



September 2001

America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century. James T. Patterson

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Recommended Citation

(2001) "America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century. James T. Patterson," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 3, Article 19.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol28/iss3/19>

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Book Notes

James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. \$18.95 papercover.

Patterson's book on poverty in the United States has been widely used by students of sociology, social work and social policy. It was first published in 1981, and since then three more editions have appeared. The latest edition, which was published in 2000, extends the 1994 edition with a useful account of anti-poverty policies during the Clinton administration.

Patterson traces developments leading up to the so-called 'welfare reform' legislation of 1996. The author pays particular attention to the role of economic prosperity in mitigating the incidence of poverty during what he describes as 'the amazing 1990s'. He also examines the political constraints on President Clinton's efforts to extend social programs and to address the pressing social problems his administration inherited. Nevertheless, the high levels of unemployment and frequent job layoffs, as well as the high rates of crime and poverty that characterized the late 1980s were ameliorated. Of course many would claim that these improvements were the result of a rapidly expanding economy and not of government social policies. Indeed, as Patterson suggests, the prosperity of the 1990s fostered an attitude among many middle class Americans that social problems can best be solved by market forces rather than the intervention of the state. Only time will tell whether this view will be sustained.

It is instructive to compare recent events with events a century ago when widespread economic prosperity was accompanied by a concerted effort by Progressives to draw public attention to the poverty problem and to campaign for state intervention. By the end of the 20th century, it seems, poverty had ceased to be a national concern. As Patterson shows, the history of policies and programs designed to combat poverty has long been accompanied by a national awareness that something ought to be done. The absence of a commitment of this kind in the 1990s marks a new trend which, accompanied by an acceptance of heightened

inequality, is suggestive of a declining interest among the public in the plight of the poor.

Patterson book remains one of the best introductory accounts of the historical evolution of social policies intended to address the poverty problem of in the United States. It will, no doubt, continue to be widely used. Perhaps its historical emphasis on the way previous generations sought to address the problem will inspire a new generation to once again commit to the struggle against poverty.

Gordon Hughes and Ross Ferguson (Eds.), *Ordering Lives: Family Work and Welfare*. New York: Routledge, 2000. \$18.95 papercover.

The view that social policies are not intended to enhance people's well-being but have ulterior functions, such as exerting social control or promoting the interests of capitalism, is now well established. Marxian interpretations which stress the role of social policy in preventing unrest and maintaining capitalist exploitation have been succeeded by Foucauldian accounts which emphasize the way social policies help to normalize power relations and maintain social order. More recently, these ideas have been developed by regulationists who argue that by promoting labor market participation, social policy revitalizes capitalism and fosters national competitiveness in the global economy. These diverse themes now comprise a coherent body of thought that challenges claims about the altruistic intentions of social welfare and instead emphasizes its role in the exercise of power and social control.

The role of social policy in shaping and supporting power relations in society is examined in this introductory textbook prepared for social science students at Britain's Open University. It begins with an analysis of power and the way both overt and covert power relations permeate human affairs. Contrasting the ideas of Weber and Foucault, the authors show that any account of social policy or indeed, other dimensions of social existence, must be based on an understanding of power. The subsequent chapters develop this theme by examining the way basic social institutions such as the family, work and social welfare function within the context of power relations.

Although the book is written for British students, its focus