

EVALUATING THE ANTIPOVERTY EFFORT SO FAR: A CONFERENCE AND A BOOK

The Institute for Research on Poverty was set up as the basic research arm of the Office of Economic Opportunity's mission to fight poverty. It thus seemed appropriate, as the first decade of the war on poverty ended, for the Institute to hold a conference to discuss what difference all the efforts of the previous ten years had made.

The Institute commissioned seven papers to be the basis for such a conference (jointly sponsored with the Johnson Foundation), which was held in 1975 at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. These papers—systematic assessments of all the major program areas—were each critiqued by a pair of invited discussants, in addition to being the subject of general conference debate.

The conference papers, along with the discussants' remarks and an introductory essay by Robert Haveman, have now appeared in *A Decade of Federal Antipoverty Programs: Achievements, Failures, and Lessons*—a volume edited by Haveman, Director of the Institute at the time of the Wingspread conference. This is the second volume in the Institute's Poverty Policy Analysis Series of books written for readers concerned with antipoverty policy but not interested in the detailed analysis presented in the technical monographs.

Fashions in Evaluation of War on Poverty Programs

Fashions in evaluation of the war on poverty and Great Society programs have changed over the period since 1964. In the early days of the war, there was little doubt in people's minds that poverty could be reduced, and that, if done right, the Great Society programs could accelerate that reduction. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, it became fashionable to say that the domestic war had failed because the financial needs of the foreign one had starved it of necessary funds. Poverty persisted, it was contended, not because of the inadequacy of the policy strategy but because it was never really given a chance.

As the seventies wore on it became fashionable to measure the effects of policy in cost-benefit terms. If programs showed poor results by this criterion, the failure was attributed to our ignorance. We had assumed that manpower, education, and health programs—human capital programs—would improve the performance, and therefore the earnings position, of the poor. But the cost-benefit analyses suggested that these expectations were wrong. If human capital programs could do this, we had clearly not yet discovered *how*.

Antipoverty expert Sar Levitan now suggests that such tests are too stringent. The appropriate method of assessment,

A DECADE OF FEDERAL ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS

Achievements, Failures, and Lessons

Robert H. Haveman, Editor

1. Introduction: Poverty and Social Policy in the 1960s and 1970s—An Overview and Some Speculations *Robert H. Haveman*
2. The Social and Political Context of the War on Poverty: An Overview *Lawrence Friedman*
3. A Decade of Policy Developments in the Income-Maintenance System *Laurence E. Lynn, Jr.*
4. A Decade of Policy Developments in Improving Education and Training for Low-Income Populations *Henry M. Levin*
5. A Decade of Policy Developments in Providing Health Care for Low-Income Families *Karen Davis*
6. Racial Change and Citizen Participation: The Mobilization of Low-Income Communities through Community Action *Paul E. Peterson and J. David Greenstone*
7. Ten Years of Legal Services for the Poor *Ellen Jane Hollingsworth*
8. A Decade of Policy Developments in Equal Opportunities in Employment and Housing *Phyllis A. Wallace*

Discussants

Wilbur Cohen	Robert Lampman
Peter Eisinger	F. Ray Marshall
Irwin Garfinkel	Edward Sparer
Earl Johnson	Karl Taeuber
Milton Kotler	Lester Thurow
Nick Kotz	Harold Watts
Anthony Kovner	Burton Weisbrod

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in his view, is a different one: "In considering programs with altruistic goals, the compassionate approach is to assume success until failure is reasonably demonstrated. Critics have frequently stressed economy over compassion."¹

The Approach Taken in the Wingspread Volume

The authors and discussants writing in this book are all sympathetic to the ideals and objectives of the war on poverty. If biases are discerned, they are certainly in favor of policies designed to help the poor. The approach they follow, however, is that in the long run, objective analysis will best help achieve those goals.

The papers, therefore, are first of all careful and detailed descriptions of the various programs. The reader can learn what the actual programs were during the decade—their scope, their provisions, and whom they reached. Second, the papers assess the available evidence on program effects, both in terms of their stated objectives and in terms of other goals. Where appropriate, the merits and shortcomings of previous program evaluations are discussed.

In many cases the authors are not in complete agreement on every nuance of the arguments. And the discussants, whose tone is more informal, frequently disagree with the emphasis and sometimes the substance of the papers. The volume, therefore, provides not only a comprehensive factual treatment of the antipoverty programs over the last ten years, but also a lively exchange of views on the poverty war. Finally, it contains some of the most systematic treatments thus far of the important issue of program evaluation. New program initiatives are valuable parts of social policy, but to move ahead in an effective way we need thorough, dispassionate analysis of what has been done in the past.

1. An Overview and Some Speculations

“While poverty was reduced during the decade, it is difficult to directly attribute this result to the programs that were an explicit part of the war. Other changes—perhaps enabled and encouraged by antipoverty policies, but not a central part of them—must also receive credit.”

Robert H. Haveman

Haveman’s introductory essay sets the rest of the volume into perspective by reviewing the basis of and motivation for the war on poverty and appraising the overall progress of the 1965-75 decade, emphasizing that many important policy developments affecting the poor during the decade were not on the agenda of the planners. This is particularly true, perhaps, of the enormous growth in size and number of programs in the income maintenance system.

Haveman makes the point that since planned social change has given way to unexpected directions in the past, future developments may also prove to have been unplanned. Nonetheless, he argues, we have a responsibility to try to set the direction of future policy.

He makes several predictions. The substantial progress of the last decade toward assuring minimal living standards for all has made income poverty less salient as a major public issue. Serious income *inequality*, however, still remains and will come to the political forefront in the next decade. But any efforts to reduce income inequality must first cope with the disjointed and uncoordinated set of income transfer and social welfare programs already in place. Also, because of the failure of policies designed to increase the productivity and earnings of low-skill workers, direct efforts to restructure or supplement labor markets (see also the FOCUS article on *Public Employment*, page 1) are likely to be increasingly proposed as policy instruments.

2. The Social and Political Context of the War on Poverty

“The war on poverty made promises that were not and could not be kept. But dollars did trickle down and filter through; and lives and institutions were transformed. In the final analysis, it was a fight worth fighting, and a step in the direction of progress.”

Lawrence M. Friedman

Lawrence Friedman takes a philosophical look at the origins and context of the war on poverty. The initiative for it, according to Friedman, came from the executive branch. Added to the power of the presidency, which was great enough to begin the new thrust, was the intellectual faith that social problems could—and should—be solved. Although the political climate fed by the shock of the Kennedy assassination and by the growing civil rights movement was right, there were no major outside forces. There was no war, no depression, no revolution, and no lobby or interest group pressure to speak of.

Once the decision to fight the war was made, there were three possible paths to take: making payments to the poor, changing the poor, and changing society. The first was, by explicit decision, not the direction the planners intended. The last was there to a small extent, but basically below the surface. The second became the dominant theme. Education programs, food programs, health programs, job programs: these were to enable the poor to earn their way out of poverty.

But many problems were built into the war from the start, according to Friedman. There were excessive hopes and promises, legislation couched in such general terms that it was all things to all people, budgets that were grossly inadequate for the problems they were supposed to solve. Yet in spite of all these, and in spite of the subsequent disillusionment of the intellectuals and reformers who planned the war, the poverty gap has narrowed and the needs of the poor have earned an enduring place on the nation’s agenda.

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Evaluating the antipoverty effort so far (continued from page 6)

3. Policy Development in the Income-Maintenance System

"Though its goals were not framed in terms of expansions or improvements in the income-maintenance system, President Johnson's 1964 declaration of a war on poverty was bound to affect policy developments in those programs by which income is transferred to the poor."

Laurence E. Lynn, Jr.

Laurence Lynn, Jr., traces the historical development of the enormous and complicated system of income-maintenance programs currently in effect, including the social insurance and the in-kind programs. (The first federally assisted program, according to his chronology, dates back to the Revolutionary War in 1776.) He documents in detail developments since 1964, including extensive data on the size and coverage of the various programs. He also describes the many efforts during the last decade, all unsuccessful, to reform the system by making it more comprehensive in coverage and simpler and cheaper to administer.

Lynn analyzes the case for incremental reform as opposed to basic overhaul of the system. His view is that in the long run the administrative costs of the current patchwork of programs will become prohibitive enough to force some reform. Paradoxically, however, cost currently seems to be a serious obstacle to basic overhaul proposals. He ends his paper with an interesting prediction. "The momentum to overcome [the cost obstacle to significant reform] is likely to be more easily generated during a change of administration by a new President personally concerned about the issue. Though such a development cannot be predicted with high confidence, much stranger things have happened."

4. Improving Education and Training for Low-Income Populations

"A wide variety of programs were initiated or expanded during the poverty decade, and the evaluations and relevant research suggest that their effect on the reduction of poverty was minimal. Why were the failures so great and what alternatives might be considered?"

Henry M. Levin

Henry Levin describes the impressive number and variety of education and training programs included in the federal antipoverty effort. Levin also reviews the rationale behind the stress on education and training. He then summarizes the results of previous program evaluations in this area, and documents systematically the apparent lack of impact of the programs either on raising the performance of participants or on reducing poverty.

As Levin says, few would now deny the basic failure of existing approaches toward education and training for alleviating poverty. Back in the mid-sixties, however, there was at least as general a belief that they would succeed. The poor were poor because they lacked basic skills. Increasing their skills, therefore, was confidently expected to raise their productivity and their earnings.

That is as far as the consensus goes. People do not agree, as Levin documents, on why these programs failed or on where we should go from here. He presents five different perspectives on the failure, pointing out that much of the statistical data supports more than one perspective and that there is little unambiguous evidence that points in a particular direction.

The interpretation one selects depends heavily on factors other than social science evidence. When this evidence conflicts with a deeply rooted commitment to a view of social reality, in Levin's judgment, it is likely to be rejected. He predicts, therefore, that the best indicators of policy over the next decade are probably the trends over the latter part of the last one, rather than what social science research is suggesting. These trends are not, however, entirely gloomy. Levin believes that government has acquired a new respect for program evaluation and research, and a willingness to press for a more direct and immediate solution to the problem of economic inequality.

5. Providing Health Care for Low-Income Families

"Among all of the Great Society programs, those devoted to health care receive the largest and most rapidly growing share of budgetary resources. . . . Experimental health delivery programs, while conducted on a limited scale, have demonstrated that considerable success is possible in overcoming a multitude of obstacles to improving the health of the poor."

Karen Davis

The major federal initiatives in providing health care for low-income families since 1964 have been Medicaid, Medicare, the OEO Neighborhood Health Center program, and the Maternal and Child Health program. The intended strategy was thus twofold. The first two programs were meant to reduce *financial* barriers to medical care, while the last two were designed to provide comprehensive health care delivery. The financial programs were open-ended commitments to pay for a wide range of services; the delivery programs were specific grants to a set of health care centers and other selected institutions.

The high expectations of the health care planners were not altogether realized. The unexpectedly enormous costs of Medicare and Medicaid precluded the substantial growth planned for the health grant programs. The open-ended budget commitments of the financing programs thus

rapidly destroyed the balance of the twofold approach. There was, however, some measure of success; and the ten years of effort, according to Karen Davis, provide a "wealth of experiences that should be instructive in the design of future policies."

On the positive side, reducing financial barriers to medical care has had a marked impact on the use of medical care by the poor and elderly. Comprehensive health centers have, in addition, demonstrated an ability to provide high quality care resulting in a major impact on the *health* of the poor.

Counterbalancing these successes, however, is the fact that the programs of the last decade have not eliminated the financial hardship of medical bills of low-income families. Medicaid does not cover about one-third of the poor because of eligibility restrictions stemming from its tie to welfare. Even the equal coverage and treatment under Medicare have not resulted in equal access to medical care among the elderly. Neither do the poor, despite the improvements, yet participate in "mainstream" medicine, but instead receive most of their care from public facilities and nonspecialists, after longer traveling and waiting time.

As we face the future, Davis would have us note that those groups whose primary barriers to health care are not financial—rural residents and minorities—have been least helped by the financing approach and most helped by the programs (limited though they have been) that have established health centers within their reach. She also stresses that rapid inflation in medical costs may now be undoing much of the progress made by the poor in the last ten years.

6. The Mobilization of Low-Income Communities through Community Action

"The Community Action Program (CAP) presents observers in the mid-1970s with an evident paradox. It was to be part of the attack on economic poverty and its social consequences. Community action instead became an attack on political poverty, oriented toward increasing the political participation of previously excluded citizens, particularly black Americans."

Paul E. Peterson and J. David Greenstone

The original intent of the Community Action Program, according to Peterson and Greenstone, did not predominantly emphasize citizen participation. The major initial objectives were service delivery and service coordination. However, when these were quickly abandoned as politically unviable, citizen participation became the central focus.

Community Action, in terms of the participation objective, was successful in their view. Minority groups were incorporated politically during the decade, and have reached a level of political influence and activity at least

comparable to that of low-income whites. Community Action was much more successful in this area, in fact, than it was in improving the economic and social position of minorities.

Because of this success, Peterson and Greenstone predict that political poverty will no longer be an issue in the coming decade. Moreover, it will not be replaced by a renewed attack on economic poverty since any sharp demarcation between poor and nonpoor is necessarily arbitrary. Rather they expect, with Haveman, that inequality will be the major target of "future scholarly and political assaults on economic deprivation."

7. Ten Years of Legal Services for the Poor

"To some, Legal Services has been a steady, if small, engine powering social reform through class action, community organization, and legislative activity. To others, it is precisely the reverse, a sizable band-aid program to lessen somewhat the impact of poverty without raising fundamental questions about reorganization of the American system through income redistribution and like measures."

Ellen Jane Hollingsworth

The Legal Services program was an experiment in a new area in a way that, with the exception of Community Action, no other Great Society program was. Its objective was to help the poor get their just deserts from the legal system, under the assumption that people who can afford lawyers get the system to work in their favor. For people who cannot, the system works against them. Unlike income maintenance, education, manpower training, housing, or even medical services, until 1964 federal (and for that matter public) money for legal services has been, practically speaking, nonexistent. Nor had there been much precedent in other countries.

There was and still is, Ellen Jane Hollingsworth tells us, no agreement upon the conceptualization or methodology by which legal services should be evaluated. Even if a framework could be agreed upon, little data exist for such evaluation. The effects are also hard to measure. How does one set a value on a legal service, such as helping solve problems in family, welfare, housing, or consumer areas? And finally, monitoring professionals for any reason is perceived by them to involve challenges to the independence and accountability of the profession itself, making it hard to persuade lawyers to give out information. "The bar," says Hollingsworth, "like its sister professions, has been quick to mobilize when threats to lawyerly independence are raised." For all these reasons, the program is a difficult one to appraise. Even the Legal Services national office itself has often found lack of information a handicap in efforts to shape policy.

These difficulties are thoroughly discussed by Hollingsworth who, because of them, is unwilling to attempt an overall evaluation. She does, however, describe

for us the historical background of the program. She also details the main problems the program has had over the decade: political crossfire, relations with the bar, bureaucratic and administrative problems, the enormous demand for legal services in relation to the available supply, and problems connected with personnel in the Legal Services program itself.

The program was an inexpensive one, because the legal needs of the poor were thought less urgent than needs for income, health, and education. Hollingsworth's judgment is that, given its scale, it has been well accepted by scholars, lawyers, and clients. As evidence of this she cites the initiation of the new Legal Services Corporation in 1975—just at the end of the first decade of federally financed legal services for the indigent—and the corporation's success in keeping off the Board of Directors those nominees who were known to be hostile to the corporation. She emphasizes that the new corporation was launched with an appropriation that was a 23 percent increase over the previous ceiling on the program, while noting the many restrictions on legal services written into the new legislation. Hollingsworth ends with the optimistic prediction, cautiously expressed, that the Legal Services program will continue to grow; that competence rather than controversy will be the hallmark of the next decade; and that the graduates of Legal Services, as they enter other streams of activity, will carry the influence of the program in their own careers and continue to support it.

8. Equalizing Opportunities in Employment and Housing

"The precise measurement of the impact of equal employment opportunity actions on the income, employment, and unemployment of low-income groups remains a major challenge for social scientists."

"The failures of the federal housing programs have been colossal. Even if HUD had enforcement powers for its fair housing programs and pursued a vigorous enforcement strategy, a large number of other agents would have to alter their discriminatory practices."

Phyllis A. Wallace

Phyllis Wallace provides a valuable factual review of the legislation passed and commission recommendations issued on employment discrimination during the last decade. The recent history of attempts to implement those laws and recommendations through litigation is also reviewed. She then discusses the work that has been done

so far on evaluating their effectiveness, using Equal Employment Opportunities Commission data and other attempts. Her assessment is that the net impact of the equal employment opportunity efforts including and since Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1963 are still not precisely known, although there is scattered evidence that limited progress has been made.

Wallace then comes at the question from another point of view by discussing the available evidence on trends in income differentials over the last ten years. Here she concludes that there has been progress in black occupational status and black earnings. Large disparities still remain, however, and the recession of 1974-75 has probably eradicated some of the relative economic gains achieved in the 1960s.

Housing policy instruments receive the same careful, factual review, including federally assisted housing for low-income families, the Fair Housing programs, the experimental housing allowance program, and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

Wallace's evaluation of equal housing opportunity policies over the last ten years is unequivocal. Discrimination against blacks is still pervasive. Federal intervention in the housing market has not opened nonsegregated housing to racial minorities. It has not reduced the amount blacks must still pay for poor quality housing and bad neighborhoods. It has not even benefited the majority of low-income people in need of adequate housing.

The housing allowance experiments, in her view, will provide evidence on the crucial question of whether financial ability to select housing on the open market will increase residential mobility, or whether an assault on residential segregation *per se* is the only way to improve minority chances of enjoying higher quality housing and better neighborhood amenities. In either case, she ends by affirming her belief that the future stability of American society is inextricably tied to a lessening of racial segregation in housing.

¹Sar A. Levitan and Robert Taggart, *The Promise of Greatness: The Social Programs of the Last Decade and Their Major Achievements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

