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### Listening to the Homeless

To begin a search for songs about homelessness I turned to the only search engine that is also a verb and, I Googled it. Just as I suspected Google had millions of hits for me to listen to and scroll through. I decided not to focus on a time period or genera, but rather songs that I believed fit together best. Things that I kept in mind while listening to the songs included: the perspective that the song was written in, the tempo, word choice (e.g. Hobo, Bum, Homeless), and the overall message of the song. I had begun this exploration of song hoping to find that music is explaining the structural forces at play within the cycle of poverty and the growing homeless population though what I found was more emphasis on defining homelessness and how it affects different people on different levels.

Even Flow by Pearl Jam: Pearl Jam explores the idea that people pass by homeless people and don't acknowledge their existence. This song is written from an outside perspective and passersby are strangers and outsiders. The homeless are happy people to themselves, but still appear "insane" with his "dark grin" to the general public ("Even Flow" lyrics). It is worth noting that the song is upbeat, though the tone of the lead singer muddles the lyrics so that they are almost incomprehensible. The original song ends with the lead singer speaking "I died, I died & you just stood there. I died & you watched. I died & you said no. I'm dead." ("Even Flow"

lyrics"). This is a very powerful ending and I believe the overall message of this song is calling upon people to recognize their ignorance.

Another Day in Paradise by Phil Collins: Watching the music video for this song is moving. Phil Collins singing is laced with photos of the homeless, especially highlighting homeless children. There are also flashes of words describing the desperate need for more shelter for people in cities. The song itself is very slow and moving, and is told from an outside perspective of someone noticing a little girl calling to a man on the street and the man ignoring her. This is an example of how even children who are homeless are ignored on the streets. The lyrics have a reoccurring lyric of "oh think twice" which is a very powerful message when you link it with homeless children ("Another Day In Paradise" lyrics.)

Hobo's Lullaby by Arlo Guthrie: This is one of my favorite pieces for this project particularly because this is an example of Arlo Guthrie talking to a homeless person; he never mentions the gender of the person which adds to the unknown features of homelessness. It is also interesting that he always refers to them as a "hobo". This term was more popular at the time that this song was written in 1972. The song itself is very slow in tempo and presents a more positive message than most other songs. It makes promises of a better tomorrow, and even suggests that the better tomorrow may not be on earth. Arlo also ties in the police force to further explain to the public that "the police cause you trouble, they cause trouble everywhere" ("Hobo's Lullaby" lyrics). This is an interesting point because many other songs don't address structural issues although it can be argued, very successfully, that these issues are the root of homelessness.

Homeless by Charlie Wilson: A different view on homelessness is explored with this song selection because it is written as a love song. Wilson is letting his girlfriend know that if

she kicks him out of her home he will be homeless. This doesn't seem relevant at first glance though when you read the lyrics it becomes more obvious that he is hinting that homeless are bums, "Without my baby a bum is what I'd be" ("Homeless" lyrics). It is worth noting his use of the word bum instead of homeless because it holds a lot of influence. When he is describing his life as a homeless person he talks about sleeping on a box, eating garbage, holding signs saying he is homeless. This view is quite contrasting to the other songs so far, he is not portraying the homeless as victims but that being left by his girlfriend is would be devastating.

Homeless by Guy Clark: This is a slow tempo song with mostly spoken lyrics. It suggests "You'll do anything that you gotta do when you're homeless" ("Homeless" 2 lyrics), but also that homeless people don't have any concept of participating in society. Clark even says "Don't give 'em no money they just spend it on beer" ("Homeless" 2 lyrics), this view is almost completely contrasting from all the other songs chosen, though does provide some crucial insight to how some people view homelessness. The message here is that the homeless aren't people and don't need help from the general public. As much as I disagree with this portrayal, it is very important in understanding how homelessness gets ignored and is facilitated by ignorance.

Man on the corner by Genesis: There is such power in this song, the tempo is slow but as the lead singer is practically screaming the lyrics it sends chills down my spine. The song is written from an outside perspective and portrays the homeless as people who "see everything and nothing at all" and "nobody knows him, and nobody cares" ("Man on the Corner" lyrics). I really enjoy these lyrics because it calls upon people to recognize that these are real people and even though there is no mention of what made this man homeless, recognizing him in society is a crucial element of this song.

Living in New York City by Robin Thicke: Choosing this song was a product of Google searching "song about homelessness in cities". Listening to it for the first time, not much of substance surfaces as many of the lyrics are "I'm living in New York City" though it speaks volumes of the perceptions of New York City and homelessness. When you are not homeless, you are able to completely ignore the issue. Thicke introduces the idea that "everybody's livin', and everybody's winning"(Living in New York City" lyrics"). This up-tempo song is an example of how songs can completely ignore the homeless population. Thicke even talks about "I'm walking my bulldog baby, in the middle of Central Park" and doesn't mention the hundreds of homeless that he must have passed in order to do so.

Streets of London by Blackmore: The somber melody of this song brings to light the different homeless people she encounters throughout the day. It is sung from an outsider's perspective though the lead singer is asking the audience if they have seen these less fortunate people. She doesn't call them bums or homeless but rather describes them as a person which is a new perspective that is appreciated. The song suggests that these homeless are dirty and forgotten and calls the public to rethink their own misfortune and to explore the less fortunate surrounding them for a new perspective.

Nobody's Home by Avril Lavigne: This song is very passionate; Lavigne is almost yelling the lyrics about a girl who is homeless. The outside perspective gives hints that lead listeners to believing that Lavigne has experienced many of these feelings, and is portraying them at different levels throughout the song. "You've been rejected, and now you can't find what you left behind." This is a great example of a lyric that explains how rejection will often lead into a spiral of lost hope and allows the public to empathize with the young girl ("Nobody's Home"

lyrics"). The music video depicts a young girl bathing in a gas station bathroom which outlines her personal struggle and gives the public concrete examples of everyday life for these people.

Underwear goes inside the pants by Lazyboy: This is probably the most unconventional song of the few that I've selected and it is probably my favorite. It hits upon so many different social issues such as homelessness, obesity, legalization of marijuana, the medical industry, and terrorism to name a few. This is a rap song and the music video is a compilation of homeless people in LA singing the chorus. The last verse of the song is dedicated to homeless and provides a very realistic insight to how people feel towards the homeless population, "People love to judge homeless guys", "I was about to give it to him and then I thought he was going to use it on drugs or alcohol. And then I thought, that's what I'm going to use it on." ("Underwear Goes Inside the Pants" lyrics)

What I have found is that a majority of the songs that I had chosen were told from an outside perspective. I believe this is strongly due to the fact that many of the artists I have chosen haven't experienced homelessness in the ways that they were portraying. The tempo of the songs varied but this was a useful tool to determine what their overall messages were. Most songs don't use and sort of the word homeless though when they do, it is usually derogatory such as bum or even to an extent, hobo. The main goal for many songs in to personify the homeless in a way for the public to empathize, contrasting to this view are the songs that suggest the homeless are worthless and undeserving.

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