



Volume 35

Issue 3 September - Special Issue: *Beyond the Numbers: How the Lived Experiences of Women Challenge the "Success" of Welfare Reform*

Article 23

2008

America Transformed: Globalization, Inequality and Power. Gary Hytrek and Kristine M. Zentgraf.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2008) "America Transformed: Globalization, Inequality and Power." Gary Hytrek and Kristine M. Zentgraf., *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 3 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss3/23>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



Gary Hytrek & Kristine M. Zentgraf. *America Transformed: Globalization, Inequality and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. \$29.95 papercover.

Globalization has now become one of the most popular concepts in the social sciences. However, it is also poorly standardized—while some scholars define the concept narrowly to connote international economic processes, others broaden it to include multiple international activities involving communications, international migration, cultural diffusion and political cooperation. Similarly, scholars differ on the normative dimension of global processes. While some view globalization optimistically as promoting new growth and employment opportunities for low-income countries, others take a pessimistic position, claiming that globalization is impoverishing once thriving communities in Western countries and serving the interests of global capitalism.

As these debates reveal, normative positions on globalization are shaped not only by the ideological beliefs of different scholars, but by their own national experiences; not surprisingly, scholars in the Western countries have often condemned the economic effects of globalization on their own societies. This position is taken by Hytrek and Zentgraf, who critically examine the effects of globalization on the United States. They conclude that globalization is transforming American society, altering the country's basic institutional structure, its cultural norms, opportunities and economic life. Their approach emphasizes the economic dimensions of globalization and contends that the diffusion of global capitalism has created a new system of profit-maximizing greed, corporate dominance, increasing income and asset inequality, radical changes to working conditions and life chances, and a weakening of governments, with negative consequences for social welfare services provision and the well-being of ordinary people. In addition, they contend that the federal government has become increasingly subservient to the demands of corporate interests and global elites.

These issues are explicated in lively prose in ten wide-ranging chapters that examine different dimensions of globalization. The book is focused on the United States but it is

situated in a broader analysis of the globalization debate and pays particular attention to different normative perspectives in the field. Although the authors present a rather depressing account of the effects of globalization on American society, they draw on Karl Polanyi's writings to suggest that a counter movement will arise to challenge globalization's negative forces.

Although the book is readable and comprehensive, the way it equates globalization with international speculative capitalism is somewhat limiting. As was noted earlier, many scholars believe that globalization involves processes that transcend current international economic trends and the hegemony of neoliberalism. However, these perspectives are not recognized in the book and no attention is given to alternative explanations that are not as pessimistic. There is growing research evidence to show that governments and their social policies and programs are more resilient and capable of resisting the demands of speculative capitalism than many believe. The book would have been enhanced by recognizing and addressing this research. Nevertheless, this enjoyable book should be widely consulted by anyone interested in globalization and its effects on American society today.

Joel F. Handler & Yeheskel Hasenfeld. *Blame Welfare, Ignore Poverty and Inequality*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. \$80.00 hardcover, \$29.99 papercover.

In the United States, the payment of income benefits to single women with children became a highly contentious issue in the 1970s and 1980s. Although it was previously accepted that "respectable" widows and deserted wives should be assisted, increasingly negative media reports about the abuse of the welfare system by applicants with illegitimate children changed attitudes. By the 1980s, blaming welfare became a popular media preoccupation and a major electoral issue. As welfare recipients were increasingly believed to be women of color, the social problems facing the nation were frequently attributed to a generous welfare system that encouraged indolence, illegitimacy, drug usage and crime. Since liberal