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Review of *The Color of Opportunity: Pathways to Family Welfare and Work*. Haya Stier and Marta Tienda. Review by Eric Swank.

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try to do this indirectly. Teaching students how to do research will not necessarily teach them how to be critical consumers of research. Finally, teaching students how researchers do research will not necessarily teach students how to use research methods to evaluate their practice or, more generally, how to conduct empirically-based practice. Again, we need to be more direct in our efforts to achieve these goals. However, the above are not so much limitations of this book as they are criticisms of how we teach foundation research in social work.

John G. Orme
University of Tennessee

Haya Steir and Marta Tienda. *The Color of Opportunity: Pathways to Family, Welfare, and Work*. University of Chicago Press, 2001. \$32.50 hardcover.

In addressing Chicago's poverty, the *Color of Opportunity* opens with an articulate elaboration of its theoretical models. In providing readable interplay of "life-course," "human capital" and "structural" perspectives, the authors clearly hit most of the mainstream theories on poverty (the lit review relies heavily on the works of William Julius Wilson, David Ellwood, Charles Murray and Sarah McLanahan). Sensibly, this lit review included many concise definitions and later chapters provides 40 pages of meticulous methodological notes (in being pretty candid, the authors acknowledge some of the limitations in their "Urban Poverty and Family Life Study" samples). Most impressively, the rest of the manuscript is inundated with data. In triangulating three samples, the analysis generated some 65 tables, 37 charts and 10 maps.

This abundance of data yielded some interesting insights. As a whole, the "culture of poverty thesis" garnered little empirical support. That is, the data did not identify any "ghetto-specific" subcultures since all social classes stigmatized welfare and poor racial minorities were more willing to take low paying jobs. Likewise, poor parents wanted their children to be educated and the determinants of welfare consumption were identical in the inner-city and suburbs.

In refuting some underclass arguments, the data also highlighted the structural causes of unemployment. Through bivariate maps and tables, it is clear that employment opportunities were unequally distributed throughout the metropolitan area (i.e., in the last 30 years the City of Chicago lost 56% of its manufacturing jobs while its outer suburbs showed a 25% increase in such jobs). Moreover, several multivariate regressions showed that the spatial allocation of jobs was a leading cause of inequality. More precisely, the geographical dispersion of jobs was the best predictor of poverty since racial minorities were segregated into job deprived areas.

As the book scrutinized economic racism, other discernments materialized. On the sense of economic vulnerability, black men seemed to fear unemployment much more than white men. Moreover, this fear was reasonable since blacks and Puerto Ricans were more likely to be discharged during mass layoffs. Finally, the book advances some familiar but important understandings—single moms experienced more poverty, welfare spells averaged 2.2 years and the middle class was oblivious to issues of structural unemployment.

As the book offers these and other observations, it was also afflicted by some methodological weaknesses. Some vital claims lacked empirical evidence. For example, an important independent variable was racist “housing policy, historic and contemporary segregation.” However, the authors forgot to include any evidence on the racial biases of landlords, realtors, bankers or politicians. Likewise, the authors argue that researchers should explore the intergenerationally of welfare attitudes, but they failed to ask any adults about their parent’s work, school or welfare attitudes.

There were other crucial omissions. In the education and family chapters, the authors ignored subjective processes (most of their measures dealt with demographic or behavioral attributes). Subsequently, the significant association between teenage pregnancies and the frequency of parental supervision may disappear if the researchers controlled for the child’s impressions of parental practices (the quality of familial interactions may be more important than the quantity of such exchanges). Likewise,

all educational indicators were fixed to a person's "educational attainment." And while school completion seems connected to income, this measure decontextualized the educational process. That is, a student's economic plight was seen purely as a result of personal attributes while environmental factors were overlooked. Thus, a shrewder analysis would see if class locations were reproduced through the means of inequitable school financing, paternalistic teaching pedagogies, insufficient sex-education programs or racist tracking systems.

The book also ignored the gendered nature of poverty. Subsequently, sections on teenage pregnancy disregarded the impact of gender roles on sexual mores and familial responsibilities (i.e., boys want to have unprotected sex but they do not want to pay child support). Moreover, the deliberations on welfare and divorce glossed over the reasons for favoring AFDC over marriage (i.e., many mothers are fleeing violent, drunk or callous spouses). Likewise no attention was given to the sexism in social policies. That is, the authors never explored the gender biases of Social Security and welfare reforms (i.e., men have greater access to social insurance programs and do not have Norplants inserted).

Some sampling decisions are equally detrimental. The use of cross-sectional data to gather life histories seems problematic (issues of incomplete or selective recall). Moreover, single people were excluded from the study and the researchers over-sampled people from poor neighborhoods (making the representativeness of the descriptive findings suspect). Finally, the 1980's samples are a bit dated and cannot examine the impact of recent welfare reforms.

In the end, this review should sound somewhat ambivalent. The book wisely explored the worth of several mainstream paradigms (i.e., human capital, life-course perspective and Wilson's formulations on poverty concentration). Moreover, the emphasis on racial discrimination and spatial matters seem prudent. Additionally, the frank discussion on methodological limitations is quite refreshing. Nevertheless, the book's theoretical premises seem a bit narrow. In effect, the authors missed the subjective and contextual cues of educational and family settings. Moreover, the

authors avoided the ramifications of gender norms. Thus, this book supplies a promising beginning. However, this beginning must be augmented by future projects that test these assertions within a wider range of feminist and educational theories.

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