
TODAY'S ISSUES

The Other Side: Homelessness in America



Homeless person reads newspaper to past time, October 2016. cherwell.org

Homelessness is still a huge problem in our society today. But how serious is being homeless? Imagine if you had to beg for money or food every day to survive. People pass by without even acknowledging you, saying a few words of encouragement or drop a can of beans. Most people don't realize the other side of homelessness in America. Most homeless people are workers just like you and me, who work office jobs by day, and live in shelters by night (Homeless Advice para 7-9). Our perceptions of the homeless community are people on the streets asking for money, otherwise known as panhandlers (Homeless Advice para. 16-18). Our perceptions, of course, are only what we see, not what we don't see.

What we don't see is that homeless shelters and temporary housing help about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the homeless community in the United States (The Week Staff para. 3). These are families and individuals, in which more than 75% of them don't have enough money to pay for a place (The Week Staff para. 3). These families look for work, but many adults struggle to find jobs, depending on the situation. When applying for jobs, they have a hard time getting accepted. Most times, employers see that there's a large gap between their last job and now (Homeless Advice para. 4). It makes them look "irresponsible" or "less dependent" (Homeless Advice para 4).

After searching around the web, found multiple options about homelessness and people’s views about the topic. The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) took opinions from the youth in the local area before and after a course over homelessness. A common theme arose beforehand; they either were lazy human beings being addicted to alcohol or drugs, or were filthy, dirty people that slept on streets (Youth Voice). After the course, most people felt sympathetic and wanted to help out those people in need (Youth Voice).

These responses remind me of multiple characters in books and in films. Two pieces of literature in particular, the book *Of Mice and Men* and the film *Hotel Rwanda*. In *Of Mice and Men*, the main character, George, views a mentally-retarded farmhand named Lenny in a hastily manner calling him “a crazy bastard” and “like a baby” (Steinbeck 4, 9). This shows a direct connection between the perceptions of George towards Lenny and the youth of Ohio towards homeless people at first. George also helps out Lenny by living with him, and helping him keep his job by saying to the boss, “...he’s sure a hell of a good worker. Strong as a bull,” (Steinbeck 23).



The homelessness counter rises. Justin Sullivan/Getty Images



People want change. politicmadepublic.com

Paul, however, views people different in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. Paul is trying to save people from the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda, after Hutu people blamed Tutsi rebels for assassinating the Rwanda President, which was part of the Hutu tribe (*Hotel Rwanda*). The Hutu people, which were enemies of the inferior Tutsi tribe, called the Tutsi tribe “cockroaches” and “tall trees” (*Hotel Rwanda*). I could tell that the youth of Ohio, at least, had views like those similar to the Hutu people because society around them influenced them to all believe in something that wasn’t morally right. I also saw how Paul tried to help the inferior Tutsi tribe by inside the Hôtel des Mille Collines (*Hotel Rwanda*). After looking through both sources, I could see how the youth of Ohio after the course would act in a way similar to Paul in *Hotel Rwanda*. He did so because he knew about the people’s struggles, and knew their situation without using stereotypes from our

society. In a way, the Tutsi people are like homeless people in America. They're always looked down upon as worse than the normal person. Lenny is not a normal person though. He kills a farmhand's wife. This causes a mob to come and kill him. George eventually kills Lenny by the river with a revolver in the back of the head (Steinbeck 106). In a way, George was sort of like the Hutu people, and still killed the inferior people, which happened to be Lenny in the book *Of Mice and Men* and the film *Hotel Rwanda*.

Next time you see someone struggling on the streets, or you find out your co-worker doesn't have a home, consider helping them out in any way or shape possible. It could and would change their life around.

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