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**Review of *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects us All*. Mark Robert Rank. Reviewed by Joel Blau.**

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## Book Reviews

Mark Robert Rank, *One Nation Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. \$29.95 hardcover.

Poor people trigger different responses. They provoke many on the street to recite the folk wisdom about poverty. Within the academy, experts scrutinize their demographic traits. But so cut off are they from the body politic that except for intensifying the workfare requirements, politicians rarely talk about them at all. In *One Nation Underprivileged*, Mark Rank sets out to reduce the social and political distance between the poor and the rest of us. Deconstructing the dominant ideology about poverty, Rank insists that since the poor are poor for structural reasons, we should stop thinking about them as a tribe apart.

Rank's book is divided into three sections. The first part describes the conditions of poverty and explores the reasons for its existence. Beginning with a discussion of the politics of the poverty line, Rank moves on to highlight poverty's changing demographics—in particular, how the decline of the poverty among the elderly has been offset by an increase in female-headed households and an accompanying rise in poverty among children. As Rank emphasizes, this poverty often forces people to make choices among necessities—the “heat or eat” dilemma—and is associated with poorer health, emotional strain, and children's stunted mental and physical development. Nor are these outcomes random occurrences scattered across the population. With growing economic insecurity and 31 percent of family heads working for less than \$10 an hour, families cycle in and out of poverty as their economic circumstances dictate. In such a fluid situation, it is no wonder that, as Rank notes in one of his more striking statistics, 58 percent of the U.S. population will be poor at some point between the ages of twenty and seventy-five.

The implications of this statistic buttress much of the author's appeal to self-interest in the book's next section. If a majority of Americans are going to be poor at some point in their adult life, then protections against poverty are not money wasted on

somebody else. Rank further maintains that these protections are consistent with two core value orientations that most Americans hold in high esteem, namely, the Judeo-Christian ethic and our nation's founding civic principles—democracy, equality, and social justice. Finally, even if these two reasons do prove insufficient, the issue of poverty merits our attention because we all have a shared responsibility to address problems that affect our fellow citizens. Whether the issue is health, education, or crime, our failure to adhere to our core values saddles us with unnecessary expenses that end up costing more in the long run.

The book's final section contains the author's policy remedies. In the labor market, Rank proposes using fiscal stimulus, employer wage subsidies, and public service employment to create enough adequately paying jobs. Likewise, an increase in the minimum wage and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit to individuals without children would supplement the wages of current jobholders. To remedy deficits and inequities in education, housing, and health care, Rank advocates changes in tax policy and an enhancement of current programs such as housing vouchers and child's health coverage through either Medicaid or CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program). Sensitive to changes in the structure of families, the author also pays special attention to the impact of issues such as childcare and teenage pregnancy on family economic well-being.

Rank writes well, and his proposals reflect the state of the policy art on the more liberal end of the political spectrum. Amid all the political discourse about individual deficiencies, his focus on the structural causes of poverty is especially welcome. Rank recognizes that the causes of poverty lie in the workings of the U.S.'s particularly dogmatic brand of free market capitalism, and he knows that for precisely this reason, his proposals are sure to encounter strong opposition.

Rank nevertheless mischaracterizes that opposition when he presents it as primarily ideological. To some extent, it is ironic that he should stress this component, since he spends so much of the book discussing the economic origins of poverty. At the same time, however, this stress on poverty's economic origins shortchanges some much-needed discussion about who benefits from its existence. As a result, the free market appears as a *deus*

ex machina, a system whose social depredations occur without any human intervention. Such a description not only constitutes too partial a portrait of poverty's structural origins; it may also mislead those committed to social change about the nature of the opposition they will face.

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Charles D. Garvin, Lorraine M. Gutierrez, and Maeda J. Galinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Work with Groups*. New York: Guilford Publications, 2004. \$70.00 hardcover.

Many aspects of social work can be viewed productively from the group perspective. Although, at times, social work with groups is perceived as a social work specialty, it embodies much of social work itself. This handbook shows how social work with groups uses social work knowledge, values, and frameworks to address social problems. The editors select and identify major group work issues and offer their influential views. The handbook explicates the theoretical and conceptual foundations; practice models; purpose and intentionality; locus and adaptability; organizations, communities, and other settings; ties to research and evaluation; and synchrony with technology.

The handbook shows how creative artful approaches are, in many ways, congruent with contemporary social science and strengths-based approaches. The case is made for an empowerment perspective, using conscientization and other theories which continue to guide group work, particularly in the developing world. This handbook points to currently underutilized aspects of social work with groups, including social action. As such, while it reveals its history, it also shows how group work, while effective in the present, can innovate in the future. Consistent with empowerment and consumer-based approaches, family group conferences are among the newer approaches to group work presented. The demand for social-emotional support and the capability of social work groups to meet such needs continues unabated, as is the capability of group work to adapt to increasingly prevalent technologically-based computerized methods of communication, which are among the newest developments and