



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 31
Issue 3 *September*

Article 10

September 2004

Review of *Global Decisions, Local Collisions: Urban Life in the New World Order*. David Ranney. Reviewed by Robert L. Boyd.

Robert L. Boyd
Mississippi State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Welfare Commons, Social Work Commons, and the Urban Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Boyd, Robert L. (2004) "Review of *Global Decisions, Local Collisions: Urban Life in the New World Order*. David Ranney. Reviewed by Robert L. Boyd.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 31: Iss. 3, Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3010>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol31/iss3/10>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Book Reviews

David Ranney, *Global Decisions, Local Collisions: Urban Life in the New World Order*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003. \$69.50 paperback.

This book offers a critical, neo-Marxist account of the postindustrial restructuring of the United States. Ranney examines the worldwide expansion of competitive capitalism and the corresponding decline of manufacturing in the nation's rustbelt, focusing on how these transformations have adversely affected the poor and working classes of Chicago.

To develop a philosophical basis for his study, Ranney builds on propositions that are rooted in Marxism and critical social science. He argues that, under capitalism, the worth of an activity is determined solely by the monetary price that the activity brings in the marketplace, and thus, socially valued goals are subordinated to economic efficiency. He further maintains that space, place, and time are not physical realities; rather, they are socially defined constructs, and their constraints on social action are mutable. These propositions will be readily accepted by those who share Ranney's ideological views. Yet, readers who question the theoretical and empirical bases of Marxism and critical social science will have reservations about their validity and will, therefore, have serious doubts about many of Ranney's subsequent assertions and conclusions.

Analyses of deindustrialization and the international spread of competitive capitalism follow this discussion. Ranney presents his neo-Marxist interpretation of the decline of Fordism (i.e., the domestic mass production of goods for domestic consumption) in the U.S. and the rise of conservative politics, freewheeling financial speculation, global mobility of capital, and exploitation of Third World labor. Emphasizing the salience of ideas, he claims that the Nobel Laureate economists Milton Friedman and Gary Becker have played crucial roles in the emergence of this "new world order" by supplying the theoretical justifications for the expansion of free market policies and the cutbacks of social welfare programs. Ranney then studies the collapse of manufacturing in Chicago, describing job losses, business failures, and

personal hardships, often drawing from his own experiences as a blue-collar worker, community activist, and professor of urban planning in that city. This presentation of data and anecdotes is engaging, and even those readers who take issue with the neo-Marxist perspective will find it to be thought provoking.

In an interesting study of urban politics, Ranney next explores the dynamics of the local government of Chicago, analyzing the challenge made by Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, to the political machine of longtime mayor, Richard J. Daley. Ranney focuses on the city's public policy responses to the fiscal crises that were exacerbated by the demise of Fordism. He argues that Washington, elected by an *ad hoc* coalition of minorities and white liberals, attempted to retain industrial jobs and fairly redistribute resources but was thwarted by an alliance of traditional Daley supporters and pro-business elites that split this coalition apart by exploiting class and racial divisions. The efforts of this alliance, Ranney asserts, culminated in the election of Daley's son, Richard M. Daley, to the office of mayor and facilitated the city's adaptation to the new world order at the expense of the poor. While this account is heavily biased in favor of Washington's agenda, few readers will disagree with Ranney's conclusion that a local government can do little to protect its constituents from the adverse effects of global postindustrial change.

This examination of the political economy of Chicago is extended in an analysis of housing. Ranney vividly describes how, during the era of urban renewal, blacks in the city were concentrated into ghettos by the wholesale demolition of low-rent housing and by the ambitious construction of large, racially segregated public housing complexes. He then argues forcefully that the recent decline of federal and local governmental support for housing assistance to the poor has been driven by the capitalistic idea that shelter is not a basic human right but a commodity whose allocation must be determined by supply and demand. To document the effects of this approach, Ranney presents anecdotal reports of the residential displacement of low-income blacks by the gentrification of Chicago's inner-city communities. This case study, particularly the historical background, is well-researched and will be of interest to students of urban studies and city planning; many readers will, however, want dispassionate, quan-

titative evidence about the extent to which poor residents have been displaced by the renovation of neighborhoods.

The book concludes with essays that Ranney hopes will inspire a new strategy of collective action to challenge the new world order and create a society that will, in his opinion, provide "living wages" and "affordable housing." He claims that the location-specific tactics that were used to organize the lower- and working-classes in the past—notably, those devised by activist Saul Alinsky—are no longer relevant in a world dominated by transnational businesses; hence, an alternative form of organization is needed. On the final page, Ranney thus proposes that the ideas of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, could be used to promote an educational campaign to foster awareness of global-local connections among those who are adversely affected by the expansion of competitive capitalism. This brief discussion is, unfortunately, underdeveloped, and it will dissatisfy those who are looking for clear and specific guidelines for social activism.

In sum, this book contains some informative case studies, but overall, it contributes little in the way of unique insights or new directions for future research, and it will be more favorably received by critical neo-Marxists than by mainstream social scientists.

Robert L. Boyd
Mississippi State University

Stephen L. Ross and John Yinger, *The Color of Credit: Mortgage Discrimination, Research Methodology and Fair Lending Enforcement*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. \$39.95 hardcover.

This book blends policy analysis and complex technical recommendations relating to the mortgage lending industry. For one, the authors comprehensively examine what has been learned about mortgage-lending discrimination in recent years. They re-analyze existing loan-approval and loan-performance data and devise new tests for detecting discrimination in contemporary mortgage markets. They also review the 1996 Boston Federal Reserve study, examining new evidence that the minority-white loan-approval disparities found represented discrimination rather than variations in underwriting standards justified on