



Evelyn Z. Brodtkin and Gregory Marston, eds., *Work and the Welfare State: Street-Level Organizations and Workfare Politics*

Work and the Welfare State: Street-Level Organizations and Workfare Politics by Evelyn Z. Brodtkin; Gregory Marston

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ganized and empirically sound in the face of limited data from the charter world, Fabricant and Fine's book persuasively articulates the need for a re-imagining of the long-term effects of auctioning off one of our most sacred public goods to the highest bidder.

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Work and the Welfare State: Street-Level Organizations and Workfare Politics. Edited by Evelyn Z. Brodtkin and Gregory Marston. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013. Pp. 324. \$36.95 (paper).

In the post-World War II era, Europe embraced expectations of guaranteed income among its citizenry, regardless of their efforts to seek new employment. During the 1960s and 1970s, such a policy was even explored in the United States through the Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance Experiments. Yet over the last 30 years, governments around the world have altered their stance, and now income support policies are accompanied by mandatory work requirements. These labor support attachment programs, known domestically as Work First, have been national policy in the United States since the mid-1990s, with similar trends appearing in other industrialized countries.

In *Work and the Welfare State*, editors Evelyn Brodtkin and Gregory Marston document this cross-national turn by focusing on the implementation of Work First policies by street-level organizations. They intend to explore how the practices of these organizations actually redraw the boundaries of the welfare state through what they term the “workfare project,” which they define as “a composite of policies and practices through which countries have promoted participation in the paid labor market and reductions in income assistance to those outside the labor market” (6). While there are many potential ways to examine welfare policy and the roles that organizations play in its implementation, the editors intend for these essays to examine the intersection of policy, politics, and organizational management and to evaluate what results in terms of the welfare state.

The editors have three aims in this volume. First, they want to connect organizational studies with the literature examining the politics of the welfare state. They accomplish this objective thoroughly. Street-level organiza-

tions are an appropriate unit of analysis for exploring income support and employment policy implementation. The collection includes studies of the full array of nonprofit, private, and public organizations and thus moves beyond an artificial historical bias to examine public bureaucracies in social welfare research. At the mezzo level of implementation systems, organizations translate policy ideals into interventions. Implementing organizations are, as the editors characterize them, “strategic locations for initiating changes in the boundaries of the welfare state” (11). They are mediators of policy, politics, and welfare state alterations.

The second aim of the book is to examine the practices, rather than the politics, of workfare. By moving beyond the labels of “labor force attachment,” “activation,” or even the “welfare state” itself, the editors assert, much will be learned about day-to-day realities. In this aim, the collection is modestly successful. When compared to large-scale studies of state social welfare regimes or papers that merely correlate state expenditures to economic or social indicators, these chapters fill in some of the pieces in how the social state is enacted. The chapters from Europe, the United States, and Australia clearly document how policy change created governance change, which, in turn, led to operational changes in organizations, which now focus on labor market activities rather than provision of social support.

While these chapters describe some of the operational procedures or redeployment of staff, however, the collection does not develop a robust, conceptual understanding of these practices or the causal mechanisms that link organizational practices and outcomes. This is a missed opportunity. Organizational science and planning scholars have made significant advances by examining individual and organizational practices to develop theoretical accounts. (See, e.g., *Knowing in Organizations: A Practice-Based Approach*, by Davide Nicolini, Silvia Gherardi, and Dvora Yanow, ed. [Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2003] or John Forrester’s article “Learning to Improve Practice: Lessons from Practice Stories and Practitioners’ Own Discourse Analysis,” *Planning Theory and Practice* 13 [2012]: 11–26.) This scholarship stresses how human agency shapes the structures of collective action through an iterative, yet indeterminate, process. This empirical reality is noted by a number of the authors in this collection. For example, as Flemming Larsen concludes, “The transformation of activation at the street level remains a work in progress” (121). Yet no framework is offered to integrate these chapters on a conceptual or theoretical basis. Unfortunately, this book does not elucidate a more general explanation of the potential causal mechanisms whereby

daily organizational operations shape welfare politics or reshape the welfare state.

The third aim of the book is to bring a comparative perspective to the workfare topic. It pulls together essays from 15 authors writing about conditions in industrialized countries such as Germany, Australia, Denmark, and the United States. Even so, it is challenging to embark upon a true comparison. For one, there are not consistent policy elements that cross national borders. Other than a general thrust of emphasizing “participation in the paid labor market and reductions in income assistance to those outside the labor market” (6), there do not seem to be consistent policy tools in use. Known in European countries as “activation,” this policy direction emerged to build an active workforce and fuel economic growth by engaging residents in job preparation and placement rather than to provide guaranteed income support. In the United States, it was linked with efforts to alter what had always been a tenuous commitment to income support for very poor, largely female-headed families.

The book also does not document the magnitude of the turn to require labor market engagement as a condition of income support. This omission, perhaps justified by the clear intention to focus on street-level organizations, raises unanswered questions about the overall significance of the workfare policy direction. Are the countries included reflective of a larger trend, or merely an artifact of the “Welfare States in Transition” symposium held at the University of Chicago in 2009, which initiated the discussions that resulted in this book? Additionally, because they do not document the magnitude, the framing essays do not provide an interpretation for the cause of the diffusion of a workfare policy direction across national boundaries other than by making general references to politics. Again, the editors’ interest in street-level organizations might be the reason for this omission, but by not addressing it at all, the editors leave readers with a limited ability to assess whether or not this is an international movement fueled by political, economic, or social factors. Without this orientation, it is difficult to appreciate the significance of street-level organizations though a comparative lens.

The book is organized into four substantive parts, with introductions for each section and a conclusion written by the editors. Throughout there are some very strong, interesting chapters. Michael Lipsky, originator of the study of street-level bureaucrats, offers a thought-provoking account of the two narratives of the welfare state told by the political left and right in the United States. Informed by his many years at the Ford Foundation and

Demos, a think tank, and reminiscent of the work of linguists such as George Lakoff (*Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002]), Lipsky's chapter shows how different fundamental assumptions within the electorate about the roles of government and the nature of the social contract contributed to the turn to a workfare policy in the United States. He chronicles events from the mid-1990s and challenges the political left's dogged focus on perfecting the welfare state while the legitimacy of government involvement in social welfare was being challenged. Susan Lambert¹ and Julia Henly also contribute a strong chapter, offering a compelling analysis of how employers' cost-containment practices create work realities for low-income workers that are directly at odds with workfare policies requiring stable and mandatory work hours. These chapters and others—including those by Joe Soss, Sanford Schram, and Richard Fording; Celeste Watkins-Hayes; and Martin Brussig and Matthias Knuth—provide thorough, empirical descriptions of organizational involvement in the welfare state. Each of these chapters could provide a nice selection to include in courses focused on social policy, poverty, or public and nonprofit management.

However, other chapters (such as those by Michael Adler, Rita Van Berkel, and Flemming Larsen) are merely descriptive accounts of the move toward activation in European countries across various levels within implementation systems. While these chapters are interesting, their focus does not seem consistent with the volume's intent to highlight street-level organizational practices. In her chapter titled "Commodification, Inclusion, or What?" coeditor Evelyn Brodtkin, who writes one-third of the book's chapters, provides some strong empirical evidence from street-level organizations in Chicago, which is analytically aligned with this book's intent. But the strength of this work is not parlayed into further conceptual development. In this chapter and her other contributions, Brodtkin stresses her normative position that the move to workfare is problematic for the shape of the social welfare state, for politics, and for low-income clients. This position overlooks the reality that, regardless of one's opinion of the workfare project, it has become the goal of public policy in the countries profiled in this collection. The key limitation of the book is thus that its integrative theme is normative, decrying the turn to workfare rather than providing an empir-

1. Susan Lambert, the editor of the *Social Service Review*, absented herself from the book review process for this title. We would like to thank Jennifer Mosley for providing the managing editor with a list of potential reviewers.

ically grounded conceptual framework to help readers better understand how street-level organizational practices directly shape social welfare policy delivery. While the book's contributors are, arguably, many of the best minds to deliver on that endeavor, the overall collection does not integrate across their contributions to fully deliver on that potential.

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Confronting Suburban Poverty in America. By Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013. Pp. 169. \$24.00 (paper).

The geography of poverty in America has taken a decisive turn in recent decades to the point that a greater number of our country's poor now live in suburbs rather than central cities. In their timely book, *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America*, Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube address important questions about this shift. Based on recent census data and interviews with local leaders and practitioners from a range of suburban communities, the book is a study of the causes and consequences of suburban poverty. In the first half of the book, the authors underscore the complexity of suburban poverty by outlining its prevalence and key factors that help explain its rapid growth. The second half of the book is dedicated to developing a regional policy response to the problem of suburban poverty. Along the way, Kneebone and Berube note the similarities and fundamental differences among suburban and urban poverty. The book provides an important summary of nearly a decade of work by the authors and other researchers at the Brookings Institution and marks an important contribution to the relatively small (but growing) field of suburban poverty studies.

The book's opening three chapters chart what the authors describe as "the new reality of poverty in metropolitan America" (12). Drawing on census data, they show the growth of suburban poverty in America's largest metropolitan areas and describe how it is changing, what is causing it, and the effect it is having on suburban communities. They highlight its rapid growth relative to urban poverty, noting that one in four individuals in the suburbs was poor or near-poor in 2010. However, suburban poverty has not increased uniformly across regions (growth in the last decade has been more pronounced in the Midwest and the South) or within metropolitan regions.

Kneebone and Berube identify the core factors driving suburban poverty, with attention to how these drivers differ between metropolitan areas