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From Prison to Homeless Shelter: Camp LaGuardia and the Political Economy of an Urban Infrastructure

Christian D. Siener
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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From Prison to Homeless Shelter
Camp LaGuardia and the Political Economy of an Urban Infrastructure

Christian D. Siener

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Earth and Environmental Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2018
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Camp LaGuardia and the Political Economy of an Urban Infrastructure

by

Christian D. Siener

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Earth and Environmental Sciences in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_________________________
Date

Ruth Wilson Gilmore
Chair of Examining Committee

_________________________
Date

Cindi Katz
Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:
Marianna Pavlovskaya
Monica Varsanyi

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

From Prison to Homeless Shelter
Camp LaGuardia and the Political Economy of an Urban Infrastructure

Christian D. Siener

Advisor: Ruth Wilson Gilmore

At this time of increasing housing insecurity, recent reforms in homeless shelter policy have attracted the attention of scholars and activists. This research sheds light on these changes by placing them in historical and political-geographic perspective, focusing on the role of homeless shelters in stabilizing social displacement by destabilizing solidarity. It demonstrates historical continuity between prisons and homeless shelters in New York City through a case study of conditions surrounding the transition of Camp LaGuardia, a prison that slowly transformed into the city’s largest, and longest lasting, homeless shelter. The case study is an empirical demonstration of some of the theoretical underpinnings of an increasingly punitive and regulatory state, its class, race, and gender dimensions, and its rhetorical classification of itself as diminishing, aspects of social structural change that Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as built on prison foundations. The research argues from a position and program of abolition.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

In its last fiscal year New York City moved more than the entire population of Albany, the capital of New York State and its sixth largest city, through institutions known as homeless shelters.\(^1\) This enormous logistical endeavor required massive amounts of money and labor. This dissertation examines how this system came to be through an analysis of its history and political geography. The institution at the center of the analysis is Camp LaGuardia, formerly New York City’s largest homeless shelter until its closure in 2007, and an institution critical to the transformation of its administrative practices with regard to poverty and displacement. I juxtapose the system for managing homelessness that New York City built around this place with its contemporary homeless shelter system. It is a study in political and economic change through the evolution of one of New York City’s enduring institutions, and that institution's role in fashioning social understandings foundational to the rollout of one of the city's most important contemporary infrastructures.

What is it about its material infrastructure that can give insight into homelessness as displacement? A primary contradiction of homeless shelters is that they individualize and at the same time promote reintegration. They are supposed to be institutions that will restore those left out of a particular social formation, but in so doing, they draw on an ideology of refuge to promote social differentiation. From this angle, this thesis seeks to describe how material infrastructure impresses ideology and how social difference and exclusion have been regularized contemporarily. While homeless shelters are frequently understood as charitable exceptions to hostile social and economic processes, I demonstrate how they are material objects of a structure

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of feeling, developed within the shifting strictures of globalization, because they distill, make coherent, and legitimate social and economic processes in a changing political economy. Refuge is therefore at the core of what homeless shelters are meant to provide, and is simultaneously an idea that exposes their central contradiction. How is it that these contradictory state institutions have become a primary means of addressing displacement in New York City over the past 40 years? While Williams’ original conception of a structure of feeling was affective and emergent, a temporal principle, this investigation explores this question from a geographic perspective. My method is thus to view shelters in the “social present,” by bringing to light their contradictions and their emergence as political tools of the state.

I envision the production of homelessness by the state institutions designed to manage it as a partitioning process akin to the mass incarceration characterizing the carceral state: “a new kind of state—an anti-state state—that is being built on prison foundations.” The appearance and expanded use of homeless shelters is concomitant with the rise in prisons across New York since the early-1980s. Yet while alienation in prison had a longer precedent as an aspect of state power, the spreading out of a system composed of relatively new institutions was accompanied by confusion as to their purpose and necessity, observable in an analysis of their initial rollout, the narrative in the following chapter. This study demonstrates further, historical continuity with a case study of conditions surrounding the transition of Camp LaGuardia, a prison that slowly transformed into a homeless shelter. Through the 1990s, while homeless shelters represented both innovation and expansion as they crystallized an emergent neoliberalism’s urban structure of feeling, they also drew on a long, if changing, history. The continuity of the institution at

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Camp LaGuardia allows insight into the changing ideology surrounding its specific functions, given particular social and political conditions. These changes account for transformations that accompanied the management of segments of the region’s relative surplus population. Homeless shelters, therefore, as demonstrated by their historical appearance in New York City, are a shapeshifting auxiliary of the carceral state. They respond to a particular narrative of crisis, stretched over space and time. I explore the ongoing levels of interaction and contestation from within this institution to understand one of the ways the changing prison system has remained “an appendage of the capitalist state—as an instrument for class, racial and national oppression.”

Conceptually, I focus on the emergence of two productions of space in the state management of New York City’s regional homeless populations, both of which had their genesis in extended periods of social and economic crisis. Chapter two explores how the spatial arrangement of contemporary homeless shelters came to be. Their main purpose has been to circulate individuals and families, most of whom are people of color, through urban space to maintain flexibility for investment in land. Rehabilitation of shelter residents through work training programs, and the concomitant focus on self-discipline, has become the primary underlying reason for their necessity. The social reintegration of shelter residents by means of entry-level service employment largely provides the institutional justification. Shelters “train” workers, therefore, for jobs that do not pay a livable wage. While chapter two outlines major contradictions in contemporary homeless policy by describing the emergence of the contemporary spatial fix for the problem of homelessness, constructed since the early 1980s, the

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5 Angela Y. Davis and Bettina Aptheker, “Preface,” in If They Come in the Morning...Voices of Resistance, ed. Angela Y. Davis (New York: Verso, 2016), xiv.
following chapters flash back to explore the emergence of a system for managing homeless men that cohered around Camp LaGuardia during the 1930s. Evolving out of a women’s prison built in the early 1920s in upstate Orange County, New York as a part of Progressive Era prison reform (chapter three), Camp LaGuardia later became a labor camp for homeless men. Chapter four follows this trajectory by examining the evolution of state-run labor camps in New York, the ideology of which was eventually institutionalized in New York City’s first modern homeless shelter in order to temper radical relief politics emerging on the left during the Great Depression. Camp LaGuardia, the initial Depression-Era effort and the model for nationwide New Deal work camps, was owned by New York City and operated in conjunction with the Works Progress Administration. In this role, the institution, centerpiece of the shelter and rehabilitation programs of Fiorello LaGuardia’s reformed Welfare Department, extracted white men from urban space in order to immobilize them and integrate them into rural, farming-based communities (chapters five and six). While Camp LaGuardia’s intent was to train men as single-wage breadwinners, the goal of today’s shelters is to prepare people for flexible part-time work as part of multiwage households. Shelters in both periods are primary examples of historical and institutional “traps,” the “exclusionary practices” which are part of the state’s efforts to delineate the possibilities of social reproduction.\footnote{Clyde Woods, “Les Misérables of New Orleans: Trap Economics and the Asset Stripping Blues, Part 1,” \textit{American Quarterly} 61, no. 3 (2009): 769–96.}

In his history outlining the various sectors of the working class targeted for discipline by the state, Peter Linebaugh uses biographies of men condemned to hang in London as an entry point to examine crucial moments in the transformation of the state’s regulation of labor practices. In his reading, almshouses were institutions that abetted the criminalization of certain
previously customary activities, being the charitable, reform arm of the punitive state.\(^7\)

Workhouses brought together and centralized elite control over ideologies and work processes in the transition from decentralized modes of production, such as handicraft and putting out.

Similarly, homeless shelters should be seen in the context of the transition to low wage service employment and the naturalization of working class displacement as a result of increased investment in urban land. In the structural adjustment of New York City over the past 40 years, the local state has guaranteed by law one aspect of social reproduction—a place to sleep—in a new disciplinary and reformatory order. This emergent shelter system in New York City, beginning in the early 1980s, both drew on and reconfigured ideologies long present in the political economy of the state’s management of crisis, including notions about work as a rehabilitative aspect of state institutions. Writing about the first wave of gentrification in the late-1980s, Neil Smith wrote, “The effort to recolonize the city involves systematic eviction. In its various plans and task force reports for gentrifying what remains of the inner city, New York City government has never proposed a plan for relocating evictees.”\(^8\) Smith's analysis makes clear the temporal as well as spatial unpredictability and unevenness of gentrification, even as it has become systemic. This dissertation argues that the shelter system became just that plan for the management of dislocation, and therefore, that it currently acts as a buffer against fluctuations in a volatile real estate market. While social dislocation was once managed by criminalizing vagrancy, the homeless shelter now takes on much of that function.

The dissertation thus examines the continuities and ruptures between homeless shelters and prisons, both of which have historically been institutions intending to effect individualized

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behavior modification. Rather than seeing these institutions as disconnected, I position them in their historical relationship: the invention of the homeless shelter out of prison restructuring through its earliest example in New York City. I understand this relationship not only through the overlap of people who spend time in each place, but also through the ideological configurations of what the institutions are meant to do. This ideology grew historically out of material conditions, as the state evolved to address crises of reproduction. As parallel institutions, prisons and homeless shelters have each informed the development of the other, given state engagement with contradictions stemming from social displacement, as it determines which people are eligible for reform and which are targeted for punishment—good versus evil, redeemable versus hopeless, first timer versus recidivist, deserving versus undeserving—a process reflected in the conflicting functions of its superintendent institutions as both punitive and rehabilitative. Linking homeless shelters to the carceral state in this way is meant to highlight the limits of reform and to advance a position of abolition, especially since homeless shelters in New York resulted from prison reform.

One of the main programmatic aspects that demonstrates continuity between the institutions of prison and shelter has been the prescription of work as rehabilitation, a program which has remained virtually unchanged since the earliest houses of correction in Europe, even as it has migrated into homeless shelters. Labor is one of the most important factors legitimating homeless shelters, much as it did formerly in prisons. As the primary function of prisons has become incapacitation, their work aspects did not go away, and much of the ideology

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9 Nino Rodriguez and Brenner Brown, “Preventing Homelessness Among People Leaving Prison” (Vera Institute of Justice, December 2003).
surrounding work as definitively rehabilitative has been taken up in the programs of contemporary homeless shelters. As the city’s Department of Homeless Services, which runs “the most sophisticated and comprehensive [shelter system] in the nation,” puts it, with regard to its singles shelters, “Now, more than ever, employment-focused programs and work supports remain a cornerstone of DHS’ efforts to help clients move out of shelter and into permanent housing.” But this type of labor has historically created grounds for further contradiction, notably in the “competition” that work programs under state control pose to free labor.\textsuperscript{13}

This thesis remains focused on the changing geographies of coercion and consent. As auxiliaries to the prison system, homeless shelters and similar institutions have historically helped the state manage contradiction. In its efforts to “individualize disorder,”\textsuperscript{14} the state has given spatial expression to punishment and rehabilitation as extraction and circulation. There are therefore spatial contradictions, which map onto ideological ones. This tension once existed within the prison system itself, expressed in the transformation of the ideology surrounding “labor.” While once meant to be punitive, the labor done by inmates subsequently came to be understood as rehabilitative, a process, which chapter three takes up, in which gender was central. As the homeless shelter has now taken on much of the prison’s rehabilitative agenda, its intended function appears to be reintegration. Addressing flexibly both sides of this contradiction, the state has taken on the role of managing alienation, given historically specific conditions. Camp LaGuardia upsets the neat clarity of these spatial processes, demonstrating overlap in its


\textsuperscript{13} Glen A. Gildemeister, “Prison Labor and Convict Competition with Free Workers in Industrializing America, 1840-1890” (PhD Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1977).

\textsuperscript{14} Feldman, quoted in Gilmore, \textit{Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California}, 235.
transitional functions and providing insight into the contradiction that alienation in homeless shelters has been both extraction and circulation.

Camp LaGuardia, over the course of its history, demonstrates the gendered and raced aspects of the state’s process of managing the alienation of working class displacement, at specific historical moments of changes in the structure of capitalism. This process of the changing function of labor in punishment and rehabilitation in New York State unfolded in the institution that became Camp LaGuardia (chapter four), and subsequently has provided currency and balance for the expansion of completely new areas of state practice, making the historical appearance of the homeless shelter possible (chapter two). Welfare Department officials imagined much of the current prison geography of New York State during the depression. The difference was that they envisioned it with camps for homeless men modeled on Camp LaGuardia (chapters five and six).  

I have chosen to focus on various artistic and creative aspects of men living in shelter at different historical moments to highlight these institutional contradictions, and the ways in which shelter residents came to terms with them. In each section of the thesis, I have drawn attention to music produced by people living in shelters, and what it means for an understanding of unfolding, systemic programs and the social relationships formed in them. This decision was motivated by

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15 Contemporary budget expenditures provide a window onto the different trajectories of the institutional functions in terms of coercion and consent with regard to the labor which makes them go. A majority of New York City’s Department of Homeless Services budget, 91%, is taken up by “other than personnel services.” In contrast, of its budget for Corrections, 87% is reserved for personnel. (See "The City of New York Financial Plan, Fiscal Years 2018-2022." (Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget, February 2018), http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/feb18-fp.pdf.) This shows a bifurcation in the strategies for managing social displacement into a decentralized homeless shelter system that minimizes labor costs and prioritizes consent and a porous boundary between the efforts at coercion and consent. This boundary shifts as the composition of the institutional arrangement is overdetermined by historical, political, and geographic conditions. In other words, there is not one specific, universal “function” for carceral institutions. They are flexible institutions that manage alienation in a changing political economy by naturalizing displacement. In this context they demonstrate continuity as well as transformation in their development as "catch all solutions to social problems" (Gilmore 2007). The following chapters examine some of these changing relationships at specific historical and political moments.
the desire to understand the consciousness of people experiencing extended dislocations, a desire sparked by musicians playing the blues on improvised instruments on a subway platform. This work shows that their stances have been sometimes conciliatory, sometimes oppositional, but always ambivalent, conflicted, and fraught. This fact allows a vision of state power that is both potent and calculating, but also malleable and inconstant. It shows a distinction between what these institutions are designed to do and how they are understood and used by people living in them. For a program of abolition, my hope is that coming to terms with this reality leaves open the possibility of an alternative, revolutionary future. This means noting state failures as well as the successful establishment of policy. I base much of chapter six, for example, on a reconstruction of an administrative vision of the future that never came into being, in order to describe a world of social relations in which certain ideas about it resonated. As long as homeless shelters are understood to be naturally the only response to widespread urban poverty and dislocation, we will continue to be stuck in the same kind of thinking that has characterized general political action toward their eradication.

Accordingly, I have been interested in how the contradictions outlined above play out in everyday life, and the project examines power in its daily, mundane aspects. This research attempts an ethnographic standpoint to narrate everyday aspects of power in institutionalized settings. I am interested in how meanings and values are produced in everyday life, and how experiences are interpreted given specific, historically-produced ideological tools. While homeless shelters have become a primary means of addressing and managing displacement, they have been molded and used strategically by people living in them. Shelters readily depict a limited picture of what displacement is and how it came to be, a tapered frame that has been built by disempowering shelter residents. My method is a critique of this exclusive understanding of
the production of space by taking into consideration the views those experiencing displacement and their actions given those constraints. It rejects a view of shelter residents as insular, keeping them centered within ongoing mainstream relationships that have produced contemporary cities. It places these views and actions in a fuller range of relationships acting during crisis in order to highlight the structural limitations placed on groups of actors. It attempts an analysis that recognizes historical space for the displaced, and their capacity in the face of precarious circumstances and limited options.

Thus, while infrastructure stamps ideology, that does not mean that its program is accepted in full. I examine the music produced by men in shelter programs at each point as a window onto wider processes and policies aiming to establish normative relationships of power and to highlight various forms of resistance and solidarity within shelters. The music produced by people living in today's shelters is an example of Clyde Woods’ blues epistemologies.\textsuperscript{16} I look at the relationship of the members of seminal hip-hop group Boogie Down Productions, who, though initially antagonistic to one another, began making music together in a makeshift homeless shelter housed in a converted armory. Their music is a lens that brings everyday experiences of shelter into relief as an already-present and widespread repudiation of policy, including the contemporary criminalization of homelessness and the hierarchical organization of relationships within shelters.\textsuperscript{17} In contrast, Camp LaGuardia's traveling minstrel band, performing in blackface and based in the city’s original homeless program, formed an


ideological core which cohered consent among the men there for their rehabilitation and prepared the ground for their subsequent integration into the local community. An idealized conception of work anchored this program, a conception that underpins policy to this day.

These histories, understood within a context of daily life, uncover both acceptance of, as well as counter-narratives in opposition to, state practice and are situated within the development of the city’s welfare policy as a whole. What do these creative practices have in common, and what about them are drastically different? Each is a way of addressing displacement and linked to an understanding of what the function of shelter is. Individuals and groups necessarily interacted with and addressed these primary understandings in a variety of ways. Boogie Down Productions' existence was based on a rejection of the hierarchies of labor and custody that make homeless shelters go, hierarchies that continue to be the source of critique by contemporary shelter residents, as outlined to me in conversations that form the basis of chapter two. The music program at Camp LaGuardia, by contrast, bolstered existing hierarchies present in New York City's relief program, and were a centripetal, motivational force in its rehabilitation program. While Boogie Down Productions forged relationships that bucked the hierarchy within shelters, the theater program at Camp LaGuardia upheld hierarchies that supported the function of homeless shelters as institutions.

Both contemporary shelters as well as Camp LaGuardia represent forms of decentralization, a fact that suggests their suitability for administrative control of social disintegration and discontent. But to say that shelters are merely individualizing would be too simplistic. They differentiate at the same time that they make coherent (chapters 2 and 5). In the early days of its articulation of the problem of homelessness, New York City developed a
program at Camp LaGuardia where men would mix their labor with the land, a process that was supposed to be rehabilitative in itself. Men who had been out of work and normalized the habits of “vagabonds” would regain their vitality through a connection with their origins, reawakened in them by working in the soil. The city naturalized this autochthonic program with an analogy of cultivation, in a press release in 1935, “Eight hundred homeless men, wrecked by the economic debacle of the past stormy years, have been rescued from the sidewalks of New York and transplanted to Camp LaGuardia where they have become tillers of the soil.”

In contrast, as homelessness has increasingly been de-linked from employment status in the contemporary political economy, many people rely on the shelter system to supplement poor wages that do not sufficiently pay for housing and other necessities. The use of homeless shelters is no longer pegged to unemployment. As regional unemployment decreases, use of shelters remains constant or increases. With New York City’s unemployment at its lowest rate since 1983, the number of people living in shelter is at its highest. During the Depression, administrators viewed Camp LaGuardia as a temporary holding place until the “business cycle” rebounded and absorbed those on the welfare rolls. Today, homelessness is understood to be a generally ongoing problem, unhinged from economic crisis, a permanent aspect of contemporary political economy. Its management consists of the logistics of moving people through a system required to provide them with the material benefit of having a roof under which to sleep.


19 For language showing this tendency during the Bloomberg Administration see Bloomberg Administration Press Office, “Press Release: Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Homeless Services Commissioner Diamond Open the City’s New Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing Center in the Bronx After Eight Years of Development,” May 11, 2011.
Figure 1.1 New York City Unemployment Rate Versus Total Number Living in Shelter, 1983-2018

Source Data: New York City Coalition for the Homeless, New York State Department of Labor.

Total living in shelter represents an average of the “point in time” number. The number of people who lived in a homeless shelter during any given year is much higher.

In these ways, shelters have attempted to resolve various historical contradictions as they both maintain and reconfigure social relations among people. This means that they provide narratives that attempt to obscure those contradictions, and are designed to maintain the power of management, the power to move people, and the power to maintain people as moveable.

Homeless shelters are reactionary institutions of counterrevolution, a process that is hidden by focusing on material conditions. Contemporary shelters have attempted to reduce the solution to homelessness to material conditions, turning problems of social relations into material problems—lack of a home, for example, or lack of work—a simplification that requires the
depoliticization of homelessness. This dissertation attempts the opposite. The chapters that follow describe a historic trajectory in New York City to demonstrate the contradictory stories homeless shelters tell about themselves.

At this time of increasing housing insecurity, recent reforms in homeless shelter policy have attracted the attention of scholars and activists. This research sheds light on these changes by placing them in historical and political-geographic perspective. It focuses on the role of homeless shelters in stabilizing social displacement by destabilizing solidarity. The case study is an empirical demonstration of some of the theoretical underpinnings of an increasingly punitive and regulatory state, its class, race, and gender dimensions, and its rhetorical classification of itself as diminishing, aspects of social structural change that Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as built on prison foundations.

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Chapter 2
Homeless Shelters and the Blues

Figure 2.1 Franklin Avenue Homeless Shelter in 2018.  

[Homelessness] pretty much gave me a straight-ahead look at reality, and it made me say, “Damn, all this is goin’ on out here and nobody got nuthin’ to say to nobody?” So I just started talkin’.  

The dynamic factor is the change in the way this objective process [crisis] is collectively understood and resisted. Thus, the social content and political meaning of “worklessness” is being thoroughly transformed from inside.  

If not for the blues, many individual tragedies affecting black working-class communities might never have been recast as social, collective adversities.  

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24 Angela Y. Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 111.
Introduction

In 1985, Scott Sterling, a social worker at the Franklin Avenue Men’s Shelter in the Bronx, got in an argument with Chris Parker, a resident of the shelter.\footnote{Brian Coleman, *Check the Technique* (New York: Villard Books, 2007).} The encounter, initially over the apparently innocuous procedure for dispersing subway tokens, did not go well because each man recognized in the other a specific role that had been designated for him by the state, one an employee and the other homeless. As a journalist subsequently recounted:

> The resident called Scott a “house Negro, one paycheck away from homelessness.” Scott countered that the homeless man was “obviously lazy, otherwise he’d have a job.” Security was called to separate the two before they came to blows, and the resident left the shelter.\footnote{Noah Callahan-Bever, “R.I.P. Scott La Rock: Remembering the BDP Legend 23 Years Later,” *XXL Magazine*, September 2002, https://goo.gl/gQfPae.}

It is perhaps not difficult to imagine how bureaucratic and hierarchical organization within homeless shelters reproduces this type of antagonistic and surveilled relationship on a daily basis. Yet in the weeks following the altercation, the men found common ground. Little more than a year later, they had produced *Criminal Minded*, the first studio album of DJ Scott La Rock and MC KRS-One’s newly-minted rap duo Boogie Down Productions.\footnote{Callahan-Bever.} It may not be surprising, further, that one of the most influential and intentionally political hip-hop groups to emerge in the mid-1980s had its radical origins in the midst of the creation of New York City’s homeless shelter system. Mainstream classification of *Criminal Minded* as the first album in the “gangsta” or “hard core” rap genre smoothes over many of the criticisms that it waged of an emergent neoliberal regime and the attendant carceral state.\footnote{I follow Gilmore’s definition of the carceral state: “a new kind of state—an anti-state state—that is being built on prison foundations.” Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*.} Rapping in a signature confrontational and narrative style, which upset liberal sensibilities and rejected the paternalism of shelter life, KRS-One’s lyrics applied and extended a system of critique in the Black radical
and Black Nationalist tradition.\textsuperscript{29} As Jeff Chang, biographer of the “hip-hop generation,” put it, along with Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions from the outset presented itself as a “return of the black radical.”\textsuperscript{30} Later, KRS would formulate himself as the “Teacher” within hip-hop, take on an image that directly channeled Malcolm X, and wage critiques of the police and their historical link to slave patrols,\textsuperscript{31} intergenerational and institutionalized racism, the crack epidemic, and the drug industry. In this sense, his career follows the trajectory of hip-hop itself as it “jumped scale,”\textsuperscript{32} extending from its origins in the South Bronx into a global movement.

The quotes that begin this piece, therefore, suggest an example of a “blues tradition of investigation and interpretation” that is continually reformatted to “[organize] communities of consciousness”\textsuperscript{33} amid the perforated “social ideology” of racial capitalism.\textsuperscript{34}

This chapter describes the shifts in consciousness that accompanied changing material, ideological, and geographical conditions within the local state as it attempted to manage an expansive regional relative surplus population beginning in the 1980s. In the process, it seeks to

\textsuperscript{29} My use of hip-hop as a window into a critical consciousness of New York City’s shelter system is not intended to romanticize all aspects of hip-hop music, which itself is always contested (for example: Walter Dawkins, “Is Hip Hop Dead?,” Davey D’s Hip Hop Corner: Where Hip Hop and Politics Meet (blog), n.d., http://www.daveyd.com/commentaryishiphopdead.html), or even all politically-oriented hip-hop music, but to highlight the unsettled nature of state-institutional roles and to recognize an existing archive and system of critique. For the gendered political posturing of rap music in its second generation, see Cherise Cheney, Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism (New York: NYU Press, 2005). Cheney summarizes this aspect of her argument as follows: “Rap nationalists considered it their duty to both inspire and cultivate a racial consciousness among young black folk, to promote a sense of race pride constantly put in jeopardy by white cultural hegemony in mass media, popular culture, and public educational systems. They were, in fact, ‘standing in for the state.’ Despite their limitations, rap nationalists provided a counterideology to white supremacy, a system of knowledge that was both race and class conscious.” (Pages 95-96).


examine the following key questions in historical context: How can we understand the “relationship between classes constituted in the economic relations of production and the forms in which they appear as political forces in the theater of political class struggle?”35 What is the relationship between experience and consciousness? What is the structural relationship between the waged and the wageless poor? In doing so, I hope to shed some light on various contradictions in the state’s role in the management of surplus labor.

Structures of Feeling

Raymond Williams defines a structure of feeling as an emergent, affective social formation, prior to being “built into institutions and social formations.”36 It provides a method of analysis that avoids “the reduction of the social to fixed forms” as well as the “mistake…[of] taking terms of analysis as terms of substance.”37 In this case, I use the notion of structure of feeling to bring out the polyvocality of the social forces acting and understanding during intense moments of social and institutional change. While Williams’ original conception of a structure of feeling was affective and emergent, Cedric Robinson showed how film cycled counterfeit histories to consolidate consent for racial regimes in the present. The linear narrative techniques of mainstream media structurally reinforced this process because they presented a template for arranging temporal strands of thought. Ideological manipulation of time was therefore paramount. In Robinson’s understanding, these “forgeries of memory and meaning” were both assembled and resisted through artistic creation: the dominant and subversive techniques of filmmaking during the early days of film. Films of the “dominant movie picture industry”38 entrained a

35 Hall et al., Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order, 365. See in particular the section called “Black Crime, Black Proletariat” in Chapter 10, pages 362-381.
36 Williams, Marxism and Literature, 132.
37 Williams, 129.
structure of thought with respect to history and culture through a linear narrative that was presumably an exhaustive representation of reality, a social perspective that prioritized the needs and desires of individuals, and a syntax that was terminal (i.e. happy or sad endings). This was in contrast to the “polyvocality” of many Black radical independent filmmakers, such as Oscar Micheaux, or the montage of Sergei Eisenstein. The mainstream Hollywood films were “closed texts,” while Micheaux's films, for example, drew on an open, polyvocal jazz template.39

These ideas about temporal patterns, history, and structure can be thought of in terms of a compositional technique called hemiola. Hemiola is an interruption in the underlying pulse of a piece of music in order to reinforce stability and continuity. Designed to jar the listener by introducing a temporal juxtaposition, the composer temporarily shifts the feeling of the music while maintaining the overall rhythmic structure. Where the music was once felt in three, it is now felt briefly in two. The shift in feeling relies on the listener's internalization of one rhythm, simultaneously felt as the rhythm shifts but remains structurally identical. While the structure is obscured, or complicated, for a moment, it usually returns momentarily. Moreover, a hemiola occurs precisely at the moment that the pattern is reproduced. Notes are tied across a bar line so that the downbeat is hidden or ambiguous. It is jarring because it appears to be different precisely because both tempos are experienced simultaneously before the structure, reinforced through the contrast, returns.

Like Robinson, I am interested in the relationship between artistic and creative production and changes within racial capitalism. How can we think of spatial templates in the same way? The following focuses on both the temporality and the spatiality of the onset of

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39 Robinson, Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII.
neoliberalism. KRS and Scott met at a time of great transition in the local state’s reorganization
to address and contain crisis, which appeared in the public consciousness as a moral panic over
“homelessness.” It was therefore also understood by elected officials as a political crisis,
especially since the city and the state faced pressure about their early methods of co-management:
housing families in welfare hotels and single adults in state armories. Yet the moral panic
surrounding homelessness, particularly in sensationalized media accounts, contrasts the
mundanity of building a state infrastructure around it. Thus, this chapter examines the process of
institutionalizing homelessness as a permanent feature of the region’s political economy and the
naturalization of shelters as the singular response to the “homeless crisis.”

While homeless shelters are frequently understood as charitable exceptions to hostile
social and economic processes, I seek to demonstrate how they distill, make coherent, and
legitimate these processes because they are material objects of a “structure of feeling” within a
dramatically shifting political economy. In the opening quote, KRS described his coming to
political consciousness and artistic activism through the mundanity of violence inflicted in
homeless shelters and in the context of extreme alienation. While in his music he approached
social problems as structural, and therefore challenged the idea of homelessness as a static,
individualized category, his experience as homeless and in the shelter, including presumably his
relationships with LaRock and the other residents, catalyzed his critical voice. Homeless shelters

41 While I am focused here on the local aspects of the panic and its long-term effects, the conditions were nationwide. Similarly, the efforts by the Cuomo administration in New York City described here often had a larger geographic scope, such as the use of armories as shelters across the state. Mario Cuomo to Larry Flood, January 24, 1984, Social Services-Homeless Shelters, Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives.
were designed to incapacitate, depoliticize, and alienate those dispossessed in the ongoing crisis. Part of this incapacitation was to “individualize disorder”\textsuperscript{42} by attributing homelessness to individual deficiency, a process experienced by KRS and others as alienation. Instead of giving voice to homeless people as individuals, this chapter attempts to give those living in shelter a collective voice—one that is in clear opposition to the “reformist reforms” outlined in the following section. Recognition of this collective voice avoids reinforcing the prevailing ideologies and justifications for the shelter system as a whole as well as its programmatic goals of reform, charity, and improvement, and presents homeless shelters as “sites for the production of geographical knowledge.”\textsuperscript{43} Taken together, I believe that this voice is one of abolition: the view that homeless shelters themselves are a reformist reform.\textsuperscript{44} I hope to establish, like the reallocation of emphasis in temporal patterns, the spatial elements of structures of feeling as they pertain to homeless shelters as emergent institutions in New York City. The sections that follow demonstrate how various groups consciously understood crisis as it unfolded: administrators and elected officials, men living in the shelters, and people working in the shelters.

**Shelters Emergent: The Politics of Reformist Reform**

State restructuring was part of a regional plan to “respond to, and anticipate, the general processes of uneven development”\textsuperscript{45} in post-fiscal crisis New York City. The Franklin Avenue Men’s Shelter, where LaRock met KRS, was put into motion in 1984 as a key transitional

\textsuperscript{42} Feldman, quoted in Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, 235.


\textsuperscript{44} My use of the term “reformist reform” comes from Gilmore’s analysis of the “non-profit industrial complex.” In this case, it indicates a policy change according to principles and strategies that produced homelessness in the first place. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State,” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Boston: South End Press, 2007), 41–52.

\textsuperscript{45} Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World’: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 71.
element in this institutional restructuring. Housed in a repurposed armory at 1122 Franklin Avenue and 166th Street in the Bronx, the shelter continues to be used as a women’s intake point for the system as a whole.\footnote{Kostas Gounis, “The Domestication of Homelessness: The Politics of Space and Time in New York City Shelters” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1993), 126.} In 1979 New York State and New York City were mandated by law to provide shelter to anybody who needed it. This “right to shelter,” as it is colloquially known, was a result of the Callahan Consent Decree of the New York State Supreme Court.\footnote{Stephen Banks, current Commissioner of New York City’s Department of Homeless Services, was then the Director of the Legal Aid Society, which brought the suit against Governor Hugh Carey that resulted in the Consent Decree.} Written in 1979, but with precedent extending back to New York State’s 1938 Constitution,\footnote{Ian Frazier, “Hidden City,” The New Yorker, October 28, 2013.} the decree was a response to organized abandonment, capital flight, and the fiscal crisis of 1975, which left the South Bronx burning. By the early 1980s, Mario Cuomo, Governor of New York, and Ed Koch, the City’s Mayor, sought any vacant state or city institution for the purpose of accommodating the estimated “36,000 homeless people wandering the streets of New York City,” as a Deputy Administrator for the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) once described the crisis.\footnote{Robert Trobe, “Caring for the Homeless Men Nobody Wants in His Neighborhood,” The New York Times, June 9, 1981.}

The first round of shelter rollout, before 1986, was to attempt to repurpose large, abandoned structures such as schools, psychiatric centers, hospitals, Department of Defense fortresses, floating barges, Quonset huts, FEMA “surplus mobile homes”\footnote{William Eimicke to Constituent, April 4, 1983, Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives; State Senator Israel Ruiz, “Op-Ed: Surplus Mobile Homes for the Homeless,” New York Times, December 16, 1983, Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives.} and armories, as sleeping accommodation for homeless adults. Families were placed in welfare hotels. In the armory spaces, dormitory-style arrangements predominated, and the beds were in rows on the drill floor. Governor Cuomo was intimately involved in this policy’s design and its results. He
was urged by his “housing czar” William Eimicke to accept an invitation from the Coalition for the Homeless to tour the Fort Washington Armory shelter in 1983, which he did on October 27.\(^5^1\) The following winter, after the Kingsbridge Armory and two others were opened, armories provided nearly 40% of the sleeping quarters within the city limits for men without homes.\(^5^2\)

Yet it was unclear what these institutions were for. A press release at the opening of the three new armories as shelters required a “fact sheet” that explained what they did: “Each shelter provides three hot meals a day, beds, showers, delousing, clean clothing, medical services, mental health referrals and social services. They are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”\(^5^3\) As with prisons, the capture and immobilization of a segment of people by the state made them visible and understandable in a particular way: as homeless people. This was part of Mario Cuomo’s larger project—to renovate “government”\(^5^4\)—as he positioned himself in national and statewide electoral politics.\(^5^5\) Cuomo ended up building more prisons in New York than all previous Governors combined\(^5^6\) and set the course for the construction of the nation’s largest homeless shelter system. Subsequent efforts to define the institutional purpose of homeless

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\(^{5^1}\) William Eimicke to Mario Cuomo, October 27, 1983, Reel 166, Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives.

\(^{5^2}\) The official homeless population was then understood to be single adults and no families.

\(^{5^3}\) “Press Release” (City of New York, January 21, 1983), Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives. At this time, Camp LaGuardia still accounted for 21% of the spaces holding homeless men. The Fort Washington Armory—the City’s largest—was converted from a “sleep only” facility to a “full services” facility.

\(^{5^4}\) Press Releases for grants and opening homeless shelters consistently used this language. To take just two examples: “This grant provides a perfect example of government at its best.” “Government will be doing its best to deal with this issue.” “Press Release” (Executive Chamber, State of New York, November 22, 1983), Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives; “Press Release” (Office of the Mayor, City of New York, January 21, 1983), Social Services. Homeless Shelters. 1983., Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives.

\(^{5^5}\) “The need to develop and maintain a ‘responsible’ social order also has led to the creation of agencies and programs designed to control the surplus population politically and to fend off the tendency toward a legitimation crisis.” James O’Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (Transaction Publishers, 2002), 69.

\(^{5^6}\) Schlosser, “The Prison-Industrial Complex.”
shelters included implanting formalized work programs, so that residents would work for their placements there, receive job training, and contribute to building and programmatic operation.

“Not in my backyard,” or NIMBY, pressure affected how these emergent institutions were rolled out, an aspect of the process which added to their transitory nature. The Franklin Armory had been activated as a shelter after community residents protested the use of the bigger Kingsbridge Armory, because Kingsbridge was located in a busy commercial district. The Vice President of Associated Supermarkets, whose office and flagship store were across the street from Kingsbridge, wrote a panicked letter to Mario Cuomo in 1983, in which he advocated the relocation of the Kingsbridge shelter residents “to the south”:

The Kingsbridge Road area is a northern Bronx community that has witnessed changing demographics, but where a large percentage of the area’s historical communities of Irish and Jewish residents still live. Kingsbridge Road, itself, has been one of the busier commercial areas in the west Bronx containing dozens of various retail establishments. The neighborhood has organized to inhibit the blight of abandonment and destruction experienced to the south, with many government programs supporting their efforts. Now in one move, with the establishment of the men’s shelter, all these efforts are being sabotaged with a vengeance.57

He went on to distinguish contemporary homelessness from an idealized image of the rail-riding laborer: “These are not, by and large, friendly unemployed hobo types who cause no one harm.” The president of the Merchant’s Association had written a less-shrill letter the previous month that made similar arguments to James Krauskopf, Commissioner of New York City’s Human Resources Administration (HRA). He likewise attributed crime in the neighborhood, perceived to be on the rise, to the homeless, but presented no evidence of this claim. He even provided evidence to the contrary. The community had raised $200,000, plus a $200,000 match from the city, “to effect programs to bolster security and commercial

57 Morton Sloan to Mario Cuomo, August 24, 1983, Mario Cuomo Subject and Correspondence Files, 1983-1984. New York State Archives.
revitalization” in the area. These programs were in place prior to the armory’s opening as a shelter. 58

Almost immediately after he took office in 1983, the military also put pressure on Mario Cuomo with regard to the armories. Major General Vito Castellano of the New York State National Guard sent him a long memo in mid-1983 about the problems he saw with housing people in armories. Castellano worried that, though they were supposed to be a temporary solution, the armories were becoming part of HRA’s long-term plan, even though the National Guard was paying all the costs of their operation. He argued that many “Guardpersons” were leaving for other assignments as a result of the shared space with a homeless shelter, and that attendance at training events was decreasing. As the largest annual training was upcoming, it was crucial that the Fort Washington and Kingsbridge Armories be vacated by the HRA.

The city did relocate a portion of the shelter to Franklin Avenue, but the complete closure of the Kingsbridge Armory shelter was disputed. Lawyers for the Coalition for the Homeless, the most prevalent advocacy group in the city, won a temporary stay in the State Supreme Court in 1984. The Human Resources Administration, opposed to this ruling, argued that it could find vacancies in other shelters in the city for some of the men, but that the majority “would be sent to Camp LaGuardia in Chester, NY, 60 miles from the city.” 59 Kingsbridge remained open for a number of years even as Franklin opened.

KRS and Scott met in the Franklin shelter during this initial, transitional period, a time when its institutional aesthetic and purpose were ambiguous and temporary. The shelter in the

armory opened in July 1984, but it wasn’t until the following year that the City began the renovations which transformed the building functionally from an armory into a homeless shelter. Acknowledging that “the shelters opened [in 1983] had not been designed to house the homeless” the Koch administration allocated $13 million in early 1984 for the renovation of seven shelters, including Franklin Avenue, as well as the Bedford-Atlantic Armory in Brooklyn and the Fort Washington Armory in Washington Heights, all of which are still in use.\(^6\) The State simultaneously contracted out $6 million to non-profits across New York for the “construction or rehabilitation of housing for the State’s homeless population” as part of the second round of its Homeless Housing and Assistance Program. Nine of the non-profits were in New York City.\(^6\)

Centralized admission to the shelter system had been suspended, and so many of the men living at Franklin were from the surrounding neighborhood. As Kostas Gounis described, “Men displaced from housing in the deteriorating environment of the South Bronx could simply walk over to the shelter.”\(^6\) Gounis was part of a team that used the shelter as a basis for designing a program for men with “chronic mental disabilities,” and further describes the building before its renovations.

Sometimes in the summer when the weather was too hot, a huge garage gate through which National Guard vehicles used to enter the building was left open, and then one could see the beds from the street.\(^6\)

Originally, a portion of the staff at Kingsbridge was transferred to Franklin.\(^6\) Institutional Aides, an *ad hoc* employee position, were subsequently given uniforms to mark them as distinct

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\(^6\) Gounis, “The Domestification of Homelessness: The Politics of Space and Time in New York City Shelters.”

\(^6\) Gounis, 135.

\(^6\) This was the city’s normal policy in establishing homeless shelters on the fly. Describing one of the first court decisions in enforcing Callahan, SSEU Local 371’s newspaper *The Unionist* wrote: “To comply with the order, the
from the men who lived there, and thus felt empowered to move toward unionizing. Permanent office space eventually replaced the “prefabricated…building within a building” social services office. “These changes,” Gounis concludes, “reflected the realization that, for the foreseeable future, the shelter was here to stay.”\textsuperscript{65} By the end of 1988, according to its original agreement with the City, the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs completely vacated the building.\textsuperscript{66}

Gounis also described the “types” of men that lived in the shelter in the mid-1980s. The following is a description of the group with which Scott and KRS, organic intellectuals in their early 20’s, may have partly identified.

A fourth group was made up of young black men in their twenties who seemed to be highly mobile. As a shelter worker put it, “they are always on the move, going places, hustling, trying to get something for themselves.” Crack use was widespread within this group and a significant number of them had been in some kind of legal trouble, or still were. Jail and/or prison experience was common among them and their work history was either non-existent or highly sporadic and in “jobs” such as messengers or security guards.\textsuperscript{67}

Contrary to prevailing notions about people living there, almost one quarter of the residents of the shelter were employed, a higher number than the percentage of those working when they arrived.\textsuperscript{68} An additional segment of the shelter residents were “trainees” in the City’s

city opened up an abandoned school building in Brooklyn October 21 [1981]. Four hundred cots were set up, and roughly 10 Institutional Aides were transferred in, though not according to seniority provisions in the Union contract, reported Shelter Chapter Chairperson David Waite.” See “City Violates Shelter Ruling; Ordered to Open New Facility,” \textit{The Unionist}, October 19, 1981, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.


\textsuperscript{66} Major General Martin E. Lind to Alberta Fuentes, Director of Office for the Homeless and SRO Housing, n.d., Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 6, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.


\textsuperscript{68} More recently, estimates of the number of working adults in the system as a whole were a bit lower. According to “city officials and advocates,” 28% percent of the families in shelter had at least one working adult and 16% of adults living in the singles shelters had work. Mireya Navarro, “In New York, Having a Job, or 2, Doesn’t Mean
“Work Experience Program,” doing janitorial work in the shelter. They had “higher status” but were seen by some as “slave labor.”® Much of the outside work that the men found while living there was provisional or short-term, such as “loading and unloading trucks at the Bronx Terminal Market or at the Hunts Point Market,” indicating that, while many of the men were employed, they did not earn enough to pay for their own apartments or rooms. For those living in shelters or on the streets, the insufficiency of wages in service sector and temporary employment was not the only problem. There were extremely difficult challenges getting and holding these jobs on a regular basis given the alienated social geography of their daily lives. A man I spoke to, who was living in a different shelter, illustrated this point brilliantly in the course of describing what it was like to do per diem work at Hunts Point:

Once I went to Hunt’s Point to try to help load, unload trucks. And I did, but had this big knapsack on, and I asked the guy, it was produce, taking you know lettuce and tomatoes, and I asked the guy, I said, “Yo, you have any part time day work?” He said, “Yeah, I’ll hire you for the day.” I said, “OK, how much is it for the day?” He said, “Sixty dollars. I’ll give you sixty dollars for the day. Start now, you off at 5:30.” And I was like, “Jesus, that’s not bad, I could eat for two days on that money.” But then I was like, “You got some place where I could put this?” He said, “Naw, naw, naw, naw. I’m not being responsible for no bags, nothing like that. You find somewhere to put that and come back.” And then I was like, “Could you please give me like half an hour?” So now here it is, I’m walking around, up there in the Bronx, trying to find a safe place to put this. That’s my property. It’s all I got in the world now. And I don’t want to lose that. My blanket is in there, my few clothes, my toothbrush, my little soap. You know so, I found a store. I went into it. I said, “Sir, um, please, um, the guy’s gonna let me help load and unload trucks. I don’t have nowhere to go. This is my bag. It’s no drugs in it or nothing, it’s just got my clothes in it. I’m trying to earn fifty.” It was a Spanish guy, bodega. “Could you please hold this bag till later?” So he was like, “I’m gonna leave, I’m here in the morning. I’m leaving at four.” He said, “What’s your name?” I said, “My name is R.” He was like, “Hold on.”


Went and got a piece of paper and said, “Yo, don’t make this a habit.” I said, “No sir, I would never make it a habit.” Got a piece of paper. “Here, write your name on that. Alright, come to the end.” Came around to the end of the store and he took the bag. “It’s gonna be right here, right here.” “OK, God bless you, thank you!” And that was the first and last time that I did that little work. Because I said, “I can’t do that.” This guy, you know and I guess all the other spots were like that too. Now here it is again, with this concept, this was only one guy who told me, “You know, I can’t hold your bag, I don’t have nowhere to put your bag.” So the first thing I said was, “Shit, all the rest of those guys are like that too. They’re not gonna let me put my bag down by the side. Or they’re not gonna let me put my bag in the place. They’re not gonna be responsible for it any way.” So I got that fifty, he gave me, matter of fact, he gave me sixty three dollars, and that held me for a few days.\(^71\)

Another man I spoke to alluded to a primary difficulty of temporary work in general:

Yeah, [I did] temp work or handing out flyers and stuff like that. So you know, you’re putting flyers on people’s houses and stuff like that in certain parts of Brooklyn. And you know, to this day, there’s this guy named Ray. If I ever see him I’m gonna break his arms. Right? Because he had me work all day and then he left us out in Brooklyn. We didn’t get paid. I never seen that guy.\(^72\)

By 1989, the City was utilizing five State armories as homeless shelters for 3,760 men and six as shelters for 750 women. At the same time pressure was mounting to discontinue their use. William Grinker, Commissioner of New York City’s Human Resources Administration at the end of the Koch Administration, wrote a confidential memo in early 1989 titled “GETTING OUT OF THE ARMORIES” in which he outlined his “strategy … which could be reflected in the 5 Year Singles Plan,” the upcoming round of shelter construction.\(^73\) Grinker’s plan was simple. In exchange for closing the armory-shelters in various community districts, the city would ask the community boards to “trade in their current armory population” for one 250-bed

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\(^71\) Author interview with R., 2011.

\(^72\) Author interview with E., 2011.

\(^73\) William Grinker to Stanley Brezenoff and Robert Esnard, “Confidential Memorandum: GETTING OUT OF THE ARMORIES,” February 9, 1989, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 6, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives; “Singles Pipeline,” n.d., Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
shelter. According to the plan, this would be much more palatable given the problems people associated with the bunker-type homeless shelters on the drill floors, attribution of crime in the neighborhood to the shelter residents, and actual or expected community opposition. To supplement the decrease, the City would make arrangements for 250 and 2,000 new beds on isolated Ward's and Hart Islands, respectively. This was the political aspect of the City’s preparations for new shelter construction, which were already under way. There were seven new Tier II shelters scheduled to be built between 1989 and 1990, plus 20 buildings slated to be renovated into 1992 to expand capacity. The Franklin Armory, for its part, was again expanded to make room for 82 more beds. The basement was renovated as a recreation area.74 Soon after, the city began targeted raids on homeless encampments across the city, including at Columbus Circle in March 199175 and in Tomkins Square Park in June 1991.76

The city was also reforming its family policy. A combination of city, state and federal money had paid for tenancy in commercial hotels, such as the Martinique, the Prince George, and the Holland, each housing hundreds of families in Manhattan. In the mid-1980s the number of these welfare hotels had grown to about 60, and the city was facing criticism about their condition as well as over the cost of housing families in them on an ongoing basis. Conditions in the welfare hotels deteriorated to the point that the federal government, which paid half the cost of rent, threatened to remove $70 million in aid if the city did not end its reliance on them.77 There were already rumblings of support for shelters run by non-profit organizations, including

74 “Shelter Site Status Report,” September 27, 1989, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, Box 2, Folder 45, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
75 Paula Fendall to Frank Landers, “Memorandum: Sanitation Removal Effort at Columbus Circle/Two Columbus Circle,” March 20, 1991, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
76 Smith, The New Urban Frontier.
from the non-profits themselves, which, it was argued, could place people in permanent housing more successfully and quickly, and could do it for less money. As they were phased out, many of the welfare hotels were converted or demolished in rounds of gentrification.

The city turned to building or converting buildings for use as family shelters. The first was HELP I, in Brooklyn. In this project, Andrew Cuomo developed a funding model for new-construction homeless shelters using bond issues from public corporations. The Urban Development Corporation seized the land from the city and turned it over to Housing Enterprise for the Less Privileged, or HELP, and the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) issued $14 million in bonds for its construction. HELP acted as a non-profit broker for the deal, diverting a portion of welfare dollars, then being paid to landlords as rent at welfare hotels, to debt service on the bonds. Tishman Speyer built the 200-family (800 person) facility and the city hired the Red Cross to run social service programs. The shelter was regarded as a break from the costly protocol of placing homeless families in welfare hotels and housing costs were advertised as halved.

In May 1990, the City had assembled a “Tier II Development Pipeline” of 62 sites identified for conversion to homeless shelters. Tier II shelters, as they are still called, provide “apartment-style” units, as opposed to Tier I shelters, which are “congregate,” or dormitory-style shelters. Some were sites where existing buildings would be renovated and others were sites for

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new building construction. Construction or renovation was funded by the city, but the shelters were run by non-profit organizations. 22 of the sites were in Brooklyn, and 20 of the sites each were in Manhattan and the Bronx. Two were in Queens. By 1991 the city had embarked on its five-year strategy, made more urgent because there were still families living in Tier I shelters. The plan was outlined in its “Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan,” formulated in order to “establish the compelling need and justification for subsequent McKinney grant applications,” the first federal legislation with regard to homelessness since the Great Depression. 750 Tier II units were added in FY91 and 600 were projected for FY92.

To coordinate all of these new shelters, the City institutionalized the Department of Homeless Services in 1993, separating the provision of homeless services from the Human Resources Administration. This was one of the recommendations of Mayor Dinkins’ early 1990’s Commission on Homelessness. The Commission’s head was Andrew Cuomo, and it had members who were non-profit leaders, real estate executives, investment bankers, and corporate lawyers. “Homelessness” had become institutionalized in a stand-alone agency, apart from the

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82 “Tier II Development Pipeline,” May 7, 1990, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives. This is a supporting document prepared by the Dinkins Administration in support of Local Law 18, which eliminated the use of Tier I facilities for families, and thus required the implementation of Tier II shelters, locations for which are listed on this document.


84 Tom Bonnett, HRA, “Memorandum: 1990 Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan (CHAP),” July 28, 1990, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, Box 2, Folder 39, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.


86 “Fact Sheet: Homelessness in New York City.”

City’s other welfare services. While the City had departments that targeted homeless services before this time, they were now organized around an infrastructure with a separate budget. Thus, while “in the fall of 1979, the city offered homeless men three options: a bed in a Bowery flophouse, a bunk in Camp LaGuardia where two men were confined to a five by seven foot cell, or, for the overflow crowd, space in the ‘big room’ at the City's ‘Shelter Care Center for Men’ located on East Third Street,” the city now maintains a system composed of nearly 300 shelters, the majority of whose residents are families.

This is an outstanding growth of the local state’s infrastructure. The New York City Department of Homeless Services budget topped $1 billion for the first time in its last fiscal year. The DeBlasio administration, after a brief moratorium on the opening of new shelters, has continued in this direction. The Mayor recently released a new plan, which proposes 90 new “purpose-built” shelters across all five boroughs and the expansion of capacity in existing ones, in order to anticipate the increase in homelessness in the upcoming years. To begin, through 2023, a minimum of five new shelters will be built each year. The plan, released in late February 2017, reads:

Over the next two years, the City will spur shelter development by removing barriers to nonprofit ownership of purpose-built shelters, for instance, by establishing mechanisms to help nonprofit partners finance

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88 The National Union of the Homeless, “a national organization of homeless people,” active in the 1980s and 1990s, continued to use the term “homeless” politically, even while understanding it in terms of class (“Homelessness is a class issue”) which is my practice as well. This group also “[established] a shelter run and managed by currently and formerly homeless people” and led an effort to take over federally owned, yet vacant, housing for use by homeless people in 1990. Emily McNeill, “The National Union of the Homeless: A Brief History” (The Homeless Union History Project of the Poverty Scholars Program, July 2011), https://goo.gl/RKcMXH; Angela Yates and Peter Kinoy, Take Over (Sylight Pictures, 1990).
89 Hopper, Kim, quoted in Gounis, “The Domestication of Homelessness: The Politics of Space and Time in New York City Shelters,” 96. Actually, the quote should begin “At the outset of 1979…” because the City had opened its first women’s shelter in January of that year.
90 See Appendix A for a chart depicting the emergence and growth of New York City’s homeless shelter infrastructure over this period.
large-scale capital projects and by expediting the shelter approval process to meet the realities of the real estate market.\textsuperscript{91}

Figure 2.2 The Constellation of Homeless Shelters in New York City
Mapped by cross-referencing data sets from New York City’s Department of City Planning and its Department of Finance and Taxation

Negating the Negation: Blues Geographies as Remix in the Production of Space

Criminal minded, you’ve been blinded. Looking for a style like mine? You can’t find it.—KRS-One, Criminal Minded

Essences get extracted from things so that they can be sold. And then when the essences are there no more, it's discarded and something else is sucked up as essence. That's just the way that the capitalist society moves in America. It finds something that has some soul, extracts it, sells it, then you move on to the next thing.\textsuperscript{92}

I study the consciousness of the masses of the people. I study and teach them of how they are perceiving themselves and how America perceives them.—KRS-One\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} “Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City” (City of New York, 2017), 90. See especially Chapter 5, titled "A Reimagined Shelter Strategy." Not Really.
\textsuperscript{93} Quoted in Ro, “Build and Destroy.”
According to Woods, the blues tradition is a system of knowledge and explanation that serves as “a permanent countermobilization against the constantly re-emerging plantation blocs of the world and their intellectual fountainhead in the South,” and which has “consistently served to unite working-class communities across different spatial scales.” Davis, in her study of black working-class feminist consciousness both emerging from and impressed by the music of 1920’s blues women, figures the blues as “experience … emotionally configured by an individual psyche,” in which the individual always is expressed through collectivity. This epistemology is epitomized in her observation that “‘the blues’…designates both feelings and the circumstances that have provoked them,” a dialectic which refuses the traditional separation between subject and object. As she writes:

Black people’s inflected appropriation of this term [“the blues”] did not make such a rigorous distinction between a subjective, psychological state of depression and an objective, socially defined status of oppression. Indeed, it seems likely that in the African-American consciousness of the period of their origins, the blues were considered to be both a subjective state and an objective phenomenon.

I posit this understanding of space as the antithesis of individualization, which is the fundamental intent of the function of homeless shelters. This dialectical space is kept open by the blues aesthetic. In this space lies consciousness, critique, and the imagination of something different, even if the blues contradictorily “[testifies] to and [registers] the lack of real, objectively attainable possibilities of social transformation” through official and institutional political channels. The blues, in a transformation of West African philosophical tradition, names existential “threat[s] to physical or psychological well-being…so that menacing problems are

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94woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World”: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 58 and 53. Thanks to Deshonay Dozier for illuminating conversations which helped me to deepen and expand my understanding of blues geographies.
ferreted out from the isolated individual experience and restructured as problems shared by the community.”

I draw on the blues tradition here to realize how partial, dialectical knowledge moves through and produces space in an attempt to offer insight into the political consciousness of those living in homeless shelters. Blues geographies are the spatial patterns of the blues tradition. Hip-hop music, extending and reformatting that tradition, is a type of musical creation that extracts and recirculates. Sampling from older cultural artifacts, it puts them back into motion as remix, preserving collective memory by reconfiguring primary understandings of “modes of existence.” Hip-hop, descendent of the blues, is therefore both critique and reconstruction. If extraction is destabilization, immobility, and disruption, circulation is stabilization through motion. In short, blues geographies allow an understanding of the lived reality of contradiction and a recognition that the production of space is always contested. In this tradition, KRS and LaRock set out to “provide a new vocabulary and syntax of rebellion much more closely attuned to the material existence as well as to the emergent consciousness of those condemned to the drifting life of the streets.” Their music is an example of Amical Cabral’s observation that “it is generally within the culture that we find the seed of opposition.”

97 Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, 360.
99 Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, 357. “Criminal Minded,” the single which preceded the album and gave it its name was also a way out of homelessness for KRS-One, as was LaRock’s vision for the album’s title. Standing in disbelief in the club as the DJ played it over and over for the first time, a friend remarks to him: “You got a hit, you out the shelter now.” Coleman, *Check the Technique*, 82. But not all of the crew’s members were so lucky, as KRS-One recounted in an interview with Brian Coleman (page 79): “As for the Boogie Down Crew, Levi 167 became a crackhead, Castle D—who wasn’t really part of the group, but was a side MC and used to travel with us—he went to Philly and robbed someone and went to jail for like two years. One day we just didn’t see him anymore…One day [Just-Ice] left the shelter and never came back.”
Boogie Down Productions, rather than acting as a type of vanguard, as was their claim, drew on and articulated a blues consciousness which was informed by their experiences in the men’s homeless shelter system in its armory period, as described in the previous section.\(^{101}\) The artists give expression to an emergent “structure of feeling” of resistance taking hold during intense political and economic change. The “reasons” for homelessness in BDP are historical and multifaceted. For BDP and others, this was experienced in a novel and unfolding institutional environment. This section will draw on oral life histories recorded by men living in homeless shelters to demonstrate a widespread critical consciousness among shelter residents through a blues epistemology.\(^{102}\) Despite sometimes reiterating the powerfully reformative state narrative for their homelessness, such as personal deficiencies, lack of responsibility, drug use, or life mistakes, these men also provide a counternarrative to individualization, which is the primary structural function of the state's clinical intervention within homeless shelters.

\(^{101}\) BDP’s and other political rappers’ didacticism, and their separation from any “formal” political movement, is part of the reason why their cultural production is sometimes criticized. BDP’s choice of images, references, and influences were also meant to market Criminal Minded and subsequent albums, an idea acknowledged by KRS-One when he notes that “battle format” for the famous dispute with MC Shan and the Juice Crew was intended to promote the records of both crews involved; it wasn’t a “real” fight but part of the innovations in style that were so important to early hip-hop authors. Coleman, *Check the Technique*, 82. Nevertheless, he goes on to say that even though hip-hop was already beginning to be compromised by commodification, “We appealed to that alienated audience, the audience that felt that rap was getting too commercial. So I wrote this album called *Criminal Minded*. The purpose of the album was to attract a thug-type audience, so we could teach them later on. That was the whole point. We wanted to make intelligence a cool thing” (page 86). My argument is not that BDP was imparting wisdom, but that their music was informed by the material conditions, relations, and values that also produced homeless shelters as fundamentally institutions of the “neoliberal antistate state,” (Gilmore 2008, 44) and that the process of making the album itself was a rejection of those conditions, relations, and values as a systemic epistemology. Therefore, this analysis attempts to show that BDP was attentive to (and therefore represented in their music) the social relations and consciousness of men faced with similar political, institutional, and survival options. Aimee Meredith Cox’s (2015) beautiful ethnography shows how black girls living in a Detroit homeless shelter similarly rejected hierarchy and re-imagined historical and political economic relationships through dance.

\(^{102}\) I analyzed a number of these interviews previously in Christian Siener, “‘A Rock My Pillow and the Sidewalk My Bed’: Homeless Geographies of New York City” (MA, Hunter College, 2011).
These interviews were open-ended. While they were not specifically oriented toward politics, they attempted to get a sense of the men’s socio-spatial consciousness. The men interviewed were participants in a program of work similar to that of the Camp LaGuardia’s original format, which is described in subsequent chapters, except that it was in an urban context. They were asked to recount their life histories and experiences in any way that they saw fit and in their own words. The initial request was for them to describe what led to their homelessness and their utilization of the homeless shelter system. Their words are quoted at length in this section in order to emphasize how their explanations “traverse multiple scales of consciousness and space.” As the single “South Bronx” attests, “every instance of blues music, literature, art, film, and criticism is concerned with mapping places and consciousness.” As opposed to administrators, who flattened homelessness into the lack of a place to sleep inside, these men recognized the myriad social forces that go into producing homelessness, and which structure its experience and institutionalization.

This epistemological method provides an entry into the substance of Boogie Down Production’s early work. Contesting the simplified flattening of space and time was the source of the title of their first album. They were criminal minded, rather than criminal. As one crew member put it, “The title Criminal Minded was really [La Rock’s] plan…He was like, ‘Let’s talk about reality, and do what we have to do to get the money, but not become criminals ourselves.’” In this explanation, Criminal Minded appropriates criminality to also appropriate power—it “Flips the rhyme upside down” as KRS raps in “Say No Brother (Crack Attack Don’t

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105 Callahan-Bever, “R.I.P. Scott La Rock: Remembering the BDP Legend 23 Years Later.”
This composite view of “crime” and “criminality” was expressed in numerous interviews. For example, as L. described to me:

My thing was that, OK, I had no problem because I used to go up in those stores. I would shoplift in the stores because my justification, this is my warped thinking, my warped thinking was, “They’re insured.” That’s how I look at it: they’re insured. They’re not gonna lose it. Like I’m not gonna go into, Christian goes to work every day, he’s taking care of his kids over there. As crazy as that may sound, I’m not gonna go break up in his house because it’s taking away from him. 107

J. gave a variation of this theme in the process of describing how he arrived in a homeless shelter, describing the objective conditions of crisis: “You know to not face reality and life on life’s terms, like going out and getting jobs, paying bills, I figured if I could just get high and not be able to take care of nobody or worry about nobody but myself, regardless of who I was hurting, then … I would be good.” 108

The term “homeless” was similarly contested as an inadequate category, and many of the men addressed it because I had used the word in my initial question. First, their identification as “homeless” was sometimes a source of embarrassment, like for J., for whom homelessness was the condition of being in a shelter: “I’ve been blessed with a lot of things and I didn’t want people to see me down at the bottom of the bottom to the point where I was quote-unquote ‘homeless,’ you know, and had to stay in a shelter.” A.’s first words when I asked him how he became “homeless” were, “I haven’t been homeless for a long period of time.” And later explained that he became “homeless” when he came out of prison and had to access services in the shelter system: “I didn’t want to tell [the intake counselor] that I’m homeless, you know what I’m saying, because it’s an embarrassment. It’s embarrassing for a grown ass man, forty years
old, you know what I’m saying, he’s homeless.” Even though V. had lived for nearly a year on the street as a kid, he told me right off the bat that “this is my first time really experiencing being homeless.” For T., being “homeless” was also identical to going to shelter, even though he had experienced long periods of hustling on the streets. First, he said, “I was still like, living in people’s houses, so I was technically homeless because I wasn’t … it’s not my house.” And later added, “I didn’t feel like I was homeless because I always had somewhere to go. Not like now, since, like, thirty-something and up it was like, ‘What do I do? Where do I go? Oh my God, I gotta go to the shelter? What?’”

A scene from a Bill Brand film from the period of BDP’s meeting reinforces this point. Though released in 1991, the film was made in the late 1980s. Brand speaks to a group of men standing outside of the Sumner Armory in Brooklyn, then with cots for 720. The scene begins with a camera’s-eye view of the drill floor, and we see security guards and staff standing around, some men sleeping in the cots which have numbers scribbled in marker on the floor at their foot, and endless rows of lockers edging the walls. The camera passes through the security station as people try not to be filmed or can be heard murmuring, “What are you doing?” These techniques convey the tension in the shelter, and the unauthorized presence of the film crew is palpable. Later, standing in front of the entrance, the filmmaker interviews the men. Over the course of the interview, none of the men refer to themselves as “homeless,” but rather in class terms: “I have no rights. I’m just a poor man,” said a man in the process of describing his work in construction trades, which he was able to continue until the shelters confiscated his tools.109

Sometimes the critique came in a different form, with the speaker setting himself apart from what he considered to be “authentic” homelessness. “I’ve always worked,” said O., right

away, describing both his on-the-books jobs and “side hustles.” “I didn’t have to go through the real horrors of homelessness.” He later clarified this earlier point, while also describing his identification with a “common” experience of “the homelessness situation,” which was precisely KRS’s point in the quote that opens this essay. There is a subtle suggestion in this quote that if I wanted to be talking to “authentic” homeless people (in a clinical sense) I should be interviewing somebody else.

I could tell you one aspect of being homeless but as far as the horror, horror of being homeless, being fully out there homeless, you know, it’s like I can’t. But I identify with it though... I don’t have a story about eating out of garbage cans and, you know, sleeping on the train and all this other, that’s not me. You know what I’m saying? Although I identify with not having a home, you know? ... Although me and a couple of individuals shared common, you know what I’m saying, certain, the homelessness situation and stuff in common, our ways of trying to get out of it was different, you know what I’m saying?T., who offered comparisons between shelters and prisons on more than one occasion, went even further in his categorical deconstructions, when he described how he thought about state institutions strategically.

I actually wanted to stay in prison for the rest of my life, you know? I was hoping that maybe. I won’t kill nobody. I won’t hurt nobody. Not intentionally, you know what I’m saying? Most of my felonies are for drugs and drug related things not really no violence or nothing like that. It was because of being homeless, like we say people make a joke, people say, “They didn’t arrest you, they rescued you.” Because, you know, most of, well me, per se, I’m weighing 140 pounds, I’m like, six-one, I’m looking all horrible like I got a real illness or something. I’m real sick because I’m all drugged out. So I’m like happy to go to jail. I’m like, “Thank you!” You know and then people like don’t understand. Because I don’t do drugs in jail.

Author interview with O. 2011. "Authenticity" has been a central theme of hip hop music since its founding. This was part of the source of the beef between BDP and Shan: where did hip-hop originate? It was therefore KRS’s main focus with his first hit, “South Bronx.” This theme later morphed into who was more "authentic" based on whether they came from the streets or not as hip-hop expressed anxiety about its cooptation by record companies and its increasingly middle-class audience.
Clearly, T’s “preference” for jail if given the option between the two types of institutions demonstrates that he did not view their desirability based on a gradient of incapacitation or presumed leniency. Brand also asked about this connection: “Have either of you ever been in prison? … How does this compare?”

Mister, I’ve been to Dannemora. I’ve been to Greenhaven. I’ll tell you, I’d swap positions right today if they’d allow me to come in and out. I would swap with Greenhaven. The food is better. And people…they treat you like you’re paying a debt to society. Here, we’re paying no debt to society. We just happen to be poor.

The man interviewed could place prisons in a framework of relations necessary for the exchange of equivalents in capitalist society, but homeless shelters were beyond the boundary of a possible explanation based on retribution. They were unmoored from any ideological grounding that had historical or material resonance.

KRS-One’s experience with the multiple pieces of the state therefore paralleled that of many others. He describes his admittance to the Franklin Avenue Armory shelter after aging out of the services in the Bureau of Child Welfare.

I got kicked out of the group home on my twentieth birthday, in 1985. I went to the YMCA for three months and after that I was supposed to get a job. Of course I jerked all the money and wasted my time and they kicked me out of the Y, so I was homeless again. So I went back to the [East] Third [Street] Men’s Shelter on the Bowery and they shipped me and a bunch of other guys on a school bus up to 166th Street and Boston Road in the Bronx.

This was a theme I encountered more than once: men either became legally too old for services they had received in their youth, or simply grew tired of hustling as they got older. L.

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112 Coleman, *Check the Technique,* 77.
rifed on a Bob Marley blues lyric\textsuperscript{113} in order to explain to me why he decided to enter shelter after years on the street. He acknowledged that he was getting old to be out hustling every day, then described for me the change in attitude which led him to come into the shelters:

I had that perception, that real crazy thinking where I’d rather make a rock my pillow and the sidewalk my bed before I’m subject myself to being with you under these rules and regulations. And what’s the rules and regulations that they were asking? It wasn’t like no crazy stuff, Christian. All I had to do … was be a responsible man.\textsuperscript{114}

V. was immersed in the same hip-hop culture as KRS, and also on the street very young. He ran away from a foster home where he was being abused. He was talented and made some money before the age of ten doing “breakdance, electric boogie.” He even auditioned for the classic film “Beat Street,” released in 1984, about a DJ from the South Bronx in the early days of hip-hop. Since he was on the streets so young, he looked to the older teenagers with whom he used to hustle for important lessons about how to survive. He describes the importance of these relationships, developed among the notorious “squeegee men,” who later became an obsession for Rudy Giuliani.

And during our get-high process, like at the end of the night time, sometimes they used to, one guy in particular, he used to take us up to the roof and we used to climb into the [elevator] shaft and we used to get high there. And I used to just think to myself, “Yo this would be a nice place for me to rest my head.” You know what I mean? And no one knew my situation that I was going through. They just knew that we were young, we were hustlers, and that we wanted to get high. So after everybody would leave and the partying was over and we would climb down I would pretend like I was going home, come back around, and go up in there. And that’s how I began to live in there. That’s how I was introduced to being able to climb in elevator shafts. And I did that for almost a year and they finally caught up to me, the police or whatever.

\textsuperscript{113} The Bob Marley lyric is from “Talkin’ Blues”: “cold ground was my bed last night and rock was my pillow.” See Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World’: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 63; Siener, “A Rock My Pillow and the Sidewalk My Bed’: Homeless Geographies of New York City.”

\textsuperscript{114} Author interview with L.
and they told...you know I had to go to another foster home. I went to another foster home.\textsuperscript{115}

The experience with multiple shelters and institutions, as opposed to just one, is not exclusive of KRS’s experience, but a common theme. Exemplary is O.’s response, when I asked him how many shelters he had been to: “Wow, I’ve been to [pause] Bellevue, Bedford and Atlantic, Pamoja House, Willow, Camp LaGuardia [pause] yeah Camp LaGuardia, I think six or seven shelters. [pause] And here.” In fact, this movement, while partly organized by City policy for the segregation of different “types” of homeless men (an internal HRA database printout from 1990 refers to one shelter as reserved for “SPECIAL POPULATION: employable men”\textsuperscript{116}), is also a strategy utilized by those seeking out the services they need. Here, J. describes how he got into a program that he thought could link him up with a job. His own initiative and social networks, rather than official referrals, got him to where he wanted to go.

I went to the detox, they referred me to a place called [pause] I forgot what it was. I forgot the name. But it was like more of a three quarter house, or a halfway house or something like that? … And it was in the Bronx. But there was a guy that came through, about my seventh day there, from New Jersey, who I actually knew growing up. We played football together. And I hadn’t seen him in probably thirty years. Well the last time I did see him…he’s in here now, but the last time I did see him prior to thirty years ago was probably two years ago when I was running in New Jersey, my last run in New Jersey, and I robbed him. But now he’s here. He came into detox about my seventh day. And he had a [program] shirt on and everything. And I said, “What you doing?” “Man, I’ve been over here in New York for a while now man. I’m doing my thing. Where you going from here?” And I said, “They sending me someplace.” He said, “Man naw, you need to get to [name of program]. You need to get here, right here, this is it.” He had the shirt on. He’s like, “This is where you need to be at. This is where I’m at. This is the spot. It’s a shelter slash work program. It’ll get you on your feet. Get your trades. Help you out. Apartments, jobs, before you leave, bank account.” So I said, yeah, and I went back to my counselor at detox and I said, “I want to be referred to [program name].” And they said, “Well we don’t

\textsuperscript{115} Author interview with V., 2011.
\textsuperscript{116} “Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Plan—Draft,” 1990, Department of Homeless Services, Office of the Commissioner, Marsha Martin Subject Files, Box 2, Folder 39, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
refer there but I’ll put it on your paper and the next spot that you go to you can ask them how do you get a referral to [program].” Anyway, upon me leaving detox, me and three other guys seen a [program] van riding, flagged him down. It was a lady here.

C: You just flagged him?

J: Yeah, flagged him down. Actually, one guy, another guy had been in [the program] before knew the driver. So when we seen him, because I was telling him, because I knew he was leaving the same day, “I’m trying to go to [the program].” He was like, “Yeah, that’s a great program. I used to be there.”

While describing the conditions in the armory and other shelters, T. also demonstrated that his agency was a factor for why he had been to so many shelters. Below he tells of his experience in the Beford-Atlantic armory, years after it had been established as a permanent part of the shelter system, and even referred back to its original, improvised days.

The shelters here, I’ve been to Bellevue, I’ve been to … they call it Castle Greyskull, it’s Bedford and Atlantic, that’s what they call it, you know, because it’s a horrible place. It was a lot worse back in the days. A lot of the shelters were treacherous back in the days. Now, they’re a little more secure but still shit goes on. Like Ward’s Island, I didn’t even … I honestly gotta say I never went in … I went right to the front of that shit and I was just like, “I’m not staying in this motherfucking … no!” I said, “Take me the fuck back over or I’ll walk back.” Or whatever the fuck. And I left because I was like something … I was like, “I’m not staying here.” Just like in Castle Greyskull … I slept there a couple times but then one time I came, I had … you know I always got stuff with me. I got some shit, you know what I’m saying, where I drag it with me or I leave it at my friend’s house, I couldn’t leave it no more. So I bring it in. So now I start taking it out of my pockets, like, here with the [?] and shit. So these young boys, a bunch of them, they looking at it. So I’m like, “I know these motherfuckers going to try to rob me.” You know what I’m saying? So I’m like, “Fuck that. I don’t even want to go through that shit right now. I’m too old for that shit.” Really, I knew they was going to get me because it was too many of them and I don’t want to have to hurt somebody and I don’t want to get hurt. I’m not trying to … I just want to go to sleep, you know? So I just took all my shit and I told the officer, “Yo, I don’t want to stay here. Look, I’m leaving.” He was like, “No, what are you leaving for? Don’t leave.” This and that. I was like, “Naw, I don’t want to stay here.” So I went, I left. I had the two dollar metrocard,

117 Author interview with J.
not two dollars, but I had a metrocard or whatever the change for the bus it was at the time, and I got on and I just rode the train all night.\textsuperscript{118}

This institutional knowledge formed the basis for unexpected strategies. T. was an extraordinary hustler, and viewed all sides of any situation from a variety of angles. In the interview he was almost in a dialog with himself, narrating from one position, then subtly switching to another and giving more insight. He had also aged out of youth services. Once he got into the shelter system and saw the disastrous conditions, he immediately began to think of his options. He had described numerous times the ways in which his ability to be “crazy” on the streets was an asset. When inside, he tried to use the strategy to get better accommodations, even though it failed.

I started telling Bellevue I hear voices so I could go to the shelter … I mean go to the nut-job house, the lockdown, to sleep! And the doctor was like, “There’s nothing wrong with you.” I’d say, “Well, they told me I got these kind of problems with me.” And he was like, “Well, I’ll see and I’ll assess you.” And stuff like that. But I actually started telling him that and he’s like, “You shouldn’t do that.” They said, “Why’d you do that?” Because I don’t want to go to that shelter, man, it’s disgusting. It’s nasty, you know? I still got some kind of morals or thing with me with the cleanliness, you know?\textsuperscript{119}

A. had been in a wide array of institutionalized settings, including treatment centers, prisons, and homeless shelters. From his appearance I knew that he would be able to hold his own in any situation he found himself in. He was tough, and had a long scar down the side of one cheek. But when we spoke he opened up. During the interview he described repeated instances of trying to get various forms of help that he needed. I asked him, given that he was so proactive, was he concerned with all the moving around between different programs or was he going to

\textsuperscript{118} Author interview with T., 2011.
\textsuperscript{119} Author interview with T. Gounis similarly described how some men took on mental illness as a strategy to access services, page 168.
make the most of it, wherever he was? His response was structural, and about the staff’s place in that structure, as he alluded to their other interests, which limited their ability to provide him with what he needed. He even had trouble finding the right word that described what the staff do. While he seemed to conflate the interests of front line staff with those of the organization, at the same time he didn't want to individualize the staff. He couldn't place their actions outside of this social web. This was his response.

Believe it or not Christian, man, I mean, the system’s real fucked up. Umm … the different types of programs I went to, you know what I’m saying, it felt like the counselors there, the staff there, you know what I’m saying, was concerned about one thing: receiving a client into the facility, the establishment, to receive money. As far as really reaching out, extending a hand to actually help the individual and assist … I mean, what, assist, I ain’t gonna say help! … assist the individual in the right direction, I haven’t seen that. Know what I mean? That’s why I was going from place to place to place to place to place to place.

R. painted a poignant picture of the fractured and alienated life of survival in the carceral state. He gave an intimately detailed account of his path from the depression and stress of holding down a job with the city while homeless, getting fired and ending up in Rikers, and his active engagement and navigation with the homeless shelter system after he was released. He had a magnificent talent for and attention to narrative and explanation. Of particular interest here is that R.’s description of his relationship with city and non-profit employees is generous, even with regard to interactions with police officers, often described as antagonistic. In his account he found many sympathetic individuals who helped him as much as they could, taking into consideration their specific roles and relative power. At the same time, he identifies the limits of their support. He was sent to a city employee who administered his drug test. “She was required

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120 “We must ask how could someone trapped in this web of social destruction assume the supernatural position, the superimposition, of ‘sittin’ on top of the world’?” Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World”: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 46.
121 Author interview with A., 2011.
by law, because they was paying for her to report to the job of my participation and my urine and things of that nature. She gave me a break the first time my urine was dirty. She said, ‘[can’t hear] Officer W, I’m sorry, I’m gonna have to report this.’

In the following section, I take up this theme—the structural position between staff and residents—in a broader context.

**Social Reproduction and the Limits of Welfare**

Measure me with memory.¹²³

The largest proportion of workers [in the contemporary economy] exchange against revenue (state employees, for example) [as opposed to against capital].¹²⁴

State workers and especially state dependents bear the main burden of the fiscal crisis…In the absence of a political movement that transcends particular interests, divisions between monopoly sector workers, state workers, and the surplus population could very well deepen.¹²⁵

Was the alliance between KRS and LaRock normal or exceptional? In this section I explore their relationship in the context of labor politics with regard to the city’s welfare agency in the 1980s. A primary contradiction of homeless shelters is that they are individualizing yet appear as institutions that re-integrate those left out of a particular social formation. Here I look at the historical role of homeless shelters in stabilizing social displacement by destabilizing solidarity. The relationship between the two musicians described in the opening can thus highlight an aspect of the class dimensions of the contemporary restructuring of the local state’s welfare practices. It can also identify some of the lived contradictions produced and experienced within the state as it takes on the role of managing displacement: it absorbs surplus labor at the same time that it manages displacement. I take as a starting point James O’Connor’s prescient observation that, given the historically “relatively close collaboration between state welfare...

¹²² Author interview with R. For a longer excerpt of this story, see Appendix B.
¹²³ Mos Def and Samuel Christian, *You (Feel Good Remix)* (Loud Records, 2000).
¹²⁴ Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, 367.
¹²⁵ O’Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, 250 and 255.
clients and workers [in New York]…perhaps the only way for the state to contain such a movement [of the alliance of radical state workers and the majority of the surplus population] is to accelerate the growth of the social-industrial complex.”¹²⁶ I propose that the construction of a homeless shelter system in New York City can be seen in this way: to increase welfare labor’s productivity as part of the state’s efforts to relieve fiscal crisis, by reconfiguring its role in social reproduction to one of housing the homeless in shelters. Organized labor consented to this arrangement in the early days of the shelter system, choosing to focus on shelter conditions and salaries in the break.

New York City’s welfare workers have sometimes had a history of radicalism.¹²⁷ One year before New York City Mayor John Lindsay reformed the Department of Welfare into the Human Resources Administration, 8,000 welfare workers went on strike. Municipal unionization had increased dramatically nationwide over the previous decades. Less than one third of large cities in the United States had unionized municipal workers in the 1930s, compared to 80% in 1969.¹²⁸ In New York City, by the early 1960s, welfare rolls and the resulting caseloads had expanded dramatically, and the intensification of work schedules radicalized some of the case workers. The strike in 1965 forced the city to temporarily shutter a majority of its welfare centers. After nearly a month, the city agreed to higher salaries, increased funding for further education, more case workers, and smaller caseloads. 1970 was a peak year nationwide for strikes in

¹²⁶ O’Connor, 244–45.
¹²⁸ O’Connor, The Fiscal Crisis of the State, 237.
general, the frequency of which remained high until 1975.\textsuperscript{129} The late 1960s and early 1970s thus marked the apex of post-World War II economic growth as well as of organized labor’s militancy and influence in New York.

By the beginning of the 1970s, New York offered a large number of jobs in the government sector, which were more secure than employment in the private sector, especially for people of color who faced racism and employment discrimination. According to Freeman, in New York City, the public sector was the largest “by far…[and] in 1970 had more employees than the garment, banking, and longshore industries put together.”\textsuperscript{130} While labor demands and expenses in private industry may prompt a company to relocate, this option is unavailable to the state, which is immobile. Thus, New York restructured a portion of its welfare by devising what became a permanent system of homeless shelters. In the process, SSEU Local 371, the union representing the city’s social workers, had an ambivalent relationship with these shelters, and cultivated no relationship with those living in them.

As noted, LaRock and KRS occupied different positions in the state’s hierarchy. While KRS had been living on the street for a year, and had been in and out of group homes and homeless shelters, LaRock was recently a college graduate. His professional activities in the shelter, after earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Business, were described by the \textit{New York Times} after he was shot and killed outside a Bronx housing project in 1987:

\begin{quote}
Former residents of the shelter remember when he first arrived, a broad shouldered young man, fresh out of college, 6 feet 2 inches tall, wearing a tie and carrying a briefcase. There he set up group counseling sessions for young homeless men before taking an extended leave of absence in April to go on a musical tour.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{130} Freeman, 201.
LaRock was already a fixture in the hip-hop clubs, working as a DJ at night and on weekends. According to the Times article, this was part of his identity at his day job in the shelter as well, noting that “He had a tremendous impact. Some residents actually went into the rap business themselves, got their own apartments, or had other success due to Mr. Sterling.” Yet, according to KRS, LaRock was initially seen as an outsider. Highlighting the hierarchy within the shelter, KRS later described how he initially imagined the difference between them. “I was in this shelter, and about two months after that walks in this new social worker, with a briefcase and everything. And we knew that he was a nerd; he was not part of the cool clique.”

Contrary to LaRock’s activities in the shelter, the institutionalized labor movement was focused on other things. Through the early 1980s, the union was primarily motivated by securing higher wages and alleviating deteriorating working conditions, two issues that were interrelated. While the State Supreme Court consent decree establishing the right to shelter for homeless people was written in 1979, it wasn’t “settled” in the courts until late 1981. Simultaneously, the union had been in discussions with the city for a new contract since mid-1980. Immediately the question of the relationship between labor and the administration was dramatized as the overcrowding of existing homeless facilities increased significantly. The city was so pressed for space that it immediately began using the offices at the East Third Street homeless shelter as sleeping quarters. Temporary shelters even opened up in other offices under HRA’s

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132 Coleman, Check the Technique, 77.
134 “Shelter” is a confusing misnomer for the East Third Street Men’s facility. For years it was not a “shelter” in terms of sleeping quarters. It was a facility for registering men and providing them with tickets they could use for accommodation at lodging houses on the Bowery.
jurisdiction, such as General Support Services, an action that provoked intense reaction from the union.\footnote{135}{"Open Shelter for Women On Site of GSS [General Support Services, Office] 24,” The Unionist, November 16, 1981, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. New York University.}

The result was that the City’s emergency practices brought the working conditions of city welfare workers, long a factor in their daily jobs, to the attention of the administration, because the union was able to push an issue that it had trying to expose even before Callahan. These issues did not just arise with the Consent Decree, but were exacerbated by overcrowding and limited space. In codifying Callahan, basic “minimums” of shelter conditions were written in—a future point of reference for the Coalition for the Homeless and other advocates.\footnote{136}{Callahan vs. Carey (Supreme Court of the State of New York, Final Judgment by Consent 1981). Available at the website of Coalition for the Homeless: https://goo.gl/FmB5OR.} As one article put it, “Management was reminded that meetings are long overdue on Camp LaGuardia, Battered Women, Group Homes and the Women's Shelter.”\footnote{137}{“City Violates Shelter Ruling; Ordered to Open New Facility.”} Therefore, the union drew on the city’s strategy for addressing crisis to give its ongoing concerns attention and legitimacy.

By the end of 1980 the union had negotiated a pay raise with the Koch administration’s HRA. When the City hedged on implementing the first stage of the raise as a result of a dispute over transfer clauses (transfers were very important in the city’s ability to open up provisional shelters), the union promised that “the Mobilization Committee would probably be reactivated. [Organization Vice President Nat Williams said,] ‘We have not had work actions for a long time...It’s time to stop being fat cats and take to the streets.’” The troops were being rallied for a strike via a campaign focused on the Men’s Shelter. The issues at hand were work conditions (to the exclusion of living conditions) found in the shelter, which were deteriorating because of the presence of homeless people themselves, and the termination of David Waite, a per diem
Institutional Aide who had been fired for his role in protesting them.\textsuperscript{138} Victor Gotbaum, Executive Officer of District Council 37, Joe Sperling, President of SSEU Local 371, and Manfred Ohrenstein, State Senator, held a press conference at the Third Street Men’s Shelter and workers testified to the City Council in February 1981 to continue the pressure.\textsuperscript{139} Even though conditions did not improve, the union marked a victory. That October, the Supreme Court forced the city to find alternate accommodation for the men sleeping at East Third Street.

A Manhattan Supreme Court judge issued an emergency order October 20 barring the City from sleeping men in the dining areas of the Men’s Shelter and other facilities for the homeless. The emergency order also required the City to open an armory within 24 hours and to submit to the court by November 2 a detailed plan to meet the needs of the homeless this winter.\textsuperscript{140}

The union ceased making conditions in the shelter an issue, especially since the pay raises had gone into effect that summer.\textsuperscript{141} The union and the city were in détente, and the trade-off appeared to be the annualization of some Institutional Aides for the disciplining of the workers who had protested.

\textsuperscript{138} Bob Pfefferman, “Raises Are Coming Despite Brezenoff Stand,” \textit{The Unionist}, December 1, 1980, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. New York University.; Marjorie Gross, “New Era of Violence at the Men’s Shelter,” \textit{The Unionist}, November 17, 1980, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. New York University. The article argued that “A new breed of client afflicted with an uncontrollable form of suffering is transforming the [East Third Street Men’s Shelter] into a horrifying pit of violence…The men’s shelter is left with a regular clientele much younger and more psychotic than its traditional population of elderly Bowery alcoholics.” The article had a one-quarter page picture of “weapons” confiscated by security at the shelter. While some are indeed weapons, like a gun and knives, (though it is not obvious whether they were intended to hurt staff or for protection on the street) many are tools or materials, and may have actually been used for work—a hammer, screwdrivers, a saw, a garden tool, pipes—and others were items used for daily use or food preparation—a fork, a can opener, kitchen knives, a ladle. There are two guns, and one of them dominates the picture, centered and set off through the contrast of its color with the background in a way that the other weapons are not. Many of the items are unidentifiable, and serve only to fill out the picture in terms of quantity. Never considered is the possibility that these tools were used for (work or protective) survival and had to be with the men at all times. See the interview with the man in the Bill Brand film about the confiscation of his work tools in the above section.


\textsuperscript{140} “City Violates Shelter Ruling; Ordered to Open New Facility.”

The hiring of additional security forces and the annualization of the per diem Institutional Aides were encouraging victories, but workers report health and safety conditions are as bad as ever. After a conversation in early September with HRA Deputy Commissioner Robert Trobe, Union President Joe Sperling was impressed by efforts the City was making to expand shelter services. “At that time, Trobe said he would like to avoid having to sleep clients in the Men’s Shelter at all. I appreciated the fact that the City was making concrete moves to find other facilities as a result of the pressure exerted last winter by shelter staff,” Sperling said.  

Coverage of the conditions in the shelter ceased until the following year, when the union was backing Mario Cuomo for Governor and shelter conditions were back on its agenda. While this may have been a good strategy in its political alliance with Mario Cuomo, it required an erasure of the people living in those shelters. Indeed, those people are only mentioned in the paper’s articles as a work hazard for city workers.  

The subsequent two years, immediately preceding when LaRock met KRS at the armory, were periods of intense focus by the union. Of the 77 articles in their newspaper, *The Unionist*, about homeless shelters between 1980 and 1987, nearly 50% were published in 1983 and 1984. Remaining focused on salaries and conditions, their strategy was to align with Mario Cuomo, by linking their reformist program to his gubernatorial bid in 1983. While, like BDP, they focused on some of the objective conditions of crisis, their position seemed to be, since working spaces are so bad, workers should get paid more. The union used a realist approach to exposing material conditions in the shelters to appropriate power. Usually, however, this was used to put pressure on the administration as a tool during contract negotiations. The homeless shelter system was

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144 “Shelter Workers Docked for Protest Last Winter.” “The Union considers domiciling [sic] clients a threat to workers’ health and safety, since many are known to carry tuberculosis, hepatitis, and lice. Others suffer from mental disorders which have caused them to attack Shelter employees without provocation.”
used politically in this process precisely because it had some of the worst working conditions of any city agency.

Coverage in the paper therefore consistently paired stories about labor’s relationship with Cuomo with its campaign to rectify conditions for workers in the shelters. The day after the election, November 8, 1982, *The Unionist* ran a story attributing Cuomo’s victory to union support in New York City, next to a headline that read “Demonstrators Protest City’s Attempt to Lower Shelter Sanitary Standards.”¹⁴⁵ The union’s most comprehensive statement of its position was published in a special issue of *The Unionist*, in March 1983, titled “Working With The Homeless: Special Shelter Supplement.” This passage attests to the way the city disciplined HRA workers into their roles as workers in an expanding shelter system, including its use of temporary workers to undermine solidarity in their workplaces.

Expansion of the shelter system has been carried out without regard to the rights and needs of shelter workers. Secret openings of new facilities, designed to thwart community protests, have meant instant involuntary transfers for existing staff, hiring of new workers without processing papers to get them paid, and giving workers and directors only a few hours notice before moving in beds and people. But the problems go even deeper. To staff the new facilities, the City has expanded a policy of hiring ‘per diem’ Institutional Aides. ‘Per diem’ is a designation for workers called in on a daily basis to supplement a permanent workforce. Per diems are not considered permanent employees and as such do not ‘count’ towards an agency’s budget allotment of workers.¹⁴⁶

**Conclusion**

The following chapters describe the rise and fall of an earlier shelter model, which eventually was replaced by the one described in this chapter. Camp LaGuardia, a rural

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reformatory/workhouse, implemented during the Great Depression, was produced by a different reorganization of social relations in space. It extracted single men from urban space and sent them upstate to learn how to farm. The institution, located seventy miles north of New York City in Orange County, is important because over its history it occupied a flexible “middle ground” between a punitive and rehabilitative local state. A sometime prison, sometime work camp, sometime homeless shelter, it always was used as a tool for the management of a section of New York’s regional surplus population. Yet, over the course of these changes, the model institutionalized ideas that continue to structure the state’s methods of managing displacement within its general administration of welfare, and the political relationships between administrators, workers, and shelter residents.
Chapter 3
Progressives and Prisons

Figure 3.1 The “ruins” of Camp LaGuardia, pictured after its closing in 2007.
Photo: Nik Piatek, YouTube

Here then to-day in the bosom of mother earth we lay this granite block, a silent witness perhaps to future ages of the humanity of our times and the progress of Christian civilization. And when the stately edifice which this granite block is intended to support shall have fulfilled the object of this dedication, and when its stately columns shall have yielded to decay, who shall say that this same stone may not by chance be from its silent bed exhumed and other men of other times read upon its rugged face the story of its origin.147

Introduction

This chapter examines the origin of New York City’s Greycourt Reformatory Prison, known as the Women’s Farm Colony, in order to describe the institutional starting point of Camp LaGuardia in Orange County, New York. It is a study of infrastructural change that is intended, as the Judge said, to “read upon its rugged face the story of its origin.”148 It specifically investigates the role of gender in this institutional transformation. The prison’s history is part of the reorganization and modernization of New York City’s Department of Corrections in sync

with the designs of the Regional Plan Association, which laid out a long-term regional economic and geographic development plan for the New York City metropolitan area. A portion of their plan engaged the geographic reconfiguration of New York City’s carceral institutions, ongoing since the early 20th century, which gave way to the original buildings of the facility pictured here. Constructed as a women’s prison, it subsequently became a work camp for homeless men during the Depression. It remained a homeless shelter until it closed in 2007. In its origins, therefore, the institution was part of the Progressive movement’s active reconfiguration of the state in order to produce and extract value from labor and land.149

The Regional Plan Association and the Geography of Reform

In 1924, George Wickersham, former Attorney General and later Chairman of the Wickersham Commission, formed to study the enforcement of prohibition,150 requested the help of the Russell Sage Foundation’s Hastings H. Hart, corrections consultant for the Regional Plan Association, to study administrative and infrastructural recommendations given to the Board of Estimate by New York City’s Commissioner of Corrections. In his report one year later, Hart agreed with the Commissioner: the city should discontinue the use of Welfare Island for prisons, construct three new prisons on Riker’s Island, most of which was created out of landfill, and use prison labor for construction and waste management, including “unloading scows and leveling waste material in Riker’s Island and for salvaging useful material therefrom.”151 The newly opened Greycourt institution, as well as the planned House of Detention for Women, was believed to be crucial for the city’s ability to remove the penal institutions from Welfare Island.

The women at the Corrections Hospital and Workhouse, together the women’s penitentiary on Welfare Island, could be sent to these institutions, and that wing could be demolished. The House of Detention, to be built on Greenwich Avenue, would be used to classify prisoners as well as to house women awaiting trial. The detention center was built in the city so that it could be close to the Ninth District Women’s Court, a “specialized [magistrate’s] court” that was de-linked from the district system in that all women arrested in Manhattan or the Bronx for prostitution were tried there. After the penal institutions were removed from Welfare Island, Greycourt was supposed to be the only convict prison for women under the auspices of New York City’s Department of Correction. The reports were therefore preoccupied with capacity: how many women would the institutions need to handle? The Farm Colony should have been more than big enough for its planned purpose. According to Hart, the largest number of women who had been confined in the Corrections Hospital and Workhouse at once over the previous eight years was 694, and it was anticipated that the buildings at Greycourt after a second period of expansion would eventually hold 700.

Figure 3.2 “The Correction Hospital for Females on Welfare Island.”

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153 Hart, Two Reports on the Reorganization & Reconstruction of the New York City Prison System.
155 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, A Study of the Conditions Which Have Accumulated Under Many Administrations and Now Exist in the Prisons on Welfare Island New York City, 1924, 15.
Concurrently, the ambitious Regional Plan Association was drawing together experts from a multitude of fields to design and implement wide ranging structural and geographic adjustments to the metropolitan urban economy. The effort was conceived by the Russell Sage Foundation’s Charles D. Norton in 1921 “to visualize the commercial, the industrial, the social, and the artistic values and possibilities of our glorious harbor and all of its broad and varied environs” and to “direct public expenditure into projects of permanent value.”

To these ends, he gathered colleagues, including Frederick Keppel and Lawrence Veiller, for an initial meetings in 1921. Keppel eventually left the Foundation to become the president of the Carnegie Corporation, where he commissioned the famous “Poor White Study” of South Africa, but maintained a consulting role in the RPA. Veiller was an eminent member of the Committee of Fourteen, a middle-class reform organization originally established to combat the so-called Raines Law hotels in the early 20th century. The Regional Plan Association maintained an “organic relation” to the Russell Sage Foundation, which funded it in its entirety, even as the Foundation sought to downplay the relationship for the purposes of public relations. The relationship was important because the plan solidified “the need for greater knowledge of social science as a foundation for physical planning.”

In his history of the Regional Plan of 1929, David Johnson writes, “Metropolitan regional planning in this period linked Progressive era planning and reform movements to the thrust towards administrative efficiency and to the responses evoked by the beginning of mass

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ownership of the automobile.” Hence, the main economic and geographic goals of the original Regional Plan were conceived as sweeping infrastructural projects. Some of the most ambitions of these were the George Washington and Triborough Bridges, the transferal of the Port of New York to Newark, and strategies to alleviate overcrowding in the burgeoning city. These infrastructural, land-use, and efficiency concerns overlapped in its prison reform designs.

Welfare Island was central geographically to an expanding New York City, and therefore vital to the RPA’s general plan. The consolidation of New York had prompted city leaders to consider the future of its institutions with regard to the management of prisoners and charitable cases. The city’s 1898 charter anticipated infrastructural changes that would be coordinated by the newly disjointed agencies of Public Charities and Corrections, the duties of which a single agency, the Department of Public Charities and Correction, had previously maintained. Providing specifically for the case of removing penal institutions from Welfare Island (then called Blackwell’s Island) Section 696 of Chapter XIV of the charter read, in part: “Whenever in consequence of such removals or otherwise any of the buildings theretofore occupied or used for said Workhouse or Penitentiary shall have become vacant, such building or buildings, with the grounds thereto appertaining, shall be transferred to the Department of Public Charities.”

The Regional Plan Association gave specific recommendations for developing Welfare Island in 1929, while bluntly considering the island’s long-term association with the indigent from its perspective of economic development:

159 Johnson, Planning the Great Metropolis: The 1929 Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1.
161 “Annual Report” (New York City Department of Corrections, 1921), 10–14.
162 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, A Study of the Conditions Which Have Accumulated Under Many Administrations and Now Exist in the Prisons on Welfare Island New York City, Appendix B.
People have so long thought of the islands as outlying spots to which criminals, paupers, and persons of broken health can be dismissed—much as a farmer’s broken machinery and rubbish are consigned to some inconspicuous and worthless corner of his farm. And it has a sanction from common sense too. For if the municipal machinery requires certain unpleasant parts for its healthy operation, such as penitentiaries and sewage treatment plants—and these cannot be placed on the mainland without greater expense and more annoyance than would result from their being placed on the islands—then, clearly, the islands are appropriate places for these parts. But to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, it is necessary to ask whether the other rôle which the islands might play in the city’s economy is or is not more important than the rôle of abiding places for prisons and nuisances. Without attempting to prejudice the decision, an attempt will be made in this memorandum to indicate what might be done if the islands were used as they never have been. It will be assumed that there is no need of explaining how they can be used for prisons and asylums because that has been demonstrated; what new function might be assigned to them does require explanation.\textsuperscript{163}

The Russell Sage Foundation’s twin objectives of prison reform and regional reconfiguration were telescoped geographically onto Welfare Island. With this focus it was able to forward a plan not just a plan of destruction, but of construction. The “broken machinery” of surplus labor would give way to healthy, productive workers, regenerated in parks. Thus, the concept of open spaces became a touchstone of the Regional Plan Association, ingrained in its vision of New York’s “total economy.” The plan for Welfare Island therefore was to hollow out the center by removing prisons and to use the resulting space for recreational facilities and parks.

It is reasonable to say, looking at the East River Islands as a whole and in relation to the city’s total economy, first, that, with the exception of the Metropolitan Hospital and the City Hospital, the institutions which now occupy them had better be removed or must be largely rebuilt somewhere; and, second, that as an alternative to refilling vacated space with new asylums, hospitals and penal institutions, there will be an opportunity for much needed recreational facilities, and that for such the islands possess a quite special fitness.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} Regional Plan Association, 438.
Figure 3.3 Corrections and Welfare Institutions on the Former Blackwell’s Island.\textsuperscript{165}

While the Regional Plan Association focused on parks and recreation areas to alleviate overcrowding within the city's limits, by contrast it viewed the hinterlands as ample.\textsuperscript{166} In a map reminiscent of the Chicago School of planning, concentric circles demonstrated their vision of a central city surrounded by areas of decreasing value expanding outward. Orange County is located in the farthest ring of concentric circles outside of the developed area of Metropolitan New York, “40 miles from New York City Hall.” The sub-region on the map described as “New York State Outside N.Y. City” had an area of 2,597 square miles, 47\% of the regional total, and only 721,449 people, 8\% of the regional total. The RPA used this center/periphery model in its justifications, the geographic materiality of the perspective that likened idled laborers in prisons to “broken machinery and rubbish,” and viewed prisons as “sewage treatment plants.” The idea was to make some labor more productive, through the provision of open spaces that would give

\textsuperscript{165} A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, \textit{A Study of the Conditions Which Have Accumulated Under Many Administrations and Now Exist in the Prisons on Welfare Island New York City}, 13.

\textsuperscript{166} Regional Plan Association, \textit{Regional Plan of New York and Its Enviorns, Volume 2: The Building of the City}, 128. The introductory to this volume read: “Open Spaces.--The total area of public parks, cemeteries, municipal watersheds and the like in 1927 was 159,097 acres, of which 14,993 acres were within New York City. There was one acre of parks to every 601 persons within the city, and one acre to every 1,245 persons in Manhattan. Within approximately 200 miles of the city there were in 1924 about 656,000 acres of forest reserves and public reservations of 1,000 acres more in size.”
respite to the overcrowding of the industrial city, while at the same time managing “broken” labor, both of which activities were activated through the reform of the state and its infrastructure. This program had an implicit geography that extracted a suitable portion of prisoners in a reform program to clean up the “sewage treatment plants.” The plan provided places for working labor to replenish itself, in public spaces on the former site of those institutions, as well as places for idled labor to pay for its own upkeep (see below.)

Figure 3.4 “Map of New York and Its Environ.”

Part of this institutional reconfiguration entailed administrative re-scaling. The other two City reformatories in Orange County were eventually turned over to the State. New York City exchanged the plot of its Dairy Farm in Warwick for Randall’s Island, in order to build the Triborough Bridge. The State used the site for its Training School for Boys, which opened in

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1932. It was later converted into a men’s medium security prison, and it closed in 2011. New Hampton remained the city’s reformatory until 1958, when it too was transferred to the State. Greycourt remained under the city’s control.

Welfare Island was seen as a particularly desirable place for parks, as demonstrated by the RPA photograph in figure 3.7, which a Grand Jury reproduced in a 1924 report. Rather than being on Manhattan's edge, the island was now easily accessible to the residents of all boroughs in a consolidated New York City. It was “more central than Central Park,” as RPA documents put it, a phrase that became a mantra in its repetition in the New York Times, the “position [of the islands] is very central—more central than that of central park.” Welfare Island, once seen as a good place to put New York’s prisons because it was on the fringe, was now at its epicenter. Their removal from the middle section of Welfare Island would create the space for:

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Twenty baseball diamonds, forty tennis courts, fifty handball courts, two outdoor swimming pools, a gymnasium, two indoor swimming pools, a small grand stand, a large field for athletic and pageantry, a one-acre children’s playground, a field 70 by 100 feet for volley ball, bowling and other field sports and a large dance pavilion.172

Figure 3.6 “A Study of the Recreational Possibilities of Welfare Island.”173

Because of this relational centrality, Welfare and Randalls were the most important East River islands. The photograph demonstrates well that understanding of geography, with Welfare Island positioned at the center and Central Park on the edge. Harts and Rikers, at the top of the picture, were isolated and peripheral, and therefore targeted as locations for new penal institutions.174

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172 “Wants City Islands Made Playgrounds,” The New York Times, September 25, 1926. The Times eliminated the gender distinctions between the facilities, but reproduced almost identically the structure and content from the RPA’s published plan, which reads: “It would...be possible to install accommodations for boys of 20 baseball diamonds; 26 tennis courts; 36 handball courts; an outdoor swimming pool; a gymnasium; an indoor swimming pool; and a small grandstand. There could also be, for girls: 24 handball courts; 14 tennis courts; a large field for athletics and pageantry; a one-acre children’s playground; a field 70 feet by 600 [sic] feet for volleyball, bowling and other field sports engaged in by girls; outdoor and indoor swimming pools; and a large dance pavilion.” Regional Plan Association, Regional Plan of New York and Its Environments, Volume 2: The Building of the City, 438–40.


174 The separation of the Department of Public Charities from the Department of Correction required a geographic split of their institutions. Blackwell’s Island was for use by Charities and Rikers and Harts were for Corrections.
To enable the dislocation of the city’s institutions from the island, deteriorating conditions, long present in them, came to the forefront. Working in conjunction with Hart was a “special committee” of the New York County Grand Jury, charged by Magistrate William Allen of the Court of General Sessions to produce a report on two prisons on Welfare Island. Their report, published in 1924, came to the same recommendations as Hart, an “expert in penology” who was conducting a “complete survey of the prisons.” The Grand Jury saw as its mandate to provide advice to the city “to modernize [its penal institutions]…and to adapt them to the increasing demands of the City, due to its growth and improvements in methods of the custodial

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175 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, A Study of the Conditions Which Have Accumulated Under Many Administrations and Now Exist in the Prisons on Welfare Island New York City, 1.
176 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, 16.
treatment of prisoners for their moral welfare and social, intellectual and industrial improvement.” Insofar as the special committee was concerned with conditions in the prisons, it was only to the extent that they were impeding the proper “scientific management” of the prison population. Part of the furor over conditions was animated by the facilities’ inability to effect the proper “segregation” and “classification” of inmates. This was especially imperative in order to prevent prisons from continuing to be “school[s] of crime.” Existing conditions permitted prisoners with “Opportunities … for retailing to each other the details of their exploits, enlarging upon their experiences, which glorify some as heroes in the eyes of others and tend to form associations which are maintained after release. There can be little doubt that many of the hold-ups and robberies now constituting a veritable crime carnival in this city were planned in the laboratories of this institution.” This view dovetailed with an understanding emerging from the experience of the administration of New York City’s Department of Corrections, in which overcrowding substantially prevented solitary confinement. The Department’s position was that “the completion of the South Wing and the opening of the institution at Greycourt will obviate doubling up in cells at the Correction Hospital.” Hart’s and other reformers’ collaboration within the RPA therefore demonstrates the geographical elements of the emergent system of classification and segregation within the City’s Department of Correction. Infrastructural differentiation and decentralization, politically justified through a public focus on fixing an ageing infrastructure’s deteriorating conditions, was the basis for this system. Hart and the Grand Jury, while emphasizing cost-efficiency (figure 3.8), presented specific recommendations to Commissioner of Corrections Frederick Wallis, which included discontinuing prisons on Welfare

177 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, 10.
178 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, 24.
Island and constructing three new prisons on Riker’s Island, using prison labor for their construction.

Thus, the major ideological basis and political motivation became conditions in the prison. The penitentiary on Welfare Island was an easy target for reformers because of the scandalously poor conditions there, conditions that had persisted since it was built, including a lack of plumbing that necessitated the famous “bucket system” for latrines in the cells. In 1914, Frank Tannenbaum, a young member of the IWW was sentenced to one year on the island for leading homeless men into churches to demand food and money. He wrote a series of articles for The Masses about his prison experience there, exposing conditions and corruption. A moral

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panic surrounding prison escapes, gang activity, and “race riots” were covered regularly in the papers. Middle-class reformers convincingly argued that the buildings were obsolete. For them the workhouse was untenable, because, as Katherine B. Davis, committed eugenicist and New York City’s first female Commissioner of Correction, put it: “the women in the workhouse are not well taken care of.” As the RPA explained, “The greater proportion of the buildings now in use on the islands are so shockingly below modern standards that they ought to be pulled down anyway.”

These were the processes and interests that contributed to the expansion of the carceral state under the ideology of Progressivism, which can be seen in the chart in figure 3.9. Part of the expansion was necessary because of lengthening sentences, which were themselves necessary given the goals of rehabilitating “fallen women,” and activated through indeterminate sentencing. The goal of this carceral system was centralization and differentiation in consolidated New York, and an increased ability to manage, segregate, and classify prisoners. The three Orange County reformatories, which at the time of this report were still under construction, were fundamental to this program.

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183 “Miss Davis to Make Convicts Buck Snow,” *New York Sun*, March 7, 1914. Davis was also a Director of the Committee of Fourteen in 1929, as was John Glenn’s wife. Committee of Fourteen, *Annual Report*, 1929.


The Committee of Fourteen

Lawrence Veiller worked with Charles Norton and Robert De Forest at the RPA. He was also a central member of the law division of the Committee of Fourteen, a private reform organization described by one scholar as “New York City’s most influential anti-vice organization.” The Committee of Fourteen was founded in 1905 by upper-middle class reformers of the City Club in response to the Raines Law Hotels. The Raines law of the late nineteenth century made it legal for hotels to sell alcohol on Sundays, while Saloons could not. Saloon proprietors therefore renovated their upper floors to accommodate at least ten hotel rooms and obtained liquor licenses for Sundays. They then rented the rooms on the upper floors for prostitution. The Committee cracked down on these practices by focusing on working women.

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The Committee was intimately involved in expanding legislation to attack what they called the “social evil,” prostitution. One of their main legislative accomplishments was in 1915, when they re-wrote the state’s vagrancy laws, in particular Subdivision 4, Section 887 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, in order to more easily capture women for solicitation. The most frequently used sections redefined vagrancy as: “A person (a) who offers to commit prostitution … or (c) who loiters in or near any thoroughfare or public or private place for the purpose of inducing, enticing, or procuring another to commit lewdness, fornication, unlawful sexual intercourse or any other indecent act.”188 This statute was expanded again in 1919. Veiller, an attorney, was a moving force in this re-write, and had legislative experience. He also was closely associated with the emergent field of urban planning, having written a book on Tenement House Law of 1901 for Russell Sage, as well as the nation’s first zoning law in 1916. He later wrote similar legislation that became the state’s wayward minor laws in 1923, which remained on the books until 1967.189 Historian Ruth Alexander summarized the Committee’s legislative successes:

The committee…obtained legal reforms that expanded the definition of prostitution and dramatically enhanced the state’s power of surveillance, allowing under-cover police to entrap and arrest disorderly young women who lived apart from and beyond the oversight of kin.190

By their own measure the Committee’s legislation was successful, based on calculations published in their 1919 Annual Report (figure 3.10). Through that year there was a steady increase in the number of arrests under the expanded vagrancy statute, which “would have been impossible prior to the 1915 amendment of the section.” Arrests under this statute went from 14% ...

to 40% of the arraignments in women’s court for prostitution between 1915 and 1919, the period
during which Greycourt was constructed. In absolute numbers it was an increase of
approximately 700—the anticipated capacity of Greycourt when completed. While clearly there
was not a one-to-one relationship, it is notable that a majority of the women sent to Greycourt
were arrested under this statute.

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<td>372</td>
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<td>Soliciting Sub. 2, Sec. 1458, Consolidation Act</td>
<td>667</td>
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<td>Vagrancy Sub. 4, Sec. 887, Code of Cr. Proc.</td>
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<td>620</td>
<td>763</td>
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<td>Vagrancy Sec. 150, Tenement House Law</td>
<td>1189</td>
<td>824</td>
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Figure 3.10 Women’s Court Arraignments for Prostitution, 1915-1919.\(^{191}\)

While initially the Committee tried to work solely through the courts and with the police, it also drew on expanded tactics. Mara Keire detailed the complicated system that was the source of the Committee’s power in pre-prohibition New York City. Saloon keepers paid a steep price for liquor licenses and insurance, costs meant to be prohibitive in efforts to limit the number of saloons. To mitigate these expenses, proprietors entered relationships with brewers, who paid the fees in exchange for exclusive rights to sell their brand at that establishment. Yet brewers also worried about their public image in an increasingly hostile environment regarding the consumption of alcohol. Exploiting this vulnerability, the Committee drew up a blacklist of “disorderly” establishments—a list which they controlled and based on definitions of vice which they composed. If an establishment was on the blacklist, they were put on probation, and forced to sign an agreement that they would put their house in order according to the dictates of the

Committee. The brewers, fearing they would be viewed as promoting disorderly saloons, went along with the plan and owner after owner was forced to sign agreements with the committee. The relatively small Committee of Fourteen’s was therefore able to wield great social influence.192

A major criteria used by the Committee in this scheme was what they called “race-mixing.” If a saloon served black and white patrons together it was marked as “disorderly.” This practice imposed separate-but-equal conditions on saloon owners. Often the agreement that the proprietors signed mandated separate rooms for patrons based on race. This prompted outrage from many, including W.E.B. DuBois, who wrote the Executive Secretary Whiten that the Committee was breaking the laws of New York State. In a series of letters between the two men, Whiten clarified that the Committee's position was one of anti-vice over anti-discrimination. The Committee's belief that “race-mixing” was the source of amorality and disorder, combined with the power it had amassed through the licensing scheme, led to increased segregation of these working-class places of leisure in New York.193 Their strategy sometimes worked too well. At black establishments, the Committee of Fourteen’s white investigators were often refused access and could no longer report on conditions.194 These methods, as well as their membership, overlapped easily with the eugenics and social hygiene movements. Katherine B. Davis, a Director of the Committee, also “conceived and advocated” for the Greycourt project as Commissioner of Correction.195 In initiating the Farm Colony plans, she drew on her past

experience, from 1901 until 1914, as Superintendent of the New York State Reformatory for women at Bedford, which ran a Social Hygiene Institute funded by the Rockefeller family.

The Committee's racial vision for “anti-vice,” written into law and put into practice at the Women's Court, was institutionalized at Greycourt, and was part and parcel of the new ideology of Progressive prison reform. The scientific management of prisons was specifically oriented to determine which prisoners were reformable, and how. A sampling of women sent to Greycourt shows that they were arrested exclusively under the section 887 subdivision. And in fact, arrested under it multiple times. They were given indeterminate sentences of up to three years, and were exclusively white with an average age of 37. In 1930, 41% were immigrants or children of immigrants. Describing its procedures at the Correction Hospital as it awaited completion of the Orange County institution that would help to facilitate modern methods, the Department of Corrections wrote: “Embarrassed by lack of funds, prohibitive building costs and building delays, the Department has sought to make the best segregation possible. The healthy and diseased are separated, colored prisoners are placed together on one tier, and self-committed drug addicts have a tier to themselves.”

Thus, the structural reformation of the prison system in New York City after consolidation was specifically a political project, grounded in the practices of racism, segregation, and classification. In considering the debate over conditions of the penitentiaries on Welfare Island, there was no discussion about changes in the law, which had expanded the ambit of police, magistrates, and what the institutions of prisons were meant to do. The state’s legal and institutional changes appeared as a question of morality, and the reformatories similarly were

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based on a program of behavioral reform. These politics amounted to the deliberate expansion of the prison infrastructure expressed in the language of Progressivism and using tactics of racial segregation. Hastings Hart projected the number of prisoners well into the future. Indeed, reformers constantly thought in terms of “capacity,” both for present and future needs. In the words of reformers, they wanted to avoid the mistakes of their “City Fathers,” who “framed the Penitentiary [on Welfare Island] to meet the needs of the then young City of New York of only 200,000 people, and made it so rigid that it could never be altered to meet future advances in civilization.”

The Farm Colony at Greycourt

This institution when completed will mark a most important event in the plans for modernization of New York City’s correctional institutions…The modern correctional institution is now conceived upon the theory of reformation, and is no longer planned or developed with a view to its punitive effect, the accomplishment of reformation serving in itself as a deterrent for future offenders.

Construction of Greycourt Prison, which lasted five years, began in 1918 as part of this Progressive movement, which in its public face was to reform prison conditions, especially for the segregation of women. Greycourt, the city’s version of the State Reformatory at Bedford, was the women’s branch of New York City’s reformatory system. The other institutions in the new system, also in Orange County, were for youth: the New Hampton Reformatory for young men, aged sixteen to thirty, and the Warwick Dairy Farm, the honor camp for New Hampton. The Municipal Farm on Riker’s Island was a men’s facility for drug users, and the Hart Island

Reformatory was not being operated as a reformatory due to the overcrowding of the men’s penitentiary on Welfare Island. These institutions were showpieces for the Department of Correction and exemplary of modern, scientific methods for the administration of carceral institutions.

The ideological foundations of reformatory science were discernible spatially and architecturally. While Greycourt was under construction, the Department of Corrections linked its necessity to its distinct design and its unique location. “The general style of architecture is English Gothic, treated in such manner as to avoid the conventional appearance of prison buildings. The walls are of variegated red and dark brick and selected to give a pleasing tone.”

The report further described why these geographic and institutional elements were so important.

The modernization of the Department in the light of knowledge gained from those who have made the subject a study, first and primarily demands means for obtaining a definite basis of classification, the accomplishment is only possible by the establishment of buildings arranged for the separation of the hardened from the less hardened, and the segregation of inmates upon the basis of physical and mental condition, character and conduct and the cause and nature of the delinquency. 202

A type of institution with a founding ideology, program, and architecture strikingly similar to progressive era reformatory prisons (as well as today’s most progressive homeless shelters) emerged in the early mercantile period across Europe. Workhouses such as England’s Bridewell’s and Holland’s Rasp-huis collected dislocated agricultural workers for their integration to a system of wage labor in urban centers at a time when a shortage of labor threatened to escalate its cost and political power. These were the first modern houses of correction, which practiced “more than mere custody.” Inmates received a wage for basic,

manual labor, vaguely productive, and done without machines to avoid competition with free labor. This payment was given in exchange for the provision that the inmates would pay their own way. Dormitories were congregate and prisoners had relative freedom within the institution itself; the retributive formula of solitary confinement in a penitentiary had not yet been institutionalized. The program emphasized communal work, which would ingrain discipline and contribute to the state’s saving some of the cost of regulating this mobile surplus population.  

Workhouses resolved a contradiction at their heart, because they encompassed a program for the poor, both the “good,” who were trained in work discipline, and the “evil,” who were deprived of liberty. Work was the crux of this resolution, which could take on both rehabilitative and punitive ideological aspects. State discipline had temporal and spatial components and constraints. Time was broken up into abstract and measurable parts and workers who had migrated from the countryside to cities were supposed to internalize these new conditions, trained in the workhouses. Melossi and Pavarini thus conclude, “the workhouse was not a true and proper place of production, it was a place for teaching the discipline of production.”

Yet there were further contradictions in the workhouses. Political opposition to prison labor rested on the argument that it would compete with outside labor. Introducing machinery would reduce labor costs as well as speed up and boost production, an argument that prevented these institutions’ transformation into fully productive, self-supporting enterprises. Neither wages nor production in the workhouse could be allowed to compete with private industry, according to the Poor Law’s “principle of less eligibility.” At the same time, that meant that workers could not be sufficiently trained for work outside, which was the ideological basis for

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their sequestration. Various attempts subsequently were made to deal with this contradiction, most notably in the famous debates on the relative merits between the Auburn and Pennsylvania systems in the United States. It was toward this conflict that the Auburn system in upstate New York was directed, and contract work with private companies was instituted. In Progressive Era New York City, these institutional contradictions appear to have been resolved through gender and articulated through race, as more women entered the prison system through the types of legislation described above. Isolation and hard labor were the mechanisms to effect penitence among men in penitentiaries. Communal work in domestic labors was deemed the appropriate form to rehabilitate women and youth in reformatories. As Davis explains, “since women were not acknowledged to be securely in possession of [individual liberties] they were not eligible to participate in this process of redemption [in a penitentiary].”

Originally, as a result of an 1828 law, segregation by sex was done in the same building. But this posed problems for reform, since sexual relationships continued inside the prison. Male prisoners and guards continued to exploit women prisoners, and some women sustained work as prostitutes while imprisoned. Separate facilities for women, often based on the cottage model, developed into a program that “infused domesticity into prison life” in the various types of work done there, a process in which the invisibility of domestic labor conformed to the institutional invisibility of reformatories for women in this period. In New York, suitable women and youth were separated out from the workhouse and penitentiary into institutions in Orange County. The planned cottage system was never implemented at Greycourt, but the Women’s Farm Colony

208 Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?, 69–70.
was New York City’s first geographically separate women’s prison. These aspects of reformatory and penitentiary practice were in dialectical relationship, relying on each other in order to define their particular ideological bases. While conditions in reformatories were more lenient, the “controlling” institution remained the penitentiary prison, the stick that made the carrot of the reformatories have power.

In these late 19th and early 20th century transitions, prisons demonstrate the intersection of race and sexuality, because femininity was relegated to white women. Davis explains this development: “As the US prison system evolved during the twentieth century, demonized modes of punishment—the cottage system, domestic training, and so on—were designed ideologically to reform white women, relegating women of color in large part to realms of public punishment that made no pretense of offering them femininity.” Women sent to reformatories served longer sentences for similar crimes than men did, because their moral rehabilitation was understood to take time. This aspect corresponded with ideals of eugenicists because they wanted women out of society for as many of their child-bearing years as possible. Although it was never full, early on the Women’s Prison Association expressed hope that through the new Women’s Farm Colony at Greycourt it would be possible to extend sentences considerably, demonstrating the reform movement’s expansion of the prison system through progressivism. “It is to be hoped that the magistrates will make longer commitments, and that Greycourt will care for and help the women who go and come repeatedly from the Correctional Hospital at Welfare Island.” Mary Harris, Superintendent of the Women’s Workhouse on Welfare Island, reflected this sentiment in

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211 Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 72.
her comment that “nothing more futile can be imagined than these short-term sentences.”

Ideal femininity had an impact on the broader reform movement, because while rigid discipline continued to dominate the regime for male prisoners in the penitentiary, the emergent women’s prisons moved toward a program of “individual redemption and moral reform” that encouraged inmates to “cooperate willingly” in this process.

In this rearrangement, Greycourt embodied the changing ideological functions of prisons. The Department of Corrections’ organizational chart in 1930 listed the Women’s Farm Colony as “for white felony cases.” According to the logic, progress toward reforming working class white women was impeded by the presence of black women in their midst. Evidence given for this degenerative effect was usually amorous relationships between black and white women. Interracial relationships were the biggest problem for investigators of New York State’s Bedford Reformatory, as reported in an official document of the State Board of Charities in 1914. Disciplinary problems stemming from “harmful intimacy” between black and white prisoners were more important than obstacles of its rural location and its inability to become “self-sustaining” using the labor of its inmates. As a result, Bedford established separate cottages for black and white women in 1917. Yet prison officials acknowledged that this did not solve the problem that they sought to address, because the relationships continued. Officials refused to acknowledge genuine feelings and “explained” white women’s participation in them as a “longing for masculinity” they were denied by their confinement in an all-female institution. Black women’s “innate promiscuity and sexual deviancy” were “confirmed” by these

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relationships as they were attributed a “masculine” role that distracted white women from the institution’s rehabilitative goals. In this way, officials attributed failure of the prison’s program to racial difference. Greycourt represented innovation to reformers because it segregated geographically by race and gender in a renovated reform program based on training white women for domestic labor. Sexuality and race were central in the carceral institution’s project of policing working class women’s behavior and criminalizing their subsistence practices.  

Most of the women sent to Greycourt were arrested multiple times under section 887 subdivision for of the revised code of criminal proceedings. All of the women with this disposition were arrested under the 1915 Laws Relating to Sex Morality in New York City, sections 4a and 4c under “Vagrancy,” which had been written by Veiller and the Committee of Fourteen. These women were sentenced at the Ninth District Magistrate’s Court, the Women’s Night Court in Manhattan. Docket books from the late 1920’s show that sentences for women at the court generally took four primary forms: probation, the workhouse/penitentiary on Welfare Island (known as the Corrections Hospital), the Bedford Reformatory, and the Church of the Good Shephard in Northern Manhattan. While a sampling of women from 1929 docket books from the Court of Special Sessions between November 1929 and July 1930, the period in which the women would have been sent there to show up on the 1930 census, shows an even distribution between white and black women with indeterminate sentences of up to three years, only the white women were sent to Greycourt to serve their sentences.

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219 "Women’s Court Case Cards,” 1929, Boxes 73 and 74, Committee of Fourteen Records, New York Public Library.
Grace Campbell, the “most prominent woman in the Harlem Left” between World War I and the depression, and a Court Attendant at the Court of Special Sessions and Officer with the Municipal Parole Commission, described this segregation, one of the few places where it is acknowledged:

Even in the workhouse segregation is rife, and that institution known as Grey Court, [sic.] which is a women’s farm colony, is used for white women only, while the colored women are kept in the old fashioned workhouse prison.222

One segment of the women sentenced in the docket books had a unique disposition: “workhouse indeterminate period, not exceeding two years.” Comparing the docket books to the census for 1930 reveals that it is from the group with the latter disposition that the women sent to Greycourt were selected. Greycourt was thus used for the purpose advocated by the Women’s Prison Association: “to send women for an indefinite period, who are over thirty years of age and are convicted of misdemeanors a number of times in a short period.”223 The women sent to Greycourt appear to be the most recalcitrant of the reformables in the eyes of the reformers. As opposed to the women who were sent to Bedford, many of whom had zero or just one prior arrest for prostitution, the Greycourt referrals had many, often up to ten. They were also older; “wayward minors” were sent to Bedford or Hudson. The Women’s Farm Colony was a prison for white women who had been sentenced to indeterminate sentences of three years or less.224

222 Grace P. Campbell, “Tragedy of the Colored Girl in Court,” New York Age, April 25, 1925.
224 All of the men and women living in the Greycourt facility in 1925 and 1930 were listed as white on the census. I have only been able to find only one other “official” acknowledgement of this segregation by race, a New York Times article states: “The cornerstone was laid on July 31, 1918, and the institution was opened in 1924 [sic] when the transfer of white inmates of the Women’s Workhouse on Welfare Island was begun.” Urges Work at Greycourt,” The New York Times, January 14, 1926.
Drug users were sent there after they had completed a treatment program at the Corrections Hospital.

Indeterminate sentencing was supposed to provide incentive for inmates to internalize their own reform, used in conjunction with parole, a program which informed the development of Camp LaGuardia. The average age of the women at the colony was 37 in both 1925 and 1930. Thus, while the designers of the system placed the functional requirements of capacity at the forefront, only certain women were selected to live at the facility. This segregation had the overarching programmatic goal of separating the “hardened” from the “less-hardened,” or, as the Grand Jury put it in the context of reform of the men’s penitentiary, preventing the “development of amateur into professional criminals.”

Reports by the various organizations thus contrasted the openness of Greycourt with the claustrophobic environment associated with the institutions on Welfare Island. In pictures, as the one shown in figure 3.11, the expansiveness of the grounds is equated with healthy reform. The underlying draw of Greycourt, the unifying cultural trope that made it seem functional and logical, is that women would be extracted from an unhealthy environment and immersed in a healthy one.

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225 A Special Committee of the Regular Grand Jury August Term, A Study of the Conditions Which Have Accumulated Under Many Administrations and Now Exist in the Prisons on Welfare Island New York City, 23.
Greycourt was also designed to activate a wider array of work assignments. At the time, all inmates under the control of the New York City Department of Corrections were required to work. In 1920, the Department’s annual report listed “Net Sales” to other city agencies of $155,405, from bed, broom, knitting, and clothing industries at the Correction Hospital, the women’s section of the workhouse. But according to Hart’s report, the training industries for prisoners at the workhouse was insufficient to requirements for their moral regeneration. The design of Greycourt took this into consideration, providing for “spaces available for contemplated shops…to manufacture articles that could be used in institutions of other city departments.” Farm work was reserved for men. Before the Women’s Farm Colony had even

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229 Hart, Two Reports on the Reorganization & Reconstruction of the New York City Prison System, 40.
opened, the men from New Hampton had already put all of its 288 available acres into cultivation.231

By 1930 there were only 81 women serving time in the Women’s Farm Colony at Greycourt. In addition, there were 30 men, the young men who demonstrated good behavior at New Hampton and were moved to the “honor camp” at Greycourt.232 This means that the facility was well under its envisioned capacity of 700 seven years after it opened, including the men living there from New Hampton. This work component of rehabilitation would be transferred over to the Department of Public Welfare along with the rural infrastructure of the former prison. Work remains part of the ideological underpinning of reform in New York City’s homeless shelters, and was a main aspect of national welfare reform in its “welfare-to work” format. This function of work, which stemmed from the tension between punishment and reform, was severed from the penitentiary component, and visible explicitly in the transition of this institution from a prison to a homeless shelter.

Conclusion

Like much of the RPA’s ambitious agenda, the clearing of Welfare Island was not immediately accomplished. Its official plan, published just months before the October crash of 1929, was never fully implemented.233 The Women’s House of Detention in Greenwich Village opened in 1932.234 Riker’s Island Prison was completed in 1935 and its first prisoners were transferred in December of that year.235 This was the year after the Women’s Farm Colony was converted into a men’s work camp in conjunction with the New Deal’s Works Progress

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Administration. The penitentiary on Welfare Island was closed in 1935, and demolition began immediately with WPA labor.\textsuperscript{236} The Committee of Fourteen, running into financial difficulties and without the pre-Prohibition leverage it had maintained in the magistrate’s courts and through an alliance with the brewers' association and insurance companies, collapsed in 1932.\textsuperscript{237}

The Greycourt institution’s specific program switched, even if its guiding principles remained. With New Deal money available for the upkeep of the property and the space problem in women’s prisons “solved,”\textsuperscript{238} Greycourt Prison was converted into a work camp for homeless men by New York City’s Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. The mayor maintained the function of Camp LaGuardia, an institution that criminalized people in neighborhoods of the transient poor, while changing its focus of who was vagrant and in need of reform: incorrigible prostitutes versus single men failing in their duty as breadwinners. The program that had been designed for the Women’s Reformatory at Greycourt became gendered male when it was changed into a homeless camp, and an exaggerated hyper-masculinity became the buttress to support consent among men in the program, the design of which had previously been understood as female. A name change from Greycourt to “Camp LaGuardia” indicated the desirability of “ridding the camp of a name still associated with the women’s prison.”\textsuperscript{239}

During the depression, Farm Colonies and similar camps became widely cited as solutions to the related problems of unemployment and political radicalism. Some even argued that widespread use of farm colonies would eliminate altogether the need for the new Riker’s

\textsuperscript{237} Committee of Fourteen, \textit{Annual Report}, 1930; Keire, “The Committee of Fourteen and Saloon Reform in New York City, 1905-1920”; Robertson, “Harlem Undercover: Vice Investigators, Race, and Prostitution, 1910-1930.”
\textsuperscript{238} “For Greycourt Change,” \textit{The New York Times}, February 5, 1933.
\textsuperscript{239} “Camp Greycourt Adopts LaGuardia as New Name,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, May 12, 1935.
prison. Camp LaGuardia became a material example of a belief, which had long been a part of the Department of Correction’s philosophy, expressed in its 1920 Annual Report, that “The greatest safeguard against un-American propaganda is the home. A man who owns his home and is able to make a comfortable living for his family and himself will never listen to un-American propaganda.” Thus, the Progressive Era focus on an individualized morality, coupled with scientific methods of behavior modification, remained focused on training for industry even in the midst of state institutional and ideological change. The precedent had been set, given the wording in the 1898 charter, for transferring vacant Department of Corrections infrastructure to the Department of Welfare. The next chapter focuses on the period of Camp LaGuardia’s history during the depression.

Edmond Kelly, The Elimination of the Tramp by the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland, with the Modifications Thereof Necessary to Adapt This System to American Conditions (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1908), xviii.
Chapter 4
Genealogy of a “Human Repair Shop”

Figure 4.1 “The farm at Camp LaGuardia” exhibits the pastoral labor idyll that the camp represented.\textsuperscript{241}

Every young man reformed before the wanderlust habit is firmly fastened upon him will add many dollars by his labor to the wealth of the State, in addition to saving the expense of maintaining him for many years in a correctional institution.\footnote{Joint Application Bureau, “A Brief for the Establishment of a State Farm Colony,” 1911, Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.}

In America, land is cheap and labor is dear; and labor is the factor of production which the prison has in abundance.\footnote{Director of Witzwil Industrial Farm Colony, quoted in Frank A. Fetter, “Witzwil, A Successful Penal Farm,” The Survey 25 (February 1911): 766.}

What a mess [Tammany] made out of it! I’d like to invite every citizen of New York to inspect our Municipal Lodging Houses and Camp LaGuardia ... We have erased the poor law concept of relief. The word “charity” has absolutely no place in modern government!\footnote{“Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in Conversation with William Hodson,” Putting Them on the Spot (WMCA, October 25, 1937), Cassettes 1791 and 1792, New York Public Library, William Hodson Papers.}

Introduction

Soon after Camp LaGuardia became a work camp for men under the auspices of the New York City Department of Welfare, Claude McKay wrote of it “The railroad, freight boats, and Marseille were heavens in comparison.” McKay had fallen on hard times and was living at the Camp, then called Greycourt, in the final months of 1934. He had already published some of his most famous works—including “If We Must Die,” the acclaimed protest poem of the Harlem Renaissance, and \textit{Banjo}, a blues novel based on his personal experiences living with black international proletarians, living homeless on the beach near the Marseilles docks—\footnote{Gary Edward Holcomb, \textit{Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).} as well as represented the African Blood Brotherhood at the Communist International in Moscow in 1922.\footnote{John Riddell, \textit{Toward a United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922} (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).} Yet despite the staunch anti-communism of Captain George L. Clark, the director of the camp, McKay, experienced revolutionary and sensitive observer, could find no evidence of a
revolutionary consciousness among its residents. On the contrary, it was hopeless: “Now I can understand why people commit suicide rather than become paupers…They are prisoners. They hate each other.”

Presumably, McKay, writing from a left-opposition perspective, was referring to the similarities between distinctive forms of managed capitalism emerging in the United States and the Soviet Union when he wrote, “I guess it was like this in Russia when the Revolution came. Strangely this place does bring back to me something of the feeling I had in Russia of people working to clear away a wreck.” But surely, conditions there must have partly resulted from the haste with which the institution was transformed from a prison into a relief site. While the camp opened its doors on May 1, 1934, as late as mid-April, there was still (at least public) confusion as to what it would be used for.

This chapter examines the material conditions that contributed to the mutating ideology of “work” in a work camp model of rehabilitation. Chief among these ideological shifts was the transformation of work in its function of legitimating the state’s management of displacement. While punitive labor guided the prison reformatory system, rehabilitative labor guided an emergent anti-charity welfare policy. New York City institutionalized its welfare program as it stabilized the social and economic crises set in motion by the Great Depression and anticipated future crises. It did so in a way that deliberately attempted to short-circuit more radical political programs. In the 1930s, the Department was under consistent pressure from the left as it contemplated and struggled to implement a reconfiguration and merger with the Emergency

248 Cooper, 205–6.
249 The New York Times reported on the grand jury report mentioned in the previous chapter, which condemned the Welfare Island penitentiary: “The grand jurors suggested that the city’s Greycourt institution, which is about to be abandoned, would be an ideal place for the drug addicts, if put in proper condition.” “City Is ‘Indicted’ on Welfare Prison,” The New York Times, April 14, 1934. “Change at Greycourt,” Correction, April 1934, 5.
Relief Bureau, the official organ for disbursing relief. William Hodson, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia’s Welfare Commissioner, was frequently a subject of stories in the Communist Daily Worker as it scrutinized this process. Not surprisingly, political actions reported in this publication circumscribed Hodson’s available options, and this had an effect on how he carried out his long-term plan for the Welfare Department.250

In its efforts to keep idled labor occupied during the depression, the state ran into political obstacles that were activated by relief politics. Correspondingly, the chapter argues, Camp LaGuardia, the state's original programmatic response to the social problem defined as homelessness, was deliberately designed to sever and isolate the consciousness of workers there from the more radical elements then developing in and engaged with relief politics, however vaguely Welfare Department administrators understood “radical” to be. (They often used terms such as “radical,” “agitator,” or “communist” interchangeably.) From a social reproduction standpoint, Camp LaGuardia evolved into an institution that could effectively keep labor occupied until the crisis ended—which required reproducing labor power socially, physically, and psychologically—even as it tried to depoliticize it. Complicating this volatile political mix was the problem of actually administering relief on a daily basis. Administrative clerical workers were on the front lines of determining the fates of families applying for relief, based on an incessantly changing jumble of programs and laws designed to distinguish between workers and forms of relief. Ideological transformations of the state’s rehabilitation program with respect to work were a particular resolution of contradictions stemming from depressed conditions themselves, as sections of the unemployed vied for insufficient resources, including official aid

250 For example, see “No Provisions Made for Families Cut Off by Gibson Committee,” Daily Worker, September 27, 1933; “Unemployment Relief Communist Demand,” Daily Worker, October 31, 1933; “Meet to Act on Firing of Negro Relief Director,” Daily Worker, June 1, 1939; “Alliance Asks 25 Per Cent Increase in Relief Budget,” Daily Worker, April 19, 1940.
and government employment, to survive. In this way, Camp LaGuardia highlights overlooked aspects of the general relief program.

It is in this context that administrators understood the function of work at the camp. For work to do its job of rehabilitation it had to be “pure,” that is, untainted by social relations or consciousness. In other words, Camp LaGuardia fetishized work as it institutionalized its rehabilitation program. A rural workhouse that attempted to reverse the rural to urban migration patterns that characterized displacement in this period, it was a short-lived attempt to make productive the rehabilitative labor programs that had developed historically out of the prison form. Simultaneously, in the increasing class diversity of joblessness during the Depression, Camp LaGuardia achieved cohesiveness among workers through specific appeals to race and nation. In the absence of an alternative ideology, racism and nationalism buttressed the emergent cohesiveness among workers at the camp as they moved from “hating each other” to being represented as the jewel in the crown of a modernized and flexible program to address homelessness. Camp LaGuardia, like contemporary homeless shelters, was a political project, rather than a merely rehabilitative project, as was the claim of its architects.

Hodson, previously the founding Executive Director of the Welfare Council of New York City, the umbrella agency that had coordinated a complicated public-private network of charity since 1925, oversaw these institutional re-alignments, after he became the Commissioner of Public Welfare in the LaGuardia administration, in January 1934. He faced a difficult task, because the inherited relief program was already strenuously contested. As Piven and Cloward describe, “the depression saw the rise and fall of the largest movement of unemployed this

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country has known, and the institution against which the movement was inevitably pitted was the relief system.”252 At a time when the lines between staff administering relief and those receiving it were being drawn—not as clear as we imagine them today—these politics were intimidating to an unstable and incipient Welfare program. Relief efforts dramatically expanded the ranks of public workers as they were absorbed as staff into the Emergency Relief Bureau and the Works Progress Administration. These agencies were in constant flux, at one moment ballooning and at the next needing to be significantly downsized so that relief would not “compete” with private industry. This caused serious uncertainty and upheaval for relief workers, who continually evaluated their political affiliations. According to the final report of the Emergency Relief Bureau of New York City to Mayor LaGuardia in 1938, it paid $70 million dollars in relief funds over the course of its existence as wages to administrative employees, “almost half of whom would have been on relief if it were not for ERB employment.”253 As Hodson repeatedly ran up against these contradictions in the administration of relief, he designed his institutions accordingly.

Camp LaGuardia, developing from the influence of members of the Russell Sage Foundation, was a relief valve in this process. Hodson specifically wanted a flexible system of relief, which would expand and contract with “business cycles,” measured by the increase and decrease of factory employment. Accordingly, he needed projects that could move with those cycles but not disturb them, and Camp LaGuardia suited this intent. Yet it did not arise fully formed out of the Depression. It relied on a philosophy developed since the early 20th century based in “curing,” through hard labor, those displaced by economic change. The Great

Depression allowed a contingent of powerful professional reformers to put into practice a method of labor control that had been long present in their agenda. The history of the institution that became Camp LaGuardia therefore encapsulates ideological shifts in notions of “work.” Originally, work was to save vagrants and “cure” them of their “disease” while segregating them from “genuine” workers. Subsequently, work intended to keep men healthy and optimistic during the depression by giving them a temporary place until they could secure employment in private industry. These transformations had a concrete impact on the city’s shelter policy. Whereas in the lodging houses only 5 nights of shelter per person were permitted monthly, at Camp LaGuardia long-term stays were necessary so that labor efficiency could be maintained seasonally.\(^{254}\) The depression justified putting this program into action with federal funding while adapting it to new conditions. In the Progressive Era, reformers worked their politics through influence in the courts (see chapter two). Later reformers increasingly worked through the expanding capacity of a bureaucratic state, developed in New Deal legislation.\(^ {255}\)

Further, Camp Greycourt, as Camp LaGuardia was known before its name change, was both the institutional and ideological model for Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), giving it both local and national significance. The homeless and men over 25 could not enroll in the CCC, but Camp LaGuardia was designed for just those people. A gendered response to the depression, it was imagined to be “self-sustaining” by providing men a rehabilitative work environment in a congregate setting.\(^ {256}\) Work camps, in their numerous forms, helped to alleviate...

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254 William B. Herlands, *Administration of Relief in New York City* (New York City: Department of Investigation, 1940).
geographic confusion, inherited from diverse state poor laws, in the general relief program. While “transients” were displaced industrial workers moving between states in search of work, “local homeless” were those with legal settlement in the locality where they received aid. With important distinctions, work camps stalled both of these categories of displacement, while simultaneously maintaining inherited hierarchies. The changing work camp model of rehabilitation eased the transition from poor law to modern welfare, and from the administration of direct relief to work relief. Displacement, stretched over space and time, was suspended until the depression passed.

A geographic perspective also demonstrates Camp LaGuardia’s regional importance. The camp occupied a position in the structure of New York City’s Welfare program other than its flexibility, because the camp’s designers imagined it to be a vehicle for repopulating the countryside. A report by the Welfare Council Research Bureau in 1933 catalogued a blueprint for the ideology of the self-sustaining work camp model in a New York regional context during the depression. It specified its “plan of development” for an experimental “self-help” program. The first “assumption” on which the proposal was based was: “It is desirable to decentralize population. It is well to assist in the movement of breaking down the congested urban centers and building up small communities.”257 In this way, it was a northeastern version of the subsistence homelands of the Farm Security Administration, tailored to an urbanized proletariat, with one crucial difference. While it resembled the same anti-communist, decentralist politics that lent tentative support for early New Deal policy, its solution was to turn the homeless into farm workers, not farm owners.

The ideology surrounding labor, worked out in the lineage of Camp LaGuardia’s rehabilitation program, therefore bridged some of the problems regarding relief that plagued New Dealers. It did not compete with “free labor.” It did not duplicate already-existing services or production. It was a “self-help” program. It seemingly helped to relieve the congestion of industrial cities and extinguished the embers of urban political contestation. Local relief was supposed to be free of politics, but this was a foil for undercutting the political positions and solidarities of an emergent critique of relief by the political left.

Antecedents: “The Emergent Resolution”

The Charity Organization Society of the Russell Sage Foundation had been interested in a Farm Colony for New York City’s surplus population since at least the early 1900s. In their advocacy of this model, they drew on work by Edmund Kelly to designate farm colonies as a central plank of prison reform policy. Kelly was the most stalwart American proponent of the farm colony archetype, as well as its most consistent and thorough theorist, his simultaneous commitments to utopian socialism and eugenics apparently resolved in his adherence to the model. Kelly saw in the camp structure a way to protect employable workers displaced by depression from the degenerative influence of “professional tramps”: permanent and unemployable vagrants who could not be reformed. For the group of relief organizations affiliated to the Russell Sage Foundation, this translated into the belief that “every prison from the village lockup to the State Reformatory” should be designed toward “cur[ing] the inmates of criminal inclinations rather than [acting] as a school for the perfecting of criminal education.”

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258 Kelly, The Elimination of the Tramp by the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland, with the Modifications Thereof Necessary to Adapt This System to American Conditions. Robert W. de Forest, President of the Charity Organization Society and Trustee of the Russell Sage Foundation, wrote a Preface to this book. In 1939, the Charity Organization Society merged with the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor to form the Community Service Society.

259 Joint Application Bureau, “A Brief for the Establishment of a State Farm Colony.”
This was why they counterpoised work camps against prisons, which were expensive and did not offer sufficient opportunities for work. A main tenet of the farm colony system, based on European industrial farms, was that they made homeless men “self-supporting.” Moreover, they saved the state money, because the farms themselves would be “self-sustaining.” The men would produce everything that they needed to live and thereby lend an “indirect saving [to the taxpayer]” that would be “incalculable.”

While originally conceived as a way to reduce rising costs associated with prisons, the “Joint Application Bureau” working at the Municipal Lodging House began to see how they could use work camps for those living in shelter, then still understood in poor law parlance as “vagrants” or “tramps.” The Joint Application Bureau, dating back to 1888, was a collaboration between the Charity Organization Society and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, private agencies that specifically coordinated their services “in aid of homeless men” to prevent duplication. Homelessness was an area of experimentation for these groups, and their reports were titled “the emergent resolution,” alluding to both uncertainty but also hope in their development of modern methods toward its alleviation. Under the leadership of Johnston de Forest, son of Robert de Forest, they began to interview men at the Municipal Lodging House to determine their eligibility to perform manual work, and thereby to identify candidates for the program of hard labor. They argued that the Municipal Lodging House, the city’s only public shelter, continuously failed because it offered little in terms of employment opportunities. The only work assignment which appeared on the Joint Application Bureau’s periodic reports was

260 “Notes on State Farm Colony Bill. (Senate Bill No. 251, State of New York, Amended as Proposed)” (National Vagrancy Committee, 1909), Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

chopping wood in the Charity Organization Society’s woodyard, yet the overwhelming reason that men gave when they applied for lodging at the lodging house was a loss of work. Additionally, fewer than one-fifth of the men applying for aid had spent their entire lives in New York, which was a problem given that poor laws regulated the disbursal of relief based on a graded system of settlement and residency.

Clearly, to these men, vagrancy was a draw on the state during economic downturns. But in this view, vagrancy also fed on periods of recovery. In the run up to the “hard winter” of 1908-1909, the tail end of the 1907-1908 depression, the “labor colony idea” was forefront in the plan of “those interested in organized charity” “to alleviate [destitution] without attracting to the city a large number of professional vagrants,” which would jeopardize relief efforts in total.262 Accordingly, the Joint Application Bureau envisioned the farm colony for the “arrest, detention, reformation, and instruction of persons convicted of vagrancy, habitual drunkenness, and disorderly conduct.”263 The Municipal Lodging House opened that year, and administrators were anxious that “vagrants” would abuse its “generosity.”264 In 1911, they reiterated this worry: “the general prosperity has apparently made it easier for vagrants to rove over large districts with the assurance that they would find little difficulty in supporting an idle and aimless life by begging or stealing supplies.”265 As poor law era relief addressed widespread homelessness, its tools of surveillance became insufficient, since, it was held, people could move constantly between localities collecting relief or panhandling. The situation was urgent that spring. Almost nine

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263 “Draft of the ‘Grattan Bill,’” no date, but late 1908 or early 1909, Box 141. Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants.,” Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.
264 This reflects a wider pattern: when a service understood to be “generous” is introduced to the homeless poor a surveillance or punitive measure is worked out simultaneously. This pattern continues to this day.
265 Joint Application Bureau, “A Brief for the Establishment of a State Farm Colony.”
thousand more men applied for lodgings in April 1911 than in the same month the previous year, 65% applying for the first time.266

Political-geographic scale was a major concern of farm colony proponents. In meetings, the bureau expressed worry over the model’s violation of the “principle of local responsibility for local burdens” because the institution would not be located in the county where its charges “had” settlement. Added to this was a concern for “securing the support of the railroads” – an inevitability that required state, rather than local, mobilization.267 Based on the Bureau’s work, Senator William Grattan introduced a bill into the State Senate on March 9, 1909. It authorized the institution of a “State Industrial Farm Colony,” and provided for the formation of a state police for enforcement.268 The labor colony was to be run from the State Department of Prisons, and the Trustees of the Labor Colony would report to both the State Board of Charities as well as the State Board of Prisons. The general idea was in keeping with the Joint Application Bureau’s philosophy: putting “vagrants” in prisons was too expensive. A farm colony could reform them for a fraction of the cost. Johnston de Forest testified, “Without a labor colony where permanent compulsory treatment of the vagrant may be held, practically all attempts to treat the vagrancy question with the facilities now available in New York City, the workhouse among the number, do not diminish vagrancy.”269 Switzerland was his outstanding example, where by use of farm labor colonies, “not only [had] vagabondage disappeared, but it [had] been eliminated without

266 “Are Homeless Men Permanently Made Self Supporting?” Report of the Social Secretary to the Superintendent” (Joint Application Bureau, April 1911), Box 141. Folder “Legislation, 1907-1917, Farm Colony, Vagrants.,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.
268 Orlando Lewis to W. Frank Persons, March 3, 1909, Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library. The bill in the assembly introduced by Brooklyn Assemblyman C.F. Murphy left out this provision.
cost to the State."²⁷⁰ In a circular sent by the National Vagrancy Committee, a lobbying group set up to promote the bills, the Joint Application Bureau succinctly described the ideology and function of a state labor colony.

The present correctional treatment of vagrancy is costly and inadequate. Short, idle sentences in jails and penitentiaries, (with the expense of maintaining the vagrants met by the local community or by the counties) are not reducing vagrants or ensuring their imprisonment for any length of time. The bill provides for a colony at which agriculture, horticulture, and the industries shall be taught. The vagrant shall be committed under indeterminate sentence, the maximum period of commitment to be two years.²⁷¹

The Farm Colony was to be used to keep people who they believed were actually employable and temporarily out of work from debasement by “professional” tramps and vagrants. The camp would “segregate all others, both criminals and inebriates, who are beyond the hope of cure.”²⁷² If they were reformed, all the better. But, more likely, at least they would pay their own way, or be repelled altogether by the idea of “real work.”²⁷³ An editorial in the New York Evening Post, in 1915, restated this idea: “It would be a much more simple matter to care for those who are victims of depressed industrial conditions if the vagrant element were eliminated and handled by other and more efficient methods.” The article quoted the Superintendent of the Joint Application Bureau, Charles Blatchly, “The State is in a position to remove in large part the menace of voluntary unemployment, to save a large proportion of the expense which it now entails, and to simplify to a considerable degree the difficulty of meeting effectively the

²⁷⁰ Kelly, The Elimination of the Tramp by the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland, with the Modifications Thereof Necessary to Adapt This System to American Conditions, xvii.
²⁷¹ “Notes on State Farm Colony Bill. (Senate Bill No. 251, State of New York, Amended as Proposed.”
²⁷² “Report of Social Secretary” (Joint Application Bureau, April 1911), 7, Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.
²⁷³ “At any rate experience shows that [Farm Colonies] will drive the hoboos away from States where they are instituted, as there is nothing the vagrant hates so much as real work.” Commissioner of Public Charities Hebbard, quoted in “Hard Winter Feared by Charity Workers.”
conditions created among genuine workers as a consequence of involuntary unemployment."

This sentiment was reinforced by the Superintendent of the Bowery Mission, who complained to Blatchly that the wording in the draft bill was too vague, because “bona fide workingmen, temporarily out of work” might be scooped up by it. Given specificity on this point, he assured Blatchly of his support. Blatchly agreed, and Section 218 of the bill read:

> Board shall notify Governor of readiness to receive inmates, whereupon he shall notify courts and magistrates, who may then, in lieu of other commitment, commit to the colony, for indeterminate period, any male over the age of sixteen (twenty-one) adjudged by them to be a vagrant or tramp; but no person proving habitual self-support.274

Other benefits apparent to prison and charity reformers of a state industrial farm colony were articulated by a Cornell Professor in an article describing Switzerland’s famous farm colony, Witzwil. In this institution, the state kept labor in reserve without empowering it politically. The gravitational draw of Witzwil was that its return on investment “has been done without the lease or the contract systems of labor, and with no injurious competition with, or protests from, free labor.” It was devised from the “ground up”: the laborers reproduced themselves as well as the camp. The laborers consented to their “reform” in an institution such as this, and were kept healthy—physically, psychologically, emotionally—rather than left to become depressed themselves. It was also a place of congregation for seasonal workers, one sub-group of “vagrants,” in which their labor could be harnessed and regularized.275 In terms of land,


275 “Shows Need of Hobo Farm,” The New York Times, February 4, 1917. This was argued immediately subsequent to the act which made the land available for military training purposes on February 1, 1917, and the project was in danger of being abandoned. “State of New York Law No. 342: An Act Providing for the Use for Military Purposes of the State Lands at Beekman Acquired for the Industrial Farm Colony,” February 1, 1917, Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, Vagrants,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.
the director of Witzwil counselled that the model would be even more appropriate to the United States given his impression of its geography, “In America, land is cheap and labor is dear; and labor is the factor of production which the prison has in abundance.”276 The labor colony, applied to the U.S. situation, solved the problem of urbanization and the loss of agricultural knowledge that it entailed. These tenets later became the dominant ideological arguments for Camp LaGuardia, which would feed workers into jobs in the upstate economy.

Surplus value had a distinct place in making these institutions self-sustaining. For the model to work the state did not appropriate surplus labor as profit, but did so “in kind.” As local fiscal crisis intensified during recurring depressions, New York City ran up against limits on the amount of money it could spend on relief.277 These material limits were also of political and ideological importance, expressed by critiques from the conservative law-and-order position. One way the farm colony idea, later embodied and expanded in Camp LaGuardia, resolved these limits is that it was to be self-sustaining. In the view of some antagonistic to public relief in general, Camp LaGuardia actually made a “profit” for the city at the expense of the federal government. It therefore became a target of Congressmen opposed to and investigating the New Deal.278 The self-sustaining aspect was achievable by appropriating a portion of the surplus value produced there as a “cost” of the men’s rehabilitation—50% of their wages were held for their upkeep. As a result the city paid the workers far lower than the prevailing wage rate—$15 per month. Thus, the more opportunities to work the better, to achieve “union of agricultural and

manufacturing industry” and the bigger the camp the better, to make it more productive and 
“more economically managed.” These methods, all together, resolved major points of dissent 
among actors designing a state reform program structured to control resistance to economic crisis. 

The overlap between prison reform and welfare modernization was apparent in the literal 
overlap of other parcels of land, not just at the Women’s Farm Colony/Camp LaGuardia site. 
While the Grattan Bill failed to pass, in 1911 a similar bill authorized the Board of Managers of a 
State Industrial Farm Colony to acquire land. They managed to purchase an 826 acre parcel in 
Beekman, New York, in Dutchess County, but could not begin construction because of a 
controversy within the Department of Prisons over whether to build the farm colony or “new 
Sing Sing.” The dispute delayed the Board of Managers putting the Farm Colony into use. By 
the time it was agreed that Sing Sing would be built in Wingdale, NY, the Beekman land had 
been turned over to the state Board of Armories for military training exercises in preparation for 
World War I. Johnston de Forest was resigned: “the chances this year [1917] in view of the 
military situation are poor for getting results.” The Beekman property was later a camp in the 
Federal Transient Program, and then the location for Greenhaven Correctional Facility. While 
success was achieved in pressing legislation through and actually acquiring a site, the project of 
implementing a farm colony was delayed for another few years. Energy for the program in the 
city was channeled into the women’s prison, described in chapter two, which was the cutting 
edge of a modern social service program in the wartime moral crusade against prostitution, and 
located on 326 acres near Chester, NY.

281 Johnston de Forest to W. Frank Persons, February 9, 1917, Box 141, Folder “Legislation, 1907-17, Farm Colony, 
Subsequent reformers revived these evolving ideas and reconfigured them to smooth over contradictions in welfare and relief programs. In the late 1920’s, the Welfare Council drew on the Joint Application Bureau’s legacy, but changed its political tactics to suit the circumstances which shaped the new depression. For its vagrancy work the Council wanted to create farm colonies that would not accept “chronic alcoholics, drug addicts, or homo sexuals [sic.]” The conservative Welfare Council was a private umbrella organization that coordinated the various aspects of the City's welfare programs and William Hodson was its Executive Director. It was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, and conceived in the early 1920s to coordinate the over 2,000 separate private charities in New York City. According to their contemporary study, private charity accounted for over 60% of all welfare in the city, public welfare nearly 40%.

Hodson came directly from a position at the Russell Sage Foundation, which had initially supported Herbert Hoover's President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, based in a philosophy of private philanthropy and self-help.

In the farm colony model the Welfare Council found political coalition with those further to the left. Originally meant to keep “professional tramps and vagrants” from corrupting “genuine workingmen” the industrial farm was now marketed as a progressive measure to help those thrown out of work in the normal business cycle. Nels Anderson, of the Chicago school of sociology, was involved in devising programmatic responses to “the hobo” nationwide as well as in the New York City area. Having written a dissertation on “the sociology of the homeless man,”

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284 A close associate of Hodson's, Joanne Colcord, and his replacement as Executive Director of the Welfare Council after Hodson left to head LaGuardia's Welfare Department, wrote the pamphlet establishing the Foundation's official position in this regard. Crouse, The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941, 51.
In 1925, he worked at the Whittier Settlement in New Jersey, authored a report for the Welfare Council of New York on the region's homeless, and administered programs of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. In 1927, while at Whittier, Anderson wrote to Hodson about the intriguing possibility of a work camp as a rehabilitation program for idled workers: “I am quite taken with the idea of turning that farm into a rest camp for homeless convalescents.” Combining Anderson’s support for convalescent camps with the rehabilitative aspect of a work regime, in 1931, the Council, in collaboration with the City’s Department of Correction, instituted a work-training program for men within the Women’s Farm Colony at Greycourt.

As the depression deepened, Hodson, well connected politically, continued to promote this composite idea in the Senate. Soon after Roosevelt was inaugurated in March 1933, and days before he signed the bill that activated the CCC, Hodson wrote to Senator Robert LaFollette about the success of Camp Bluefield, in Blauvelt Park along the Hudson River, and the second experimental camp opened through the Welfare Council’s initiative. Progressives touted Blauvelt as “the ideal in the care of homeless unemployed men, a project which might be offered as a model for other communities to emulate...a dream come true.” It was housed within a summer camp for children formerly owned by the New York Tribune. Hodson wrote to LaFollette: “I enclose a statement prepared by one of our committees in connection with a work relief camp experiment which has proved unusually successful.” In his view the camp presented a way to coordinate the different scales of relief: “I still believe that the best way to administer relief for all classes of society is through local machinery. Perhaps the President's program for

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286 Nels Anderson to William Hodson, June 11, 1927, Box 1, Folder, “Correspondence, General, A-C,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library.
287 Loula D. Lasker, “Rediscovered Men,” Survey Graphic 22 (July 1933): 358. Bluefield was short-lived as a relief camp, and was soon re-converted to a summer camp after Greycourt opened. By July 1934 children were already enrolled for their vacations. “Children on Way Home From Camps,” North Shore Daily Journal, July 27, 1934.
conservation camps can be tied in with local effort along these lines." The camp, instituted in December 1932, was “a cooperative enterprise of the State Temporary Relief Administration, the Interstate Palisades Commission and the Work Colony Committee of the Welfare Council” and was modeled on the program that had been unrolled at Greycourt two years earlier. The difference was that men were referred from the Municipal Lodging House rather than from the Department of Correction and the courts. Demonstrating the overlap, Bluefield was turned into a CCC camp in October 1933. By January 1934, Hodson could assert “I’d like to see every homeless man and woman in a camp of this sort.” When Edwin Cunningham was tapped to become Camp LaGuardia’s Director in December 1935, he had already run both Camp Bluefield as well as Camp Roosevelt at Bear Mountain, the first CCC camp in the state. He was experienced with the model, hired to get the program in shape to counter the disorder that McKay had described the previous winter.

Anxiety that rural displacement was feeding urbanization was at the forefront of the Welfare Council's concerns. A 1932 confidential study of the men in the municipal lodging house by Nels Anderson “[revealed] an increasing drift of the adults into the city.” Thus, the Welfare Council's Farm Colony Committee proposed that a primary purpose of a “work relief project for the homeless” during the depression in the form of a reinvigorated farm colony based on the experience at Beekman, was that “mendicants will be discouraged from coming to New

288 William Hodson to LaFollette Robert, March 25, 1933, Box 1, Folder, “Correspondence, General, I to L,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library. Camp Roosevelt, in Virginia, was the first CCC camp to open in April 1933 following this legislation, signed March 31, 1933.
289 Lasker, “Rediscovered Men.”
York and professional vagrants will leave New York.”

This was an integral part of how its designers described the camp to the public. In its first year of operation, Stanley Howe, First Deputy Commissioner of Welfare who was instrumental in Camp LaGuardia’s setup and ongoing administration, said: “Most of the men have no desire to return to New York. The city spells defeat to them.” As a result, the program was designed so that the men would learn rural occupations, like farming. All men worked the soil during harvests. In the fall of its first year, Howe commented, “[t]he most remarkable thing of all is that the men from the city, who have never been in the country before, are showing a great interest in all forms of farming. Some of our best men had never seen a farm before May 1 [1934].” While the country supported a healthy work ethic, the city enabled apathy. As Hodson put it, “The men should be removed from the idleness of the city as fast as possible and given self-respecting work to do.” The camp was beginning to fill a gap: it was increasingly “impossible to get a competent hired man [for farm work].” Yet it was the productive capacity harnessed by the model that was its biggest benefit to the city. Camp LaGuardia produced all of the food for the Municipal Lodging House that autumn. This aspect of a work regime was so successful that administrators continually expanded the types of work offered, and even considered putting a factory there. Each year there was a push to extend farm productivity. In its second year, the camp added the “cultivation of

293 Farm Colony Committee, Section on the Homeless, “A Work Relief Project for the Homeless” (Welfare Council of New York City, undated, but sometime during , the year following the opening of the Welfare Council’s Central Registration Bureau for the Homeless at South Ferry 1932), Box 185, Folder “Welfare Council--Coordinating Committee on Unemployment, 1934-1935.,” Community Service Society Records, 1842-1995, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library.
additional land, tree surgery and the erection of additional stables, also the making of pillows, sheets and night clothing for the camp’s population.”

While Hodson said his relief effort was apolitical, in reality it was honed over many rounds of Progressive Era depressions. Downturns of 1907-08, 1914-15, and 1920-22 demonstrated to reformers the imperatives of revising the existing poor laws in New York State for the administration of relief. As industrial and factory employment went into freefall after 1929, and county lodging houses across the state became overcrowded, penitentiaries captured much of the overflow. In the early 1930s, New York City constructed two annexes on its Municipal Lodging House as a result of the increase in those seeking shelter. The massive displacement was managed by use of the State's new 1929 Public Welfare Law, which was a revision of the patchwork of complicated poor laws, the most recent of which was from 1896. One of the central theoretical considerations in these changing laws concerned settlement: in order to receive state aid, applicants had to demonstrate residency within the state for two years. If people applied for aid but could not sufficiently prove their legal settlement they would be placed for a night in a lodging house, or in jail, then “passed-on” to the next locality. They would be removed from the state altogether if New York could establish their settlement elsewhere. (According to its charter New York City was forbidden to give outdoor—non-institutionalized—relief prior to TERA.) The 1929 law gestured to reform but kept intact these aspects of settlement and removal. Crouse notes, “in dealing with removal the new law actually was a step

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298 “City’s Camp Opened for 800: Greycourt to Till More Land and Undertake Several New Activities This Season,” The New York Times, April 14, 1935.
300 The law was enacted before the stock market crashed in October 1929. These legislative changes were years in the making and not simply the result of the Great Depression. According to Crouse—as well as to Schneider and Deutsch, writing at the time—the law would have been effective were it not interrupted by the depression. Page 40. Schneider and Deutsch, who Crouse relies on for much of her history of welfare law in the state, were allies of Hodson. They asked him for comments on their book before its publication. Notes to David Schneider in William Hodson papers Box 7, folder "Misc. M to Z, Jan. 1, 1941."
back from 1896” because under the old law, “persons were to be cared for in the locality where they became disabled [i.e. the county]” but now, removal was “sanctioned even if force were necessary” and “intrastate removal was one again acceptable.”

Work camps—whether for youth enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps, people moving across state lines in search of work in the Federal Transient Program, or the local homeless—were situated within this changing same. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), beginning in 1933, provided the first nationwide standards to manage “transiency.” The Federal Transient Program (FTP), embedded in FERA, defined transiency geographically as a subset of homelessness. Transients were those moving across state lines in search of work, without legal settlement or with legal settlement elsewhere. Local homeless were those without a place to live but with legal settlement in the locality in which they applied for relief. The distinction between different forms of displacement were therefore legal-geographic rather than social, and appeared at the moment that people applied for relief. This fact filtered into different camps’ identities. Camp LaGuardia, for example, was a camp for the “local homeless,” rather than a transient camp, and its residents wanted to maintain this hierarchical distinction.

The FTP temporarily halted poor law removal in the 48 participating states, and simultaneously standardized definitions of settlement for the purposes of defining responsibility

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303 A majority, 53%, of the unattached (non-family) transient group nationwide was unskilled and semi-skilled labor, 17% was skilled labor, and 11% were “servants or allied.” About 18% of total unattached were “white collar” workers, including sales, clerical, managers, or professional/semi-professional technical workers. Almost one-half of the “unskilled” group was displaced farm labor, and the second largest in this group was “common laborer.” John N. Webb, “The Transient Unemployed: A Description and Analysis of the Transient Relief Population” (Washington: Works Progress Administration, Division of Social Research, 1935), 48–50.
for various segments of displaced workers. Amid historic dislocations of people moving across state boundaries in search of work, and a patchwork of state laws governing the administration of relief, the FERA provided uniform definitions of transiency—an unemployed person “in the state for less than 12 months”—and settlement—“residence within the state for a period of one year or longer.” On the one hand, this bolstered the previous poor law definitions at a time when states were attempting to attenuate their responsibility for welfare by writing legislation that would revoke settlement privileges. On the other, however, it began a process that would eventually make those same laws obsolete.\(^{304}\) In any case, it was a major transformation based on the ideological principles already outlined by the Joint Application Bureau. The National Committee on Care of Transient and Homeless hired Ellery Reed to assess the FTP in 1934. Reed’s dissertation explored institutional ways to combat revolution by working classes dislocated by economic downturns, arguing that “sound social progress is impeded and threatened by the increase of social unrest and radicalism…Radicalism is…symptomatic of a diseased condition of the social body.” These were ideas consistent with the Joint Application Bureau’s philosophy with regard to “vagrancy” and economic stagnation. In his final report, he outlined the FTP’s various functions, which included: “The protection of society from vagrancy and crime, incident to the old policies of neglect and punitive treatment of transients” and “relieving the labor market of the competition” of younger men.\(^{305}\) The laws of settlement had previously prevented sufficient solutions to transiency, and by extension, to preventing the development of radicalism.


The federal government’s official final report described these same ideological underpinnings for segregative methods in its transient program.

Poor relief procedure based upon [the principle of local responsibility for relief] makes no attempt to distinguish the temporary unemployed who have set out to find work, from the chronic wanderer—the hobo, the tramp, and the bum. By excluding all needy non-residents, the poor laws force the former to adopt the means of livelihood employed by the latter, with the result that some of the temporarily unemployed never resume a sedentary life.306

New York State’s transient division, administered by the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, began in November 1933 and lasted for two years. Overlaid over the 1929 Poor Law as well as the Wicks Act, which established statewide relief efforts, it was a confused amalgam that required detailed instructions to sort out who was “eligible” for transient aid. Moreover, since the money spent for transient rehabilitation was 100% refundable by the federal government, the state had incentive to classify more people as transient. This meant that there were four categories of displacement: federal transient, unattached state transient, family state transient, and local homeless. The program’s core policy was its transient camps. At its peak in September 1935 there were 3,216 “cases” in the state’s transient camps, in which they received $1 to $3 per week to operate the camps. The camps were not as robust programmatically as Camp LaGuardia, and did not serve its productive function. They did not farm. Laborers in New York’s transient division worked on short-term projects, such as upstate flood relief efforts in the summer of 1935. (Prior to this emergency work they were not readily accepted by the rural communities in which they were located—foreshadowing the experience of Camp LaGuardia.)307

But while FTP camps were not as fully integrated, nevertheless they reflected the shifting

ideological character of work as relief. Crouse alludes to this with respect to how services were encoded in the law: “This talk of service, prevention, and implied rehabilitation was dramatically opposed to the earlier emphasis on poorhouse confinement as a form of punishment meant to deter applicants rather than to serve them.” The labor done by the homeless in the camps sustained the camps themselves, and lowered costs.

These legal changes point to the encoding of an emergent structure of feeling with respect to the governing of the relative surplus populations in this period. The first poor laws sought to prevent transients from entering localities. The 1929 revision, while “only a symbolic break from the past,” was nevertheless different in its function, because it sought to extract transients from localities. The relief effort took for granted that displaced people would be coming into the city, and therefore sought to re-place them in country settings and occupations. Progression Era segregation methods, which attempted to define who was an able worker, and, therefore, who was a target for relief, both carried over and were in flux during the Great Depression. Removal continued to be the prevailing policy, even during the short-lived FTP. Through 1934, the vast majority of those applying for relief were either sent out of the state or discharged from

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308 Crouse, The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941, 42.
309 There are still those who continue to advocate a poor law-like “transportation” of poor people out of New York City. Thomas Main, Professor at Baruch College of the City University of New York, has been writing on homelessness since the 1980s and published a book in 2016 called Homelessness in New York City: Policy Making From Koch to DeBlasio. New York: NYU Press. At a public forum 2017, he said: “maybe one solution, at least for the very poor, is to disperse them [out of New York].” “Affordable Housing and Homelessness from LaGuardia to DeBlasio” (October 26, 2017). Not surprisingly, most of the audience scoffed at this idea. Main has been arguing this for a long time. Thomas J. Main, “New York City’s Lure to the ‘Homeless,’” The Wall Street Journal, September 12, 1983. Increasingly, this is an actual tactic that localities rely on across the country. “Bussed Out: How America Moves Its Homeless,” The Guardian, December 20, 2017, sec. Chronicling Homelessness, https://goo.gl/6ywFU.
310 Crouse, The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941, 57–60. This was carried over from New York State’s relief efforts, which began on January 1, 1930 and predated Roosevelt’s federal aid. The initial TERA outlay in September 1931 was $20 million (spent "within a matter of months" (62), and raised by increasing income taxes (54) in the Wicks Act of September 1931. Original had strict residency requirements of two years.
consideration, and there were more people removed than accessed aid. At the same time, the number remaining “in state care” steadily increased through 1933 and 1934.

“It will be a long, slow process and there will be no revolution”

Before LaGuardia appointed Hodson as Commissioner of Welfare, they met to discuss the relief effort and the future of department policy. The winter of 1933-1934 was the winter of the CWA, and there was an increase in the number of applicants for a limited number of jobs. Hodson's duty to create a flexible system of relief was mandated by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia during this meeting. Hodson wrote, “Major LaGuardia … had in mind some kind of a reservoir of projects which would take up this surplus of registrants.” Yet LaGuardia was also worried that CWA wages were too high, and that “the effect…would be to pull men from regular industry where they were receiving a lower hourly wage into civil works.” Hodson quoted the CWA wage rates to the mayor-elect: 50 cents an hour for unskilled labor and $1.20 for skilled labor. Workers at Camp LaGuardia eventually made 15 dollars a week for 40 hours of work, or 38 cents an hour. The industrial farm colony model offered a flexible program that would provide a large number of jobs but also contain wages. At the same time, Hodson was tasked with “reorganizing the department” by creating a model of Welfare that would subsequently take on functions of the Emergency Relief Bureau. For the first few years of Hodson’s tenure, the Department coexisted with the ERB. They merged at the end of 1937, and the ERB was officially disbanded on the final day of that year.

Like the relief program broadly, Hodson’s job and approach were never secure. In early 1935, he appeared before the “Aldermanic Committee Investigating Relief” and gave testimony defending accusations of relief fraud.  

This was only one investigation among many which caused him great stress, necessitating stays in the hospital and convalescent periods out of the country. He was consistently on the offensive as well as the defensive, and gave radio interviews, addresses, and statements about the role of the reconfigured Welfare Department in administering what came to be a permanent relief effort. These radio addresses had as part of their audience the staff of the Welfare Department.

In Hodson’s ideal political economy, relief efforts were the negative image of industrial production. As the “business index” improved, less relief was necessary. Soon after he addressed the New York State Constitutional Convention’s Welfare Committee in 1938, Hodson advocated for a permanent relief program on these specific grounds, and reiterated the temporal feeling that he had expressed in describing his colossal task of institutionalizing welfare: a long, slow process.

There will always be a considerable number willing to work and able to work who will never be employed again. In a rapidly mechanizing industry, many hand skills are no longer needed, and many of the older workers cannot meet the demands of a highly competitive labor market. When skills are no longer marketable, it is a long, slow process to acquire new ones. The machine is likely to throw people out of work faster than the new industries can absorb them, even in times when new industries are being established...Under these conditions the necessity for a permanent public assistance program is inevitable, and for a long

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314 Hodson wrote to a friend in May, 1939, "This is my seventh investigation in five years." William Hodson to Earle Bailie, May 1939, Box 6, Folder “Misc. A-K, From Jan 1, 1939,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library; “Hodson Ouster Placed Before State Senate,” The New York Sun, March 26, 1935.


316 William McClure, “Informational No. 39-2, Please Post: Broadcast by Commissioner Hodson,” January 6, 1939, Box 3243, Folder 7, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College. This is one of many informationals announcing Hodson’s addresses in this folder.
time to come we shall have to face the fact that large numbers of persons must be cared for at public expense, the number decreasing in good times and increasing in bad times.\textsuperscript{317}

The work camp model was meant to achieve a reduction in home relief costs, a fact that sheds light on Hodson’s gendered program of relief during this period. When he came to the Department Hodson expanded the shelter program based on gender segregation. According to contemporary ideology, women needed individualized care, which was usually provided through private charities. Men lived in the barracks-style shelters associated with the city’s municipal lodging houses and annexes.\textsuperscript{318} This was the basis for the operation of women-only shelters. As Hodson put it, “They used to care for the women and men together, as you know. I’ve changed all that. And women now have their own shelter with a medical clinic.” This view informed the program at Camp LaGuardia in important ways. Women and children entering the labor market during depression prevented the state from being able to effectively end the crisis. In a radio interview with a Times reporter in Spring 1940, Hodson offered this gendered explanation of the Welfare Department’s emerging ideology.

If the usual breadwinner in the family is employed at steady work and decent wages his wife will not be looking for work, and the older children will stay on in school and not try to find jobs as soon as they are of working age. A recent study of the Committee on Social Security shows that very clearly. Insecurity…starts a chain of events that increases the labor supply. These persons, temporarily looking for work because of hard times, are sometimes called “additional workers,” over and above the so-called usual workers, who are the regular breadwinners. Now these additional workers greatly increase the competition for jobs at the very time when jobs are scarce. The result is that in times of Depression, there are many more persons seeking jobs than there are workers who have lost their jobs. In other words, if 1,000 regular workers are laid off, perhaps 1,100 or 1,250 people will then be seeking


\textsuperscript{318} For the Salvation Army homes for women, see Crouse, \textit{The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941}, 84–85.
work. Once jobs and incomes are stabilized, mother and the older children may withdraw from the labor market entirely and the number of those looking for work drops automatically.319

It may not be a coincidence that the numbers he cited—1,000 workers—was the exact number that Camp LaGuardia was supposed to be able to rehabilitate at any time. In any case, he gives a brief political-economic outline of the local state’s plan in managing a crisis in reproduction, and its view of how an industrial reserve army would be reabsorbed “automatically” by industry. Hodson was motivated by the fact that WPA appropriations were in danger of being cut again, arguing that, if the proposal went through, it would increase competition in the labor market and intensify the state’s ability to end the depression. The WPA had already pulled out of the Camp LaGuardia project three years earlier. It is in this way that he positioned the WPA, as he consistently did in these addresses, as a temporary fix until jobs could be created. His ultimate concern was that industry produce more and more jobs as quickly as possible. In other words, relief labor in this scenario, paid for by the state, was short term, until the “business cycle,” measured by factory employment, picked up again.320

Relief agitation was already turning into an organized political movement by the early 1930s. On March 6, 1930, a nationwide proclamation of “International Unemployment Day” by Communists was accompanied by protests around the country, including demonstrations in New York City. 35,000 people marched on Union Square, and Police Commissioner Grover Whalen sent “hundreds of policemen and detectives, swinging night sticks, blackjacks, and bare fists” into the crowd.321 The brawl with police prompted New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker, in

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320 “Social and Industrial Reconstruction” (WMCA, 1940), Cassettes 1788 and 1799, New York Public Library, William Hodson Papers.
321 Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail, 51–52.
accordance with the city charter’s prohibition of outdoor relief, to initiate a committee to collect and distribute private funds for the unemployed. William Hodson defended Whalen's actions to John Fitch of the New School for Social Research, writing, “I do not believe that what happened was any serious abridgement of free speech or free assembly.”^322

Unemployment Councils organized by Communists were only the largest and most visible of groups involved in organizing the unemployed. Nationwide protests targeted official relief, especially when it was being cut. The political impact of a place like Camp LaGuardia should be measured in relation to those in organized political groups, not in terms of total relief numbers, especially given Hodson’s declaration of a gendered relief program that targeted breadwinners as the key to pulling entire families out of poverty. Seeing relief in this way contextualizes Piven and Cloward’s conclusion that relief was not adequate. While fiscal crisis at the local level was certainly important, and highlights the conditions which impelled federal involvement, it also points to the fact that relief was never meant to be adequate. It was a temporary holding place until private industry could pick up again and “absorb” the unemployed. The Unemployed Councils (later renamed Unemployment Councils) were made official in 1930, and favored direct action over organizing for the first few years of their existence. The early depression was therefore a period in which the politics of unemployment were emergent, prior to their institutionalization in the national Workers’ Alliance (in 1935), a coalition which unified Communists, Socialists, and Musteites during the Popular Front period.\textsuperscript{323}

Local relief administrators in New York City were undoubtedly attuned to actions of the Unemployed Councils, which consistently made themselves known directly. Communists made

\begin{footnotesize}^322\end{footnotesize} William Hodson to John Fitch, April 30, 1930, Box 1, Folder “Correspondence, General, D-H,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library. 
\begin{footnotesize}^323\end{footnotesize} Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail, 68–76.
it a practice to organize in the flophouses, municipal lodging houses, and breadlines. Yet their scope was also wider. A report from the time documented that the majority of district relief offices had experienced “frequent dealings with unemployed groups, most of them led by Communists.”

In 1933, for example, Unemployed Council members approached the Joint Application Bureau on a weekly basis to register together for relief. This was a strategy to undermine the relief program in general because the Bureau insisted that they apply as individuals rather than as a delegation. Each single person or family had to demonstrate an individualized need for relief. These encounters demonstrate, on a small scale, the willingness within the local, institutionalized relief effort, to change its program in order to counter and deflect the political positions and strategies of the Councils, or to avoid them altogether. Since many of the encounters took place on Saturdays because of the work relief schedule, a staff member submitted a request, approved by the supervisor, that they close the office early on Saturdays, thus eliminating completely all possibility of confrontation with this group.

From the outset Hodson also faced growing political radicalism among staff of the relief agencies, especially among younger social workers who came from working class backgrounds and identified with those on their caseloads. The line between staff and client, employed and unemployed was equivocal, relief workers were paid among the lowest salaries of employees of any city department, and the rapidly expanding profession of social work was in considerable flux, giving workers the sense that their political actions would have impact. As a

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324 Alice Brophy and George Hallowitz, “Pressure Groups and the Relief Administration in New York City” (New York: New School of Social Work, April 8, 1937); Cited in Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail, 67.
326 Walkowitz, Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity.
result of the “proletarianization” of sections of these workers and their lack of previous experience in the field, they were “closely supervised.” While the social workers in private agencies maintained status as a more experienced and professional workforce, public workers increasingly were charged with impersonally managing and investigating vast amounts of relief cases.328

In 1933, Emergency Relief Bureau workers organized into the Emergency Home Relief Bureau Association, which the following year became the Association of Workers in Public Relief Agencies (AWPRA). These workers were part of the growing “Rank and File Movement” of Social Workers, which grew out of discussion groups nationwide in the field, and dated back to 1931. According to Reisch and Andrews, the movement “arose primarily from the heightened consciousness among social workers of the contradictions between their daily work and the imperatives of a capitalist system.” The groups were formidable. By the mid-1930s, the growing membership in the discussion clubs was double that of the membership of the American Association of Social Work, one of two main national professional organizations. The New York groups were large and “most radical of all,” in a political field which by 1934 had adopted a “specifically anticapitalist program” and had joined with the Communist Party to form the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota.329 The Rank-and-File Movement, which “seemed to win majority support” among social workers in the Department of Welfare, specifically embraced a program which saw the interests of caseworkers and clients intertwined, and thus “enable[d] radical caseworkers to engage a social context for diagnosis and treatment.”330 AWPRA was

328 Walkowitz, Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity, 130.
Black workers constituted 14% of AWPRA’s membership, including Division 4 of the Unattached and Transient Bureau, and there were five Black executive Board Members on its citywide body that coordinated policy, which was then rare among New York City unions.\(^\text{331}\) Perhaps the most important aspect of AWPRA’s success in organizing was making relief political, against the intentionally apolitical program of the Emergency Relief Bureau and Welfare Department administrators. After all, it was ERB workers who, based on a complicated and ever changing schema of laws, had to tell a relief applicant that, if he was evicted, “his furniture would be confiscated, his children would be placed in homes, and he and his wife would be sent to shelters.”\(^\text{332}\) For clerical workers in the relief bureau to remain occupied they were tasked with moving other workers, with whom many identified, through the relief program after adjudicating their claims for relief. This was a de-skilling of relief workers as they became managers for the administration.

The Rank-and-File Movement mounted some of the most vocal and persistent opposition to early New Deal programs, especially the replacement of FERA’s “direct relief” with the “work relief” of the WPA, which they deemed Roosevelt’s “work or starve” policy.\(^\text{333}\) Work relief had an impact on the number of social workers employed by the relief program. When the WPA was implemented, the Emergency Relief Bureau reported that a 40% decrease in its staff


\(^{332}\) Joan Crouse paraphrases this typical disposition of a relief applicant’s case, described by the applicant in a letter of complaint to FDR in March 1936. Crouse, The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941, 237.

\(^{333}\) Walkowitz, Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity, 67.
(1,800 jobs) was required. As home relief cases were transferred to work relief, AWPRA, which represented employees who investigated home relief eligibility, and who were therefore no longer needed after cases were transferred to work relief, organized a three-hour work stoppage in the ERB in October, 1935. Hodson, in Buffalo at the time, received a telegram from his Secretary, William McClure, that morning:

NEW REPUBLIC DATED OCTOBER THIRTIETH OUT TODAY CONTAINING ARTICLE ALSO SEE TODAY'S NEW YORK TIMES STOP TOTAL ERB WALKOUT 2,936 IN BOROUGHS AND 536 IN CENTRAL OFFICE OR SLIGHTLY OVER TWENTY PERCENT ENTIRE STAFF STOP ERB MEETING TOMORROW AT FIVE.

McClure underestimated the number of workers who had walked out. The percentage was actually about 45%, or 7,500 workers out of a total of 16,778 in the ERB in that month. The action “crippled the machine at the central office” and completely halted the distribution of relief. The union claimed that the number was actually higher, and that some employees agreed to remain on the job to deal with “emergencies.” In response, the ERB initially rescinded seniority rights for the striking workers. This punishment almost equaled job termination, since 3,500 workers were disciplined for the action and downsizing would likely require 3,000 layoffs by January 1936. Under pressure from AWPRA and other unions, the ERB dropped the sentence, and docked the workers for the time they were on work stoppage. Although the strike did not block the layoffs, days later, on October 29th, the Emergency Relief Bureau signed

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335 “Ridder to Put No Bar on Reds in the PWA,” The New York Sun, October 16, 1935.
338 The workers were represented by Vito Marcantonio. “Job Offices Ready to Man WPA Drive,” The New York Times, October 27, 1935.
a collective bargaining agreement with AWPRA. Many of the laid off workers were transferred to WPA payrolls, while a substantial number were fired for “incompetence.”

In the midst of this controversy, a New York Sun editorial expressed a logical solution that the Board of Managers of the ERB must have contemplated: heightening the contradictions to a political boiling point: “fill the places of the strikers from the ranks of the unemployed men and women who will not try to dictate to the State and city governments.” The Daily Worker claimed that LaGuardia suggested the same thing to an AWPRA protest against the Mayor’s termination of 2,000 ERB employees in December of that year. Walkowitz identifies an individual case where the recommendation of the Relief Bureau to a fired employee was that he was eligible for Home Relief, and concludes that the circumstance demonstrates “one of the tragic ironies of the decade—the unemployed could one day be dispensing welfare as a form of work relief and the next day [be] receiving it.”

The AWPRA walkout of October 1935 mirrored the general politics of the early WPA. In the first two and a half years of its existence, there were 571 strikes of WPA workers across the country. The strikes were concentrated in four states, and New York had the third highest of any state. The first strike in the country took place in New York City starting on August 6, 1935, when the WPA was just one week old. Bricklayers, building the low income Astor Houses, went on strike to protest a lowered hourly wage. Workers on other projects walked off the job in sympathy actions for nearly two months until a compromise was reached that workers would be paid the same monthly amount yet work fewer hours. As Ziskind put it, “In this first WPA strike

340 Walkowitz, Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity.
341 “C. of C. Opposes State Bond Issue For Unemployed,” The New York Sun, November 1, 1935.
343 “Mayor Injures ERB Delegate--LaGuardia Tells Social Workers to Seek Aid When Dismissed,” Daily Worker, December 31, 1935.
almost every problem and situation to be experienced in the numerous future strikes was
rehearsed.”

The fact that the WPA was a work relief program brought inherent contradictions. Chief
among these was the question over whether striking workers would get relief. Harry Hopkins
was adamant that they would not, but left home relief up to local administration. LaGuardia
defferred to him, stating, “The city administration will not scab for the Federal Government.” But
in one high profile case, pressed by the Unemployed Council, LaGuardia gave a worker’s family
not relief but “necessary food for his sick wife and children,” a turn of phrase which deliberately
begged the question. AWPA’s early successes positioned it to protest consistently these cuts
in the relief staff.

This radicalism and solidarity extended into ongoing protests against emerging homeless
policy. Protests explicitly rejected the false choice between “forced labor in transient camps and
jail.” As funding dried up for the CWA and the workers were laid off, 1,000 demonstrated in
the Bronx and 250 protested outside the central relief administration office, where “Hodson and
his deputy commissioners were forced to receive delegation after delegation of workers
protesting C.W.A firings, discrimination against Negroes on jobs and relief, and demanding jobs
for the fired C.W.A. workers and unemployed.” In the fall of that year, 300 homeless men in
the Council of Unattached Men of the National Unemployment Councils demanded a meeting
with Howe at the ERB office and won demands over food and lodging. As federal aid ended

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345 Ziskind, 145.
348 “Homeless Men March on Relief Headquarters,” *Daily Worker*, September 12, 1934.
for the FTP in the fall of 1935, the Unattached Local of the Unemployed Council organized a
picket on the ERB, at which a protester explained their purpose, “There is talk about sending us
to camps, where we will work for a minimum of $15 a month, but so far we have received no
order to go to the camps.”349 At the same time, a “week of uninterrupted picketing by the
Unattached and Transient Local 1, Unemployment Council” disputed the eviction from decent
lodgings of Black transient workers, and their relocation to a “flophouse.”350 March 1936
brought the occupation of the Unattached and Transient Bureau on Fulton Street by a group
affiliated to the Unemployment Council demanding an increase in relief. In May 1939, a three-
day picket outside City Hall by the “Unemployed and Project Workers Union” of the Workers
Alliance was timed to coincide with Mayor LaGuardia’s meeting with out of town mayors
visiting New York for the World’s Fair. It “was run night and day, on four hour shifts, with the
local homeless, unemployed single mothers, not eligible for home relief, contributing a large
share of the man-power despite the fact that they eat only an unsatisfactory breakfast at the
Municipal Lodging House early in the day, and then must go hungry until five p.m.” One
rallying call on the picket was “Close Camp LaGuardia—Give Jobs!”351 These protests were in
the context of what groups affiliated to the Minnesota Farmer-Labor organization understood to
be the “deportation of single men to transient camps.”352

Surveillance was common practice for the Welfare Department. Under the ideology of
maintaining a “non-political” department based in scientific case management, left-leaning
affiliations were consistently targets. Howe was part of a wider controversy over the Welfare

349 “Transients March Today as Aid Ends,” Daily Worker, November 15, 1935.
352 “Jobless Picket and Occupy Relief Bureau,” Daily Worker, March 8, 1936; “WPL Protests Sending WPA Men to
Camps,” Tri-County Forum, March 12, 1936.
Department’s surveillance of political groups in the midst of the ERB walkout. Writing in *The New Republic* in October 1935, I.F. Stone accused Hodson of colluding with the New York City Police Department to target political opponents and organizers who were on relief rolls. Drawing on a TERA investigation that was never published, Stone wrote that according to this report, which quoted Deputy Welfare Commissioner Howe, the Welfare Department had assigned two “special investigators” to work with the police’s “Alien Squad” to build a list of “professional agitators, Communists.” One of the specific targets was Richard Sullivan, leader in the Unemployment Councils. A July, 1934 report by a city detective corroborated, “[I] was assisted during the entire investigation by Confidential Investigators White and McCormack of Deputy Commissioner Howe’s staff of the Department of Public Welfare and will state that without their coöperation this investigation could not have been made.”

Howe was the First Deputy Commissioner of Welfare under William Hodson, and went on to become Executive Secretary to Fiorello LaGuardia in mid-1935, and his anti-communism was public. Acting as Commissioner of Welfare at the end of 1934, the year that the camp opened (Hodson was on medical leave), Howe argued that “The Communist Party is conducting a regular educational campaign to teach [employable men] how to chisel. We are going to crack down on them.”

Howe used his influence in the Mayor’s office to push this agenda. In December, Hodson received a memo from Howe with instructions to investigate an organization’s political position, asking for his “usual spirit of cooperation.” His language shows that this was not an isolated request.

The Mayor has asked me to confirm my impression that the organization circulating the enclosed petition is communistic. I interviewed a delegation representing the People’s Press recently and concluded from

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353 The investigation was done at the behest of Nels Anderson.  
their characteristic phraseology that this was the case. While this is not exactly within the scope of the Welfare Department, I would appreciate it very much if, in your usual spirit of cooperation, you would ask Levin to make a special investigation for us.\(^{356}\)

Camp LaGuardia opened on May 1, 1934 as Camp Greycourt, in the midst of these ideological, infrastructural, and organizational upheavals. Its function to segregate, left over from prison reform work camp design, remained. But, rather than segregating prisoners who corrupted working people in “universities of crime,” the camp began to segregate relief recipients who could be disentangled from universities of politics. The reversal accounts for the swing to the left of the model’s proponents, pushed by agitation to defend and reconfigure its relief efforts. The ideology that pure work was a cure remained, while the camp siphoned off a portion of the unemployed to wait out the depression until they could be reabsorbed by increased investment in private industry. Yet in contrast to other work relief projects, this one formed the basis of what was intended to be a permanent function of Welfare.

“Camp LaGuardia: A Human Repair Shop”

A press release calling Camp LaGuardia “a human repair shop” described its rehabilitation program.

New York City’s Department of Welfare maintains a farm where, it might be said, human character is grown. It is a rehabilitation project operated on a 326-acre tract in peaceful Orange County. The farm is known officially as Camp LaGuardia, and much of its success can be attributed to the interest and energy of Stanley H. Howe, the former First Deputy Commissioner of Public Welfare in New York City.\(^{357}\)

Howe’s anti-communism were part and parcel of Camp LaGuardia’s operation.

Allegations of “outside agitators” characterized any opposition to camp policy, however modest.


\(^{357}\) “Press Release: A Human Repair Shop.” This show was broadcast on July 31, as part of a series publicizing the relief efforts of the Emergency Relief Bureau.
When residents of the camp staged a strike to oppose conditions, wage exploitation, and food quality, Hodson threatened residents while reassuring the readers of the newspaper that published the account: “I have strong suspicion that certain persons are at work at the camp engaged in stirring up strife and confusion. I have a good idea of who they are. Among them are some people who were formerly in the department. As to the agitators who are disturbing the peace at the camp, I am going to take vigorous steps to discover who they are, and when I do I will see that drastic action is taken against them.”

**Even if there was not consistent agitation among the workers living at the camp, the Communist Press relied on the former understanding of labor as punitive to politicize the Welfare Department’s unfolding policies. To them it was a “forced labor camp” and their intended political intervention was to delink relief from the requirement of work.**

However, what they did not consider was the possibility that the camp was a place from which these politics were segregated. As McKay wrote to Eastman on the same day, “no working-class pride exists here—no hope of a better nobler life for the workers.”

McKay's explicit descriptions of the camp as lacking cohesion and the staunch anti-communism of its director are notable, especially since these observations came from an experienced revolutionary who was a subordinate in the camp's hierarchy. Why would Clarke even mention this to McKay? In fact, Clarke's personal indication to McKay that he was on an anti-communist crusade was not out of the ordinary; it was his public representation of the camp's purpose. Although the tactic was a dubious one given the numerous strikes on rural relief

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358 “Too Much Hash Brings Protest at Relief Camp,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 10, 1935. Hodson’s reference to “people who are formerly in the department” is cryptic. Were they former staff, now on relief rolls? If so, his comment directly references the constant overlap between relief staff and those on work relief, and the resultant politics that he was attempting to hide or dismantle.


projects, including the CCC and the CWA, Camp LaGuardia was imagined to be a place where laborers would be partitioned from the prevailing political mood in New York City, including its labor unrest and developing solidarities among those administering relief and those receiving it. For New York City administrators, it made political sense to have a self-sustaining work project located outside of the city.\(^\text{361}\)

In an editorial in the camp newspaper in 1935, Clarke linked the rehabilitation program to its pursuit of an anti-communist agenda. According to his argument, the camp's success would hinge on the inmates' ability to withstand persuasion by communist saboteurs, who wanted it to fail.

"[W]e know for a fact that Communists are being assembled here to foment trouble, to tear down this work which has taken months to build up.

And what have they to offer? NOTHING EXCEPT VAGUE PROMISES. We know that they personally don't care, being paid propagandists. They have their rates of pay. Here are some of them: For causing a local disturbance, $3; speeches on street corners, $1 per speech, limited to $3 per day; for being arrested, etc. $5; for being “mussed up” by police, $8 while in hospital.

Greycourt actually gives what they can only promise. The graft and greed within their own ranks makes it impossible for them to fulfill their hypocritical promises. While they rant against “capitalism”, they have never been known to refuse money. While they express horror at the United States increasing its armed forces, -- the SMALLEST, incidentally, IN THE WORLD per capita -- they themselves boast of the mighty Red Machine of six millions of men, the largest standing army in the world today, and greater than the combined armies of Italy, England and France.

We will not bother these paid propagandists, my friends, just so long as they are willing to abide by the camp rules: In bed by eleven o'clock, and no drunkenness. So long as they do their fair share of work willingly, Greycourt is theirs.

\(^{361}\) Ziskind, *One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees*, chap. X.
But we don't need them and we can do very well without them, WE HAVE NO ROOM HERE FOR CRACKPOTS.\footnote{\textsuperscript{362}}

Clarke’s intentions could not fend off September and October actions at the camp that year.

The city faced the same problem it had on other of its work relief projects: unhappy people with a common experience assembled in one place. It had a clear interest in defusing any type of political alliance among workers that it could not control. This may have been why the city capitulated to certain demands by the Unemployment Council, vehemently opposed to the contingency of relief on “forced labor” at the camp. For example, early on, the Unemployment Council advocated for Alexander Mendoza, who was dropped from relief after refusing a placement at the camp. According to the Council, this was a marked victory that demonstrated an end to established city practice: “The victory against the forced labor drive against single men in the case of Mendoza marks a number of similar victories by the Unemployment Councils throughout the city in winning relief for workers who had been denied relief after refusing to go to Camp Greycourt.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{363}} Yet it may also have been a concession the city was willing to grant in order to keep the camp segregated from those movements. In any event, the fact of Mendoza’s successful defense corroborates McKay’s early vision of the camp, which disputed the city’s official position, and as he described to Max Eastman in his letter of the same day.

\footnote{George L. Clarke, “Editorial,” \textit{The Greycourter}, March 17, 1935, 1. The Greycourter was renamed \textit{Camp LaGuardia News} in 1935, after the camp itself was renamed Camp LaGuardia. All of the emphases in the quote are in Clarke's original. McKay directly counters Clarke’s assertion in a letter to Eastman on October 25, 1934: “The director, Captain Clarke, has been nice; [he] has a vast contempt of Communists, however, [and] confuses them with socialists, anarchists, and what not. Says the Communists sent paid agitators here, not so of course.” McKay also indicated to Eastman that Clarke considered himself a writer, even if McKay had gone to the camp originally under the advice that he should might get the approval of “the director, Captain Clarke…to let me work on a four-sheet mimeograph[ed] weekly the camp put out.” This is probably a reference to a predecessor of \textit{The Greycourter}, and although McKay referenced a previous publication of the Camp, his experience there demonstrates Clarke's heavy hand in editing and publishing subsequent versions. McKay wrote to Eastman that “[Clarke] told me one day that his greatest desire was also to write, but he couldn't find the time nor the opportunity. He dabbles in poetry and prose too, bad stuff.” Although the very earliest issues of \textit{The Greycourter} are unavailable, the following year Clarke wrote consistently for the magazine, editorials as well as short stories.}

\footnote{“Councils Score Victory over Forced Labor Camp.”}
Camp LaGuardia was a model for managing the “local homeless,” and the city planned to open a second, even larger camp in Columbia County immediately. Hodson told the New York Herald Tribune “I’d like to be able to place 10,000 men in establishments similar to this.” Three years later, as the WPA pulled out and local homeless were transferred to city, Hodson expressed his desire to “gradually work toward increasing the number of these camps until the entire homeless problem is dealt with in that way.” Administrators anticipated that sites would be cheap and easy to come by as federal transient and CCC camps were decommissioned. Intentions of expansion were accompanied by an increase in policing, a recurring pattern in New York City’s history of welfare. Part of Hodson’s radio propaganda was to center legitimacy for welfare provision in the state by calling into question the subsistence practices of poor people, including what he called “charity rackets.” He dedicated a number of shows to this topic in the late 1930s. Describing Camp LaGuardia’s function, he said, “With the cooperation of the police department, begging has almost been eliminated.” According to this plan, Hodson confidently proclaimed the end of need in New York: “No man, woman or child needs to go without food or shelter in this city.” Throughout August 1935, New York Police Commissioner Valentine headed a series of crackdowns on “Hoovervilles” and “derelict centers” in a round of arrests totaling over 700.

In mid-1937 the reallocation of federal funds for the WPA required that New York City reduce its WPA workforce by nearly 30,000 people in the short timeframe between July and

364 “Jobless to Get New Farm Unit Like Greycourt.” These camps never materialized.
365 “City Reports Drop in Homeless Men.”
366 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 181–82.
October. The elimination of Camp LaGuardia from the WPA budget was part of the first rollout of cuts, along with layoffs from the Department of Hospitals, the Commodities Distribution Project, and 1,200 Social Investigators from the Department of Welfare. According to a plan devised by New York WPA Administrator Brehon Somervell, which he described in a confidential letter to Mayor LaGuardia in June, 1937, layoffs from these projects, along with “normal losses,” which included a moratorium on transfers from the Home Relief Bureau, would “cause the reduction of approximately 5,000 persons between [June 11] and July 15.” More “cuts” would be achieved after “the necessity of actually dropping 12,000 persons in July.” He assured the mayor that Home Relief would only need to absorb half of this, an estimate based on “experience in the past.” The plan was to transfer many of these jobs, including the spots at Camp LaGuardia, to city departments. In the case of Camp LaGuardia, the expectation was that the state would pay 40% of its future costs. One of the reasons the city wanted to hold on to the camp was its low labor-materials ratio; work at the camp was manual, done without expensive machinery. The city would have had to fund any amount above the federal allocation of $9.50 per person for “other than payroll” costs, which then stood at $15.60. (It was already paying the difference of $6.)

It achieved other savings through a pay cut. WPA pay rates started at $42 per month, with $24 deducted for “maintenance,” the men receiving $18 in wages. Later, the camp rate was $30 per month with $15 deducted for maintenance, or $15 in wages.

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368 Brehon Somervell to Fiorello LaGuardia, “Confidential,” June 11, 1937, Box 6, Folder “Miscellaneous, E-H, 1937,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library. At the time he wrote the letter, the Camp LaGuardia aspect was “tentatively suggested, but subject to further study.” By October it had been finalized and announced in a “joint statement by Colonel Somervell and William Hodson,” with the transfer date set at November 6.

When the city took over full financial responsibility for the camp in November, it began negotiating with the state over partial reimbursement. Given the state’s hesitation, confusion over the camp’s legality under the 1929 law, and the possibility of the camp’s closure absent state funds, Hodson’s rationale for the state assuming 40% of the costs of the camp’s operation rested precisely on the vague and moving distinction between relief workers and staff. He wrote a letter to the State’s Department of Social Welfare, which argued:

The $15.00 monthly wage should not be regarded as a work relief wage, because these men are performing the necessary work of operating a relief institution. We make this distinction because there is some doubt about the State’s authority under the law to reimburse on work relief projects, whereas there is no doubt about the authority of the state to reimburse on wages paid to men engaged in the administration of a necessary welfare function even though these men have a relief status. The organization of the Commodities Distribution Division furnishes an excellent precedent for this view.\(^{370}\)

In other words, the program at Camp LaGuardia collapsed the distinction between different types of labor in its operation for purposes of finance and accounting, but maintained them for purposes of rehabilitation in its ideological sense. Hodson’s letter revealed the changing definitions of labor as they connected to politics. While Hodson’s Department established Camp LaGuardia as a work relief program under the Civil Works Administration, at this moment in time, his argument was that the workers at Camp LaGuardia ran the institution as well as effected their own rehabilitation. They were administering relief (by actually running the camp) and they were receiving relief (by doing the work of the camp).

When the state refused to reimburse on costs for the camp, the referral process changed significantly. The city began to substitute single men from home relief for the homeless men that had previously been referred there. That is, it intentionally reclassified home relief cases as

\(^{370}\) Quoted in Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 159.
dislocated homeless/transient cases. In the process, it solved two major problems of cost. The state agreed to pay “40% of the cost of food and administrative personnel on the theory that the operation of the camp was ‘an extension of the home relief program’ in New York City.” (This meant that the city-state percentage of total funding of the camp was about 84%-16%. The city continued to fund its portion through relief funding. “No part of its expenditures is included in the regular tax budget.”) Additionally, the city saved on the costs of home relief, since the cost of maintaining a man at Camp LaGuardia was cheaper by nearly $4 than maintaining a man on home relief, a fact substantiating the city’s plan to establish many more of these camps, recommended as late as 1940.\(^{371}\) However, as opposed to the Progressive feeling that “Any unattached person ‘in the know’ would be a damned fool NOT to go transient,” the city expressed extreme difficulty “recruiting” campers from home relief.\(^{372}\)

The process for referring men to Camp LaGuardia was always closely monitored and managed. Men were “selected on the basis of their apparent adaptability to the camp program.”\(^{373}\) Staff in the central bureau as well as in the district offices maintained a list of men which included their work histories, and men were chosen from this list when vacancies became available. This list was carefully matched to the ongoing labor needs of the camp.\(^{374}\) In 1940 the camp remained a springboard program for “unattached domiciled men…if active Home Relief cases,”\(^{375}\) in addition to homeless men. The homeless continued to be referred to the Municipal Lodging Houses on 25th Street and South Ferry and, for women, to the Emergency Shelter on

\(^{371}\) Herlands, 159–61. For city-state cost breakdown for 1939, see Appendix E on page 190 of this report.

\(^{372}\) Hickock quoted in Howard, *Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America*, 68; Herlands, *Administration of Relief in New York City*.

\(^{373}\) Herlands, *Administration of Relief in New York City*.

\(^{374}\) Herlands, 163. “The requests [from the camp] for additional men usually include a statement of the types of workers then required at the camp.”

\(^{375}\) “Procedural 39-7—Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia” (New York City Department of Welfare, February 4, 1939), Box 3243, Folder 7, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College. Emphasis added.
East Sixth Street.\textsuperscript{376} For a “case” to be closed, that is, to be removed from the purview of the Department of Welfare’s relief program, they had to be moved into private employment, a federal government program such as WPA, CCC, or National Youth Administration, or to “local homeless.”\textsuperscript{377} The men at the camp, therefore, were not considered “homeless,” a fact that was ideologically central to Hodson’s understanding of relief, that they should be “[considered] human beings…self-respecting and self-sustaining.” Further, this emphasis of their belonging was important for maintaining a working relationship with other residents of Orange County. The jobs secured “outside” to get men off relief were intended to be in the surrounding towns: “Employment is secured for camp members in the surrounding towns and cities through the camp Social Service Department;”\textsuperscript{378} an aspect of the program meant to counter migration to New York City from the rural areas of the state. Therefore, although the camp’s budget fell under “homeless relief” the consistent emphasis was that the men were a “cross section of any neighborhood, of any borough, or of the city as a whole.”\textsuperscript{379} The camp began to more closely resemble the CCC efforts—pulling people from home relief onto work projects, actions that were consistently met with citywide protests.\textsuperscript{380}

**Conclusion**

In “an unusual series of broadcasts,” Mayor LaGuardia “[put] his commissioners on the spot” in order to defend his welfare programs against Tammany criticisms that it was ineffective

\textsuperscript{376} “Informational Number 39-43” (New York City Department of Welfare, March 1, 1939), Box 3243, Folder 7, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.

\textsuperscript{377} “Reasons for Closing Cases” (New York City Department of Welfare, March 1939), Box 3243, Folder 7, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.

\textsuperscript{378} “Procedural 39-7--Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia.”

\textsuperscript{379} William Hodson, “Home Relief Budget Request for April, May, and June 1939” (City of New York Department of Welfare, Bureau of Finance and Statistics, March 30, 1939), Box 3243, Folder 7, William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library; “Social and Industrial Reconstruction.”

\textsuperscript{380} 1938, Welfare Department Terminations, Feb-March, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
and too expensive. An interview with Hodson in October 1937 allowed the Welfare Commissioner to give specific examples of reforms made in the previous three years. Hodson focused on infrastructural changes to the city’s shelter program, including appropriations of “half a million dollars remodeling the Municipal Lodging Houses and its annexes” and the establishment of “a rehabilitation Camp in Orange County called Camp LaGuardia,” expressing that the “human repair shop” was central to Hodson’s overall plan for reorganizing the Department of Welfare. By 1939 the city was displaying the innovative aspects of its professionalized welfare program in an exhibit at the World’s Fair, which included vegetables produced at Camp LaGuardia and a scaled relief map of its 326 acres. Hodson boasted about the number of people that stopped to see the exhibit. Production at the camp was on the increase, with the goal to can enough vegetables there for all of the city’s institutions. New jobs were being added yearly. Yet the laborers there remained in a holding pattern—sustaining themselves until the end of the Depression. Camp LaGuardia, like the Civil Works relief projects in the city that substituted for the “dole” of the early New Deal, was merely the first of many farm labor camps envisioned. By the late 1930s, Hodson could assert to Mayor LaGuardia, “you must get to Camp LaGuardia soon. It’s one of the best pieces of work in your administration.” The camp, once experimental and disorganized, was now a crucial addition for homeless men to the Welfare Department’s customary programs of caring for the aged, veterans, the blind, and the “needy unemployed.” It eased mobilization and demobilization of various aspects of the ongoing

384 William Hodson to Fiorello LaGuardia, August 28, 1939, Box 3244, Folder 2, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College. He had elsewhere described the camp as “the one bright spot in the whole relief program today,” “Jobless to Get New Farm Unit Like Greycourt.” This was coordinated advertising, because Howe, in an interview, used identical language. The Camp was “the brightest spot in the relief picture here in New York.” “Press Release: A Human Repair Shop.”
relief effort, helping to solve the problem of social and ideological reproduction. It extended the penal system’s program of rehabilitation through labor to a segment of those unemployed persons cared for by the city’s Welfare Department at the same time that welfare for the unemployed, previously administered predominantly by private charities, was brought within the centralized control of the state.

As this chapter has shown, homeless shelters have historically been places where the processes of extraction and containment are worked out by the state. This is a process continuous with the historical development of prisons, and visible in competing and overlapping programs that are either corrective (for “the good”) or punitive (for “the evil”).\(^{385}\) Who do they extract, and why? What are the purposes of their segregation? This contradiction, which lies at their heart and was present from the very beginning, can be expressed simply by describing homeless shelters’ primary function: extraction for the purpose of integration. Yet this contradiction also shows the inherent instability of the institutional model, and therefore its fitness as a place for revolutionary change. Its masking function is both in the open and hidden. The following chapters take up this masking function in greater detail. It examines the consolidation of the work program at Camp LaGuardia around the ideologies of race and nation, and the various explicit programs for cohesion among workers at the camp, especially through performances coordinated by its theater program. Into the dramatic flux of political agitation, hierarchical salaries, types of workers, relief functions, geographic scale, and state financing, in a segregated work camp in the midst of the Depression, a minstrel show at Camp LaGuardia provided the basis for communal identification among workers. This crucial aspect of New York City’s first modern homeless shelter has never before been identified. As opposed to hip-hop, music of rebellion, in the camp’s

daily, mundane mixture of ideology and experience “blackface minstrelsy conspired with power.”\textsuperscript{386}

\textsuperscript{386} Robinson, \textit{Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII}, 127.
Chapter 5
Consolidating Consent, Part I: Contradiction and Camp LaGuardia

Figure 5.1 Cover of “The Greycourter,” May 1935.
From the sidewalks of New York 800 men have returned to the soil at Camp Greycourt.387

Introduction

The previous chapter established the importance of Camp LaGuardia, and similar institutions designed on the model, to the national as well as the regional relief program. Though disorganized as it opened, and referred to as an “experiment” by its designers,388 the camp enjoyed widespread support, demonstrating the resonance of its enduring foundational ideologies. Celebrities no less than Babe Ruth, who gave an inspirational speech to the men in March 1935, visited the camp in its early days.389 The camp was a crucial part of an institutionalized relief effort that required suppression of a collective oppositional consciousness then emerging to come to terms with the particular historical moment of economic crisis and the politics of relief administration and reform. Camp LaGuardia, as its newspaper insisted, was an innovative place where a select few would learn that a “sit down job” was better than a “sit down strike,”390 and where “wildcat schemes and shortcuts to utopia”391 were unnecessary. The broad narrative that the camp drew on and helped to recreate, like the relief effort in general, was that crisis was an aberration, rather than normal.

This chapter analyzes Camp LaGuardia, rural workhouse and early homeless shelter, in its function of dissembling social crisis by veiling political challenges to efforts at stabilization. While the camp played an important role in isolating its inmates geographically, it also consciously developed programs that cohered life there, so that the men would accept and live

391 “Social and Industrial Reconstruction.”
out the premise of rehabilitative work. Removed from the political ferment of New York City’s effervescent relief politics, the men at the camp, in their collective isolation, were completely dependent on the state, even if the state, in a way, gave to them their own means of subsistence.\(^{392}\) These “morale-building” aspects of the program masked contradictions at the camp, especially the irony that the men were expanding the infrastructure of a former prison, where they and future generations of homeless people would live, as their relief assignments. In exchange for their agreement to participate in the program, the men living there received consistent reassurance that they were not homeless because of their own fault: they remained working class. As such, all men there, including new arrivals, were referred to formally as “workers.”\(^ {393}\) This chapter examines the demotic aspects of camp life given these particular political and geographical conditions. It describes the consolidation of a fictitious white working-class identity that encouraged inmates to buy-in to their sequestration in an upstate labor colony to wait out the depression.

The idea of work as an aspect of rehabilitation, which extended from the productive aspects of the city’s reform program, was connected to a historic 1930 revision of New York City’s long-standing policy with regard to the homeless. In the Municipal Lodging House, overnight stays had been limited to five nights per month for residents and one night per month

\(^{392}\) The Aldermanic Investigation Committee which investigated the relief effort of the city wrote, “It would be more in accordance with sound public policy to send [homeless persons] to projects in the country [rather than to lodging houses on the Bowery], such as Camp Greycourt, (LaGuardia) where they can till the soil and provide themselves with food in surroundings which are far more salutary than the lodging houses of the City.” Quoted in “Camp News,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 29.

\(^{393}\) For example, “Engineers,” Camp LaGuardia News, October 1937, 13. This column describes the boost in camp membership as the WPA dramatically reduced its presence in New York City and the camp channeled men from home relief into the camp’s work program in order to save costs. “The Camp begins to look like old-times again what with bus-load after bus-load of new men arriving. The mess line at lunch time stretches snake-like out in the back yard and even extends down the hill as the queue of hungry workers await Steward La Salle’s sumptuous repast.”
for those without the entitlements of settlement.\textsuperscript{394} The need for a continuous labor pool for planting and harvesting meant that in Camp LaGuardia long-term stays for the unsheltered were institutionalized programmatically for the first time. In six months in mid-1935, the camp’s first full year, it provided an average of nearly three months lodgings to each resident, and there was only one new resident admitted in August of that year, demonstrating very little turnover.\textsuperscript{395} In 1938, nearly 70\% of residents had worked there for over six months; 50 men had lived there for over two years. Average time spent there was on the increase, and in 1939 was up to 14 months.\textsuperscript{396} By 1940, at least 55 men had been living there for more than 5 years.\textsuperscript{397} This was not only a result of the impracticality and expense of transporting men back and forth the 70 miles between the camp and the city. Workers with trans-seasonal knowledge about farming, gained working there over a number of years, were increasingly valuable as the city strived for efficiency in its production. Men with any farming experience were prioritized.\textsuperscript{398} Yet this aspect of policy became a contradiction; both the administration and the workers themselves began to view their employment there as permanent, when in reality relief status made their jobs temporary.\textsuperscript{399}

\textsuperscript{394} 	extit{Interstate Migration: Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, House of Representatives, Seventy-Sixth Congress} (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 201; Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 111.

\textsuperscript{395} “Routine Changes Made since August 9, 1935” (Greycourt, NY: Camp LaGuardia, September 12, 1935), Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Folder 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.

\textsuperscript{396} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 164–65.

\textsuperscript{397} The 1940 census for Camp LaGuardia was incomplete. The enumerator seems to have listed every man’s name, but detailed information ends on the third to last page. The census listed two men who had been Orange County residents outside of the camp in 1935, demonstrating another, if small, link between the camp and the surrounding towns. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, “Population Schedule, Enumeration District 36-5,” 1940.


\textsuperscript{399} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 174. This was the first and most important finding of the Herlands investigation with regard to Camp LaGuardia. See Appendix C for details on the yearly increase in farm production.
The geographical knowledge that Camp LaGuardia drew on, and in turn helped to recreate, was central to the camp’s coherence and expressed in its newspaper. The paper comprised an assortment of features on the commonplace aspects of camp life. It included nostalgic reminiscences about the mythology of the camp’s genesis, practical advice from the clinic about working in the country and outdoors, instructions for administrative requests, overviews of recreational schedules, and reviews of camp events. Yet in this assortment can be gleaned a glimpse of the unifying structure of feeling underlying not only the camp, but New York City’s relief program as a whole, and its anxieties about both the recent past and the near future. Relief efforts aimed at making depression seem anomaly rather than norm, and men needed ongoing convincing that proper recourse for their consistent, long-term unemployment was work relief. This was imperative in the mid-1930s, five years after the stock market crash of 1929, and given that men at the camp averaged three years out of work. The paper’s mixture of discipline, nostalgia, myth, and empowerment characterized the life of the publication, informed the men’s consciousness of their experiences there and regarding the Depression, and was the expression of the complex and contradictory nature of camp life.

While the blues named, minstrelsy masked. Minstrelsy relied on the rhetoric of apophasis, ambiguously saying in order to hide, to deny what it articulated. In this process, not only were relief efforts at the camp superimposed on already existing racist and gendered geographies and practices, but also those racist and gendered geographies and practices were reproduced as a

400 Part of my method has been to reconstruct a future that never existed, because the administrative vision was not fully implemented.
401 Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, “Population Schedule, Enumeration District 36-5.”
function of the relief effort. Racial perforations dramatized in a camp-initiated minstrel show congealed an exclusive definition of the working-class at the camp: it was composed of white, male workers. The camp members’ working-class identity was forged through a nationalism that bound people from a diversity of places, international as well as national, in an upscaling of “settlement” status to “citizenship” status with regard to relief benefits. Ralph Astrofsky, the first Director of the Welfare Department’s newly-formed Division of Shelter Care, gave Congressional testimony in 1940 regarding the city’s experience with interstate migrants. He explained what he was trying to preserve but also to address, and gave a succinct view of the state’s approach to rehabilitation at Camp LaGuardia and its connection to nationalism.

The homeless have a fairly good background in a variety of skills and semiskills; the transient are the more capable by virtue of their more recent experience in their regular occupations. Camp LaGuardia, providing maintenance work relief to unattached men, has been a self-sufficient community by being able to draw from its population every skill necessary to operate it — cooks, bakers, butchers, laundrymen, workers, electricians, painters, carpenters, clerks, etc. Few of the men have had an opportunity to remain long enough on a job to join any trade union. They have worked, however, at one or more of their several skills along their journeys and helped build this country by their appearance when they are needed. The industrial migrant secures only seasonal work of such brief duration that he does not accumulate sufficient credit to entitle him to benefits of social security laws of any single State.

The ideology of “vagrancy” that had regulated settlement had been institutionalized in the vagrancy statutes of the poor law era. The old “benefits” of local relief accruing to individuals who had settlement status in a particular county, no matter how slight, would be superseded by

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403 In a survey of 5,234 Camp Members and their country of origin, 56% came from outside the United States from 53 countries. On this basis the newspaper declared that “our personnel has been made up of men in every walk of life..and from nearly every country on the face of the globe.” “Browsing About,” *Camp LaGuardia News*, February 1938, 2.

404 *Interstate Migration: Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, House of Representatives, Seventy-Sixth Congress*, 204.
benefits accruing from the national relief effort. This was the practice of the Progressive mantra, “we will take you in and consider you a worthwhile citizen,” and was fused to reformers’ notion of work as a recuperative process in itself. Single men extracted from urban space had the opportunity to mix their labor with the land, a “privilege” that would allow them to support families if they succeeded. From the standpoint of social reproduction, this was a part of a broader effort to keep a chosen segment of laborers productively occupied during the depression, which required replenishing their labor power socially, physically, and psychologically, until the crisis ended. At Greycourt, workers could “gaze out over the black velvet soil, a hundred acres of which have been reclaimed by the sweat of their brows.”

Race and Gender Politics during the Depression

Race and gender were central to general relief politics during the depression. Racism adjudicated who got limited relief funds, while gender was formative in creating a distinction between home relief and work relief. Naison argues that there was both strong pressure for black communists to subsume politics of race to politics of class, especially after the 1934 National Convention of the Party, but also that they were able to create space to organize independently of the party line. During a period of intense proletarianization of black as well as white migrants from the south to northern urban centers, New York City had the biggest, and one of the fastest growing, working-class migrant populations of Northern cities. William Hodson claimed that

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405 Quote from Crouse, page 151.
relief was a “cross-section of the community,” but the unemployment rate among black people was up to three times that of whites in New York City. Contemporary estimates of the Harlem situation placed the unemployment rate among black workers as high as 85%. For single men, this was as high as 64%, and for all household heads the rate approached 80%. Despite these high numbers, there was only one relief office in Harlem in 1933. “Systematic discrimination” was especially prevalent in the programs of work relief, according to the official contemporary report.

Harlem became forefront in the Communist Party’s organizing efforts beginning in the 1920s, a decade that ended with the genesis of the Unemployed Councils. The area was officially a “national concentration point” of the party, evident in its high-profile defense efforts in the Scottsboro case and its “black belt” policy of 1931. Both were expressive of a working-class black nationalism on which a declining Garveyism had previously built. These politics were strategic attempts to expand party membership in the early depression, leading up to the party’s Popular Front tactics. Women provided the backbone of the Harlem Tenants League, a pre-depression organization which fought evictions and organized rent strikes, and which was the prototype for the expanding Unemployed Councils. In April 1931, the Harlem Unemployed Council had 500 members. By 1935, it was the largest in the city, with over 3,000 members and

409 “Relief Problems of New York City” (Intercity Broadcasting System, March 10, 1940), Cassette 1786a and 1786b, William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library.
410 Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression.
10 locals. A majority of the rank-and-file were women. Black women made up 70% of Harlem’s Communist Party membership in general, and their activity was “concentrated in the unemployed movement.” Leaders such as Grace Campbell, Louise Thompson, Esther Cooper, Williana Burroughs, and Thyra Edwards all came from backgrounds of social work. Black women’s labor sustained families during these periods of depressed conditions and high unemployment. Sixty percent of all black women over 15 worked in 1931, a higher percentage than both the recent pre-depression rate as well as white women. As McDuffie argues, black left feminism of this period—with its layered understanding of gender, race, and class in an early articulation of intersectionality, and which saw in the Communist Party a vehicle for liberation even as it disputed and reworked Marxist-Leninist dogma—was a rejection of “the ‘worker’ as a white male factory laborer, the ‘working woman’ as white, and the shop floor as the determinant of class consciousness.”

Part of the radicalization of various segments of the working-class during the Depression were multi-racial alliances that challenged the New Deal’s authority, especially its definition and treatment of workers. As Davis puts it, “far from pacifying those who suffered the effects of the Great Depression, the New Deal served as a further catalyst for the organization of multiracial mass movements.” At the same time, as Kelley details, left organizers encountered a predicament with regard to the New Deal’s unfolding programs, because “Communists nationwide were already placed in the ironic position of having to fight for improvements within

417 Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression, 136.
418 McDuffie, Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism, 84.
419 Greenberg, “Or Does It Explode?”: Black Harlem in the Great Depression, 69.
421 Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, 191.
the WPA while simultaneously trying to build an alliance with the WPA’s creators.\textsuperscript{422} The Communist Party explicitly fought “white chauvinism” in its ranks, in attempts to forge black-white political power among the working class.\textsuperscript{423} In contrast, the New York relief administration exploited these politics, attempting to reverse political strength into weakness, and to diffuse the Party’s influence among relief recipients, relief workers, and the unemployed. Usually, the relief effort’s practical interests motivated these politics, rather than any generalized ideological commitments.\textsuperscript{424} As part of that process, the administration exploited the Popular Front strategy to maintain liberal influence over the relief program. In this way, Camp LaGuardia demonstrates a break in the Popular Front coalition, specifically in the transformation of the state’s carceral institutions managing surplus labor, a process that turned on race and gender.

Despite limitations, both the united and popular fronts’ “unity against fascism” expressed a structure of feeling that could be detected in much of the cultural politics emergent from the class struggle of the depression. As Naison puts it, “despite cynicism on both sides, the united front had an élan and emotional force which should not be underestimated” and “opened the way for a significant expansion of Party activity among Harlem’s creative intelligentsia…to generate a black cultural movement explicitly identified with the left.” This emergent politics, consistent with the Black radical tradition’s contestation of the working-class as white, male factory workers, was still tentative. Clifford Odets’ play, “Waiting for Lefty,” performed at the Negro Peoples’ Theater, was criticized on the left because it did not transmit “the experiences of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{422} Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression}, 158.
\item \textsuperscript{423} “No other interracial political organization in the United States in the 1930s was more committed to black-white unity and racial equality than the CPUSA.” McDuffie, \textit{Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism}, 124. The Communist Party was “an organization militantly antiracist and consciously antiracial.” Kelley, \textit{Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{424} Locally, administrators viewed opposition to policy in terms of efficiency. The Workers Alliance consumed, by far, the most time of Home Relief Bureau labor in responding to complaints, sit-ins, pickets, and other “pressure tactics.” Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 93.
\end{itemize}
Negro people.” Marvel Cooke, reviewing the production in the *Amsterdam News*, concluded, “Lefty’s pals did not quite convince us that they belonged ‘deep down in the working class.’”

The minstrel show at Camp LaGuardia solidified white workers’ continued claims on working class identity within the institutionalized relief effort itself. As described in the previous chapter, the city saw the flourishing of radical organizations as a threat, indicated by its grouping together of all “agitators.” Concomitantly, much of the Communist Party’s organizing was underground or through relationships among affiliated organizations and memberships, prompting relief authorities to see its influence everywhere. It is notable that these performances were motivated by the politics that surrounded an early “homeless shelter,” an institution emerging to smooth out political contradictions and to diffuse politics surrounding crisis, and that the Communist Party was the political organization best positioned to reject the model. On the one hand, the “socialist” nature of the camp as a refuge for white workers demonstrated to those workers a generosity of the state in a time of need. This was particularly resonant in the continuing struggle against the patronage of political machines, which presented a real contradiction as the Democratic Party inherited its structure, a structure it fought against but also drew power from. On the other hand, the Communist Party explicitly repudiated the camp, as a result of its building energy around a united front against fascism that self-consciously attempted to integrate concerns of white and black workers.

These politics were particularly evident in the AWPRA. It explicitly forged interracial solidarities and was a keystone of the Communist Party’s Popular Front policy of “linking groups which shared a strong consciousness of oppression, but possessed vastly different

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histories, cultures, and economic profiles.” As the AWPRA expressed this position, “The union recognizes that it is not enough to seek united action on the economic front alone, but that the same must be done in the cultural, political and social life of its members.” AWPRA fought racism, which it viewed as central to the ongoing relief structure. Part of AWPRA’s strategy, which shared office space with the Harlem Labor Committee and Frank Crosswaith’s ILGWU, was to build consciousness among workers in segregated district offices, where there was “no question of Negro discrimination in my precinct because ‘there are no Negroes,’ ” as William Gaulden, the union’s Vice President, stated at its convention, in January 1936. It further explained its tactics in a pamphlet, “were it not for the union’s consciousness, driving power and initiative on the specific issues already mentioned, a community movement would not have been built up.” AWPRA built community support in Harlem, which had the highest rates of unemployment in the city, by tapping into long-standing religious and civic organizations. The effectiveness of relief bureau agitations in 1932 and 1933, Hitler’s rise to power, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, boosted Communists’ antifascist image in Harlem, even if official membership in the party continued to be slow. Further, the “Harlem Riot” of 1935 was critical in AWPRA’s ability to make connections with the rest of the Harlem community. The Communist Party helped to turn the official commission investigating it, in part, into a critique of the entire relief program, especially its racial discrimination, and an expression of the structural origins of the uprising. This was the reason the final official report could conclude that, “the generally low economic status of Negro workers is, of course, due fundamentally to the operation of our competitive capitalistic system.” The Amsterdam News, claiming that Mayor LaGuardia tried to

427 Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression, 49.
428 McKenzie and Doliner, “The Negro Worker in the ERB.”
429 Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression, 143.
suppress the full report, including the chapter in which this quote appears, published it in its entirety in the summer of 1936.\textsuperscript{430}

Oswald Knauth, a relief head, advised staff not to participate in the mayor’s investigation, and the city worked to counter AWPRA’s influence through a company union, the Five Boro Civic League.\textsuperscript{431} Edward Corsi, who replaced Stanley Howe as Hodson’s First Deputy and Director of Home Relief, after Howe became the Mayor’s Executive Secretary, testified at the hearings that there was no discrimination on relief, and was challenged by Bernard Riback, Executive Secretary of AWPRA, and others.\textsuperscript{432} Corsi received direct communications from the investigative committee, including a memorandum written by Dr. Charles H. Roberts, Chairman, and A. Philip Randolph, Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Relief, recommending the dismissal of Victor Suarez, Administrator of Home Relief Bureau 26, in Harlem. Suarez, acknowledging his methods of increasing the rate of rejection for relief in Harlem, which he thought were below the rates in other district offices, had said, “I wish no deserving family to suffer hunger. However, your closings [of cases in the precinct by its investigators] are under the average of other precincts throughout the city. Not even in jest should a prize be offered for such closings, but if $5.00 were offered, we might be surprised at the result.”\textsuperscript{433} The united front growing out of these politics created inertia to protest discrimination on the WPA, opening that fall. AWPRA was instrumental in initiating the Joint Conference, which consulted for the Mayor’s commission that

\textsuperscript{430} The Complete Report of Mayor LaGuardia’s Commission on the Harlem Riot of March 19, 1935, 123.
\textsuperscript{431} McKenzie and Doliner, “The Negro Worker in the ERB.”
\textsuperscript{432} Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression, 146.
\textsuperscript{433} Charles H. Roberts and A. Philip Randolph to Edward Corsi, “MEMORANDUM: On the Case of Victor Suarez - Precinct 26 Administrator by the Sub-Committee on Relief of the Mayor’s Commission on the Conditions in Harlem,” n.d., Mayor’s Committee on Conditions in Harlem, Discrimination, Negro Employment, Box 3146, Folder 4, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
researched the causes for the uprising and which was followed by the All-People’s Party. It subsequently affiliated to the National Negro Congress, in February 1936.\textsuperscript{434}

These protracted contestations were obstacles in the city’s efforts to stabilize the relief program, in which race helped adjudicate who got limited relief jobs and funds, and who did not.\textsuperscript{435} The primary focus of the city’s official investigation of relief was to ensure that relief was efficient, which meant withholding aid from those not deemed needy, or nearly three-quarters of all applicants. Relief was therefore entirely structured as surveillance, a practice justified in order to “protect the taxpayer.”\textsuperscript{436} First encounters with the system were meant to weed people out who were poor, but not poor enough. Typically, only 27\% of those applying for relief citywide actually received it, and once approved, there was ongoing investigation into family relationships and budgets for continued support.\textsuperscript{437} Many of the people doing this crucial policing work were on relief themselves. As the City’s Department of Investigation put it, “The investigator is the key to efficient administration of relief and the most important cog in its machinery. He represents the chief safeguard against the receipt of relief funds by those who are ineligible.”\textsuperscript{438}

So important was the role of the investigator that when Jack Bigel, an investigator in Home Relief Bureau District Office 62, admitted to co-worker Vincent Marcellino, Property Manager, that he organized his caseload into the Unemployed Council, he was immediately reported and an investigation was conducted by the Department of Welfare. A full report was

\textsuperscript{434} McKenzie and Doliner, “The Negro Worker in the ERB,” Section III.
\textsuperscript{435} McKenzie and Doliner, “The Negro Worker in the ERB.”
\textsuperscript{436} “Unemployment Relief in New York City: Final Report of the Emergency Relief Bureau of the City of New York to the Honorable F.H. LaGuardia.”
\textsuperscript{437} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 15.
\textsuperscript{438} Herlands, 14.
given directly to Hodson.\(^{439}\) This incident, and the resulting events, demonstrate the contradictions faced by fledgling organizing efforts of the staff at this Brooklyn office. The newsletter of the AWPRAffiliated Lodge 1064-AFGE, the *Beacon*, “Issued by Communist Party, D.O. 62” saw themselves “engaged in work which proves to us more clearly than most other young people the widespread misery and unemployment which prevails to-day.” They wrote that they were “constantly harassed with dismissals and speed-up” as they tried to do their jobs.\(^{440}\) The rank and file of the AFGE, then part of the AFL, pushed its conservative leadership to adopt more radical tactics as its ranks swelled with younger members employed with the opening of New Deal agencies.\(^{441}\) In the midst of organizing to fight layoffs in the E.R.B. at the end of 1935 and the beginning of 1936, this local had formulated a dual “program of our union” that included demands for staff as well as clients. This was why Bigel had tried to forge solidarity with those on his caseload. At the same time, these semi-permanent, but ultimately temporary workers were fighting to keep jobs with the Emergency Relief Bureau as the administration downsized it in order to save costs and to merge it permanently into the Department of Public Welfare. The workers’ end goal was to maintain their employment in a permanent budget. In his effort to “BUILD THE AFGE TO 100% MEMBERSHIP,” Bigel had reached out to Marcellino, who was also taking action to preserve his job amidst severe cuts, and who appealed to the administrators of relief and reported Bigel. Marcellino even requested a meeting directly with Hodson, but it is not evident whether they met or not. Bigel’s interrelated


\(^{441}\) Rhonda Hanson, “United Public Workers: A Real Union Organizes,” in *The Cold War Against Labor: An Anthology*, ed. Anne Fagan Ginder and David Christiano (Berkeley: Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, 1987).
mistakes, according to the thrust of the report, were explicitly forging a unity of struggle between
relief workers and those receiving home relief and his affiliation to a Communist organization.

As documents collected in the administration’s surveillance of the union’s activities
demonstrate, the “Men’s Service Division #4” was the first to suffer the job cuts. The Division
was obsolete when men on home relief were put to work on WPA programs. Part of the logic of
downsizing was to remove single, unattached men from the home relief rolls, and to transfer
them to work relief, paid for by the federal and state governments, rather than by the city. These
men would pull entire families off relief through their jobs as breadwinners. They were also the
ones usually framed as communists, those putting stress on the expenses of home relief rolls.
Camp LaGuardia and other camps were going to be the dragnet for these, now homeless, men.
Investigators, in similar logic, were laid off as a part of this process, their jobs no longer needed
as people were transferred from home relief to work relief. This was one of the reasons that relief
workers struggled to get out of “the field” and into the more senior, stable office positions.
Organizing in the home relief bureaus made these layoffs difficult. While at D.O. 62 the
elimination of “Men’s Service Division #4” went smoothly, the subsequent firing of Alice
Bierman, the Division’s bookkeeper, did not. She claimed that the mass firing of relief workers
was a pretext for her dismissal because she was a member of AWPRA. Her defense by AWPRA
rested on discrimination, which at this home relief bureau meant discrimination against Jewish
workers, who were laid off earlier and in greater proportion than Christian workers. The union
therefore urged “unity of the Christian and Jewish workers in their stand against the vicious
policies of the Administration. Do not permit Ms. McNamara [the Office Administrator] to divide us."442

AWPRA efforts had a real impact on Relief Bureau policy, and early actions against workplace discrimination and in the disbursal of relief blossomed into the capacity for more organized politics. Various community actions, including sit-ins, demonstrations, and pickets, ultimately brought success in winning more employment for black workers in the department. Naison reports that, “In December, 1934, relief officials promoted several blacks to supervisory positions in the 124th Street bureau, and in subsequent months, they appointed so many black investigators that by the summer of 1935, relief workers constituted the largest group of black professionals on the payroll.”443 Another spontaneous riot in March 1934, just months before Camp LaGuardia opened, brought an estimated 5,000 participants. A boycott of the Empire Cafeteria on 125th and Lennox, targeted for its discrimination in hiring counterpeople, was supported by predominantly white home-relief bureau employees, who had been frequent patrons there.444 These organized politics were not only threatening to the relief project as a whole, but to its aftermath, as the union publically built support for permanent civil service status for relief workers, against the open competitive examination format, a process they tried to expose as racist.445 They were also part of a larger struggle then building, according to an article in the New

443 Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression, 123.
444 Naison, 116, 120–21.
445 McKenzie and Doliner, “The Negro Worker in the ERB”; “1,100 Negro E.R.B. Workers Face Firings--Competitive Exams Are Directed at Organized Workers, Says Union,” Daily Worker, November 14, 1936. The dialectic of veil versus challenge, with respect to Western Civilization, is precisely the basis for Claude McKay’s 1929 novel. Claude McKay, Banjo: A Story without a Plot (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), 272–73. Later, McKay, depicting leading Harlem Communists as dupes of overbearing Stalinists, dramatizes these politics during the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, in Amiable With Big Teeth, a novel, written in early 1941 but only recently re-discovered by Jean-Cristophe Cloutier, which was published in 2017. Claude McKay, Amiable With Big Teeth: A
Masses. The author argued that revolt in Harlem, beginning with the 1935 uprising, was also the beginning of class struggle “without make-up.” While race had been highly visible to make class invisible, “Harlem has a new sense of its position and importance. Frightened officials have already let up on discrimination in relief agencies.”

Thus, in contrast to the administration’s blanket denunciation and caricature of “Communist agitators,” the Communist Party was going through a period of intense change and institutional development throughout the Depression as it engaged social and economic crisis. In agitating in Harlem in many forms, both the employed and the unemployed either embraced or rejected specific campaigns led by Communists or where Communists were participants. From this perspective, Camp LaGuardia was successful, because it defused much of the anticipated and real political activity then taking hold as a result of the despair and uncertainty of the Great Depression. This specific aspect of its rehabilitation plan had a distinctive effect on camp life, which was transfigured according to longstanding methods adapted to camp life for the purposes of stabilizing the state’s relief program.

“A normal and vital feature of American life”

The minstrel show, “a great American tradition,” was a crucial dynamic in the camp’s reliance on a national socialism that emerged out of the material conditions under which it was created, and which it sought to address. In the camp, we see how “Fascism represents the triumph of the … preventive counter-revolution to the socialist transformation of society.”

One issue of the camp’s official newspaper posited three fascist examples as model social


448 Davis and Aptheker, “Preface,” xiv.
movements: “One of our Irish patriots, who evidently has been reading the newspapers quite a bit, wants to form a movement of ‘Green Shirts.’ He says, ‘They have ‘Black Shirts,’ ‘Khaki Shirts,’ and ‘Silver Shirts’…so why not ‘Green Shirts?’” What does it mean that a successful minstrel show was produced within the state’s relief machinery? Why did minstrel performances resonate at particular moments of institution-building at the camp and place-making in the region? How did an antebellum cultural form reappear in the institutionalized local relief efforts of the 1930s New Deal in New York? Why did this form resonate with the men who were working, creating, living, and interacting within the institution? The performers at the camp did not merely replicate acts that had been developed on the Bowery; they transformed the genre to address contradictions and experiences that took hold given the camp’s particular position in the relief effort and the dislocations that brought the men to upstate New York. The show was therefore an expression of the fraught consciousness stemming from multiple and overlapping uncertainties: first, of the uncertainty of unemployment, followed by the uncertainty of available relief, the politics of which were already circumscribed by the structure of the institution itself and its intrinsic geography. Class struggle was voiced and tempered by race. It is a reflection of the response of workers to the state, which exploited their misgivings regarding relief as it “organized scarcity not plenty.”

There were two major “moments” of intensive camp consolidation during the 1930s, and at both moments minstrelsy played a prominent, cohesive role. First, as the camp was getting off the ground, and later, during the World’s Fair, when it expanded dramatically as a “catch all” for recurring WPA reductions of work relief in New York. These moments, during which full

control of the camp was located locally, in New York City’s relief administration, loosely correspond to its efforts to depoliticize relief against Communist agitation, and its efforts to institutionalize a long-term program for the management of homelessness. A “white working-class structure of feeling,” indicated ultimately by the appearance of a minstrel troupe that was repeatedly held up as a form of leisure and cohesion for the laborers, was central in securing the existence and purpose of the camp under changing circumstances. Edwin Cunningham, the Camp’s director, wrote in the “progressive…publication” that was *Camp LaGuardia News* and its propaganda arm, of the “family” being developed in this “homelike” institution, “You have made Camp LaGuardia a working reality...you have found yourself.” This is a far cry from late 1934, when Claude McKay could describe such a dire situation there: “They are prisoners. They hate each other.”

Historically, the minstrel show was always an expression of the complexity of white working-class racial consciousness amid social and economic crisis. Eric Lott summarizes that the minstrel genre, a northern invention that “mediated political conflicts,” was a “bulwark against insurrection” and embodied contradiction in its pre-Civil War heyday. It “[captured] an antebellum structure of racial feeling” and was a “historically new articulation of racial difference.” All male, white bohemian cultures often formed the basis for the dialectic of “love and theft” which activated “white men’s appropriations of ‘black’ maleness.” Lott argues that it “continually transgressed the color line even as it made possible the formation of a self-

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consciously white working class.” These “performance[s] of the superlatives of whiteness” apply to many of the cohesive functions of the camp in the mid to late 1930s, whose primary function as a “counterfeit of black culture” was “to suppress class antagonisms by stressing degrading representations of blacks.” That is, according to Robinson, minstrelsy, rather than revealing an emergent structure of feeling, represents the projection of a fabricated history to make sense out of emerging social relations. It fostered nostalgia for a counterfeit past that never existed.

The “home talent” of Camp LaGuardia’s theatrical club gave group expression to the lived contradictions of camp life by staging them on a regular basis for the benefit of both camp residents as well as residents of the surrounding region. While there was considerable turnover among unskilled laborers at the camp, it is telling that the in-house theater personnel was long-standing, and performed year after year. Musicians and actors in the theater program were not just performers. They maintained primary duties as laborers, and often had the most seniority in the camp. Long-time performer John J. Sullivan, the head porter, was one of the original camp members, and lived there for over five years. Four others—Joseph Fitzsimmons, John Marion, Melbourne Brown, and Thomas M. Ryan—were also camp residents for at least five years, from 1935 to 1940.

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455 Lott, 9.
458 Camp LaGuardia News, “Second Anniversary Issue.” May, 1936, pages 6 and 16. See the importance for of seniority in the camp’s personnel structure and the relationship of “straw bosses” to the other workers in the following chapter.
459 “Mel” Brown was also a writer for Camp LaGuardia News who published a regular column titled “Roving Reporter.” Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, “Population Schedule, Enumeration District 36-5.”
The minstrel show was a local phenomenon that started before federal association with the project, and returned after it ended. The Federal Theater Project made it possible for “Congress to act openly and directly as a producer of culture.” The project was closely coordinated by the director and regional directors who “decided on plays and policies every four months.” On May 1, 1934 the NYC Department of Public Welfare took over the drama department of the early Federal Theater Project, until the WPA took over in 1935. Although the CWA supported the camp theater program, minstrel shows were not a part of New York City’s Federal Theater Project; it appears to have been exceptional at Camp LaGuardia. Many of the Theater Project’s plays were pre-scripted, and not designed from scratch like they were at the camp. There is no evidence that these performances were coordinated by camp administrators. However, the performers who put them together may have taken their cue from the mayor, demonstrating the political power that this theatrical genre still held in the 1930s. Mayor LaGuardia, who appeared in a minstrel show at the New York Elks Lodge, in which “Exalted Ruler” Ferdinand Pecora, celebrated populist, Supreme Court Justice, and prosecutor of Wall Street excess, performed in blackface with the chief city magistrate. Though LaGuardia and former Governor Al Smith, performing together, ultimately “spurned the blackface stuff,” apparently it was their original intent to do so, according to the original announcement.

The origins of minstrelsy coincide with “the invention of, and the inventor of, a white identity which was bonding foreign (principally Irish and German) and ‘native’ urban

461 http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ftscript&fileName=farbf/00020012/ftscript.db&recNum=4
463 But see “Vaudeville and Minstrels” at http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ftscript&fileName=fpral/09670013/ftscript.db&recNum=2
While in its heyday “minstrelsy was its own imperium” [which] “in popular culture held absolute domain over blackness and the imagery of blackness,” its origins preceded mass, popular culture. In particular, Irish immigrants drew on this type of performance; as a result of their position as unskilled laborers, the Irish were seen as a distinct racial group, even used as disposable labor in the South where black slaves were viewed as more valuable. Minstrelsy had its origins in northern “labor camps of slaves, free Blacks, and Irish immigrants associated with canal building...the nation's most significant examples of capital-intensive public works.”

These temporary and dislocated laborers lived in shanty towns and work camps along the canal routes, and “staged their imitations of Blacks for entertainment. Generally illiterate, their métier was recital and impersonation.” “Whiteness,” in Robinson’s understanding, a social formation without ethnic or class boundaries, was consolidated out of the forged and counterfeited idea of “blackness,” which was the result of the presumed and attempted erasure of African histories and their identity with slavery. By extension, “blackface, as a masquerade for public revelries, ribald stage antics, or even city mobs, appropriated the class, racial, and ethnic ambiguities of blackness.” The “stump speech,” for example, was white appropriation of black performers already parodying whites. In similar fashion, northern minstrel stage professionals composed

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465 Robinson, Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII, 132.
466 Robinson, 129. Robinson goes on to describe the transferal of this cultural form to mass popular culture: “By the time of its appearance in commercial settings like music halls, blackface minstrelsy was predominantly a ‘white’ working-class entertainment--riotous, raucous, and participatory and performed by solo entertainers.” Page 135
467 Robinson, 133–34.
468 Robinson, 135.
469 Robinson, 133.
“Dixie,” which became the “de facto Confederate anthem.” Later minstrel songs depicted blacks as drunks and vagabonds.

Irish immigrants were dominant at the camp, in both numbers and in representation by the newspaper. Over 20% of the inmates were Irish immigrants, exclusive of men of Irish families born in the United States, according to the Department of Welfare’s reporting. The newspaper wrote of the “Irish race,” and, in particular, the Irish property-holding class’s contributions to the historical development of Orange County, specifically to counter the “Anglo Saxon” hegemonic hold over this history. “Irish blood brain and brawn [sic.] have been a valuable asset in the building of America,” and in particular the “vicinity of Albany and Catskill.” The paper consciously tried to impart a claim to “original” colonization of the land in this area, to make Irish settlement there compatible with colonial history, and to give the men a historical justification for their attachment to the land. “Among these hardy pioneers were many of a fighting nature who held the marauding Indians in check and repelled the advances of the French while his more peaceful brothers followed the pursuits of tilling and building,” before they “migrated Westward and played a leading part in the settling and development of the country in its early day.” These were some of the “pioneers” that “blazed a trail of civilization through that section [and] rolled back the Redman.” The piece also mentioned the Erie Canal, in terms of its infrastructural and geographical innovation, rather than in terms of the conditions and social relations of its laborers. When a camp member returned to the camp, he recounted his

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470 Saxton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology,” 16.
471 Robinson, Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII, 143.
experiences with outside employment, another layoff, and his readmittance to the camp, in a piece he titled “Return of a Native.”

McKay overstated when he wrote that “the Captain and ninety percent of the crew here are Irish.” Yet he was correct that in the first sixteen months of the camp's existence, under 4% of those admitted were considered to be non-white. This contrasts similar camps in the state, such as the CWA Camp at Bear Mountain, also in Orange County and twelve miles down the road, which was 60% “Negro.” The men at Bear Mountain were required to commute by ferry and train from New York City every day to get to the work camp, and to pay for their own transportation, which amounted to almost a dollar a day, from meager wages. “Many…get up at 3:30 a.m. and don't get home before nine at night.” They were docked for lateness or absence, both of which occurred more frequently given this precarious commute. In contrast, at Camp LaGuardia the men had accommodation, albeit in former cells, or later, in barracks-style annexes. Hodson was fully aware of the camps at Bear Mountain, having written in March 1933, that it was a site where he was sending hundreds of men from the Municipal Lodging House, one of “two experiments with camps which have been quite successful,” and that should be the model on which Roosevelt should coordinate federal with local relief.

The Bear Mountain work camps were a continual source of political agitation for better conditions, work schedules, and increased pay, and against deductions for the commute. These workers were the first to strike under the Civil Works Administration, in winter 1933, as they

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475 “Bear Mt. CWA Workers Fired, Terrorized by Brutal Foreman,” Daily Worker, January 19, 1934.
476 William Hodson to Jacob Billikopf, March 27, 1933, Box 2, Folder “Federal Aid, A-P,” William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library.
boarded trains in Weehawken on the way to the work sites. Bear Mountain was the also the site of numerous labor actions against the WPA. Between 5,000 and 6,000 men began working there beginning in September 1935. The following month, workers went on strike to protest pay differentials between men living in the city and men living upstate, who received lower wages, even though they worked the same jobs. Wage levels were evened two weeks later.

When men protested that they had to commute so far to work the site, they were kicked off relief rolls. Credit for travel time was denied in November.

Camp LaGuardia was, by design, an overwhelmingly white institution. 97% of the men who lived there in 1937 were white. This fact paralleled the federal government’s policy for the main work relief effort of the New Deal. The Civilian Conservation Corps camps, according to military procedure of the day, were segregated nationwide. Racial politics within the CCC were evident in New York State in the early 1930’s. Hodson was then Executive Director of the Welfare Council, which had brought the industrial work camp model into existence at Blauvelt, in 1931, and then at Greycourt, the twin camps that provided the institutional prototypes for the CCC. He surely would have been aware of the “rebellion” of black workers at a camp in Preston, New York in the summer of 1933. The camp at Preston was one of a group of segregated camps

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482 John A. Salmond, “The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Negro,” The Journal of American History 52, no. 1 (1965): 79. “It was never the policy of CCC officials to attempt to create a nationwide system of integrated camps. Given the customs of the era, to do so would have invited trouble. From the first the mixing of the races was permitted only in those regions where Negro enrollment was so slight that no colored company could be formed. Elsewhere Negroes were assigned to all-Negro camps.” Patton points out that Roosevelt appointed the racist southerner Robert Fechner as head of the CCC to ensure that it did not become “a form of sovietism,” as the head of the AFL put it. Thomas W. Patton, “‘A Forest Camp Disgrace.’: The Rebellion of Civilian Conservation Corps Workers at Preston, New York, July 7, 1933,” New York History 82, no. 3 (2001): 240.
for Black workers located in Central New York State. But when the camp director promoted white recruits to higher paying positions over black workers with more seniority, protests by these workers over discrimination sparked their dismissal, and subsequent outrage drew attention to the “forced labor” camps in general. The white workers were transferred to “an all white camp…a wise and precautionary move on the part of [General Roberts.]” The protesters were sent back to Harlem.483

Even if professional minstrelsy was in decline throughout the 1920s,484 its effects were long lasting, as it migrated to other forms of commodified entertainment, especially Hollywood films, but also radio, toys, and World’s Fair souvenirs.485 Commercial theater, already in decline before the Depression, was one of the earliest industries to suffer from depressed conditions, throwing many actors out of work as it contracted. Movie theaters, which provided a cheaper alternative to stage performances, opened up viewership to wider audiences. Radio programs, such as Amos ’n Andy, similarly gained wide popularity. Unemployment in the theater industry was widespread, especially among black workers, writers, and performers. Exacerbating this situation, whites performing in blackface often took the few roles available to black actors.486 Thus, while minstrelsy was a product of the 19th century, its changing power continued to evolve and grow, even if increasingly and consciously resisted, all the way up to the current

483 Camp Preston was run by a rabid anti-communist and racist Major Roland P. Shugg. General Roberts was the army general who stepped in to address the disturbance and to reassert discipline. The quote is from the director of a nearby “colored” camp in Chenango, Major Peale, commenting on the situation to the Binghamton Press. Patton, “‘A Forest Camp Disgrace.’: The Rebellion of Civilian Conservation Corps Workers at Preston, New York, July 7, 1933,” 247.
484 Lott, Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class, 7.
485 Robinson, Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII, Chapter 3.
486 Ronald Ross, “The Role of Blacks in the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939,” The Journal of Negro History 59, no. 1 (January 1974): 38 and 44. This was still the early days of sound film. The Jazz Singer was released in late 1927.
It is unclear whether the performers at Camp LaGuardia were formerly stage professionals displaced by its decline, but they were amateurs in the sense that they did not receive remuneration from the camp. This makes all the more striking their efforts amid a group of white and immigrant men living in an institution specifically designed with the goal of their ideological reformation.

Alice Childress characterizes the minstrel show as hypnotic. It expressed a feeling in which coercion and consent were not exclusive, but rather coexisted. The form masked cultural difference while calling attention to difference as universal. At the same time it masked class similarity while inventing a counterfeit of racial difference. This is why Lott describes minstrelsy’s potency in the “mediation of northern class, racial, and ethnic conflict—all largely grounded in a problematic of masculinity.” At Camp LaGuardia, this translated into a program that could build group cohesion for the speed up of work as a grounds for working-class masculinity. The newspaper chided, ambiguously, even likening camp labor to a “performance,” “If that certain party feels he had contributed so much to the camp that he is compelled to seek solitude and quiet in the camp hospital after each performance, Mussolini will get a nasty letter that one of his subjects is goldbricking.”

The official newspaper at Camp LaGuardia was highly suggestive in its impression of a structure of feeling as it adopted aspects of the genre, which contributing writers reproduced in turn. For example, one camp member’s letter to the editor after he had left for private

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487 Silvera, “Still in Blackface.”
488 Alice Childress, A Short Walk (New York: CUNY, Feminist Press, 2006); Lott, Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class; Robinson, Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before WWII. The “perfectness” of the white interlocutor invites fear in Cora, the main character of Alice Childress’ novel, yet she is nevertheless captivated by the show, and declares, “Papa I’d like to spend my whole life in a minstrel show!” Page 40.
489 Lott, Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class, 36.
employment described the importance of working the land toward the creation of a “new man,” as well as his identification of Irish and Black workers. In this context, rural labor, often erroneously identified only with black migrants from the South, created an identity of labor that white camp workers simultaneously submitted to, yet repudiated.

I saw the new man in the making. But I cannot think of him, nor did I ever see him as typical of any race. The predominating group were Irish, of course – and may God bless ‘em – but after days of hard work in the black dirt under the torrid skies, it would take an eye better than an Army 20/20 to tell which was which. His use of the term “race” to describe the various ethnicities that made up the camp’s population was common at the time. But the claim that the program was for men of “any race” is conspicuous, given the virtual absence of black men there. In its first sixteen months of operation, less than 4% of enrollees were classified as other than white. By 1940, this number had declined to less than 2%. At the same time, there was an increasing number of immigrants living there. In August 1935, 61% of the camp’s residents were born in the US. By the 1940 census, 64% were immigrants. Elsewhere, as the men prepared cotton stuffing for mattresses, they described the “cinch” of the “cotton picking” job, “the old southern trade [they had] down to a science.”

Traditional content for minstrel skits sometimes translated directly onto the newspaper’s written page. For example, “Rastus,” the name often given to one of the endmen, was frequently the vehicle for humor in “Laff it Off” sections of the paper. Familial deficiency or confused syntax accounted for the punch line of jokes, inflected with exaggerated dialect. The paper

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491 Hicks, Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935, 48.
493 “Routine Changes Made since August 9, 1935”; Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, “Population Schedule, Enumeration District 36-5.” Ella Howard seems to mischaracterize who lived at Camp LaGuardia in its early months when she writes that “approximately 70 percent of participants were city natives.” Howard, Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America, 70. According to the Welfare Department’s report for the time period between the camp’s opening in May 1934 through the end of August 1935, 35% of the camp’s residents were natives of New York City.
494 “Construction Division,” February 1937, 14.
frequently singled out Chester Morris and “Goatee” Green, two of the few black men to live at the camp long-term, as the butt of jokes and depicted in caricature.\textsuperscript{495} The newspaper reported a fake story of Green describing his coming to the camp, in falsified dialect, as a mistake, after which he decided to “jest stay a while at Greycote.”\textsuperscript{496} In a story “vouched for by the Editors of Readers Digest,” Akuko Subash “an Indian native, who lost his job while sleeping on duty” wrote to the colonial “District Officer” of “Abookuta” to ask for his job back. This fabricated letter drew on the exoticized geographical imaginings of colonialism and the invented officer’s inflated neologisms as the basis for humor.\textsuperscript{497}

The newspaper’s explicit intent was to unify its readers, whether residents of the camp or not. It masked and instructed with humor, and its content was sexualized and gendered. In an all-male camp, which understood residents’ deficiency as failing to be male breadwinners for families, jokes about “feminine” men and the recuperative power of dominating women were marshalled to assemble and expand morale. Another camp resident that the newspaper singled out for caricature was Eddie Lavezzo, “ex-adagio and fan dancer, Greenwich Village and Rittenhouse Square,” who came to Greycourt because “I love flowers…I think daffodils are divine, don’t you? I love nature in May and I love to dance in the open and I love, oh I just love everything, don’t you? Whoops!” At cards, the men played “with four queens to the deck, except when Lavezzo is in the game.”\textsuperscript{498} The paper’s invented geographies paralleled the exoticization of African tribes and the North’s invented understanding of the Southern plantation, staples of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{495} “Camp LaGuardia Celebrities,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, November 1936, 27.  
\textsuperscript{498} “Our Own Nosy Reporter: Why the Devil Did You Come to Camp Greycourt, Anyhow?,” 19.

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the genre, to expand a sense of nostalgia for “better times.” In general, the paper made caricatures of racialized relationships, and was itself structured in the minstrel genre. Newspaper writing, like the theatrical club, was a recreational activity. The writers and editors held jobs as farm, kitchen, or construction laborers by day. It was a form of pop-culture rather than a way for the writers to assert control through propaganda. Minstrelsy resonated with the camp’s members and a long-standing working class cultural institution of the Bowery became an especially cohesive aspect of the camp’s routine. Although Claude McKay was sent there explicitly to work on its paper, it is no surprise that he vigorously declined.

The nationalism and anti-Communism of Camp LaGuardia easily transformed into an orotund nativism at the same time that the camp was regularly preparing white immigrants for citizenship. The Camp LaGuardia News sometimes referenced actual political events in caricature. One issue retailed the story that, “Bill Morris stopped us the other day and asked if we had heard the latest Harlem song craze. When we told him we didn’t he said it was ‘I Love Salassie.’” A May 1936 issue included the racist “Oriental Row,” which ridiculed the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, then organizing against the nativist attack by non-Chinese laundries, supported by the Board of Aldermen, against Chinese laundries. Describing the “riot” of the Alliance’s members “to elect new officers,” the paper wrote, “Three hours of sing—song argument between opposing factions reached a climax amid a chorus of Bronx ejaculations, and shrieks of ‘Communists! Radicals! Reds!’” In the period of restricted immigration following the 1924 Immigration Act, which continued the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, the Welfare 499

499 “Aliens Registered,” Camp LaGuardia News, December 1940, 43. “There is also conducted, when warranted, classes in citizenship…for those who contemplate becoming naturalized. Help is given in the obtaining of these [papers?], and the fact that a man has somewhere to stay and not be forced through circumstances to wander about the country, has aided many men in becoming citizens.” John G. Parker, “The Camp, Its Aims and Ideals,” Camp LaGuardia News, May 1939, 19 and 43.

Department reinforced a racialized nationalism as a crucial aspect of this program. After its initial declaration, the Hand Laundry Alliance membership soared to over 3,000 as it challenged these types of nativist attacks as well as the “power structure of New York Chinatown.”

The content of the theater program supported these functions. The importance of “the land” in the rehabilitation of camp inmates was dramatized by its theater club, under the direction of Guy F. Bragdon, who was possibly a former director from the Bowery. The “camp written and directed show,” which was the “climax” of first anniversary celebrations, was called “Dirt Diggers of 1935,” a spoof that parodied the class pretentions of the film “Gold Diggers of 1935,” popular that year. It built on the previous effort the month before, the “Gala Premier” of “The Greycourt Minstrels” by Bragdon in collaboration with Jack Shelley, which was “A Greycourt Presentation,” with a fifty-member cast and “28 big numbers.” The Mayor of Boston, witness to a performance of “Dirt Diggers,” was convinced that Boston needed a similar institution, and the show toured other Orange County institutions, including New York State Warwick Training School, the New York City Reformatory at New Hampton, and Camp Roosevelt. The newspaper advertised, “The show has a cast of more than thirty embryo, city-bred farmers and packs about as many laughs as were ever squeezed into an amateur endeavor.” It was followed by the “‘LaGuardia Follies,’ another outstanding home talent play,” in August, and then a “prison play,” in 1936, in which camp actors played guards as well as

prisoners. The reviewer “had a number of misgivings about a show of this type being staged here,” but concluded that the “home talent” gave a performance that “was equal, if not superior, to some of the old CWA shows that were given here, presumably by experienced actors.”506

The following month the newspaper reviewed another performance by the Theatrical Club, led by a new director.

In the recent Minstrel Show, the band did much to add to the enthusiasm of the stage performers; so much in fact that they [were] invited to present the show at Hampton Farms, where they were accorded an enthusiastic reception at the hands of a critical audience. As was promised by the Theatrical Club Director, Rupert H. Clarke, the recent show was not a minstrel show though it was called such. This had us puzzled until we saw the performance then we understood, as it was truly unlike any such show we had ever seen.507

While it is unclear what innovations this minstrel show introduced, what is certain is that it, too, was adjusted to the real conditions at the camp, rather than just a reproduction of previously composed acts. More importantly, this show anchored the camp’s recreational programming and sedimented its position in the area. First, it built relationships among the city’s far-flung institutions. The city’s nearby reformatory, “Hampton Farms,” which hosted it, came to do a performance in return. They received “special permission” from the Commissioner of Corrections, because it was “the first outside performace they have ever given.” The theatrical club’s “six piece orchestra”508 played weekly at nearby Greenwood Lake. The “camp thespians were invited to perform over Radio Station WGNY, Chester in their amateur hour” and “carried off the first prize of $10.00.” This was followed by first place finishes in other contests, over the radio and in Middletown, leading to their booking on the station “and a three night vaudeville

engagement in Middletown." These relationships were continually reinforced and refreshed. “Plans are going forward to secure further outside engagements for the thespians [sic.] minstrel show.” Second, the show was the basis for social events that were both prestigious and rare in the austere context of relief and depression. A party for the theatrical club in Spring 1936 at the “Four Deuces,” a restaurant on Highway 17, was “its first … of the year,” featuring “an excellent dinner served by two attractive young ladies,” and ending well past the camp’s normal curfew of 10:30, at “about 3:00A.M.” These were some of the few regular times that men were encouraged to leave the campus, since most recreational activities were designed specifically to “induce [the men] to remain on the camp grounds.” The dramatic club had celebrated “the successful completion of another show” at the “Buck’s Lodge” the previous year. When “Mr. Clarke suggested that the club get together once a month for such an evening…a vote was taken on this bright scheme [and] no dissenters were found.” Finally, the program was a lynchpin that held together a number of recreational activities at the camp. At the gala, “Martinkus spoke of the close connection between the Theatrical Club and the Camp Baseball Team, Mr. Clarke being director of both of these enterprises.” Clarke was also the “guest of honor” at the dramatic club’s end of the year dinner, held by Guy Bragdon, the director of the club. The club’s activities were reported in the “Social Services” section of the paper, demonstrating its programmatic centrality. More space was dedicated to describe the theater club in this section than any other activity.

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511 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 173.
512 Graham, “Dramatic Club Notes.”
The minstrel show, long-standing Bowery institution, evoked particular geographies. According to Lott, while it once had broached unity between the North and the South in the antebellum period, as the Civil War approached, it increasingly expressed geographical division, as it “faced west [to become] a major national signifier of western migration.”\textsuperscript{514} Camp LaGuardia’s minstrel show had a geographic component as well. It was part of a policy seeking to appease local anxieties about a transient camp nearby, a process that was ongoing. From the beginning the camp’s situation in Orange County was problematic from a local perspective. In 1937 the town of Chester hired its first police as a direct result of the unease felt by the community over the camp’s opening. The official report said, “Relations with the surrounding communities have presented a difficult problem to the camp administration,” which was why “‘The LaGuardia Theatrical Club’ often performs in town halls of the neighboring communities and also invites the townspeople to attend the performances at the camp.”\textsuperscript{515} The newspaper’s use of a masculinized mythology of colonialism infused its revisionist camp history and buffered these relationships. Additionally, nostalgia tempered displacement and saturated camp ideology. Performances played with gender, as in “Cuddling Cuties [by] John Sullivan and Edward Lavezzo,” geographic displacement, the “10\textsuperscript{th} Avenue Farmer,” and nostalgia in “Two Breaths from the Ould Sod.”\textsuperscript{516}

Commissioner of Welfare William Hodson linked relief and production through his understanding of nationalism. As he explained on a radio program titled “Battle of Production” in July 1941, “America is like a great giant of unlimited power who does not know his strength, and has not yet focused that power through complete coordination of brain and muscle. A giant

\textsuperscript{514} Lott, \textit{Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class}, 209.
\textsuperscript{515} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 173–74.
\textsuperscript{516} “Program: Dirt Diggers of 1935.”
who has not yet been able to concentrate his full emotional as well as physical strength to the
task at hand. In this explanation, given just weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he
combined his view of the function of an industrial reserve army with the permanent need for
public assistance to continually mobilize it as a productive force, so that “goods may be
consumed in ever-increasing quantity” by “reducing idleness.” While relief was meant to restore
peoples’ “purchasing power” when the “social and industrial mechanism gets jammed,” the
“emotional” preparedness of workers rested on their clear vision of this “task at hand.” Thus, his
intensive crack-down on “chiseling,” panhandling, and “charity racketeering” were necessary to
awaken this great giant. As Camp LaGuardia News put it, “All chiselers are not sculptors.” He envisioned the camp’s dormant raw materials of land and labor to be assembled to achieve
this “coordination of brain and muscle.” (See also the “Black Dirt” section in the following
chapter.)

At about the same time that the Camp LaGuardia minstrels had their widest coverage in a
piece by “[New York] World-Telegram feature writer,” Earl Sparling, the newspaper ran a story
containing an interview with Stanley Howe. He described the Communist strategy as a
coordinated effort by single men to overload the relief effort in order to destabilize the state.
“Chiseling” was an attack on the U.S. government by communist organizations. “Members of
these organizations,” were, in particular, misled single (immigrant) men, who needed tutoring in
the ways of nationalism and hard work, precisely the program on offer at Camp LaGuardia. He
had thus instituted a “new intake system” at relief access points below 14th Street that deterred

517 “Battle of Production” (WOR, July 29, 1941), Cassette 1797, William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library.
518 “Social and Industrial Reconstruction.”
519 “Fake Charities,” September 27, 1940, Cassette 1775a and 1775b, William Hodson Papers, New York Public
Library.
520 Camp LaGuardia News, August 1938, 5.
single men from applying from home relief. According to Howe, this had caused the “migration” of communists to points north of 14th Street, and he planned to implement this strategy citywide to close the loophole. Howe justified his actions, which, the paper concurred, would cut down on costs with the stricter application process.

It has been obvious for some time that there has been an organized raid on the relief rolls by communist organizations. Under the tenet that the end justifies the means, members of these organizations have been urged to perjure themselves in relief applications to make the relief load so heavy that the city, State [sic:] and federal relief administrations would eventually break down, and with them, they hope, the whole government structure.\footnote{E.K. Titus, “Halt ‘Chiseling’ By Single Men: Relief Officials Drafting New System to Bar Them from Robbing Needy,” \textit{New York World-Telegram}, March 6, 1935.}

Reformers have periodically interpreted homelessness through a nationalist lens to gather political support for its amelioration, and, drawing on frontier mythology, have even understood it in exceptionalist terms: a quintessentially American phenomenon. Frances Perkins, Roosevelt’s Secretary of Labor, described displacement: “mobility has always been and still is a normal and vital feature of American life.”\footnote{Crouse, \textit{The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941}, 261.} Echoing the head of New York City’s Division of Shelter Care, whose testimony was quoted in this chapter’s introduction, Nels Anderson expressed this thesis in even more detail.

Hobos have a romantic place in our history. From the beginning they have been numbered among the pioneers. They have played an important rôle in reclaiming the desert and in subduing the trackless forests. They have contributed more to the open, frank, and adventurous spirit of the Old West than we are always willing to admit. They are, as it were, belated frontiersman. Their presence in the migrant group has been the chief factor in making the American vagabond class different from that of any other country.\footnote{Anderson, \textit{The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man}, 92.}
Farm colonies in general drew on this form of frontier nationalism, a policy which institutionalized the analogous process of exporting surplus labor to overseas colonies. The program of the national farm colony, which opened in Matanuska, Alaska in May 1935, achieved resonance because the Great Depression was widely believed to have been the result of the frontier being closed. Now largely forgotten, it was the largest project of FERA’s resettlement program, which envisaged the colonization of Alaska before it became a U.S. state. The colony was open to people “of Nordic type and fitted by living habits to adjust to the Alaska environment.” These colonists, like the LaGuardians, were a step “above” the transients who built the colony and did all of its most grueling manual labor. In its founding mythology, Camp LaGuardia’s original members were always described as “pioneers” in the same way, especially in retrospectives, even though there had been a similar institution on this site for over a decade before they arrived. Camp administrators and newspaper writers drew on and appropriated a presumed longing for “nature,” the escape from capitalist time domination that was assumed to motivate hoboes. The move to country labor thus became “natural” for the Camp LaGuardia “pioneers.” At the same time, longing for nature was itself “naturalized,” exploited and simultaneously put to a specific purpose. This was part of the “dual relationship of city and frontier” that characterized the content of minstrel shows, even as they “transcended regionalism.”

524 David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism (Faber & Faber, 2011).
With wits sharpened by city contacts, farming has come as naturally to them and with much greater ease than if their status were reversed….and they had first come from the farm to the city.\textsuperscript{528}

The nationalist impulse, which became indisputable in the fall of 1937, also took on a frontier aspect, an idea that had always been central to the administrators’ idea of the camp and the identity of its residents. “Frontier hero” Johnny Appleseed was a vagabond caretaker of working class settlers “who gave to the West apples to eat” so that “their children might have fruit to save them from the scurvy.”\textsuperscript{529} A Thanksgiving issue of 1936 likened camp residents to Pilgrims, who in their efforts to form “a co-operative community in which all of the people would share in the food, drink and clothing” waged “continuing battles … with [marauding] Indians. They had to protect their homes, wives and children from the dangers of these raids and from roving wild beasts…How much like these Pilgrims are we here at Camp LaGuardia.”\textsuperscript{530} A geographic structure of feeling informed this narrative because historical obstacles to westward expansion were equated with the struggle to build up the camp.

The newspaper’s writers imagined themselves as leaving behind the problems of the city and beginning anew in an idyllic, pastoral wilderness. “A City man Walks through Country Lanes” by William Kirby, later the newspaper’s editor, describes how he was “consumed with the great desire to commune with Mother Nature.” His hike takes him to higher elevations in the countryside, where “At the top of the hill…in a southwesterly direction, [I saw] the Camp, squatting contentedly on its perch.” He describes the walk in great detail, so that others might take the same path. But at the same time, he ultimately negates this experience in what is

\textsuperscript{528} A Veteran Greycourter, “The First Year.” The camp itself was described as “pioneering” as well, as a “member of the Danish Parliament” remarked, “This is the most interesting pioneer work in human rehabilitation that I saw anywhere in the United States.” “Press Release: A Human Repair Shop.”
supposed to be the humorous culmination of the piece, “NOW DON’T GET ME WRONG! The hike is really delightful, interesting, and the scenery beautiful. It is something YOU SHOULD NOT MISS…BUT YOU CAN TAKE THE WALK………..I’LL STAY HOME AND READ A BOOK.\textsuperscript{531} Charles F. Carroll, a Camp LaGuardia member who wrote poetry for the newspaper, summed up the geographical idea that was at the heart of the rehabilitation program at the camp in his poem, “Prospective.” In the piece, the “lowlands” of the city were ugly, and the Ramapo mountains of upstate New York were “Heaven.” The frontier geography, enabled by the state, manifests both the idea of freedom as well as nostalgia “to be back with [his] kind.”

\textbf{PROSPECTIVE.}

I am weary of life in the lowlands
In the spell of the heat and the rush,
I am longing to sit on the hilltops,
To thrill at the song of the thrush.

I am sad when I see me like others
In the mad rush for God knows what,
I yearn for the winds in the high mountains,
To run from the fate of my lot.

I can’t see the people about me
When they dash thru the streets at my side,
But to watch these from heights should be Heaven,
To see where they slink and hide[.]

In the lowlands the life seems so ugly,
In the mountains pure joy I’ll find,
But perhaps when I climb to the hilltops,

I’ll long to be back with my kind.\textsuperscript{532}

The camp was an extraordinarily large presence, comparable in size to the rest of the town of Chester. In 1950, 906 people lived in the town outside of the camp; 104 of the 241 households were farms.\textsuperscript{533} According to the official plan, as the camp developed, with all of its modern infrastructures and technologies, the surrounding rural area would also develop. This went to the geographic core of the camp’s existence. Indeed, how would men find jobs in New York City with only one-day furlough granted for every thirty worked? Yet this was not just ideologically important but had a direct impact on the camp’s relief function. Its end goal, fitting its imagined function of disbursing population from the city to the country, was to find the men jobs in local private positions. After all, a major obstacle of the Federal Transient Program in the state was a lack of work assignments in major urban centers such as Buffalo and New York.\textsuperscript{534} Therefore, at Camp LaGuardia, “Contacts are made with local employers. Advertisements are sometimes placed in local newspapers.”\textsuperscript{535} The camp newspaper boasted, “Positions have been secured for a number of men with our neighboring farmers.”\textsuperscript{536} Even though fewer than half of the men who left had gotten jobs outside,\textsuperscript{537} a positive image of the unemployed workers at the camp was necessary to achieve this objective. Hodson took this aspect of the camp up when he

\textsuperscript{533} Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, “Enumeration District 36,” 1950.
\textsuperscript{534} Crouse, “The Remembered Men: Transient Camps in New York State: 1933-1935.”
\textsuperscript{535} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 170.
\textsuperscript{537} “Browsing About,” February 1938, 2. Even this is likely to be inflated, because these numbers were probably self-reported by the men who left, given that there was no follow-up, and it is not clear how many would have been able to keep the jobs they got in an unstable economy. The official Departmental report of 1937 put the number of men who left the camp for “outside positions” at 738 during that year. But the report conceded that the statistic was unreliable, because it was “Not verified—the figure includes many who stated as their reasons for leaving that they had secured outside employment. Many of these men were transferred to other W.P.A. positions.” Hodson, \textit{Public Welfare in Transition: Annual Report for the Year 1937}, 115. Another official report, in one of the few instances where the term “colonist” was used to describe the men, acknowledged that “not quite all of the camp’s contented colonists remain so.” “Press Release: A Human Repair Shop.”
said, “many intelligent persons talk about the folks on relief as if they were a class apart” when
they were actually a “cross section of any neighborhood, of any borough, or of the city as a
whole…doctors and skilled workers, clerks, stenographers, teachers, lawyers, doctors and
dentists.”

Employers, the logic went, would need a positive image of workers if they were to give
them a job. The paper boasted, “it is no unusual sight to see men wandering along country roads
and comparing the crops reaped on our farm with those of our neighbors.” These
interpretations were attempts to substantiate the view that the camp would modernize the rural
countryside through its enhanced infrastructure and cultivation. Camp services and buildings
were often presented as the “best” or “most modern” in the county. “Camp LaGuardia boasts the
most picturesque and finest baseball, soccer and athletic field in Orange County.” The garage
was to be “the most outstanding building of its type in this section of the County…to
accommodate the Camp’s fleet of cars.” The dental office, open to residents of the town, was
“one of the best equipped and most complete in Orange County.” The root cellar, reinforced with
steel, was dynamited out of rock and compared to the ongoing construction of the subways.
Building it was “one of the most difficult jobs” at the camp, and it was “the largest and the finest
of it’s [sic.] kind in the County.” A Department of Welfare Fire truck, a “modern fire-engine,”
was housed there, and provided services to the area. New annexes featured radiators and
electricity, and were “modern, convenient, and comfortable to live in.” A “New and larger”
piggery was being built. Even the barbershop was “modern”! The buildings recently constructed

538 “Social and Industrial Reconstruction.”
539 A Veteran Greycourter, “The First Year.”
540 “Procedural 39-7--Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia.”
542 “Construction Division,” Camp LaGuardia News, December 1936, 8–9; “Construction Division,” February 1937,
with WPA funding, including the administration building, storehouse, garage, administration dormitory, and “several lesser buildings,” “will add no little to the material worth of the property, no matter what use it might be put [to] in the future.”

Diplomacy tutored the men living at the camp as well as area residents. The News continuously published articles on Orange County facts to acquaint campers with their surroundings, social knowledge that was intentionally regional. These lessons were nearly always published next to the “What do you know about your city?” feature. Camp LaGuardia News even reproduced a custom map for its readers, with the title “where to walk and how to get there” to familiarize new camp members with the surrounding area. Town officials, including the judge at Middletown, wrote glowing letters of appreciation for the men at the camp. While it became more prevalent later on, this specific tactic seems to have been in place from its early days, as it consciously took part in county social events. The paper covered the crowning of the “Queen of the Black Dirt,” awarded at “Orange County’s first Onion Harvest Festival” to “an unmarried girl, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, who either now or at some time in her life has worked in the fields---planting, weeding and harvesting.” Clarke, the Director, wrote to Howe in June, 1935 that he would be reaching out to the “Orange County Fair committee [to] discuss with him the space for the Camp LaGuardia exhibits.” These efforts

545 “Where to Walk and How to Get There, and Back (We Hope),” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1940, 15; “Take a Walk, but with a Destination,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1940, 14.
548 George L. Clarke to Stanley H. Howe, June 27, 1935, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3155, Box 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
strongly contrast the later days of the camp, during which race was utilized to express social division (see final chapter.)

Later, Hodson used similar strategies to publicize the Welfare Department at the World’s Fair, and at which Camp LaGuardia maintained a “vegetable exhibit.” He ceremoniously presented Mayor LaGuardia with “a sample box in which was contained a variety of vegetables grown here in Camp, along with several cans of tomatoes and beets put up in the Camp’s own cannery” at the Mayor’s “Summer City Hall” at the World’s Fair.⁵⁴⁹ He also used theater to explain the functions of modern welfare. In a radio play broadcast over WNYC to publicize the relief effort during the World’s Fair, he presented a history of “the dramatic story of public welfare in New York,” and its transformation from “punishment to security.” It documented institutional reconfigurations that addressed those things “beyond the control of workers and employers,” as “a country once predominantly agrarian was being rapidly transformed into the greatest industrial nation in the world…this was progress…but…the cities were crowded with wage earners…men who left the soil knew hunger for the first time.” In the process of evolving into the “largest relief job in the world,” New York City ended its reliance on the “almshouse or workhouse…a hovel that was hospital, insane asylum, and jail…all in one…(SOUND OF WHIP, SCREAM OF PAIN.)” That institution enabled a “form of slavery,” in which workhouse labor, “when [it] became overcrowded,” was “[farmed] out … to avaricious employers.” In contrast, after “men who fought in America’s army were found homeless and starving,” New York State finally initiated a method to address “the last and most feared of the [Four Horsemen of Insecurity]…unemployment.” The piece concluded, “The heroic but makeshift measures of

private unemployment relief had failed… and… New York City began to meet its biggest problem—relief—with government aid… Relief to the unemployed was recognized to be a permanent function of government.”

The following chapter examines Camp LaGuardia’s position in this transition. Its work program reversed geographically the traditional function harnessing labor in a workhouse. While historically workhouses sought to integrate displaced rural workers into urban wage labor, Camp LaGuardia intended to send displaced urban wage laborers into employment on the city’s rural outskirts.

Conclusion

Nationalism was a way to structure the depression as an anomaly, rather than as a periodically re-occurring crisis of reproduction. This temporal and spatial displacement, like Cedric Robinson’s definition of the conceit of “racial regimes,” rested implicitly on “forgeries of memory and meaning.” It was also structured to oppose communism, then making inroads electorally in the restructuring of the Democratic Party and in terms of its Popular Front concessions to “Americanization.” Black-white unity was often expressed as a distinctly “Communist” politics, and the fight against it was also the fight against racial equality. As Martin Dies, who led the “little red scare,” said in Congress’ Un-American Activities hearings in December 1938, “racial equality forms a vital part of the Communistic teaching and practices.”

With federal money supporting the operation of Camp LaGuardia, its minstrel program went on hiatus for three years. When the WPA pulled out of the camp in November, 1937, the newspaper reported that “all former recreational activities will once more be resumed.”

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following year it was revived in a stage performance titled “World’s Fair Auditions.” A full-blown minstrel show, “BIGGER AND BETTER” than previous efforts, was composed and performed in 1939, the year of the World’s Fair. The following chapter examines these developments next to structural changes happening in the Department of Welfare, simultaneously to phase out emergency relief and to institutionalize a long-term program to manage homelessness. It investigates how the stories told at Camp LaGuardia provided a meaningful narrative for these material changes.

Chapter 6
Consolidating Consent, Part II: Managed Men

Figure 6.1 Flyer advertising “Old-Fashioned Minstrel Show” by the Camp LaGuardia Theatrical Club, as a benefit performance in Washingtonville, NY.\(^{553}\)

\(^{553}\) *Camp LaGuardia News.* May 1939, 41.
Of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order.\textsuperscript{554}

Handling the men is probably our biggest farm job.\textsuperscript{555}

From the chaotic condition existing before the establishment of the Central Registration Bureau in 1931 and the confusion arising from the divided responsibility of the Emergency Relief Bureau and the Department of Public Welfare, there has finally emerged a close approach to a fully coordinated program for administering care of the destitute homeless.\textsuperscript{556}

Introduction

This chapter continues an analysis of contradictions, stemming from material and ideological processes, that account for why and how men were placed in state custody. Camp LaGuardia helped to mobilize work relief, by providing jobs outside the city’s normal purview, and then to demobilize it, by cutting down on expansive home relief rolls as the WPA “tapered off.” The second “moment” of consolidation of Camp LaGuardia was in the late 1930s as the “entire responsibility for the homeless was placed in one agency” with the merging of the Emergency Relief Bureau and the Department of Public Welfare, as 1937 closed.\textsuperscript{557} The Welfare Department was institutionalizing its provision of unemployment relief, supplementing its other “traditional” fields of aid, such as Veterans and Old Age Assistance and Child Welfare. The prototype to stabilize, emergency relief, was over six times larger than the previous size of ongoing, permanent welfare.\textsuperscript{558} In September 1939, a Division of the Care of the Homeless within the Welfare Department was established, with Ralph Astrofsky at its head, as the WPA was downsizing by 75,000 jobs in New York City. The Division, which focused primarily on

\textsuperscript{554} From Melville, Herman, \textit{Moby Dick}, quoted in C.L.R. James, \textit{Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In} (Detroit: BEWICK/ED, 1978), 14.

\textsuperscript{555} “City Derelicts Reap Prize Crop on Relief Farm,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, November 23, 1941.

\textsuperscript{556} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 177.

\textsuperscript{557} Herlands, 114; “Unemployment Relief in New York City: Final Report of the Emergency Relief Bureau of the City of New York to the Honorable F.H. LaGuardia.”

\textsuperscript{558} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, xi.
single men, included a Registration Department; the Municipal Lodging House, with its separate annex for women; Camp LaGuardia; and a Women’s Emergency Shelter; and paid commercial establishments to house men on a nightly basis.\textsuperscript{559} Consolidated in a context that increasingly pulled housed men to Camp LaGuardia, the Division was part of a “fully integrated” network of Public Welfare agencies given the merger of emergency relief with permanent Public Assistance.\textsuperscript{560} The historical strands of development of the farm colony model, made material in Camp LaGuardia during the political turmoil of the Great Depression, had been institutionalized; “homelessness” was formalized by and in the state.\textsuperscript{561} Surplus labor, whether taken from prisons, lodging houses, or the ranks of unemployed, and put to work for its “rehabilitation,” was an integral aspect of “reform” in a new Homeless Division of the Department of Public Welfare.

As the Division consolidated, it sought to export men from lodging houses on the Bowery to new lives in upstate New York.\textsuperscript{562} Hodson’s 1937 Annual Report for the Department of Public Welfare, titled “Public Welfare in Transition,” drew on the geographic imagery that had activated the Regional Plan a decade earlier. The cover depicts a suspension bridge that leads the reader’s eye into the distant horizon. The words of the title cross the flowing water below. The bridge in the picture is an approximation of the George Washington Bridge, distinguished by its conspicuous rivets and square frame, which was both the symbol of and material link in the new regional geography of New York, and over which men would need to go to get to the camp in Orange County. The Welfare Department was apparently the bridge to a modern New York City.

\textsuperscript{559} Herlands, 122–23, 183; “Maids on Relief” (WMCA Intercity, n.d.), Audio, MssCol 1410, cassette 1789, William Hodson Papers, New York Public Library.
\textsuperscript{560} “Aid to Civilians during an Air Raid” (WOR, Mutual Broadcasting System, February 25, 1942), Audio, MssCol 1410, cassette 1774, New York Public Library, William Hodson Papers.
\textsuperscript{561} Previously, “homelessness” was a term used more frequently to describe dislocations from natural disasters or war. “Unemployed” or “needy” were terms reserved for dislocated workers.
\textsuperscript{562} See Appendix D for a map showing the location of the Bowery lodging houses in New York in 1939.
The chapter places the changes happening within the Welfare Department next to the daily life of the camp, explicitly cultivated to incorporate its program, in order to demonstrate Camp LaGuardia’s function in stabilizing wider institutional reform. It looks at the stories told by the camp newspaper to gain an understanding of how the men processed their contradictory experiences there. The focus on the World’s Fair, and performances by the Camp LaGuardia minstrels, obscured intensive changes that were re-structuring the entire Welfare Department, and that were the intent of William Hodson and Fiorello LaGuardia since the beginning of their administration. While the Welfare Department intended to preserve its capacity for moving people in its efforts to manage dislocation, it also needed to preserve a feeling of stability. To these ends, every piece in the relief program was designed to be interchangeable, with procedurals and manuals helping to standardize the relief process. Administrative changes in the centralization process closed loopholes for those seeking shelter, aspects of aid that were actually helpful for people. For example, men could no longer go directly to the Municipal Lodging House to get shelter; they had to apply for a referral at a Lafayette Street office, and then go over to the Lodging House. This maintained the power of management to move people and to maintain people as moveable.

At the same time, these aspects of power were concealed. By the end of the 1930s, the camp administration had a twofold problem. First, men saw their positions as “semi-permanent,” making turnover too low because it prevented the churning of large groups of men. Permanancy of the workforce played into the administration’s vision of efficiency for the camp. It also allowed the camp to maintain a low staff to worker ratio. There were only 17 staff positions for the camp budgeted in 1939, employees jokingly referred to as “bourgeois” since they ate in a
separate dining room. All the workers reported directly to foremen, over 50 “straw bosses,” who were camp inmates themselves, but who were paid more due to their seniority. There were at least three grades of these higher paid foremen and Hodson was in contact with them. An administrative memo from his Secretary in May, 1937 listed the task, “Check up on DiMartini at Camp LaGuardia.” Orestes DiMartini, camp member, ran the Social Services Department. The straw boss configuration drew on the expertise of the more experienced workers to boost the farm’s production and run the camp’s other programmatic aspects. The second problem was that the men on home relief recruited to labor there understandably did not want to leave their homes to enroll in an upstate farm camp, a program that must have felt like punishment. Even though the rehabilitation program was similar to those in workhouses and reformatories, the administration was at pains to distinguish it from prison. The recommendations of the Herlands commission were therefore that the men at the camp should be re-convinced that their jobs were relief and not permanent. The spatial confinement (isolation) that had activated the geographic importance of the camp was weakened, and time once again became a driver of camp policy. The allotted time for the men’s “rehabilitation” was set at 6 months, rather than indeterminate, with a maximum of one year. The City’s claim that it had “stabilized the maximum stay at six months” is doubtful, but demonstrates the pressure that it placed on the men in this regard. While the consolidation in the previous chapter was based on a nostalgia for a past that never existed, the administration’s plans for a homeless infrastructure relied on a vision of the future that never came to be.

565 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 173.
566 “City Derelicts Reap Prize Crop on Relief Farm.”
Managed Men

Camp LaGuardia was isolated geographically from the intense political changes of depression-era New York. Symbolically, new recruits entered the campus by crossing “Howe Bridge,” named for the anti-communist Executive Secretary to Mayor LaGuardia who was the main administrator in getting the camp off the ground.\(^{568}\) Its newspaper was central to consolidating the administration’s program, as acknowledged by Superintendent Edwin Cunningham in a piece in the fourth anniversary issue. “In the absence of a Central Recreation Hall as a meeting place, I am using the medium of your magazine to address a few words to you men.”\(^{569}\) The camp’s prison architecture continued to influence daily relationships there. Its newspaper acquired a power to dictate and reinforce particular forms of social interaction. Over

\(^{569}\) Cunningham, “Superintendent’s Page,” May 1938, 4.
its eight and a half years of publication the house newspaper at Camp LaGuardia, while passing through distinct formats, documented New York City’s institutionalized version of the farm colony model in its most complete, concrete form. It enunciated an amusing parable that the men lived in an extended drama. They were urban workers thrust surprisingly into a pastoral way of life. For its writers, time slowed down, stretched over space. But, in addition to trivia, “facts and fancies,” puzzles, comics, and jokes, one can read in its pages the intentional masking functions of the camp as its rehabilitation program addressed the social contradictions stemming from depressed conditions and the resulting institutional reforms. The newspaper consciously enabled a “means of group expression,” and, along with its recreational activities, like the theater and sports programs, was intended to smooth over relations with the surrounding communities.

Given the upheavals of the depression, where both revolutionary energy and social dislocation were exploited as well as controlled, minstrelsy resonated as “a form in which transgression and containment coexisted.” Just as the minstrel acts of the 1850’s “institutionalized the social divisions they narrated,” so too did the Camp LaGuardia newspaper, and eventually an actual performing minstrel troupe, provide a flexible expression of both unity and differentiation.

The mimeographed monthly ran recurring reports that initiated incoming campers into the cadences of camp life. It reinforced the programmatic aspects of the camp, surveilled residents’ behavior, and generally formed the ideological narrative of the camp’s goals as they

570 “The First Year,” a description of the Camp LaGuardia’s initial land reclamation projects describes the interacting functions of work, artistic expression, and the camp’s official rehabilitation program. It boasted, “The camp newspaper which has been commented upon favorably by transient camps throughout the entire length and breadth of the United States, has done more than anything else to bring out the latent artistic ability in writers from among Greycourters themselves, who have done much to mould [sic.] the policy and to bring the attention of the officials their desire to be of assistance and guidance.” A Veteran Greycourter, “The First Year,” 6–7.
573 Lott, 230. Here Lott was specifically describing the stage productions of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which had absorbed and articulated various aspects of the minstrel show in the political climate of “America’s 1848.” Thus the minstrel show presaged the re-alignment of party politics in the mid-1850’s.
related to men’s lives there. Its message was delivered in a jocular tone that upheld a confident and robust white masculinity, and its comedic, whimsical, and mischievous voice tempered the psychological pain inflicted by the dislocations of the Great Depression. Early issues clearly targeted camp readers. Running lists of jokes characterized the “Camp News” sections, and expressed novelty of being recognized in a newspaper, and, usually, these inside jokes were too cryptic for an outside reader to understand. “Charley Holler is recuperating from a recent furlough. Charley, from the reports we hear had quite an excursion.”

The intent of the program was consistently described and reinforced in review for newcomers; the camp’s functions and structure described in detail.

Later, as the camp’s program emerged in full form, issues had a dual audience that included outside readers. The periodical was “sent to the neighboring schools and libraries, and is [sometimes] used in school classrooms.”

Camp rituals further intended to ease the men into livelihoods within the social life of Orange County, buttressing official efforts of the staff: “Employment is secured for camp members in the surrounding towns and cities through the camp Social Service Department,” a Department Fiorello LaGuardia singled out as “very worth while and shows what can be done and what is done in a practical way to promote the welfare of the members of the Camp.” Overall, the Mayor congratulated the paper’s staff, and conveyed “best wishes for the continued success of the publication.”

Clearly, the newspaper was crucial to camp life as well as to announcing the camp’s purpose to the extent that its success was linked to the success of the men themselves. The integrated publicity of the camp

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575 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 174.
576 “Procedural 39-7--Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia.”
placated local consciences troubled by a homeless colony in their community, which was central to the men’s success in their “rehabilitation.”

Odes to the camp demonstrated the publication’s distinct form of coaching. “Camp La Guardia Farm” summarizes the interacting impulses of the camp’s purposes, while also deflects workers’ grievances by insinuating that the psychological “pain” felt in living at the camp was due to the absence of women. The poem linked difficult work, love of the soil, the novelty of agricultural labor, and male sexuality in a convincing mixture that was, nevertheless, delivered with subtlety and humor.

I till the soil…..for endless hour I toil
Under a blazing hot sun…and just broil.
Yet I find farming is charming, my love for it alarming,
And that’s not passing out any banana oil!
The sows and the cows, the tractor plows,
The sowing and hoeing grip me, though I boil;
I state it’s great, but I calculate
I’m astounded, confounded and in turmoil!
It gives me pain to be profane as I complain
For the farm has charm….a sweet rustic lane,
Shady nooks, rippling brooks and shimmering waters….
The reason I’m hissing, something is missing:
Wherinell do they hide those farmers’ daughters?578

Stanly Howe, architect of the nation’s “first public agricultural colony,” described it as “[an experiment] to bring abandoned men and abandoned land together and help them put new life in each other.”579 The counties of Southern New York State provided an ideal place for these

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578 This poem’s bland language may have been the point. It was published on page 30 of the July 1935 issue. Page 30 of the copy of the same issue, in the Welfare Department Correspondence files of Mayor LaGuardia, has a different page 30, which contains the “LaGuardia Camp Song” with lyrics and music. Stanley Howe had written to Clark in May that he wanted to “have an opportunity to see the final copy for your next issue before it goes to press,” since it was the issue honoring Mayor LaGuardia and the name change of the camp. “Camp LaGuardia Farm,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 30; “LaGuardia Camp Song,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 30. Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3155, Box 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College; Stanley H. Howe to George L. Clarke, May 20, 1935, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3155, Box 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
579 “Relief Farm for Boston Urged.”
purposes. Characterized by a dark, mineral-rich soil, they are together widely referred to as the “Black Dirt” area of the state.\textsuperscript{580} Historically, the region was not ideal for building because foundations shifted easily in the excessively moist soil. While good for farming because of its richness, mechanized agriculture was difficult as a result of the softness of the earth. A longer planting season was possible since the dark soil heated up quickly, and therefore could be planted earlier in the year. The season was extended even further through plantings in February using hotbeds, which expanded in number each year.\textsuperscript{581} While a portion of the counties in the area just west of the Hudson River had a history of radical populism, Orange County itself seems to have been spared much of the anti-rent wars of the mid-nineteenth century, because of a wider system of “freeholdings” as opposed to “feudal tenure,” which dominated nearby.\textsuperscript{582} These environmental and social attributes made the area ideal for a labor-intensive work program that was supposed to supply food for city agencies and to employ many laborers. Other attributes, however, contributed to its difficulty. The dense soil easily caught fire and needed special attention and expertise to make it yield produce. Sinkholes in the swampy marshland were common, and it took much labor to clear and prepare it for cultivation.\textsuperscript{583} Nevertheless, it was the “most valuable agricultural land in the county,” including large patches near Chester.\textsuperscript{584} The general relief effort targeted 21,000 acres of this “muck land” for drainage.\textsuperscript{585}

\textsuperscript{581} “Farm News,” February 1938, 8.
\textsuperscript{583} John Gordon Steele, “Sowing the American Dream,” \textit{American Heritage}, 1990.
As the program developed, labor at the camp fell under three categories, “house and maintenance” (services); “construction” (infrastructure); and “farm, cannery, piggery, and rabbitry” (production). These accounted for 38%, 20%, and 42% of the positions at the camp, out of approximately 1,000. While the productive jobs accounted for a plurality, an official report advised a significant increase in production, since “the full productive possibilities of Camp LaGuardia have not yet been realized.” Crews were led by “straw bosses,” an aspect of the camp’s “self-sufficient” character and its cost-saving function. Straw bosses were camp members who had seniority and acted as foremen. For this role, they received a higher pay, but were still not considered full-time employees of the Welfare Department. The administration exploited this hierarchy. Campers read about promotions in the recurring “Camp News” section of the paper.  

There were just nine supervisory employees at the camp in 1940. Without supervision from dedicated staff members (or guards) the hierarchical structure among workers took on added importance for achieving both consent and motivation, especially through the prospect of higher

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586 Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 28, for example.
wages. Likewise, it was necessary that the men internalized the camp’s ideology, largely expressed through the newspaper.

_Camp LaGuardia News_ continually chronicled the changing personnel within the camp. Simultaneously, its confidential and conspiratorial tone expressed an upbeat feeling meant to lighten the grimmest aspects of the depression, and also to constantly initiate new members. Monthly announcements told of deaths of current and former residents, and the Social Services Department consistently reported on official visits to camp members recovering in Bellevue Hospital. There was a separate “receiving station” of men waiting for their official camp assignments, in which one author felt “like he has been plopped down right in the middle of Ireland.” The station was colloquially called “Hogan’s Alley,” a reference to the slum that was home to the “Yellow Kid” in the minstrel comic strip of Richard Outcault. Through a description of the receiving station the newspaper documented, in July 1935, that the camp had reached its peak census to date, and that it anticipated filling up even more in the near future. Before the WPA constructed congregate barracks to supplement the cells of the former prison, men waiting for entry into the program lived in tents on the grounds, reminiscent of the famous “Hoovervilles” dotting U.S. urban landscapes in the 1930s. Men were segregated in the receiving station until they received their official assignment and they could be assimilated to the camp’s culture. The issue described the importance of the “tent city” to a growing institution.

Tent city, down by the Receiving Station, is now a thriving little hamlet, the last two quotas of men arriving in camp having taken up each of the

48 available bunks with a steadily growing waiting list full of applicants assuring “full house” all this summer.\footnote{591}{“Construction,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, July 1935, 33.}

The importance of the institution’s distinct means of socialization is found in the fact that a separate recreation hall was planned for the receiving station in the spring of 1936, a “long needed improvement [that] will help to segregate us from that riff raff up on yonder hill and will further minimize the danger of contamination which we have been subject to in the past.”\footnote{592}{“Receiving Station,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, March 1936, 19.} This quip from the receiving station coordinator, in which he inverted “riff raff” to mean the men already in the “permanent” housing of the camp, is revealing, because it demonstrates a consciousness that goes beyond the men being unwitting dupes of the administration’s politics and policies. This was the importance of the joke itself. Although the men can’t possibly have believed that they were in “danger of contamination” from incoming members, they nevertheless submitted to the program, because they had few options. Men without other resources poked fun at the camp while simultaneously buying in to what it offered. Camp LaGuardia was one place that actually provided them with a place to be, work, and survive, even if it was an insufficient last resort. At the same time, the men were not deceived, because they got the joke.

The WPA began a radical reorganization of its presence in New York City in the summer of 1937, a process that necessitated the initial reduction of work relief jobs for the city by 30,000. Curiously, the Summer and Fall, 1937 issues do not take any position on this, or describe how any of the possible cuts in funding would have serious consequences for the men living there. It does not mention that the WPA is leaving until the November issue, after the changes had already been made. “With the exodus of the W.P.A. from the Camp, the Department of Public Welfare once more resumes to take complete charge of all activities here in Camp La
Guardia…all former recreational activities will once more be resumed.” Diminishing of federal work relief meant a steep rise in costs for local relief agencies, who paid for direct relief. Work relief and home relief were related in inverse proportion, as indicated by the Emergency Relief Bureau’s final report, “When WPA lays off people, the direct (home) relief load climbs.” How strange that a camp newspaper, published “by and for the members of Camp LaGuardia” would have no news on such an important subject.

Diminishing work relief meant that local agencies were strained at the same time that needy cases would increase. All 1,233 WPA positions assigned to work in the Department of Welfare were cut in July 1937. Hodson tried to save 700 of these jobs by turning them into permanent Welfare Department jobs, the majority of which were in the Central Office. 243 of the requested positions were in the Municipal Lodging House and its annexes. In fact, nearly all of the jobs added since 1930 for the “institutional care of the homeless” had been work relief jobs; the city had the same number of these permanent positions that it had at the outset of the Depression. Since the shelters that the city had opened for the homeless were run by WPA labor, the elimination of these jobs would mean that “it will be necessary to close these facilities down.” Hodson concluded to LaGuardia, “I think the time has now come to recognize frankly that we shall have a permanent load of homeless men and that we are no longer justified in relying upon W.P.A. and work relief personnel.”

593 “Camp Transition,” 11.
595 As new shelters opened, an open question was whether they would be run by the Department of Welfare or the Emergency Relief Bureau. Fiorello LaGuardia to William Hodson, December 6, 1935, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3155, Box 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
596 William Hodson to Fiorello LaGuardia, July 6, 1937, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935-1937, Box 3198, Folder 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
WPA reductions posed specific difficulty to the ongoing survival of the camp because they occurred at harvest time, when all men were required to perform their seasonal duties in the farm program. Each fall, all of the men there, despite previous work history, were reduced to the same level as farm laborers and expected to contribute to the camp’s production.\footnote{Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 171.} While the fluctuating population had reached an all-time low immediately prior to manpower reductions, one month after the WPA left the camp grew by 850 men. In November and December of that year together, over 1,000 new men arrived. “Since the reorganization on November the 7\textsuperscript{th}, at which time we had an estimated population of 161 members, we have steadily grown until at the present writing we have approximately one thousand.”\footnote{“Browsing About,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, December 1937, 2.} As WPA reductions initially diminished the Camp’s labor force to this extraordinarily low number, it still managed to produce “the largest crop since the Camp’s inception” during the following month’s harvesting by “the endless stream of teams …going to and from the black dirt.” The paper announced relief reductions discursively in its “Farm News” section, “And yet, in spite of the curtailment of men working the Farm this past month, the harvesting is coming along handily.” It explained that its monthly reporting was abridged because “with the enormous amount of work we have on hand, it is impossible to give you the usual amount of news about the Farm.”\footnote{“Farm News,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, September 1937, 8.} Simultaneously, the camp’s infrastructure was expanding due to the work of the WPA, which had to be finished before the end of the funding. A new root cellar was completed in the summer of 1937, which was “the largest and the finest of it’s [sic.] kind in the County, and will afford a proper place to store the large crop of vegetables which are required to properly provision the Camp over the
period from the fall until the following season’s crop.”\textsuperscript{600} “Annex No. 2,” a congregate dormitory being built “on the highest point on the Camp grounds” originally envisaged to house another 1,000 men, was under construction, and moving quickly.\textsuperscript{601} “Where only a few weeks ago only frameworks were visible, one now is able to see the outer walls and roofing nearing completion.” The largest project occupying the construction teams was the “all-metal and cement garage.”\textsuperscript{602}

Camp LaGuardia epitomized an administration of welfare that understood single male incomes as supportive of entire families, in the economic context of industrial production, and seeking to alleviate the demographic shift in political economy that was sending more and more displaced people nationwide into cities seeking work. This gendered aspect went directly to the core of the relief program in the late 1930s, and imagined home relief to be for women and women with children, while men were put to work. Yet this program was always in flux, and was related to the costs incurred by the city. When federal funding dried up, Camp LaGuardia turned “unattached domiciled men” from home relief into “local homeless,” because it was cheaper—a savings calculated at $3.64 per month, per man.\textsuperscript{603} Camp LaGuardia was therefore in the contradictory position of being both a WPA cut, in terms of jobs, as well as the solution to WPA cuts, because it became a cheaper alternative for single, unattached men on home relief who were transferred there to receive work relief. In this new referral process, further, the State reimbursed the city in part for these men, now off home relief rolls. The change, put into effect in October 1938, enacted a demographic shift at the camp. In 1939, 30% of the men came from this domiciled group. Therefore, after the WPA pulled out of the project, and the city changed

\textsuperscript{600} “Farm News,” \textit{Camp LaGuardia News}, August 1937, 8–9.
\textsuperscript{601} “City Reports Drop in Homeless Men”; “Fewer Homeless,” \textit{The New York Sun}, April 27, 1937.
\textsuperscript{603} Herlands, \textit{Administration of Relief in New York City}, 162.
the referral process to draw down money to fund the camp, there was a resurgence and revivalization of the camp’s purpose, as the administration sent more and more types of workers there. While the original Camp LaGuardia inmates were those that maintained settlement in New York City (in the Poor Law context) and did not have eligibility for home relief without an address, this newer cohort of men was taken specifically from home relief. In this particular way, the camp more closely began to resemble CCC camps, an occurrence demonstrated in, and reinforced by, the overlap in personnel and coordinated recreational activities between the two. Their sports teams competed against one another, and men shuttled back and forth between the federal camps and LaGuardia, as the Social Services Department helped men secure positions in the CCC. One editor of Camp LaGuardia News went on to edit the newspaper of a CCC camp in nearby Middleton. Yet there was also obvious resistance. Administrators had difficulty recruiting men living at home to leave New York and work at the camp, which official reports interpreted as acculturated experience of their environment: “Former unattached domiciled men do not adjust readily to the congregate care given at the facility.”

In 1932, as the city dealt with the overflow of men applying for shelter at the Municipal Lodging House, it had begun to pay commercial lodging houses on a nightly basis for their accommodation. That year, the city paid for 29,696 lodgings, or stays for 81 men per night. Yet this policy got increasingly unwieldy and expensive. By 1937, it was paying for 2,226,978 yearly lodgings, or over 8,000 per night, in nearly 70 establishments, many of which began to house

only homeless men. It cost 5 cents more per night per man for a night’s stay a lodging house on the Bowery than for them to sleep on a cot in the Municipal Lodging House. Thus, if the city could have housed all of the homeless men needing shelter in a municipal lodging house, it could save $131,415 dollars per year, which was more than the $111,213.03 that it had spent on lodgings at the municipal lodging house and its annexes in 1937. Camp LaGuardia, which had expanded to have a capacity for 1,000 men, and whose internal laborers were working to double this capacity with new annexes, would be a considerable start to housing this 8,000. Part of the reason that the administration wanted to cohere the camp into the country was to legitimate the camp form itself. The goal of more camps was to eliminate the use of commercial lodging houses, and to free up space in the Municipal Lodging House for those awaiting transfer to camps or other institutions. Hodson bluntly expressed his future plans, of “working toward increasing the number of these camps until the entire homeless problem is dealt with in that way.” The administration assumed that these new camps could be rolled out easily, because “it should be possible to obtain such sites as abandoned federal transient and CCC camps at no great expense to the city.” This was an early ideological articulation of New York State’s prison geography, which has come into existence over the past forty years, but with work camps for homeless men, the evolving progressive rehabilitation program of the day.

610 “City Reports Drop in Homeless Men.” These facts came to the camp as “rumors.” “Many rumors have been heard around Camp in the past few weeks regarding Camp Greycourt. From one source we hear that an even one thousand men are to be added to the camp quota. From another source, just as ‘reliable’ comes work that not only are more men to be added to the roster, but that ‘hundreds’ of acres of land are to be acquired to further the work begun here. Whether or not these rumors are based on reliable information, IT IS A FACT that Greycourt is looked upon in a most favorable light by leaders in rehabilitation work both in this country and abroad…We all hope the rumors are well founded.” L.S. Zorek, “Editorial,” Camp LaGuardia News, February 1935, 1.
611 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 181–82. The Welfare Department also imagined “[organizing] men in squads at the [Municipal Lodging House] to do their own work,” a project that they had also hoped to turn into a WPA work site. McClure to Hodson, “Memoranda Re Administrative Matters.”
Astrofsky, the future Director of the Division of the Care of the Homeless, was, like Stanley Howe, worried about the Communist threat posed by single, “unattached” men. He wrote to Howe in June, 1935 just before he took over from Elmer Galloway as the Director of the Unattached and Transients Division of the Emergency Relief Bureau, and as the Division was beginning to receive single men, both black and white, who were transferred to its custody from “Home Relief District Offices 25, 26, 28, 31, 32 and 33.”\(^{612}\) As a “consultant to the Department of Public Welfare on Camp LaGuardia,” he anticipated the “problem of Unattached” without federal funding, as the Federal Transient Program ended.

Moreover, it will not be before a month after Mr. Galloway departs that all of the unattached will be under our care. There is dynamite in this problem of Unattached, both of those under care and those to be transferred [Poor Law removal], and unless the job is done efficiently as we have been doing it right along, there will be an explosion. For this reason alone, a change at this time would be extremely dangerous. You know that the Unemployed Council and other radical organizations are made up on the whole of unattached men. So far we have practiced a considerate but firm policy, taking under care only those genuinely in need. I can still safely say that we have no chiselers on our rolls…After the unattached have been taken over, we want to strengthen care for the local homeless and transients and arrange for as many of our clientele to be absorbed by the Federal Work Projects as possible. As a matter of fact, I have a crew now of twenty-five persons registering all our clients for the work projects contemplated by Washington. We are one of the very few cities doing this job.

This memo describes the city’s solution to the problematic interaction between the gendered balance of home and work relief, and the specific, nationalist politics that activated it. The longstanding policy was always to use the WPA to relieve the city of home relief costs. Astrofsky assured Howe that he would “carry out the plans we have in mind. As you know, we are not working in the dark, but along very constructive and definite lines, which I feel will save

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\(^{612}\) Emergency Relief Bureau of New York City, “Press Release: FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT,” August 2, 1935, Department of Welfare, Correspondence, Box 3156, Folder 2, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
the City considerable funds and at the same time rehabilitate maladjusted individuals.” He describes a prospective employee for the Division, who is “very loyal, a virtue which is essential for the able administration of our Division,” and who “is quite remarkable in tightening up operation of Home Relief Precincts.” He himself was very loyal, “Mr. Galloway and I have always felt that our first responsibility was to the City of New York and to yourself.” What made individuals maladjusted, clearly, was their politics. When the WPA was no longer an option, Camp LaGuardia continued to be the solution to this contradiction.

Narrating a Regional Geography of Scarcity

Consistent with the newspaper’s method of reporting contradiction with a masking humor, this period of intense change at the camp was depicted in burlesque in the magazine. Throughout these structural changes, stories serialized in the newspaper took on a staged feeling, a fact that demonstrates how different groups’ emerging consciousness of crisis and their concomitant visions of change impressed a concrete understanding of what “relief” was supposed to be. These elements of the paper give a glimpse of why the camp’s specific program of rehabilitation was so important, but also marked by inconsistency. While the majority of men at the camp remained laborers, 64% unskilled and 30% skilled, the remainder were formerly clerks (6%) or even professionals (less than 1%). The paper’s “Construction Column” described the surge in numbers underway in 1940, “with the complete re-population of the Camp in sight, at present some three hundred men are busily engaged in construction work.” A recurring “campus comics” section lampooned men unaccustomed to manual labor. As two men carry a stretcher,

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Ralph Astrofsky to Stanley H. Howe, June 1, 1935, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3156, Folder 1, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.


another asks “Accident?” They reply, “Naw-pickin up tired clerks and watchmen on Farm Draft.” In the same comic, a fireman comes to the foreman in uniform, hose and axe in hand. “D’ja send for me?” “Yeh!” replies the foreman, “You’re gonna plant cabbage!”

In December, a fashionably dressed man with shiny shoes is accompanied by the caption, “Naw-dat aint no city slicker-its one o’dem new-dressed campers.” In the same issue, a man observing a busload of men arriving at camp remarks, “maybe there’ll be something besides artists and dishwashers on this one.”

The newspaper also provided a confident narrative for men unsure about their presence and future in Orange County. In a revealing piece titled “A.D. 1950,” which was published serially in 1936 and reads like the script of a stage play, the anonymous author self-consciously detailed the future of former Camp LaGuardia workers in their lives as colonists of Orange County and around the State. The story marks one of the most explicit instances in which prison was named in order to refuse its association with the camp. It provides a sustained elaboration of a counterfeit history, meant to leaven the men’s time spent collectively in a former prison through comic relief. The outlandish aspects of the story provide humor at the same time that the author reflects on a shared and imagined past. In the story, former “LaGuardians” are attending an annual reunion in the “Town Hall of Guardiaville,” in their self-contained town on Staten Island. The town is comprised of former camp members, and others “return” to it for the reunion, purely by chance. The one who did not come had escaped “to Paris three years ago and has never returned.” The characters, all of whom are former camp residents, occupy the most important political and social positions in the town, as well as in the state and nation: President,

Senator, Mayor, Fire and Police Chiefs, Inspector of Water Supply, a “big money mogul” from New York.\(^{619}\) In almost all cases, the men were successfully wealthy, company heads, or property owners. Times were good again, and the narrative inverted their present condition, placing them in the position of condemning intransigent laborers. The Senator remarks on the “shortage of labor,” lamenting, “It seems a pity, doesn’t it? Now that there’s all kinds of jobs nobody will go to work.” The Mayor of New York, former camp member, likewise complains in a speech, “Here I am, self made man risen from the ranks to bring the country out of depression and now nobody’ll work.”

These successful men conduct the “trial” of the one man who has failed in his rehabilitation, a prisoner held in the town jail, an inconceivable fact to the others: “surely it must be a stranger and not one of the residents.” “No it’s ---- it’s one of us.” They head to New York to attend a theater performance of one of the camp singers who now has an opera career, a trip during which the prisoner escapes and the Chief is robbed, a detail that expresses the depravity of the city. “Every time I go to New York something like this happens!” Since one of them is the Police Chief, the men police themselves. The Chief, without the stolen money, cannot pay their cab driver the fare, and the driver threatens to call the police. “Why Mr. Fletcher, you wouldn’t do that! And anyway, the police are already here.” Without other options, he is resigned to a prolonged period of waiting, paralleling the men’s own extended and precarious existence. “I guess I’ll just have to stay here until you guys pay me.” They prepare to go to sleep at the Chief’s house, and as they do, find that the prisoner has returned of his own accord to recommit himself, “I got sleepy over in New York so I came back to go to bed. I couldn’t get in the jail so I

\(^{619}\) The Chief of Police was John J. Sullivan, the head porter and performer in the dramatic club, who “used to be on the Camp LaGuardia stage.”
came here.” The next morning, when another character sees him for the first time and remarks, with surprise, “I thought you were in jail!” He responds “with gloom,” ambiguously articulating his presence in the non-existent jail, “I am.” The feminized members of the surrounding community enter the story in the character of the Police Chief’s wife, angry that there is a “prisoner” among them in her house. “The last time you were out like this you brought home ‘A big Wall Street Man.’ When we got up the next day both he and my silver spoons were gone,” she reprimands, but reluctantly lets them stay if they “get to bed, all of you.”

The next day, before the reunion, the men must conduct the trial. Finally, we hear the charges brought against the prisoner, “After wading through a mass of legal technicalities, [the Chief] reached the charge: ‘-----and you, Edmund Rogers are hereby charged with openly flirting with Clementina McNally [daughter of the town’s mayor, also a former camp member, making it a self-referential accusation] on a public thoroughfare in the broad light of day--.’” Clementina, asked to corroborate that the accused had flirted with her, declares her love, which sends the town into “pandemonium,” before the band restores order by beginning “a lively air.” After everyone returns to their seats, the Mayor, diplomatically, gives a speech on the difficult state of affairs.

My friends, this evening when we are gathered here like a big happy family, it seems a shame that we should have to contend with the presence of this wolf in sheep’s clothing, Edmund Rogers. To think that this—this wastrel had the effrontery to so much as look at my pure undefiled Clementina. I will leave it to the audience as to what is to be his fate.620

The mayor’s “ancient political foe” Martin Harney, suggests a marriage as the solution, challenging the mayor. After a comical, childish argument between the two,

620 This type of “trial” was used at the camp for discipline. Two men were elected as representatives to investigate complaints and effect discipline alongside the administrators.
Mr. Harney spoke with some spirit, ‘just what have you ever accomplished aside from getting elected mayor by a fluke, then living off the taxpayers money. Why, you aren’t even a graduate of Camp LaGuardia. I remember now—you took a day’s furlough to go to Goshen and it took you so long to find your way back to the camp that they dropped you for being AWOL.

They all fight. “A furore of the first magnitude had broken loose. Fists, screams, and juicy remarks flew at random.” The mayor and Harney show down in a fistfight, during which the couple escapes and gets married. The town reunites with music, “for the next four hours, the Town Hall of Guardiaville was the scene of hearty, carefree revelry [sic], as the couples swayed to the tantalizing rhythm of the band.” They had successfully, if haphazardly, negotiated splits in their ranks to leave New York City behind for good, a geographic view that was also racialized. The whites who remained there were classified as hillbillies, while the successful Camp LaGuardians proactively colonized the countryside: “There will be none of this frivolous Honkey Tonk dancing like they are doing over in that wicked city of New York.”

Surveillance was part and parcel of the Welfare Department’s actions as it stabilized its efforts, ostensibly to depoliticize the administration of relief. As the Workers Alliance and other groups achieved some success in organizing relief workers, Department administrators took action. Hodson received detailed reports, from at least 1936 to 1938, from a man named Frank Quinn, and an investigator working for him, about meetings of the Association of W.P.A. Welfare Employees, who were attempting to organize against WPA layoffs in New York City at the end of 1936. David Lasser, head of the Workers Alliance, addressed their meetings. Reports indicate that the young organization had a difficult time getting off the ground and recruiting members, and the leaders expressed discouragement that more people were not

622 “To All WPA Welfare Employees!”
attending the evening meetings. Many of the group’s participants were workers in the newly created divisions of the Welfare Department, staffed with predominantly temporary relief positions, rather than in its traditional bureaus, Veterans and Old Age Assistance, and Child Welfare. Although the investigator concluded that “the organization would have to fold up because of lack of cooperation and funds,” nevertheless Hodson kept an eye on them and their affiliations with the AFGE and the Workers Alliance. What was important was not a single organizing group, but the links between groups that focused on similar, but isolated, issues.

The mass meetings took place after leaders of the organization had a private meeting with Hodson in his office. Mr. Slater, a representative of the group, directly asked about a contradiction in the labor of the WPA, “My job is the same as the person sitting next to me who is a Civil Service worker.” Hodson responded, “I am saying to you that if the WPA goes out, the administration will not take these jobs over.” Related concerns included the low pay of workers on Welfare Department projects and the intensification of work as workers tried to cover increasing caseloads given reduced hours. The meeting convinced the committee that their jobs were “less secure today than at any time in the past” and that “we cannot cope with these problems by acting individually. We can only attempt to solve these vital problems when the entire staff is united behind a solid, strong association.” In the midst of a WPA investigation regarding “current need,” flyers advertising the meetings announced, “Dismissals stare us in the face!” and asked, “What will happen to our jobs after January first [1937]? How can we further our efforts in attaining Civil Service [permanent employee] status?” As the merger of the ERB and the DPW approached, the administration increasingly focused on relief labor unrest.

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623 Although a few were in the Division of Old Age Assistance.
McClure wrote to Hodson in a memo on May 25, 1937, “There is a contemplated one-day work stoppage by W.P.A. employees for Thursday, the 27th, in the City and the D.P.W. Association is meeting tonight at five o’clock to vote on possible participation.” A sit-down strike organized by Workers Alliance Local 57 in Washington Heights, against the “miserable relief standards” and in favor of “raising the relief budget,” coincided with the approaching consolidation date.

As the layoffs continued in early 1938, protests of the ERB terminations as it closed shop escalated. In the reorganization into the DPW, 900 investigators were laid off, making caseloads rise. The mayor was flooded with telegrams of protests from individuals and staff of dozens of district offices, many organized through the State, County, and Municipal Workers Association. The primary demand was a cap of caseloads at 50, as the size of a typical caseload was rising, eventually to hit 65. District Office 67’s position was that “the present caseload being carried at this time does not warrant dismissal of a single investigator.” Yet, demonstrating the precarious nature of employment, the official notice of layoffs was merely 48 hours. The “two weeks notice clause” was part of the Department’s personnel policy, and was not being honored for emergency workers. Evans Butcher wrote to the Mayor, “In November 1933, you needed a job. We Negroes and ERB workers assisted in your election as mayor. Now we need our jobs and your assistance. You cannot fail us…Why are you depriving investigators of our two weeks notice with pay?” “Experienced staff” were the first to be laid off, consistent with Somervell’s

625 William Hodson Papers, Box 6, E-H, 1937.
626 Workers Alliance Local 57 to Fiorello LaGuardia, December 1937, Protests, Workers Alliance, Folder 2, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
627 For example, Staff of District Office 67 to Fiorello LaGuardia, February 1938, Protests, Welfare Department Terminations, Folder 14, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
628 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 15.
629 Staff of District Office 4 to Fiorello LaGuardia, February 28, 1938, 4, Protests, Welfare Department Terminations, Folder 14, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
630 Evans Butcher to Fiorello LaGuardia, February 28, 1938, Protests, Welfare Department Terminations, Folder 14, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
averring that those on relief longest would be the first to go. Protests argued that the city’s examinations for civil service opened competition for their jobs to prospective employees without the necessary experience. The staff of the “Local Homeless Division of the Department of Welfare” argued that “having given years of service to the city of New York, it is not unreasonable to request that dismissed investigators be given two weeks’ severance pay at the time of their discharge.” 631 307 members of Local 42 of the Workers Alliance demanded the mayor “stick to your committee report on relief question.” 632 Finally, in May 1938 Hodson, in Executive Order 40, banned staff from being “actively engaged in a political campaign or activity,” an order that was long-term and reinforced in official communications to staff. 633 While Hodson had always maintained that the Department should be apolitical, this was simply a charge against the political patronage of the Tammany regime, and cover for ensuring a smooth transition between emergency relief and the permanent, ongoing functions of welfare.

Given its purpose as an oasis of anti-communism, the low staff-inmate ratio, and its function of reducing the costs of home relief in the transition, surveillance at the camp was important. The jocular tone of the publication developed strange forms of scrutiny, simultaneously overt and hidden, indicating that the journal’s constant banter could be marshalled with intent. For example, “Operator 13” was a monthly gossip column by an anonymous writer, one of the various “secret agents” and spies placed throughout the camp, who “Seezall, knowzall, tellzall,” that acted as a surveillance mechanism to establish rules and

631 Staff of Local Homeless Division to Fiorello LaGuardia, February 28, 1938, Protests, Welfare Department Terminations, Folder 14, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
632 Workers Alliance Local 42 to Fiorello LaGuardia, March 1, 1938, Protests, Welfare Department Terminations, Folder 14, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
punishments in order to monitor and regulate the men’s behavior. “902 and also his lanceman here in the camp” relied on this “line up” of “field agents” for information, and to keep order. Operator 13 described his presence at the camp, humorously referring to a symbiotic relationship that the column promoted, “Greycourt needs me. I need Greycourt. That is why I am here.”

The column is important for a number of reasons. First, it alludes to the paper’s function as a type of panopticon, which enforced discipline on the “inspection principle.” Second, it expresses how the program of Camp LaGuardia served as a mask for the anxieties of the depression and uncertainties about its future, and the ways that the journal both named and concealed threats to the camp and its purpose. And finally, it established a balance between social coherence and individualization at the camp, given its members’ collective isolation in upstate New York.

The column named threats to the camp in a joking manner in order to identify them, but also to defuse the impact and appearance of authoritarian presence. The fear that the men were supposed to feel for the double agents was expressed humorously and, at the same time, voiced through race. “Goatee” Green, “Harlem’s contribution to Greycourt [who] hasn’t learned to speak Gaelic yet,” was accused of being “Operator 13,” the paper said, so that he would “turn white with fright” and the doctor could see the iodine spot on his arm to give him an

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636 “Our Own Nosy Reporter: Why the Devil Did You Come to Camp Greycourt, Anyhow?”
638 “Blackface defused such meanings without denying them.” Saxton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology,” 11.
inoculation. Operator 13, “IN PERSON --- The one and only!” teasingly was to appear in the “Dirt Diggers of 1935,” the theatrical club’s show to celebrate the camp’s first anniversary. Jokingly publishing the “secrets” of the camp, the author warned inmates to be careful or they would be sent “over the bridge,” the euphemism for the ultimate discipline, exiting the camp and going back to New York City. This phrase sought to depict those who got out of line and received this ultimate punishment as crazy; they went “over the bridge.”

There is a certain gentleman in the Farm Gang who has had several warnings about his drinking and shooting his mouth off about the officials of the camp, even his own bosses. This is to advise him that he is in the pitiless glare of the spotlight and one more move, and zowie! Over the Bridge he goes! ----The Shadow.

Accusations attempted to embarrass those who were “goldbricking,” establishing the condition that men work diligently to maintain their placement there, as well as cover for the program of work relief over direct relief.

There’s a guy around the camp who’s had almost every position available, except that of “Outsider Looking In” for which he will be nominated shortly. He’d better stop his squawking and bulldozing and really do some work---the 17 karat goldbrick!---“I Spy”.

These direct admonitions demonstrate the salience of dissimulation in the function of the newspaper, and editors, in conjunction with the administration, drew on this simultaneously overt and hidden strategy. Camp Director Clarke was worried about discipline at the camp in 1935, and wrote urgently to Howe that “three way supervision [resulting from the institutional configuration of shared administration between the WPA, ERB, and DPW]…is creating confusion in the minds of the men as well as the supervisors themselves…Men have been heard

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to remark, ‘Clarke can’t touch me. I would like to see him try to fire me.’”

But, more tellingly, the column expressed the real anxieties of camp and Welfare Department administrators in a conspiratorial tone, as the column veered into the political, in July 1935.

Who was it that phoned the Skipper [Clarke] from New York some weeks ago, long distance, - one who is in touch with the so-called ‘plotters’ and warned him specifically to watch a certain gent whose personal ambitions ran away with his business sense[?]? Undoubtedly, three quarters of the camp has been watching this comedy of errors and is deeply interested in the result.

This was confided by “G-Man,” someone “from our own G dormitory, perhaps?”—an allusion to both the system of labeling dormitories by letter as well as an alleged government secret agent who was also living at the camp. G-Men was a term sometimes used jokingly to refer to the WPA administrators who had office space in the main building. Two months later, in September, at least 70% of the camp (not quite three quarters) walked off the job, an event that “threatened to cause the discontinuance of Camp LaGuardia.”

Reports in mainstream newspapers implied that the major reason for the protest was food quality. Other, secondary, concerns were the removal of money for their room and board, and dislike of Joseph Mannix, the camp’s interim director after Clarke left. But none of Ziskind’s complete compilation of the 571 strikes on WPA projects mention food as a demand; it is likely that this strike had to do with the switch to the WPA.

This issue would continually haunt the Welfare Department. Camp LaGuardia was a WPA work project, but the men also lived there. This was the reason for its existence. WPA projects were not supposed to duplicate work done during normal times, one of the reasons the

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640 George L. Clarke to Stanley H. Howe, May 18, 1935, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1935, Box 3155, Box 8, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
641 “Pinch Hitting for Operator 13,” 16.
Welfare Department established the camp in Orange County and why the men were occupied there building its infrastructure. Payment was “deposited to their credit in the camp bank” and “given to the camper at time of discharge” after deductions for purchases at the canteen, including for clothing, which was not provided. At the same time, the city was also landlord, and drew nearly 50% of men’s wages for their “maintenance,” which supported overhead and staff salaries. These were the ways that the city had made the project “self-supporting,” and also why the wages were never secure. Official recommendations in 1940 were to reduce the monthly wage again, to $10, in order to “save about $60,000 per year” and to bring take home pay into line with the men on the CCC, who were required to send $22 a month in their wages to families. But the “unattached” men at LaGuardia contended that these maintenance costs were inflated, and wondered why they would not be receiving the full WPA wage. This was an especially sensitive issue for administrators, since it had also been contested from the right as a local source of “profit” at the expense of the Federal Government. Congress later investigated Mayor LaGuardia, Hodson, and Camp LaGuardia, in 1939, accusing the misappropriation of over $54,000 in WPA funds, a story that made national headlines. Another Orange County strike of over 3,500 workers, almost simultaneous with the Camp LaGuardia action, must have forced administrators to reevaluate their political tactics and options. An Unemployed Council

643 “Procedural 39-7--Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia.”
644 “Budget Request for the Emergency Relief Bureau for the Three-Month Period Ending December 31, 1937,” September 25, 1937, Welfare Department Correspondence, 1937, Box 3196, Folder 4, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College. Out of monthly wages totaling $54.65 men paid $25.26 for maintenance, not inclusive of “clothes, tobacco, toothpaste, etc., which are purchased from the camp canteen.”
645 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 175.
646 “Too Much Hash Brings Protest at Relief Camp.”
648 Ziskind, One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees.
formed in neighboring Middletown, N.Y. in May of that year, with the understanding that unemployed relief there was “lower than anywhere else in the state.”

William Goetz and James Ahearn led the “mass meetings” that brought about the protest at the camp, and at which camp members urged each other to “Keep away from [Howe]! He’s responsible for everything.” Goetz, whom Hodson “did not refer [to] by name” may also have been who Operator 13 specified in the run-up to the mass meetings. Only a demonstration by an estimated 500 men at the camp’s administration building saved Goetz and Ahearn’s initial dismissal. Goetz left the camp as the protest ended because he had found a job, reported the Herald Tribune, which now described the protest as over food by “diet-conscious transients,” a feminized construal intended to belittle real demands. By means of reform, the Department of Welfare replaced Mannix with a new Director, Edwin Cunningham, in late 1935, and hired a new steward, Raymond LaSalle, who was a camp mainstay for years.

The masking aspect of Operator 13’s column was resurrected in a column called “Browsing About,” which began in November 1937, as the WPA was completing its dramatic reduction of its presence in New York City. Throughout the previous six-month period during which WPA work was seriously curtailed, Camp LaGuardia News made zero mentions of changes in the relief program. It was also that summer, during what should have been the most anxious period about pending relief reductions, that the newspaper published its first “Historic Orange County” section, which used a form of nationalism purposefully to legitimate the camp’s presence there—“this part of the country played an important part in the building up of our

650 “Hash Days End, So Does Protest At City’s Camp: 810 Diet-Conscious Transients at Camp LaGuardia Compromise on Sausage.”
651 Staff Listing in Table of Contents, Camp LaGuardia News. December 1935,
nation—and self-consciously created a geographic knowledge of the region for men getting jobs and starting lives outside of New York City. The editor announced that “Browsing About” would contain “newsy items about the members of this Camp” and that “the Browser will be among you, unknown of course, and pick up what ever [sic.] he thinks worth printing.” The writer conspicuously reiterated the claim that “CAMP LA GUARDIA NEWS is YOUR magazine; created to serve as…YOUR…medium of expression. Whether news is good or bad is dependent upon the interest shown in it by the members of the camp.” The anonymous column, tellingly, was one of the only sections that broached serious structural changes. “In all probability some of our closest friends will be leaving to enter the Civilian Conservation Corps real soon.”

Finally, there were stories in the paper whose purpose was to re-center Greycourt specifically as a location of redemption in absolute space. The men at the camp were invited to identify with Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, whose “true fairy-tale” was told by dramatizing the rescue of his daughter, “America-Frances,” in a piece called the “Cinderella of Greycourt,” in December 1940. A nobleman who settles in his “Garden of Eden” in the town of Greycourt and transforms himself into an “American Farmer,” Crevecoeur was later jailed for his “refusals to join [the] labors and ardors of the Revolution” which “made him an enemy of the colonists.” When he returned from jail—“(yes, the man who tried to mind his own business was jailed by both sides)”—his “paradise” had been “burned to the ground by Indians.” His tribulations at Greycourt eventually led him to become “a close friend and confident [sic.] of two great

653 “Browsing About.” CLN. November 1937, page 3. Another column that used this anonymous gossip format to spy on residents was “The Snooper,” Camp LaGuardia News, March 1936, 10–11.
655 W.C. Kirby, “Cinderella of Greycourt,” Camp LaGuardia News, December 1940, 15. The irony that they were in a former prison was either lost, or part of the joke, depending on the reader.
Americans—Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson,” relationships that “soon turned the ‘disinterested and disloyal’ Orange County farmer into a strong partisan of the American Revolution,” … “a miracle that even the Goshen jail failed to accomplish.” During his absence, which was the result of his disloyalty, Crevecoeur somehow got to France and became the “American Consul of ‘His Christian Majesty’, the King of France.” With his newly-found power, the result of his hitting rock bottom in the “paradise” farm of Orange County, he is able to return to the United States and find his daughter, the “barefoot Cinderella” who is now able to assume the title, “Countess of France.” To top it off, he subsequently wrote his “Letters of an American Farmer” while at Greycourt “and told Europe as no other book had ever done, what American life was really like.”

In the story, Greycourt was figured geographically as the men’s ground zero for rehabilitation through a nationalist awakening. Although it acknowledged that the work program was extraordinarily demanding, and would present numerous individual challenges (failures were peremptorily attributed to individual effort), it did so in order to articulate the genesis of their new, more promising life, that would follow the inevitable, numerous setbacks. The story’s message contains all of the elements of redemption that Camp LaGuardia was designed to address. After spending unjustified time in prison, Crevecoeur manages to pass from his un-American behaviors, through magic and miracle, to a full supporter of the American Revolution living among colonists in Orange County. He returns to save his family, able to give his daughter a life of luxury and nobility. The narrative repudiated any “European” connection; it

656 Kirby, 14–16.
was a purely “American” trajectory. It established identity between the soil of Greycourt, clandestine and noble origins, and the genesis of a rehabilitated, productive life.

An “Old Fashioned Minstrel Show”

In general, WPA work assignments were limited, because work relief was not to “compete” with private industry, a historical characteristic of all rehabilitation programs in workhouses, prisons, and homeless shelters. The relief program of the New Deal generalized the limitations of carceral institutions with regard to prison labor. This meant that work relief, by definition, was far from adequate. Ziskind estimated that government works programs employed from between 1.3 to 4.2 million people, while unemployment ranged from 8.5 to 15 million nationwide. After the experience of the CWA and the FTP, the WPA sought to “stabilize makeshift activities” of these programs by building on their successes and rectifying their failures. In short, “the Works Progress Administration was intended to remove persons from relief status by providing them with employment until private industry could take over.”

Given this restriction, and the necessity of producing “new” work assignments, jobs were often produced in the bureaucracy of relief itself. In Buffalo, the transient camp was printing one-half of the documents that the state transient agency needed. One of the industrial jobs therefore became churning the state’s own propaganda efforts. Similarly, the jobs at Camp LaGuardia served this purpose; they were makeshift jobs that fit the program of relief as well as stabilized it. The kinds of work were thus afterthoughts rather than actual “training.” Referrals to the camp took into consideration which labor was then necessary there, and men were assigned to work that resembled their previous occupation. To the camp, then, rehabilitation

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658 Ziskind, One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees, 136.
659 Crouse, The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941, 144.
660 As described in Chapter Four, this dynamic was also at play with the white-collar workers employed by the ERB, many of whom were radicalized by the experience and joined the Rank and File Movement.
meant “to restore … morale and normal work habits,” as men at the camp were “assigned to duties commensurate with their previous work experience.” Like the WPA more broadly, in which anyone who encountered a position amid this managed scarcity of opportunity was lucky, and was made aware of it, there was a sense of privilege and opportunity built into the functionality of Camp LaGuardia. In this framework, even camp expansion, which should have been a signal that the depression was deepening, was depicted as a benefit to men who were already there. An editorial explained, “More men means MORE WORK, more work means PROMOTION, and promotion means REHABILITATION.”

As noted, Camp LaGuardia, in some aspects, was a long term, permanent version of the CCC camps. The labor performed in the different types of camps was sometimes similar, but the array of services offered at Camp LaGuardia was astounding in comparison, and its program was intentionally more exhaustive. In this regard it was designed as a “model of the ideal society.” The Mayor of Boston, on visiting the Camp, reflected that the “most impressive” aspect of the camp was its “self-discipline and morale,” which allowed the men to “act as a microcosm of the large city from where they have been sent,” but with the important distinction that “they arrange their own discipline, enforce their own rules.” More importantly, while there was no farming done at the CCC camps or in the transient program, Camp LaGuardia, in contrast, played an important productive function. However, in addition to the primary work departments, including

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661 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 157 and 163.
662 “Procedural 39-7—Referrals to Camp LaGuardia/Factual Information Concerning Camp LaGuardia.”
664 Melossi and Pavarini, The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System, Chapter 4. “Our pride is our small village, with it’s [sic.] LaGuardia Square, Howe Terrace, and Hodson Boulevard. Rustic fences have been put up all around all buildings and the “Headquarters” of the Tenth Assembly District. This is where our Mayor had his start in politics. In his first campaign he backed a truck into Farley’s saloon on 8th Avenue, between 13th and 14th Streets. The fight in those days was just as tough as the one he is waging today for the benefit of all. The helmet you see at this Square has been through the Argonne, St. Mihiel, and all over France and England.” “Maintenance,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 33.
crews in farming, carpentry, kitchen, painting, and landscaping, the camp also offered canteen; doctor; dentist (frequented by Orange county residents); blacksmith shop to repair farm equipment; full, modern laundry; tailor; shoemaker; barber; religious services; and optician. There were also police and fire crews, as well as a Department of Welfare fire truck. The local state’s version of a company town facilitated an economy that was supposed to make it self-sustaining. As the paper described, “Unlike the CCC and similarly operated camps, the men here purchase their own clothing from their earnings, which tends to give a feeling of individualism and arouses a friendly feeling of outdoing one’s neighbor.” On this basis there was thus an understood hierarchy between Camp LaGuardia and the other camps, a difference which the paper explicitly demarcated based on its ambiguous sense of settled permanence. This feeling saturated even the farm work, which was supposed to be the entry-level rehabilitation tool for general laborers. The yearly, acquired experience of the farm crews was apparently the reason for the increased productivity of the institution.

This permanence required that the camp establish an ongoing rapport with the surrounding towns. Community opposition to relief camps was systematic, and a number were forced shut as a result. Local hostility toward similar camps, such as Bluefield, informed the implementation of Camp LaGuardia, the city’s centerpiece program. A mixture of unease and acceptance characterized Orange County’s response to Camp LaGuardia due to the concerted efforts of the camp’s programs. On the one hand, the village of Chester hired its first police

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officer in 1937 as an explicit response to the camp’s presence. At the same time, the camp had successes integrating with the surrounding towns because of its outreach. Stanley Howe was the best man at camp member Ralph Renaldo’s wedding to a woman from Chester, “in a pretty village church in the hills of Orange County.” Renaldo had “secured a position with one of the local farmers;” the “onion grower’s daughter” had “persuaded her father to give him a part-time job.” The wedding was covered “in the Chester and Middletown papers.” At the party following, “every member of the theatrical club either sang, played or danced as his contribution to this very unique occasion.” Other men dated women from the area, and events encouraged this interaction. A dance in town was attended by camp members, who held their own dance the following St. Patrick’s Day. Town members used the on-site dentist. Furloughs were spent in Middletown, the largest city in the county.

The longevity of the camp proved to be an obstacle to the Welfare Department in other ways. It required balancing concessions to the men to secure their consent with the men’s own expectations. Everyday programmatic elements were geared toward this end. Social services granted one-day furloughs for every month of work, because “this policy removes any possible feeling of incarceration,” a tricky maneuver, since the men actually were living in a former prison. Howe’s successful proposal to change the name to Camp LaGuardia eliminated “the odium attached to the name Greycourt because of its use as a prison.” The men were not “doing time” as a contractual obligation for wrongs committed against the social order, but they were doing time for an unknown period, during which the Department needed them to be

672 “Mayor’s Aide Brings Father Knickerbocker’s Blessings to First Camp Groom,” Camp LaGuardia News, July 1935, 10–11. There were numerous announcements of these weddings in the newspaper.
673 Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 169.
674 “City Camp Marks First Anniversary.”
acquiescent, but also vigorous and obedient in their daily labors. Cartoons often deflected the program’s closeness and association with prison. One mocked the tedium of repetition that the men would have known well. As two men enter a prison mess hall, one remarks to the other, “I always eat here.” Another comic referenced the improvements made to Greycourt when it was converted into Camp LaGuardia. It shows a prison guard inspecting a cell, still sparse, but with curtains, a rug, and a lamp, who comments to the prisoner, “I suppose the next thing you’ll want is venetian blinds.” A third used this same punchline, but expressed it through gender. In an extravagantly decorated room in the camp’s former cells, at the regular “quarters inspection” by the Camp Director, the inspector tells the camper, “Very nice, Mike—but I think you went just a wee bit too far this time.”675 When the barracks were completed, the living spaces for the men at the institution was an actual hybrid of prison and homeless shelter, and remained so. It had both cells as well as congregate, dormitory sleeping arrangements. Similarly, the length of time granted to men for their rehabilitation was a continuous a point of debate. How long did it take to reconstruct them? Herlands, writing the official report on relief administration, wanted to cap the length of time that a man could stay at the camp at six months, because he saw in it an institutional example that could manage the movement of thousands of people. In his view, the men were becoming accustomed to their relief jobs as permanent, and wanted to prevent them from a squatter’s-type claim to their positions. But this cap would also hurt farm productivity, since seasonal experience was so important for the labor-intensive cultivation of the historically rich, yet difficult to till, soil.

The wide variety of jobs, along with the changing nature of unemployment during the Depression, meant that there was slightly more class diversity at Camp LaGuardia than, for example, in contemporary shelters. At the same time, it was necessary to build a camp culture that would sustain men separated from their families and homes. Many aspects of camp recreational activities were geared toward this purpose. Originally, when “relations with the surrounding communities … presented a difficult problem,” the administration attempted a number of tactics to keep the men on the campus. Hodson approved serving beer at the institution in 1938, which “had the effect of keeping the men in the camp in the evening, where they can be better controlled and observed.” Sporting events as well as the Camp LaGuardia News were other examples of self-contained, in-camp activities. They were later expanded to cultivate relationships with the surrounding area and its institutions. “The LaGuardia Theatrical Club” was the most prominent example of the “helpful” way that “the number of complaints … greatly decreased.” By 1939, “the community relations of the camp no longer [presented] a

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677 Administrators advocated for space in city shelters to keep men out of bars, and for actual bar space at Camp LaGuardia to keep men out of the bars in the town of Chester.
serious problem.” This process manifests the most astonishing example of the links between surrounding Orange County and the camp. The minstrel acts that were central to this program were crucial in building both camp cohesion as well as regional acceptance. Theater performances were a respite from backbreaking work, in difficult jobs that were never secure. There was always the chance that these men would find themselves right back “on the streets of New York.” Performances offered men, some of whom were over 70, a venue to laugh after an average of nearly three years of unemployment. It also was entertainment for community residents, who were experiencing the intense effects of the Depression themselves.679

The reinvigorated minstrel show at Camp LaGuardia emerged out of the excitement over the upcoming World’s Fair. Robinson is specific about the centrality of World’s Fairs in promoting the new scientific racial regime of the late nineteenth century; they played a large part in signifying and propagandizing a break from “an earlier and more vulgar representation of the racialized order.”680 The Chicago Exposition in 1893, for example, sparked “an amateur blackface minstrel movement in the country which was drilled and amused by skits and suggestions for costumes and makeup by [guidebooks].” Similar factors combined to produce what the Camp LaGuardia newspaper endearingly called “our touring minstrels” in 1939,681 in the issue dedicated to the New York World’s Fair of that year.

The spring of 1939, ten years after the start of the depression, was the high point for all unemployment relief. In February, 364,000 families were receiving home and work relief in New York City, and Congress had just mandated the dismissal of another 75,000 from WPA

employment. Hodson was explicit on a WMCA radio program that “we must stabilize this relief program,” and he used the World’s Fair to boost morale. In the News’ expanded issue dedicated to the World’s Fair, Hodson, drawing on the image of exodus to motivate, wrote a radiant “editorial” addressed “to the men of Camp LaGuardia”: “Go forth to conquer and the world will help and applaud you.” In the same issue, Grover Whalen was even more explicit in linking the intent of the camp to the intent of the fair, in an open letter to the men, “Rehabilitation of the individual is the purpose of Camp La Guardia, and rehabilitation of man’s ideals and faith in the future is the purpose of the New York Fair.” But in reality, the World’s Fair was a source of anxiety for Fiorello LaGuardia with regard to dislocated workers, because he thought it would bring an army of homeless that would never leave and become dependent on New York City, especially given relaxed Poor Law legislation.

After a long hiatus, the theater program put together its first production in the winter leading up to the fair. “World’s Fair Auditions” was “a vaudeville and variety show staged and presented by the Camp membership,” anticipated by the newspaper’s preview “after too long an absence” of “LaGuardia’s thespians.” Performed on December 22 and 23, 1938, the premise for

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683 “Maids on Relief.”
685 In 1935, requirements for eligibility were relaxed so that applicants needed two years residency in New York State and one in New York City to receive relief. Greenberg, “Or Does It Explode?”: Black Harlem in the Great Depression, 148; “Testimony of Hon. Fiorello LaGuardia, Mayor of the City of New York,” in Interstate Migration: Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, House of Representatives, Seventy-Sixth Congress (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 4. In a memorandum from Edmund Butler, of the ERB, to Mayor LaGuardia on January 9, 1939, Butler worried about people intentionally staying after the World’s Fair and purchasing only a one-way ticket. He warned about the “avalanche” to come on May 1, and advised “an amendment to the law immediately in connection with settlement and residence.” Presumably this is a reference to a reversion to a poor-law-type legislation. The Mayor was not worried, and replied two days later: “Way ahead of it. Working on it a long time. As my spiritual adviser, how about a one-way ticket to Heaven?” He did not explain what his own solution was. Fiorello H. LaGuardia Collection, Department of Welfare, Correspondence, Box 3243, Folder 7, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College.
the piece was that the variety acts were auditioning for actual jobs performing in the upcoming World’s Fair. The campers were therefore invited to actually imagine themselves being redeemed socially and financially by the upcoming festivities. It featured camp member Frank Brady “as a Broadway show producer, ably assisted by Leo Saxe, as his secretary.” After the opening chorus, and John Sivell’s rendition of “Danny Boy,” Joseph Fitzsimmons, “our silver-voiced tenor,” sang “two familiar tunes,” nostalgic reminiscences about southern plantation life, “Stay In Your Own Back Yard” and “Are You From Dixie.” (“…Gee! but I’ve yearned/Longed to return/To all the good old pals I left behind./My home is way down in Alabam’/On a plantation near Birmingham…”)686 After these wistful performances,

Charles Gray and John Sullivan lend a touch of Amos and Andy to the program with black-face and songs. Their offering of “Dinah” was well received by this critic, and they sure go to town on “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead You Rascal You.” Sullivan later returned for an encore, to sing the hypnotic lullaby “Sleep Baby, Sleep,” whose “echo emanating from Gooseneck [possibly nearby Goose Pond Mountain, one of the highest elevations in the area] will lull half the audience to peaceful slumber.” These pieces were interspersed with instrumental numbers by the “Camp LaGuardia Swing Band” and the “Intermezzo from the Opera Cavaleria [sic.] Rusticana,” played by Adolph Siering, who, “when he isn’t working over a hot range, offers a delightful piano recital,” and poetry readings by Stanley Johnson who “dramatically recites [Kipling’s] ‘Gunga Din.’” “Last but not least, came the LaGuardia Swing Band...[which] offered some modern tunes, ending up with the spirited ‘Stars and Stripes.’”

The program demonstrates that the show was intended to touch various conflicting emotions during the long and isolated winter season at the camp, and to explore what the expectations of the World’s Fair would have meant for the men, most of whom probably would not witness it in person. Although the newspaper advertised the “Sunday excursion offered by the Erie Railroad” to get to the fair, elsewhere it sardonically pointed out, “New York City has its World’s Fair and Camp La Guardia has its New Cannery so we break even.” There was never any coordination by the Social Services Department in its section on requesting furloughs, or organization of group trips. There were no comedic “reports” of men attending the fair, as was normal for the paper describing trips off campus. The reviewer concluded, “All in all, it was a very fine first attempt and we sincerely mean it when we say let us have more of these shows during the winter. By all means, more shows and newer….as well as the old, talent.”

The minstrel show was so successful that it “went on tour in the surrounding community.” It first gave a benefit concert in Washingtonville, about eight miles northeast of the town of Chester, which raised money “to perpetuate the memory of Duane May, who came to Washingtonville with a group of orphans and was placed on a farm.” Advertisements and reviews for the show consistently depicted scenes and costumes of actors in uniforms associated with Southern convict labor (see figures 6.5 and 6.6). The performers were once again “making a name for themselves and for the camp” as they performed for local audiences and nearby institutions. They performed multiple times at the reformatory, where they had previously been.

689 “Our Touring Minstrels,” 40–41.
“guests of the administration of the Camp, at a dinner at the Irish Villa, in Monroe.” The April 1939 show was “localized,” tailored specifically to address the audience at that venue, and was “one of the most enjoyable nights this writer has spent outside of the Camp.” The reformatory inmates had spoofed the Magistrates Courts in its performance of “Night Court Scandals of 1938” at Camp LaGuardia, on December 20. It was “a fast moving show…chocked full of songs, dances and humor,” and took place “[entirely]…in a Night Court.” In the opening chorus, men appearing before the court sang and danced together to “This is My Lucky Day,” before “Leo ‘Sargie’ Helfer” gave his “excellent comic portrayal of the presiding judge.” Numbers staging longing and aching included “Pocket Full of Dreams” and “Four Street Sweepers.” Taking its cue from the LaGuardia minstrels, the performers from New Hampton followed in March with acts drawing on nostalgia for the Old South as well as Jacksonian agrarian politics. Their show included “’Plantation Echoes’ … and ‘Copperhead’ sang ‘Southland’ after which a chorus of southern belles and their boy friends…blended their voices in ‘Swanee River.’” They spoofed homelessness in “Hobo,” after which followed “Al Williams…with a novelty combined monologue and song which was an impression of how ‘Old Black Joe’ would sound if it had been written by Eugene O’Neill.” According to the Camp LaGuardia News, this show “hit a bull’s eye.”

The Theatrical Club built on this energy and momentum for its newest offering. In March, it “took to the stage again…and presented an old-fashioned Minstrel Show. The Old South was brought to life again with the songs of Dixie ringing from the rafters.” It represented the

692 “Stage Shows,” 14 and 23.
693 Saxton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology.”
694 “Hampton Farms Show,” Camp LaGuardia News, March 1939, 22A.
plantation as “timeless,” both close to nature and exotic, in a south that was a symbol of “a collective rural past.” For minstrel performers, “The South became symbolically their old home: the place where simplicity, happiness, all the things we have left behind, exist outside of time,” because it “became the antithesis to both…new cities and new frontiers.” In this show, the club brought an “authentic” Bowery minstrel show to the residents of Orange County. Each time it was performed, Camp Director Cunningham introduced it with a letter from Mayor LaGuardia’s secretary, “expressing the Mayor’s regret at being unable to attend, but wishing the show lots of success.” The newspaper reviewed it at length.

An influx of visitors from the surrounding community made it necessary to add extra seats to those already provided, and the auditorium was packed to the doors.

Excellent costumes and colorful lighting effects made it an outstanding show. The Endmen had authentic costumes and some of the entertainers were dressed to really represent their characters.

Frank Brady, as Interlocutor, kept the Endmen, Mel Brown, Charlie Gray, Leo Saxe and W. Scheffler, on the go with gags and cross-fire which kept the audience laughing. Adolph Siering was at the piano as accompanist. John C. Burns handled the lights and John E. O’Neill acted as property man.

The show got off to a flying start with the opening chorus, “Are You From Dixie?” and from then on it was a melange of songs and patter…

…Following him came Mel Brown who sang “Wagon Wheels” and encoured with “Willie the Weeper”…

…Frank White and Ray Gregory followed with a comedy skit called “Ham and Eggs In Jail” which elicited a great deal of laughter from the audience.

…Joe Fitzsimmons opened the second half with “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny” and encoured with “Old Black Joe.”…

…[Another act] was followed by another comedy song depicting the types of people one will meet at the New York World’s Fair…

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696 “Review (Untitled),” Camp LaGuardia News, March 1939, 20 and 22B.
...C. Gallagher ...played Irish jigs and reels in fast tempo on a violin, and with those two acts following each other, it seemed to this reviewer to be a preview of St. Patrick’s Day. Charlie Gray, one of the Endmen, sang “Mandy” and then “Darktown Strutter’s Ball.” Eddie MacDonald, our favorite Scotch comedian, came out attired in a costume that well portrayed a broken-down Englishman and sang “Burlington Burt.” After changing costumes, he came out in his kilts [and] he sang “The Waddle O’ the Kilts”, “Bell O’Duncon” and “Roamin’ In The Gloamin’” which was then followed by the Grand Finale...

Figure 6.5 “Scenes from our Minstrel Show.”

The minstrel show was the basis for the “charitable” efforts of the men at the camp, demonstrated by their donation of proceeds to causes in both Orange County as well as New

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697. “Review (Untitled),” 22B.
York.\textsuperscript{699} The World’s Fair marked the high point of the camp, as well as its theatrical club and minstrel show. Coverage subsequently dwindled in the newspaper, although it did describe the travels of the group that summer. The troupe “with Mr. John Diffily, Postmaster of Chester, took to the road and...staged another minstrel show in Pine Bush, N.Y., where the entertainment was sponsored by the Pine Bush Fire Department.”\textsuperscript{700} This was followed by performances in Goshen and Bullville, New York. Sports overtook the minstrel show as the focus of recreational coverage that fall. The paper tried to stress work as a “panacea,” but this effort seemed flat compared to the motivational usefulness of the high-energy, “cross-fire” theater program.\textsuperscript{701} Nationalism surrounding the war seems to have been more effective, and the following year Camp LaGuardia men began to register for the draft, a social aspect of the camp that the Campus Comics turned to for inspiration. One comic sums up this change in feeling at the camp in the early 1940s, as the prospect of the draft offered a feeling of escape. As two men observe a camper walking cheerfully with a shovel, whistling in time to a military march, another camper remarks, “Yep! Ever since he got that draft no. he’s in a world of his own.”\textsuperscript{702}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In a letter to William Hodson in 1934, Lorena Hickok, Administrator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, explained that a confidential investigation was more concerned about the “physical condition and morale” of those on relief more than the “local carrying out of the policy.” Her statement goes a long way toward explaining both the leeway


\textsuperscript{700} “Browsing About,” July 1939, 2–3.


that local administrators had in dictating policy, as well as the interest administrators at all levels
had in eliciting workers’ consent for temporary crisis measures.\footnote{Hickok to Hodson, October 30, 1934. [WH papers, box 5, folder F-L, 1935, image 107]} Against Hodson’s notion that
“idleness breaks morale,”\footnote{“Relief Problems of New York City.”} the official opinion was that the camp “performs a very real service
in restoring the health and morale of unattached men who have been crushed by the
depression…with a little money to tide them over.”\footnote{“Budget Request for the Emergency Relief Bureau for the Three-Month Period Ending December 31, 1937.”}  

The Welfare Department ramped up Camp LaGuardia at the end of the depression in the
build-up for war. Unattached men were not given home relief, but were given cheaper work
relief, taken out of homes in New York City and placed in state custody in Orange County.\footnote{Herlands, Administration of Relief in New York City, 110.}
The WPA had pulled out of the project in 1937 and the City was under pressure to pay for its
operation, which to that date had been bankrolled by the federal government. At the time, the
official budget request was dire, “Unless another method for financing the camp is found, a
sound welfare enterprise will have to be abandoned.”\footnote{“Budget Request for the Emergency Relief Bureau For the Three Month Period Ending December 31, 1937.” (September 25, 1937). Pages 7-9. The request was urgent due to the "refusal of the state to reimburse on all of the costs of operating the camp" apart from the costs of food and staff. It would not pay the workers’ salaries of $15 per man per month.} With the onset of a war economy, many
of the aspects of the camp that had given it inertia ebbed, and referrals dwindled. By 1944, there
were 444 men living there, and they were canning half of the vegetables used in New York
City’s institutions. Farm production was not what it once was, and while “some [of the
vegetables] are grown on the camp acres,” the city was purchasing “most of the vegetables
used … in the open market.” Despite this, Leo Arnstein, the new Welfare Commissioner,
confidently predicted that it would produce all of the city’s canning needs the following year.\footnote{“Homeless Men Can Vegetables for City Needs.”}

When they could no longer recruit men from home relief, the Welfare Department turned back to
the Department of Corrections. The city formally revised its procedures for sending men to the camp in 1944, and it began to refer men on probation there just before it was taken over by the Department of Purchase, which continued to run the cannery using prison labor.\footnote{Samuel Gertner, “Report on the Cooperative Program between the Probation Department of the Magistrate’s Court and the Division of Shelter Care of the Department of Welfare” (New York City: Department of Welfare of the City of New York, February 14, 1944), Department of Welfare, Correspondence, Box 3342, Folder 5, LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College; Abraham D. Beame, “Memorandum,” August 5, 1946, O’Dwyer Subject Files, “Camp LaGuardia,” New York City Municipal Archives.}
Chapter 7
Camp LaGuardia Coda

The use of the institution...for experimental purposes of one kind or another has apparently ended in failure.  

The residents of Camp LaGuardia are not a credit to New York City or a credit to our community.

The contradictions that Camp LaGuardia attempted to hold together became unraveled after World War II. In mid-1943, it was transferred to the Department of Purchase, which was responsible for procuring food for the city’s hospitals and schools. This department ran the camp as the “Municipal Cannery” using a “permanent prison population of 125 prisoners” drawn from Riker’s Island, in addition to “men who were inmates of the camp when it was used as a rehabilitation center for derelicts and chronic alcoholics.” The administration spun this setup as another “experiment” in rehabilitation, as reported in the New York Herald Tribune, “The cannery was opened four months ago as a three-way experiment in war-time food conservation, municipal economy and rehabilitation of inmates from the city penitentiary at Riker’s Island.”

It was one of two canneries that the city maintained in Orange County, the other at New Hampton reformatory, in its efforts to implement the Federally urged program of “cooperative community canning” and given that “a major food shortage [was] possible.”

The canning project was part of a wider effort at collaboration between the Welfare Department and Corrections, given the reduction of manpower at the camp. Noticing that a majority of men who had engaged with the Division of Shelter Care had also been entangled

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712 “Mayor Happy Over Results at City Cannery,” New York Herald Tribune, September 9, 1944.
with the courts and “spent considerable time at Rikers Island,” the collaboration attempted to use the Welfare Department to integrate men into jobs either after they had served time and were on parole, or as an alternative sentencing. A report on the first year of this program boasted that it had “eliminated to a great extent the much deplored ‘revolving door’ process of arrest, arraignment, sentence, workhouse, arrest, etc. ad infinitum, but also has given us a more complete understanding of the homeless man, and enabled us to make more appropriate plans for his assistance.” Camp LaGuardia’s position in this project was determined by the “type” of man sent there. Following the long-term characterization of the camp’s population, the men sent there in this relationship were those whose “capacity for self-maintenance and self-direction had been so impaired that a satisfactory adjustment would not have been likely without a period of rehabilitation in a controlled environment such as is offered at Camp LaGuardia.”

After the first year, it is unclear what happened to the program, but the search for a purpose to the institution continued. The farm program, which was the center of the camp’s program, had dwindled; as the labor pool at the camp shrank, so did its farm operations. In August 1943, there were 444 men at the camp, less than half of its full capacity of over 1,000 just a few years before. While some of the “raw materials” for canning continued to be produced at the camp, the city had already begun to contract out for food purchasing, to farmers in the Hudson Valley (who in turn hired “farm help from Florida,”) and in Texas, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. The distance separating these farms from the cannery was

714 80% of the men referred to the Division of Shelter Care by the Department of Corrections had already received care from the Department of Welfare.
715 Gertner, “Report on the Cooperative Program between the Probation Department of the Magistrate’s Court and the Division of Shelter Care of the Department of Welfare.”
extremely inefficient and contributed to the food’s spoilage; the Commissioner of Purchase wrote that it needed to “be canned same day harvested.”

Despite the uplifting language promoting the camp and its contribution to the war effort, the pretense of rehabilitation also was eventually stripped away as the cannery fell into disorder. Outbreaks of gastroenteritis at the City’s Hospitals forced the Commissioner of Hospitals to forbid canned food from Camp LaGuardia to be served in those institutions. With the availability of frozen foods increasing, he “hoped to eliminate a great percentage of canned products.” This situation provoked investigation of the canning operation. Resulting reports led the mayor to condemn the food from Camp LaGuardia then sitting in storage in a Long Island City warehouse, a loss of nearly $130,000 at a time when the city faced “an impending deficit of $3,500,000 in [its] food appropriations.” Options for recouping this money were limited. The State Constitution of 1938 prohibited prison labor or the products of prison labor to be “farmed out, contracted, given or sold to any person, firm, association or corporation.” On the other hand, these products could be “disposed of to the state or any political division thereof.” The Commissioner of Purchase, worried that without the cannery the city would not be able to “procure supplies for city institutions,” advocated for its remaining open, and for distributing the condemned food to other city institutions, once it could be “resterilized.” It is unclear what became of the contaminated food, but after three years of Department of Purchase oversight, Mayor O’Dwyer closed the cannery.

Given this closure, the future of the camp was once again uncertain. Paul McGinnis, Secretary of the State’s Prison Commission, petitioned the Mayor for the institution’s return to

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716 New York City Municipal Archives, O’Dwyer Papers
717 New York City Municipal Archives, O’Dwyer Papers
the Department of Corrections for women prisoners, arguing that “the use of the institution [by the Department of Welfare] for experimental purposes of one kind or another has apparently ended in failure.” The Prison Association of New York supported this request, but Budget Director Abraham Beame advised that, like in 1934, it would prove to be too expensive, and that the Women’s House of Detention provided ample space for the women in the custody of the Corrections Department. Commissioner of Welfare Edward Rhatigan also immediately asked for the institution to be “returned to his jurisdiction,” a request that the Corporation Council ultimately advised, “so that the City may continue to receive state reimbursement,” and that the Mayor enacted in October 1947. The equipment, which the Department of Welfare and the Emergency Relief Bureau had purchased at “considerable cost,” and the Department of Purchase had expanded, was apparently given to the City’s Department of Education. The use of the institution bounced back and forth between corrections and welfare for another ten years, given fluctuating arrest and employment rates.\(^718\)

The one aspect of Camp LaGuardia that remained in force was its objective of “cleaning up” the Bowery. It was presented as a “voluntary” institution, an escape from New York’s skid row district, a place valuable for social scientists at Columbia University in developing theories of deviance and disaffiliation to explain alcoholism and homelessness.\(^719\) By the 1970’s, the camp was a place to which older men from the Bowery fled, as one documentary put it, so that they were not preyed upon by the “new breed of derelict, younger stronger,” who “stalked the old men on the streets and in the broken down hotels, trapped in narrow rooms, easy victims in

\(^{718}\) Charles E. Murphy, Corporation Council to William O’Dwyer, Mayor, “Re: Camp LaGuardia,” January 3, 1947, Box 12, Folder 115, Camp LaGuardia, 1946-1948, New York City Municipal Archives, O’Dwyer Subject Files.

the open dormitories of flophouses.” (See chapter two.) “Some of them huddle in the city’s overcrowded shelter on East Third Street, where 1,400 are fed every day. But others decide that they can no longer survive in New York, and for them Camp LaGuardia, the city’s upstate home for penniless, forgotten men, is another place to go.”720 This configuration meant that the work component of the shelter system was reversed in Camp LaGuardia’s final days. The place was seen as a “resort,” and men were referred from it to work programs in the city. They were not expected to find work in the upstate economy, and tellingly, were exempt from restrictions requiring people in shelters to look for work, which was imposed on others in the system.

The politics surrounding the camp in the early 1990s informed its eventual closure fifteen years later. While there were always those in New York City as well as in Chester who wanted to see the facility closed, as the homeless shelter system within New York City developed, these politics gained more traction when younger men were sent to the camp. A recent change, explicitly meant to eliminate the similarity between living at the camp and incarceration, motivated concerted, organized action by politicians and residents of the surrounding area. The initial panic was over letting the men have leeway in moving through the surrounding communities. The Coalition for the Homeless in New York, responsible for monitoring conditions in the unfolding shelter system, had advocated for this change. Area politicians, increasingly anxious about young black men living nearby, openly protested this more “lenient” policy, figuring the surrounding towns as having no crime apart from the camp. They placed pressure on the city to hire more security guards, build a fence, and institute warrant checks for shelter residents. HRA installed vending machines in an attempt to keep men on the campus rather than patronize local stores. One State Senator couldn’t figure out what kind of institution

720 Kotuk, “Camp LaGuardia.”
was necessary, a hospital, a jail, or a psychiatric ward, but certainly not what Camp LaGuardia had become, “Frankly…parents, many of whom both work full-time, are extremely concerned with the welfare of their young children while unattended patients, many with criminal records, are allowed and encouraged to integrate with the surrounding community before their treatment has been completed.”

Local newspapers repeatedly harped on HRA’s negligence to generate fear among residents of the nearby towns. Sensational headlines broadcast a new plan: reforming surveillance, since, town leaders worried, “under HRA’s open facility policy, men transported to Camp LaGuardia may the next day leave the Camp and assume residence in any of the surrounding communities.”

In 1992, an attorney in Chester who was also on the town board wrote to New York City Police Commissioner Lee Brown and presented him with arguments as to why Camp LaGuardia was no longer structurally relevant in its new shelter model. He argued that the city failed to contain the men who were living there. “Peace officers” at the Camp had no jurisdiction outside of it, a situation that “taxed our local police forces”—forces, he could have added, which had their origin in the terror over the presence of Camp LaGuardia’s original residents.

In addition to bolstering the physical plant of the jail-like facility, such as repairing “holes in the fence around the property,” the policy proposal was to implement mandatory warrant checks for any person moved to the camp from New York City. According to the strategy, this would ensure that New York City was not “unwittingly … [assisting] an accused felon [to] escape from the

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721 State Senator William Larkin to Barbara Sabol, November 13, 1991, Homeless Services/Comm SF, Box 1, Folder 6, David Dinkins Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.


724 “Village Hires First Cop, Blames Derelicts Camp.”

725 Aberbach, “LaGuardia ‘appalling’ to Staten Island Official.”
criminal justice system” through the anonymity of its shelter system. Assembly Member Nancy
Calhoun concurred, while giving meaning to the camp through her own invented history.

Camp LaGuardia, while initially a shelter for older non-violent homeless
men, has developed to a point that requires security checks of those
coming to our area as many now utilize this once quiet facility as an
escape from the New York City legal system.726

In a letter that equated “being racist” with being against providing for the homeless, State
Senator Benjamin Gilman wrote to New York City Mayor David Dinkins, “Please bear in mind
that our constituents are not racist, not opposed to providing for the homeless, but most of all
want to make certain that there is adequate security for effective internal administration so that
the LaGuardia residents will be good neighbors and not a threat to the community.”727 These
letters’ rhetorical motive emphasized the argument, which they stated in order to both exploit
and deny its power. These reforms would prevent “much more radical demands [by the town],
e.g., closure of the Camp altogether.”728 This was a significant threat because Camp LaGuardia
still represented a major portion of New York City’s single shelter beds. In 1990, there were just
under 9,000 spots available system-wide for singles [How many for men?]; the camp provided
1,000 of these, and, in the winter of 1991, the city was dealing with the winter “surge” in its
homeless population. A vision of containment, therefore, began the process that blocked further
use of Camp LaGuardia and prompted continued expansion of the city’s emerging infrastructure.

“How the shelter was like a prison” was specifically the crux of the surrounding politics.
Orange County wanted to make Camp LaGuardia more like a prison, similar to those under
construction in upstate New York. New York City, for its part, needed to provide enough shelter

726 Assembly Member Nancy Calhoun to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, August 2, 1994, Box 02/14/004, Folder 0188,
Rudolph Giuliani Papers, New York City Municipal Archives.
727 Benjamin A. Gilman to Mayor David Dinkins, December 31, 1991, David Dinkins papers, “Homeless
Services/Comm SF,” New York City Municipal Archives.
beds to comply with the Callahan Consent Decree, and was then implementing its armory-to-shelter plan (see chapter 2). The regional contradictions brought up legal issues. If the requests of upstate lawmakers were granted, it would turn the entire HRA into an agency for the surveillance of homeless people to uncover former convictions, a process that would generalize policing throughout the entire, emergent shelter system. HRA lawyers therefore resisted, “Regarding a special system of screening clients before they are assigned to Camp LaGuardia, I believe that any such unique treatment would also be objectionable from a fairness point of view. If HRA does not screen shelter applicants assigned to any other facility, it would not be appropriate to do so for Camp LaGuardia.” Dinkins’ advisors concluded, stating the obvious, “Since Camp LaGuardia is not a prison, there is no basis to restrict [the men’s] movement.” Both of these arguments, significantly, overlooked the continued violence enacted on men living in the shelter.

The institution that came to be known as the homeless shelter had its beginnings in Progressive Era prison reform. Out of the lineage of city agencies dedicated to social welfare emerged New York City's Department of Homeless Services in the early 1990s, an agency with a current annual budget of over $1 billion. During this time, national welfare was dismantled and the number of shelters located within the city ballooned. Simultaneously, Camp LaGuardia’s importance waned. Orange County became increasingly aggressive toward residents of the shelter, and it closed in 2007. As the shelter system described in chapter two rolled out, the previous spatial configuration of New York’s shelter system also finally came to a close. Its

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730 “Camp LaGuardia-Homeless,” n.d., Box 1, Folder 6, New York City Municipal Archives, David Dinkins Subject Files, Homeless Services/Comm SF.
legacy was the establishment of a resilient model for the management of homelessness in New York, a dedicated agency and infrastructure, and a policy format that foreshadowed national transformation. The city sold the site to Orange County for $9.5 million and diverted its $19.5 million to DHS's operating budget.\textsuperscript{732} The county, ironically, has been involved in developing housing on the site ever since, a project that has been delayed for the past decade. The institutional continuity between prisons and homeless shelters endures, now with geographic reversal. A recent investigative report found that a majority of men released from upstate prisons and returning to New York City now receive State referrals directly to Bellevue Shelter, the City’s intake point for homeless men. The reporter concluded that, parolees, immediately thrust into “freedom and homelessness,” and “who are trying to escape their past, are often sent into a system riddled with drugs and violence,” as they go from being a “ward of the state to the responsibility of the City.”\textsuperscript{733}

Greycourt is not an official place in the atlases and gazetteers of New York State. It names the physical and environmental attributes of the area, but also communicates historical inertia. It was a colloquial way to refer to the self-contained area within what came to be the town of Chester. Greycourt’s founding as the town’s original settlement lent it a sense of local meaning and importance. Later, as a junction on the Erie Railroad, it signified transition, and the place continued to be imbued with a sense of nostalgia and historic consequence. Throughout its history in Orange County, Camp LaGuardia was consistently advertised as being in “Greycourt, NY.” The place’s eponymous historical myth contributed to the meaning granted to the camp as


a place of both isolation and of change. These meanings both haunted and provided ground for the camp’s existence, even as the camp drew on and reconfigured those meanings toward its own purposes. As a transitional place, for both the men living there as well as for the city’s evolving institutions, these meanings were central to defining its purpose and creating its own momentum. Camp LaGuardia is no longer a prison or a homeless shelter, but it contributed its own legacy to New York City’s newest program of engaging with displacement.
## Appendices

### Appendix A:

### Emergence of New York City's Homeless Shelter Infrastructure, 1979-2013

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Percent increase (capacity)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>$300 million</td>
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Sources:
- Kim Hopper, quoted in Gounis.
- The budget went up to $62.9 million the following year: "$13 Million Plan Set for 7 Shelters Run by the City." (1984, March 23). *The New York Times*.
- The beds at Camp LaGuardia. There were no beds for women.
- There were 3 shelters for women and 12 shelters for men.
- The three armories opened in January 1983 had a bed capacity of "a few hundred" rather than an exact number. The calculation here is based on an estimate of 300.
- Capacity for family shelters is number of families, not of people.
- "Bytes of the Big Apple." NYC Department of City Planning, Open GIS data: Primary Land Use Tax Lot Output (PLUTO) and Selected Facilities and Program Sites, 2013.
- The official shelter count by the de Blasio Administration in early 2017 was 287. See "Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City." City of New York, 2017, 85 and 88.
Appendix B:
This is one small but illuminating section of R.’s story, in which he describes the link between his drug use, his job, the institutional overlap between prisons and homeless shelters, and learning to navigate the shelter system itself.

R: My drug abuse took off, whew, it took off crazy. I went to my boss and I told my boss I was using. The particular job I had I was working for the New York City Board of Elections, in which I had a badge. It’s like a city official badge. And I knew I was doing wrong. I had that badge in my wallet and I was going to cop crack cocaine on the street in spots, and had I gotten arrested it would have been in the newspaper. And they was generous enough to hire me, an ex-felon. So I thought it was the least that I owed to them and I could tell them that. So here it is, I’m sleeping in train stations, in the park. This was the summer months. I’m trying to cope with going to work and being homeless at the same time. They sent me to a city agency for help, employment assistance, EAP, Employment Assistance Program, where they enrolled me into a drug program. And it didn’t work. She was required by law, because they was paying for her to report to the job of my participation and my urine and things of that nature. She gave me a break the first time my urine was dirty. She said, “[can’t hear] Officer W, I’m sorry, I’m gonna have to report this.” When she reported to my employer …

C: The second time?

The second time, they let me go. They said, “We’re terribly sorry, you’re an excellent worker, but we have to let you go.” I was granted a severance pay, which was about $3,100 I believe. And I blew that. I could have took that and went and got a room somewhere. And even though I was laid off from the job or fired, I could have at least tried but I didn’t. And my drug addiction was spiraling out of control. So I was homeless.
When the money ran out I found myself begging for food. Begging for change. Very hungry at times. Now it became a matter where my drug use wasn’t that important. What was important was a place to stay. I tried staying in Bellevue. It was terrible. It was so terrible that I would rather stay in the street. I went down to the Bowery to a church and they let you stay overnight. It was much cleaner, but you would stay overnight. I had trouble with that, meeting their curfew. You had to be in at a certain time. So I was breaking their curfew rules. And they were like, “You can’t come in here like that. It’s best that you go to another place.” In the midst of that I was still dabbling with drugs, because I would be depressed. Like sometimes I would not get nothing to eat. Or I would see an old friend on the train. The police would kick my foot. “Hey, buddy, let’s go.” I still had my identification so I didn’t get ran through the system. They would be like, so I had my old identification from the city. He was like, “Hey, you work for the city?” I was like, “Naw, I used to.” “Well are you ok? Do you have any drugs or weapons on you?” I was like, “No sir, just tired. I just need somewhere to stay.” So my every day adventure besides looking for food was riding the A train. That was my favorite train because it’s like the longest train. So I would ride that train out, because that was the summer time, [but] now it’s cold out, very, very cold. And that was the most depressing, terriblest thing I ever witnessed in my life.

And it led me to a burglary charge. I went past…now we going from the year, I was, we going to the year 2006 of February. I went to a late night convenient store, where the window spins. And right next to the window is the register. And the guy was in the back in the chair. He was back in the chair I think resting. And I peeked in the window and seen that the register was open and there were a few bills I could see sticking out. This was in my neighborhood. And this guy know me. He know me by face. It’s not like I had a mask or hood. And I punched the
window out and was trying to grab the money. And he came and he was like, “Hey, what you doin, what you doin!??” And I was like, “Back up, back up.” And this wasn’t actually for drugs. It was actually so I could feed myself. So I could at least go into McDonald’s and have money at night to eat. That became like a first priority. And never in my adult life experienced hunger pains. Like man, I’m hungry, like really. This was crazy. I didn’t even want no drugs. I’m not starving, but I’m hungry. And for the first time I felt those hunger pains. At any rate, he knew who I was. I guess when he called the police, they probably asked him to come to the precinct, maybe he see my mug shot, or whatever like that, he described them to me, gave them my nickname, because he knew my nickname. And a month later they arrested me on the street. I was feeling so bad, so down and out, that I told them the truth. I said, “Yeah, that was me.” Up in the 28th precinct in Harlem. They had me, the robbery, burglaries call, whatever, they said, “Did you break through this man’s window? Did you try to remove cash from his register? Was that you?” And I said, “Yes.” And I had a criminal history. So the judge, he could have gave me more time. But I wasn’t fighting it. The lawyer, he was like, “You made statements here. Why did you do this?” And I said, “Because I did it.” He said, “Because you did it, you at least wanna let them prove it! Jesus, you just giving yourself up like that?!” And I said, “Yeah, because I don’t have nowhere to go.” And I found jail at that time to be a blessing. As crazy as that may sound. And it was cold out. It was March and it was still cold out. But I had a place to stay. I didn’t have to worry about feeding myself. You know how prison is, jail, Riker’s Island. Food wasn’t all that great, but it was great. I didn’t have to run around scrapping, begging for food. Going into restaurants asking them do they have any food left over and things of that nature. The judge gave me flat five years. This was in 2006.
I was released from prison April of 2010, last year. And not wanting to experience someone the power of saying, “Get out,” I said I have to find somewhere to go that would assist me with housing. And that’s when I read a connection book. It’s a book that they give to correction facilities. It be in the library and it has connections. And I read [name of program] for formerly incarcerated homeless men, it assists you with programs. I said, “Wow, a chance to save money. This is up my alley.” As soon as I was released I had to go to Bellevue to get a reference letter to this program here at [name of program.]

C: So you went back to Bellevue?

R: I went back to Bellevue overnight. I was released from prison to a shelter system in Brooklyn. But I came to [the program] and they said, “No, you can’t come in here like that. You must get a HA number.” I didn’t know what that is. “What is that?” A homeless assistance number, whatever, HRA number. And you gotta go to Bellevue to get that. Or Bedford-Atlantic [armory shelter]. I said, “Wow, I’m released from prison, I’m healthy, I’m clean.” I said, “Hey, I gotta go to Bellevue?” They said, “Yeah but just for overnight. Just get that letter, report to your parole, and come right here. We got you man. We got you.” And that’s what I did. I stayed overnight in Bellevue. I went upstairs to the lady’s office. She wrote the letter. Packed my stuff. Or I already had it packed. And I came here to [name of program.] And that was April of last year. And that’s pretty much where I am today.
Appendix C:
Locations of private lodging houses that the city used to house homeless men in 1939. It paid, on average, 25 cents per man per night for this accommodation. Data is from Herlands, William B. *Administration of Relief in New York City*. New York City: Department of Investigation, 1940.
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