

## **Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream**

Edited by John Edwards, Marion Crain and Arne L. Kalleberg  
The New Press. 2007. 304 pages. \$25.95 cloth.

**Reviewer:** Daniel B. Cornfield, *Vanderbilt University*

*Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream* appears at a time when millions of poor and working families are struggling to attain the American Dream. Economic globalization, technological change, and the seismic restructuring of the manufacturing economy into an hour-glass service economy of haves and have nots have led to persistent poverty and declining real wages for most workers since the start of the new millennium. The labor movement, a major social force for combating poverty, has eroded under these same conditions, while recent and rapid increases in immigration to the United States have diversified the ranks of poor and working people, leading many labor unions to undertake new initiatives in immigrant labor organizing. Poverty politics are a central theme in these campaign months leading up to the U.S. presidential election in November 2008.

*Ending Poverty in America* is timely because the poverty rate in the United States has changed little since the 1960s era of the Great Society and civil rights movement. From 1959 through 1969, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008b), the percentage of people who were poor declined from 22.4 percent to 12.1 percent. In 1970-2006, the poverty rate stabilized, fluctuating between 11.1 percent and 15.2 percent (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor and Smith, 2007). What is more, income inequality has sharpened since the 1960s. The U.S. Gini coefficient for household incomes, a leading statistical indicator of income inequality published by the Census Bureau (2008a), increased steadily from .386 in 1968 to .470 in 2006.

*Ending Poverty in America* is a comprehensive, multifaceted and synthetic treatment of poverty and poverty policy. An inter-disciplinary assessment of poverty by an all-star group of academic and activist contributors, the book is co-edited by a distinguished team who are associated with the University of North Carolina's Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity that was founded in 2005 by former U.S. Senator and presidential contender John Edwards (D-North Carolina). The editorial team is composed of Sen. Edwards, law professor Marion Crain, and sociologist Arne L. Kalleberg, 2008 President of the American Sociological Association.

The book is organized into five parts that address the causes and changing character of poverty and that assess a wide array of mainly government-sponsored anti-poverty measures, including "labor market and work supports, asset-building programs, and programs designed to build social capital by strengthening family and community."(8) Among the

highlights of the chapters dealing with the causes and changing character of poverty are David Shipler's multi-dimensional depiction of poverty not only in economic and materialist terms, but also as powerlessness and vulnerability; Sara McLanahan's demographic analysis of fragile families and poverty, and review of liberal and conservative policies; and William Julius Wilson's analysis of the development and impact of poverty concentration in inner-city black neighborhoods on a wide range of social problems, and call for "economic policies that produce tight labor markets" that address "inner-city joblessness."(94)

*Ending Poverty in America* also assesses a wide range of government-promoted "policies to help low-wage workers and families in economic distress."(7) These include Katherine Newman's assessment of several policies for encouraging the upward social mobility of the working poor, such as access to college education, state-earned income tax credits, extending health insurance coverage to poor and near-poor children, and extending affordable childcare to working poor families; Harry Holzer's call for education and training policies that promote early skill building, high school completion, college attendance, training opportunities for working adult poor, and expanded protections against the risks of job loss and displacement; Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro's call for individual asset policies, such as individual development accounts, and progressive taxation for reducing the race gap in wealth; Ronald Mincy and Hillard Pouncy's assessment of policies for improving the life chances of young black men, including school-based and after-school youth programs, job training, family self-sufficiency programs, and re-entry programs for ex-offenders; and Carol Mendez Cassell's analysis of a wide range of community- and school-based, family- and child-centered programs for preventing teenage pregnancy.

*Ending Poverty in America* is a clarion call to the nation for eliminating poverty, and offers an impressive array of approaches for doing so. The book, however, only alludes to the immense political struggle it will take to usher in a new era of federal social legislation for building a more comprehensive approach to poverty. Inspired by the New Deal and the War on Poverty, and decrying the persistence of poverty, Sen. Edwards concludes that "[e]ven the most brilliant policy ideas will not make a difference in anyone's life without the determination and commitment to turn them into a reality. If we are ever going to end poverty, the American people will have to demand action from their leaders."(264-65) In their introductory chapter, co-editors Crain and Kalleberg suggest that government-promoted policies "would be more likely to be enacted if they were encouraged by strong [labor] unions."(7) Squarely situated in the sociological field of "poverty and social welfare," and less so in the neighboring fields of social movements, labor studies and immigration, *Ending Poverty in America* offers pathways for

families to pursue the American Dream, but fewer pathways for citizens, labor-community coalitions and advocates for immigrants, ethnic-racial minorities, women, neighborhoods and the environment to demand legislative action from their leaders. Nonetheless, those anti-poverty political coalitions that do mobilize in the coming months prior to the November 2008 U.S. presidential election would do well to incorporate into their platforms the comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to combating poverty that is presented in *Ending Poverty in America*.

## References

- DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor and Jessica Smith. 2007. *Income Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006*. U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports, P60-233. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-233.pdf>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2008a. Table H-4. *Gini Ratios for Households, by Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder: 1967 to 2006*. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/h04.html>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2008b. Table 2. *Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2006*. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.html>.

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## Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change

By Melissa J. Wilde

Princeton University Press. 2007. 196 pages. \$38.50 cloth.

**Reviewer:** Helen Rose Ebaugh, *University of Houston*

In her Introduction, Wilde says that Vatican II represents the most significant example of institutionalized religious change since the Reformation. By the time it was finished on Dec. 8, 1965, it had "turned the Church on its head." Included in these dramatic changes was that the Roman Catholic Church relinquished its claim to be the one true church, had abdicated claims to power over nation-states and reinterpreted its identity from a hierarchical authority to a church as the people of God. Among the hundreds of books that have been published in the past 40 years that describe and analyze the factors behind this dramatic event, none, in my opinion, is as analytically astute as Wilde's book.

Based on primary documents from the Vatican Secret Archive that have recently been released and a reanalysis of transcripts of interviews with more than 80 of the most important bishops and theologians at Vatican