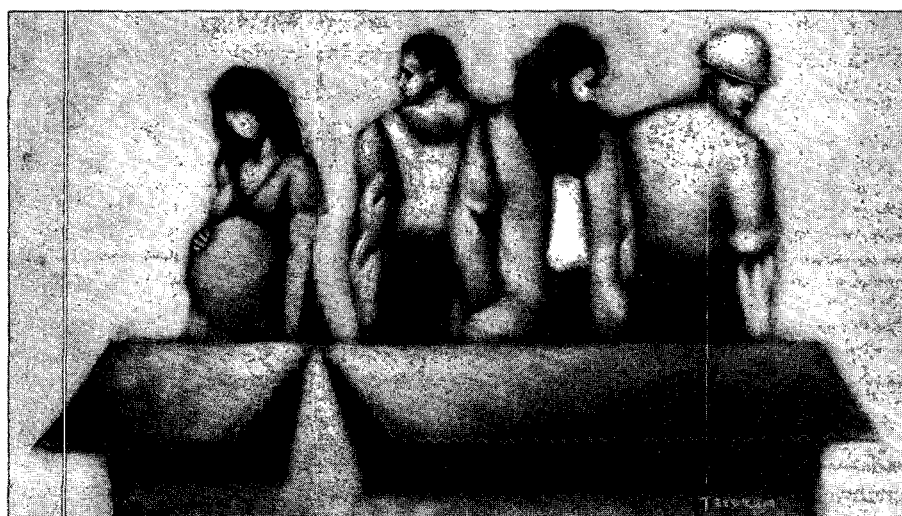


## Po' Folks

BY KARL ZINSMEISTER

**The Undeserving Poor**, by Michael Katz  
New York: Pantheon, 293 pages, \$22.95/\$14.95 paper



**M**ichael Katz has written a book about poverty that contains no new arguments or facts and no passion or conviction of the sort that can occasionally cause reinterpretation of old material. It is a book that, in my opinion, errs in many important ways. Yet it is not a book I could get angry with; I found it agreeable to read, and it left me with a kind of gentle sadness. It is one of those discussions where you get the feeling that even the author suspects his case is hopeless.

Poverty is a topic near intellectual exhaustion—particularly when approached from the political left. (Katz reasons as a Marxist, though I have no way of knowing if that is how he identifies himself). Generations of interpreters have twisted and knotted themselves around the subject, eyes averted from the central taboos, producing one of the most cramped and oxygen-starved of policy literatures. The only discussions of the subject that have much originality these days are ones that

consciously throw aside the layered pietisms and examine the brutally simple questions that most social scientists would prefer to keep deeply buried at the base of the mental pyramid. Basic things like: Do people feel better and live better when they work? What moves people to labor? Is a human entitled to his fellows' support?

Unfortunately, Katz's idea of going to the root is to call for "economic justice and political mobilization" by means of instruments like "controls on plant relocation, the stimulation of community-based economic development, the redistribution of political power, and a guaranteed income." If those seem like somewhat vague goals, let me say that I actually scoured his book to get that specific. Characteristic of most academic publishing these days, Katz writes with his neck pulled in, taking few risks and venturing almost not at all into the dangerous exploratory work of social invention.

Socialist theory tells Katz that the solution to poverty in industrial countries lies in turning the world upside down—state-imposed "distributive justice" is obviously his ideal. He avers that poverty has nothing to do with the particularities of human behavior or localized conditions, that it is about "power." A revolution something like those that swept the Third World in the 1960s is what is required for its abolition, he suggests.

But he says this only indirectly, without much heart. There is less-ambitious boilerplate in here about hidden successes in the CETA program and so forth, and the possibilities for better results from traditional income leveling plans if only the funding can be increased. But this, too, is unconvincing. Katz is an obviously intelligent man; he understands well the long debate over the sources of modern poverty, and he appreciates how durable poverty has proved to be in the face of repeated public attacks. One gets the feeling he is discouraged, and a little tired. Understandably so. None of what he calls for has ever worked, in this country or others.

**T**he real root of Katz's failing lies in the central tenet of his book: his refusal to accept that there are categories of poor. He argues strongly against any differentiation or discrimination among the poor. Indeed, he makes the more radical case denying functional distinctions between economically successful and unsuccessful persons. Longstanding efforts by scholars to understand differing sources of poverty, and to draw "arbitrary distinctions" among "deserving" and "undeserving" poor are, he insists, baseless.

Which leaves us in the unfortunate position of having to dump the retired poor, the drug-addicted poor, the disabled poor, the criminal poor, the juvenile poor, and others all together into one lumpy stew. The idea that you can improve the

physical welfare of a steam-grate wino, or the infant of an unmarried teenage mother, the same way you help a West Virginia coal miner thrown out of work by the Clean Air Act is the kind of thing that only sociology professors think of. Thankfully.

The occasional leftist gas bubble also contributes to the artificiality of Katz's thesis. For instance, he approvingly quotes Charles Reich's "elegant redefinition of property": Property is a collective product created by state law. If this is true, one wonders why the Ethiopian government does not just pass an edict declaring that there is food for all, or why the Romanians do not decree equal heat for every home. Perhaps they have.

**H**appily, these intellectual sur-realisms can be skirted, and the larger part of Katz's text is a concise, generally fair, and sometimes even epigrammatic history of arguments on the poverty question dating particularly from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s. Oscar Lewis, Edward Banfield, and the "culture of poverty" are recapitulated interestingly, as is the battle over the Moynihan Report. An extended tracing of the black family debate is presented, and the conservative criticisms of Gilder, Murray, and Mead are summarized. A lot of this material is pretty well worn—Molly Orshansky and the origins of the poverty index, the Rawls-Nozick debate, the statistical war over homelessness, and so forth—but it is woven together nicely.

For this compilation of historical sketches the book will probably earn a handy spot in certain libraries. But by the conclusion of most chapters, and at the end of the book, an impression of vagueness wells up: So what? Does this matter? What is to be done?

One would like to admire a pithy, well-phrased book like this. But we live in a time of economic expansion to the point of labor shortage, yet where infant mortality is rising in some urban areas for the first time in decades, where generations are growing up without close knowledge of a single self-supporting adult, where crime has become at least a temporary career choice of perhaps a

quarter of all young men living in cities, where average black life expectancy has actually fallen for three years running. In the face of cold, clashing, catastrophic patterns like these, Katz's incantation of Michael Harrington's muffled solution—

"when we join in solidarity...with the poor we will rediscover our own best selves"—reeks of fire-midst fiddling.

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## Open the Floodgates

BY ANNE LISE ANDERSON

**The Economic Consequences of Immigration**, by Julian L. Simon  
Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 402 pages, \$39.95

**H**ow many immigrants, of what kinds, should the United States admit—and on what terms? These are the questions Julian Simon's *The Economic Consequences of Immigration* addresses.

Simon is a well-known proponent of more immigration—but this was not always his position. When he began studying the economics of population two decades ago, he believed, he tells us, that more people would be damaging to the world and the United States; it was the literature that changed his mind. His careful and critical review of the relevant literature explains the problems with various studies not in the technical jargon of the economics journalists, but in language appropriate to the laymen Simon hopes to reach. As such, this book provides a model of how professional economists should write for a general audience—and perhaps for each other as well.

Simon's analysis of the economic consequences of immigration is detailed; he takes us through his reasoning step by step. There is perhaps much more to be considered than most of us realize: not only whether or not immigrants take jobs from natives, but their tax contributions and the demands they place on public treasuries; their effect on natural resources, the environment, technology, and the productivity of natives; and the consequences of their use of capital goods.

Immigration is not, Simon finds, high by historical standards—and immigrants constitute a far smaller percentage of the U.S. population than they did in the early

20th century or than they do in many other countries such as Great Britain, Switzerland, and France. On average they're as well educated as the U.S. population and include a disproportionate number of professional and technical people. More of them work, they save more than the native population, and they're just as law-abiding.

Furthermore, they get less in transfer payments—welfare and public services, including education for their children—than natives, mainly because most of them are too young to be getting Social Security or Medicare.

Immigrants take jobs—but they also make jobs, and they make more jobs than they take. They're more likely to create new businesses than natives.

**D**oes no one get hurt? In the short run, increased unemployment of those most like the immigrants is a possibility, just as foreign trade may reduce employment and output in some local industries but benefit the country overall. Simon's general conclusion is that immigrants have improved the lot of natives, however, and that more immigration would be beneficial economically for the United States. How much more?

Simon isn't sure. But he is sure that higher levels of immigration, above the current level of up to 800,000 a year, would be beneficial, and he recommends that total immigration be increased every year. Because we don't know at what levels undesirable consequences may occur, Simon doesn't argue for open borders, but he isn't certain that there are any