



Begging in America, 1850-1940: The Needy, the Frauds, the Charities and the Law

Kerry Segrave

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The poverty that drives people to begging has been a pressing social issue in this country since its inception. This historical book explores begging and beggars in the period 1850 to 1940, with emphasis on how the police, the courts, the media and private charity organizations dealt with the issue. Efforts to suppress mendicancy are explored, including legislation, police crackdowns, and public vouchers for meals and shelter. Of particular interest is the way in which media portrayals have guided public perception of mendicants.

Despite the massive social upheavals the last two centuries have brought, all efforts to suppress begging have failed. Many of the complaints and arguments made against beggars and begging in 1850 and 1900 and 1940 were also made into the 21st century because, in the end, the public continued to give alms.

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