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**Review of *Faces of Poverty: Portraits of Women and Children on Welfare*. Jill Duerr Berrick. Reviewed by Tracey Mabrey, Western Michigan University.**

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Continental and Roman Catholic versions of the subject, and the later growth of a politically conservative Christian coalition.

Phillips presents an overview not available elsewhere, based on a critical familiarity with scholarship in three nations (the Canadian story is interesting). His understanding of historical complexity makes this book is a good corrective for sanctimonious generalities about religious influence on the welfare state—the Hebrew prophets and all that. He doesn't do justice to the Charity Organization Society and the profession of social work that grew out of it (he doesn't mention *Charity and Social Life*, by Charles Stuart Loch [1910], or the publications of Bernard Bosanquet; because, I suppose, they weren't formal theology); he un-deliberately ignores the religious communities and theology discussed in John Humphrey Noyes' interesting *History of American Socialisms* (1870); he doesn't mention the great work of the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1911), because. I suppose, it wasn't Anglo-American and it may not have influenced the Anglo-Americans. But it did, or should, influence scholars on that subject.

James Leiby  
University of California, Berkeley

Jill Duerr Berrick, *Face of Poverty: Portraits of Women and Children on Welfare*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. \$25.00 hardcover.

Much is said but little is actually known about the experiences of people who are connected to the American system of welfare. The poor are among us, they are talked about, they are scandalized, they are planned for and schemed against, yet the voices of the poor, the faces of poor children, are largely made unheard and invisible in the rancor of welfare reform. Jill Duerr Berrick's *Faces of Poverty: Portraits of Women and Children on Welfare* does much to raise the tenor of the voices of people on welfare.

It almost doesn't bear repeating that there has been a dearth of both qualitative and quantitative research in the area of welfare. All too frequently, research on welfare has been done with a moralizing or politicizing bent so as to render statistics and

data soberingly impersonal or highly charged. The paucity of diligently-collected information has contributed to wrongful policies, reified stereotypes, and malingering attacks on specific groups of people. Welfare recipients, the clients of social workers, are being blamed for many social ills, a war has been waged on the poor. Research on the people on welfare is needed as fight this most pernicious battle. Social work researchers have a unique vantage point from which to conduct inquiry into the lives of people on welfare.

Duerr Berrick's book is a much-needed armament in the battle for accuracy and information about people on welfare and the varied welfare reform proposals. The author's brilliantly simple research should go far towards filling the knowledge gap related to welfare. Duerr Berrick spent one year with five families on welfare. Each family is different and each provides rich detail about just how being on welfare affects individual opportunities and expectations. This book is wrongly subtitled for while each of the five families is headed by a woman, it should not be assumed that men (fathers, husbands, boyfriends and sons) are not included in the family portraits or in the families' decision-making and lives' events. Indeed, as is often the case with female-headed households, the men are around, though their names may not be on the lease or on the birth certificate. By and large, this book is an intimate revealing about what goes on in the households where monthly welfare checks are delivered. The author seems to have taken great pains to capture families from distinct vantage points on the welfare plateau. All of the women have children. Each of the five families is on welfare for a different reason. And each of the five families may some day get off of welfare for a different reason. There is great diversity in this book; the people profiled come from urban and rural settings, from multiple ethnic groups, are various ages and come from different class orientations. And the women have varied lengths of attachment to the welfare system. The tie that binds these dissimilar people is the much-pilloried welfare check.

The five women profiled, Ana, Sandy, Rebecca, Darlene, and Cora have tales not dissimilar to millions of other welfare and non-welfare recipients across the country. If there is strength in numbers, the stories of these families could represent a powerful

constituency. Ana, for example, seemed to embody an American dream; she held a solid-paying, benefit-providing job, saved enough money to invest in a business and still ended up on welfare. Ana went from being a critic to a recipient of welfare literally overnight and she's very frank about her previous assumptions and her on-going experiences with welfare. There is in Ana's portrait a vision of welfare being a temporary salve, of knowing a life independent of a welfare check. In contrast to Ana, there is Cora whose profile is the last of the five portraits presented in the book. Cora's profile is aptly titled "A Portrait of Dependency". Cora's latest (and most long-lasting) dependency is on the welfare system. Her life, her very being, is organized around the receipt of a monthly welfare check. Cora's household is a collection of co-dependencies, all somehow related to living a welfare life. The complexity of lives in poverty is made resoundingly clear by the telling of these vulnerable tales.

While these intimate portrayals are effective in providing much-needed qualitative (and some quantitative) data about welfare families, Duerr Berrick adds greatly to this already great book by including a discussion of welfare terminology, myths, and rhetoric in effort to present as much factual grist as possible. Additionally, the final chapter includes an analysis of welfare reform proposals. Though always changing, the terrain of reform proposals does allow for some pragmatic comparisons which Duerr Berrick provides in the context of the families profiled in her book; the reader is forced to consider what might be Cora's fate if she lived under the Wisconsin model.

Duerr Berrick is to be commended for collecting this substantial data from the five families on welfare. It is obvious that the researcher spent substantial time in making these families comfortable with her presence and gleaned an impressive amount of direct information. If there is one shortcoming in the book, it is its over-reliance on specific research studies; perhaps this is more related to the dearth of research in this area more than a direct failing of the book. These are unabashedly direct pictures of welfare families; Duerr Berrick is unafraid to show people's limitations, foibles, and the results of their poor decision-making in an economically poor environment. The book tells the full story of dumb decisions made by people who are poor to dumb policies

made by people who are not. This book ought to be required reading for every elected official and every talking head who call for reform without first calling for accurate information.

Tracey Mabrey  
Western Michigan University

John A. Vincent, *Inequality in Old Age*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. \$ 49.95 hardcover.

Inequality generated by distinctions based on class, ethnicity, and gender is a social and economic concern that transcends age. Unfortunately, inequality tends to be exacerbated in old age, assuming a greater impact that leads to more hardships and deprivation for many elderly persons. Individuals who have experienced discrimination and social or economic marginalization throughout the life cycle are even more susceptible in old age.

This text explores the relationship between inequality and old age by examining the impact of social stratification, class, gender, race and ethnicity over the life course. The author suggests that most sociological studies of inequality and old age provide a limited snapshot view of the conditions faced by the elderly. What is needed, it is argued, is a method that examines inequality as a process over the life course to address the central question of "how do old age and inequality fit together in society?"

A process analysis method sheds light on the conditions that historical and contemporary structures have created under which elderly people are more likely to be exploited. In addition to class, race, and gender, for example, inequality in old age reflects the afflictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. These economic and social developments have led to an exploitation of labor, including the artificial and detrimental development of the concept of dividing the life course into pre-work, work and post-work. They also reflect the economic subordination of women based on the gender division of labor which is carried into old age. The discussion on how these and other structures impact inequality in old age is quite detailed and informative.

This book is particularly valuable for those interested in theories of inequality and social theories of aging. The author provides