

Nels Anderson was a pioneer observer of the homeless. In the early 1920s Anderson combined his own experience “on the bummery,” with keen sociological insight to give voice to a largely ignored but undoubtedly active underclass. He remains an extraordinary and underrated figure in the history of American sociology.

*On Hobos and Homelessness* includes Anderson’s rich and vibrant ethnographic work on the world of homeless men. He conducted his study on Madison Street in Chicago, and we come to intimately know this portion of the 1920s hobo underworld—the harshness of vagrant life and the adventures of young hobos who come

to the big city. This selection also includes Anderson’s later work on the juvenile and the tramp, the unattached migrant, and the family. Like John Steinbeck’s Depression-era observations, Anderson’s writings express the memory of those who have no direct way of communicating their experiences, whose lives were a series of temporary occupations.