

## PREFACE

This monograph emerged from an extended process of personal, professional, and sociopolitical revolution and evolution. However, there were a few primary moments and principal people that provided a foundation and context for themes taken up in the following chapters.

The primary research began in 1989 on New York City's "gentrifying" Lower East Side, when I convinced two colleagues who were also first year PhD students at the City University of New York (CUNY) to join me in a "research practicum" on housing loss and community activism. I had no idea at the time that any of this early research would enter my PhD thesis, become part of my later academic work, or form any part of a book written many years later.

Professor Leith Mullings provided intellectual support, professional contacts, and the academic credit points necessary to justify the huge amount of time that was taken out of our reading, writing, and discussing what counted as the anthropological canon at CUNY in the late 1980s. I remain grateful for her support and that of my two research colleagues in this first research project, Walter Ewing and Alfredo Gonzalez.

It is, of course, the case that the processes that yielded an American homeless crisis and the group of researchers who studied it was accretive and preceded, by many decades, my first days annoying tent dwellers and their neighbors and elected officials in Tompkins Square Park in 1989. However, if there is one moment that I would hold as the formative point when theory, history, and lived experience came together to create something new and dramatic that set the context for this monograph and the experiences that led me to research and write it, it was the first Tuesday in November 1980, when Jimmy Carter was voted out of the White House after one term. Though many of Carter's policies, such as his federal cost cutting and intensified cold war anticommunism that ended the Keynesianism and geopolitical détente of the Nixon years were indistinguishable from those of his successor, Ronald Reagan, this seemingly smooth evolution belied what was an ideological and political revolution.

At the time I was a first year undergraduate and knew little about politics, ideology, and the state. However, I, and my freshman friends, who

were all liberal democrats, understood, along with much of the rest of the country, that there were big changes in the air. From the moment that Jimmy Carter undermined the west coast electoral process by making his concession speech in advance of the polls closing, the auguries were fearful. Like the eighteen-year-olds that we were, we took the opportunity to get drunk and held a “wake for democracy.” The discussion focused on social concerns such as the end of the countercultural lifestyles and idealistic radical politics which had, since the late 1960s, been a birthright for many late teens. First and foremost, there were drugs, rock-and-roll music, and the sexual revolution that we were all looking forward to. We envisioned an army of Bible thumpers, moral majority conservatives, and public health officials concerned with the spread of herpes returning us to the 1950s.

The moral majority, in fact, came to our campus that year, and it was not long before “young Republicans” in suits and ties and dresses and pumps emerged from the shadows and filled university campuses across the nation with political arguments about the evils of affirmative action, multiculturalism, abortion, premarital sex, homosexuality, and welfare. There was a feeling among many of my professors and fellow students that the world of popular protest, countercultural lifestyles, attenuating moral codes in cinema, timid US foreign policy, and leftist idealism that had been the harvest of the post-Vietnam years was suddenly ending. The night of long knives that was the Reagan Revolution had arrived and we were suddenly all dressed up, with nowhere to go.

Some of us “fought” and some of us “switched,” but public life and politics were changed forever. When I returned to New York City in 1984, after spending a year in Africa, my ideo-moral concern about the increasing belligerence of US foreign policy, the antilabor offensive that had broken the air traffic controllers’ strike of 1981, and Reagan’s outrageous social revanchism came to be dwarfed by shock at what had happened to the city in which I had grown up. It looked worse than many of the cities I had seen in the third world. Beggars and ragged mentally ill “street people” filled the sidewalks, housing problems had reached a point of visible crisis, and disease seemed to be everywhere. New York became one of the centers of the HIV epidemic and people feared contracting tuberculosis and other preventable diseases in crowded subway cars and public buildings. Nobody knew when their local firehouse or school would close, and the president was assuring the country that ketchup was “a vegetable,” while cutting funding for school meal programs and the teaching, learning and research that those meals were supposed to support.

New York City had, of course, had its own night of long knives during the fiscal crisis of the mid 1970s. However, the combination of almost a decade of decay, a predatory and compassionless Republican White House, and an equally abusive Democratic Party in New York City, and the broader vision that comes with viewing home through the eyes of adulthood pulled me strongly in the direction of studying and advocating against the terrible deprivations of the Reagan Revolution.

There were many oppositional liberal issues that emerged during this period that seemed to be defined by the distance between Michael Moore's first film, *Roger and Me*, about the destruction of Flint, Michigan by the closing of a General Motors factory and *Red Dawn*, Golan and Globus's late cold war tale of a high school football team's successful guerrilla campaign against a Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaraguan invasion of the United States. However, the issue of homelessness came to be one of the key outcome assessment indicators for the Reagan Revolution. This was so much the case that Ronald Reagan was forced to sign into law the 1987 McKinney Act that apportioned billions of dollars for study of and care for "the homeless." It was in this environment of declining support for nearly everything but the homeless that my scholarly attempts to understand and confront the Reagan Revolution developed.

Despite the virulent anti-Reaganism that drew me into studying the homeless from an anthropological perspective, this work is neither another attempt to write a nostalgic epitaph for the, previously reluctant and later failed, US welfare state, nor is it an angry attempt to "set the record straight" after the beatification of Reagan that emerged in the wake of his death in 2004. Though I continue to view the Reagan revolution as a profoundly negative period in U.S., hemispheric, and world politics, this book is in a much more fundamental way an attempt to draw a balance sheet on the political and ideological opposition to Reaganism between 1980 and 1992. Since homelessness was primarily a political construction that developed in and around the Democratic Party and yielded a research and policy agenda that heavily favored and was favored by liberals affiliated with social and political projects in such Democratic Party strongholds as New York, San Francisco, and Boston, this book is far more concerned with assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition than with delivering more superfluous nails into the Reagan coffin.

A project such as this one, which is based on a PhD thesis, necessarily draws on the help and consideration of many people, most of whom do not even know they are helping at the time they are helping. My first debt of gratitude has to somehow be paid to my informants. I hope that those who do see this volume will, in some way, recognize themselves and their words in these pages and appreciate what I am trying to do. I must also thank my doctoral committee, Michael Blim, Ida Susser, and Gerald Sider. It was Ida who first offered me work studying homelessness, Michael Blim who gave me the courage to finally write about what I had seen, and Gerald Sider who has been there at every important step in my professional life both encouraging me and contesting nearly everything I say: a rare and potent scholarly cocktail. Beyond these core mentors many others have influenced me and contributed to this manuscript. Discussions with the late Del Jones were crucial to my thinking about the intersection between poverty, public policy, and race in America and my work with Ralph Miliband gave me tools for thinking about the relationship between the state and public policy.

In the field, I benefited from the help of my colleagues on the McKinney Act project that employed me. They were Kostas Gounis, who provided an anthropological take that was very different from my own, Paul Colson, who provided the view from Public Health and Social Work, and Brenda Roche, who helped me stay on top of whatever was happening on the project. There have been too many colleagues who have contributed to this manuscript to name all, but I must start with my father, Robert Marcus, who died in October 2000, but managed to read the first draft of the manuscript during the summer of 2000. His suggestions and criticisms were absolutely foundational to the product that emerged. Even now, he remains my first and most important colleague.

Other colleagues who sacrificed their time to read, listen, and make helpful suggestions are Sharryn Kasmir, Charles Menzies, Winnie Lem, Katherine McCaffrey, Suleyman Khalaf, Mary Patterson, and Gavin Smith. Finally, Dr. Alfredo Gonzalez, my collaborator in fieldwork, stands far above the rest for his intimate participation in the research and analysis. We shared the joys, dangers, and fears of fieldwork, as well as a lot of adventure. Our many discussions of what we saw together often made it difficult to separate out his work from mine. It was Alfredo who led the fieldwork for my first research project on gentrification on the Lower East Side and then helped guide me through three years studying homelessness for the federal government.

Of course, my ability to finish both the PhD thesis and the monograph depended on the help, support and guidance of many friends and family, in particular, my socialist grandmother Mary Weisstein, my dear friends Michael Weinstein and Andy Dawson, my sister Abigail Marcus-Hong, and my ex-partner Mary Lennon.

I am grateful to all those at Berghahn Books, who have helped bring this manuscript to press. In particular, Dr. Gus Carbonella who believed in my work, Dr. Don Kalb, who not only believed in my work, but helped shape major sections of some of the early drafts as part of his work with the journal FOCAAL, Marion Berghahn, Michael Dempsey, and Catherine Kirby.

Finally, it is impossible to imagine this manuscript without the love and support of my companion, Jo Sanson. When Gerald Sider informed me that I had passed my dissertation defense, but would need to hire someone to move every comma in the manuscript from where I had put it to where it belonged, she stepped up with her editor's pen. Later when I wanted to turn it into a book, she read several drafts, covering page after page with ruthlessly critical commentary and useful suggestions for improvements. However, more than being a great editor and a clear-eyed co-thinker, she gave me the love and courage to face all those pages covered with black ink from my desk jet and red ink from her editor's pen.