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Social Policy in a Changing Society. Maurice Mullard and Paul Spicker.

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draws on his professional skills as a demographer to show how the subjective experience of poverty translates into national data of disturbing dimensions. Aber, in turn, links the ethnographic and statistical data to an interpretation of the causes of poverty and offers policy proposals for its amelioration.

The book stresses the fact that poverty in America thrives in a context of affluence. In many nations, poverty is directly associated with a lack of economic development. In the United States, on the other hand, its causes lie in a multiplicity of factors that operate at both the individual and societal level. The book suggests that low educational attainment, young parenthood and a lack of adequately remunerated jobs are of primary importance. The fact that these causal factors have not been addressed is, they argue, nothing short of a national disgrace. The United States is notorious for having the highest rate of child poverty in the Western, industrial world.

The authors have not only produced a readable and insightful account of what it is like to be poor in America, but effectively combine statistical findings and policy recommendations to offer a comprehensive view of the problem. The book will be of particular value to undergraduate students who will find that the linking of narrative, statistical data and policy analysis offers meaningful insights into poverty in America today.

Maurice Mullard and Paul Spicker, *Social Policy in a Changing Society*. New York: Routledge, 1999. \$80.00 hardcover, \$24.88 papercover.

The study of social policy has historically been a descriptive exercise dominated by descriptive accounts of historical events, legislative provisions and administrative practices. The lack of theoretical sophistication in the field has long been noted by commentators in other disciplines who have effectively used theory to frame their own analyses of social policy issues. Over the years, social policy writers within social work and social administration have responded to these criticisms and today, theoretical insights are much more widely used.

This book shows how effectively theory can be used in a textbook to inform social work and social administration students of the assumptions that pervade the policy making and

implementation process. Consisting of 15 chapters, it is extremely wide ranging and informative. It also shows how exciting the subject can be when properly linked to theoretical discourse. A very attractive feature of the book is the way it draws on theory from various fields, including political science, economics and sociology. Several chapters deal with the most important ideological perspectives in social policy covering conservatism, social democracy, liberal individualism and Marxism. Other chapters discuss Keynesianism, global economy theory, communitarianism and postmodernism. Another strength of the book is the way the authors link theory to the practical problems which have long been the purview of social policy analysis. Issues such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, social justice and even public expenditure are linked to wider theoretical debates.

Although the book is written for British students, it will also be useful for students in other countries. It can be effectively used as a supplemental text for students in the United States who are not adequately exposed to theoretical issues and who will benefit from its wider perspective. The book has many strengths and will appeal to students. It should be widely prescribed.