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Never Enough: Capitalism and the Progressive Spirit

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level, the many sensible objections (financial, environmental, social) to the continuing widespread popularity of big, high-powered pick-up trucks and mammoth SUV's have done little to stem their sales in North America. Consequently, as Foster recognizes, the question of whether productivism will be replaced by no-growth or de-growth policies must remain politically unresolved for the present.

Never Enough: Capitalism and the Progressive Spirit, by Neil Gilbert. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 219 pp. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780199361335.

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Neil Gilbert's chief aim in *Never Enough: Capitalism and the Progressive Spirit* is to challenge misconceptions about poverty, inequality, intergenerational mobility, and social policy. There are many, and the book provides an array of useful correctives. It should be required reading for stratification researchers.

A related but distinct mission of the book is to argue that progressives, including many left-leaning academics, are wrong to believe that poverty, inequality, and mobility are big problems in the world's rich nations. Gilbert sees this belief as built into the progressive worldview: "Inspired by utopian tendencies and a passion for equality that fuels a perpetual search for disparities, the progressive spirit is temperamentally discontent with the current state of affairs. In the constant quest for a better future, progressives are inclined to discount past achievements that quickly form the status quo. In this sense, their glasses are always half empty" (p. 9). This is accentuated, he says, by electoral concerns: If left parties have no further problems to solve, how can they convince people to keep voting for them?

Is Gilbert correct that "while these problems have not been entirely resolved, they are far less serious than contemporary progressive claims would have the public believe" (pp. 11–12)? Consider poverty.

According to the government's official measure, 13.5 percent of Americans are poor (as of 2016). In the early 1960s, government researchers took an estimate of the average cost of nutritionally adequate meals and multiplied this by three, because data suggested a typical household spent about a third of its income on food. That dollar amount became the poverty line. Updated for inflation, today it's about \$12,500 for a single adult and \$19,500 for a household with one adult and two children. The poverty rate is calculated as the share of Americans who live in a household with an income below that line.

Gilbert contends that this overstates the share of Americans who are genuinely poor. He points out that surveys of household consumption find that people with low incomes tend to purchase more than their income would allow, which is due partly to borrowing but also suggests some underreporting of income. In addition, he says, some people with low incomes have amenities such as cars, televisions, and air conditioning.

He also notes that many people who are counted as poor in a given year are there only temporarily. Their income has dropped due to short-term job loss or injury or some other circumstance. The share of Americans who are chronically poor, according to Gilbert, is likely between 2 and 7 percent.

Gilbert argues that poverty should no longer be seen as chiefly a problem of low income. Instead, he says, "when we look more closely, we see a chronic poverty problem restricted largely to people with physical and psychological conditions that make it difficult to engage in productive activities—people in need of intense services, rehabilitation, and care. From this perspective, not only does the size of the problem become more manageable, but the solutions take on a different hue from those mainly seeking to provide additional cash for low-income people" (p. 29).

These points have merit. But they don't convince me that poverty is no longer a big problem, nor that additional income transfers aren't needed.

For starters, the official poverty line isn't an especially sensible one. Suppose the U.S. government had established a poverty line

in 1863. No one thinks it would make sense to simply extend that dollar amount (adjusted for inflation) to the present. Yet that's what we've done with a poverty line set in 1963, more than half a century ago. Incomes and living standards for ordinary Americans have increased significantly since then. Should we not adjust our thinking about what level of income reflects poverty?

Imagine what it feels like to live in the contemporary United States with an annual income of \$20,000, which is the average among three-person households in the bottom 20 percent of the income distribution. Yes, you may have a car, TV, and air conditioning. But that car is likely a pretty old one, and you may not be able to afford to run the air conditioning in your apartment or mobile home very often. Your children's clothing comes from second-hand stores. If you live in one of the many states with restrictive criteria for Medicaid eligibility, you probably don't have health insurance. And you likely have no savings to turn to if something goes wrong, which means you are constantly one car accident or extended illness away from eviction. When the Federal Reserve recently asked a sample of 5,000 Americans how they would pay for a hypothetical emergency expense totaling \$400, more than a third said they would be unable to pay for it with cash or money in their bank account (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 2015, pp. 18–19).

Moreover, data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) coupled with ethnographic work by William Julius Wilson, Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer, Matthew Desmond, and others tell us that there is deep material deprivation in the United States. Christopher Jencks (2016), who is attentive to the pitfalls of survey data on the incomes of the poor, concludes that approximately 1 percent of American families with children and 4 percent of those without children have, for at least three months during a year, an income of less than \$2 a day. That includes food stamps, Earned Income Tax Credit payments, and housing support they receive.

Should we worry about low income only when it is long lasting? And should

antipoverty efforts concentrate on provision of services for low-income Americans with psychological and physical disabilities rather than on boosting incomes? Recent research suggests that scarcity overloads our brains with concern about how we'll make it through the day or week, impeding long-term goal setting and short-term goal seeking. Temporary poverty can thereby beget chronic poverty. In any event, there are plenty of Americans for whom low income isn't temporary. Using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), Mark Rank, Thomas Hirschl, and Kirk Foster (2014) calculate that 10 percent of Americans spend ten or more years between the ages of 25 and 60 with an income below 1.5 times the poverty line. Greg Duncan, Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest, and Ariel Kalil (2010) have found that for American children growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, an increase in family income of just \$3,000 during a person's first five years of life boosted earnings in adulthood by nearly 20 percent on average.

Many of us believe the least well-off should have not only decent incomes but incomes that rise over time as the country gets richer. In principle, economic growth can lift the incomes of the poor via rising earnings, but in many of the world's affluent nations the earnings of low-end households haven't increased much since the late 1970s. This owes to technological advance, globalization, union weakening, and other economic developments that are unlikely to reverse. As a result, increases in government transfers have been the main source of increases in incomes for low-end households. Boosting incomes has thus become more important for poverty alleviation, not less.

Despite these misgivings, I heartily recommend *Never Enough*. Gilbert's aim to spark greater introspection and rigor among scholars of poverty, inequality, and mobility is laudable, and the book is a helpful contributor to that goal.

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Modernity and the Jews in Western Social Thought, by **Chad Alan Goldberg**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 226 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780226460550.

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Despite the many thousands of books written about why Jews have played such an outsized, mostly negative role in the imagination of Christians and Muslims, it still remains somewhat puzzling because there have never been that many Jews. The facts are well established. Christians thought that Jews should have recognized Christ as their savior, and Muslims wanted Jews to accept Muhammad as God's greatest and final prophet. Many did one or the other, but those who resisted remained forever suspect as familiar but alien interlopers who are forever damned because they did not.

Those of their descendants who became mercantile middlemen and urban artisans for many generations were able to take advantage of capitalism better than most peasants or noble warriors so that in the industrializing West this advantage made Jews particularly visible as carriers of capitalism. This success plus the Jews' traditional emphasis on being literate allowed many to become professionals and intellectuals once they were emancipated. Combined with prior religious prejudice, this relative success made Jews ideal modern scapegoats who could be blamed for all the sins of disruptive modernization. To this was added the misinterpretation of Darwinian theory that turned Jews into polluters of healthy races who had to be exterminated to prevent them from

insidiously infecting and mongrelizing the superior pure nations.

Chad Alan Goldberg's interesting *Modernity and the Jews in Western Social Thought* cites many of the best works on why this happened but takes a more specialized and focused look at how the analysis of the Jews' situation became a key analytic concern for the founders of sociology in France, Germany, and the United States. He pays particular attention to Marx, Durkheim, Sombart, Simmel, Weber, and to the leaders of the early twentieth-century Chicago school: Thomas, Park, Wirth, and Stonequist. His conclusion is that Jews came to symbolize vastly contradictory aspects of modernity. For Sombart, who became a Nazi sympathizer and anti-Semite, it was Jews who created all the negative aspects of capitalism and modern alienation. For Simmel and Durkheim, who were born into Jewish families, Jewish religion, particularly its more orthodox forms, was regressive, even an archaic leftover from the past, though emancipated Jews could also be carriers of modernity. The Chicago sociologists saw Jews positively as strangers who nevertheless had adapted to modern urban life so successfully that they could be models of emerging modernity and assimilation into American life.

Karl Marx, whose father had converted to Protestantism to get a bureaucratic job in Prussia but who remains identified as a Jew, is more problematic. It has always been difficult for those who think of Marx as one of the greatest of all thinkers to admit that his early essay on the Jewish Question is a model of vicious anti-Semitism unredeemed by the conclusion that Jews had no real religion other than money and therefore were archetypal capitalists whose salvation would only come when capitalism itself was abolished.

There is no doubt that Jews have indeed played an outsized role in the popular and intellectual imagination. The French far right (before being disgraced by its collaboration with the Nazi occupiers during the Second World War) not only denied the legitimacy of the French Revolution but claimed that the Revolution itself was part of a Jewish plot to take over the world. Anti-Semites took it for granted that somehow less than