

# The Academy of Political Science

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**Citizens Without Shelter: Homelessness, Democracy, and Political Exclusion** by Leonard C. Feldman. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004. 224 pp. \$35.00.

In response to the marked increase in homelessness that has occurred over the last two decades, many municipalities across the United States have attempted to deal with the issue in a two-fold manner. First, city and state governments have created a shelter system to offer a place for homeless people to dwell. After the shelters are in place, cities can implement order maintenance regulations, such as sleeping bans, which criminalize the activities of homeless citizens who choose to remain on the street. When these regulations are challenged, governments respond by pointing out that homeless citizens have other dwelling options, and that their activities threaten the safety and well-being of housed citizens.

*Citizens Without Shelter* traces the development of homelessness policy by analyzing these local regulations and their judicial challenges. Leonard Feldman addresses this development by arguing that cities and the courts are now criminalizing the very activities that homeless citizens must carry out in order to live. He also explores the changing definitions of “the public sphere,” “citizenship,” and “home” in political philosophy, and how the interaction among these definitions has impacted the evolution of homelessness regulations.

The author advances a theoretical idea that is not often expressed in the day-to-day management of homelessness—the right of the homeless citizen to dwell and exist in public. He argues that fighting for the recognition of the rights of homeless citizens shifts the issue of homelessness from the public banning of life-sustaining activities to “the register of citizenship, justice/injustice, and democratic politics” (p. 109). Homeless people are still citizens, and as such, have the right to exist, to not be persecuted for that existence, and to be legally recognized as citizens.

This legal recognition is a point of contention among homeless advocates. Feldman notes that “legal recognition of, and city support for, homeless persons and homeless encampments is seen as existing in opposition to the therapeutic interventions by social service agencies” (p. 83). These social service agencies provide shelters that “isolate people and deny them privacy, reinforce cultural stigmas, and enforce petty humiliations” (p. 109). He contends that the state’s desire to reprogram and assimilate homeless people into society only reinforces the implication that homelessness means political and cultural exclusion.

Having worked in the shelter system for many years, I can agree with Feldman’s call for the development of more housing options for low-income citizens. The destruction of low- and moderate-rent accommodation in urban areas has contributed greatly to the increase in homelessness. However, lack of housing is not the only reason that people become homeless, and shelters today often address these other reasons. The author’s negative view of shelters does not reflect the current state of the shelter system. Few shelters these days are “warehouse-like” (p. 26), especially those designed for families. They provide privacy

and eliminate the humiliation of earlier congregate shelters. The voluntary programs on job training, life skills, and literacy that are offered in these shelters help residents overcome cultural stigmas and reduce isolation through interaction with other residents. Although these residents should have the right to exist in a democratic society with the various habits or behaviors with which they enter the shelter system, one additional consideration remains. Many adult residents are also parents, responsible for the care and well-being of one or more children. These children also have rights, including the right to a safe and secure environment. Few would argue that living on the street provides such an environment.

RALPH DA COSTA NUNEZ  
*Homes for the Homeless, Inc., New York*

**Why Deliberative Democracy?** by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson.  
*Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004. 256 pp. Cloth, \$55.00; paper, \$16.95.*

One of the major recent developments in democratic theory has been an increasing emphasis upon deliberation amongst citizens as a way of both increasing participation in democratic governance and enhancing the justness of public policies. Prominent among these “deliberative democrats” are Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, whose book, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), has been influential in the ongoing debate as to the most appropriate way to realize an ideal of a “deliberative democracy.” The current volume draws together a series of writings on this topic by Gutmann and Thompson.

The first chapter, “What Deliberative Democracy Means,” is a clear and accessible introduction to the core principles of their conception of deliberative democracy. For the authors, deliberative democracy is essentially about justification, specifically, the justifications that representatives give for laws to both other representatives and their constituents, and the justifications that citizens give both to each other and to their representatives for how they vote and for their support of various laws and policies. Justification is a process of “reason-giving,” but not all reasons will serve as acceptable reasons for citizens of a democracy; for example, policies justified by racist beliefs would clearly be unacceptable to many. Striving to give reasons that all citizens can accept makes such reasons moral reasons and both satisfies a principle of reciprocity and supports the value of mutual respect. As the authors stress, the mutual acceptability of reasons must be determined through actual public deliberations. It is this feature that makes their theory deliberative.

In subsequent chapters, the authors tackle a number of important issues related to their principles of justification and reciprocity. They claim that a policy is not necessarily justified and does not necessarily satisfy a principle of reci-