budget cuts which have sold out the public in exchange for "Star Wars" has reduced a \$31 billion dollar budget in housing to \$9 billion in 1987. The construction of federal low-income housing units has fallen from 20,000 to 5,000. The aid to families with dependent children's budget has been cut by \$3.6 billion creating a situation where only 55 out of every 200

poor children received AFDC payments in 1984. The budget cuts have also affected the number of social workers across the country.

Economic Growth and Administrative cutbacks have been exchanged for housing for the public.

The events which have

led to the demise of public housing in this country are beginning to hit home with authority. We are in a crisis in which no end is in sight.

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