



## Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University  
LMU Loyola Law School

---

Honors Thesis

Honors Program

---

5-5-2022

# Black Homelessness in Los Angeles

Dezmin Hemmans

*Loyola Marymount University*, [dhemmans@lion.lmu.edu](mailto:dhemmans@lion.lmu.edu)

Rosemary Kim

*Loyola Marymount University*, [rosemary.kim@lmu.edu](mailto:rosemary.kim@lmu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/honors-thesis>



Part of the [Accounting Commons](#), and the [Africana Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hemmans, Dezmin and Kim, Rosemary, "Black Homelessness in Los Angeles" (2022). *Honors Thesis*. 440.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/honors-thesis/440>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu).



**Loyola Marymount University**  
**University Honors**  
**Program**

# **Black Homelessness In Los Angeles**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements of the University Honors Program  
of Loyola Marymount University

by

**Dezmin Hemmans**

**May 5, 2022**

**ABSTRACT:**

Throughout American history, Black people have experienced disproportionate amounts of racism, inequity, and lack of resources. This systemic lack of resources and disparities contribute to an overall lack of individual economic development. These factors were further emphasized following the COVID 19 pandemic, which, increased the separations between others. At the start of the Reconstruction Era, the recently freed enslaved faced homelessness as they left plantations penniless with nowhere to go. They were met with both de facto and de jure segregation codified through restrictive covenants, deed clauses that restricted the sale of property to Black people (Cite). Today, Black people still face disproportionate rates of homelessness, a few hundred years removed from emancipation. In Los Angeles specifically, Black people make up only nine percent of the total population yet represent forty percent of the total homeless population in LA. This is particularly relevant because Black people are more likely to experience certain risk factors such as economic hardship and mental illness due to systemic racism, and these risks are likely elevated by experiencing homelessness. The present study investigates whether there has been a noticeable change in the number of homeless people in Los Angeles from the perspective of commuters through survey techniques. The sample consists of responders aged 16-52 who currently live in Los Angeles County. The questionnaire was distributed through Qualtrics and participants will be asked to report on the demographics (age, race) of homeless individuals in their community. This investigation is important because an effective solution to homelessness requires understanding the intersections between race and class.

**Introduction:**

Recently homelessness has been on the rise in America, reinterring public opinion around the 2008 recession (Sard). Studies show that more people feel that homelessness is a growing

problem in cities (Tsai et al.). A homeless person does not have a place of residence at night, is living in a shelter, or sleeps in a place not meant for people, according to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD tracks homelessness across America and creates policies to prevent it.

The inspiration for the research for this paper is from firsthand knowledge and experience in Skid Row Los Angeles. Black homelessness is a problem across the nation. Throughout American history, black people have been discriminated against by housing practices (HUD). This ranged from not being able to own a home during slavery to restrictive housing laws. These actions affected black people and set them back finically which can explain the lack of Black homeownership.

In Los Angeles, a large portion of homeless people resides in an area called Skid Row (Slayton). This area has historically been overpoliced while under-resourced. Drug usage and mortality are high, and the population of Skid Row has been increasing. The conditions people live in Skid Row are horrible, there was a typhus outbreak over the past summer (Karlman). Skid Row exits only two blocks away from downtown Los Angeles, a metropolitan hub. Studies have identified multiple reasons for the increase in homeless. Mainly the correlation between mental illness, financial pressure, and homelessness (Glynn et al.).

Recently, the Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority (LAHSA) conducted a bi-yearly homeless count in Los Angeles County. The homeless count is a visual count of all the homeless individuals in the Los Angeles County area. In the last two years, homelessness has increased by twelve percent. The study results reported that Black people make up thirty-four percent of the homeless population following closely after the Latinx racial group (LAHSA). The recent context of the Black Live Matter movement has necessitated the inclusion of examining

issues from an intersectional viewpoint. In other words, seeing how Blackness relates to homeless, mental health, and socioeconomic status.

### **Literature review:**

The following literature review encompasses the recent data and information that are relating to the increase in homelessness across the nation, Black homelessness in America, Black economic injustice, homelessness policies, and critiques of the said studies.

A 2018 metanalysis conducted by Shelton et Al. used. Statistical analysis from multiple previous studies relating to homelessness risk factors. Researchers conducted a study to identify risk factors for homelessness. The results of the study link childhood neglect, child homelessness, and economic hardship as some key factors (Shelton). The study showed a correlation between homelessness, mental health, and drug abuse. When speaking on race the study found a weak to no conclusion relating to ethnicity or race as a factor in homelessness. The researchers theorized the findings were in part from the lack of available research using race. As a factor or predictor of homelessness.

A similar systemic review and metanalysis from 2019 conducted by Nilsson et. Al examined both predictors of entering and exiting homelessness across countries with 72% of the studies being conducted in the United States. The researchers coded the results of the independent studies to determine the correlation between homelessness and socioeconomic factors. The findings of the study also found no correlation between race and ethnicity, “Based on the existing evidence, we found no clear associations with the risk of homelessness for the following factors: age, ethnicity, having children, size of their social network, dissatisfaction with social support, lack of supportive friends, sex work, eviction, non-adherence to psychiatric medication, severe physical health problems, and traumatic brain injury. (Nilsson)”

Upon initial review, the previous lacked any explanation or qualities to contradict research, assumptions, and personal experience between race and homelessness. Given that most of the sources for the meta-analysis were published post-2010 and pre-2017 a racial view was not to have been used. In the Shelton article, there is stated within the limitations that there was not enough sustained research within the area of race and homelessness “The regression analyses also accounted for the effects of age [], gender [], and race and ethnicity [], partly in light of previous research showing links between these factors and homelessness (Shelton).” The lack of such data within independent studies can provide a new space for cutting-edge research.

Black homelessness in America has been a pervasive issue. Previous studies regarding race and Blackness have been studied and sued overall. Starting back in 1988 According there have been visible differences in the causes and effects of homelessness amongst racial groups within the United States (First). The study is from the 80s that categorizes the risk factors for homelessness using a self-reporting method of 987 homeless participants in Ohio. The participants were to self-state the reasons that contributed to them being homeless. Interestingly as seen below between white and black respondents there are disparities between “mental disturbances.” Black respondents reported that the reasoning for homelessness was a disturbance while having a lower reporting of psychiatric hospitalization. This study is foundational in homeless studies. In an ideal scenario, a much more in-depth version of this study could be replicated. This is the most recent study in this area that employs this method.

**Problems of Black and White Homeless People in Ohio (percentage)**

Problem	Total Respondents (n = 979)	Black Respondents (n = 292)	White Respondents (n = 639)
Reasons			
Economic factors	48.0	51.4	46.5
Family conflict	13.3	16.8	12.1
Family dissolution	8.0	4.1	9.6
Others	30.7	26.0	30.5
Any income in past month	63.4	62.0	64.2
Primary source of income			
Welfare	23.8	30.8	20.5
Earnings	17.1	12.3	18.5
Social Security	12.7	11.6	13.9
Others	10.0	7.2	11.0
Has been in jail	58.5	54.5	61.8
Ever had a job	87.3	80.5	91.5
Psychiatric hospitalization	29.9	29.5	31.3
Psychiatric symptomatology	30.8	26.7	33.0
Behavioral disturbance	53.7	63.0	49.0
Problem drinking	20.8	16.4	23.0
Physical health problems	30.7	28.1	33.2
Social support			
Family can count on	36.0	35.3	36.8
Friends can count on	41.0	31.9	45.9

*Table 1*

*Problems of Black and White Homeless People In Ohio from Homelessness: Understanding the Dimensions of the Problem for Minorities. Social Work (1988)*

The Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) conducted a study regarding the equity of housing. From their studies was that across all aspects of the housing market Black people were facing discrimination. While not on the same level as that of the civil rights movement, Black people still are shown 17% homes less than their White counterparts (Perry).

In LA County the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) publishes the homelessness count every two years. This count determines how many people are houseless either within the LA County shelter system, sleeping in tents, or sleeping in cars. In the past period between 2018 and 2020, the number of homeless folks in LA county rose by 12 percent (LAHSA). Notably, only three racial categories were disproportionately homeless, the percentage

of said racial group being larger in the homeless population versus the general population. Of the racial groups Black/ African Americans, Native Americans, and Indigenous Alaskans were disproportionately homeless as seen below. Black people made up the second-largest group of homeless people and were 3 times as likely to be homeless than other racial groups (LAHSA). This study begs the question: *What specific issues are causing Black people to be homeless?* LASHA identifies risk factors like access to mental health and housing as key issues.

LA CoC Homeless Population and LA County Population

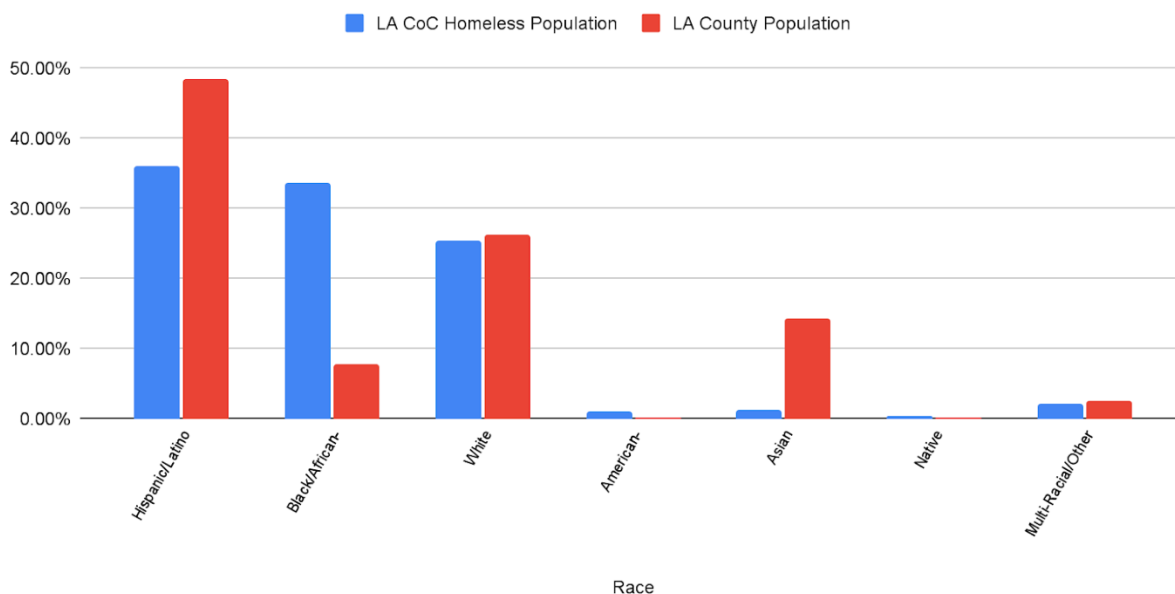


Figure 1 From LAHSA Homelessness Count 2020

A related study that was introduced in 2018 entitled “Public Exposure and Attitudes about Homelessness” directly influenced the below study. It was a questionnaire with the main goal of identifying the public perception of homelessness, which socio-political groups found race as a factor of homelessness stating, “most Americans care about homelessness as a major problem but there are divergent perspectives on solutions to address homelessness based on gender,



income level, and political affiliation (Shelton).” The study found that based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and political affiliation the care for homelessness varies and the most liberal and understanding were democratic women. Part of the study also had participants’ conjecture about the causes of homelessness. Typically, those who had preexisting medical conditions believed that medical or mental health reasons were the main factor in homelessness (Shelton).

#### Methods:

The described study was Distributed questionnaire via social media using a volunteer study reflecting trends and observable features of homeless people they encountered. The questions presented in the study were the following- the questions were the following: Do you live in LA county?

1. Have you traveled within LA county within the last 2 years?
2. Have you noticed homeless people on your commute?
3. On average how many homeless people do you see on your typical commute?
4. What is the race of the majority of homeless people you see on your commute?
5. Did you notice an increase in homeless people in the past 2 years?
6. What do you think caused the increase?
7. Have you noticed any displacement of homeless people (forced relocation of homeless folks) within the past year?
8. Are you aware of any policies that address homelessness within LA County?
9. List the policies that address homelessness in LA county.

The questions were distributed via Qualtrics and advertised using social media. The hypothesis is that the combination of previous existing inequity amongst the socio-economic status would be further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the public would notice also. The main aim

of the study was to first identify the public. Perceptions about homelessness include the reasons for the increase. The second was to identify if participants noted trends amongst racial data.

Results:

The study consisted of 74 respondents. Of the respondents, all except 1 reported seeing homeless people on the commute. 53% of respondents could not categorize the race of homeless people they have seen. Supporting my hypotheses. This could be due to not noticing the race of the homeless people or other factors. Of those who did select a race, they noticed 41.67% identified black people also supporting the existing data that Black people are more likely to be homeless. As seen in figure 2 when participants were asked to identify “What do you think caused the increase in homelessness” the largest segment identifies the covid 19 pandemic as the main cause. The other highest points were inflation, gentrification, job loss, low wages, and rising home prices..

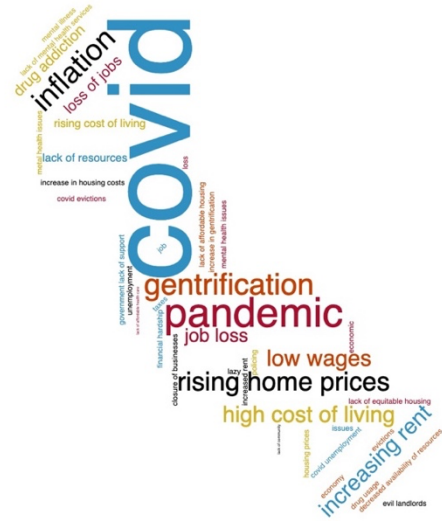


Figure 2 Questionnaire Word Bubble

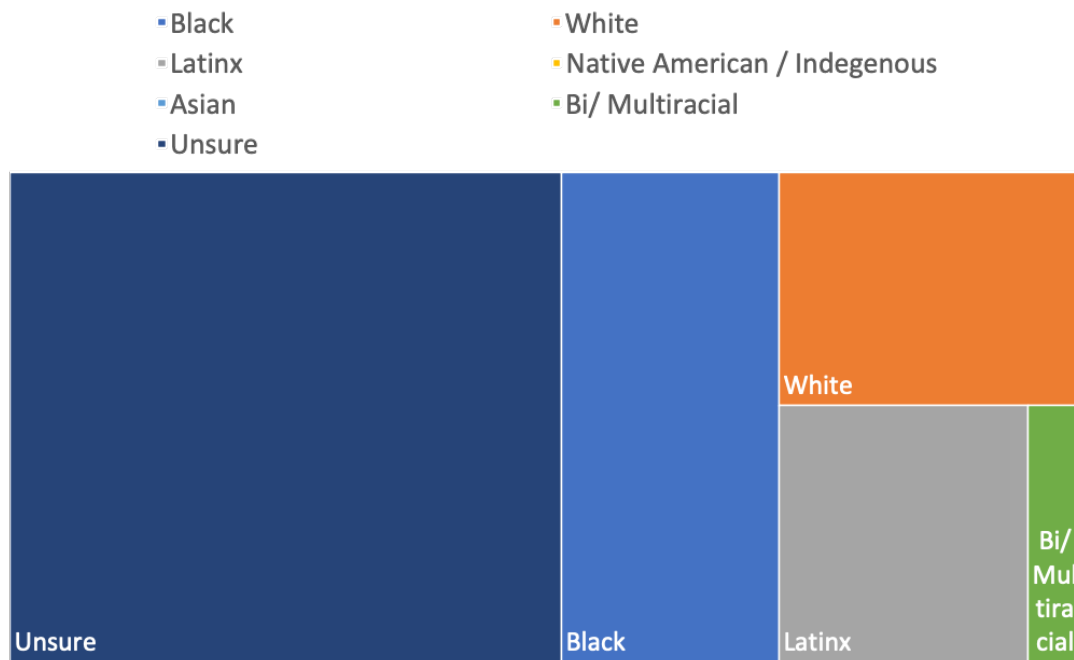


Figure 3 Race of Homeless people encountered

Discussion:

The results of the study exist to complement gaps in the existing literature and maintain previously unsubstantiated beliefs. The observed data is consistent with that of the LAHSA Study which shows that Black people are known to be disproportionately homeless in America. As part of the process of preparing the presentation of data identifying the main cause of homelessness additional studies and new clippings were used to give more context to the results. The four largest responses were the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in costs of living, loss of jobs, and rising home prices. Each of the sources affected black people more. In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic minorities specifically, Black and Latinx folks were at a unique risk of developing aggressive forms of the virus (CDC). The study described the reasons for the. Virus affecting racial groups was a combination of underlying medical issues and environmental issues. In addition to the physical toll of the virus multiple sources stated that racial disparities increased

due to the rising costs of living and loss of jobs. Black individuals were two times as likely to lose their job or have frozen wages during the pandemic. To add even more context Black homeownership had already been at the lowest it has ever been since housing discrimination was legal (Perry). There is a lack of research in the area that warrants further studies.

#### Limitations:

General limitations of the study included sample size and scope of participants. In a future study, it would benefit from having a large range of participants and collecting more demographic data. Similar successful studies included political affiliation, age, gender, and race. A future study would also benefit from data from multiple districts within LA county. For example, comparing East LA to the West side of LA in terms of the number of homeless people and the racial makeup of the population. Lastly Including a control group that self-reflects on the homeless population they encounter and a survey group that consciously does not whenever they see homeless people get more accurate data. Interviewing homeless people as in the '988 study would be the most pragmatic way to collect data but could run the risk of self-serving bias.

#### Conclusion:

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue that has continuously become more difficult. Simply put, we have a long way to go. LASHA and HUD Have both identified that racism is a problem for the homeless there are still more steps to take. Politicians, leaders, and activists first must inform the public about this discrepancy. Then they must create effective solutions to making mental health services more accessible, availability of jobs and livable wages, and provide overall support to our houseless folks in LA and across the country. I mean we should know. The mayoral debate was just happening and it's clear that this has been an overlooked item. The study conducted serves as another reminder of what more there is to do on the issues.

It highlights the pressing matter that race must be a factor in the discrepancies within the homeless populations in Los Angeles. Further study is needed to ensure that there is an equitable and fair way to end homelessness at least in Los Angeles.

## References

HUD releases 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report part 1. HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (2021, May 21). Retrieved March 18, 2022, from [https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/hud\\_no\\_21\\_041](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_21_041)

*2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Results*. Go to main LAHSA website. (n.d.). Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=726-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results>

Nilsson, S. F., Nordentoft, M., & Hjorthøj, C. (2019, October). *Individual-level predictors for becoming homeless and exiting homelessness: A systematic review and meta-analysis*. *Journal of urban health : bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6814700>

Katherine H. Shelton Ph.D.Pamela J. Taylor M.D.Adrian Bonner, Shelton, K. H., Taylor, P. J., Bonner, A., Bree, M. van den, Shelton, ... School of Psychology. (2015, January 13). *Risk Factors for Homelessness: Evidence From a Population-Based Study*. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/ps.2009.60.4.465>

*People experiencing or at risk of homelessness should be a priority in state COVID-19 responses*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2020, June 10). Retrieved March 18, 2022, from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/people-experiencing-or-at-risk-of-homelessness-should-be-a-priority-in-state-covid>

Tsai, J., Lee, C. Y. S., Shen, J., Southwick, S. M., & Pietrzak, R. H. (2019). Public exposure and attitudes about homelessness. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 47(1), 76–92.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22100>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, December). *Risk of exposure to COVID-19*.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/increased-risk-](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/increased-risk-exposure.html#:~:text=Neighborhood%20and%20physical%20environment%3A,may%20vary%20between%20counties)

[exposure.html#:~:text=Neighborhood%20and%20physical%20environment%3A,may%20vary%20between%20counties](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/increased-risk-exposure.html#:~:text=Neighborhood%20and%20physical%20environment%3A,may%20vary%20between%20counties)

Floyd, J. (2022, February 3). *From businesses to workers, inflation is taking its toll on Black*

*Communities*. TheGrio. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from

<https://thegrio.com/2022/01/30/inflation-businesses-workers-black-communities/>

Lalljee, J. (2021, November 24). *People of color and rural households are getting hit the hardest by*

*the hot inflation of 2021*. Business Insider. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from

<https://www.businessinsider.com/inflation-hurts-black-latino-hispanic-people-of-color-rural-households-2021-11>

Perry, A. M. (2022, March 9). *How racial disparities in home prices reveal widespread*

*discrimination*. Brookings. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from

<https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/how-racial-disparities-in-home-prices-reveal-widespread-discrimination/>

- Katherine H. Shelton Ph.D.Pamela J. Taylor M.D.Adrian Bonner, Shelton, K. H., Taylor, P. J., Bonner, A., Bree, M. van den, Shelton, ... School of Psychology. (2015, January 13). Risk Factors for Homelessness: Evidence From a Population-Based Study. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/ps.2009.60.4.465>.
- Johnson, R. A. (2010). African Americans and Homelessness: Moving Through History. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(4), 583–605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934708315487>
- First, R. J., Roth, D., & Arewa, B. D. (1988). Homelessness: Understanding the Dimensions of the Problem for Minorities. *Social Work*, 33(2), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/33.2.120>
- HUD. (2012). Housing Discrimination Against Racial And Ethnic Minorities 2012: HUD USER. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/fairhsg/hsg\\_discrimination\\_2012.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/fairhsg/hsg_discrimination_2012.html).
- NW, 1615 L. St, Suite 800 Washington, & Inquiries, D. 20036USA202-419-4300 | M.-857-8562 | F.-419-4372 | M. (n.d.). Racial and ethnic income inequality in America: 5 key findings. Retrieved October 6, 2019, from Pew Research Center website: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/12/key-findings-on-the-rise-in-income-inequality-within-americas-racial-and-ethnic-groups/>
- Statistics: Black people disproportionately homeless in California. (n.d.). Retrieved October 6, 2019, from <https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2019/10/05/california-homelessness-black-racism-impacts-prison-addiction-housing/2430321001/>