



Praxis for the Poor: Piven and Cloward and the Future of Social Science in Social Welfare by Sanford F. Schramm

Praxis for the Poor: Piven and Cloward and the Future of Social Science in Social Welfare by Sanford F. Schramm

Review by: Mary Jo Deegan

American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 110, No. 2 (September 2004), pp. 533-534

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/425406>

Accessed: 06/11/2013 08:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Journal of Sociology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

theory cannot explain everything. For example, although it predicts that incorporation into the capitalist world economy generates large economic units, this inland region was for the most part devoid of such units.

I have some minor criticisms: the emphasis on data from 1860 occasionally produces a static view of mountain bondage, the statistics on which the analyses are based are available only at a Web site, and the chapters end abruptly without summaries of the key results. But overall, this is a fine piece of scholarship, and it makes one wonder why sociologists continue to ignore this critical chapter in American history.

Praxis for the Poor: Piven and Cloward and the Future of Social Science in Social Welfare. By Sanford F. Schramm. New York: University Press. Pp. xi + 303. \$65.00 (cloth); \$20.00 (paper).

Mary Jo Deegan
University of Nebraska

Sanford F. Schram analyzes the development of theory and practices for academics who advocate social justice and equality. In *Praxis for the Poor*, he specifically applies them to the problematic relationships between poverty and the welfare state. In the first half of the book he examines the theory of practice. Schram argues for rigor and complexity in ideas instead of an over-simplification that attempts to make these interpretation accessible to a broad audience. He presents two existing models for such efforts: the work of Jane Addams and of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward. He adopts and defends Piven and Cloward's commitment to "radical incrementalism" in depth. This praxis "pushes for as much change as possible while recognizing that often the resulting changes that are implemented may only be modest improvements to the existing system" (p. 51). It is a "bottom-up strategy" with a high degree of contingency.

In the second half of the book Schram presents his application of these theories to recent welfare reforms, particularly after 1996. He documents that race is a significant factor in various states' adoption of strict interpretation and implementation of welfare limits and sanctions. Many of the old forms of racial barriers that were lowered have "bounced back" and reappeared as a result. White privilege and racism interact with the mass media to frame written information and televised news to create a distorted image of the success of welfare reforms and the elimination of widespread welfare fraud. Liberals who distorted the problems of welfare problems by ignoring or minimizing them helped create policies ignoring the dilemmas facing people of color who are an increasing number of welfare recipients. Schram presents a powerful analysis of the connection between welfare reform and globalization. These social policies aim to change the economy and the culture of people in nation states with weak

economies. Terrorists find fertile ground for their form of striking back against these new forms of social inequality and injustice. International corporations are creating new images of docile workers tied to western patterns of racism, sexism, and poverty.

Schram tackles major issues and problems facing the theory and practices of applied sociology and social work. He brings forward new interpretations and a holistic approach to invigorate academics who have had little success in shaping a more just American society over the last 25 years. He has an incisive critique of academics and critics who fiddle with ideas and numbers to generate a more repressive state. He confronts the difficulties facing discussions of race and the dangers of having serious analyzes coopted to unintended, if not deliberately distorted, ends. I recommend reading this book, and I applaud Schram's many accomplishments while I share his long-term commitments.

My approval of the book needs to be tempered, however. There are flaws to Piven and Cloward's work that Schram does not discuss. For example, "radical incrementalism" is a tame idea that settles for tiny changes accompanied by more ambitious ideas. Jane Addams, in contrast, worked for major changes and often had them adopted, and sometimes she worked for even bigger changes, such as world peace, and failed. She lived with this failure and never gave up the dream promised but not delivered in the fight for the equal and just treatment of all. She also did not "dumb down" her writings and they still resonate with the public almost a century after she wrote many of them. Addams always implemented a "praxis *with* the poor" and not *for* the poor, as this title and argument suggests. Schram's book tackles big issues but compromises with modified practices that satisfy academic standards for scholarship in a world riven by divisions by gender, race, disability, violence, global exploitation, and class. Bold theory and practices are needed to even enter the fray. We need, for example, to analyze why Americans have created greater income disparities over the past quarter century; why we live in a society that watches homeless people carry their tattered belongings with them; why liberals and radicals have retreated from empowering visions and actions; why the academy is controlled increasingly by funded research that implements the hungry bureaucracies that create ever more injustices toward the poor, people of color, women, the aged, and sick. Schram raises some of these issues, and it is well worth considering his serious attempt to respond to them.