



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 23  
Issue 2 June

Article 17

---

June 1996

*Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States.* Robert Halpern.

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



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

#### Recommended Citation

(1996) "*Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States.* Robert Halpern.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 23: Iss. 2, Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2343>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol23/iss2/17>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

## BOOK NOTES

Robert Halpern, *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. \$49.50 hardcover, \$17.00 papercover.

Concern with inner-city decay, crime, drug addiction and poverty is hardly new. As Halpern shows in this important historical overview, these problems have been a characteristic feature of the urban landscape for many decades. In fact, social reformers first began to provide services to inner-city slum dwellers in the 19th century. The settlements were the first coordinated effort to address these problems. Since then, a bewildering variety of programs and projects with similar aims have been implemented. However, one hundred years after the heyday of the settlements, the problems of urban decline have not been solved. Indeed, there is significant evidence to show that they are worse than ever before. Inner-city areas are more deprived, violent, impoverished and desperate than they were even twenty years ago.

Halpern traces the history of efforts to improve inner city neighborhoods over the last century providing rich historical material as well as a comprehensive guide to the numerous programs which have been introduced at different times and places. The book is essentially a history and reference work and, as such, it will probably be the definitive work on the subject. However, the author also raises critical questions about the role of inner city revitalization programs in American social policy. While his commentary on the success and failure of urban community organizing is sadly too brief, it is insightful, offering an interpretation that will resonate with those who are skeptical of the view that the massive social problems facing America's cities can be solved through local effort. As Halpern points out, these efforts are highly compatible with prevailing views about poverty and deprivation in American culture. The impoverished urban community is viewed no differently from impoverished individuals. Exacerbated by racist ideology and entrenched segregationist tendencies, the inner city is exhorted to solve its own problems through its own efforts. But Halpern does not view community

organizing as a futile endeavor; indeed, he emphasizes both its successes and failures. Nevertheless, he remains doubtful that the massive problems of inner-cities can be solved locally with minimal external aid.

Robert Halpern has written an important and exciting book which will should serve as the standard work on the subject of urban community organization for many years to come. It should be widely read.

John Hagan and Ruth Patterson (Eds), *Crime and Inequality*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995. \$45.00 hardcover, \$16.95 papercover.

The link between crime and inequality has been debated for many years but both criminologists and the lay public remain skeptical of the idea that crime is a function of the social structure of society. Instead, there is a distinct preference for views that attribute criminality to individual malevolence, genetic defects, unsatisfactory child rearing practices or nefarious neighborhood influences. Structural views are not palatable, particularly in a society that venerates wealth and ostentatious living. Despite substantive sociological evidence, the link between crime and inequality is generally disregarded.

Hagan and Peterson have made a significant contribution to the literature by compiling a useful collection of original articles on the subject. The book is wide ranging, covering topics as diverse as gender and age inequality and crime; the role of unemployment in exacerbating inequality and crime; race and crime; and law, crime and inequality. The book also contains interesting theoretical pieces and several articles that introduce comparative content into the discussion. These include an account of crime and inequality in 18th century London and a chapter in crime and inequality in Eastern Europe. The editors introduction is well written and offers a useful overview of the topic.

While much of the material contained in the book is interesting, like many edited collections, the articles are uneven and they do not make for coherent reading. The editor's introduction does provide an overall framework but the thread is lost as some of the articles diverge into esoteric and marginally related