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*The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building Among America's Working Poor.* Erin E. O'Brien. Reviewed by Robert D. Weaver.

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rise of nativism and nationalism provoked by self-appointed 'border watchers' and 'anti-immigrant and specifically anti-Latino hardliners' reminiscent of past economic-hard times elsewhere. The author offers a comprehensive understanding of the construction of 'identity' and 'narrative' making by unpacking our unexamined notions of citizenship and nationalism. Of equal importance, he provides us with the knowledge of how we can go about 'deconstructing' such socially crafted narratives.

*Barbara Robles, Arizona State University*

Erin E. O'Brien. *The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building Among America's Working Poor*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008. \$80.00 hardcover, \$28.95 papercover.

The author is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The book is based upon a comparative case study involving semi-structured interviews with 48 low-wage service workers employed at a hotel given the pseudonym MJE. Though the bulk of poor individuals who are employed may consider themselves part of the so-called "working class," scholars have consistently reported on the lack of political solidarity amongst America's working poor population. A predominant view is that this lack of solidarity may be attributed to the working poor's diverse demographic characteristics, including race, ethnicity, and gender. In other words, any solidarities they may develop are based on demographics, not class.

Chapter 1 challenges this view, asserting that one of the primary aims of the book is to reveal how solidarities are defined and developed by the working poor. Chapter 2 describes the workers' explanations of the difficulties they face in their workplace. Moreover, very few define themselves as the "working poor." Instead, those who articulated notions of group identification or consciousness did so with identities based on demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and gender. In chapter 3, the author introduces the concept of coalitional solidarity as the phenomenon in which workers formed a bond, or political solidarity, with a group

demographically distinct from their own. The basis for this bond is the belief that both groups are experiencing difficulties stemming from unjust social forces. Furthermore, evidence for these unjust social forces is found within the exploitative service industry. Thus, the workplace is the means by which one group discovers the struggles and obstacles faced by another group which, in turn, forms the basis for coalitional solidarity. Chapter 4 focuses on those participant workers who did not express attitudes indicative of coalitional solidarity.

Chapter 5 explicates collective worker solidarity, described by the author as those workers who attach political meaning to their own identities as workers and who experience a political connection with other low-wage workers. Perhaps the most significant of O'Brien's case study findings is highlighted in this chapter, that is, the positive relationship between demographic-based group identification or consciousness and collective worker solidarity. As discussed in chapter 6, however, not all of the interviewed workers experienced collective solidarity, and this chapter unveils the reasons why for some, "being a worker doesn't mean a thing." Chapters 7 and 8 consider the implications that the collective and coalitional solidarities, embraced or rejected by workers, have for spawning political activities aimed at bettering conditions within the low-wage labor market. Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter and summarizes the key findings.

The book's findings have important implications for observers of poverty-related politics and policy. In comparison with other advanced nations, America is a nation of tremendous demographic diversity with a high proportion of impoverished workers. Until now, a plethora of social welfare scholars have opined that these two characteristics are strongly intertwined, and that America's diversity thwarted the development of regulations and programs which ensured adequate wages and protections for workers. O'Brien's work calls this into question, however, given that workers' awareness of their demographic characteristics was associated with their worker-based identities. These findings provide a theoretical foundation for developing strategies aimed at improving the lot of America's poor.

Moreover, the author's in-depth examination of worker

solidarities, buttressed by a generous amount of insightful and revealing quotes from the participants, as well as timely statistical analysis, legitimizes the book's conclusions. A shortcoming of the book is the paucity of specific examples of what types of activities and policies could emanate from its findings. Thus, the book's potential as a catalyst for social change remains undeveloped. Nevertheless, the author's clarity, incisiveness and use of methodological rigor results in a book that makes an important contribution to our understanding of how America's working poor perceive themselves, and the implications these perceptions could have for social action and policy.

*Robert D. Weaver, University of Windsor*

Chad Alan Goldberg, *Citizens and Paupers: Relief, Rights, and Race, from the Freedmen's Bureau to Workfare*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008. \$22.00 papercover.

The question of why the Western governments rapidly expanded their social programs and increased social expenditures during the 20th century has generated a great deal of scholarly research. Although a large number of explanations have been offered, many are simplistic and deterministic, attributing the expansion of social programs to a single factor such as industrialization, the role of interest groups or class conflict. Today there is a greater awareness of the complexity of the processes that contributed to the emergence of modern-day welfare systems. Rather than seeking to identify a single cause, contemporary research is much more nuanced and more interested in interpretation and analysis than simple explanation.

Goldberg's account of the historical evolution of welfare programs in the United States since the mid-19th century is a good example of the sophistication of more recent social policy scholarship. His answer to the question of why and how social programs evolve focuses on political struggles to classify those who receive social benefits either as dependent paupers or worthy citizens. At the center of his analysis is the concept of citizenship and the way it is defined. Drawing on Marshall's seminal contribution, he shows that the definition of citizenship is subject to interpretation. Those who are believed to be