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Review of *Rebuild America: Solving the Economic Crisis Through Civic Works*. Scott Myers-Lipton. Reviewed by Frank Stricker.

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careful research should also inspire future inquiry into the way colonialism and imperialism continue to affect social welfare policies and programs in the modern world.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Scott Myers-Lipton, *Rebuild America: Solving the Economic Crisis Through Civic Works*, Paradigm Publishers, 2009. \$82.00 hardcover, \$17.95 papercover.

Five years after Katrina the Gulf Coast is still a mess. Billions of federal dollars have been appropriated for reconstruction but billions were wasted. Foreign workers were imported instead of training and hiring local people. Thousands still lived in toxic FEMA trailers and a third of New Orleans' homes were empty.

In 2008 the nation joined the Gulf Coast in disaster mode. A total crash was averted but official unemployment hit 10% and real unemployment, according to the National Jobs for All Coalition (NJFAC), was double that. Experts predicted five years of high unemployment, but pundits, economists and politicians were slow with solutions. Very few advocated improved versions of the New Deal job programs that employed 10% of the labor force in the 1930s to build and repair roads, schools, forests, and culture. Excessive pragmatism and market idolatry was part of the refusal to face facts. Certainly the issue was not that historians had demonstrated that New Deal projects like the CCC and the WPA failed. Just the opposite. But despite a good historical record, there has been little support among experts and politicians for a what was needed: a large and varied federal public works program

So Scott Myers-Lipton is bucking a trend when he urges such a program to rehabilitate the Gulf Coast and provide a model for how the nation can respond to soaring unemployment. Myers-Lipton is Associate Professor of Sociology at San Jose State University; he specializes in service learning courses that link class work and social action. In 2006 several things combined to spark interest in Gulf Coast reconstruction, among them student activism against homelessness, a presentation of Spike Lee's Katrina film, and Myers-

Lipton's classroom discussion of the New Deal programs. Students and teacher visited the Gulf Coast, met with residents to learn of their needs, and eventually composed the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act (GCCWA), a federal program to employ 100,000 coast residents at a living wage building and repairing public infrastructure. The GCCWA was introduced into Congress by Zoe Lofgren, Democrat from California. It was left out of Obama's first stimulus package but nine Democratic representatives reintroduced it in May of 2009.

Rebuild America is a short book. Not counting a mini-anthology of experts like Howard Zinn and Robert Leighninger, Jr., or appendices, there are about one hundred pages of text. *Rebuild America* succinctly describes the origins of our current depression and the operation of New Deal job programs. The book is not a work of social science scholarship in which questions of politics, social structure, and history are researched and probed. It is, mostly, an activist's handbook for the GCCWA; and I think it succeeds. I found the story of what the teacher and his students accomplished heartening.

I do think, however, that the author might have been more critical in his tally of supporters. (Full disclosure: I belong to the National Jobs for All Coalition, which has endorsed the GCCWA.) The idea that Obama, the public and the Chamber of Commerce support civic works is not much help without the details. There was not much works money in Obama's first stimulus bill and there won't be much in phase two. As to the chamber, private interests have never been squeamish about taking the public's money, but what kind of jobs do they want? Does the support of the chamber and the public fade when they are told that government job programs require higher deficits? And I am sure the chamber would oppose a twenty-first century WPA, with government as employer. In my view, there is too much Obama-like moderation in the book. In reality, there are many individuals and groups who powerfully oppose real job programs and they have to be confronted on the way to success.

The other concern I had with *Rebuild America* is that little is said about unions. The author is not anti-union but the union role is all but ignored in later chapters. That is an issue in several ways. The political heft of the AFL-CIO, with its ten

million members, would give clout to drive for the GCCWA. It is true that unionists have sometimes opposed government job programs because they pay too little or they seem to replace union jobs. But things seem to be improving on that front, and the issue needs to be discussed, as does the actual union presence in New Orleans, including whether union apprenticeship programs match the training goals of the GCCWA.

Frank Stricker, California State University, Dominguez Hills

William Julius Wilson, *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City (Issues of Our Time)*. W. W. Norton and Co., 2009. \$24.95 hardcover, \$15.95 papercover.

The pre-eminent sociologist, William Julius Wilson, has been analyzing and clarifying the causes of impoverished African Americans' marginalization from mainstream American society for over two decades. In this latest work, Wilson extends his project by engaging the conflict between the culture of poverty and structural theories of persistent inequality experienced by those at the bottom of the U.S. socio-economic ladder. And, while he continues to find the primary causes of harsh inequality to be structural in nature—especially the changing economy that leaves unskilled workers behind, but also discriminatory hiring practices, de facto housing segregation, the inferior schools that African American children attend, the lack of transportation and the like—he now gives more credence to cultural explanations. This shift, he bluntly states, “will likely generate controversy” because it is offensive to those social scientists who cringe from any explanation that suggests “blaming the victim.”

In a compact text (155 pages plus extensive notes), Wilson covers a broad range of topics related to the consequences of living in blighted urban neighborhoods characterized by joblessness. Wilson has focused on this singularly important issue before, but he here extends his analysis by incorporating recent research on topics such as subsidies for housing choice, young black men's exceedingly high rates of incarceration (more could have been done here), the greater success that black women have in the new service economy, and