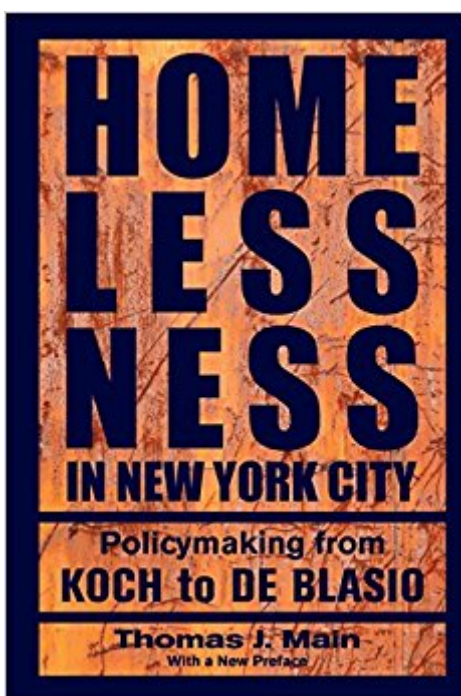


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Homelessness In New York City: Policymaking From Koch To De Blasio



Synopsis

The story of New York City's struggle to provide shelter for its homeless population—Can American cities respond effectively to pressing social problems? Or, as many scholars have claimed, are urban politics so mired in stasis, gridlock and bureaucratic paralysis that dramatic policy change is impossible?—*Homelessness in New York City* tells the remarkable story of how America's largest city has struggled for more than thirty years to meet the crisis of modern homelessness through the landmark development, since the initiation of the *Callahan v Carey* litigation in 1979, of a municipal shelter system based on a court-enforced right to shelter. New York City now shelters more than 50,000 otherwise homeless people at an annual cost of more than \$1 billion in the largest and most complex shelter system in the world. Establishing the right to shelter was a dramatic break with long established practice. Developing and managing the shelter system required the city to repeatedly overcome daunting challenges, from dealing with mentally ill street dwellers to confronting community opposition to shelter placement. In the course of these efforts many classic dilemmas in social policy and public administration arose. Does adequate provision for the poor create perverse incentives? Can courts manage recalcitrant bureaucracies? Is poverty rooted in economic structures or personal behavior? The tale of how five mayors—Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani, Bloomberg and de Blasio—have wrestled with these problems is one of caution and hope: the task is difficult and success is never unqualified, but positive change is possible. *Homelessness in New York City* tells the remarkable story of what happened—“for good and sometimes less good”—when New York established the right to shelter.

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Customer Reviews

"Thomas Main has produced a well documented and comprehensive analysis of five mayors' efforts over more than thirty years to respond to the growing challenge of urban homelessness. Readers interested in issues of big cities and the policy process that drives politicians actions will learn much from this book." -Charles Brecher, New York University

"Main's account of key developments in homelessness policy in New York City is meticulously researched, highly detailed, and worthy of praise. The book makes extensive and effective use of interviews that the author conducted with a wide range of policy actors past and present . . . a compelling history of what has been done to date and how we got where we are." -European Journal of Homelessness

"This finely crafted study invites us to explore a double paradox: first, that policies addressing homelessness in New York City are legally and morally necessary, but politically and substantively difficult to impossible; and second, that relatively conservative mayoral administrations developed the nation's largest and best funded set of programs for weak, vulnerable, and marginal populations. It is a probing investigation of vexing policy challenges." -John Mollenkopf, Distinguished Professor, City University of New York

"A must-read for anyone seeking to understand the challenges of homeless policy in urban America." -Choice

"Professor Main narrates a fascinating history of one of New York City's greatest social struggles of the last third of a century. It is compelling reading, filled with battles fought and lessons learned in moving a government and a society to a better place." -Robert Hayes, Founder, National and New York Coalitions for the Homeless and MacArthur Foundation Fellow

"Homelessness in New York City is one of the big stories of the last several decades as inequality returns to the U.S. Lots of people know the story, but usually only small pieces of it. Some people know the legal battles, and others know the funding streams; some scholars follow the aggregate numbers and others study particular interventions; many writers have told stories of individual trials and triumphs, and homeless people, too, have their own important versions of what happened to them. But we have all been handicapped because we could not understand fully how our pieces fit together into a larger picture; the context has always been a little foggy. No longer. Main has given us a definitive history of modern homelessness in New York City. This is the book you should start with to understand how we got where we are." -Brendan O'Flaherty, Columbia University

"[Main's] attention to detail and balanced judgment makes this a valuable history of social-policy research." -City Journal

"Government has wrestled with homelessness for decades, especially in New York. Thomas Main's book is the definitive account of that struggle. It is deeply

researched, fluently written, and absolutely absorbing. It is also even-handed. Main questions the nostrums for social problems peddled by left and right, but he also rejects the view that government must inevitably fail. Rather, progress is possibleâ "but not easy ones. As Max Weber said, politics is 'the strong and slow boring of hard boards.'" -Lawrence M. Mead, author of *The New Politics of Poverty* "Clear, well-written, and well-researched. If you are going to debate homelessness in New York, this is the neoconservative analysis with which you should argue." -Joel Blau, Stony Brook University

Thomas J. Main is Professor at the School of Public Affairs, Baruch College, City University of New York.

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