"We Know What the Problem Is": Using Oral History to Develop a Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness from the Bottom up

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“We Know What the Problem Is”: Using Oral History to Develop a Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness from the Bottom Up

by Daniel Kerr

Abstract Using audio, video, and radio interviews, the Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project (CHOHP) has sought to foster the development of a collaborative analysis of homelessness from the bottom up. Designed to overcome problems with traditional academic research on homelessness, CHOHP explicitly seeks to share research with those living on the streets and in the shelters in Cleveland, Ohio and involve homeless people in the process of analysis. Rather than focusing on the personal pathologies of the homeless, the analysis that emerges from CHOHP suggests that trends in downtown and neighborhood real estate development, the criminalization of the poor, the growth of the temporary labor industry, and the retrenchment of the welfare system have led to the emergence of powerful interests invested in perpetuating homelessness. Beyond analyzing these trends, CHOHP’s formal research setting has emboldened homeless people to act and become agents for social change.

It takes the efforts, man, of all of us homeless people to get together and try and come up with solutions. But they don’t want to hear our ideas. We go on homeless marches. We go on homeless outings. And we tell them what’s the problem. We know what the problem is. But

In the early 1990s, Daniel Kerr developed his interest in housing issues while taking over abandoned buildings and participating in the squatter movement and anti-eviction struggles on the Lower East Side in New York City. Fresh from the barricades, he moved to Cleveland, Ohio where he helped found the local chapter of Food Not Bombs and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in history at Case Western Reserve University.

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they don’t listen to us. You know why? Because there’s big dollars involved now.

—JOHN APPLING¹

In the fall of 1996, after eight months of working with a group I founded that provides food to people living on the streets and in the shelters of Cleveland, I initiated what has become the Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project (CHOHP). Intrigued with the possibility that oral history could promote dialogue on the streets among the homeless, I bought a thirty-dollar mini-cassette recorder and brought it to our weekly picnics. The initial audio interviews examined the life histories of four homeless men. The project coincided with my entrance into the graduate program in history at Case Western Reserve University and I used the interviews in a seminar paper, a performance piece and pamphlet, “A Complete Perfect Nothingness.”²

As I transcribed these interviews, however, I realized that my goal of promoting dialogue on the streets was only partially fulfilled. While the individuals I interviewed knew they were being recorded, they were clearly talking to me. I was the one who had collected and compiled their profound words, which I now had before me at my desk. My desire to have the interviewees talk to each other resulted in some unconventional theoretical approaches in my first paper. However, the limitations of the printed format, measured in terms of its cool reception by the most important intended audience, the homeless themselves, prompted me to switch over to video. I began to see this project more explicitly as a collaborative one, unlike mainstream academic research on homelessness.

Advocates and academics studying homelessness in the United States have primarily sought an audience of public officials, civic leaders, and middle and upper class progressives, who they believe have the power to create change. In part this focus has been structured by the public officials themselves who have encouraged this approach, seeking advice on the homeless

¹John Appling interview, September 5, 1999. All interviews, tapes, and transcriptions in possession of author.
problem almost exclusively from social service providers and academic experts. There is little incentive for academics to work collaboratively with the homeless. Those who have had the most success having their voice heard at the national policy level, such as Martha Burt of the Urban Institute, have devised solutions without the input and oversight of the homeless and have done little to generate support for their solutions among the homeless. Burt’s highly touted report, “Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve,” garnered no attention from the homeless in Cleveland, Ohio. Although Burt and the Urban Institute boast that all their research undergoes extensive peer review, they have not sought criticism or evaluation from the homeless. Nonetheless, Burt’s research functions as the primary data used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to evaluate and develop its policies with respect to homelessness. While Burt’s statistical data may in fact be “reliable,” its interpretation is significantly impacted by her failure to collaborate with the homeless. Perhaps more importantly, the questions she addresses are significantly impoverished by this omission.

In spite of her position of power, Burt has made little headway in developing or implementing public policy changes that could have stemmed the spread of homelessness in urban centers across the United States. Albeit the bulk of Burt’s work has sought to identify statistically the demographic and personal characteristics of the homeless, she has consistently argued that larger structural issues must be raised in order to address the problem successfully. While her demographic data has garnered attention, her calls for structural change have largely been

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3 Although Cleveland City Councilman Joe Cimperman and United States Representative Dennis Kucinich have taken an important step and met with homeless groups, they have both made comments in public settings that show they view the homeless as primarily defined by mental illness and substance abuse. One informant, JD provides an alternative perspective: “But the bottom line is we all have a little insanity. No one is completely sane. You show me one sane person and he should be president. I don’t think there’s one out here.” JD interview, September 15, 1996.

4 Interestingly enough, the highly touted report relies on interviews with representatives from 11,909 programs that serve the homeless and only 4,207 interviews with those who are actually homeless. A full copy of the report can be found at the HUD website: http://www.huduser.org/publications/homeless/homelessness/contents.html.
ignored. Burt has argued for over a decade that policies need to be implemented to make housing more affordable, yet nothing has emerged to make these policies a reality. Her authority as an expert has withered when she has confronted entrenched established interests. Burt’s own failure to explain why her solutions have been ignored suggests that she really does not understand the power dynamics and vested interests that benefit from maintaining the status quo.5

Presently there is no accountability in the relationship between the state and the homeless subject or between the academic and the homeless subject. Defining the homeless as a primary audience would be a significant act in and of itself, and an acknowledgement of the inability of the present political process to deal with the phenomenon of homelessness. Such an approach necessitates more than just having the homeless as an audience or as spectators, but also having them as active participants in the formation of a collective analysis. James Jones’s research on the Tuskegee syphilis experiment makes it clear that researchers cannot ethically study misery in a detached scientific fashion.6 It is not enough to critique the closed and ineffectual circle of discussions on present homeless policies or academic debates on homelessness without working towards building a movement of people who can add weight to the critique and leverage social change as a result. Clearly one group of people with the biggest stake in seeing things change for the better are homeless people themselves.

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5 In her HUD report, Burt includes a table (Figure 2.8) identifying "the single most important factor" that the homeless respondents felt was keeping them homeless. This appears to be the only question where the homeless were invited to provide their analysis of homelessness—albeit in a highly personalized manner. 30% cited insufficient income, 24% identified lack of a job or income, and only 11% mentioned lack of affordable housing. Highlighting Burt’s lack of interest with an analysis of homelessness from the homeless, she ignores this finding and gears her policy proposals towards enhancing the stock of affordable housing. On her earlier calls for affordable housing, see Martha Burt, *Over the Edge: The Growth of Homelessness in the 1980’s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992). For her more recent policy proposals, see Martha Burt, *Helping America’s Homeless* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 2001), and Martha Burt, “What Will It Take to End Homelessness,” Urban Institute, October 1, 2001—available online at www.urban.org.

The Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project is based on the supposition that a democratically organized research project built on the framework of what Michael Frisch terms “shared authority” can play a significant role in movement building. Frisch goes beyond the model of arguing that the goals of oral and public history should be to impart skills and knowledge to the disempowered. He argues for “a more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantages about the shape, meaning and implications of history.” He argues that this dialogue will “promote a more democratized and widely shared historical consciousness, consequently encouraging broader participation in debates about history, debates that will be informed by a more deeply representative range of experiences, perspectives and values.”

I would add that the dialogue built on this basis needs to go beyond the way we view history, but also influence the way we design public policy and more importantly, the way we reproduce the social organization of the communities we live in.

Will such an approach violate the academic commitment to objectivity? While it is clear from Jones’s research that there is an ethical dimension that requires us to eschew a detached position when studying suffering and human misery, does this necessitate that we forego our commitment to “the truth”? By providing a “bullhorn” to the oppressed and excluded, do we give up our critical authority and give in to “bad science”? Helen Longino argues that all science is influenced by background assumptions that shape our questions and influence our interpretations of data. Rather than foregoing empiricism and peer review, Longino argues that a scientific community is closer to objectivity when it is more inclusive and democratic. Acknowledging that theories can never attain the status of “single truth,” Longino contends, “We can nevertheless rank theories as to their acceptability, in particular their worthiness as basis for collective action to solve common problems. That theory which is the product of the most inclusive scientific community is better, other things being equal, than that which is the

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product of the most exclusive." By broadening the scientific community through the process of sharing authority with the homeless, one does not give up objectivity; rather one produces more objective and effective research. Theories and solutions that garner support are effectively implemented, and successfully address common problems are objectively better than those that do not.

Perhaps the homeless in Cleveland at the turn of the millennium present an ideal peer review group due to their cynicism, disillusionment, and unwillingness to be sold false hope. Two decades of seeing social conditions deteriorate within the city and witnessing would-be “visionaries” flounder on their grand ideas and disappear from the social scene has all contributed to this phenomenon. But it is not just outsiders subjected to this critique, I have frequently heard homeless tell other homeless that their theories are full of crap. In an interview in 1996, JD expressed a sentiment held by many of the homeless I have interviewed: “I don’t see nothing getting no better. This is not the worst. I hear people saying, ‘Well things can’t get worser.’ That’s the biggest piece of dooodoo I have ever heard.”

Since JD issued his prophecy, conditions have indeed grown worse. The shelters became significantly more overcrowded while at the same time former Mayor Mike White implemented a policy of arresting the homeless for sleeping outside. It is precisely this context from which the theorists of the school of hard knocks have emerged, and which makes their story more compelling and their analysis of homelessness and social power more truthful.

In the summer of 1999, I conceived the CHOHP video project with a fairly simple design rooted in the principle of reflexivity—making the actual research accessible to the homeless. While bringing food downtown, I discovered that Cleveland’s Public Square was full of electrical outlets. Earlier in the day preachers and church groups made use of these outlets to

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9 JD interview, September 15, 1996.
Using Oral History to Develop Analysis of Homelessness

proselytize when they brought food to the Square. Through experience I learned that homeless folks were not readily willing to speak into a microphone in front of a large crowd. However, the audio interviews demonstrated they would talk extensively in a more relaxed setting. By videotaping interviews and bringing a television and VCR to the Square, it became possible to create a format where people could talk to a homeless audience extensively about their experiences with and analysis of homelessness. Others on the Square expressed interest in watching these tapes the following week, and invited me to show the videos in other settings such as the shelters. The project developed to the point where homeless spectators requested a re-showing of particular interviews from earlier weeks—establishing a grassroots canon of homeless voices. While the interviewees

11 In the summer of 1997, we brought down a microphone and amplifier in order to set up an open forum for the homeless.
spoke on wide-ranging issues, it became apparent from these requests that certain analyses resonated with homeless audiences.

Early on when I switched from tape to video, I moved away from asking questions that centered on the life histories of the narrators and asked them both what they felt the historical causes of homelessness were and what they thought could be done about the present situation. This move occurred following my initial video interview with Anthony Ball. I asked him what questions he would like to ask homeless folks, and he replied:

I guess if I was to ask any kind of questions . . . I don’t know, it’s hard maybe to ask anybody else questions who is living out here and living a certain way in the streets . . . I don’t want to get too personal in someone else’s business, but the thing I would want to ask them are what are they doing for themselves to try and make things better for themselves and for other people.12

Avoiding direct life history questions provided a means for each of the narrators to be more flexible in their presentation of their experiences and avoid being in a position where they felt they had to provide a confessional. One man, Levi Israel, specifically stated that he would like to see a world where we do not have to probe into the lives of the oppressed.13 Moving away from personalized life history questions and asking what the interviewee believes to be the causes of homelessness explicitly brings the interviewee into the process of analysis. Nearly all participants combined their experiences with a larger political and structural explanation of the causes of homelessness. Talmadge Wright, whose work on homelessness has furthered the field of critical sociological analysis, argues that this nexus between experience and social structure is at the root of agency. His work Out of Place stresses that this recognition of the agency of the homeless has been lacking in most research on homelessness. However, as he argues, recognizing the agency of the homeless is absolutely necessary if we are ever going to see any substantive social change.14

Anthony Ball in Emergency Men’s Shelter at 2100 Lakeside Avenue.

Beyond bringing me to change my interview format, Anthony Ball also prompted me to reevaluate and ultimately change the interview medium. Ball continually asked me what I was doing with his interview beyond just showing it on the Square. He wanted to hear his voice “amplified” by broadcasting the videos to a larger audience. While I had made a concerted effort to ensure that the interviews were broadcast to a homeless audience, I could think of no reason why they should not be broadcast to a broader audience as well. The problem, however, was a technical one. The unedited videos began accumulating and did not present themselves in a readily consumable format. Furthermore, I did not have the skills or access to
equipment to do the editing. There was no one willing to take the project on voluntarily, and I did not have the resources to pay someone else to do the project. Access to broadcasting a finished product on television presented another significant hurdle. On top of these barriers, I was not readily convinced that it would be worth all the effort, especially when radio could accomplish the same ends. Radio as a medium had added benefits. A sizeable number of people staying in the shelters, under the bridges, and on the sidewalks of downtown Cleveland carry portable radios with them. Live interviews with the homeless broadcast from the studios of WRUW, CWRU’s college radio station, would be readily accessible to a homeless audience and could reach households and cars throughout the city and outlying suburbs.

In the summer of 2000, I began conducting weekly one-hour interviews with different homeless people each week. As the word spread, people began tuning their radios in on Tuesday mornings and playing our broadcast at drop-in centers and homeless shelters. While it is impossible to determine exactly who your listening audience is when broadcasting a radio show, the fact that we began receiving calls from homeless people who had questions and comments demonstrated that broadening the audience turned out not to mean reaching the middle-class college educated public we had expected. While we received calls from suburban listeners, the majority of non-homeless callers were working-class city residents interested in the topics addressed by the show’s homeless experts.

Like academics, the homeless narrators in the video and radio project did not all share the same analysis of the causes of homelessness. However, it became clear through repetition that

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15 CHOHP has received small amounts of funding from individuals, the CWRU History Department, and some material support from WRUW. The expenses have also been limited. From 1996–2002 the project has approximately cost $4000. My personal income has come from stipends as a teaching and research assistant.

16 As a graduate student I had no problems entering the staff training program and obtaining my own show. To secure my position in the station, I gave up my role as student senator and became the WRUW Public Affairs director. The organization of the show also meant that I stopped conducting video interviews as I juggled my time commitments. Over the whole project, from 1996 to the present, I have on average committed two evenings and one morning every week to CHOHP research.
there were certain themes that were broadly accepted and discussed. How these themes could and would be identified and who would identify them posed certain problems if I was to stick with my desire to keep this a collaborative project. Certainly I could not go off and do it on my own. In developing the concept of reciprocal ethnography, Elaine Lawless stresses the importance of building a research structure that includes spaces for the collective discussion of research and development of analysis with her research subjects.\(^{17}\) Drawing from her research model, I organized weekly workshop and research sessions in a drop-in center and emergency shelter in the winter and spring of 1999–2000. During these sessions we watched the video interviews, we brainstormed, and we set about identifying core themes of an analysis of homelessness from the bottom up. Beyond identifying the themes, throughout the entire year in 2000 we prioritized them and developed strategies to promote substantive social change.

While no narrators touched on all the themes, the workshops allowed for the creation of a collective analysis that could evaluate the interviews in a critical manner and identify the most compelling theories. This process produced a multi-factored understanding of homelessness that goes beyond traditional academic analysis. Intriguingly enough, the majority of the issues raised are not inherently “homeless issues,” but are issues that affect a broad number of city residents. The analysis has a built-in capacity for coalition building. While the space here does not allow me to do complete justice to this analysis, the basic contours of it can be discussed. The workshop participants identified six major themes essential to understanding the present state of homelessness. These themes are not listed in order of importance and were not seen as distinct but understood as interrelated. The first strand of the analysis identifies public and economic policies that led to disinvestment and decline in working class neighborhoods following the 1966 Hough Riots—policies that ultimately paved the way for the gentrification of these areas. John

Appling, a participant in the Hough riots and the 1968 Glenville riots, argues:

But to cut a long story short, if you go down into the Hough area now, it is a planned thing . . . Because back in the sixties when the Hough riots were going down, people couldn’t get to work. They were scared to come down Chester. They were scared to come down Euclid. They were scared to come down Superior. Because you see, in order to get downtown to the center, the work district, you had to come down through them streets. And they say, never again will it be like this here. And if you look around here today, it is not like that anymore. If you go down to the Hough area, you have $300,000 homes down there now. You have got apartments that cost 700, 750, 800, $900 a month now, which we cannot afford. The whole area in which I was raised up in, until I was a grown man, now is taken over by Cleveland Clinic, Mt. Sinai, and [University Hospitals].

The second theme identifies the destruction of the single room occupancy hotels, better known as the flop houses, and the subsequent development of sports arenas, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and other downtown “revitalization” projects as central to the rise of homelessness. Ralph Pack, a former employee at one of these hotels, reflects:

They wanted to make downtown look real photogenic and make it look real clean. So they cleared out all the old hotels and all the places that were frequented by the poor guys so that when the well-to-do tourists . . . came in they wouldn’t see all this . . . They wanted to create a complete new image for downtown Cleveland of everyone prosperous, of everyone doing real well, so they really made a sweep on all the poor people there.

The role of the retrenchment of the welfare system in the creation of homelessness is the third theme. Thomas Smith argues:

I think if welfare did a better job and gave checks for rent you would have less homeless people . . . . It took me four years to get disability. I had four operations. Cut from top to bottom. Eventually they will amputate this one leg. It really ain’t the main cause of my being homeless—the disease itself. Mainly it’s the welfare department.

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18 John Appling interview, September 5, 1999.
20 Thomas Smith interview, September 12, 1999.
The fourth theme consists of the expansion of the criminal justice system as a result of the war on drugs and the criminalization of the poor. Hakeem Ali reasons:

Ohio itself has thirty-one prisons in the state. [There are 1.6 million people incarcerated.] And that rises at 68% each year. So we’re either building more prisons for the rich people to get rich or we’re building more prisons to make society safer. It is not making society safer. What it is doing is taking poor white men and poor black men and incarcerating them for a limited time. And they come out angry. Now they’re angry when they come out here again, instead of working with their addictions. . . . So we’re talking about America using their money anyway they want, instead of using it for the people. It should be for the people and by the people.21

Jason Maiden notes that increasingly the homeless have been arrested merely for being homeless:

The topic is the police coming down and telling us we cannot lay on the sidewalks period. . . . Now we must find places where they can’t see us. Now they want to come around the holiday season and get homeless people off the streets—show things off for the people in the suburbs. That’s all they want to do is see things pleasant. They don’t want to see us lying on benches, trying to get money. I think it is uncalled for.22

Anthony Ball argues that this expansion of the prison population impacts people well beyond the time they serve for their alleged crimes:

But being a felon, I can tell you right now that I can’t go to the RTA [Regional Transit Authority] and sweep their floor because of my background. I can’t go to the Renaissance Building because I can’t even talk to a person anymore because you are talking to an automated system. I did that for about almost three or four weeks. The only places I can probably get a job with quickness is the slave labor, which is the temporary agencies. You can’t get no housing with them folks, because you don’t get paid enough. After Uncle Sam gets your money and the temp agency gets your money, you ain’t got nothing left.23

Which leads us to our fifth theme—the rise of the temporary industry. Clarence Dailey recalls:

22 Jason Maiden interview, November 28, 1999.
Back in the sixties and seventies you could basically walk off one job or get fired from one job and be back on another job within an hour or two. Now with the temp agencies, they have taken over control. The companies do not really want to hire anyone because they do not want to pay the benefits, the vacations, the sick pay and take on the responsibilities.24

Finally, the sixth theme consists of the establishment of an inhumane shelter system that is akin to an open penitentiary. Robert Molchan emphasizes this point, “Actually you are in a penitentiary more or less. The only thing is you have the freedom to get up and go.”25 Clarence Dailey highlights the level of disgust he has towards the shelter system—a sentiment that most of the homeless people I have interviewed share:

They have a site down at 2100 Lakeside where 300 men or more come in there every night. They have about 300 beds and you have about 50 to 100 people sleeping on the bare floor with one blanket up under them. Sure it is cold out there. It is better than sleeping on the streets. But they are warehousing people just like Hitler did in the days of old.26

These six points are most concisely summed up by the notion that every which way you look, people other than the homeless are profiting off of the institution of homelessness—be it the real estate developers, downtown leisure and retail business interests, the temp agencies, the prison industries, or the shelter providers. It is precisely because of these entrenched interests that homelessness as a phenomenon has not been effectively addressed. It is also because of these entrenched interests that the homeless have concluded in the workshops that they, along with other segments of the working-class, must take the lead in a movement for social change.

The workshops have gone beyond analyzing what Levi Israel terms “The Downpression Man.”27 They have sought to identify strategies for social change. While it has been useful to establish an analysis of the matrix of oppression, it has been even more important to identify avenues of resistance. Discussions throughout the year 2000 made it clear that there were

two areas where the homeless felt that they should focus their attention. Not surprisingly, these areas consisted of gaining aspects of control in their working lives (the temp agencies) and their home lives (the shelters and the streets). Nearly all the homeless grassroots activism has arisen in these two sectors since the Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project began. However this activism has not been narrowly drawn. Individuals have been clear to draw interconnections to other issues as they have articulated what they are fighting for.

CHOHP has already had an indirect impact on the public debate in Cleveland. Many of the folks I have interviewed were involved in a series of protests in the summer of 1999 that led to the closing of one shelter due to its poor management and unsanitary conditions. Later that same year Jason Maiden’s taped interview on arrests of the homeless during the Christmas season actually spurred a flurry of protests and public hearings. In interviews with the mainstream press, where he critiqued the mayor’s policies of criminalizing the homeless, Maiden stressed that the homeless chose to sleep outside because the conditions in the shelter were so miserable.

Both the June and December protests sparked harsh editorial responses from columnists in The Cleveland Plain Dealer. In June, Beth Barber wrote, “What we have here is a bunch of blather about the rights and needs of ‘clients.’” In December, Dick Feagler responded: “The bums on the street corner must be forgiven if they cannot see reality. So I can forgive them. The people I cannot forgive are the homeless demagogues who won’t see reality.” Both resisted hearing the analysis provided by the homeless of their own situation. As alluded to by John Appling in the epigraph at the beginning of this paper, this stubborn ignorance is unsurprising given the large number of material interests invested in the preservation of homelessness. What is perhaps more surprising is the degree of success the

protests had. The first protest led to a major reorganization of Cleveland’s emergency shelters. The second series of protests resulted in an injunction against Mayor Mike White’s holiday policy and a subsequent settlement in which the city explicitly agreed not to arrest or threaten to arrest “any individuals, including homeless individuals, for performing innocent, harmless, inoffensive acts such as sleeping, lying or sitting in or on public property.”\textsuperscript{31} The fact that the protests provoked these responses suggests that the relationship between the homeless and the constellation of interests invested in homelessness began to become unsettled.

The following summer a group of homeless individuals, all of whom had been involved in the CHOHP project, refused to leave a building they had squatted for well over a decade. These individuals argued their case to the public on the CHOHP radio show weeks prior to the eviction. On the day of the eviction, this

small band of homeless individuals ground the development process of the city to a halt. All the top-level officials in the mayor’s administration negotiated over walkie-talkies with the homeless in the building, while the local media broadcast reports throughout the afternoon. In their press conferences, the homeless made it clear that their occupation of the building was directly related to neighborhood development practices and shelter conditions. Although the building was eventually taken, the standoff resulted in the widespread broadcast of an oppositional analysis of homelessness and an embarrassment for the city administration.32

The weekly workshops eventually evolved into what has become the Day Laborers’ Organizing Committee (DLOC). By the spring of 2001, the DLOC had successfully secured a ban prohibiting recruiters from temp agencies from entering the city’s emergency shelter. In the fall of 2001, eighteen homeless day laborers testified before Cleveland City Council regarding the exploitation and abuse they faced at the temp agencies. The DLOC has since networked with local service unions in the city and has set up an advisory council to establish an alternative hiring hall accountable to day laborers. The organization has also worked with attorneys to draft municipal legislation to regulate day labor agencies operating in Cleveland.33 Meanwhile, many CHOHP members have worked with the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless to establish a shelter residents’ council and address the pervasive problems in the emergency shelter. In May 2002, Raymond Robinson collected 350 signatures from residents at 2100 Lakeside demanding that the Salvation Army be removed from operating the shelter for the city and the county and that the homeless residents be placed in


charge of the facility. The petition prompted the convening of a high level meeting at City Hall and has resulted in significant changes at the shelter as the Salvation Army has scrambled to retain its control.34

This flourishing of activity clearly demonstrates that the homeless are more than victims but are agents and perhaps the most effective agents for social change. It not so much that CHOHP has produced discussion and analysis where there was none. Rather it has created links between multiple discussions that were already occurring in the smoke rooms of the shelters, under the bridges, in the parks, and on the steam grates of

34 “Resident Committee Victory at 2100 Lakeside,” The Homeless Grapevine, Issue 56.
downtown Cleveland. If there is anything that CHOHP has done, it is to connect people who were thinking about similar things so that they could talk to one another and further develop an analysis of homelessness. The process of creating a shared analysis in a formal research setting has emboldened people to act.

As I research and write my dissertation, knowing that my committee will not accept a co-authored product, I take solace in the fact that the most important product for my collaborators is not my thesis, but the movement for social change that we have all been a part of. While I have committed myself to creating spaces in which homeless people could develop their authority, I have not given up my own. Consistently I have listened, critiqued, taught, and learned from the thousands of discussions and hundreds of interviews I have had and conducted with the homeless over the past six years. While I will write about this process at some length in the future, I have committed myself to use my skills as a traditional research historian to explore the longer-term historical development of the six themes identified in the workshops. As the project winds down, I am dedicated to making sure that the DLOC is sustainable and that the alternative hiring hall is established. The last CHOHP radio show broadcast on August 27, 2002 so that I could create the time necessary to write. After putting up with me for all these years, I rest easy knowing that many of the homeless people with whom I have collaborated will take the time to read and critique my dissertation.