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THE LIE OF THE HOMELESS PROBLEM: FINAL SOLUTIONS

by David Jamison

THE HOMELESS PROBLEM was created by coined commerce. It's as simple as that. The homeless phenomenon did not begin until we had money, which was ultimately created to relieve man of the burden of learning any skills necessary to survival. Well maybe that's not why it was created, but that's what it did. We don't have to learn to build a home because we can buy one. We don't have to learn to grow food because we have Shop Mart. We don't have to reinforce our karma because we can buy ourselves out of jams. I think it's so funny when I hear people say spread the Lie that homelessness comes down to anything else. I think it's so funny when people say "it's their fault."

Is not the pattern plain to the naked eye? Look at it from a historical perspective.

What would be the point of homelessness in a tribal setting? In a tribal setting, the prime directive is cooperation. You have to trade labor, goods, and talents. As such, you are forced to develop a skill for survival. There is no money to hand out; there is only the initiative for you to go out, cut down a tree, and build yourself a home or you get wet. Imagine yourself in 14th century Peru. How could you fathom a man sitting on a proud Incan temple, asking for alms, when every person you knew knew how to build a hut. “Why don’t you go and build a hut?” you would ask. And so they would. But almost immediately after the Spanish conquest of the Americas, colonial administrators began to write back to the Crown about the phenomenon of “shiftless” *indios* who inhabited the new Spanish towns. Frustrated at the inability to develop prosperous farms in the Indian villages the Spanish had set up, many young Indians had moved to the cities with the promise of the easy money made as porters, drivers, and builders. The influx was so sudden, however, that many had taken to living on the streets, drinking and gambling between jobs.

There are no Mayan or Incan accounts of this civic problem, because the extended family either took care of the indigent or helped them with the skills needed to create their own homestead. But in today’s modern cities, the only option is to tell them to go out and get a job. And so the cities become an incubator for shiftlessness.

Street people know the kind of money floating around, and know if they stand in the right spot, someone will give them pocket change. The wild encourages initiative. Cities stunt it.

And there is a terrible lesson any city's underground will tell you: Once the system labels you a misfit, it becomes less and less possible to reintegrate yourself into the ebb and flow of gainful employment. Commerce demands quantification, identification, records being kept, systems being implemented in which you are made less a human, more a number, which makes it easier for people to ignore you. They become less able to feel the your pain. More number.

And here's where the Lie becomes most insidious. Society tells you the poor are "less worthy" than those with money, so that the ebb and flow of commerce is not interrupted by compassion. It tells you the point of the game is to get On Top. It conditions us to despise our neighbor because they are losers in the game of civilized living. Furthermore, that game is the only option presented to us as a way of leading a successful life. It makes us fight over the apple like kids in a street game. It's actually amusing how many of us follow along.

To tell the truth, we all know what we're supposed to do. We know we're supposed to take our fellow man in, and feed and clothe him, and give him a nice shower and a shave. We know we're supposed to find out how they came so low, and learn from them and laugh at the tribulations of life. That's what all the religions tell us. But cash lets us off easy. We don't have to treat this man with

respect, 'cuz we've got money in the bank. But in a rural setting, there's always the slim chance that we're gonna need him somewhere down the line. If Jim the Shipbuilder fell on hard times, you sure as hell would give him a seat at your table in case a volcano erupted and you needed to get the hell off the island. In the wild, each person is their own commodity. But when money replaced skills as commodities, the homeless were a natural by-product.

And they know it, too. They look at you and smile compassionately and say "God bless you," but you know inside they're just wondering the same thing you are: *Why aren't you taking me in? Can't you see I live on the street? I live on the STREET. Wouldn't you want ME to give YOU some change if you weren't so graced by God?* The only reason they don't explode, I think, is because of the awkwardness they've felt at giving people coins in the past.

And we all do it. We all feel the icy stare down our spines when they make eye contact and we immediately sense how much change we're carrying. *Why should I give it to them?* we think. *I worked hard for it, we think, whether we did or not. Aren't I winning? Shouldn't I be expected to keep my earnings? If I give my money to this man, how will people know how successful I've become?* We don't want to give up money so we can have status. We have become as complicit in the Lie as the man on the street, thinking that life is about waiting for handouts. But we fuss and fight like it's real. But it is the Lie telling us to neglect our neighbor. It's as simple as that.

So all I'm saying is, if we want to solve the homeless problem we will have to let go of the illusion that you don't need basic survival skills to live. We might finally have to subsidize training them all in the skills they need for urban living, and caretaking the mentally ill (humanely please); or train them in the skills for rural living, and send them packing. But we must give up the Lie that they must simply *gain initiative*. We have conditioned the homeless to believe, just as we have conditioned ourselves to believe, that living amongst the urban throng is worth any indignity, even willing away your days waiting for someone to take care of you. I don't know how to build a house. Or dig a well. Or install plumbing. I am just as dependent on the system as a homeless person, but I have many more coins. Does that make me more worthy?