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BOOK REVIEWS

Michael B. Katz. *Poverty and Policy in American History*. New York: Academic Press, 1983. xii + 289. Graphs, photographs, notes, appendix, and index.

According to Michael Katz, historians have characterized the dependent poor in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries United States as passive, morally deficient, and lazy individuals undeserving of aid from a society that has long praised self-help and personal initiative. He perceives that this view has been important in continuing throughout the twentieth century the punitive and degrading nature of American welfare policy. He attributes such a view to three major factors: 1) the dominance of a Whig bias that has influenced welfare historians to categorize dependent individuals in conventional terms; 2) the lack of research based on the experiences of the desperate poor; and 3) the avoidance of records on the state and local level, where many decisions about welfare originated.

Having studied a portion of the state and local records and reanalyzed some of the data included in existing welfare histories, Katz concludes that the characterization of the dependent poor and their reality are different. He blames American economic and political structures for making dependence a periodic experience and a "predictable...feature of working-class life" (p. 240). He discovered that various interests, whether fearful of radicalism and violence or just seeking votes, used welfare policy to promote social discipline, rather than to correct flaws within the economy. They initiated programs to alleviate stress in society, yet they stigmatized dependency to discourage broad reliance on welfare to keep the working and dependent poor from uniting to alter the economic and political system. Dependent individuals were not just passive participants, however, for they took full advantage of welfare institutions and policies to survive.

Katz believes that the welfare state is not inevitable. As long as welfare policy (historically a joint effort between the public and private sectors) is based on compromise and choice, influential interests will be able to inject

their biases into policy formation. In addition, if the professional bureaucracy that developed during the early twentieth century continues to wield the power to inhibit or expand welfare activities, then the efficient allocation of resources may take precedence over legitimate social need.

Poverty and Policy in American History is an important and appealing book. Katz challenges historians to redirect their efforts in writing welfare history. He questions some of the conclusions previously drawn from quantitative data and calls for their reanalysis. Effectively utilizing a broad survey of primary and secondary materials, he creates a framework upon which additional research can be based. He combines the case study method with quantitative analysis (from elementary statistics to multivariate analysis) to provide a mixture that is productive. At times, Katz makes inferences about relationships when little or no data are available, and then transforms those inferences into bold statements of fact.

Despite this one problem, anyone interested in the study of public policy, poverty, or welfare in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will find this book enlightening. The extensive historiographical discussion along provides justification for pouring over its pages. In addition, students of history will find it a good example of the application of quantitative methods in the development of new hypotheses and in the testing of existing ones.

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Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. *Transforming the Past: Tradition and Kinship Among Japanese Americans*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985. xii + 289 pp. Preface, tables, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$39.50 (cloth).

Scholars have long debated the extent to which the Japanese American family has facilitated cultural assimilation. About two decades ago, social scientists applied the assimilation model to Japanese Americans and concluded that while the *Issei* (first-generation) retained some of their Japanese heritage, the *Nisei* (second-generation) had already assimilated into mainstream America. In recent years, however, some scholars have challenged the assimilationist position. Maintaining that American society is culturally pluralistic these scholars point to readily observable forms of behavior among the *Nisei* and *Sansei* (third-generation) identifiable as traditional Japanese and argue that the *Issei* were remarkably successful in passing on a significant portion of their pre-World War II Japanese culture to their descendants. One work that adds significantly to this debate is Yanagisako's *Transforming the Past*.