

# history on homelessness in america

**History on homelessness in America** is a complex and multifaceted topic that reflects the changing social, economic, and political landscape of the country. From the early colonial days to the present, homelessness has been a persistent issue, shaped by various factors, including economic downturns, housing policies, and social attitudes. This article explores the evolution of homelessness in America, examining key historical events, influential policies, and the ongoing challenges faced by those without stable housing.

## The Early Years: Colonial America to the 19th Century

In colonial America, homelessness was often linked to poverty and social welfare. Communities took responsibility for their poor, and the concept of public assistance began to take shape.

### Colonial Attitudes Towards the Poor

- Religious and Moral Obligations: Many colonies viewed caring for the poor as a moral duty. Churches often played a significant role in providing aid.
- Workhouses: By the 17th century, workhouses were established in some colonies, serving as institutions for the poor to learn trades and earn their keep.

As America expanded, the growth of cities and industrialization in the 19th century led to an increase in poverty and homelessness.

## The Rise of Urban Homelessness

The Industrial Revolution brought significant changes:

- Rural to Urban Migration: Many people moved to cities in search of jobs, leading to overcrowding and inadequate housing.
- Economic Crises: Events such as the Panic of 1837 resulted in widespread unemployment and homelessness.

During this period, the emergence of "tramps" and "hobos" became a notable phenomenon, as many individuals traveled in search of work.

## The 20th Century: The Great Depression and Beyond

The Great Depression of the 1930s marked a significant turning point in the history of homelessness in America. The economic collapse led to unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty.

# **The Great Depression's Impact**

- Rising Homelessness: Millions lost their jobs and homes, leading to the establishment of "Hoovervilles," makeshift shantytowns named mockingly after President Hoover.
- Government Response: The New Deal programs introduced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt aimed to provide relief and employment, but many still struggled to find stable housing.

The post-war era saw a temporary decline in homelessness due to economic growth and the expansion of the middle class. However, the seeds of future homelessness were sown through various systemic issues.

## **Suburbanization and Economic Inequality**

The 1950s and 1960s were characterized by:

- Suburbanization: As families moved to suburbs, urban areas faced disinvestment and decay.
- Deinstitutionalization: The closure of mental health facilities, beginning in the 1960s, left many individuals without support systems, contributing to homelessness.