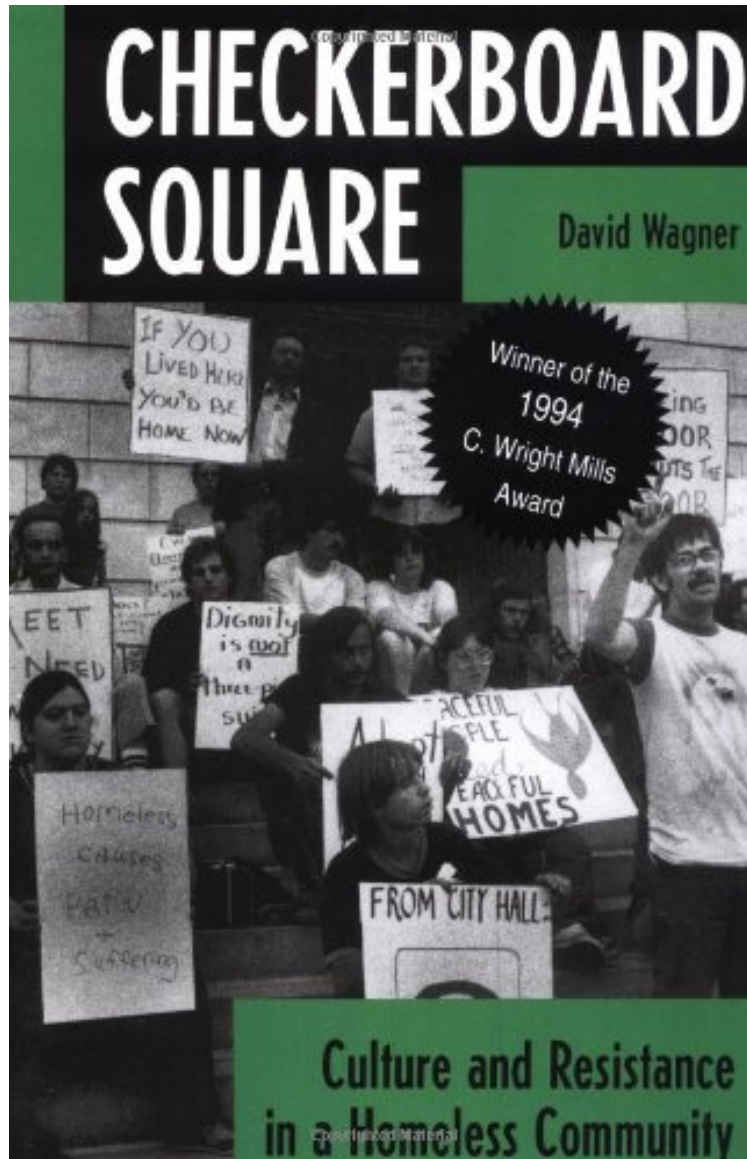


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Checkerboard Square: Culture And Resistance In A Homeless Community

David Wagner

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accurately portrays a well-organized homelessness community and the less known aspects of homeless. The book counters the media's image that the homeless lack a social network, that they are all simply drug addicts or mentally ill. Its greatest strength lies in its detailed descriptions of homeless people, which Wagner gathered from his own experiences with a homeless community (presumably Portland, Maine).

During the past decade, homelessness became a widespread phenomenon in the United States for the first time since the Great Depression. The public frequently blamed the poor for their plight. Journalistic and academic accounts, in contrast, often evoked pathos and pity, regarding the homeless primarily as objects of treatment and rehabilitation. David Wagner challenges both of these dominant images, offering an ethnographic portrait of the poor that reveals their struggle not only to survive but also to create communities on the streets and to develop social movements on their own behalf. Definitely not passive victims, the homeless of Checkerboard Square survive within an alternative street culture, with its own norms and social organization, in a world often hidden from the view of researchers, journalists, and social workers. Checkerboard Square reveals the daily struggle of street people to organize their lives in the face of rejection by employers, government, landlords, and even their own families. Looking beyond the well-documented causes of homelessness such as lack of affordable housing or unemployment, Wagner shows how the poor often become homeless through resistance to the discipline of the workplace, authoritarian families, and the bureaucratic social welfare system. He explains why the crisis of homelessness is not only about the lack of services, housing, and jobs but a result of the very structure of the dominant institutions of work, family, and public social welfare.

About the Author David Wagner is associate professor of social work and sociology at the University of Southern Maine. He is the author of two previous books, including *Checkerboard Square* (Westview, 1993), winner of the 1993 C. Wright Mills Award.