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Half a Trillion Reasons for Shame



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

A report released on December 27 from hud.gov dropped an extremely startling new statistic. In the last year the number of homeless individuals in America shot up an astounding 18%, bringing the number of Americans without a home to 770,000. Of course, this number is probably a distinct underestimation as it is difficult to properly include the souls out there without reliable housing, or of course those who are still sheltered, but barely existing on a shoestring, juggling numerous jobs and falling behind daily.

Reports also indicate that many Americans have had to sell possessions and forgo necessities to simply keep something of a roof over their head in this, the throaty last gasps of whatever you want to call this dystopian economy. An increase of 18% is a mark of shame that is being all too normalized in the US. In fact, it's a necessary aspect to ensure compliance in the vast

sea of workers. With eroding social ties as well, there is an inability to keep many afloat. People are struggling in the water to such an extent, they can't help the others around them drowning, so the help from traditional sources just really isn't there. The cost of producing billionaires seems to be the flesh and safety of US citizens.

The government is certainly not looking at this situation as the distinct and shameful catastrophe that it is. Major elections focus on the increase in the stock market of the previous year, but I have yet to hear any questions in a debate in regard to issues like a growing population of homeless individuals. It is as if those statistics simply have no meaning, when in fact, they hold all the meaning if a society deserves to continue in its present state.

There has been a successful elimination of practically all public areas and a cruel criminality has been assigned to simply not having a place to be. We have moved from Art Deco, Craftsman and other design schools to that of Hostile Architecture, producing places of worship for commerce and the wheels of profit. In this system, a bench can no longer be a bench as it might afford one a place to sleep. It might have poured "decorative" blocks centered in the middle of it or even be "a leaning bench" to prevent even momentary comfort to the unfortunate and exhausted. This is all the more ironic in this season with many, especially of the reactionary right persuasion, putting out manger scenes in their yard without a hint of self-awareness. Those bright white figures around a newborn baby from an area of the world suffering violence they currently also turn a blind eye to. That baby wouldn't last long in that region of the world today. I'm thinking we'd see his bloody torso as we scroll on social media, that heavy feeling that has become all too common, seeing the same atrocity on a never-ending loop, feeling powerless and angry without a clear way to intervene. But it's all about fantasy and not considering those currently in need, that Northern European baby surrounded by donkeys and camels in the straw. It serves those in power to keep the populace in a state of cognitive disconnect.

In the setting of the above, that of the 18% increase, we have a year that saw one Elon Musk see his wealth almost double. He's now in ½ trillion territory with Jeff Bezos in the ¼ trillion club. If you are like me, you need context, inequality.org puts it this way: work every year of your life at a rate of 75,000 dollars and without taxes, you too can be a billionaire (by that I mean have \$1 billion) in around 13,000 years. And that's just to get to 1 billion. How ludicrous that we've allowed ourselves to arrive at this point? A handful of socially inept men without empathy or decency have been handed the power that goes along with such wealth. Of course, when you hit a certain amount, it's self-propagating. Nobody dares stop you and the nation's laws all become red carpets for your feet. In a country with most individuals

scared of becoming part of that 18%, they aren't organizing effectively to stop such egregious hoarding. And this, as they say, is a feature, not a bug.

The initial reasons given for the government to stay out of the "charity" business was that our nation has private organizations that can take on the task. Obviously this was a way to disregard one of the basic requirements of a functioning society, that of providing for the welfare of its citizens. This neglect has been required in order to continue feathering the nests of birds like Musk. In my area, the local shelter will not even allow those who show up from out of state to get a bed immediately. They have a waiting period that those individuals must sleep outside until they've been homeless "in the right region" for a couple of weeks. Now, if someone shows up and lies, saying they have been homeless in the "right region" –well, that's good. This is just a hardship on someone down on their luck who shows up and is honest. And, of course, any backtalk about the religion that is required to get a warm bed will get you banned at the shelter as well. The only exception being extreme cold (because don't you know 24 degrees is dangerous, but 25 degrees is not) and even then, they open warming stations that you can sit in but not have a bed. How long would most of us be able to handle that life without becoming suicidal? I know these details due to some time spent doing Case Management out of an ER so I'm not pulling this stuff out of my ass. I'm sure similar situations exist in other locales.

When people want to think there are great options out there for those without shelter, they simply don't know the reality of the situation. Not to mention, either before or after their time on the street, many of these people start to rely on substance abuse to get through the day (and night). Can you blame them? Lots of individuals in safe, warm homes do the same. But this puts them on ban lists, of course, and really, that's about the end of a possible return to what we would consider a normal life—barring miracles, that is, and for them to reinsert into society. Places like Finland that provide no-questions-asked safe housing have unbelievable success rates in helping their citizens get back on their feet. But again, most likely they want those individuals to become healthy and safe. In America, it seems we need walking advertisements to remind you that if you leave that horrendous job if you dare try to do things like unionize, this very well could be what awaits you. All while government largesse is there, it's just for the billionaire hoarder class, not the vast swath of humanity that truly makes up the nation.

It was evident how little we are worth to them in comparison to the wealthy when we saw the manpower devoted to finding the CEO shooter in New York. Indigenous women vanish, veterans commit suicide, cops have a shoot-first policy—all of that is okay and part of the

recipe, but let one wealthy individual come to an end like that CEO, and the police suddenly take notice. It's not hard to see that modern-day policing has its roots in slavery patrols.

I'm sure I am describing what you all know to be true, and thankfully, the awareness of these truths is spreading far and wide. This as the government overreaches in its control while relinquishing any social contract to its citizens. We simply cannot handle more years of 18% increases in homelessness or any other type of general misery indicator. This is how a society fails and on a path like this, it deserves to fail. Let something better flourish that works for more than just a handful of greedy, maladjusted hoarders.

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Kathleen Wallace writes out of the US Midwest. Her writing is collected on her [Substack page](#).