The History of the War on Poverty

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Social Welfare in America: Overviews and Early Histories up to the War on Poverty


Amenta, Edwin. Bold Relief: Institutional Politics and the Origins of Modern American Social Policy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Argues that the goal of the New Deal was not to create a two-track welfare state of paltry means-tested benefits and generous social insurance—it was, rather, to establish a “bold program of work and relief.”


Katz, Michael B. In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America.


Newman, Katherine S. and Elizabeth S. Jacobs. *Who Cares? Public Ambivalence and Government Action from the New Deal to the Second Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Examines public opinion about social policymaking from the New Deal to the present, arguing that there was not a groundswell of support for new policies to help the poor during the New Deal and the Great Society, but nor was there popular support for rolling back these policies in the 1980s and 1990s.


The War on Poverty

Primary Sources on the War on Poverty


Lewis, Oscar. Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty. New York: Basic Books, 1959. In this book, an ethnographic study of Mexican slum dwellers, Lewis argues that poverty is not only defined by an absence of wealth, but also creates “a subculture of its own.” The phrase “culture of poverty,” which Lewis coined, took on a life of its own after the book’s publication. Harrington borrowed it and Moynihan and other participants in the War on Poverty used it to explain the problems the poor faced—particularly intergenerational poverty. So too did many critics of the War on Poverty in later years. On the history of the phrase, and its


Moynihan, Daniel P. The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965. The report, which has become known simply as the Moynihan Report, attracted criticism soon after it was circulated within the administration, though it was not widely available to the public for some time. Was controversial primarily because of Moynihan’s focus on what he described as the “tangle of pathology” in African American communities, which he attributes primarily to the matriarchal family structure. Moynihan’s primary policy recommendation was that the federal government needed to address lack of jobs for African American men. In it he also highlighted the break between unemployment rates and number of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. On the lessons and legacy of the Moynihan report, see The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades, Special Issue of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, January 2009, available at: http://ann.sagepub.com/content/621/1.toc.


Tenbroek, Jacobus, ed. The Law of the Poor. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1966. Collection of essays originally presented at a conference at Berkeley, providing “a critical review of the rules and procedures, doctrines and presuppositions of the law applicable to the poor, primarily as that law is found in welfare codes, statutes, ordinances, programs and administration” (vii). Including essays on cash assistance, residence laws, vagrancy, public housing, child welfare, disability, and mental health services, among other subjects.

Early Assessments and Reflections on the War on Poverty


----- *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty*. New York, 1970. Critiques the community action approach of the War on Poverty and the failure to develop a jobs program. “An immense opportunity to institute more or less permanent social changes—a fixed full employment program, a measure of income maintenance—was lost while energies were expended in ways that very probably hastened the end of the brief period when such options were open” (193, check citation, from Davies).


Piven, Frances Fox and Richard Cloward. *Regulating the Poor: the Functions of Public Welfare* (1971). Argues that Kennedy and Johnson had to address poverty, or inject federal dollars into inner cities, in order to pacify African Americans.


**Secondary Sources on the War on Poverty**


Chappell, Marisa. *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty and Politics in Modern America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Argues that the liberal anti-poverty coalition from the 1960s forward was wedded to the idea of the male
breadwinner family, and worked to create male breadwinner families, especially among poor African Americans, at a moment when that model was becoming increasingly unrealistic.


Germany, Kent. *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007. One of a number of recent books that looks at the War on Poverty from the bottom up. The Community Action Program in New Orleans is at the book’s center, and Germany argues that black activists used CAP as a base to challenge the South’s racist political culture. For other bottom-up accounts see especially Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirgian eds. *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History*.


Orleck, Annelise. *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty.* Boston: Beacon, 2005. A collective biography of a group of poor black women activists who left the south for jobs in Las Vegas in the 1950s and, in the 1960s, after losing their jobs, applied for public assistance and fought for welfare rights. In the 1970s, they formed a powerful and influential community development corporation to improve the lives of African Americans in the city.


Schmitt, Edward R. *President of the Other America: Robert Kennedy and the Politics of*


Social Welfare in America Since the War on Poverty


Murray, Charles. Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980. 1984. Argues that a paradigm shift occurred the 1960s: as federal spending on social welfare increased, the new programs that resulted increasingly focused on equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. Controversially suggests that these programs—the social policy of Great Society—are responsible for the increasing number and worsening circumstances of poor Americans.

Wilson, William Julius. The Truly Disadvantaged: The Innercity, the Underclass, and public policy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. A second edition published in 2012 has a new afterward. Argues that industrial decline and the disappearance of good-paying jobs have created a black underclass in American cities. Links black male unemployment to the rise in single-parent black families, suggesting there has been a decline in “marriageable” black men—an insight echoing and updating
the Moynihan Report. Read at the time as a sort of rejoinder to Murray.

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Legacies: Recent Writings and Resources on the War on Poverty


Goldfarb, Zachary. “Study: U.S. Poverty Decreased Over Last half-century thanks to safety-net programs” Washington Post, December 9, 2013. Links to study and LBJ speech and quotes from White House officials.


Meyer, Bruce D. and James X. Sullivan. “Winning the War: Poverty from the Great Society to the Great Recession.” NBER Working Paper No. 18718. “We find that moving from traditional income-based measures of poverty to a consumption-based measure (which we argue is superior on both theoretical and practical grounds) and, crucially, adjusting for bias in price indices leads to the conclusion that the poverty rate declined by 26.4 percentage points between 1960 and 2010, with 8.5 percentage points of that decline occurring since 1980.”

Sherman, Arloc. “Official Poverty Measure Masks Gains Made Over Last 50 Years.” September 13, 2013, CBPP.

Sherman, Arloc, Sharon Parrott, and Danilo Trisis, Chartbook: The War on Poverty at 50, January 6, 2014, CBPP.

Spotlight on Poverty, links to press coverage, events, etc: http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/50th_anniversaries.aspx

Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. “State of the Union: The Poverty and Inequality Report, 2014.”

Tax Policy Center, Urban Institute and Brookings Institution. “50 Years into LBJ’s War on Poverty, What’s the Role for Tax Policy”? An event on January 24, 2014. The link has video of the panel discussions and the keynote by Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, Jason Furman.


Other Bibliographic Sources, Resources and Archival Collections

Rutgers University Libraries has two bibliographies on the history of social welfare policies, one for pre-1930 and one for post-1930 policy. Both are very useful, with links to primary source documents that might be particularly helpful when teaching.

Georgetown University Law Library has a poverty law research guide: http://www.law.georgetown.edu/library/research/guides/poverty.cfm

For a terrific bibliography of sources on poverty law in particular, with an emphasis on more recent books and law review articles on poverty lawyering, see Scott L. Cummings and Jeffrey Selbin, “Poverty Law: United States” (Full citation: Cummings, Scott L. and Selbin, Jeffrey, Poverty Law: United States (September 7, 2013). International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2d Ed., Forthcoming; NYLS Clinical Research
The Social Welfare History Project has very useful encyclopedia-style entries on the people, events, organizations, and programs most important for understanding the history of social welfare in America.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Poverty and Income webpage (contains numerous resources on the development of poverty in the United States, including recent analyses evaluating the War on Poverty at 50.).

Robert Greenstein's Jan, 28, 2014, testimony before the House Budget Committee is also available on the Center's website: http://www.cbpp.org/files/1-28-14pov-testimony.pdf

The Children's Leadership Council, Overview of the War on Poverty programs that help children and youth: http://www.childrensleadershipcouncil.org/clc-advocacy/war-on-poverty


U.S. Census Bureau: Measuring America: How Census Measures Poverty (infographic) http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/poverty_measure-how.html (Terrific infographic comparing the official and supplemental poverty measure.)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Poverty Guidelines, Research, and Measurement (Good starting point for finding resources)

University of Michigan, National Poverty Center

University of Wisconsin-Madison, The Institute for Research on Poverty

University of Kentucky, The Kentucky Center for Poverty Research

University of Washington, The West Coast Poverty Research Center at the University of Washington

Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, The Joint Center for Poverty Research

University of Missouri, The RUPRI Rural Poverty Research Center

Urban Institute, Understanding Poverty webpage, http://www.urban.org/poverty/index.cfm (Contains a wealth of research, including information about children in poverty)
Teaching the War on Poverty: Syllabi and Related Material

The National Poverty Center collects syllabi of courses on poverty policy and related topics: http://www.npc.umich.edu/opportunities/training/course/index.php


A new textbook on poverty law came out in 2014: Juliet Brodie, Clare Pastore, Ezra Rosser, Jeffrey Selbin, Poverty Law: Policy and Practice, Aspen, 2014. The front matter (preface and table of contents) is available from the SSRN. Poverty Law, Policy and Practice is the first new poverty law casebook in 17 years and only the second since 1976. With current literature from multiple viewpoints, the book provides an overview of the field, including cases, data and major government programs that map onto important theoretical, doctrinal, policy and practice questions. The book is designed to accompany a survey course, and an online teacher’s manual will be published soon.

A note on this bibliography

This bibliography is not exhaustive. Rather, the goal is to highlight 1) some of the most enduring scholarship on the War on Poverty and 2) the most recent work being done by social scientists, legal scholars, and historians on the subject. For context, we have included a list of useful sources on social welfare in America before and after the War on Poverty, as well as some recent analyses of the legacies of the War on Poverty.

Elisa Minoff started this bibliography, but she hopes others will add to it and improve it. If you would like to contribute citations and commentary, please e-mail Elisa at elisa.minoff@gmail.com. Elisa can either give you permission to edit the document directly or add your suggested citations herself.

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