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Locked in the Poorhouse: Cities, Race, and Poverty in the United States

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ers the opportunity to perceive things otherwise unnoticed.

Lopez provides unexpected little jewels of observations and metaphors that can startle to waking and introspection the reader's own metaphorical frame of seeing the familiar. For example, in an allusion to the metaphor of "quarantining" he talks about the finding one's "voice" thus: ". . . (it) had to grow out of its own knowledge and desire, that it could not rise legitimately out of the privilege of race or gender or social rank, so did it take time to grasp the depth of cruelty inflicted upon all of us the moment voices are silenced, when for prejudicial reasons people are told their stories are not valuable, not useful." Similarly, and in parallel fashion, the late theologian Howard Thurman observed the cruel and destructive consequences of messages to people who are led to believe that "they don't count, they don't matter" when their life stories are not deemed worthy of hearing. In the context of his narratives, Lopez's keen observations are unexpectedly illuminating. I believe there is something much more profound in his writing than the seemingly simple wisdom of such observations.

Lopez also evokes the possibility of seeing all manner of things anew, and of valuing the grace of simple humanity, with essays such as "A short passage in northern Hokkaido," "Learning to see," "A passage of hands," "Replacing memory," and "Theft." Each of these essays is a gem of a different hue. I find myself drawn to little snippets of his observations that shake my entrenched ways of perceiving and allow me to see life from a different slant. In all of his observations there is a subtle sense of reverence for people and life that is to be greatly valued. Buy both the book and a pencil and then underline things in it as you read it. Then come back to it from time to time to rediscover the treasures and to learn to see anew. Or, read his works because they are, if nothing else, entertaining.

In each chapter of *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott shares narratives about times and circumstances in her life. There is a strong thread of spiritual or religious issues that binds the various episodes together, but there is much more. You can read this in silence and then suddenly "split a gut" laughing out loud at some of the author's observations. I laughed a lot. I also came to more roundly comprehend certain things in ways that I have no words for.

There are many keen observations about parenting here, about friendship, about loss and death, about drug addiction and alcohol abuse, about the playing out of relationships over time, about aloneness, forgiveness, why kids should go to church, small but profound kindnesses and acceptance, and life's struggles and joys. There are also

a lot of those "blue words" that most people say but which rarely grace professional journals — they help the reader gain the sense that we're hearing a real person's voice, a real person's heart. Plus, you have to like someone who knows how to curse appropriately and well.

I came away from this book thinking I'd really like to meet the author — to come to know her even better. She has forged ahead through tough times and retained a wonderfully wry sense of humor and an understated sense of awe for life. She has shared bits of her life and soul, and through that sharing the reader gains a greater understanding of all the variations of events that life lays out for us. As the old expression goes, "God is in the details" — and so is understanding. In the details of her story we can understand something of life better and, perhaps, find there's something resonating within us as well.

Each of these books offers different things for people in the helping professions. They can inform us, enlighten us, and entertain us. Perhaps most importantly, they wipe the malaise of habitual thinking from our "mind's eye" and let us see slivers of life from new perspectives. That's refreshing.

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Locked in the Poorhouse: Cities, Race, and Poverty in the United States

Fred R. Harris and Lynn A. Curtis, eds.
Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998

Reviewed by Patricia W. Ivry

FRED R. HARRIS is a former senator from Oklahoma, former presidential candidate, and currently a professor of political science at the University of New Mexico. Lynn A. Curtis is a former urban policy advisor at HUD, former urban policy advisor to President Carter, and is now president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. Both men have been actively involved in shaping social policy for three decades. Their book, *Locked in the Poorhouse: Cities, Race, and Poverty in the United States*,¹ is a continuation of this strong tradition. Both Harris and Curtis served on the Kerner Commission, the blue ribbon group appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, to provide ad-

vice on civil disorders after the urban riots in 1967. As the editors of this book, they are eminently well qualified to address these issues. Moreover, they were able to draw from their extensive networks to compile a group of six essays, written by outstanding (and emerging) scholars. Harris provides the introduction and Curtis the conclusion. Each essay gives a status report and update on the issues addressed in the Kerner Commission Report: Poverty is the central focus with discussion of its effects on children, public health, cities, work, race, crime, and affirmative action.

It is not surprising that this book should appear to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Kerner Commission for the Report called for “compassionate, massive, and sustained federal effort to combat the nation’s intertwined problems of racism and poverty.” The new welfare policy with its emphasis on “personal responsibility” is anything but compassionate. The content of this book is not only a review of the years since Kerner, but also a response to current policy.

The book provides a compendium of information, including a significant amount of data (some very frightening statistics) all proving in a variety of ways that previous social policies have failed for the poor. “Today, thirty years after the Kerner Report, there is more poverty in American, it is deeper, blacker, and browner than before, and it is more concentrated in the cities, which have become America’s poorhouses.” Oddly, the conclusions reached by these lifelong liberal advocates, are remarkably similar to the conclusions reached by Charles Murray and other conservatives, that the War on Poverty was lost. However, the explanations set forth in *Locked in the Poorhouse* for how and why poverty in the United States not only continues, but in fact has worsened, are diametrically opposed to those of Murray and others. The conservatives argue that poverty persists because the programs were flawed (not cost effective, there was abuse within various programs, and the programs were designed to foster dependency) and because poor people are flawed (lack necessary skills and motivation to become un-poor). The liberals argue that the failure is due to lack of governmental and societal commitment to carrying out effective programs long enough or well enough to reach intended goals. They argue that as a nation we must reorder our priorities, “we must return to human investment — in programs that do work.”

The book provides both a good history leading to the Kerner Commission and a good review of what has transpired in the intervening years. It refers to many critical studies and landmark decisions, that have over the past thirty years helped to shape social policy. It also cites ex-

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amples of programs that have been very effective. Though it can be a bit repetitive at times, with each different author referring back to the Kerner Report, it does provide convincing arguments for a renewed commitment to social change. Recommendations for future social policy directions are accompanied by strategies for moving in those directions.

The book is a bit nostalgic for social activist children of the sixties. It is a refreshing and modern look at the old agenda and essentially answers the question, "Where are we now?" Though answers are rather depressing, there is optimism for the future. To that end, the book is effective for children of the nineties both from an historical perspective and from a policy perspective. This book is appealing to many with diverse but related interests; social policy, poverty, crime, race, violence, urban issues, economics, employment public health, integration, and affirmative action, and children at risk. Direct service providers, social policy analysts and advocates, social justice advocates, legislators, administrators, students, and scholars would all benefit from this book.

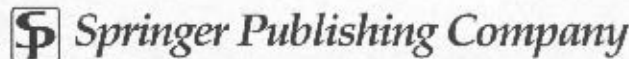
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By Virginia S. Burlingame
 New York: Springer Publishing, 1999

Reviewed by Virginia Yribia

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