

Original Article:

***ADOMIZEN: DISCOURSES OF CIVIC ERASURE IN THE
HELP THE HOMELESS WALKATHON***

Edward Erikson
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Abstract

The discourse of Washington, D.C.'s monumental core and that of citizenship mark the remnant of a grand liberal narrative that upholds the continual integration of excluded populations (Smith, 1997; Barber, 2002; Bednar, 2006). If we look carefully, however, we find that these discourses are not wholly inclusive; rather, they are perpetually marred by exclusion. Homelessness has existed within the monumental core throughout its history, yet remains defined by its ontological exteriority. The following paper examines Fannie Mae's *Help the Homeless Walkathon* in order to explore the relationship between homelessness and citizenship. I dis-engage the Walkathon from a classic liberal narrative of incorporation and re-position it as an act of exclusion which bars homeless from full citizenship. More specifically, I engage in a semiotic analysis of a television advertisement created for the Walkathon in order to examine discourses of erasure that I suggest marks contemporary social policy. In the end, my analysis deposits a pressing imperative for a revaluation of citizenship as well as contemporary social policy.

Keywords: homelessness, Fannie Mae, walkathon, semiotics, erasure, social citizenship, adomizen

AUTHOR NOTE: Please address all correspondence to: Edward Erikson, Department of Political Science, The University of Massachusetts Amherst, 202 Thompson Hall 200 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003, USA. Or by Email: eerikson@polisci.umass.edu

Every attempt to rethink political space in the west must begin with a clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between...private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city.

(Giorgio Agamben)

INTRODUCTION

Washington D.C.'s monumental core¹ is a unique space in which discourses circulate like taxi cabs and hail individuals as U.S. citizens. The city itself contains within it a material ideological framework: the monuments, the museums, and the parks constitute a discourse that aims to inspire and instruct individuals as citizens.² Louis Althusser writes, "What is represented in ideology is...not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (Althusser, 1971, p. 165). The monumental core does not express the real relation between people or between people and the government, but rather an imaginary relationship between citizens and the State: a space in which each individual can imagine their communion with the nation as a whole (Anderson, 2006).

The discourse of the monumental core and that of citizenship mark the remnant of a grand liberal narrative in which the story of perpetual integration overshadows excluded populations (Smith, 1997; Barber, 2002; Bednar, 2006). If we look carefully, however, we find that these liberal discourses are never wholly inclusive; but rather, they are marred by exclusion. Homelessness has existed within the monumental core throughout its history, yet remains defined by its ontological exteriority: the homeless live in the silence behind, and linger in the spaces between. Their shadow presence appears to us in the alley dwellings that once filled the neighborhoods around the Capitol in the late 19th century (Gillette, 1995). Or in the contemporary emergency shelters like *Community for Creative Non-Violence* (CCNV) that sleeps thousands of people a night. While historically the homeless have been excluded from the National Mall through police and military force,³ contemporary events such as the Help the Homeless Walkathon indicate the incorporation of homelessness into this symbolic space of citizenship. The following paper, however, dis-engages the Walkathon from a classic liberal narrative of incorporation in order to emphasize exclusionary tendencies which persist and act to bar homeless from full citizenship. In examining the phenomenon of exclusion more closely, I engage in a semiotic analysis of a television advertisement created for the Walkathon. I suggest that the Walkathon advertisement points to a larger shift in contemporary social policy, from physical expulsion to discursive erasure. In the end, my analysis deposits a pressing imperative for a revaluation of citizenship as well as contemporary social policy.

Homelessness and Citizenship

Beginning in the 1980's, the crisis of homelessness led to an increase in scholarly engagement. Academics have typically focused on the root causes emphasizing either individual (Kozol, 1988; Hobbs, 1996) or institutional factors (Hoch & Slayton, 1989; Hilfker, 2002). A more contemporary approach suggests that homelessness is not a singular problem, but a complex network of material and individual problems embodied in a single term (Morse, 1992; Liebow, 1993; Jencks, 1994). Others scholars have examined the effectiveness of institutions designed to "manage" or "treat" homelessness such as the poorhouse (Katz, 1983; Wagner, 2005), the shelter (Liebow, 1993; Hoch & Slayton, 1989) federal agencies (Koch, 1987), and non-profit and faith-based organizations (Cooper, 1987).

While such research has greatly influenced contemporary social policy and comprehensive service models, Joanne Neale (1997) argues that current theories of homelessness do not adequately describe the condition of homelessness. She suggests that if we wish to create good policy, we must first have good theory. Neale takes up feminist arguments as well as postmodern and post-structural arguments in order to rethink concepts of housing policy, housing design, and homelessness (Neale, 1997). Similarly, April Veness argues that it is not enough to examine the individual or material conditions at the root of homelessness, but that the concept of home as distinct from housing or shelter also needs to re-evaluated (Veness, 1992, p. 464). While Veness and Neale open up a tension-bound relationship between home and homeless, Samira Kawash (1998) goes further suggesting the two constitute a dialectic identity. Kawash writes, "this 'war on homeless' must also be seen as a mechanism for constituting and securing a public, establishing the boundaries of inclusion, and producing an abject body against which the proper, public body of the citizen can stand" (Kawash, 1998, p. 325). Similarly, Don Mitchell (1995) argues that "the public" is a category constituted by private citizens, one which homeless people disrupt. As a result, the presence of homelessness alters the way in which public spaces are created, maintained and utilized (Mitchell, 1995). Following Kawash and Mitchell I suggest that the discourse of citizenship in the monumental core necessitates the exclusion of homelessness. While the *Help the Homeless Walkathon* appears to incorporate the homeless into this symbolic civic space, in the advertisements for *the Walkathon* and in *the Walk* itself, we encounter an event void of any vestige of homelessness.

Citizenship constitutes more than a legal or political right. Rather, it implicitly encompasses a whole series of social rights granted or withheld depending on a variety of circumstances and factors. T.H. Marshall (1964) divides citizenship into three categories: civil, political, and social. Civil citizenship, he describes, is the right to individual freedom, to certain 'inalienable rights'; political citizenship, the right to participate in politics, whether by voting or running for public office; and finally social citizenship,

“the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security...the right to share in the full social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall, 1964, p. 8). In America, the state largely relegates this last form of citizenship to the private sector (Mettler, 1998; Kessler-Harris, 2001; Hacker, 2002). Kessler-Harris writes, “When the federal government linked wage work to tangible, publically provided rewards, employment emerged as a boundary line demarcating different kinds of citizenship” (2001, p. 5). Michael Katz argues, “It is true that men and women do not lose formal citizenship because they lack work or do not pay taxes, but a definition of citizenship that rests on obligation and contribution marginalizes those who do not work at regular jobs and creates second class citizens” (2001, p. 344). Similarly, Judith Shklar (1991) describes two qualities of citizenship: the right to vote and the opportunity to earn. Thus, citizenship is not only an issue of agency, but it is also an issue of social standing (Shklar, 1991). While social citizenship develops through associational relationships and finds expression in small local communities, I suggest that the symbolic nature of the monumental core makes for an ideal location in which to examine the expression of this concept. Here we find the ideals of citizenship represented both in the monumental architecture as well as the civic activities that take place every day in the Mall. My analysis of homelessness suggests that homeless people are not simply partial or second class citizens; rather their exclusion from social citizenship makes them non-citizens. I adapt the neologism *adomizen*⁴ to suggest an inextricable link between citizenship and homeownership that arises in the discourse of the Mall yet has remained unarticulated. The term suggests that when one lacks a home, one also lacks citizenship. I do not use the term as a synonym for homeless, but rather as a theoretical concept that distinguishes citizenship from an inclusive, rights-bearing, liberal concept to one fundamentally premised on exclusion.

Scholars such as Todd Depastino (2003) and Leonard Feldman (2004) speak directly to the relationship between homelessness and citizenship. In *Citizen Hobo* Depastino traces the cultural history of homelessness from the late 19th century to the present focusing on broad patterns of civic exclusion. In *Citizens Without Shelter*, Leonard Feldman examines a series of punitive policy such as anti-panhandling laws or public sleeping bans. He argues that such policies relegate the homeless to a criminal status (Feldman, 2004). Building upon Depastino’s and Feldman’s respective works, the following paper examine the discursive erasure of homelessness in Washington D.C. in order to identify illiberal trends running through the subtext of American social policy.

METHOD

Fannie Mae’s annual Help the Homeless Walkathon holds a privileged place in homeless policy in both local and national contexts. While the event started in

Washington, D.C. over twenty years ago, they now hold similar fundraisers in major cities across the nation. Homeless people depend upon a diverse array of social service agencies and resource centers in order to receive housing, employment services, counseling or advocacy etc. In Washington, D.C. alone, there are over 180 such organizations. Fannie Mae's annual Help the Homeless Walkathon is the one event in which the majority of these D.C. organizations come together in concert. Thus, the Walkathon is an ideal event in which to examine narratives of homelessness within the National Mall.

In order to approach the discourse of homelessness, the following paper examines the promotional material produced and distributed for the 20th Annual *Help the Homeless Walkathon*. Specifically, I analyze a thirty second television advertisement produced by Fannie Mae that aired in the weeks leading up to the event on November 17, 2007, during local and national network news broadcasts in the D.C. Metro area. While Fannie Mae distributes posters and brochures, this was the only television ad produced for the event. My analysis and conclusions are further supported by informal ethnographic observations of the planning and execution of the Walkathon as well as additional promotional material such as brochures.⁵ I limit my analysis to a single advertisement for two reasons: First, the aim of the analysis is to help render visible that which has been erased, such a task necessitates an in-depth interpretive engagement opposed to a quantitative analysis. Second, I suggest that this ad represents a paradigmatic example of contemporary homeless discourse. During preliminary research I found that an examination of additional promotional material does not greatly add to or subtract from my analysis and thus a thorough overview of these materials is not present in this paper.

To analyze the thirty second advertisement I adapt a series of techniques from the field of semiotics. Building from Ferdinand de Saussure theory of structural linguistics which takes language to be a logical system of signs operating within a field of difference (Saussure, 1986), semiotics extends its scope of analysis beyond the linguistic sign to "comprise all forms of formation and exchange of meaning on the basis of phenomena which have been coded as signs" (Johansen and Larsen, 2002, p. 3). Semiotics can be deployed to read film, photographs, or even public spaces as a system of signs that communicate meaning through relations of difference. I break the ad down into its constituent parts or 'signs' such as characters, setting, shots, script, etc. Next I examine how these elements are constituted in relation to one another and how they shape the messages conveyed in the advertisement. Specifically, I examine the denotative and connotative meanings, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic arrangements, and finally, the mode of address. These semiotic techniques provide a unique way to analyze the messages produced by both the medium and the content. Taken together, they open up a series of questions that I use as a general guide when analyzing promotional materials. I ask: "who is the preferred reader/audience?" "What is the text's relationship to other texts?" "What are the inferred or applied meanings?" "What is the relationship between

the parts that compose the text to the whole (what is included, what is excluded)?” And more specifically: “How is this relationship between homelessness and citizenship articulated in the advertisement?” “In what ways are the homeless excluded from the Walkathon?”

Social scientists often contend that semiotics is subjective; preferring instead, quantitative modes of textual analysis such content analysis. The two forms of analysis, however, are not necessarily exclusive. Rather, they can complement each other (Chandler, 2002). While the former suggests overarching trends that can be quantified, the latter suggests the way in which a text communicates. Given the nature of homelessness, I suggest quantitative analysis alone is particularly insufficient because the transient, impermanent, invisible nature of the population resists counting.⁶ The commercial itself exemplifies this problem; here, there are literally no homeless to count. In order to begin to understand the problem, one requires an alternative entry point.

The adoption of semiotics to the study of social phenomenon is instructive for the social sciences as a whole. Since their inception the social sciences have longed to mimic the natural sciences, ultimately leading to a field of study driven by abstract modeling and statistical analysis (Granato & Scioli, 2004). The heavy emphasis on modeling limits the topics we study and the questions we ask. They narrow our horizon, leaving us blind to a variety of problems as well as explanations (Pierson, 2007). The turn to semiotics suggests that social science can benefit equally from imitating the study of literature and philosophy as much as physics and economics. Social phenomenon everywhere is mediated through various texts, semiotics helps to render visible the multiplicity of meanings made possible by these texts and the different ways they communicates meaning (Eco, 1979).

ADVERTISING CITIZENSHIP: DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MESSAGES

The advertising image is, as Roland Barthes notes, “undoubtedly intentional” (1977, p. 33). Advertisements aim to sell or to promote and Fannie Mae’s advertisement is no different. Nevertheless, the commercial conveys multiple messages beyond this intended meaning. As Barthes writes, “[A]ll these ‘imitative’ arts comprise two messages: a denoted message, which is the analogon itself, and a connoted message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it” (1977, p. 6). The denotative meaning can be read as Fannie Mae’s intended or direct communicated message, while the connotative meaning suggests the possibilities of viewers’ responses to the commercial within different viewing contexts.

Denotative Messages

The commercial begins with a young, college-aged man dressed in a blue polo walking a dog in front of a metro station. The *mise-en-scene* is framed by a green letterbox. In the lower right hand corner a call to action reads “www.helpthehomelessdc.org.” The commercial then cuts to a mother and child on a park bench, then to a businessman in a suit and tie, and then to a middle-aged married couple; all within the green letterbox. Each character talks directly to the camera, hinting at why the Walkathon appeals to them, but never mentioning it by name. For example, the middle-aged couple says, “We just want to make more of a difference.” Midway through the commercial a dark turquoise intertitle is superimposed on an image of mother and child as they walk towards the camera. A voiceover narration reiterates the text that is simultaneously imprinted across the screen and invites the viewer to join in the *Help the Homeless Walkathon*. The second half of the commercial consists of four additional shots that revisit each of the four characters in reverse order: the couple, the businessman, the mother and child, and lastly, the student. This time, it is only the couple that speaks, and then a voiceover narration comes up over the last three characters.

The denotative message of the advertisement is twofold: First, to promote the Walkathon; and second, to promote Fannie Mae. While the commercial begins with a series of vague scripted statements, the denotative message becomes anchored in the text of the intertitle. Barthes writes, “The text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others” (1977, p. 9). The text immediately shapes the viewers’ experiences: it functions as an adhesive that binds together all of the scenes and images up to this point as well as the images to follow. Both denotative messages are encapsulated in a single line: “Join honorary chair...for the Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Walkathon.” The first message tells the viewer to participate in the Walkathon; the second tells the viewer that Fannie Mae helps homeless people. The commercial promotes the walk, while simultaneously promoting Fannie Mae. Furthermore, the syntagmatic arrangement of the text on the screen suggests that one meaning is privileged over the other. When the text rolls across the intertitle, three statements are triangulated on the screen. Centered on the top reads “Honorary Chair Michael McDonald;” the lower left hand side, reads “Fannie Mae” and directly below, in larger letters, “Foundation.” On the lower right hand side, there is a logo for the Walkathon - a silhouette of a family within the shape of a two dimensional house, and the phrase, “Help the Homeless,” printed in a semi-circle around the roof. Beneath the logo, in larger text, is a tagline that reads “20 years of commitment.” The viewer reads the text top down, from left to right, prioritizing the text as such: the text on the left hand side is privileged over the text on the right. Furthermore, the way the text is situated on the screen produces the accidental reading, “Fannie Mae Foundations 20 years of commitment.” While the advertisement is created under the auspices of the Walkathon,

the arrangement of the text locates Fannie Mae as the primary subject of the message, not the walk.⁷

If the primary intention of the commercial is to publicize Fannie Mae, to whom is the company targeting their message? What is the mode of address? Fannie Mae, of course, is one of the nation's leading providers of home mortgages; the logical target for its' commercials are homeowners and potential homeowners. Consequently, the two denotative messages immediately enter into tension with each other. In one sense the commercial locates itself within the discourse of homelessness, yet, simultaneously excludes the homeless in structuring a message that specifically addresses homeowners and potential owners. The commercial produces a discourse of homelessness that excludes the homeless. The tension between the two denotative messages increases when one considers the different connotative messages made possible by the advertisement.

Connotative Messages

While the denotative messages suggest the scripted intention of the advertisement, there remains a series of connotative messages lingering beneath the surface. The producer does not simply dictate a message which the consumer receives. Rather, each informs the other. As Barthes writes, “[t]he more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably of images), the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning” (1977, p. 40). Barthes suggests that the viewer first experiences connotative messages not the denotative messages. Connotative messages, however, become concealed by the “obviousness” of the denotative meaning. What is it that the denotative ad consciously or unconsciously conceals from the viewer?

The commercial begins, as noted above, with four shots of four different people. Each person communicates a unique message, which, when taken together, forms a particular image in the viewers mind. While these messages are later subordinated by the denotative message, they continue to linger, and work to create a positive image of Fannie Mae as a site of corporate responsibility and ‘corporate citizenship.’ In addition, these images produce an ideal viewer that glorifies the homeowner elevating them to the status of social citizen – in this way, the commercial links social citizenship to homeownership. Michael Joyce writes, good citizenship is marked by “active participation in that vast realm of human affairs known as civil society” (1995, p.4). Citizenship extends beyond the act of voting to all aspects of social life: from working to volunteering; from school to church; from the family to the neighborhood; etc. In introducing the Walkathon, Fannie Mae invites people to take up these associational actives. These activities, however, are premised on exclusion. Institutions such as the service-based voluntary organizations, churches, etc., are based on the server/served binary which place the homeless within a hierarchical system that privileges the former

over the latter (Liebow, 1993). Other associational relationships, such as family, school, and neighborhood, are premised to some extent on domestic life and ultimately the home. In both situations, the homeless become excluded from social citizenship.

The commercial opens with a long shot of a young man spreading out his arms, “This is my community,” he says. Looking to his right, the camera cuts to a mid-shot and the man looks straight into the lens, locking eyes with the viewer, “I want to help take care of it.” There are at least two presuppositions that accompany this statement: 1) the community needs to be taken care of and 2) there are a particular group of people who are best suited to take care of it. The problem at hand, however, remains amorphous – the immediate message appeals, not directed to a niche population, but to the community as a “whole” (i.e. social citizens). The next scene is a mid-shot of a woman sitting on a bench, “I want to teach my kids, to help others,” She says. As she speaks, her son stands behind her, disinterestedly fidgeting with the back of a park bench. The syntagmatic arrangement of the *mise-en-scene* speaks to the mother’s dilemma: her son does not sit with her on the bench as she addresses the viewer; rather he stands behind the bench and thus outside of the discourse of social citizenship. The mother bears the responsibility to draw him into the discourse, to “teach” him to help others; to point out how he is an integral part of a larger community. This scene suggests that social citizenship is not a natural or common identity: The state does not grant it at birth like the status of legal or political citizenship; but rather, it constitutes an identity that must be acquired, that must be learned, and consequently, must be taught. The third scene is a low-angle mid-shot of a businessman, “I wish I could say I volunteered more.” He says, looking off to the right, and then shrugging his shoulders. The shot positions the spectator in a way that forces them to look up at the businessman. The camera angle suggests, perhaps literally, that this man should be looked up to in the community. The man’s guilty intonation and impotent body language, however, suggests that he knows his responsibility to the community, but has not lived up to that expectation.

The issue at hand in each of these messages is not homelessness but the act of helping, of teaching, of volunteering – acts which compose the associational relationships that are essential to social citizenship (Eberly, 1995). Each scene speaks to an obligation and each character takes up this obligation in a different way. While the young man expresses enthusiasm, the businessman demonstrates reluctance or guilt. A fundamental lack presents itself within each statement: the characters want to, or feel obliged to help, but they do not act upon that desire in the scenes. Fannie Mae presents the Walkathon not as a means to help homeless people, but rather, as a means for people to partake in associational activities such as volunteerism and philanthropy. Perhaps more importantly, Fannie Mae provides a venue in which participants can be seen engaging in these activities. The Walkathon itself supports this conclusion.

On the morning of November 17th, the National Mall filled with walkers clad in the white long sleeve “help the homeless” t-shirts and touting signs branded with the

name or logo of different non-profit organizations. A large stage stood parallel to the grand Capitol. Announcers bantered back and forth on the PA. When the walk began, the crowd of people slowly coalesced into a mob and shuffled towards the starting line. The announcers welcomed the beneficiary organizations – listing off the names to the sound of muffled yelps and cheers from the crowd. As the event progressed, it became increasingly clear that there was something missing from the walk: the homeless themselves were absent. Through this engagement, participants enter the public sphere and assert their identity as social citizens simultaneously the homeless become relegated to the status of *adomizen*.

While the image of social citizenship occupies the focus of the commercial, it does so by continually marginalizing homelessness, the very crisis that Fannie Mae sets out to “end.” Consequently, we find *adomizen* and the social citizen intimately bound together in a dialectical identity: the individual can only “live the life of a civilized being according to the standards in the society” (Marshall, 1964, p. 8) if he/she can simultaneously point their finger at an individual who lives below these standards. *Adomizen* produces the possibility to volunteer, the possibility to help the community and the possibility to “help others.” *Adomizen* arises as a foil against which the individual can distinguish him/herself as a social citizen. Individuals define their social positions through identifiable difference. In recognition of their difference from *adomizen* these individuals take up their privileged position as a social citizen.

INVISIBLE INK: *ADOMIZEN* AND DISCOURSES OF ERASURE

The Help the Homeless Walkathon erases homelessness from the discourse of the National Mall leaving a mere specter in its wake. The act of erasure presents itself generally in the narratives that flow through the advertisement, but stands out when one examines closely the paradigmatic parts that compose the narratives such as shots, cuts, characters, setting, etc. The ad’s message takes shape through the active constitution of each shot. Each choice marks an act of exclusion so much as “the choice of one excludes the choice of another” (Silverman & Torode, 1980, p. 255). For example, the long shot in the opening scene could easily be replaced with a close up or a point of view shot, etc. But how would a different shot alter the message that is communicated? I explore these questions specifically as they relate to two key paradigmatic components of the text: setting and characters.

Public Spaces

The choice of setting in the commercial plays an integral role in the construction of the message. Every shot is constituted within a public space. While the setting corresponds with the characters identity (for example the businessman is located in the

business district, or, the mother and child in a park, etc.), each scene distinguishes public spaces from private spaces such as the home. How is the message shaped by the use of setting? What does the exclusion of private spaces reveal about the advertisement's message?

Ideally, public spaces mark a location in which citizens engage in public discourse; a location where the rights and duties of citizenship find expression; a place to see and to be seen (Mitchell, 1995). A tension arises, however, in this space because it is also the location where *adomizen* dwells. Public spaces are both locations of citizenship, but also, the lack of citizenship. The conspicuous absence of homelessness within the setting of each scene exemplifies this lack. Take for example the mother and the child in the park. The act of erasure becomes particularly evident when one considers how unusual it is to encounter a park in Washington, D.C. void of all signs of homelessness. What then does the setting tell us about *adomizen*? On the one hand the setting provides a space in which people are more likely to think of their role as social citizens and of their role as community members. For example, a young man throwing out his arms and saying "this is my community" inside his own home conveys a very different message, than when he is outside on the street. On the other hand, the setting suggests the purification of public spaces. The act of erasure can be found in the discourse of other promotional material as well. In an introductory letter on the Help the Homeless website, Daniel Mudd, the former Chairman of the Board of Fannie Mae Foundation writes, "Someone once said, 'To solve a problem, walk around,' which is exactly what 150 Fannie Mae employees did 20 years ago to help solve the problem of homelessness in our community" (Fannie Mae Foundation, 2007). The chairman frames the crisis of homelessness in a as if it were perpetually being ended or perpetually being solved while the condition continues to prevail. The social citizen appears in opposition to *adomizen*, yet at the same time denies *adomizen's* existence. The advertisement rids itself of all images of *adomizen*, reinforcing the ontological exteriority of the subject: homeless are present only in their absences, visible only within their invisibility.

While the setting is a secondary feature within the *mise-en-scene*, nevertheless, it frames the messages in the commercial. The majority of shots in the commercial are mid-shots with a low depth of field. Consequently, the background often appears blurry and truncated. While it is clear that each shot takes place outside, the specific location of each shot is obscured. As a result, the shots continually marginalize setting in place of the character. While space is important, the focus remains on the people themselves. Different shots would come to change the significance of the setting and the messages. For example, a series of close up shots would entirely remove the setting from the discourse. Alternatively, a series a long shots would emphasize the location over the individual; it would shift the discourse from citizenship and the role of the individual in the community to the community as a whole, and, perhaps more specifically, the crisis of homelessness in Washington, D.C.

The absence of the Mall from the physical setting also bears significance. The location of the National Mall stands as a guiding ideal within the discourse of the Walkathon, and that of the commercial. The characters do not speak from a position on the Mall, instead the ad posits the Mall as the end location. The Mall contributes to the commercials' message, not as location of homelessness, or a convenient location to walk, but as a location where individuals' articulate their identities as social citizens. The transition from city space from which the characters speak to monumental space where the characters are to walk signifies for the characters (and the viewer) the transition from an individual to that of a social citizen that takes place in the discourse of the Walkathon. The symbolic space of the National Mall amplifies the experience of the Walkathon for participants. It greatly encourages a self-conscious reflection upon the rights and the duties of citizenship.

Characters

The role of individual characters in the advertisement helps to shape the message, and more particularly, the mode of address. As alluded to previously, the characters in the commercial are characters with whom viewers can identify and thus function as place holders in the narrative for the viewers themselves. What kinds of people are included as characters? Who is excluded? While the characters demonstrate a diversity of age, race, and gender, they are uniform in one feature: class. Every character in the commercial is well dressed, clean cut, and visibly middle class. The characters match the qualities of the ideal recipient of the message: a homeowner, or potential homeowner.

The uniformity of class signifies an exclusive narrative premised on a distinct binary between homeowners and the homeless. The term "Help the Homeless" presupposes a helpless individual. Perhaps, the commercial takes it upon itself to only address middle class individuals operating on the assumption that only middle class individuals have the capability of helping. The discourse relegates homeless to the image of the infantilized child or of the victim. But unlike the child presented in the commercial, the discourse reduces homeless people to the status of *adomizen*: they do not have opportunity to "learn" to be a social citizen.

The advertisement for the Help the Homeless Walkathon is unique in its exclusion of homeless people. While other walks such as the AIDS Walk or the Breast Cancer Walk take up the position of those afflicted with the illness as well as survivors in their advertisements and in the walks themselves, the homeless appear to be largely absent from the official discourse of the walk. Furthermore, there are specific barriers in place that prohibit the homeless from participating in the walk itself, such as a registration fee to walk, online registration, access, etc. The discourse is premised on absence. If *adomizen* were included as a character, the message would shift drastically. His/her presence would extend the discourse from that of volunteerism and helping others to the

act of empowerment and helping oneself. In this way, the discourse would shift from that of exclusion to inclusion; from victimization to healing. At the same time, the very reason that *adomizen* may be excluded from the advertisement is that his/her presence may in turn exclude homeowners and consequently disassociate viewers/walkers/borrowers: Fannie Mae's ideal audience.

MAKING SOCIAL CITIZENS: THE INTERPELLATIVE FUNCTION OF HOMELESSNESS

Fannie Mae's advertisement marks a function of ideology that "hails" the viewer and helps to transform them into social citizens. The commercial calls to the viewers, as if by name, and identifies them as social citizens. The act of hailing reveals itself in two of the commercials structural features. First, in the function of the gaze, in the way the actors look at the camera. And second, in the pronominal use of "we." In each instance, the ad seeks to implicate the viewer in the message. It comes to produce the very subject that it wishes to address. In this way, the advertisement resembles Althusser's concept of interpellation: the ideology of social citizenship precedes the individuals and is deployed in a way that helps to transform them into subjects (Althusser, 1971).

The Interpellative Function of the Gaze

The syntagmatic arrangement of shots, or the order of shots, form a supplementary narrative that strengthens many of the connotative messages and interpellates the viewer. Through a progressive movement from long shots, mid shots, to close ups, the commercial draws the viewer into the *mise-en-scene*. As the camera moves incrementally closer to the characters, it leads the spectator to identify with the characters: to see themselves as one of the characters on the screen, or, as a part of a greater social community, as a social citizen.

The way in which the actors' gaze is constituted, particularly in the last three shots, creates a powerful effect that addresses the viewer as a member of a larger unnamed group. The last three shots of the commercial are composed like moving portraiture: the businessman lifts up his head and, looking directly at the camera, smiles faintly, as if only now he is able to look the viewer in the eye without being embarrassed. The next shot is of the mother who is sitting on the park bench with her child. The boy has moved from his peripheral position behind the bench to a privileged position on his mother's lap. They are looking at each other and smiling. Finally, the commercial ends with a close up shot of the young man, looking directly at the camera, and smiling. The shot fades out as the man continually moves closer to the viewer. The characters engage the spectator by looking them directly in the eye. Their gaze simulates an act of recognition – it seems to call out to the spectator through the screen and says "You're like

me!” It calls on the spectator to take up the position of the character in the commercial; more specifically, to take up their responsibility as a social citizen.

The last sequence of images marks the completion of a transformation for Walkathon participants from individual to social citizen that occurs within the commercial. While in the first four scenes the characters’ expressed desire to “help” signifies a lack, Fannie Mae’s Help the Homeless Walkathon resolves that lack. The denouement takes place in the last three scenes as the viewer revisits each of the characters one last time and the view witnesses the visible resolve.

The Pronominal use of “We”

Language itself hails the viewer as a subject within society. As Emile Benveniste writes, “it is in and through language alone that man constitutes himself as subject” (1971, p. 729). In the advertisement, the pronominal use of “we” calls forth the viewer as a collective member in a specific group.

After the first four scenes, the commercial cuts to the intertitle and, for the first time, the narrator speaks: “We’ve all talked the talk, now let’s walk the walk.” The pronominal use of we in the slogan immediately groups the spectator with the characters on the screen. While the exclusive pronoun “I” distinguishes oneself from others, the inclusive “we” locates the speaker as one among a larger group. “We” is often deployed strategically in order to invent and to coalesce a group identity. John Wilson writes that people use “we” “to encourage solidarity; to designate and identify those who are supporters (with us) as well as those who are enemies (against us)” (Wilson, 1990, p.113). Who then constitutes this “we”? And, more importantly, who is excluded?

The pronominal use of “we” assumes that the viewer is like the characters. In the sense of the advertisement for the Walkathon, “we” can be characterized by a variety of middle class individuals who have a strong underlying sense of civic responsibility and either feel obligated to participate in the community or have a sincere desire to help out. The group may not agree on their reasons for wanting to help, or to be involved, but are bound together by the obligation to do so. Thus, the “we” denotes a group of people who are bound by their identity as social citizens.

The group, of course, is not all inclusive. In fact, the group may more accurately be described by what it is not: *adomizen*. It is *adomizen* who stands outside of this “we.” He/she takes the position of the other, not only through his/her absence in the images, and characters, but also within the language itself. It is this difference that makes possible a group identity, so much as, a social citizen is a social citizen because they are not *adomizen*. The pronominal use of “we” defines a specific yet amorphous group of social citizens and simultaneously functions to interpellate the viewer as a member of that group.

HOMELESS NO MORE

The discourse of erasure that takes place in the Walkathon echoes throughout the non-profit sector, philanthropic foundations, and in contemporary social policy. The exclusion suggests that these policy tools are not designed to “end homelessness” but rather to strike it from the public view. Despite an increase in aggressive rhetoric many indications suggest that the number of homeless continue to increase.⁸ The aim of contemporary social policy may not be to produce the best solution to poverty, but instead to create a more effective and sophisticated means to mitigate and control a population of underclass.

In 2004, Anthony Williams, the Mayor of Washington D.C., proposed a comprehensive plan to end homeless in D.C. in 10 years. In a letter to stakeholders, Williams writes “Ending the social and economic scourge of homelessness – rather than just continuing to manage it – will benefit not only those who suffer the problem personally, but will also improve the quality of our neighborhoods and the experience of all residents and visitors” (Williams, 2005). The major feature of Williams’ plan is a shift in focus from emergency services to a “Housing First” model (Liebow, 1993). This model would place homeless people in permanent or transitional housing first and then address the issues that may have caused them to become homeless such as financial management, drug addiction, mental health, unemployment, chronic illness, etc. Since the policy was set forth in 2004 the city has been eliminating emergency services⁹ but they are not installing adequate alternatives to emergency resources. As a result, the homeless are being pushed onto the street or out of the city. The question becomes, for whom are we solving the crisis of homelessness? Looking back at the above quoted letter from Mayor Williams, it appears that the emphasis of the policy resides more upon cleaning up the city for residents and visitors than in extending an adequate standard of living for all residents.

Talking Back: The Homeless Organize

In July of 2005, Washington, D.C. Government Officials made plans to lease Franklin School, a historic building in downtown Washington, to developer Herbert S. Miller. Miller planned to renovate the building into a high-end hotel. The building, however, was not entirely unoccupied. At the time, Franklin School was being used as an emergency shelter that provided two-hundred and forty beds for the homeless. While Franklin School is run-down and dilapidated, it is also an integral part of a diminishing shelter system in the downtown area that provides spaces for approximately three thousand people a night.

Many advocates and consumer advocates have derided the conditions of the shelter system in Washington, D.C. and have called for more permanent solutions to

homelessness; nevertheless, many of these advocates have argued that shelters like Franklin School remain a necessity. Emergency Shelters serve two primary needs: First, they provide a necessary safety-net that keep people off the street in the case of an emergency; and second, they offer an alternative to the street for many people who are currently waiting for transitional housing or vouchers for permanent housing. In reaction to the District's plan to develop Franklin School, a group of advocates started The Committee to Save Franklin Shelter (CSFS). They wrote letters, appealed to politicians, and in September of 2006, they marched on City Hall to protest the deteriorating conditions of poverty in the District and to demand the right to shelter. The actions of the CSFS were successful. That October, D.C. Council severed the lease agreement with Miller, and the development plans were scrapped. The success, however, was tenuous. In September of 2008, two years later, Franklin Shelter was abruptly closed.

The act of marching or public protest is in no way a unique experience in the city of Washington. The National Park Service estimates that they receive an average of three thousand permit requests per year from groups who wish to demonstrate (Ruane, 2008). For the homeless, however, the act of protest is uniquely significant. For a long time, the homeless have attempted to engage in the public sphere in Washington and have been excluded from such by various means. The act of gathering in public spaces is a symbolic activity: it allows for people "to, literally, see themselves by coming together in the same place, and thereby constituting themselves as part of 'a public'" (Mitchell, 1995). An intense irony persists for the homeless: they reside wholly within the public and yet, remain outside of the Public. CSFS's actions mark the struggle implicit in *adomizen*: desire for recognition amidst the moment of erasure.

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Footnotes:

1. The monumental core or the National Mall signifies the kite shaped park system at the heart of Pierre L'Enfant's plan for the city of Washington. The four points

of the kite are distinguished by the Capitol, The Lincoln Memorial, The Jefferson Memorial, and the White House. The Washington Monument resides at the center.

2. Didactic intentions are evident in both Pierre L'Enfant's original design of the city in 1791 and the Senate Parks Commission's re-vision of the Mall in 1902 (Gillette, 1995; Luria, 2006).
3. The use of military and police force to expel homeless from the National Mall is explicit in examples such as Coxey's Army in 1893, the infamous Bonus March in 1932, or the CCNV protests during the 1980's
4. The word 'citizen' comes from the Anglo-Norman *citesein*. The prefix *Cite* from Old French meaning city and the alternative ending *zein*, as the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). While the rights and duties associated with citizenship often find their expression in the city or the public sphere, I argue that these rights are in fact rooted in the home. Thus, I change the word to *domizen*. *Dom* is from the Latin *domus* – meaning home. The ending *-izen* comes from denizen or citizen. Finally, I take the prefix *a-* from the Greek meaning without or lacking to get *adomizen*.
5. From 2006 to 2008 I worked for a non-profit organization that participates in the event. For two years I helped to organize our participation in the fundraiser and attended the Walkathon.
6. See The National Coalition for the Homeless for a discussion on the contemporary limitations of counting the Homeless: http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html
7. This reading reflects contemporary development practices: non-profits often offer naming opportunities or publicity in return for corporate sponsorship.
8. See the 2008 US Mayor's Hunger and Homelessness Survey: http://usmayors.org/pressreleases/documents/hungerhomelessnessreport_121208.pdf
9. Emergency housing facilities that have been shut down in the last 3 years include: DC Village, Gales Shelter, Randall Shelter, Franklin Shelter.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION:

Edward Erikson is Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst where he teaches Political Theory and American Political Thought. His research interests include critical and post-structural theory and contemporary American social policy. His work has appeared in journals such as *Rocky Mountain Communication Review*, *Gnovis*, and *Words and Images*. Please address all correspondence to: Edward Erikson, Department of Political Science, The University of Massachusetts Amherst, 202 Thompson Hall 200 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003, USA. Or by Email: erikson@polisci.umass.edu