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***Understanding Poverty.* Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H.
Haveman (Eds.).**

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interwoven and intricate dimensions of the cultural experiences of Asian American communities living in the United States today. The book's editors also points out that it is not only a matter of providing a deeper understanding of the complexities of the cultural experiences of Asian Americans, but of normatively transcending the ghettoization of cultural images. There is, they point out, no empirical basis for identifying a unique or unitary Asian American culture. There are major differences in beliefs, attitudes, languages among different Asian communities. Differences of this kind are to be found within ethnic groups from different countries and regions. Clearly, a far more sophisticated account of culture is needed.

The book delivers on its promise to demonstrate the diversity of Asian American culture by offering a veritable fest of material dealing with many aspects of the cultural experiences of Asian Americans. Its fifteen chapters range over topics as diverse as South East Asian youth gangs in Oakland, California; Gay Asian Americans in Los Angeles; internet discussions among immigrant Filipinos; participation in Japanese American beauty pageants; entrepreneurial Asian American children; domestic violence in the South Asian community and much more. The individual preferences and interests of readers will no doubt decide which of these contributions are the most interesting and informative but, as a collection, the book takes debates about culture well beyond traditional concerns. Its arguments about how popular stereotypes obscure complex realities apply equally to accounts of cultural and ethnic groups. The book's final chapter which deals with the intersection of public policy and the subjective experience of cultural life is particularly important. Although this is not a textbook for entry level undergraduates, its engaging style and range of interesting material should appeal to many readers interested in understanding the complex issues attending people's experiences and expressions of culture today.

Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H. Haveman (Eds.), *Understanding Poverty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. \$55.00 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Social scientists have long been aware that the incidence of income poverty is susceptible to economic trends, rising when

economic conditions deteriorate and falling when the economy experiences sustained growth. It was not surprising, therefore, that the boom years of the 1990s witnessed a fall in the poverty rate in the United States. In some parts of the country, labor shortages became chronic and, as wages rose, the incidence of poverty declined. These trends seem to vindicate the belief that a vibrant capitalist economic is the answer to the poverty problem. With talk of a New Economy based on high tech and high productivity, and a belief that permanent prosperity now characterized American society, some even argued that poverty was a thing of the past.

In the last two years, these optimistic beliefs have been countered not only by the collapse of the dot-com industry and numerous corporate scandals, but by more careful research into poverty trends in the 1990s which suggest that while the overall poverty rate did indeed decline, a sizable number of very poor people were left behind. This research also revealed that many middle income workers did not experience significant improvements in their incomes and standards of living. The idea that the economic boom of the 1990s solved the poverty problem now seems a hollow one.

It is in this context that Danziger and Haveman's book should be recognized for making a major contribution to social science research into poverty. In seeking to understand poverty, the book shows how different factors interact in complex ways to perpetuate poverty at times when wider economic conditions would suggest that poverty should be significantly reduced. Although the book is not specifically intended to address the issue of poverty in the context of the economic prosperity of the 1990s, its numerous contributors deal with aspects of the problem that have direct bearing on the question of why poverty and deprivation persist in wealthy societies such as the United States where the values of material success and prosperity are deeply institutionalized.

This weighty tome consists of no less than 15 chapters and amounts to about 500 pages. It begins with an overview of the issues by the editors both of whom are among the most prolific and important scholars in the field today. The first part of the book deals with the extent of income poverty in the United States and its relation to family structure and mobility. It also contains a

useful chapter which situates poverty in the United States in the international context. The second part of the book is concerned with anti-poverty policies ranging over topics such as income support programs, welfare reform, health and human capital investments. Part III focuses on the spatial dimension paying attention to community based interventions and housing programs for low income people. The final part of the book addresses issues of race, and the current state of research into poverty.

Despite its size, this is an extremely useful book which should be consulted by students, researchers and general readers alike. It is easy to read and summarizes a huge amount of important information in a systematic way. Although some will be critical of its atheoretical approach, this is not a major limitation. Even though theory is neglected, the book finds an appropriate balance between descriptive and policy approaches and, in this way, offers a succinct overview of what governments, communities and non-profit agencies can do to address the poverty problem. The book offers an excellent overview of the field and will be a widely used resource for many years to come.

Kenneth J. Neubeck and Noel Cazenave, *Welfare Racism: Playing the Race Card Against America's Poor*. New York: Routledge, 2001. \$19.95 papercover.

Social science scholarship has shown that there are many different ways of conceptualizing real world events and phenomena. Different investigators often use different perspectives to approach their subject matter and accordingly, their analyses and conclusions will differ from those who use other perspectives. This is equally true of the study of income support programs. Although much research in the field is based on an atheoretical, empiricist approach, more theoretically grounded approaches that rely on the insights of functionalism, Marxism, pluralism, gender and other perspectives are now common. However, it is only recently that scholars engaged in the analysis of welfare have explicitly sought to understand welfare from a perspective based on an understanding of race and the way racist attitudes and practices are infused into social policy. The pioneering work of scholars such as Jill Quadagno and Robert Lieberman has