



# You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads

*James P. Spradley*

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## **You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads** James P. Spradley

While *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* was far from the first anthropological study of a non-native population in North America, its appearance marked an early stage in an increasingly evident shift toward “bringing anthropology home.” Now available from Waveland Press, Spradley’s carefully researched portrayal of skid row men in Seattle in the late sixties documents their treatment by jails and the legal system in a time before homelessness became a recognized problem. As a result of Spradley’s elegant and impassioned writing, the book became a sharp challenge to politicians, policymakers, judges, police, and others inclined to punish people “for the crime of poverty.” The insights he gained from studying the tramp culture of Seattle ultimately were seen as highly significant in the treatment of recidivist alcoholics as well as in creating a more appropriate and human response to public drunkenness. This now-classic landmark study in urban ethnography stands as a shining example of the direct application of distinctly anthropological concepts and methods to address real-world problems. But more important, it represents a poignant challenge to society about our capacity to endure and accept nonconformity and social diversity. The Waveland reissue includes a valuable retrospective introduction by Merrill Singer.

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