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Why Americans Hate Welfare. Martin Gilens.

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capitalism, these social programs have been redesigned to serve its interests.

This is a depressing book which is rendered even more depressing by its concluding chapter. Although this chapter offers a comprehensive strategy for "the next deal", it is unlikely that proposals for reform will be implemented without major political and attitudinal changes. Indeed, Blau concedes that effective changes are only likely to be implemented after people realize that unregulated capitalism has failed them. The book would have been strengthened by a discussion of how populist politics could be used to mobilize public opinion against the current excesses of the time. Populism provided a effective impetus for reform at the end of the last century and could, in the hands of skillful political leaders, conceivably do so again. It would also have been interesting if Blau has speculated on the need for a new rationale for state interventionism that could inspire people as it did in the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, Blau's analysis is rigorous, readable and prophetic. It should be widely consulted.

Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999. \$ 25 hardcover, \$ 19.95 papercover.

It is generally recognized among welfare experts that there is widespread public antipathy to social programs that focus on the poor. While social programs that cater for all income groups, such as social security, have widespread support, means tested programs that cater for only for the needy are less popular. Although social scientists have offered numerous explanations for the public's negative attitudes towards welfare services, Martin Gilens argues that these explanations are incorrect. The major issue, he suggests, is not America's strong cultural commitment to individualism, or whether government aid is inclusive or targeted on the poor, but whether the recipients of welfare are people of color. In short, negative public attitudes towards welfare are governed by racism, and particularly by racist attitudes towards African Americans who are perceived to be manipulating the welfare system for their own ends.

Gilens makes use of a vast amount of survey data to support his argument. Survey research has consistently shown that the American public has a strong sense of compassion, and is willing

to endorse governmental programs designed to help the needy. However, when race is factored in, these attitudes change and erroneous beliefs about welfare are frequently expressed. Most survey respondents believe wrongly that African Americans are the major recipients of welfare. They also believe that most African Americans receiving welfare are abusing the system. In an attempt to discover the basis for these beliefs, Gilens laboriously traces media images of welfare response in popular magazines, newspapers and television and finds that negative reporting of welfare since the 1960s has projected negative images in which people of color are shown to dominate the welfare population and to be exploiting it. It is these images that have shaped popular attitudes towards the welfare system.

Gilens does not believe that there is an organized conspiracy among reporters and news presenters to malign poor African Americans. Instead, he believes that this type of reporting was itself insidiously shaped by the events of the 1960s when the Civil Rights movement, the war on poverty and urban riots challenged established racist attitudes. The racist attitudes which characterize public opinion on welfare today are themselves a reaction against the emancipatory struggles of African Americans.

This is an important book which makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on race and social policy. Its message is a powerful albeit depressing one. Although the author's attempts to offer policy options that can address the problem are insubstantial, his analysis is incisive and important. The book will provoke widespread debate and deserves praise for its originality and powerful message. Hopefully, it will inspire further discussion about how false beliefs about race and welfare can be countered.