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The Politics of Neglect: Urban Aid From Model Cities to Revenue Sharing. by Bernard J. Frieden; Marshall Kaplan; Federal Programs and City Politics: The Dynamics of the Aid Process in Oakland. by Jeffrey L. Pressman

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Book Reviews

MURRAY CLARK HAVENS, EDITOR

The Politics of Neglect: Urban Aid From Model Cities to Revenue Sharing. By BERNARD J. FRIEDEN and MARSHALL KAPLAN. (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1975. Pp. 281. \$12.00.)

Federal Programs and City Politics: The Dynamics of the Aid Process in Oakland. By JEFFREY L. PRESSMAN. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. Pp. xii, 162. \$10.95.)

For most scholars and political and administrative activists of American domestic policy the era comprising the decade of the 1960s and the early years of the 1970s was, and still appears to be, a period of exhilarating hope and frustrating failure. To even the most orderly minds it must be remembered as a fast-paced time when a veritable kaleidoscope of political events escalated into both complementary and conflicting psalms of revolution, legislative mandate, and outright oppression. Out of such heightened conflict we scholars of politics are usually "objectively" willing to theorize the political directions by which nations are forged. But the proximity and drama of the events of the past 15 to 20 years continue to have an inordinate impact on the normative predilections and scholarly analysis of students of these years.

Such heightened lack of "objectivity" is especially true of scholars who were actively involved in governmental attempts to redress the grievances of the poor living in cities. To those committed to waging a "war on poverty" it is tragic to see a nation reducing the struggle to a "war against welfare cheaters." To those committed

to the construction of an effective social welfare system, the dilution of the politics of welfare to the regressive rhetoric of “workfare” is, at the very least, disheartening. The disappointment and disillusionment of such scholars and activists is not built upon their support of cheaters and their antipathy for work; rather it is built upon their recognition that the conditions that boiled to an explosive head in the 1960s still exist, and the governmental programs designed to redress these conditions have been wiped out, substantially gutted, or have failed outright.

It is not surprising that such a dramatic era in our political history and such bitterly defined judgements of the political directions of our nation should combine to spawn a spate of books on our domestic urban policy. Most of these books have concentrated either on the political conflict of the time or on the activist-informed definition of the political failure of our Federal and local policies in cities. The two books under review here share some of both of these perspectives, but they are also representative of much more. *The Politics of Neglect* by Bernard J. Frieden and Marshall Kaplan combines the insight and commitment of two veterans of the domestic policy wars of the 1960s with a scholarly attention for detail, providing us with a comprehensive and useful description of the Federal level activity which surrounded the instigation and ultimate disillusion of the Model Cities Program. Jeffrey Pressman, in his book *Federal Programs and City Politics*, joins an original analytic mixture with an activist’s insight to give us a case description of the urban milieu within which Federal aid was used.

While the strength of both of these books rests with the activist insight of these authors, this perspective also skews the authors’ normative perspective. The authors look to the products and process of Federal domestic aid as substantial failures. They analytically critique the process, yet cannot divest themselves normatively from it. The result is a confused critique in which the ultimate problem, the process of policy initiation and implementation, is at once critiqued and justified. Both books treat the Federal and local participation in Federal urban programs from not terribly dissimilar perspectives: namely that the Federal programs of the 1960s failed to achieve their potential as ultimate sources of the resolution of the injustice and disparities found in the streets of urban America. As one reads these volumes, one reads the work of scholars both directly and indirectly disappointed with the lack of a fulsome

commitment on the part of the governing institutions of our nation to the tasks of meeting the needs of the urban poor.

Both studies suggest that what commitment did exist, at either the Federal or local level, was quickly dissolved in the seemingly uncontrollable, uncommunicative, and self-interested quagmire of political and bureaucratic entanglements which characterize the relationships between and among local and national political and administrative fiefdoms. Here the case study of the Federal development of the Model Cities Program by Frieden and Kaplan and the case study of Oakland's participation in Federal programs by Pressman are both superlative. They are two of the best representatives of the case method and they are two of the best books yet to emerge (a third being Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's *Implementation*) on the *process* of this policy era.

Perhaps the most interesting question for analysts and practitioners alike is, given the universal acceptance of the overall failure of past governmental actions, where do we go from here? In rather particular ways, the authors of these books offer different alternatives for the future: Pressman argues for a revitalization of the responsiveness of our political institutions (both national and local), while Kaplan and Frieden suggest that we slow down and back away from grandiose goals and try to use what is left of social welfare structures and resources to meet a more pragmatic and incremental set of expectations.

Hence there are three basic topics which these two volumes address: (1) the nature and extent of the nation's commitment to a Federal urban policy; (2) the political and administrative nature of the policy-making process; and (3) the future of Federal social action for cities.

From the discussions of both Pressman and Kaplan and Frieden it appears that, for all the polemics and good intentions of the 1960s, there was neither the structure nor the process available to mount and sustain a real reform of the socially and economically disparate environment of our cities. Both books argue that the politicization of poor folk, various political organizations, and even mayors and city councils were not enough to influence the Federal government. There were no urban interest groups strong enough to wrest long-range financial as well as rhetorical commitment out of Washington. Frieden and Kaplan conclude that, given the new administrative demands by comprehensive social action reforms

such as the Model Cities Program, and given "the lack of potent constituency to support it, . . . the response of the White House [became the] key indicator of the federal will to make it succeed." (p. 190) The White House failed to establish this national commitment and force a fractured Congress and balkanized bureaucracy to attack clearly the living conditions of the urban poor.

In both instances, the authors' participation in the programs they are studying at once helps their case studies and limits the vision and hence the analysis of the studies. Such limitations are especially evident in the differing approaches to the future offered in the two books. Both books present, in detail, the variety of places in both Washington and Oakland where a form of lasting political and programmatic commitment is *not* to be found; yet neither book offers a conceptual jumping off place big enough really to measure the reality and the myth of our nation's policy commitment. Whatever the differences in emphasis, both studies rely upon a patchwork articulation of incremental retrenchment when discussing the future direction of federal aid to the cities: Pressman arguing for a more specific and less cosmetic program of federal enforcement of program objectives through heightened "carrot and stick" grantsmanship; Frieden and Kaplan suggesting a new, less radical, process of "muddling through" with the present-day mix of general and special revenue sharing blocks and what is left of categorical grants.

In short, the irony in these otherwise excellent case studies is that hindsight has provided all three authors with substantial insight into the *conditions* of past failures while they appear to remain insensitive to the institutional causes of such failures. Such approaches therefore lead to prescriptions for change which are limited to positions which simply recast (in the name of pragmatism) the same failing structural and programmatic features of our governmental and economic institutions with the hope that they will meet with success this time around.

Indeed, even these, two of the best books on the apparent salad days of urban policy, seem to raise the axiomatic straw man that given that *more* was promised and *more* was attempted on behalf of the urban poor in the 1960s, therefore the system of policy delivery *should* have brought about real social equity. They seem to have forgotten the arguments of sixties-period critics as diverse as Frances Piven, Richard Cloward, Stokeley Carmichael, C. V. Hamilton, Saul Alinsky, Peter Bachrach, Eldridge Cleaver, and Joe

Feagin who, together, have left us a legacy of critique, not merely of the *conditions* of urban oppression, but also of the institutional *causes* of the system of oppression itself. The works of these and other systemic critics told us, *during* the “salad days” of our “war on poverty,” that the war was being fought with “popguns” and the “salad” was, at best, a cosmetic garnish to the otherwise malnourished meal so often served up to the poor by this welfare-unconscious liberal democratic nationstate. The liberally-biased political philosophy of our brand of government all but predetermines that our collectively directed social welfare policies will be *more* promise than guarantee.

Books such as these reviewed here would be strengthened immeasurably by couching their middle range analysis and micro-level case study within such a theoretical frame of causation. Further prescriptions for change which do not confront the impact of the anachronistic tensions found in a system of government, which is at once liberal and democratic, upon the viability of the suggested changes stop short both analytically and pragmatically in measuring their future success. Indeed, the changes suggested by Frieden and Kaplan, and to a lesser extent by Pressman, seem to indicate a predilection to satisfy the needs of liberally-biased legislatures and bureaucracies. The democratically motivated demands of collectivities of poor in the streets have been “pragmatically” pushed back to the “romantic” and “unrealistic” days of the 60s. Little attention is paid to the *causative* reasons for such a reduction of democratic pressure other than the implication that *too* much was promised *too* fast.

In conclusion, the scholarship, like the object of study itself, has remained dedicated to short-sighted and conflicting goals and practices. Such books as *The Politics of Neglect*, and to a lesser degree, *Federal Programs and City Politics*, give us substantial insight into the policy era—both through what they consciously discuss and *how* they unconsciously limit their own analysis. These works therefore stand as empirically complete socio-political studies of urban policy and as highly reflective examples of the sociology of knowledge which has influenced the successes and reinforced the failures of our urban policy.

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