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Book Reviews

James Midgley, Martin B. Tracy and Michelle Livermore (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999. $85.00 hardcover.

Although social policy is no longer the stepchild of social work curriculum, it nevertheless fails to command as much attention or interest of social workers as, for example, subjects dealing with direct practice or clinical treatment. That's a pity since all social work practice, direct or indirect, takes place within the framework of extant social policies—a point that would not be lost on those who read this excellent text for graduate and undergraduate students in social work and other cognate disciplines and professions.

Organized in five sections, its 33 chapters cover a wide territory. The six chapters in the first section discuss such topics as the definition of social policy, an overview of American social policy, economic dimensions of social policy, policy analysis, policy practice, and the impact of social policy. Section two contains five chapters that trace the history of American social policy beginning from Colonial times to the post-Reagan era. The largest section, consisting of twelve chapters, is devoted to social policy and the social services. Here one finds discussion of such bread and butter topics for social workers as child and family welfare services, income maintenance, social security, the correctional system, housing policy, policies for people with disabilities, employment policy, education and social welfare policy, urban development policy, and social policies dealing with the elderly, health care, and mental health. So extensive is this section that the book might even appropriately be titled Handbook of Social Policy and Social Services.

The eight chapters on the institutional approach to social policy, conservative approaches to social policy, critical social policy, welfare pluralism and social policy, feminist approaches to social policy, the social development perspective in social policy, race, politics and social policy, and social policy and physical environment are organized under the rubric of the political economy of

social policy in section four. The final section has two chapters-one on international aspects of social policy and the other offering conjectures about the future of social policy.

The book is written primarily for a U.S. audience. Despite occasional references to social policies and services in other countries, the focus of the book is exclusively on social policy in this country. Students and instructors would find this a helpful introduction to the major social policies and social services in the United States. It is unrealistic to expect an introductory textbook to have the depth or the detail required for more advanced study. Readers especially interested in such areas as the role of social movements, faith-based organizations, single issue pressure groups, and lobbyists in the process of policy formulation will want to read specialized books. Similarly, while allusions to such topics as the role of judiciary in policy development, the values and ideologies undergirding different social policies, the manifest versus the latent functions of social policy, and the unintended consequences of social policy are made in the various chapters, readers expecting fuller treatments will need to turn to advanced texts.

Will the non-poor continue to be the principal beneficiaries of policies ostensibly enacted to help support the poor? What will be the impact of the revolution in information technology on social services? Will social policy in the United States, dominated by income support and social service approaches, incorporate a social development perspective? Will the welfare state—arguably the most notable social and political invention of the twentieth century—expand, shrink or evolve in a different direction? Questions such as these are stimulated by a careful reading of this extremely useful and welcome handbook, noteworthy both for its comprehensiveness and for the clarity of exposition by most of the contributors, all of whom are well-known experts in their respective fields.

The final chapter by the editors offers a number of cautious and plausible speculations about the future of social policy in the United States. On present indication, it does look likely that U.S. policies will continue to be shaped incrementally; that they will not always be mutually compatible; that they would be fragmented and pluralistic; that they would be created within

the dominant framework of a market economy and that, alas, the huge economic disparities, further sharpened during the current economic boom, will not be attenuated anytime soon.

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Cynthia Duncan, *World's Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999. $27.50 hardcover.

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, current national policy requires states to provide benefits to adult participants only when they actively seek employment, become employed, or participate in employment training activities. Welfare reform, embedded in the theory of labor-force attachment, will fail in areas of the country where jobs are scarce and a few politically powerful individuals control opportunity. Discrimination, whether overt or latent, provides a significant barrier to self-sufficiency, undermining the efforts of participants to end their dependency on welfare.

World's Apart takes the reader deep into the heart of rural poverty. Three geographical areas are examined-areas that have depressed labor markets and where opportunity is in short supply. In the first two areas, Blackwell—a community in the Appalachian Mountains, and Dahlia—a community in the Mississippi Delta—inequality and lack of opportunity are functions of overt discrimination. Here, discrimination coupled with a depressed labor market serve as structural barriers for which the welfare participant has no recourse. No amount of legislated work requirements can mitigate the conditions that prevent the participant from achieving self-sufficiency.

Blackwell's poverty population consists of primarily low-skilled whites, while Dahlia's poor are primarily black. Despite the difference in ethnicity, both impoverished populations experience very similar inequality and oppression. Opportunity is dished out as a reward or withheld as a punishment by the controlling elite. These oligarchies have a long history as part and parcel of the social, economic, and even spiritual fabric of the community.