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‘Managing Homelessness’ in New York City

The specter of homelessness looms over the United States, and New York city is no exception. In 2019, an average of 18,694 single adults slept in the city’s shelter system each night[1], while 3,600 people experienced ‘unsheltered’ homelessness, or sleeping in public spaces such as streets and subways[2]. These numbers alone are indicative of a crisis, but 2019 data collected by the Coalition for the Homeless reveals further cause for alarm: single adults stay in shelters for an average of 429 nights – 86 per cent of whom are Black or Hispanic (only 10 percent identifying as white).[3] Thirty percent of newly homeless individuals enter from institutional settings, primarily from state prisons in addition to hospitals and city jails.[4] 1 in every 100 babies born in NYC hospitals went home to a shelter in 2019.[5] Under Bill de Blasio, the number of single adults residing in shelters has increased by about 10 per cent each year since he took office.[6] A survey on street homelessness conducted by Coalition for the Homeless in 2017-2018 revealed that three-fourths of respondents had stayed in shelters before and would not return due to safety concerns or strict rules and procedures. Two-thirds had mental health needs, and one-third had concurrent disabilities. The majority had been approached by outreach teams but rejected services because they weren’t offered housing.[7] The statistics on homelessness in New York City raise a variety of concerns including a growing homeless population, experiencing homelessness for extended periods, large racial disparities, untreated mental and physical health needs, and an unsafe, failing shelter system.

The gravity of the homelessness crisis is not only understood through databases and statical reports. It can also be understood when walking down the street and seeing belongings that have been abandoned: a blanket or cardboard laid out on the hard concrete sidewalk, a

[1] Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020*, 6. (This number excludes families and couples residing in shelters).
[2] City of New York, *The Journey Home*, 4. Coalition for homeless argues that this is a significant undercount because it excludes people seeking refuge in privately-owned spaces, the estimate is made “on a single night during the coldest month of the year.” (Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020*, 14).
[3] Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020*, 11, 14.
[4] Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020*, 13.
[5] Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020,* 4.
[6] Coalition for the Homeless. *State of the Homeless 2019*, 4.
[7] Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020,* 16.

backpack or shopping cart teeming with someone's limited possessions, left behind unwillingly by a person who has been displaced by law enforcement. It can be understood during an early-morning commute where someone is stretched out beside you, cloth over their face, trying to sleep despite the florescent lighting and clamor of other riders. It can be understood when that person is evicted from the train by the NYPD and filtered back into the shelter system or the prison system against their will. We may look at these numbers in shock – and they are shocking – but New Yorkers are very accustomed to the homelessness crisis. We see homeless people in crisis every day.

Despite the brutal reality that the data and lived experiences of homeless people reveal, NYC drafts a different narrative. In *The Journey Home*, a report on NYC street homelessness released in December 2019, the mayor boasts that since 2015 the city has tripled investment in street homelessness from $45 million to $140 million through their homeless management system: HOME-STAT.[8] From 2015 to 2019, the city increased the number of 'safe haven'[9] beds to 1,800, added over 350 homeless outreach staff to total 550, established a "by-name list of individuals known to be homeless," and strengthened ties between various city agencies involved in managing homelessness.[10] *The Journey Home* paints a mirage of homeless management in New York City. Throughout this paper I will explore how the city's response to the homelessness crisis fails housing-deprived individuals despite optimistic and self-congratulatory rhetoric.

Craig Willse, while conceptualizing the homeless crisis, asserts that the way we speak of homeless people mobilizes a "pathological category that directs attention to an individual" rather than recognizing homelessness as a social phenomenon. Willse argues that instead of individual analyses of homelessness, we should speak in terms of 'housing deprivation,' which indicates the active taking away of shelter rather than individualizing its impacts.[11] Although changing the terminology we employ in discussions about homelessness will not in itself "solve" housing insecurity, it does reframe how we understand the crisis. It shifts the onus of responsibility from

[8] City of New York, *The Journey Home*, 8.
[9] Safe Havens are smaller shelters that employ more social workers and fewer cops. The threshold for entry is lower and rules are more flexible to accommodate people who are wary of traditional shelters. Coalition for the Homeless notes that the current number of Safe Haven beds is nowhere near enough to accommodate 'service resistant' individuals. (Coalition for the Homeless, *State of the Homeless 2020,* 14).
[10] City of New York, *The Journey Home*, 8. The agencies listed in the plan include the New York City Police Department, NYC Health + Hospitals, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, FDNY Emergency Medical Service, and the Department of Parks and Recreation.
[11] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 2.

people who are homeless on to the structures that deprive them of homes, meaning that our approach to housing must change rather than individual behaviors. This paper will build on Willse's theory of homeless management as a system that reproduces housing insecurity rather than eliminating it. With a focus on New York City transit in 2019, it will investigate the changing methods of organizing and managing homelessness by various city agencies, law enforcement, and private non-profit groups. It will question the purpose of these policies and the ways the state and private sector work in tandem. Ultimately, I seek to understand why, with the abundance of investment in programs to "help the homeless," does the problem persist?

I chose to situate this analysis in 2019 New York City because there was an acceleration of homeless 'outreach efforts,' which diverted more resources towards managing homelessness and solidified a coalition of city agencies, law enforcement, and private sector organizations. The policies introduced in 2019 are not new, but rather reiterations of quality-of-life policing and the use of social services as a means to regulate the behaviors of housing-deprived populations. Public transit is not the only public space where housing-deprived people find shelter, but it is where NYC focused its efforts in 2019. Finding refuge in public transit is a way for housing-deprived people to protect themselves against the elements (rain, snow, hot or cold weather) without entering shelter systems. For many homeless New Yorkers, the shelter system is undesirable due to the crumbling physical infrastructure of older shelters, unhygienic conditions, and dehumanizing practices.[12] The city views the presence of people sleeping or pandering on trains as a nuisance to the public, and in response these behaviors are criminalized and policed.

To understand why the city reacted to homelessness the way it did, we must acknowledge that the MTA subway system was a site of political struggle over police repression during 2019. Riders were arrested or fined $100 for avoiding the $2.75 fare, and 92 percent of people arrested for fare evasion were non-white.[13] Unlicensed vendors were dispossessed of their belongings and evicted from stations or arrested.[14] Activists drew these connections and mobilized against

[12] Dehumanizing practices include "requiring residents to request toilet paper whenever they need to use the restroom; providing poor-quality, unappetizing food and insufficient portions (while forbidding residents from bringing outside food into shelters); failing to offer frequent laundry services; providing inadequate case management and housing assistance; and erecting bureaucratic barriers that deter those seeking shelter." (Coalition for the Homeless. *State of the Homeless 2019*, 29).
[13] Rubenstein, "Fare Evasion Shouldn't Be a Crime; Neither Should Putting Your Feet Up on the Subway."
[14] Aranati, "NYC police's 'quality of life' strategy for subways: arrest food vendors."

repressive surveillance and violent force.[15] In some ways, homeless management (state agencies and private groups who interact with housing-deprived populations, and the tools they use to manage them) is a way to invest more in the surveillance and public order enforcement capacities of the state. Although the larger context of political struggle on public transit is a worthy field of exploration, this paper will focus on the response to homelessness.

I will begin this paper by explaining what it means to "manage" homelessness. The paper will then analyze how NYC frames street homelessness by examining their rhetoric, appeals to "the public," what they claim causes street homelessness, and the solutions they propose. We will then explore the creation of HOME-STAT in 2015, a database that collects information on homeless individuals to build a body of knowledge on homelessness. This section will consider Willse's critique of Homeless Management Information Systems. Although 2015 falls outside the timeframe being examined, HOME-STAT is central to the developments of 2019. After giving this context, I will begin my overview of 2019's shifting policies of homeless management. This includes three primary developments: the introduction of the Subway Diversion Program in July, the creation of the Joint Crisis Coordination Center in August, and the passing of an MTA budget in December that invested $249 million in adding 500 officers to patrol the subways. I will analyze the rhetoric, ideological underpinnings, and role of agencies involved in each policy change. The policy changes around 'homeless outreach' and policing public transit coalesce in the December release of the city's report on street homeless, *The Journey Home*.

Managing homelessness

What does it mean to *manage* homelessness? Craig Willse argues that homeless populations constitute "surplus life," which includes those without shelter who have been isolated from traditional labor and housing. He asserts that "surplus populations are not simply left to die, but in their slow deaths are managed by social service and social science industries."[16] This 'management' is done with the purpose of cleansing public space for the benefit of businesses and consumers. Managing homelessness has become a knowledge/service industry in itself through the development of new methods for quantifying, identifying, and organizing

[15] Aranati, "'We will not let up': activists protest NYPD subway crackdown."
[16] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 48.

surplus life.[17] Management takes the form of moralistic programs that target unsheltered homeless populations with the intent to "manage the costs of social abandonment, and to transform the illness and death that result from housing deprivation into productive dimensions of postindustrial service and knowledge economies."[18] In this way, the creation of management databases, the expansion of law enforcement and surveillance capacities, and the outsourcing of homeless services make homeless populations a lucrative category for investment. Willse argues, and I concur, that cities choose to manage homelessness rather than eliminate it because "an actual elimination of housing insecurity and deprivation would also mean an end to the service and knowledge industries proliferating around managing and studying populations living without shelter."[19] In the context of 2019 New York City, law enforcement, social services and nonprofits play unique roles in the management of homeless populations. The role of law enforcement is the most straightforward: they enforce social policies by removing people who are not using public space in ways that the city deems appropriate. The NYPD (city-level) and Metro Transit Authority officers (state-level) police public transit by issuing summonses or arresting individuals who violate the MTA's Codes of Conduct. Homeless individuals are primarily targeted for sleeping outstretched on trains, panhandling, and fare evasion. These are what George Lipsitz refers to as 'poverty violations' -- "crimes of condition rather than crimes of conduct."[20] This implies that the condition of poverty is ultimately criminalized, not the actions themselves.

A constellation of social service agencies contribute to homelessness management. The primary agency is the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) which operates under the Department of Social Services (DSS), both city-level agencies. Various other agencies on the city and state levels will also play a role, but the DHS structures the response around homelessness. They coordinate efforts between different agencies and outsources many homeless services to private non-profits. Social welfare agencies are one of the "key mechanisms not only through which [social] abandonment takes place but through which it is coded as a form of help."[21] Social work is painted as the benevolent savior of housing-deprived people, when in reality it

[17] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 12, 47.
[18] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 50. Social abandonment is the alienation of one group from the whole, premised on "the illusion of separateness" (Willse, 10).
[19] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 167.
[20] Lipsitz, "Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row," 103.
[21] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 11.

contributes to their neglect by filtering masses of people through a system that is detrimental to health, safety, and security.

The foremost non-profit involved in NYC homeless management during 2019 was the Bowery Residents' Committee (BRC), which operates under government contracts that compose the majority of its funding.[22] The BRC and other non-profits involved with homelessness should be understood as the state outsourcing its responsibilities to private business – part of the larger neoliberalisation of social services. Willse explains the shift towards privatization in two parts: the roll-back phase, which included "dismantling of social welfare programs, the increasing privatization of social administration as well as public space, and the devolution of authority to lower levels of government." The roll-back was followed by neoliberalisation of social welfare services, in which "state institutions reassert authority over decentralized welfare apparatuses and reorganize the structure and delivery of social welfare services."[23] The policy changes of 2019 are reflective of neoliberal restructuring: the city reasserted their authority over disorderly conduct by consolidating its powers and continuing to outsource welfare services. Throughout this paper I will continue to unpack the relationship between law enforcement, social welfare agencies and non-profits.

The framing of 'street homelessness'

The NYC Department of Homeless Services' website has a page dedicated to 'Street Outreach.' The page urges New Yorkers to call 311 and request outreach assistance when they "see individuals they believe to be homeless," or call 911 when the person poses a threat to themselves, others, or is engaged in criminal activity.[24] This call to action is based on the personal perceptions of individual New Yorkers who have likely derived their understanding of homelessness from the media and political caricatures. It directly involves the public in the management of homelessness by mobilizing the othering category of homelessness and reducing people assumed homeless into objects of pity, fear, and disorder. Rather than directly asking someone they assume to be homeless if they need help, New Yorkers are encouraged to use the state as an intermediary. This proliferates the artificial distance between housing-deprived people

[22] BKD CPAs & Advisors, *Bowery Residents' Committee, Inc. and Affiliated Organizations: Independent Auditor's Report and Combined Financial Statements.*
[23] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 102.
[24] NYC Department of Homeless Services. "Street Outreach."

and 'the public,' positioning homeless people as an unpredictable subgroup that must be controlled. It is also dehumanizing to assume that a stranger encountered on the street is incapable of doing what is best for themselves, so the state must step in to 'help' them.

The DHS site also crafts the narrative that unsheltered homeless people are 'service resistant,' or unwilling to accept services offered by the city.[25] The site states that "many [unsheltered homeless people] have fallen through every social safety net and may have experienced trauma or suffer from mental health or substance use challenges."[26] The idea of 'service resistant' populations is concurrent with notions of 'chronic homelessness:' people "understood to exhibit long- term patterns of cycling in and out of shelters, hospitals, and jails, interspersed with periods of living unhoused and on the streets."[27] The category of chronic homelessness is artificial, and individuals are made to fit into the category rather than the other way around. Willse quotes the director of a private homeless services agency who explains that the label 'service resistant' is "a meaningless thing to call a person, it doesn't mean anything. It's not rooted in behavioral science, it's just a cop out."[28] Additionally, language of 'falling through every social safety net' ignores structural failings of a gutted social welfare system and individualizes the social phenomenon. Thus, rather than addressing structural inequality by rebuilding decimated public housing and cracking down on unregulated, profit-driven real-estate markets, the city only needs to focus on "bringing service-resistant individuals indoors."[29] This language is vague enough that the city isn't accountable to a specific outcome and creates a justification to remove unsheltered homeless people from public spaces. In sum, the city's rhetoric around street homelessness frames housing-deprived individuals who seek refuge in public spaces as potentially dangerous, likely mentally ill or addicted to drugs, unapproachable, and resistant to the empathetic assistance of the state.

The creation of HOME-STAT

Before delving into the city's response to street homelessness in 2019, we must first look back to the creation of HOME-STAT in 2015 by Mayor Bill de Blasio. HOME-STAT, or

[25] "Unsheltered" homeless people find refuge in public spaces such as streets or transit rather than interacting with the shelter system.
[26] NYC Department of Homeless Services. "Street Outreach."
[27] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 139.
[28] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 147.
[29] NYC Department of Homeless Services. "Street Outreach."

Homeless Outreach & Mobile Engagement Street Action Teams, has three main pillars: proactive canvassing, immediate response to 311 calls, and creating a "city-wide case management system."[30] Canvassing is done by 60 field staff who identify 'hotspots,' or places with "persistent homeless presence," with the stated intent to figure out how to best deploy resources. Data gathered from 311 calls and outreach teams are compiled into a publicly available "suite of dashboards" relaying daily and monthly information.[31]

HOME-STAT facilitates the rapid response to 311 calls by increasing the number of *contracted* Street Outreach Team staff from 175 to around 312 and adding 40 officers to the 70-officer Homeless Outreach Unit. They specify that the NYPD's Homeless Outreach Unit will respond to calls regarding encampments, large hot spots, and those experiencing emotional disturbance or exhibiting erratic behavior."[32] Finally, HOME-STAT created a city-wide case management database for the purpose of surveillance, outreach, and rapid response, staffed by DHS, the NYPD, and other social service agencies. The database was established in partnership with NYC SAFE Hub, "a central command for tracking mentally ill individuals with a history of erratic or violent behavior."[33] The birth of HOME-STAT is reflective of Mayor Dinkins' efforts to "establish an expanded police presence to manage quality-of-life issues" and develop "tighter links between the city government, police headquarters, local precincts, and discrete neighborhood areas so as to maximize the NYPD's ability to manage 'problem epidemiologies.'"[34] 'Problem epidemiologies are disruptions to quality-of-life and signs of social disorder, a category that evolves over time depending on what the majority of the public finds objectionable (influenced by media and government messaging). The rapid deployment of resources to people 'in need of services' is possible, allegedly due to the consolidation of information across agencies.

HOME-STAT is one of many Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) in the U.S. HMIS refers to information databases that collect information on housing-deprived people in an effort to understand homelessness and how to manage it. On the individual level, it is used to compile information on people who come into contact with the State through different

[30] City of New York, "Mayor de Blasio Announces Home-Stat At ABNY Breakfast."
[31] City of New York, "Mayor de Blasio Announces Home-Stat At ABNY Breakfast."
[32] City of New York, "Mayor de Blasio Announces Home-Stat At ABNY Breakfast."
[33] City of New York, "Mayor de Blasio Announces Home-Stat At ABNY Breakfast."
[34] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 136.

agencies in a shared database. This allows agencies and groups that interact with homeless people the ability to peer into that person's every encounter with the State. The massive amount of data collected helps agencies determine where to invest resources and is used to inform the work of social scientific research, such as this paper. However, the way that cities employ this data can be to the detriment of the populations they seek to quantify. Willse argues that homeless populations "become fertile sites for economic investment as they multiply opportunities for developing and extending government mechanisms."[35] HOME-STAT is an articulation of this. In order to manage what they say is a mentally ill, socially isolated population, NYC invested in homelessness by multiplying the number of staff and officers who respond. HOME-STAT professionalizes homeless outreach by implementing case management systems, mapping the presence of homelessness, and generating a body of knowledge on homeless populations in NYC. This knowledge is then used to enhance mechanisms of control by predicting patterns and determining surveillance, policing, or outreach efforts accordingly. This is reminiscent of COMPSTAT, a police database that provides "precinct-by-precinct daily crime counts, creating an all-encompassing eye surveilling city disorder and a new brain trust for assessing the management of it."[36] COMPSTAT was similarly created with the purpose of regulating social order, and both play the role of generating bodies of knowledge that inform future responses.

The Subway Diversion Program

In July 2019, the city established the Subway Diversion Program with the goal of diverting homeless individuals in violation of transit rules away from tickets and arrest by offering them services instead. In the press release announcing the project, Mayor de Blasio states: "Subjecting these individuals to criminal justice involvement for low level, non-violent offenses is not the answer and does not help anyone."[37] Despite the city's alleged goal to divert housing-deprived people from the criminal justice system, individuals in violation will still receive a summonses, but can have it cleared *if* they cooperate with the Bowery Residents' Committee. The process is as follows: the NYPD screens individuals for eligibility and offers the alternative to arrest. If accepted, the individual will be 'escorted' to an office where the BRC

[35] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 48.
[36] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 139.
[37] City of New York, "Supports, Not Summonses."

assesses housing, employment, medical, substance abuse and mental health histories. If the individual complies, the BRC will "work with them" to have the summons cleared.[38]

In the press release, NYC balances the rhetoric of offering services to housing-deprived people and maintaining public order. Homeless people are positioned as both helpless and in need of services, and disorderly and in need of policing. This contradiction is at the heart of the Subway Diversion Program. The mayor proclaims that minor quality of life offenses should not lead to incarceration, yet the criminalization of these offenses is codified in legislation from the city and the MTA. Rather than decriminalizing these behaviors, as could be expected after one concedes they are harmful, the city posed an ultimatum to housing-deprived people: risk arrest or comply with the BRC. The Subway diversion Program can be understood through Willse's model of the "tyranny of kindness," which he describes as the "coercive nature of paternalistic programs that demand submission to reform protocols in the name of the client's own good."[39] Individuals have no agency in deciding what is best for themselves in the face of this tyrannical kindness.

Although the plan is framed as an alternative to incarceration, it is more indicative of the "extension of the carceral state into the community."[40] Vitale and Jefferson explain how broken windows policing[41] imposes "new standards of public civility…through a gentle nudge or stern reminder, but if necessary (and more realistically) through arrest or other forms of coercion."[42] In the case of the Subway Diversion Project, homeless people are micromanaged through the surveillance and criminalization of their behaviors which forces them into contact with police. Lipsitz refers to these interactions of officers as ""tax[ing] the time of poor people, disrupting social networks and interrupting daily routines."[43] These are not brief interactions, however. Being arrested or coerced into the shelter system forces people into places that they do not want to go, and though it is coded as kindness, the outreach is no less forced than before.

[38] City of New York, "Supports, Not Summonses."
[39] Willse, *The Value of Homelessness*, 101-102.
[40] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 134.
[41] Broken windows policing "enforces a moral order on the poor, a new public ethos of law and order, through police practices targeting low-level offences and noncriminal disorderly conduct." (Vitale and Jefferson, 134).
[42] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 135.
[43] Lipsitz, "Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row," 102.

The announcement of the Subway Diversion Project reveals the symbiotic relationship between the Bowery Residents' Committee and the police. While police remove surplus populations from the public view, the BRC organizes the population through assessments and 'recommended' treatment (which, in this case, is hardly a recommendation). Due to its fundamental role, the Bowery Residents' Committee requires an overview.

The Bowery Residents' Committee

The BRC was established in 1971 by "down and out alcoholics, sick, homeless, and without hope; most, but not all" who decided to "change for the better."[44] This resulted in a self-help day program for people struggling with alcoholism, originally called The Social Rehabilitation Club for Public Inebriates, later renamed the Bowery Residents' Committee. It is unclear how exactly the group was formed, how they received funding for their self-help and residential programs, and when and how it transitioned to a nonprofit. Additionally, the language used to describe their own founders mobilizes the pathological categories of homelessness that plague conversations around housing insecurity. The notions of individual change and self-help, "hand ups, not handouts," and "empowering [the homeless] to be a force of change in their own lives" align with neoliberal ideas of personal responsibility and individualism.[45] Alex Vitale explains that in the 1970s, the Bowery was NYC's skid row. He introduces the Manhattan Bowery Project, "created by the Vera Institute of Justice, whose aim was to reduce the number of street inebriates by offering them voluntary shelter as an alternative to repetitive short-term incarceration."[46] There are clear parallels between the Manhattan Bowery Project in 1967 and Subway Diversion Program of 2019, as illustrated by a 1971 report from the Vera Institute of Justice:

> Most of the admissions to the project are accepted through the operation of the Street Rescue Patrol Units, consisting of four plain-clothes patrolmen and two unmarked police station wagons, assisted by former alcoholics acting as Rescue Aids... seeking out derelicts most in need of attention. The derelict is first approached by the Rescue Aid who explains the benefits of the program and requests the man to accompany him to the infirmary. The police officer assists in getting the man into the police vehicle, transporting him to the project and maintaining related security and record keeping.[47]

[44] Bowery Residents' Committee. "Who We Are."
[45] Bowery Residents' Committee. "Who We Are."
[46] Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 74.
[47] Vera Institute of Justice, *Evaluation of the Manhattan Bowery Project*, 1.

This process is strikingly similar to that of the Subway Diversion Project. Both include patrols specifically for 'derelicts' of society who disrupt the public order, run by a collaboration of social welfare agencies, the police, and non-profit staff. They each involve a level of coercion by police which is mollified by the presence of social workers. They justify the removal of certain members of the public, not by labelling them as criminals, but as 'sick men' in need of treatment. This comparison reveals that the Subway Diversion Program is a reiteration of former initiatives to manage disorder.

The origins of the BRC are murky, as are its present-day operations. The BRC boasts its 30 programs aimed at addressing homelessness including: outreach to homeless individuals on public transit and city streets, assisting in recovery from substance abuse, incarceration, and mental health, as well as transitional and permanent housing. The nonprofit receives the bulk of its funding from government contracts, amounting to over $77 million of its total $91.6 million dollar revenue in 2019.[48] According to an audit by the New York State Comptroller, the BRC has received MTA funding since its first contract in 2010. In 2013, the MTA and DHS entered a "Memorandum of Understanding," stating that DHS would be in charge of providing outreach services in the MTA. In turn, the DHS contracted with the Bowery Residents' Committee to "reduce the homeless population residing in subways by two-thirds" from June 2014 to June 2017 and were given $18.5 million in funding.[49] The audit revealed that the BRC was not fulfilling its obligations under the contract, and relayed stories of people seeking services sleeping outside the organization's Amtrack office while staff were inside. It found that data reported by the BRC was inaccurate and misleading, and that the MTA had little oversight over how the BRC collected data and performed outreach. The DHS contract was also not fulfilled – in fact, the population of homeless living in subways rose 18 per cent from 2013 to 2019.[50] Despite the poor performance metrics, in 2017 the new contract was not put up for bid and was renewed but "not dependent on any performance metrics."[51] The audit's findings reveal not only that the BRC was neglecting the homeless populations they claim to serve, but also that the city exercised little oversight over the organization. It calls into question why the BRC was

[48] BKD CPAs & Advisors, *Bowery Residents' Committee, Inc. and Affiliated Organizations: Independent Auditor's Report and Combined Financial Statements.*
[49] Office of the New York State Comptroller, *Homeless Outreach Services in the New York City Subway System*, 6.
[50] Office of the New York State Comptroller*, Homeless Outreach Services in the New York City Subway System*, 2.
[51] Iverac, "Homeless Outreach Provider Acquired Multi- Million-Dollar Contract Without Bidding."

continually awarded contracts from DHS without going up for bid. The history of BRC reveals its condescending view of the people they serve and draws attention to a time when homeless management was closely tied to connecting alcoholics with medical services in an effort to remove them from the street. The connections between quality-of-life policing and the rise of non-profits in population management during the 1960s and 70s warrants further investigation.

Consolidating state power: the Joint Crisis Coordination Center

In late August, the city introduced "enhancements" to their HOME-STAT outreach to "encourage more unsheltered New Yorkers to accept services and transition out of the subways."[52] This included the establishment of an interagency command center dubbed the Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCCC), which strengthened connections between the NYPD and DHS, as well as collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene and Health + Hospitals. The command center would target "entrenched" homelessness: individuals who have been engaged by outreach teams 50+ times over the course of a year.[53] Other enhancements announced in the press release include expanding the Subway Diversion Project to all five boroughs, coordinating joint outreach between the NYPD and outreach teams, and introducing "system-wide live CCTV feed for Eye-in-the-sky rapid deployment outreach."[54]

The establishment of the JCCC is representative of the consolidation of state power, or the bringing together of capacities of different agencies under a joint surveillance and policing unit. This constitutes a "super police agency" that facilitates not only responses to people seeking refuge in public transit, but also expands the ability of law enforcement and other state agencies to control 'disorderly' people and behaviors in tandem.[55] It is important to remember that 'disorder' is a shifting social/economic category that can be waged against any group the state finds undesirable. Live system-wide surveillance acts similarly, as they both strengthen the power of the state to control disorder (and in this case, curb fare evasion and sleeping on trains). In writing about command-and-control policing in NYC, Vitale and Jefferson explain how "surveillance infrastructure has become increasingly dispersed throughout public space, while its

[52] City of New York. "Platform to Placement."
[53] City of New York. "Platform to Placement."
[54] City of New York. "Platform to Placement."
[55] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 137.

command system has become increasingly centralized and insulated from public oversight."[56] The expansion of CCTV footage can be seen as the expansion of the carceral state into the community, where the technologies and control of incarceration becomes a daily part of life.

The MTA Task Force on Homelessness

In October 2019, the MTA released an obscure report titled "Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness in the NYC Subway System." The task force was comprised of the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA), the NYS Office of Mental Health, the Department of Health, and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. It is unsigned and nine pages long (eight, excluding the title page), and takes a less empathetic tone than the city's messaging. The report explains that NYC is "legally obligated to house all individuals who are experiencing homelessness and request shelter," and stresses that the growing number of homeless individuals "inappropriately seeking shelter" on the subways "leads to panhandling and sanitary issues."[57] They refer to housing deprived people seeking refuge in the MTA system as "inappropriate" eleven times throughout the brief report, and maintain that the "MTA's priority is and must remain the safety, security, and comfort of riders, and the efficient operation of the system."[58] The report offers five recommendations: 1) NYS Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA) will continue to provide "enhanced homeless outreach" and require DHS to enhance its existing services; 2) MTA will expand its force by 50 percent; 3) MTA will publicize its Rules of Conduct "to enhance the rider experience for all customers;" 4) MTA will coordinate with the state OTDA, NYPD Transit Bureau, MTA police, DHS, contracted outreach providers, and others; and 5) the MTA Office of Inspector General should provide oversight.[59] The MTA webpage on their "Homelessness Outreach Initiative" offers four sentences of explanation, positioning the report as "a 5-point plan to reduce homelessness through coordinated emergency outreach to provide homeless services, and enforcement of Transit Rules of Conduct."[60] Local reporting reveals that the task force was convened by Governor Andrew Cuomo in July to address the growing population of people seeking shelter on trains, giving them a deadline of 30

[56] Vitale and Jefferson, "The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York," 142.
[57] NYS Metro Transit Authority. *Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness*, 2.
[58] NYS Metro Transit Authority. *Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness*, 2.
[59] NYS Metro Transit Authority. *Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness*, 3, 6.
[60] Metro Transit Authority, "MTA Homelessness Outreach Initiative."

days to produce a report with recommendations. Despite their deadline of late August, the report was not released until early October and was astonishingly brief. [61]

The report and recommendations raise a variety of concerns. First, the persistent use of the word "inappropriate" to describe survival behaviors of people deprived of housing orients them as outside of what is socially accepted. Interestingly, the report does not simply lean into the illegality of these actions, likely because clarifying them as 'illegal' raises structural critiques of the criminal justice system whereas 'inappropriate' is socially determined. The focus on panhandling/sanitary issues, as well as centering the 'safety, security, and comfort of riders,' definitively positions people seeking shelter in subways as outside of the general public and implies that they are inherently threatening to public health and safety. The presence of 'riders' and homeless people are apparently incompatible, as one must be removed to procure the business of another. Lumping fare evasion into the report on homelessness compounds the two issues under the auspice of quality-of-life offenses, which are framed as harmful to the city and other riders despite the lack of violence and physical harm stemming from these offenses.

On December 18th, the MTA voted in favor of a $17 billion dollar budget for 2020 and approved the hiring of 500 new MTA police with an estimated cost of $249 million over the next 4 years. This expanded the MTA police force by 63 percent from 783 officers to 1,283 in addition to the 2,500 NYPD officers patrolling subways.[62] Reporter Vincent Barone notes that this came at a time when major felonies were trending down 3.7 percent.[63] As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, these policies coincided with when MTA system was the focus of and location for many protests around police brutality, surveillance, and free public transit. The addition of new officers fueled the flames of social unrest, but would also counteract future mobilizations. The decision to invest in new officers also shows the priorities of NYS – positioning public order and adherence to regulations as more important than fast, quality, and affordable train service.

The Journey Home

[61] Nissen, "MTA 'Task Force' on Homelessness Releases Report That Is One Month Late and 9 Pages Long."
[62] Barone, "MTA board approves hiring 500 new police officers amid controversy."
[63] Barone, "MTA board approves hiring 500 new police officers amid controversy."

In many ways, *The Journey Home* is the cumulation of the city's outreach efforts throughout 2019 into a dynamic 32-page report. Its design is appealing, easy to read and follow, and complemented by graphs and tables relaying data. This is in stark contrast to the MTA Task Force's report, which was short, simply designed, and not widely publicized. The rhetoric of *The Journey Home* also departs from that of the MTA report, and instead takes a seemingly softer, more empathetic approach. The plan argues that it is our "moral imperative" to help "every single" unsheltered person, framing it as a *moral challenge* rather than an *legal obligation*.[64] In order to "end street homelessness as we know it," the plan highlights the following actions: 1) increase the number of Safe Haven beds by 1,000; 2) create 1,000 low-barrier apartments in collaboration with housing and social service sectors; 3) provide street-based medical and behavioral healthcare; 4) utilize the Street Homelessness Joint Command Center to provide rapid outreach; 5) use "state-of-the-art outreach technology" to connect individuals with adequate services; and 6) "expand diversion and outreach in our subway system."[65]

Throughout the document, the city presents itself as the shining examples that cities across the U.S. turn to as a model, touting low numbers of street homelessness in relation to other cities. It also introduces various policies pushed for by housing advocates and sandwiches them between the increased control of homeless populations. While the construction of new low-barrier apartments had not yet begun, the rollout of new surveillance and policing techniques was very much underway. In some ways, it seems that this report was a way to legitimize the city's increasingly authoritarian approach to homeless management by packing the punch with more palatable policy ideas.

Conclusion

The solution to housing insecurity seems simple – invest in housing for those who do not have it. However, it appears that investment in homelessness goes to everything but: temporary shelters, databases and surveillance dedicated to monitoring housing-deprived people, outreach groups that 'encourage' the homeless to 'come inside.' The city frames homelessness as an issue of individuals who are resistant to services that are meant to help them. Their ultimate solution is to bring unsheltered people "inside" – with little elaboration on what "inside" really means. 2019

[64] City of New York, *The Journey Home,* 1, 4.
[65] City of New York, *The Journey Home*, 5.

New York City shows us how programs to 'help the homeless' are, in reality, investments to expand the reach of government surveillance and control. Thus, eliminating housing insecurity would end the ability to use the category of "homeless" as a proxy for 'disorder.' It would also harm the industry fortified around housing insecurity – meaning less massive government contracts to non-profits providing homeless services, fewer donations to these organizations, and reduced investment in tracking technologies that position housing-deprived people as objects of knowledge and objects of governance. Without the scapegoat of homelessness, law enforcement would need to erect a new social pathology to target, and non-profits would need to entirely change their mission or disband altogether.

The other primary objective of this paper is to illustrate how state agencies and private non-profits work in tandem to organize homelessness. Social service agencies construct the messaging and response to homelessness, dictating who receives government contracts, how institutions should interact with housing-deprived people, and codes management as benevolent aid. Law enforcement cleanses public spaces of disorder to make room for the 'safety and security' of the socially disciplined, as well as the appeal for consumers across the city. The Bowery Residents' Committee presents as an altruistic organization fighting for the common good, but closer analysis reveals that their rhetoric towards the homeless is patronizing and collaboration with law enforcement is ultimately harmful to the communities they serve. This collaboration of state power, with the gentle yet coercive touch of the Bowery Residents' Committee, comes down on the city's homeless population in the form of surveillance, strict regulation and policing, and stripping away the agency to choose how to survive.

Future research

The world has radically changed since 2019, and in some ways the way homelessness is managed has changed with it. Analysis of 2020 and 2021 with a future-oriented approach would reveal avenues for change and advocacy. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic struck, exacerbating economic inequality and the failures of the healthcare system. The MTA also shut down subway service from 1am to 5am to clean subways, but advocates argued it was a way to remove homeless people from public transit and force them into shelters overnight. The NYPD Homeless outreach Unit was disbanded and the Subway Diversion Program was eliminated in the midst of

mass protests against police brutality.[66] Deeper analysis will help understand why this was the case during the 2020 uprisings but not the protests of 2019 around policing on transit. In 2021 Eric Adams, a former NYPD officer, was elected to be the next mayor of NYC. His politics are definitively pro-business and in support of law enforcement, which raises concerns over the privatization of public services, increased surveillance and force by officers, and "cleaning up" people and behaviors that are undesirable for business.

Conversely, a historical context of managing homelessness and policing disorder on public transit will draw more parallels and show how social attitudes are created and change, how policy, political messaging, and media shape the way New Yorkers view each other, how social pathologies are created, managed, and spoken about over time. Looking into the changes of homeless-oriented policies and policing under different mayoral administration will offer insight into how political processes are either changed or maintained. For example, looking into the transition from Bloomberg's administration to de Blasio would likely reveal the motivations for the creation of the HOME-STAT database. Additionally, looking into advocacy groups on the grassroots and non-profit levels show other models of fighting housing insecurity, supporting people deprived of basic shelter and security, and centering their calls to action. Further exploration into non-profits to help the homeless, alongside study of the 'non-profit industrial complex,' shows how non-profits can be immensely helpful but also complicit in the outsourcing of basic public services. Grassroots organizing is more difficult to come across, likely because my research was done primarily online rather than interviewing homeless folks. Lastly, investigations into national and international responses to homelessness will illuminate alternatives to the way we manage homelessness in NYC.

[66] Iverac, "NYPD Scales Back 'Outreach' To Homeless In Subway System."

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