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**Review of *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal.**

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notion that adolescents in disadvantaged neighborhoods are condemned to poor outcomes.

Although the authors provide a strong and compelling study, the book's primary weakness stems from the relatively short outline of the book and the minimal discussion of placing this study within the current research context. The authors do not do an adequate job preparing the reader for what's to come and suggesting how this study pushes our thinking on youth development beyond the current literature. The study itself could have been strengthened through the use of longitudinal data, additional sample sites, and additional variables that capture characteristics of social capital in neighborhoods.

However, the book's strengths lie in its attempts to grapple with the complex contextual issues affecting the lives of adolescents. The authors go beyond the one-dimensional approach as their work articulates and tests a framework for understanding the impact of multiple contexts on youth development. Additionally, the authors address not just whether neighborhood influences youth development, but what the contextual mechanisms are through which this occurs. As they provide this important study in helping us understand youth development, they also push the field of social inquiry to consider the influence of multiple contexts on all aspects of life.

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Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal.  
*Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches.*  
Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006. \$35.00  
hardcover, \$18.00 papercover.

*Polarized America* is a political science book that joins the burgeoning list of academic and popular writing about the growth of economic inequality in the United States. This

volume, however, has a slightly different twist. Instead of merely describing income inequality, the authors seek to correlate it with the evidence of political polarization in Congress. Using a sophisticated quantitative procedure that enables them to track congressional voting records over time, they contend that rising income inequality and a Congress of ideological extremes has replaced the declining inequality and political consensus of post-World War II America. Although the correlation they note is indisputable, much of their broader argument is misguided. At this point in U.S. politics, a return to the 'moderates' they yearn for—Sam Rayburn, John Heinz, Dan Rostenkowski, and Sam Nunn—would further exacerbate the trend toward the greater income inequality they so decry.

By now, however, virtually everyone except the far right has come to accept the evidence of growing income inequality. In 1967, the ninety-fifth percentile of the income distribution earned six times what the twenty-fifth percentile did; by 2003, this differential had expanded to 8.6. Meanwhile, median family income increased from \$31,400 in 1967 to \$42,200 in 2000. This latter statistic actually understates the trend to income inequality, because the authors chose 1967, and not 1973, the high point of American equalitarianism, as the baseline year. Moreover, even if median income did increase, it is the widespread entry of women into the workforce as well as the spurt at the top that drove the median upward. Indeed, other studies have noted that in 2004, the bottom 60 percent of all Americans received 95 percent of what they earned in 1979. Statistics like these cast doubt on one of the authors' core assumptions that even while income disparity soared, workers rejected redistributive policies because many benefited from "a period of increasing prosperity."

No comparable soft spots mar the authors' analysis of polarization in the U.S. Congress. For them, the quintessential political vignette is what happened to a single Pennsylvania Senate seat. In 1991, after a plane crash killed three-term Republican moderate John Heinz, the seat was occupied first by Harris Wofford, a liberal who ran on platform of national health insurance, and then in 1994, by Rick Santorum, one of the most conservative members of the House of Representatives. Even if the 2006 election of moderate Democrat Bob Casey, Jr. partly

spoils the tidiness of this vignette, their evidence of political polarization is compelling. In their detailed analysis of voting patterns, for example, the authors find some overlap between the members of the Republican and Democratic parties during the 1960s. But over the next forty years, the parties diverge, so that by the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress (2003-2004), no Democrat voted to the right of any Republican, and no Republican voted to the left of any Democrat.

It is the loss of this center in American politics that most concerns the authors. Their concern is revealing, but if their purpose is actually to redistribute income, the reestablishment of a bipartisan center is not the way to do it. After all, with the shift of both parties to the right, this center would merely perpetuate the same neoliberal, market-driven policies that have already spurred the growth of income inequality. The authors may desire to go back to the future, but the American political economy has changed, and a return to the relatively stable post World War II capitalism that raised everyone's income is not likely.

This point highlights the fundamental problem with the authors' perspective. In essence, their entire book consists of two mutually interrelated variables—income inequality and political polarization. The big mistake they make is thinking that these two variables cause one another, when, in fact, each flows from a prior cause—broadly speaking, changes in the American political economy that have given rise to them both. In passing, the authors do acknowledge the existence of alternative explanations about income inequality: factors such as trade liberalization, immigration and the establishment of a global labor market, declining rates of unionization, and losses in the value of minimum wage. Nevertheless, they quickly discard these “exogenous” explanations in order to focus on “the public policies produced in the American political system.” Even if it is not completely wrong to say that politics produces more politics, something is clearly missing.

Until the rise of “political science” departments in the 1920s, political economy was an established university course. Political science courses separated politics from economics and turned politics into a subject with observable laws. Although *Polarized America* does contain some valuable insights, it is still

most memorable for its illustration of the intellectual damage that this separation continues to inflict.

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Lorraine T. Midanik. *Biomedicalization of Alcohol Studies: Ideological Shifts and Institutional Challenges*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2006. \$ 39.95 hardcover.

From the first pages of Lorraine Midanik's thoughtful and thought provoking book, one senses a commitment to coming to terms with some of the major policy and practice and educational challenges of our times, having to do with the role of science, the role of government and the role of money in understanding addiction generally, and the social context and the social construction of social problems, especially as they relate to alcohol studies. Underlying the thesis is a larger concern about the current state of social science research, not only in alcohol studies, but more generally the health sciences. At the outset Midanik tells the reader that the purpose of the book is "to describe, assess and critique biomedicalization and its influence as a larger social trend on the health field." The book is divided into seven chapters, five of which are concerned with various facets of biomedicalization, as she sees it: its definition; history; its relation to public health; and the carefully documented paradigm shift under the rubric of alcohol studies. Midanik, a scholar of repute in the alcohol studies arena, and a public health scientist at the University of California's School of Social Welfare, brings to the table considerable acumen with respect to her arguments. The remaining two chapters address two related topics. Chapter six offers a case study of alcohol related research in Sweden where Midanik undertook a Fulbright in 2004. Chapter seven is an essay reflecting the dilemma facing the social sciences more generally in terms of biomedicalization.

So what is *biomedicalization* and why is it problematic?