



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35
Issue 4 December

Article 17

2008

Dynamics of Social Welfare Policy: Right versus Left. Gardenia Harris, Bernard Ivan Tamas, and Nancy S. Lind

James Midgley
University of California, Berkeley

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



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Midgley, James (2008) "*Dynamics of Social Welfare Policy: Right versus Left.* Gardenia Harris, Bernard Ivan Tamas, and Nancy S. Lind," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 4 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss4/17>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



an investigation into barriers for empowerment of indigenous persons, the catalyst and effects of migration in Ethiopian, Sweden, and Jamaica, and the impact of aid on local rebuilding in tsunami-affected countries

Part three includes six articles which investigate social work education at both the national and international levels. The primary focus is the exploration of how, through increased education and training, social workers can be better equipped to practice in globalizing communities. Articles include an exploration of social work responses in situations of national disaster, child trafficking, and work with indigenous persons. The section ends with an exploration of international social work and the need to create a global professional community which is sensitive to local knowledge and diversity.

While the information presented is interesting and timely, the scope and flow of the included literature makes it difficult to grasp the unifying message. But maybe that's the point. Globalization is a multifaceted and challenging topic that has yet to be fully explored or understood within a social work perspective. The social work profession is just beginning to grapple with intricacies of affect and how the profession can adapt to address global concerns. While specific answers are not forthcoming in this text, it does present an overview of important questions in which to begin an earnest discussion.

Kristine Frerer, University of California, Berkeley

Gardenia Harris, Bernard Ivan Tamas and Nancy S. Lind,
Dynamics of Social Welfare Policy: Right versus Left. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. \$80.00 hardcover; \$39.95 papercover.

Although it may be true that there was a general consensus about social welfare issues in the decades following the Second World War, and that politicians of different political hues recognized the need for government intervention in social welfare, debates about these issues are now sharply polarized. Today, as the nation's policymakers seek to formulate legislative responses to the pressing problems of the time,

differences of opinion on the role of government and on social and moral issues are now vociferously expressed. While liberals in the Democratic Party continue to espouse traditional progressive causes, Republicans on the right argue either for minimal government intervention or for more statutory regulation of peoples' behavior and moral beliefs. Although the pendulum appears to have swung to the right in recent years, clear differences between these two factions are maintained.

The authors of this informative book have compiled an interesting collection of excerpts from Congressional debates as well as speeches by Presidents Clinton and Bush that exemplify these differences. Their intention is to make available to students studying social welfare policy, primarily at schools of social work, contrasting viewpoints on a large number of important issues. These are grouped into ten themes ranging over topics such as poverty, the economy, health, criminal justice, child welfare, education, housing, aging and civil rights. Each theme is divided into subtopics and excerpts that demonstrate the contrasting viewpoints of liberals and conservatives. For example, the theme of poverty, which is covered in the book's first chapter, has sections on the TANF program, inequality and the concentration of wealth, food stamps and homelessness. Similarly, child welfare is broken into child care funding, the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, and interracial adoption. In addition, the authors provide a brief introductory commentary on each topic and append a useful reading list which students can consult.

The authors are to be commended not only for coming up with an innovative idea but for compiling an informative collection of excerpts that clearly reveal the differences between liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. Apart from one or two unusual categorizations, such as including Social Security under the chapter on health, and again in the chapter on aging, the excerpts are well organized and the material flows nicely. Many of the excerpts are taken from actual speeches and provide interesting insights into the way policy makers on both sides of the ideological spectrum argue their respective viewpoints. It is important that social work students—particularly graduate students—understand how complex issues are analyzed from different normative perspectives and how

policy proposals reflect different ideological tendencies. The book is a helpful resource and should be widely prescribed.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Rodney E. Hero, *Racial Diversity and Social Capital: Equality and Community in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. \$58.00 hardcover; \$19.95 paperback.

Where do I belong? This is a question that many human beings have asked themselves as they form their social networks and adjust their lifestyles to community living. This question underlies many attempts to explain social phenomena and particularly the relationship of the individual to the wider community. The question has been answered with reference to two conceptual frameworks—social capital and racial diversity. Social capital has become an important way of looking at society's general well-being and also as a way of explaining developments in American politics. Diversity is also emphasized in current social science scholarship but uses a very different approach to analyze social relationships. The question for social scientists is which of the two offers greater insights and explanatory power.

Hero's book examines this issue in some depth, asking whether the social capital thesis or the racial diversity thesis consistently explains social and political outcomes in the United States. The author also asks how notions of race and community interact with each other to affect social outcomes and political participation. Although many social scientists have explained the dramatic decline of social capital from the mid 1960s in relation to decreasing political participation, the book introduces racial diversity to this explanatory framework and offers helpful insights.

The book begins with an extensive summary of the argument, evidence and conclusions on the social capital and racial diversity theses. These issues are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, while Chapter 4 examines social outcomes such as minority school graduation rates and minority infant mortality rates across different states. The author contends that the outcomes for minorities in high social capital states are no better