
Homelessness: How Did We Come to Recognize It as Such a Problem and the Possible Ways to Solve It

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how homelessness in the United States has developed into a significant social issue. It examines key causes such as economic instability, lack of affordable housing, and systemic inequality. Additionally, vulnerable populations such as people of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and individuals from low-income communities who are disproportionately impacted due to intersecting forms of discrimination are also discussed. Using a conflict theory framework, this paper explores how systemic inequalities and corporate interests contribute to the exploitation of the working class, deepening poverty and fueling homelessness. It also discusses the harsh conditions faced by unhoused individuals and assesses potential solutions, all of which will come with high financial costs, reaching billions of dollars annually. Through a focus on both systemic factors and individual experiences of homelessness, my paper emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies to reduce homelessness and its long-term societal impact.

Homelessness is one of the most pressing humanitarian and sociological crises in modern society, shaped by systemic economic inequality, inadequate government intervention, and structural barriers such as the high cost of living and insufficient mental health resources. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (de Sousa et al. 2023), California accounts for nearly 30% of the nation's homeless population, with Los Angeles having the highest number of unsheltered individuals in the country. From a sociological perspective, the conflict theory framework highlights how economic disparities and power imbalances contribute to the persistence of homelessness, as those in lower socioeconomic classes struggle to access stable housing while wealthier individuals benefit from policies that prioritize real estate development over affordable housing (Nickerson

2023). Despite national inaction on the crisis, California has implemented some of the most ambitious policy efforts to address homelessness. Recent initiatives such as Governor Gavin Newsom's (2022) \$15.3 billion Homekey and Project Roomkey programs, which convert vacant spaces into temporary and long-term housing, and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, City of Los Angeles's (2024) Inside Safe initiative, aimed at rapidly moving unhoused individuals into shelters, demonstrate a localized commitment to reducing homelessness. However, while these policies have made progress, the programs still have room for improvement as the crisis persists due to ongoing structural challenges, requiring a coordinated federal, state, and local response. This paper will explore the root causes of homelessness, societal neglect of the issue, and how it relates to conflict theory along with comprehensive strategies needed to create long-term solutions at both the state and national levels.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Before solving homelessness, it must first be understood how it occurs. Homelessness can happen for several reasons including the loss of a loved one, accumulating debt, mental illness, socioeconomic status, natural disasters, and being kicked out of their home as in the case of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (LGBTQ+) youth. Synovec (2020:233) reports, "Individuals experiencing homelessness also manage significant personal factors, such as chronic health conditions, histories of trauma, and limited economic and social support . . . may also have long and familiar histories of living in poverty and housing instability." Another reason is mental health issues, as individuals with persistent mental illness are more likely to experience repeated and longer periods of homelessness compared to those who are not experiencing extensive mental health issues, with the homeless population having a greater prevalence of mental health problems when compared with the general public (Piat et al. 2014). In fact, a study conducted from 2021 until 2022 (Statista Research Department 2023) found that 66% of homeless adults in California suffer from some sort of mental health condition with anxiety and depression being at the top. Homelessness can occur after foster care with an estimated 22% of all children who age-

out of foster care will become homeless within a year (Administration for Children and Families 2024) due to the individual not having the proper resources or support to transition out of the foster care system. In addition to foster care youth, LGBTQ+ youth are also at a disadvantage when it comes to being homeless when compared with their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts.

LGBTQ+ YOUTH

When it comes to youth homeless populations, LGBTQ+ identifying individuals have a higher chance of becoming homeless. Of the estimated 1.6 million youth aged 15 to 24 who experience homelessness each year, approximately 40% identify as LGBTQ+, even though they make up only about 7% of the total youth population (Lesley University n.d.). This is because “LGBTQ+ youth are at greater risk of homelessness because they are affected both by the factors which precipitate homelessness among the young population in general and by additional challenges related to sexuality and/ or gender identity which can directly or indirectly result in homelessness” (Quilty and Norris 2022:2). Many LGBTQ+ youth are left homeless because of disagreements with their parents or legal guardian for coming out or fear regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. The National Coalition for the Homeless mention that in a survey administered by the Williams Institute at UCLA, 68% of LGBTQ+ youth were homeless due to a history of family rejection, 65% because of mental health issues, and 54% because they had a history of family abuse. From an online survey conducted by The Trevor Project (2021) with 34,759 LGBTQ+ youth respondents, 34% live in the South, 25% live in the West and in the Midwest, and 16% living in the Northeast. While there is no precise number of LGBTQ+ youth in the South, they might have a harder time accessing safe spaces with most states that have anti-LGBTQ laws and no protection laws for LGBTQ+ individuals, are predominantly in the southern region of the United States. There are also more LGBTQ+ youth of color in the South, with 48%, when compared to other regions. In addition to anti-LGBTQ laws, about 46% of LGBTQ+ youth in the South reported that they lived in a *somewhat or very unaccepting*

community and had lower rates of access to LGBTQ+ affirming spaces in those areas including homes, schools, workplaces, and community events (Trevor Project 2021). When LGBTQ+ youth are disowned, publicly ostracized, have no access to support system, or safe spaces, it could then lead to poor mental health as well as attempted suicide. In the 2019 Southern LGBTQ Health Survey, it was found that 69% of LGBTQ+ adults, aged 18 to 24, had fair or poor mental health (Harless, et al., 2019). The Trevor Project (2021) found that LGBTQ+ youth in the South had 9% greater odds of suicide attempts in contrast to other regions with 16% of LGBTQ+ youth attempting suicide in the South when compared to 14% divided between the other regions. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth in *somewhat or very unaccepting* communities had a 20% suicide attempt rate with those in ‘somewhat or very accepting’ communities have a 13% suicide attempt rate. There are also no federal regulations in relation to LGBTQ+ youth services as Lesley University (n.d.) declares:

There are currently no federal programs specifically designed to meet the needs of gay and transgender homeless youth. This means that, in many cases, LGBT youth are left without the resources and assistance provided to other homeless populations. Human services professionals should have a clear understanding of the unique needs, risk factors, and challenges facing LGBT homeless youth in order to design and deliver the best possible services.

Homelessness is a huge social issue and can ruin a person’s life and deteriorate their mental health as it disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ youth, especially youth of color and those from low-income communities. Furthermore, homeless individuals do not have the best living conditions as they are, for the most part, on the streets and are subject to substance abuse, crime, and sometimes harassment by the public.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Just as how someone becomes homeless, each individual’s living conditions will vary. The definition for homelessness, as defined by the federal government is “An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as those

living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation” (SAMHSA 2018). Using this definition, a lot more people are considered homeless than just those who are unfortunate enough to be on the street, including those who are staying with family and sleeping on the floor or anywhere else that is not designed to be a sleeping area. Another example of living and being homeless is “couch surfing” (Huerta and Gutierrez-Vera 2020:30) where someone might stay with different people at different times to have a place to stay and not overstay their welcome at any one location.

In the streets of Los Angeles, it’s very common to see homeless people setting up tents as a main way of staying sheltered, especially in extreme weather such as rain or excessive heat. These tents will be set up in various places such as riverbeds, on the side of a highway, on the sidewalk, in parks, and more. If they do not have a tent, then they are most likely wrapped up in a blanket, or otherwise, somewhere on the sidewalk or sleeping at covered bus stops. This is also a reason why many bus stops will have armrests in between seats to prevent the homeless from sleeping there, which has come under fire from activists for its unwelcoming environment which is known as architectural discrimination or hostile architecture. In addition, some transients will use a shopping cart to move the things they have collected such as bottles and cans to recycle for money and personal items.

And because the homeless population usually is not sheltered indoors, a study (Montgomery et al. 2016:765) was conducted and found that homeless people report poorer health compared with those who are not homeless:

People living in unsheltered situations—staying at a primary nighttime residence not intended for habitation (e.g., streets, parks, cars, abandoned buildings)—often report poorer health and more symptoms of physical illness than their sheltered counterparts. Unsheltered people frequently have a serious mental illness, cognitive disorders, substance use disorders, co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions, and chronic health conditions.

This connects to how substance abuse plagues the homeless population. Research (Johnson and Fendrich 2007:212) has shown

that those “comparing homeless and non-homeless individuals have also documented substantially higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse among the homeless . . . In Los Angeles, age, race/ethnicity, and gender-adjusted estimates indicated that homeless people were more than twice as likely than non-homeless people to have both lifetime and 6-month DSM . . . substance use disorders.” The use of drugs could be used as a way to deal with stress, to cope with the pressures of being homeless, or even help them forget and take them to a ‘better place.’

TROUBLE GETTING A JOB AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In addition to a person experiencing homelessness’ living conditions, it does not improve their situation when other people do not look their way or acknowledge them, only to look at them in disgust and treat the individual as less than human. Sarver (2023) notes that the most common question that crosses people’s minds in regard to homelessness is, “Why don’t you just go get a job?” But getting a job is not as easy as it may seem. A lot of homeless individuals are unable to get a job because applicants need to be able to provide or maintain a Social Security number, an ID, a phone, their own professional work clothes, reliable transportation, good hygiene, and a home address or at least a PO box which costs money; most of these things are unobtainable or missing for many homeless individuals. Sarver (2023) additionally states, “There’s a shortage of good, quality jobs that meet workers’ needs and support their well-being, including their economic security. This shortage is the result of multiple factors, including decades of offshoring, wage stagnation, lack of benefits, and increasingly aggressive anti-union activity.” Even individuals and families with homes found it hard to get or even keep a job during the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic came like a bullet train, with the U.S. not well equipped or prepared to deal with it especially as former President Trump and his administration failed to take serious action. As a result, an estimated 103 million American citizens got sick, about 6 million were hospitalized, and almost 2 million people died. People lost their family, their friends, any kind of social interaction, as well as their jobs. According to a

study completed by CEW (2021), a cumulative 23 million jobs were lost. This loss of jobs had indirectly contributed to the growing homeless population. The pandemic also affected the homeless population as they are more vulnerable to sickness, as aforementioned, and were not given any personal protective equipment, especially the ones living on the street at the time. However, since the coronavirus was spread through the air, the homeless living in shelters tested positive for the virus compared with those living on the streets. According to Yoon et al. (2021), out of 2,875 homeless people tested in Atlanta, Georgia, only 46 total tested positive, with 36 being sheltered and only 3 being unsheltered along with 7 positive cases for the staff.

COST OF LIVING AND HOUSING COSTS

In today's economy, the homeless population continues to grow not only due to an individual's mental and physical health, substance abuse, or being displaced, but also because the federal minimum wage has been stagnant since 2009, and housing costs are on the rise all across the country. Sarver (2023) states, "It's now more evident than ever that homelessness is the result of failed policies that have perpetuated inequitable access to quality education, health care, and economic opportunity and that communities with rapidly increasing housing costs have faced the brunt of the homelessness crisis." This is because, federally, the minimum wage is \$7.25 and, according to Rent Cafe (n.d.), the average monthly rent in the United States is \$1,713 with the average square foot being 899. The lowest rent in the United States is in Oklahoma with an average of \$989 for an average of 856 square feet, which is not sustainable enough for those making only \$7.25 per hour. The highest rent in the country being in Massachusetts at an average of \$2,714 with an average of 888 square feet, which is not sustainable enough for those only making \$15 per hour. The average rent in California is \$2,531 along an average square foot of 851 with a minimum wage of \$16. High rent costs and low wages force people to live with one or maybe two more people to cover the cost of rent only, not including the utilities, groceries, and other monthly bills such as insurance, a phone bill, car payments, and so forth. The rising cost of living has become so noticeable that it has permeated pop culture,

particularly among Generation Z, who often use humor as a coping mechanism. This is exemplified by internet memes containing exaggerated statements such as, “It costs me \$20 to breathe,” which, while humorous, it reflects a deep concern and frustration with economic challenges. However, it is a sad reality that no one in the U.S. government is trying to have its citizens make a comfortable and livable wage. And because people fall behind on rent and get evicted, it only pushes them further to being homeless as an individual cannot pay the excessively high rent along with several late fees. And once evicted, it will show up on their credit report and make it even more difficult to get into a different apartment. Unless rent is controlled and capped, more people will eventually become homeless in the United States.

The rent prices in the country at this current moment are quite egregious and most blue-collar Americans cannot afford to live on their own. As mentioned before, many individuals within the homeless population suffer from certain disabilities, whether it be mental or physical. Burns et al. (2021:1719) explain, “Skyrocketing housing prices have been contributing to a major public health problem in America for years . . . Persons with disabilities are at heightened risk for not only feeling the economic impact of the [COVID-19] pandemic but also for having poor health and safety outcomes resulting from the associated affordable housing challenges.” Not only are housing costs expensive for the average American but, those living with a disability statistically have it harder as it is just an added obstacle for them to deal with. Burns et al. go on to say that the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment is roughly 131% of monthly income for a person living with a disability and although affordable living options exist for people with disabilities, they typically involve lengthy waitlists. This issue is linked to the persistently high cost of housing, a challenge that can be traced back to the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and its long-term impact on the housing market.

In 2007, the Great Recession started and peaked in 2008 when the U.S. Gross Domestic Product fell 4.3%, the unemployment rate doubled to over 10%, the price of a home fell about 30%, and the S&P 500 was down 57% from its usual highs (Duggan 2023). Burns et al. (2021:1720) note:

Since the Great Recession of 2008, homeownership rates have fallen drastically resulting in spikes in foreclosures and short sales. As a result, more people have been renting homes leading to significant increases in rental costs for individuals and families . . . the COVID-19 pandemic has had a swift and substantial economic impact, further contributing to the crisis. Housing costs are increasing significantly in many cities as the demand for housing is high.

The United States is not the only country in the world facing a housing crisis, take Australia for example. Worldwide concerns about housing affordability were further validated in mid-2007 with the release of Australian census data revealing that over 1.2 million households were experiencing housing stress, commonly defined as spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs. Additionally, from 1960 to 2006, real house prices grew at an average annual rate of 2.7%, outpacing the 1.9% annual increase in real household incomes (Yates 2008). In other words, housing prices increased more than the household income, which has also happened here in the United States.

PROFIT OVER PEOPLE

The famous phrase, “The poor get poorer, and the rich get richer,” directly relates to the sociological concept of conflict theory, where the rich are prioritizing profit over the middle class’s struggles. This signifies the continuing uphill battle that many Americans face, especially noticeable at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, when millions were laid off and stuck in their living spaces with little to no income. Although there were about three stimulus payments made that were passed by Congress, those were still not sustainable enough for the people who were suffering. Notably, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed in 2020 because of the devastating pandemic that it caused for working families, individuals, and small businesses, has been seen to cater to big companies and wealthier individuals who may not have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Gross (2020) describes how the CARES Act gave \$174 billion in temporary tax breaks to wealthy individuals and larger companies when it was intended to

help small businesses. And while the CARES Act was marketed toward the working class and small businesses, it was manipulated by Congress to help large, wealthy companies, as well as powerful families like the Trumps, by allowing them to report losses on their tax returns and not lose money business-wise. Gross (2020) interviewed New York Times's investigative reporter Jesse Drucker, who states:

one of the provisions that they put in the CARES Act is a provision that allows business owners to use losses from their businesses . . . to offset the tax bills . . . And the reason that's potentially particularly beneficial . . . is the concept of losses on your tax return is very complicated . . . And the result is that people like Jared Kushner and Donald Trump - to the degree that we have had some insight into their taxes over the last few years, we have seen that they have reported big losses on their tax returns.

These companies and individuals, who were getting these tax breaks, did not need to show proof that they were suffering because of the pandemic, especially at a time when families and individuals were losing their homes and jobs. This is a huge factor as to why the homeless are still homeless and why individuals become homeless. Many corporations in the United States actively pursue tax breaks and deductions as strategies to reduce costs and maximize profits, often in ways that disproportionately affect working-class consumers

MISUSE OF FEDERAL FUNDING

But also, it is a question of, why does the United States government does not provide any federal funding to states to combat homelessness. It is because they have the wrong numbers as well as not using the funds in a helpful, effective way and misproportioning the funds focusing on other areas. For example (National Priorities Project 2023), in the 2023 fiscal year, \$1.14 trillion, or 62%, was approved to go towards defense which includes the military, law enforcement, prisons, and other things of that nature while housing and community, the second highest, only got \$133 billion, or 7%. It is a disturbing amount of money the U.S. government spends on militarization when a lot of the funds could be spent on other areas that need the most help while

also continuing to have the title of the biggest military power in the world. The federal budget is a direct contributor to the reason why community resources and programs along with homelessness do not get the attention needed, either on a state or national level.

COUNTING THE HOMELESS POPULATION

For homelessness, the neglect and funding problem also comes from how the population is counted. When it comes to population counts in the United States, the Census Bureau collects information from households every ten years but at first, it did not get the population of those who were unhoused. The bureau started to count the homeless population in 1970 when they went around to

hotels and motels in an evening called Transient Night and then sent enumerators to short-term homeless shelters. In 1980, Census enumerators went to areas with high transient populations and encampments, in an effort named Mission Night. Local governments then began providing the Census Bureau with the address of homeless encampments in 1990. From that information provided by local governments, the Census Bureau found that between 29 and 72 percent of the homeless population had not previously been counted. (Huerta and Gutierrez-Vera 2020:28)

This just shows that it is not clear how many American citizens were homeless before the 1970 count and even how much it grew within those 20 years between the 1970 and 1990 census.

In recent years, California counties have developed strategies to count the homeless population and report them to HUD, including mandating local governments to submit a count of their homeless population every two years through a “point-in-time count” (Huerta and Gutierrez-Vera 2020:29). Huerta and Gutierrez-Vera (2020:29-30) also state, “HUD defines ‘point-in-time count(s)’ as a count of all individuals experiencing homelessness, whether they are sheltered or unsheltered, on a single night of the year. Although a ‘point-in-time count’ typically indicates a visual street count, the methodology for a point-in-time count is left to the city’s discretion.” Now, the problem with “point-in-time counts” is that they do not account for constantly

moving transients or, as aforementioned, those who are staying with a relative or friend and is “couch surfing” (Huerta and Gutierrez-Vera 2020:30) on a single night of the year. Adler (2021) describes, “At least 580,000 people experienced homelessness on a given day in January 2020 . . . but many homelessness advocates argue that these numbers fail to account for the true scope of the homelessness crisis in the U.S.” Not getting an accurate count of the total homeless population is detrimental because government agencies and local communities rely on federal data to determine funding, services, and policy decisions. Accurate data collection is essential because without a true representation of children, youth, and families in federal records, they risk being overlooked, leading to insufficient support and ultimately contributing to ongoing homelessness (SchoolHouse Connection 2024). The funding given now is a big part of the reason why the homeless problem has not been solved because it is not even enough to make a dent or make real change.

THE SOLUTIONS AND COST TO END HOMELESSNESS

One of the main problems present when it comes to solving homelessness is the cost, but if homelessness needs to be solved, then it is evident that more affordable housing is needed by building more homes so that demand goes down. Advocates must stay persistent when it comes to building more homes with dedicated leaders and a whole rework of the current government structure to make change happen. As previously mentioned, some of the projects that were started to help combat homelessness in California and the City of Los Angeles to get people off the street are Governor Gavin Newsom’s Project Roomkey, Homekey, Mayor Karen Bass, Los Angeles’s (2024) Inside Safe initiative, and Housing California’s, a nonprofit organization, Roadmap Home 2030 plan.

Governor Newsom launched Project Roomkey in 2020 in order to help homeless individuals get off the street during the COVID-19 pandemic by securing hotel and motel rooms across the state. After a study was conducted in March 2020 (California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services 2021), it found that people experiencing homelessness and who were infected by the virus were two to four times more likely to require critical care

and two to three times more likely to die from the virus compared to those who are not experiencing homelessness. According to the report (Fuchs et al. 2021), the project helped over 42,000 people, significantly reduced the number of people going to hospitals, and provided over 20% of those in the program with permanent housing. Piggybacking off the success of Project Roomkey is Homekey, a statewide initiative which expands the original plan of Roomkey to include more vacant spaces including office buildings and apartment buildings for more permanent housing while also focusing on at-risk populations such as youth and Native Americans. As for its lasting impact, Espinoza (2024) from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has said, “To date, the innovate program has funded 250 projects that will include 15,319 homes, serving more than 167,164 Californians over the projects’ lifetimes.” Next, is Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass’s Inside Safe initiative which was launched in December 2022 with the purpose of bringing people inside from tents and encampments, to prevent those encampments from returning, and provide permanent housing.

Two years later, Inside Safe has provided 23,000 people with temporary housing, with permanent housing move-ins nearly doubling, program application wait times dropping 75%, and—according to the 2024 Point-In-Time counts—a 10% decrease in street homelessness (Mayor Karen Bass, City of Los Angeles 2024). Housing California’s (2024) initiative Roadmap Home 2030 lists goals such as:

Create affordable homes [around 1.2 million homes for low-income Californians], protect low-income renters [to protect around 1 million low-income renter households from losing their homes, including more than 300,000 who face eviction each year], and ensure racial equality [to close the racial equity gap in housing and homelessness created by years of racist housing policies that have harmed Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color.]

Housing California continues with homelessness solutions including interventions to prevent someone from experiencing homelessness and supportive housing that is designed to help those who have experienced homelessness with services such as

case management and to help with substance abuse, mental health, and medical treatment. Other solutions mentioned were rental subsidies to help low-income renters pay their rent, in addition to eviction prevention. These ideas are a good step in the right direction for policy changes to be implemented, not only in California but the entire country. The solution to homelessness must be aggressive and decisive. But how much would it cost to make a change and potentially end homelessness?

Addressing homelessness and trying to solve the problem is not easy. However, continued investment, raising the minimum wage, and capping rent prices can effectively and potentially stop the cause. Compared with the rest of the country, California has been on the frontlines and taking the initiative when it comes to minimum wage increases as well as housing support for individuals and families. California has also done well with investing money into housing solutions (State of California Department of Finance 2023) as the state has invested more than \$17 billion to aid local governments in addressing homelessness since 2019, but it is not enough to stop the problem as there is a more costly solution that will span over the next decade. Tat (2022) reports, “The state could end homelessness in California by 2035 if it invested \$8.1 billion annually in each of the next 12 years - \$6.9 billion more than its current average annual investment.” This amount according to the Needs Assessment would effectively make homelessness non-recurring in Los Angeles, but also California as a whole. As for the rest of the United States:

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, it would cost \$20 billion to end homelessness in the United States. That is a big number, yes, but let’s put it into perspective: Americans spend \$19 billion a year on unplugged appliances, Americans spend more than \$35 billion a year on gym memberships, The U.S. government spent around \$718 billion on its military in 2019 alone. (Adler 2021)

Per the examples provided by Adler, according to the HUD, solving homelessness is within reach, but why is action never taken? It is not all about ending the current homeless problem now, but it is also to end it for good and that means attacking the

root cause. The minimum wage should be adjusted to align with the cost of living in different regions as a means to address economic disparities. This is a concept known as location-based wage structuring. This wage structure could help alleviate some of the costs of living in dense metropolitan areas where the job market tends to be more competitive. Luna (n.d.) explains further, “This means that you pay employees differently based on their location. In some cases, this refers to additional compensation given to employees to account for higher costs of labor or cost of living in the areas where they reside and work.” For example, a location-based wage structure could result in higher minimum wages in areas with elevated costs, such as \$27 per hour in California, compared to \$16 per hour in states with lower living costs, like North Dakota. Additionally, implementing rent caps should be put in place for low-income renters to improve housing affordability. These caps could be based on an individual's income and financial capacity or set in relation to the median income of a given area. Given regional differences in housing markets, rent regulations would likely vary between high-cost locations like Beverly Hills and more affordable areas such as Bakersfield. No matter what, something must happen fast.

CONCLUSION

Homelessness in the United States is a deeply rooted issue shaped by systemic economic disparities, policy shortcomings, and a lack of coordinated governmental response. As discussed, the persistence of this crisis can be understood through the lens of conflict theory, which highlights how economic structures and political influence have prioritized corporate interests over social welfare. While homelessness has existed for decades due to various structural factors including unaffordable housing, job insecurity, and insufficient mental health services, recent efforts made in California demonstrate that targeted policy interventions can make a difference. However, sustainable solutions require a continued commitment from federal, state, and local governments to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness receive the support they need. Ultimately, addressing homelessness is not just a matter of economic policy but a moral imperative to uphold the fundamental dignity and rights of all individuals in society.

Nothing will change if we continue to disregard human life and this trend of capitalistic greed.

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