

than competing theories. Aside from these quibbles, however, I quite enjoyed this book and recommend it to anyone interested in Meriwether Lewis's mysterious last days.

LARRY E. MORRIS is author of *The Fate of the Corps: What Became of the Lewis and Clark Explorers After the Expedition* (2004). (The author of this review read and commented on part of the manuscript before it went to press).



### *The Cost of Being Poor*

By Sandra Barnes

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. Pp. xiii, 275. Photographs, maps, charts, notes, references, index. \$24.95.)

It is often said that journalism is the first draft of history. For historians concerned with urban poverty in twentieth-century America, sociology has more often and more reliably filled that role, from the Chicago School studies of the 1920s and beyond, to Kenneth Clark's social psychological profile of the urban ghetto in the 1960s, to William Julius Wilson's examination of the ruinous impact of de-industrialization in the 1980s. Aside from the prescriptive role social science can play in understanding contemporary problems, this historical function is also a vital one, because the dearth of conventional primary sources often makes the experiences of the poor particularly fleeting.

Sandra L. Barnes, associate professor of sociology at Purdue University, has produced a compelling study in this same tradition, focusing on one of the most devastated of de-industrialized midwestern cities, Gary, Indiana. From the first, Gary was tied

to the economic fortunes of heavy industry, born of U.S. Steel's desire to create a midwestern outpost and named for the corporation's chairman. As historian Jon Teaford has recounted, the city was promoted as the "eighth wonder of the world" and referred to in 1909 by *Putnam's Magazine* as "the magic city." Barnes provides some historical background to the tragedy of Gary's decline, but more historical context, including some discussion of whether the urban renewal programs of the post-World War II era had any impact on the then-youthful city, would be helpful.

Barnes, herself a Gary native, focuses primarily on the unique challenges facing impoverished Gary residents today as manufacturing jobs and retail and other service outlets have left the city, often having relocated to the suburban centers of Merrillville and Portage. Her analysis revolves around the relative impact of these structural shifts and the individual agency maintained by Gary

residents in managing the economic and psychological challenges of what she calls their “daily round” of providing for basic family needs (p. 2).

Barnes contends that contemporary Gary residents are far from the “other Americans” mired in the deflating culture of poverty depicted by Michael Harrington in the 1960s, asserting instead that those she studied “do not exhibit present-time orientation, feelings of hopelessness, despair, inferiority, low aspirations, and fatalism, but rather appear to concentrate their efforts and resources toward the future of their children” (pp. 188-89). Her subjects here are more frequently examples of the “working poor”—those earning meager wages, an unfortunate and unexpected event away from disaster, cobbling together what support systems they can in an era of more limited public assistance in the wake of the welfare reform legislation of 1996. Barnes criticizes the official federal poverty threshold as an inadequate measuring tool, but she accepts this as her functional definition of poverty, and focuses less on those who are endemically unemployable and destitute—e.g., the mentally ill or the chemically dependent—than on those nearer the poverty line.

Barnes spotlights the stories of selected women and their families as exemplary, including the frustrations of a college-educated African American woman struggling to find a decent job, weighing the costs of her loyalty to Gary and the employment

opportunities in outlying areas, along with the case of a Latino mother of three who patronized Gary businesses when possible but kept her children out of what she judged the city’s inferior school system.

Race is clearly a factor in the poverty detailed by Barnes, but not so much in differing daily experiences among racial minorities as in the outmigration of businesses to surrounding areas. Barnes produces staggering statistics about the growth of suburban retailers at Gary’s expense, and she offers an extensive examination of the difficult choices residents must make when shopping for food and clothing.

This important work is among the first to provide a close-range examination of life for poor urban residents in the post-welfare reform era. Nevertheless, while the book jacket proclaims that the study “offers broad findings that apply to other similarly impoverished Rust Belt Cities,” Barnes provides little comparative discussion, and sadly, in spite of her convincing conclusion that Gary’s residents bravely maintain hope for their individual futures, the study leaves the reader with the impression that aside from the determination of many residents, Gary offers few of the resources that have provided a measure of hope for revitalization in other urban areas.

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