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Understanding Social Inequality. Tim Butler and Paul Watt.

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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

analytical approaches of mainstream sociological theory. In addition, they stress the importance of a spatial dimension in understanding inequality and they effectively link these factors to issues of globalization, low-paid work, social exclusion and social policy. One chapter deals specifically with the way social policy in Britain and Europe has conceptualized poverty and inequality in terms of the concept of social exclusion. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, they show how complex and multidimensional contemporary analyses of inequality and class have become.

The book is a welcome addition to the rapidly expanding literature on social inequality in the Western nations and will help to reinstate class as a key interpretive concept in sociological analysis. Although the book may be regarded by some as primarily theoretical and unlimited practical value, it offers helpful insights for those working in the field of social policy and social welfare and deserves to be widely consulted. It summarizes a huge literature and will also be a useful resource for readers wishing to understand the way inequality has now been reconceptualized in the social sciences. It also shows how the concept can be used to address the serious inequalities that characterize Western societies today.

Peter Sacks. *Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$24.95 hardcover.

While social science research and media reports have unequivocally exposed the growing problem of income inequality in the United States in recent years, the extent to which inequality pervades the whole social structure is not often recognized. Similarly, popular beliefs about how ordinary people can succeed in a highly stratified society are seldom challenged. One popular belief concern is the role of public education. It is widely accepted that schools, colleges and universities promote social mobility and provide the knowledge and skills which the children of poor and lower income families can acquire to succeed in an open, competitive economy. Provided they are motivated, children and young people from