*Vagrancy*

William C. Carroll

* The poor lived horribly in 16th century London.
  + Some people saw their lives as very sad and others saw them as a threat to society.
* The Privy Council wrote a letter in 1571that stated that the poor was the reason behind all crime.

**Historical Contexts**

* Political, social, economic, and religious issues contributed to the conditions of the poor during this time.
* The population was also growing, which was leading more individuals into poverty.
* London was seen as a saving grace.
  + People who were living in other places saw London as the place where there was opportunity, so the moved. This caused more of a population boom then the city could handle.
* The plague caused inflation in food prices.
  + Rent also increased.
* The issue of land ownership was the lead reason behind people being displaced and turning in vagrants.
  + Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* was the earliest report of this issue.
  + The term “enclosure” was termed.
    - One greedy landowner could consume a thousand acres with one hedge and would push the tenant farms out.
    - This caused people to have an economic shift from farming to grazing.
* In the early 16th century the poor was cared for by local churches and monasteries.
* King Henry the VIII disbanded the monasteries in 1536, ultimately riding the only support system in place for the poor.
  + It took years for the government to come up with a solution to this.
* In 1553 London regained control of its hospitals and they were chartered.
  + Bridewell was created as a place for the poor to be taken care of.
    - It helped make people realize that the poor needed work
    - However, it eventually turned into a place where the poor and the prostitutes were taken to be whipped and beaten.

**Representations**

* The poor were divided into 2 categories.
  + “Deserving” poor- these were people who were sick or old.
  + “Sturdy beggers”- these were seen as the vagrants.
    - The punishment of these poor individuals was brutal.
* The sturdy beggers were seen as lazy and chose to go without work.
  + Since they weren’t tied to work then they had no stake in any area or community.
* While many people saw beggers to be worthless, there were those that romanticized the lifestyle.
  + They had food given to them, they got to sleep under the stars, they were their own boss, and could be sexual.

**Theatres**

* Being vagrant was considered a crime.
* In order for actors not to be considered vagrants they had to be part of a company that was licensed by an honorable person.
  + They would then be seen as servants.
* Theatre goers enjoyed seeing characters that resembled beggers on the stage.
  + Theatres were seen as places that drew vagrants.

*Family and Household*

Martin Ingram

* Families were seen as basis for social order and security.
  + They were held together by the husband. It was not uncommon for widowed women to remarry.
* The middle and upper class families also included servants or apprentices.
  + To the upper class a family meant a household.
    - Servants had different ranks.
* Grandparents, sisters, brothers, and cousins were sometimes included in the family structure.
  + Often times newly married couples would live with the parents. However, newlyweds were supposed to establish their own homes.
* Households with families were seen as economic forces.
* Churches put the pressure on parents to instill Christian ideals into their children, servants, and apprentices.
* They were also responsible for education.
  + This included everything from social skills to the books.
* In every town the church was responsible for making known the mistakes of their neighbors.
* Privacy was limited in homes, as houses were filled with many people.
  + If married couples were behind locked doors it was assumed that they were “up to no good.”
  + These types of conditions led to maiden servants being sexually harassed and children being molested.
* The size and type of house varied depending on the wealth of the owner and the location.
* The legal age for a girl to marry was 12 and a boy was 14.
  + A girl could be betrothed at age 7.
* People normally married in their mid to late 20’s.
  + While parent approval was preferred, many parents did not live to see their kids get married due to sickness.
* Churchman wanted people to seek the consent and counsel of their parents before getting married.
* Due to the back and forth and up and down of courting and marriages, relationships became hot topics for plays.
* Men expected a payment with their brides. Women expected to be taken care of support for their rest of their lives.
  + Many marriages had issues because of financial hardships or disagreements.
* It was thought that men were the authority and women owed them obedience.
* There was a no tolerance law policy for adultery.
  + There was a double standard that allowed men more freedom to have affairs.
  + If a woman cheated there were questions of paternity and the man’s control was questions.
* Husbands and wives usually only had a few kids.
  + Mothers were responsible for daughters and sons until they were 5 or 6.
    - After the age of 6, the father took on responsibility for the son.