3.5 Million

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, approximately 3.5 million people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year (2007). This is an important number as it illustrates the amount of people at the very bottom of the class system. Without a home, these people are unlikely to find a permanent job. It becomes a cyclical pattern: without a home, people cannot get a job; without a job people cannot feed, clothe, and support themselves.

As Katharine Bradbury and Jane Katz found in their study on lifetime incomes, it is quite difficult to rise through the stratification system, especially if you are starting at the very bottom. In their study, the population was split into fifths. They found that in the middle three quintiles there was a high degree of social mobility; people were able to earn more money than their parents did and rise to the next quintile. In the top quintile they was less movement because there was nowhere else to move up to. In the bottom quintile, the destitute did not have the resources to rise.

Alan Krueger theorized that education and training is a large part of inequality. Without the necessary training, a person cannot achieve awards; i.e. income. For the bottom of the lowest class, which would probably include the homeless, education is not always an option. Going to school requires the support of others, usually parents, but many young adults do not have this support system and are unable to receive the training needed. Without this training, they are unable to get a job, pay bills, buy a house, and provide a stable life for their own children.

Economically, there must be some unemployment to keep a competitive society. However, these 3.5 million people are never given a chance. This number is important; it
represents the very bottom class in the United States, which is also the class least likely to be able to rise to the next quintile in income distribution. However, there are a few considerations to keep in mind with this number. It includes all people who have experienced homelessness in a given year; it does not separate the chronically homeless from those who went through a short period of homelessness. However, the majority are probably still in the lowest class. The 1.35 million children who have spent nights without a home are very unlikely to succeed out of the bottom of society, which explains the importance of this number: it signifies those with very little hope of success.