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## History of Homelessness

Homelessness has been present in Seattle from the very beginning. It started off with pirates and has evolved to the surplus of individuals we see on the streets every day. This essay will cover the history of homelessness in Seattle, and how the consequences and repercussions of homelessness have evolved over time by analyzing Josephine Ensign's *Skid Road* and Eric Tars's *Criminalization of Homelessness*. Although the criminalization of homelessness has occurred both in the past and present, the ways that law enforcement deals with and punishes homelessness have changed over time, with past punishments being on a more individual level due to the smaller homeless population, while current day punishments for being homeless have taken effect on entire homeless populations regardless of each individual's situation.

Early America, and therefore early Seattle, developed their own laws criminalizing homelessness. These laws were an adaptation of the Elizabethan Poor Laws, some of the first laws and signs of criminalization of homelessness. Those experiencing homelessness who received aid from those who were higher in economic standings were marked "such as wearing on the left arm a red cloth band with the name of the country from which the pauper was receiving aid" (Ensign 18). This act of marking those receiving aid already began to dehumanize and set those individuals out from the rest of society, thus beginning

the early stages of the criminalization of homelessness. Ensign also states that “the Poor Laws supported the view of poverty as a crime, especially for the ‘undeserving poor’” (Ensign 18). Anyone considered “undeserving poor” was someone who was considered able to work because it was seen as a choice to be homeless due to the ability to perform work even when unable to get it.

Current-day homelessness has some similarities to early homelessness, but many aspects have changed. Many people still see individuals as undeserving poor and have thoughts about being able to get a job and help themselves out of homelessness as “if they wanted to, they would.” In Tars’s article, he says, “The Law Center also recently found state statutes criminalizing homelessness in 48 states” (Tars). One of the most common punishments for being homeless is also “sweeps,” which is when homeless encampments are swept through and people’s belongings become destroyed, setting individuals back in their journey out of homelessness. Current-day laws criminalising homelessness “create arrest records, fines, and fees that stand in the way of homeless people securing jobs or housing, and perpetuate racial inequity” (Tars). This criminalization does nothing but worsen the problem, and the problem has continued to worsen since the introduction of poor laws.

In conclusion, the ways that the city has enforced bans and crimes related to homelessness have changed drastically over the years, and although they were always enforced, these enforcements have gotten worse as time goes on.