



June 1999

Beside the Golden Door: Policy, Politics and the Homeless. James D. Wright, Beth A. Rubin and Joel A. Devine.

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Recommended Citation

(1999) "*Beside the Golden Door: Policy, Politics and the Homeless.* James D. Wright, Beth A. Rubin and Joel A. Devine.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 17.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol26/iss2/17>

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Book Notes

James D. Wright, Beth A. Rubin and Joel A. Devine, *Beside the Golden Door: Policy, Politics and the Homeless*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1998. \$ 39.95 hardcover, \$ 19.95 papercover.

During the last decade, James Wright and his colleagues at Tulane University have secured a well-deserved reputation as the nation's leading authorities on the subject of homelessness. They have worked on major research studies of homelessness for foundations and the federal government, and have published a plethora of research reports, journal articles and books. They have not only documented the extent of the problem, and formulated a coherent conceptual framework for understanding its causes, but have been active in numerous demonstration projects designed to address its various dimensions.

This book is a collection of papers, essays and speeches by Wright and his colleagues over the last decade. While some of the material has been published previously, it has been heavily edited to form a coherent account of many dimensions of the homelessness. The book's eleven chapters deal with issues as diverse as the definition of homelessness, its causes, its incidence and the relationship between homelessness and family disintegration, mental illness and substance abuse. The book also contains two chapters about homelessness in other countries.

The book's central argument, which Wright and his colleagues have stated before, is that homelessness is primarily a consequence of inadequate affordable housing. While mental illness, family breakdown and other factors may play a critical role in facilitating homelessness, it is primarily due to the fact that many people with low incomes cannot afford to acquire housing on the market. The book challenges the widespread belief that mental illness, substance abuse or other individual pathologies cause homelessness. Its message is a powerful one which needs to form the basis for policy making if the growing problem of homelessness is to be properly addressed.