

Reframing Poverty: New Thinking and Feeling about Humanity's Greatest Challenge

Eric Meade

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Reframing Poverty skillfully combines interdisciplinary research with popular sources to address poverty for the future.

Eric Meade's *Reframing Poverty* advocates for a new paradigm when it comes to considering the factors and choices that influence poverty in the modern world.

Meade asserts that many of those who work to address poverty have rigid beliefs about why poverty occurs and so often oppose alternative perspectives. This book explores the most common explanations for why poverty occurs, encompassing both the views of those who criticize poor people and those who advocate for them. In particular, the "Culture of Poverty" is discussed—how the values of those experiencing poverty are considered to be part of what perpetuates that poverty. While these cultural influences are affirmed to exist, this book treats them as only one of the many influences that lead to modern poverty. Many influences, Meade says, are beyond an individual's control.

Combining multiple theories, anecdotes from popular authors like J. D. Vance, and theories on developmental "ego stages," the book makes a compelling case for continuing to address poverty and reduce suffering. However, it also asserts that social chaos and complexity will always result in people suffering; from its perspective, reducing poverty, rather than eradicating it, is the most reasonable and productive goal.

The book's prose is clear and stylish, and distinctions are sharp within it. This is a complex, academic topic, but Meade's work is engaging and engrossing. He avoids simple answers in favor of real insights into the roots of poverty.

When people are counseled "to live by our principles and to do what we believe is right in each moment, recognizing all the while that we will never fully resolve the tension," the idealistic pursuit of "eliminating all poverty" is avoided, Meade says, and addressing individual and systemic poverty issues one-by-one becomes the goal. Distinctions between different influences on poverty, from cultural barriers to the lucky chances of finding helpful mentors in school, are maintained well, especially because of the book's excellent organization and fluid incorporation of sources.

Self-awarely not the first book to address poverty, Meade's text builds upon previous material and points out that much of what people have already done to address poverty has worked. Going from near total "poverty" to a world with around 10% poverty is, he says, a triumph. Meade's view is that, while great strides have been made, more work is needed. This understanding is one of most unique and well-articulated aspects of the book and is backed up by its many discussions of psychological and sociological research.

The book's two-part format—which includes a section focused primarily on cultural influences and perceptions of poverty, and another that focuses more on structural and decision-making influences—helps it to connect diverse elements from various social sciences. It ends with a hopeful epilogue, and extensive endnotes add valuable context and statistics.

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LAURA LEAVITT (January 9, 2019)

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