



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35

Issue 3 September - Special Issue: *Beyond the Numbers: How the Lived Experiences of Women Challenge the "Success" of Welfare Reform*

Article 12

2008

Review of *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive Era Reform in New York City*. John Louis Recchiuti. Reviewed by John M. Herrick.

John M. Herrick
Michigan State University

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



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Herrick, John M. (2008) "Review of *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive Era Reform in New York City*. John Louis Recchiuti. Reviewed by John M. Herrick.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35: Iss. 3, Article 12.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3364>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss3/12>

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

others. Moreover, the authors, including Luis Barrios, David Brotherton, Jock Young, and James Short, Jr. (just to name a few), are among the leaders of gang research. The authors are respected scholars and are more than qualified to contribute meaningfully to this volume.

This strong mix of fresh ideas offered by top authors in well-written and well-researched commentaries makes this book an important publication. The challenges to traditional criminology offered here are welcome and reasonable given the changing nature of gangs as well as the international influences on gang activities. The book is recommended reading for criminologists, sociologists, and anyone else with an interest in understanding street gangs and crime in a global context.

Matthew T. Theriot
The University of Tennessee

John Louis Recchiuti. *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive Era Reform in New York City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. \$59.95 hardcover.

John Louis Recchiuti, Professor of History and Director of the American Studies Program at Mount Union College, Ohio, has written a lively and well-researched study of activist intellectuals in New York City during the Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It complements the many studies of the Progressive Era published each year, illustrating ongoing scholarly interest in a period that saw an outpouring of social thought and action by broad array of reformers from proponents of the Social Gospel to pioneering social scientists that included women, African Americans such as W.E.B. DuBois and George Edmund Haynes, and others who searched for ways to bring an increasingly complex society into conformity with its egalitarian ideals.

Recchiuti focuses on New York City, arguably the most dynamic and important city in the United States at the end of the 19th century. A magnet for business, banking and immigrants looking for opportunities, the city attracted young social scientists, including college educated women with backgrounds in history, economics, anthropology and political science, who

found careers in social settlements, charitable organizations, municipal research bureaus, philanthropic foundations and universities. Charles Beard, a progressive Columbia University professor of politics, called New York City a "political science laboratory" and his Columbia colleague, sociologist Samuel McCune Lindsay, saw the city as a "sociological laboratory" teeming with immigrants and races where new social science methods could be enlisted in progressive social causes.

Recchiuti skillfully uses primary sources, archival collections and memoirs to unravel the reform activities of an indefatigable band of New York City reformers. He does not attempt to place their work in a broader international context as has been done by scholars who have investigated the international dimensions of reform during the Progressive Era. Similar to today's "public intellectuals," the "civically engaged" New York experts were not confined by narrow job descriptions. They held multiple memberships on the boards of social settlements and in progressive organizations such as the American Association for Labor Legislation which advocated for government assistance to the unemployed, the elderly and the sick; the National Child Labor Committee which fought against child labor and the National Consumers League where Florence Kelley, a lawyer and alumna of Jane Addams' Hull House, led the fight for safe working conditions and adequate wages. Lillian Wald, the nurse who founded Henry Street Settlement on Manhattan's Lower East Side, not only offered innovative and badly needed services to her immigrant neighbors, but worked incessantly with like-minded social scientists and philanthropists both locally and nationally to end child labor, improve housing for low-income workers, improve municipal sanitation, and prevent tuberculosis.

Progressive reformers understood that good social science research was no guarantee of successful reform. One of the book's strengths is the author's delineation of the frequent gaps between reformers' means and ends—recognition that even the most elegantly crafted social research was no guarantee that good social policies would eventuate, given the realities of the political process. The election of 1912 saw progressive social science at the peak of its influence, most notably in the platform of the Progressive Party and its candidate Theodore

Roosevelt. Shifting political alliances and World War I brought much of progressivism to a standstill.

Recchiuti has crafted a careful and lively account of the work of the New York social scientists in the New York Charity Organization Society and the founding of the New York School of Philanthropy, a pioneering School of Social Work. His story of the New York City social settlements, which have been studied elsewhere, illustrates a central paradox of Progressive reform, the gap between privileged experts and their reformist ideals and those they meant to serve. Settlement leaders, such as Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, a founder of Greenwich House on the Lower West Side, fostered participation by settlement neighbors in efforts to improve their well-being and were sometimes met with resistance, a dilemma often experienced by social welfare reformers.

This book is particularly timely. The experiences of this small band of New York City reformers, women and men, African Americans and whites who used social science to engage the problems of their day is worth retelling. Their stories could encourage and invigorate progressive social scientists, particularly those working in academic settings which may discourage applied research and community service that could contribute to beneficial social reform. The successes of the New York City reformers illustrate how careful research and effective collaboration can influence policymaking.

John M. Herrick
Michigan State University

Craig Calhoun (Ed.). *Sociology in America: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. \$85.00 hardcover, \$30.00 papercover.

This fascinating, informative, and at times frustrating book of 913 pages is a centennial publication of the American Sociological Association. It provides a *sociological* history of sociology in the United States. The contributing authors of this twenty-one chapter edited volume focus firstly on an understanding the development of the discipline more than its implications for broader national or intellectual history and