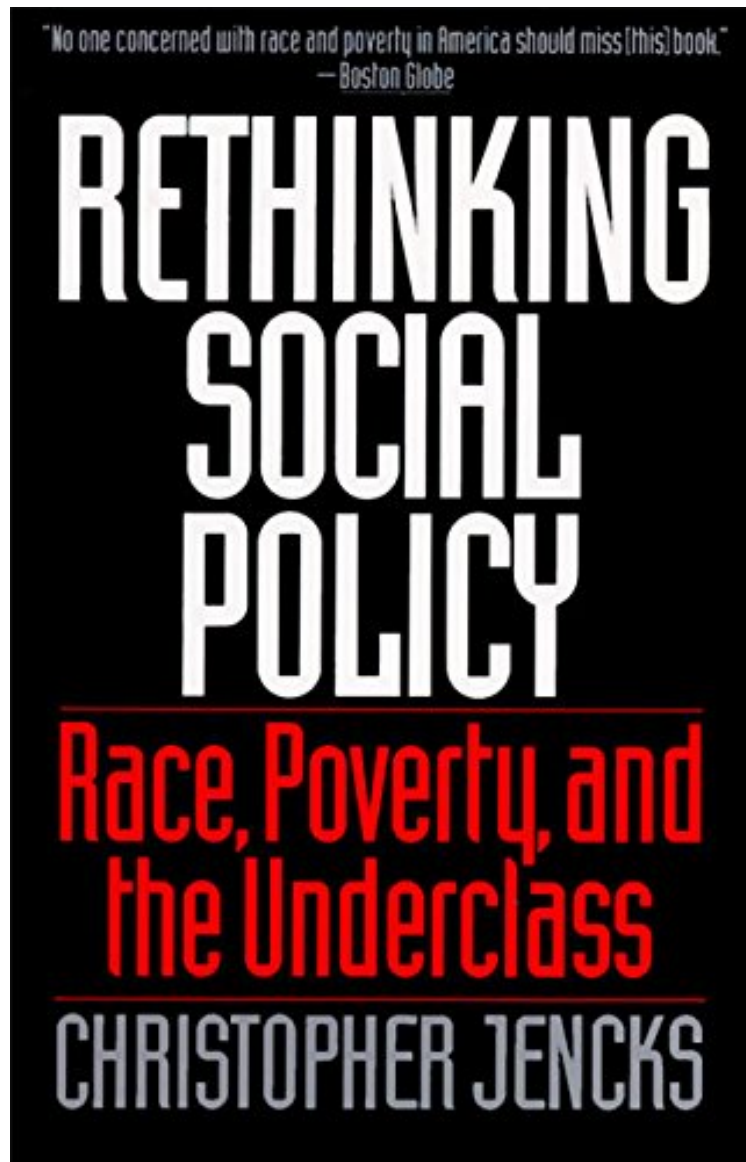


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Rethinking Social Policy

Christopher Jencks

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Christopher Jencks : Rethinking Social Policy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rethinking Social Policy:

29 of 58 people found the following review helpful. Once again, the problem with underclass is family structureBy Kathleen K. MelonakosChristopher Jencks corroborates what so many other social scientists, including Charles Murray (The Bell Curve, Losing Ground), Ken Aluetta (The Underclass)and Daniel Patrick Moynihan have been

saying, and that is that social problems of the underclass are behavioral in nature, not just economic. Purely economic "solutions" (paying poor people money) may even exacerbate their tendencies to make poor choices, i.e., become addicted to drugs, commit crimes, have children out of wedlock. The question is, what to do to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to these social pathologies? One of the most interesting parts of this book is where Jencks describes what happened in the sixties and seventies in terms of society's attitudes on sexual morality. He says the upper and middle classes were more able to make adjustments to liberalizing attitudes than the lower classes, who were devastated by the "sexual revolution." He says that lower class individuals have a hard time maintaining the discipline and long term thinking required to manage stable family structures anyway. To take away the neighborhood, church, and social constraints on promiscuity and illegitimacy is to devastate the urban poor, and has led to the 70% illegitimacy rate that we are seeing. Clearly, the public schools, who are barred from teaching morals or the religious underpinnings for them, and instead hand out condoms, exacerbate, in my opinion, the family problems of the poor, and hence, all of society.

10 of 20 people found the following review helpful. thoughtful and thought-provoking
 By A Customer
 I buy this book for friends, assign it to my college students, and read it again every now and then for fun. Does social policy seem overwhelming - the domain of "experts" rather than ordinary people? By following the author's thoughtful analysis of complex issues, the reader cannot help but acquire critical thinking skills. Those skills can be put to good use in other contexts such as voting, evaluating news accounts, etc. Furthermore, the reader will learn interesting new things about topics covered in the book. Most highly recommended

4 of 10 people found the following review helpful. What Jencks really says
 By Moten Swing
 One of the previous reviewers completely misrepresents Jencks' views. In fact, she seems to confuse his arguments with those he is criticizing, such as Charles Murray in "Losing Ground." Here are some points from Jencks, related to Murray's argument. Murray says the War on Poverty "created more poor people." However, the poor didn't begin to do badly in the 1960s, as a result of Great Society programs. Net poverty declined almost as fast from 1965 to 1980 as from 1950 to 1965. For example:

1. The proportion living below the poverty line was almost twice as high in 1965 than in 1980, and almost 3 times as high in 1950 than in 1980.
2. The decline in poverty rate from 1965 to 1980 occurred despite highly unfavorable economic conditions and depended on gov't efforts to help the poor. Improvement did slow down between 1965 and 1980, but so did the economy as a whole.
3. The beneficiaries were precisely those whom legislators had intended to help: the aged and disabled. Those whom the legislators did not want to help--poor women of color-- did not benefit. See the poverty rate of persons over 65 compared to families headed by a woman (Table 2.1, p. 73).

It's a great book. Dispassionate, clear, apolitical.

One of the foremost sociologists of our time makes a fervent appeal for clearer thinking on race, poverty, crime, and the underclass.

The essays [in this book] deal with such widely contested matters as affirmative action; the argument--associated with Charles Murray's influential book 'Losing Ground'--that welfare creates the conditions it purports to eliminate; the nature-versus-nurture controversy with reference to crime; the analysis by the University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson of the urban ghetto; trends in the size of the American underclass; and the need for reform on welfare policies toward single mothers...Mr. Jencks's capacity to zero in on the relevant statistics, his down-to-earth sense of reality, his way of pinpointing areas of ignorance in which ideology often outpaces limited data, and his unpretentious moral judgments, which are utterly lacking in self-righteousness, are exemplary. Christopher Jencks, I am fully persuaded, is a national resource. --Dennis H. Wrong (New York Times Book Review)

[Jencks's] is the most perceptive discussion I have seen of the connections between race and class, the drive for success and fear of failure, and the way that recurrent crises defy durable solutions. --Andrew Hacker (New York Review of Books)

Christopher Jencks takes on some of the most difficult issues facing contemporary liberalism: affirmative action, the underclass, the heritability of intelligence and criminal inclination, and the necessity for lying by welfare recipients whose payments are inadequate for survival. Jencks is an intellectually courageous person, determined to confront and deal with the forces that have undermined his deeply felt commitment to egalitarianism...Rethinking Social Policy is an extraordinary achievement. Jencks...not only takes on issues that are explosively dangerous for a liberal academic but, in the main, does so without ideological bias, and with consistent intellectual clarity. --Thomas Byrne Edsall (The Atlantic)

Few social scientists are as thoughtful, perceptive, and wide-ranging as Christopher Jencks...This is an excellent book. --Sheldon Danziger (Contemporary Sociology)

Christopher Jencks is perhaps the country's most seasoned, supple thinker on poverty and race. --Christopher Farrell (International Business Week)

About the Author
 Christopher Jencks is John D. MacArthur Professor of Sociology and Urban Affairs at Northwestern University.