March 1998

Social Policy: Reform, Research and Practice. Patricia L. Ewalt, Edith M. Freeman, Sturart A. Kirk and Dennis L. Poole (Eds.).

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Recommended Citation

(1998) "Social Policy: Reform, Research and Practice. Patricia L. Ewalt, Edith M. Freeman, Sturart A. Kirk and Dennis L. Poole (Eds.)," The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 19. Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss1/19
women and their children will undoubtedly experience serious hardships as the new time limits are imposed.

Reviewing past attempts to assist welfare recipients to obtain the educational and other skills they need to be employable, Harris is not optimistic about the future, especially since the new legislation is accompanied by reductions in budgetary allocations. On the basis of her study she concludes that substantial investments will be needed for the new system to work. The fact that more than ninety per cent of her subjects were economically active reveals that welfare recipients not only want to work but actually engage in work. The act that they cycle on and off welfare suggests that much more needs to be done to provide them with the skills and opportunities they need to become permanently self-sufficient and productive citizens. Hopefully the lessons of this important study will be heeded.


The dramatic changes which were introduced in 1996 to the federal government’s income support program (AFDC) has again brought social policy to the forefront of national attention. While the federal government has not relinquished control over income support, many observers believe that the substantial devolution of programmatic and budgetary authority for the program to the states, heralds the beginning of the break-up of the New Deal welfare state. The question of whether further federal withdrawal from social policy is likely is an important one. While it is difficult to discern the future, those concerned with social policy need to understand recent events and anticipate the future directions if the well-being of the country’s citizens is to be maintained.

This book makes an important contribution to the emerging discussion on the nature of social policy in an era of diminishing federal responsibility for social welfare. Although the book is not specifically written to examine this question, its diverse chapters touch on many aspects of this issue. The book is comprised of more than forty articles which were previously published in the journal Social Work and they deal with change staking place in the major fields of social service endeavor including income support,
children and families, health, mental health and education. For obvious reasons, readers of this type are rarely successful but the editors of this volume have managed to pull the material together in a coherent way. There are descriptive as well as analytical and empirical contributions which cover a wide terrain in a readable way. The book is up to date, lively and helpful and should be a useful resource for students of social policy.


Until recently, social policy research paid scant attention to issues of color, racism and discrimination. Reflecting its historical roots in class, labor and urban industrial politics, social policy has not until recently factored in the ethnic dimension. A major contribution was Jill Quadagno’s Color of Welfare (1994) which demonstrated the critical role that race has played in American social policy. Hamilton and Hamilton take the subject further, making a powerful statement which should be heeded not only by academics but by policy makers as well.

Drawing on an extensive body of historical research, the authors contend that the civil rights struggle has been widely misinterpreted as a struggle to abolish racial segregation and discrimination. The role of civil rights organizations in campaigning both for social policy reform and for economic development has not only been ignored but regarded as beyond the legitimate scope of these organizations. Over the last sixty years, their attempts to promote an inclusive progressive agenda have been consistently thwarted by the widespread belief that theirs is a race-specific agenda concerned appropriately with the abolition of discrimination.

Demonstrating the fallaciousness of this belief, the book documents in rich and fascinating detail the efforts of civil rights organizations to promote a universalistic approach to social policy and, above all, to focus on the need for economic development strategies which will create employment, raise incomes and enhance participation in the productive economy. This agenda, the authors insist, has not been race specific. Campaigns on welfare