

those who “don’t count,” and so forth. He tries passionately to call attention to those on the margins, but he does not successfully show their capacities and gifts. We are not left with a sense of those on the margins as persons gifted by God with intelligence and freedom and endowed with the capacity to make self-determining choices ordered toward the common good. Although De La Torre seems to want us to see the marginalized with the eyes of Christ, instead we learn to see them with the eyes of nineteenth-century German philosophers.

In a similar way, the issues and case studies are flawed. Scholars committed to the Enlightenment ideals of objectivity and detachment might complain that the presentation of the issues and cases is one-sided. That is true enough; there is no pretense to objectivity. De La Torre makes it pretty plain which side he is on for each issue, and it is always the side that one would expect from a liberation theologian located on the political left. I have a different complaint about the case studies. The cases are so brief (usually only a few paragraphs long) that they make it impossible for college students to understand the issues with any kind of human complexity. In some of the cases, those on the margins are given names to make the cases seem more real, but we do not learn much about the people involved. We never see the people involved as moral agents or as persons created in God’s image. Instead, each one seems like a caricature, a helpless victim—followed by a five-step rational process for how to fix the problem. (Perhaps a violent revolution is justified?) The personal passion, evident at the beginning of the book, quickly transforms into a mechanical analysis of impersonal power relationships.

I have found that my students learn most about marginalized people by serving in their neighborhoods, and then, over time, coming to know them not as the oppressed but as neighbors and maybe as friends. For a better book, I recommend John McKnight’s *The Careless Society*. My sense is that De La Torre’s gifts—as a writer, a teacher, and a theologian—would be developed better with a vision more like McKnight’s.

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American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation’s Drive to End Welfare

Jason DeParle

New York: Viking, 2004 (422 pages)

Jason DeParle, senior writer for the *New York Times*, does a remarkable job of personalizing the policymakers who fashioned and the recipients who lived the reality of welfare reform. Drawing from years of urban poverty research, DeParle details the impact of six generations of “the way things are” and the staunch interdependence and resourcefulness of those in poverty.

American Dream contains the expected and unexpected politicians, the think-tank gurus, and the Congressional staffers; it pictures the angst over funding and the jubilation of governors eager to do welfare on their own from a variety of motivations. DeParle's engaging style puts flesh on the bones of the players and helps the reader to understand why "ending welfare as we know it" was very different from ending welfare as the only thing that many recipients ever knew. The time in history; the general disgust of all for welfare; the burgeoning welfare rolls; and even new, seemingly impossible policy pieces all converged to generate the most dramatic and most successful antipoverty policy change attempted in decades.

The chronicling of the lives of three cousins, Angie, Jewell, and Opal, which begins in Chicago with the three as single mothers living on welfare, is intended as "public policy in real life." With Wisconsin moving to second in the nation for welfare benefits, and already enjoying housing rates half those in Chicago, the Illinois moms move ninety miles north to Milwaukee.

He does not take a "poor as victims" perspective, but the author does trace a consistent thread of relationship and economic problems among these women back six generations to a Mississippi cotton plantation. He insightfully observes that part of that thread is illegitimacy, lack of husbands and fathers in the home, sexual abuse, violence, and general family breakdown. Welfare did not initiate this pattern, and DeParle shows that it continues in the post-welfare reform period as well.

DeParle pictures the sadness and utter despair of people, such as drug-addicted Opal and her children, literally lost in the bureaucracy of social programs. *American Dream* provides disturbing details of privatization and the established social service organizations. As alarming as these reports are, it is unrealistic to believe that even overwhelming need can *make* a caseworker be committed to solve clients' problems or guarantee that a computer system performs so that caseworkers can help.

The writer's own frustration is evident, and any reader concerned about the poor in general, or about achieving even remotely effective social service policy, will be frustrated as well. It seems that even the "flagship" of welfare reform policy, Wisconsin's W-2 program, was short on appropriately trained, talented, and savvy support personnel. Working with people whose lives are especially challenged—for a plethora of reasons—is not for the faint-hearted. It appears that there was no expectation of either W-2 service providers or welfare clients to be accountable, trustworthy, or simply honest. Governments can make rules and they can do after-the-money-is-spent audits, but rules cannot guarantee that people make good choices.

Importantly, DeParle infers that there are other important issues beyond public policy—alternative life choices that should be supported in the broader culture—no matter the race. He refers to Jewell's comment, "[selling crack] is every black man's job," as if to say that one thing poverty can impoverish is one's sense of possibility (324).

This focus on personal responsibility should cause the reader intently to examine this tapestry of people and events in *American Dream*. Highlighting the lack of it in Angie's, Jewell's, and Opal's lives, the author suggests that without the undergirding of

a culture that values the dignity of each person, those dependent on public support will continue to have limited hope for better futures. “The ratio of hope to defeat in [Angie’s] life feels like it had shifted in a downward direction,” DeParle writes. “Yet, for all the turmoil and need around her, and all her pure exhaustion, she continues to mine her life for scraps of optimism and meaning” (338).

DeParle questions minimum wage rates, health care access, and even the current marriage promotion initiatives. To his credit, he argues for a fatherhood initiative (330). This indicates that he sees the positive connection of healthy families and declining welfare caseloads.

We suggest additional alternatives. Why is it that “work works” and moves “Opal look-alikes” in Denver’s Step 13 program (www.step13.org) to health and self-sufficiency, but the government mandated work system never helped Opal? Perhaps the issue is not “just work.”

The omission of private alternatives, besides a passing reference at the end of the book to a program that might help Opal, leaves a reader to assume that DeParle values public poverty solutions. Although he extends his Milwaukee investigations to current still-questionable performance, he does not include the myriad of smaller faith-based and community programs in the same city. He articulates well the challenges of welfare policy that struggles in the labyrinths of various bureaucracies. Interestingly, he refers to his continued contact with Angie, Jewell, and Opal, providing transportation, inquiring about their children or work; the trust he earned over the years in urban neighborhoods served him well for the substantive research for this book.

Would that DeParle’s research extended to neighborhood programs tutoring kids such as Jewell’s—holding them accountable for school and better choices, and standing in the gap for absent fathers. Perhaps an *American Dream* sequel will include these small, privately funded programs that are helping challenged, poor single moms and their children, one family at a time. This talented writer knows Milwaukee and, we suspect, knows many such programs. He is a poverty writer who has made a significant effort to “walk with” the poor; he might catch an even greater vision from people who “suffer with” the poor.

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The Power of Productivity: Wealth, Poverty, and the Threat to Global Stability

William W. Lewis

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 (312 pages)

Lewis, founding director of McKinsey Global Institute Associates, concludes that productivity is the fundamental engine of economic growth. Productivity determines living standards. Traditional growth models, dependent on the amounts of available capital and labor, fail to identify productivity impediments. These impeding factors prevent