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Los Angeles: Skid Row is My Home is a documentary that is based around a certain street in Los Angeles called Skid Row. Not mentioned on any map of Los Angeles, Skid Row is essentially the impoverished area of the city. Where those who have no home go, Skid Row is an entire community of people who are either homeless or extremely low-income, with most of these people living with untreated mental illness or drug addiction.

The documentary first shows different people talking about Skid Row. It is mentioned that it is looked at by many as nothing more than possible realty, people who don’t live there don’t seem to care about those who do. However, some referred to the place that was originally described as inhospitable as their home. The documentary interviewed people who live on Skid Row, asking questions that reveal the stories of those on Skid Row, both during their time there as well as during their lives before they came to be on Skid Row.

The interviews then turn over to other people discussing Skid Row, beginning with a police officer who works the Skid Row area alone. The crime is discussed by people such as owners of a soup kitchen who claim that the law does not care for those who are homeless. There are also claims that civil liberties do not exist in Skid Row. The community is seen fighting against the “Safer cities initiative” that is said to have created a “war on the poor,” claiming that it has much more police personell than is necessary.

The documentary ends with where some of the people of Skid Row who were originally interviewed end up.

One of the people in the documentary that reminds me of the information from chapter 3 of the textbook is the lady who walks the streets of Skid Row taking care of cats and birds. She claims that she’s on Skid Row in order to ensure that the animals get fresh water and food. Also noticeable, and mentioned by her “fiancé,” is the fact that she hordes trash. In addition, she has an apartment yet chooses to sleep on the streets, claiming towards the end of the documentary that there is radiation that beams down in the apartments, making her weak. Her “fiancé” tells the interviewers that she has a mental illness, it is unclear if it is actually diagnosed but it is obvious that something is wrong with the woman. This relates back to the book because as aspect of the book discusses the concept that untreated mental illness is a social problem. This woman is a prime example of this because she becomes a social problem in the fact that it is dangerous for her to sleep on the streets of skid row. Her delusion of radiation in her apartment is most probably caused by an untreated mental illness which, in turn, leads to her sleeping on the streets. Beyond it being a danger to herself, it is also a problem for society because it is unsanitary and an abundance of homeless people in an area makes it a prime spot for crime and drug/ gang activity. One of the theories in chapter three claims that poverty can be an effect of mental illness because those who suffer from mental illness cannot function to participate in normal societal roles. The woman in the documentary is an example of this in the way that she is compelled to walk around collecting trash.

At one point in the documentary the woman is devastated because she claims that police lie to her about cleaning the sidewalk so she dumps all of her belongings on the street and she claims that the police take much of what was put in the street. This is an example of the issue of how society views homeless and those with mental illness. Some theories say that mental illness is defined as society defines it and some say that it is caused by physiological problems. However, no matter what mental illness is caused by, the negative stigma and criminalization around it is defined by society. The woman in the documentary is an example of someone who is discriminated against by members of society due to their mental illness. The issue between her and the police also reveal the truth behind the claims that due to insufficient care opportunities provided by society, those who suffer from mental illness are criminalized for their actions caused by their mental illness.

Skid Row is a prime example of the social problems that arise from mental illness as well as the concept of mental illness as a social problem itself.