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## Review of *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen.* by Stephen Pimpare

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neglected by traditional quantitative research. This spurs us toward higher valuing of qualitative study and rethinking the need for balance in quantitative assessment and service quality.

Zhong Xin  
*Nanjing University of Finance and Economics*

Stephen Pimpare, *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*. Oxford University Press (2017), 342 pages, \$35 (hardcover).

Representations of poverty in the film industry step into the limelight in Stephen Pimpare's new book, *Ghettos, Tramps and Welfare Queens*. I was excited to review this book, as I have a background in Film Studies in addition to my formal social work training. The suspension of disbelief is the practice of setting aside one's critical faculties to participate in escapism through fiction. Here, Pimpare calls on the reader to critically investigate representations of poverty in film from the silent era to our modern times, in order to analyze how the selected films reflect social welfare policy and advocacy at the time of a film's production. Pimpare demonstrates that there are identifiable tropes and stock characters within the genre of films about poverty, while highlighting that, in the real world, most of the poor in the United States are the working poor.

Pimpare takes the position that the effect of these portrayals is more important than their intent, as the overwhelming majority of filmmakers and writers do not have direct experience with poverty. Therefore, while the representations of the poor in film matter because they are influential, they all too often perpetuate stereotypes about poverty based on ignorance. This book is important because it conditions the viewer to look past the common reliance on an individual character's behavior to explain their poverty. We are educated on how social welfare policy often systematically reproduces poverty and how film plays its part both in disguising this fact and perpetuating the myths. The reader comes away more sensitive to how audiences

are taught to view the poor as either worthy (a widow, an orphan) or unworthy (a gang member, a welfare recipient).

Dichotomous thinking also typifies how people who are poor are characterized as either to be feared or pitied, but rarely to be centered within their own narrative. A host of middle class savior tropes are discussed, and the filmmakers often use people who are poor as props for the savior's own redemption. These lessons are imperative for students who will be working with or in close proximity to the poor, such as teachers and social workers, each of whom receive a chapter focused on their concerns. In utilizing film to challenge our understanding of poverty, Pimpare provides an accessible text for retraining our thinking about poverty and unraveling widespread fallacies. Threaded throughout the book is a discussion of how race and gender are intricately bound up with any true discussion of poverty.

The book is broken into two parts. Part One concerns films that represent poor environments and the people in them, such as inner-city ghettos, disadvantaged classrooms and social welfare offices. Part Two focuses on how poverty is represented outside of enclosed spaces: on the streets and in other transient spaces. The chapters work well as standalone readings and as a collection. A word of caution, though: the reader will only walk away wanting to watch a handful of films. This is because Pimpare conveys how rare and exceptional it is to see a fully formed character who is poor and who is also central to the storyline. One drawback of a book of this nature is that there are a host of summaries about movies the reader will become disinclined to see, except as examples of how poorly those without material resources are represented.

The book has all sorts of interesting tidbits about the relationship between film and social welfare policy, such as Meyer Levin advocating in *Esquire* in 1936 that movie tickets should be a social welfare benefit, because even the poorest people do not spare the expense of going to the movies. Pimpare coins the term the *propertied gaze*, where "the viewer is never assumed to be poor or homeless, and films are never meant for them, even when they are ostensibly about them" (p. 288). Although Pimpare sees few films that provide any real ideas for solving poverty, he does conclude with a host of well-reasoned recommendations for

filmgoers, filmmakers, policy makers and journalists. At the very least, the reader will gain a much more thorough understanding of the role we all play in the cycles of poverty.

Melanie Lynn Carlson  
Michigan State University

Cara H. Drinan, *The War on Kids: How American Juvenile Justice Lost Its Way*. Oxford University Press (2018), 215 pages, \$27.95 (hardcover).

The evolution of the treatment of young people by the U.S. criminal justice system is the focus of Cara Drinan's new book, *The War on Kids*. Despite the fact that the overall rates of youth involved in the juvenile justice system have declined over recent years, there are still more than one million youth arrested every year, about a quarter of whom are charged with a crime and processed by adult criminal courts. In adult courts, these youth can be sentenced without consideration of their young ages (e.g., death penalty without parole), and can even be held in solitary confinement in adult correctional facilities, where they experience the highest rates of physical and sexual assaults and suicide among all inmates.

Drinan claims that the American juvenile justice system has gradually degraded: once trailblazing, it now faces international scorn and criticism for its treatment of youth. Drinan draws upon both theoretical failings of the system and personal experiences of some of the juveniles who have paid with their lives for their early mistakes. At the beginning of the book, Drinan illustrates the harsh sentencing practices applied to juvenile criminal defendants, explaining their rapid and dramatic increasing severity over the last hundred years. Using both individual stories as case studies and the field studies of social science research, she further explains that some children in the United States are especially vulnerable to participation in crime and the justice system that follows. According to Drinan, race, poverty, parental incarceration, and exposure to violence are common risk factors that significantly increase the odds of these children becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. In addition, the mechanisms of certain policies and laws