

emerging needs, such as migrant and homeless children, is an indicator of adaptation to changing needs, which by default, has not occurred in most other programs. Health programs, however, have evolved, particularly Medicaid; that chapter (Ch. 10) documents its expansion through SCHIP, and ACA, though the latter is only mentioned.

The irony that pro-homeownership policies were used to exploit poor, minority, and women householders in the foreclosure crisis (Ch. 8) highlighted the limits of anti-poverty programs in changing economies.

Workforce programs (Ch. 12) also evolved, but unfortunately, from the original focus on the poor and to one focused on dislocated workers, with modest results, and the analysis details how lack of good data hampers developing effecting programs, though neither here nor elsewhere does anyone tackle what poverty is, and what measures to use to document success. This chapter has enough detail in its specific example of Maryland to make clear what works in this area.

The remaining chapters address alternatives such as worker co-operatives (Ch. 13) and inclusive capitalism (Ch. 14) as alternatives to address low incomes and wealth among the poor. Not having ever been on the agenda, however, as major alternatives, these are of interest mainly because they highlight by default the plight of workers today, of low wages and little labour power, that are quite different from the problems of the poor a half-century ago.

Indeed, the introduction posited that the book's goal was to answer the question, 'Why does poverty exist in America?' It would have been helpful, and more in keeping with the title . . . *A Retrospective*, to have asked how the War on Poverty's programs reflected the program designers' answer to that question, and then to ask how those answers have fared over the ensuing five decades. Some chapters did trace how programs evolved, but others were basically ahistorical. Still others ignored or gave short shrift to key events and trends that deeply affected the scope and direction of these programs, such as busing and school desegregation, deep cuts in housing and other programs under President Reagan, or the Great Recession.

The War on Poverty was a testament to the belief that comprehensive initiatives, by the government but in partnership with public and non-profit entities, can have an impact on the lives of poor people. This book, though uneven, documents how both difficult and persistent some dynamics are (racial inequality), how good and adaptive ideas can succeed (Head Start), but at the same time, how easy it is for economic trends to overwhelm the best and brightest ideas (the Great Recession, globalization.)

Reference

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DIANA M. PEARCE

University of Washington

pearce@uw.edu

Daniel Béland and Pierre-Marc Daigneault (2015), *Welfare Reform in Canada: Provincial Social Assistance in Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. \$38.95, pp. 448, pbk.

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This volume offers a comprehensive review of social assistance programmes in the Canadian provinces. It begins with chapters by the editors and by Robert Henry Cox that propose a general framework for understanding the evolution of Canadian social assistance in recent decades.

Their approach is predominantly constructivist, stressing what their authors understand to be the main ideas that have conditioned changes during this period. These include an increasing preference for market solutions for social problems, and more focus on 'activating' clients, that is, seeking to return them to work. These ideas are said to have displaced a more generous disposition that existed during the post-war years. The next two chapters address overarching empirical themes – the extent of interprovincial variation in assistance systems (by Boychuk) and trends in reciprocity and benefit levels, and in programme clientele (by Kneebone and White). These two contributions are empirically rich and conceptually tight; they could easily serve as a gateway to understanding Canadian social assistance. Each of the subsequent ten chapters surveys assistance programmes in one province. Seven additional chapters address specific clienteles, including women, immigrants and disabled people. These 17 contributions are all brief, as was no doubt necessary to keep the book to a manageable length.

There is much to praise here. All of the one-province surveys provide valuable details on recent changes, and an assessment of their consequences. In general, as the editors anticipated in their introductory chapter, assistance benefits have become less adequate in Canada since the 1980s. Caseloads have also declined substantially in most provinces, a change that is at least partly attributable to efforts by provincial governments to make it more difficult to qualify for benefits. Most governments also now do more to induce recipients to return to work, using a mix of compulsion and of positive incentives that varies from province to province. Several of the clientele-focussed chapters are particularly illuminating; those on aboriginal peoples (Papillon), the elderly (Marier and Séguin) and the homeless (Prince) include important new insights even for seasoned students of Canadian social policy.

This is a book of very broad scope, involving many authors with various disciplinary backgrounds. Inevitably, there are some inconsistencies. The 17 one-province and clientele-focussed chapters would have benefitted from a more common focus. One must acknowledge that this can be difficult, even hazardous, to achieve. Contributors to a valuable scholarly collection like this one must be given an opportunity to express their singular voices. Yet their empirical overviews would have been enriched by an effort to address several shared reference points regarding the evolution of benefit adequacy and caseload size, and in relation to the extent and kind of employment-oriented changes in each province. Such a framework may also have permitted a synoptic chapter near the end of the book to summarize this information comparatively. The editors observe in their concluding chapter that this topic would benefit considerably from more comparative study. Yet this volume will contribute less than it might have to informing comparisons.

A disjunction is also evident between the framework set forth by the book's editors and by Cox in the first two chapters, on the one hand, and much of the rest of the study, on the other. There is very little discussion of this framework in the 19 empirical chapters. Indeed, the third and fourth chapters implicitly take issue with it. Boychuk argues that provincial assistance systems remain quite dissimilar, and are shaped by distinctive forces in different jurisdictions. A review of the evidence presented by Kneebone and White and in the ten provincial overviews lends credence to this argument, as does my own research in this area. The adequacy of assistance benefit levels has declined almost everywhere, but when combined with the refundable tax credits that have become much ampler in Canada since the 1990s, the incomes available to low income families in Canada have evolved in quite different ways over the past twenty years; in some cases, they have risen. These trajectories have varied considerably across provinces and among clienteles. It is difficult to reconcile these facts with an argument that assistance has changed in broadly similar ways in response to the same ideational trends. This variegated pattern also suggests that other explanatory approaches commonly used by welfare state scholars might usefully have been referred to by the editors as possible complements to their own, and

as potential contributors to an account of these variations. These could include the possibility that policy has been shaped by differences over space and time in the balance between pro- and anti-redistributive political parties and organized interests. Boychuk also points out that access to social assistance was never defined as a right in national legislation in Canada during the post-war years, further undermining the argument that the country has experienced a clear transition from a rights-oriented to a more market-conforming understanding of social assistance. Data presented by Kneebone and White underscore that the main determinant of change in assistance caseloads in recent decades appears to be a province's employment rate, further calling into question explanations that stress convergence and the role of ideas.

None of this detracts from the essential value of this study. Béland and Daigneault have assembled a wide-ranging and comprehensive study of what remains an essential component of Canada's social security system, as it is in most liberal welfare states. The chapters are effectively organized to offer a thorough overview of Canadian social assistance. Almost all empirical chapters are detailed and well organized, which attests to fine editorial oversight and the careful selection of participants, as well as reflecting consistent dedication by the authors. By bringing the volume to print so quickly, the University of Toronto Press is offering readers very current assessments of these programmes. This is an important study.

RODNEY HADDOW
University of Toronto
r.haddow@utoronto.ca