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Challenge the "Success" of Welfare Reform

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*Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Models,
Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Theoretical
Perspectives to Practice.* James Forte.

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on poverty and social welfare policy in the United States, and while many of them deal with issues that have been previously documented in the literature, others are concerned with particularly interesting or neglected issues. For example, the role of social conservatives and religious fundamentalists in shaping the welfare to work program and injecting traditional beliefs into American social welfare policy makes for fascinating reading. Several chapters deal with the racial dynamics of welfare reform as they affect minority and immigrant communities. Since race is a consistent theme in American social welfare policy, these chapters make a useful contribution in explicating the issues. Another unusual chapter deals with micro-enterprise and emphasizes the way these programs reflect efforts to marketize social welfare policy in the United States.

The welfare reform initiatives adopted in the United States in the 1990s have been widely reported internationally, and unfortunately, many of these reports present a simplistic and optimistic account of the changes that have taken place. The book's many insightful chapters provide a more nuanced and thoughtful analysis which will be helpful to anyone interested in whether welfare-to-work programs can make a positive contribution to social development. While there are many lessons to be learned from the American experience of welfare reform, the book reveals that it has been very problematic and should not be widely emulated.

James Forte. *Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Models, Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Practice*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2007. \$67.95 papercover.

It has become something of a cliché to say that social workers are ignorant of theory and disinterested in the subject. While it is true that many social workers prefer to rely on their personal skills and experience when engaging in professional practice, this is not true of all practitioners and, indeed, many do not always recognize that they do, in fact, apply theoretical ideas in their everyday work. Nevertheless, it is clear that

much more needs to be done if social work practitioners are to be effective utilizers of theory and to be able to effectively adapt theoretical insights to enhance the well-being of their clients. Obviously, schools of social work have a major responsibility to promote the use of theory in professional practice.

It is encouraging, therefore, to see a new textbook on human behavior that offers a systematic exposition of theory and the way it should be applied when seeking to understand clients and improve professional practice. The book's 14 chapters cover a sizable range of theoretical approaches, orientations and schools of thought, and systematically summarize their core assumptions, propositions and exponents. The limits of each theoretical school are also discussed. Interesting biographies of the leading scholars in each theoretical school are provided. Most of the theoretical approaches discussed in the book are rooted in psychology or social psychology but two chapters, which deal with applied economic theory and critical theory will be of interest to those concerned with macro social work practice. The other chapters cover ecological theory, systems theory, cognitive theory, psychodynamic theory, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism and role theory. A useful chapter on applied biological approaches is also provided. In addition to explaining these theoretical schools of thought, the book contains three introductory chapters that address a number of issues relating to theoretical discourse in social work. They also explain the way theories are outlined in the book.

Forte has produced a major resource book on theory for social workers and it should be widely consulted. Although presented as a human behavior text, the book clearly has wider application and may well be adopted in social work practice and other classes. The book will undoubtedly be challenging for undergraduates, but the author has standardized the material so that each chapter has the same structure, and devices such as metaphors and applied maps are used to make an material more accessible. However, the book is perhaps better suited to graduates and practitioners in the field who already have a sound practice experience and knowledge, as well as the ability to reflect critically on the different approaches outlined by the author. The book will be an extremely helpful

reference resource for social work educators and particularly those teaching practice classes. On the other hand, those teaching community practice and social policy courses may find that the two chapters on macro social work theory do not adequately cover the field. Nevertheless, the author is to be congratulated on compiling a prodigious compendium of theoretical perspectives of much value to the profession.

Tim Butler & Paul Watt. *Understanding Social Inequality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007. \$39.95 papercover.

As a consequence of the successful attacks on social liberal and social democratic ideology by radical right wing movements in the 1980s, inequality became a topic to be avoided in polite political discourse. Right-wing scholars successfully portrayed efforts by progressives to highlight the growing inequalities of the time as a divisive attempt to promote "class warfare," and in the 1990s, Clintonian and Blairite liberals even took the view that inequalities could be justified provided everyone had the opportunity to excel in an open market economy. Today, as income inequality in Western countries has reached unprecedented levels, inequality is back on the agenda. In addition, it now seems legitimate to talk about social class and the way class differences have been exacerbated by deregulation, tax cuts, stock market speculation and other economic manifestations of neoliberal ideology.

Butler and Watt's book is a timely call to social scientists to refocus attention on inequality and particularly on class. Although the book is primarily concerned with Britain, it contains much useful information about trends in the United States and other Western countries. It makes sophisticated use of theory and points out that the avoidance of serious academic discourse on the subject of class is as much a consequence of the postmodernist emphasis on identity, culture and gender as it is of the hegemonic diffusion of market liberal ideas. While the authors do not dismiss the insights of postmodernist analysis, they offer an account of inequality that synthesizes cultural, racial and gender perspectives with the more conventional