

The Ecology of Welfare: Housing and the Welfare Crisis in New York City,

by GEORGE S. STERNLIEB and BERNARD P. INDIK.

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HAROLD KERBO Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

At present this country must begin facing up to some tough issues with respect to housing an increasingly urban poor. Some solutions attempted in the 1960s, as we all know only too well from Pruitt-Igoe, ended in disaster. The question of what must be done is approached by Sternlieb and Indik with a large scale study of welfare housing in New York City. While this book seems directed most to the welfare administrator, social scientists generally interested in this area who can overlook the study's lack of theoretical guidance will find it valuable.

The book begins with three introductory chapters: a general overview of the "welfare crisis"; a description of the methodology of the study; and an in-depth look at the back-ground characteristics of their principal sample of 412 welfare recipients in New York City. With chapter 4 the main analysis of the study begins. The first major concern is the present deteriorated state of welfare housing in New York City (what we may call an objective dimension). As we might suspect, though hard evidence is often lacking, welfare recipients live in the worst housing in the city. For example, "welfare buildings" (buildings with a majority of the tenants receiving welfare-most often the oldest buildings in the city) are found to have more building code violations and less regular maintenance than buildings housing primarily families not receiving public welfare. In chapter 5, what may be called a subjective dimension of this deteriorated housing situation is considered. Here welfare recipients' discontents and fears are tied to the objective dimension of inadequate housing. Upon demonstrating that the housing situation does have at least some effect on attitudes and life goals, the argument turns to what can and must be done to change this housing crisis.

With what seems a thorough and complex analysis of the costs and profits for "slum landlords" in New York City, the authors conclude in chapter 8 that the possibility of improving the situation through private financing is remote. Contrary to traditional beliefs, "slum landlords" are not big operators making big profits, but are small owners making little or no profits-and at times operating at a loss. With this finding the authors argue that, though well

meaning, the city is misdirected in investing resources for attacking "slum landlords" as a solution to the problem.

Concluding with a short and very limited chapter on policy implications, the authors raise further questions and reiterate more what should not be done than suggesting specific policies. Principally, what the city can not do is expect the situation to improve without dipping into the "public purse." But the authors reject the large public housing approach. The danger of the increased concentration of welfare recipients (indicated by their findings) is further stressed, and as if by default, the suggestion is made that in the short-run the city must help improve upon what exists-the privately owned "welfare buildings."

Overall the book presents a fine piece of research on a big problem that could use much more research. The book's basic weakness lies in the attempt to link objectively poor housing conditions and the recipients' general outlook on life. In an interesting analysis using "The Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale" the authors report that contrary to other populations, especially in contrast to national samples from the United States, welfare recipients in New York City view their past and future situation much more positively than they do the present. But the problem lies with the authors' failure to tie these findings into their analysis of housing conditions.

Despite it's limitations, the book should be valuable to anyone interested in the problems of housing the poor. No doubt, a welfare administrator in New York City would be more frustrated than enlightened by the authors' limited policy implications in the concluding chapter-but this probably reflects more the nature of a problem realistically faced than the few inadequacies of the study.