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Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford F. Schram, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*

Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race by Joe Soss; Richard C. Fording; Sanford F. Schram

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eral decades is a direct by-product of neoliberalism. As the welfare state has been retrenched, NGOs have emerged, but failed, to fill the gap. More problematically, they tend to be funded by wealthy foundations whose fortunes have been created, or at least enhanced, by neoliberalism's upward redistributive impacts. Thus, unsurprisingly, the best possible scenario the authors envision for the NGOs is that they step back from fundraising and social service delivery and engage in lobbying to get better legislation to protect the most vulnerable.

Despite these shortcomings, the authors of *Community Lost* provide a timely and stimulating analysis of the social costs of welfare state retrenchment. Their detailed study of Katrina survivors displaced in Austin, Texas (whose experience they plausibly argue is representative of other survivors), provides a powerful indictment of the human suffering wrought by the retrenchment of the welfare state. Likewise they show the bankruptcy and inadequacy of private, nonprofit efforts to meet human need in a disaster, despite their good intentions. In this cautionary tale, the authors also provide a glimpse of the human toll that will be produced if the current bipartisan effort to slash the last remnants of the welfare state is implemented, which national leaders are indeed intent on doing, despite large swaths of the population continuing to suffer from the worst capitalist crisis since the 1930s and the latest natural disaster that has just struck the most densely populated section of the country. The job of those who share the sentiments of Ronald J. Angel, Holly Bell, Julie Beaucoileil, and Laura Lein is to build the social power that can take the country and world in a radically different direction.

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**Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race.** By Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford F. Schram. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. 368. \$81.00 (cloth); \$25.00 (paper).

*Disciplining the Poor*, a volume in the series Chicago Studies in American Politics, is a tour de force. It has won several prestigious awards including the American Political Science Association/New Political Science Michael Harrington Award and the American Sociological Association Oliver Cromwell Cox Book Award. Joe Soss is the Cowles Professor for the Study of

Public Service in the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota; Richard Fording is a professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama; and Sanford Schram is a professor of social theory and policy in the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research at Bryn Mawr College. All three authors are among the country's most prolific and insightful scholars of social policy, and together they have crafted a work of wide and ambitious scope, combining a superb and nuanced theoretical intensity with historical insight and skillfully amassed empirical evidence. One of the pleasures of engaging with this work of expansive vision and erudition is to encounter academic minds on their sharpest edge. Embodying the very spirit that they prescribe, the authors acknowledge that book was written "through almost daily conversations . . . and a collaboration marked by generosity, respect, and an unflagging willingness to teach and learn" (vii).

The authors began work on the book in 2002 as a study of how welfare reform (the federal 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) was playing out at the local level in Florida. The work is located in a long tradition of critical writing on the history and philosophy of the welfare state that includes Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's seminal work, *Regulating the Poor: The Public Functions of Welfare* (New York: Vintage, 1971), and Loic Wacquant's *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). *Disciplining the Poor* is a major contribution toward clarifying neoliberal paternalism as a regime type and providing it with a historical framework as it has been developing from 1970 to 2010. In its extensive grasp of detail, theoretical erudition, and deep analysis of racism, in particular, it is more convincing and compelling than other texts to date. The book is much more than the usual theoretical lamentation over neoliberalism, since it makes a watertight case against neoliberalism on the basis of solid empirical research and evidence. Few books actually do this—Wacquant's, for example, does not.

In the introduction, the authors comment that "poverty is more than a blight to be eradicated; it is also a problem of governance" (1). The book's central claim is that poverty has to be managed in our society, but that poverty governance has grown ever mean-spirited and disciplinary in the past 30 years. Their empirical analysis of welfare provision at the local level in Florida conclusively demonstrates that "poverty emerges occa-

sionally in public life as a problem to be solved; the poor exist perennially as subjects who must be governed” (1). Since the elimination of poverty is not possible in a competitive capitalist culture, poverty programs are actually designed to make poor communities more manageable and to shovel the poor into the lower reaches of social institutions. Poverty governance, they explain, is now anchored in the convergence of two movements that masquerade as reform but which are nothing less than severe crusades: paternalism and neoliberalism. Paternalism extends the disciplining moral arm of the state to supervise and tell the poor how to behave if they wish to receive benefits, whether they seek nutritional assistance or housing support. Concomitantly, harsh and unforgiving criminal justice policies have resulted in the United States having the highest incarceration rate of any country in the world, to all intents and purposes another dimension of poverty governance.

Soss, Fording, and Schram provide a luminous and thorough analysis of how the second crusade, neoliberalism, perniciously mutated from its 1970s and 1980s version of a market-engendered laissez-faire outlook to a much more vigorous effort by the state at all levels to organize and colonize the entire society in line with strict market rationality. An example of neoliberal market invasion into all institutions is the academic life of the university through the metricization of research and, for instance, the increasing use of the word “product” to describe scholarship. Drawing on several articles by Wendy Brown, the authors suggest that “neoliberal governance privileges economic freedoms at the expense of political freedoms as well as democratic values such as universalism, egalitarianism, promotion of an active citizenry, and conceptions of a public good” (20). One of the many original features of *Disciplining the Poor* is the authors’ meticulous examination of the ways in which multiple levels of poverty governance now operate from the national level, cascading down a path of decentralization through state-level and local policy designs, most often in conjunction with private market operators, as in the delivery of the TANF program. They demonstrate conclusively that through the complex weaving of the moral surveillance of paternalism and almost total capitalist market-driven neoliberalism, the lives of the poor are disciplined and inhospitably governed. They lay out, as well, the ingredients of contemporary neoliberal paternalism, such as embracing the authority of the activist state while at the same time working to transform it to accord with market principles that are more economically ambitious and expanding

social programs that target the poor. In short, the historically separate domains of the market and the state have now been collapsed into one entity. The authors also deftly explain and analyze the multifarious political and economic forces that created this form of poverty governance, another distinctive feature of the book.

Chapter 3, “The Color of Neoliberal Paternalism,” provides an intricate yet readable account of the ways in which race contributes to the structure of poverty governance laid out by neoliberal paternalism. The authors adopt a social constructionist approach for their analysis: race as a cultural force influences poverty governance, and poverty governance in its myriad framings and specific local practices serves as a site that reinforces racial inequality. In order to arrive at a more fine-grained analysis of race and its key role in transforming American poverty governance, they develop an original investigative instrument, the Racial Classification Model of policy choice, to enable them to say with considerable precision how and when racial categories influence and are influenced by poverty governance. This model, which they apply astutely to the Florida case, the authors explain, is rooted in theories of implicit racism and the manner in which racial categorization and judgment are created through cultural discourses that provide shared cognitive frames to structure interpretation and choice.

The second half of the book is a painstaking account of how neoliberal paternalism and race shape poverty governance at local levels in Florida, where “local officials work to convert policy mandates into concrete rules, routines, and administrative actions” (141). Florida was chosen, the authors explain, since it provides a setting where all the distinguishing essentials of neoliberal paternalism in conjunction with race can be observed with considerable clarity. In particular, their field research focuses on the implementation of sanctioning practices in the Florida Welfare Transition Program and the penalties for noncompliance, such as removing the entire TANF family from receiving benefits at the first instance of noncompliance with TANF rules and regulations. Over a 3-year period the authors carried out intensive field research in four of the state’s 24 workforce regions by conducting in-depth interviews with state-level officials, regional board members, program supervisors, and case managers. They also attended sanction training workshops for front-line case managers, as well as meetings of region-level staff, and intake and orientation sessions for new Welfare Transition applicants, comprehensively gathering documentary material (memoranda, reports, and web-

sites) for all 24 workforce regions over a 2-year interval. Throughout detailed chapters, the research evidence collected and preserved allows for scrupulous attention being given to local efforts to discipline the poor, to the practice of marketization (privatization of service provision), to performance systems for meeting numerical benchmarks and promoting ever-higher sanction rates, and to the interplay of race and disciplinary procedures. “Our results offer the strongest evidence to date,” the authors maintain, “that case managers choices regarding penalties [sanctions] tend to be biased in systematic ways by client race” (259).

This is one of a number of recent books by brilliant social welfare and urban studies scholars who are redefining both disciplines: Robert Fairbanks, *How It Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), and the work by Loic Wacquant mentioned above (*Punishing the Poor*). At several places in the book under review the authors contrast their interpretation of neoliberal paternalism with that of Wacquant’s *Punishing the Poor*. Wacquant theorizes that neoliberalism has fashioned a diminishing and disassembling of the social programs of the activist welfare state originating in the 1930s. Penal means of paternalism are in the ascendancy, Wacquant maintains, to contain the perceived disorder and chaos raging in poor black communities and to serve as the principal method of governing poverty. While *Disciplining the Poor* concurs that the carceral state now plays a more prominent role in poverty governance, the book’s position is that in juxtaposition “neoliberals have not dismantled the activist state; they have embraced its authority while working to redirect and transform it. In many respects, the neoliberal state is marked by *more* ambitious economic involvements and by *expansions* of social programs that target the poor. Neoliberal reforms have strengthened the state’s capacities to serve markets, restructure its operations around market principles, and extended its reach through collaborations with civil society organizations” (6).

In his 1816 poem, “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” Shelley says, “why man has such a scope for love and hate, despondency and hope.” The authors’ concluding chapter is a hopeful gesture in response to despondency and asks us to reimagine poverty governance. The book provides ample reasons “why people who value justice, care, and democracy should reject the neoliberal-paternalist approach to poverty governance” (301). Privatization has been a disaster producing “a scandalous record of corruption and service failure, enriching corporations and shareholders at the expense

of citizens” (301) as neoliberal paternalism has condemned the poor to dwell on the outer reaches of marginality. In proposing a very different construction of poverty governance, the authors put forward three guiding values, each containing hope for a better future. First, it would promote democracy by allowing the poor to participate in the decisions that structure their lives and have a meaningful voice to contain and restrict the arbitrary use of authority. Second, it would augment social justice by expanding the capacity for self-development and self-determination; to learn skills; and, most important, for the poor to define for themselves the direction and conditions of their lives. Third, considerable value would be allotted to the ethic and practice of care—to give and receive care without fear of further marginalization. Of course to implement these values and to translate them into practice would necessitate the eradication of neoliberal paternalism, a task as daunting as cleaning the Augean stables in a single day.

That Soss, Fording, and Schram were able to shape and sculpt all the massive amounts of data into coherent, elegant chapters is a marvel of engaged and passionate scholarly dedication, and the ethos of their piece is as impressive as the content. Their research—historical, theoretical, and empirical—is impeccable, and breathtakingly they bring all the realms of research together, in the process forging laser-like insight into poverty governance in the contemporary moments of complexity. Both graduate students and faculty in a wide range of disciplines who wish to gain cultural literacy in understanding poverty, race, and its management need to treat this text as priority reading. It will become a classic in the way Piven and Cloward’s *Regulating the Poor* did over 40 years ago.

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**Design After Decline: How America Rebuilds Shrinking Cities.** By Brent D. Ryan. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. 261. \$45.00 (cloth).

In the final chapter of *Design After Decline*, Brent D. Ryan, assistant professor of urban design and public policy at MIT, praises the *urbanismo social* of Medellín, Colombia. From 2003 to 2007, Medellín’s government undertook a series of integrated urban projects that merged urban design