
Reviewer: Howard S. Becker, Northwestern University

Jane Mercer reports in this book a magnificent and comprehensive study of mental retardation as a clinical and social phenomenon. The study followed two tracks. Adopting a social system perspective, it had both official agencies (the schools, law enforcement, welfare, medical organizations, and so on) and a general population sample—furnishing the names of those labeled either formally or informally as mental retardates. Adopting a clinical perspective, it screened that same general sample with various testing procedures to get an epidemiological picture of the prevalence of retardation. Mercer has analyzed these voluminous data with systemic rigor and on their basis argues some shocking conclusions cogently.

She concludes that those who achieve the social position of mental retardate do so as the result of a process of "institutionalized Anglocentrism," a pattern "closely linked with the statistical definition of 'normal' and the IQ test." She distinguished two kinds of retardates: one group is physically disabled, has very low IQ scores, is discovered to be retarded quite young, and is known as a retardate to more than one organization and to family and neighbors; the second group is less disabled, has higher test scores, is discovered to be retarded in school and is known only to the school as a retardate, while accepted as normal by family and neighbors. What makes this an Anglocentric pattern is that, while the first group reflects the ethnic proportions of the community population, the second is extremely disproportionately made up of blacks and Mexican-Americans. People who perform adequately in the community among these groups do not do well on school IQ tests and are funneled into the school system's labeling process; they are "situationally retarded" and recover from their ailments as soon as they leave school, whereas "they disappear into the general population." The first group, the clinical study reveals, consists both of those with clinically discernible physical pathology, who cannot learn, and those from the culturally dominant Anglo group who for unknown reasons have not learned. These people, the bottom 3 percent of the population, presumably could not fit adequately into any society, and represent that point at which the biological prerequisites for successful socialization are not present. The second, and much larger, group are drawn from the bottom 9 or 16 percent of the IQ distribution (depending on whether an educational IQ criterion or that of the American Association on Mental Deficiency is used). Chosen by criteria that do not reflect community standards, this group has just not been socialized into the proper culture. Although Mercer does not pursue this point, I can't imagine a more damning critique of intelligence testing and those who would like to base social policy on its results.

No short review can do justice to the careful and compelling way Mercer brings her data to bear on these conclusions. Her analysis is a model for work of this kind, and readers who are not particularly interested in retardation may enjoy it just for this feature.

Mercer devotes her attention largely to policy issues connected with the use of IQ tests and the labeling of students as retarded. She has many important and useful recommendations on the kinds and levels of criteria that ought to be used in diagnosing retardation, arguing persuasively for a sociocultural pluralism in assessing intelligence. She takes an interactionist theory of deviance as given, and does not use her results, as she might well have, to speak to some of the controversies that have arisen around this theory. Some critics, for instance, contend that "labeling theorists" are overly cynical about official diagnoses of deviance, whether in the field of crime, mental illness, or whatever. Those criticized have not so much been cynical as they have argued that the definition of a person as a particular kind of deviant and that person's possession of the trait on which such definition is allegedly based vary independently. Mercer gives evidence that that occurs with respect to a large and important class of labeled deviants. Similarly, her material on the labeling process in the school provides material useful in developing further a theory of the role of professional self-interest and specialized perspectives in the creation of "deviants."

Applications of Sociology


Reviewer: Mayer N. Zald, Vanderbilt University

Social Planning is a curse and a promised panacea in modern society. It is a curse when planners wield power irresponsibly and without adequate knowledge to interfere with the wishes and lives of the citizenry. It is a promised panacea in the face of the difficulties in realizing social values given unmistakable externalities and of the long-time horizons of bureaucratic action in modern life.

John Gower Davies writes of planning as curse, Guy Benveniste as promised panacea. Benveniste's book is an elegantly written description of the problems and prospects of planning. Starting from a recognition of the social role of the planner as pundit to the prince, Benveniste discusses the audiences of the planner, the function of planning for the prince, the organization of the planning enterprise, and the strategies and tactics of planning. Davies' book on planning in Newcastle is
The Politics of Expertise was "... intended as a text to be used in schools where system experts are trained." I think it will be useful as secondary reading for planners and in those week-long conferences on planning which foundations and civil service bureaucracies use as excuses for not working. It recognizes the limits and variety of planning efforts and it is sensitive to social process. It discusses planning in general, and thus is distant from substantive planning issues.

Evangelistic Bureaucrat is broken into four sections. In Part One the history, social composition, and culture of Rye Hill are discussed. Part Two traces the emergence of Newcastle as a planner's dream, as local political elites and planners teamed to transform Newcastle's decay, to make it into the "Brasilia" of Scotland. Part Three shows how planning and the acts of city officials led to the deterioration of Rye Hill as it disrupted expectations and fed into speculative landowners' schemes. Part Four traces out policy alternatives to the comprehensive planning of local officials.

Davies is a partisan of the old Rye Hill, a textured immigrant and deviant lower-class community. He is brilliant in describing the futuristic, paranoid, self-aggrandizing ideology of planners. He is self-indulgent in including case material on the psychological fantasies and pathologies of some residents of Rye Hill; and he is boring in presenting his policy alternatives, as if he were giving evidence to a Royal Commission. Davies' book will be especially useful to courses on urban sociology and urban planning; it is fascinating to see the same processes of planning blight that occur in the United States operating in England. Benveniste's book, while fun, is neither as deep as the best scholarly work on planning, nor filled enough with real illustrations to be of much help to practitioners.


Reviewer: ROBERT H. WELLER, Florida State University

This book has four sections. The first contains reports on current research on patterns of fertility control. In it, Zelnik and Kantner conclude that teenage girls engaging in coitus have great ignorance of the biology of conception and use contraception irregularly. Westoff follows with a description of recent patterns of contraceptive use by married persons. Bumpass and Presser document the increasing acceptance of sterilization and abortion. The final contribution to this section is by Shearer, who outlines probable future developments in contraceptive technology.

The second section is entitled "Future Population Growth." Ryder examines recent trends in American fertility and the contraction of racial, religious, and educational differences, and states that two factors explain the decline in the birth rate during the last decade. One is a rise in the mean age of wanted fertility; the other, a decline in unwanted fertility. Teitelbaum reviews population growth in other countries and depicts a common trend toward reduced rates of growth. Ryder concludes this section with a selection on the future growth of the American population.

The third section deals with the implications of population growth. Enke assesses the impact of population growth upon the national economy. Ridker examines the impact of population growth on resources and the environment. Parke analyzes the implications of alternative rates of growth for federal expenditures on education, health, and welfare. Presser concludes this section with a very intriguing essay on the consequences of perfect fertility control for women. I was particularly impressed with her assessment of the importance of being able to control the timing of their first birth.

The concluding section deals with population policy. Berelson reviews the situation in 15 developed countries. Westoff describes recent developments in U.S. population policy and documents changing attitudes toward population growth.

Generally, the articles are well written and undergraduates will find most of them interesting and informative. I do have a quarrel with the book's title and its underlying assumption. Perhaps it is only proper that Westoff's next book after From Now to Zero (Westoff and Westoff, 1968) be entitled Toward the End of Growth; but it is assumed, not demonstrated, that we are moving toward and will attain a stationary population. Thus Westoff states that "Teitelbaum's review . . . indicates how common is the resumption of the trend toward zero population growth" (p. 3). Moreover, with the exception of Ryder's contributions, marital fertility is regarded as synonymous with national fertility levels, and the practices of contraception (including sterilization) and abortion are treated as the sole determinants of marital fertility. However, these are means to ends. Thus, although the incidence of unwanted births has declined and this undoubtedly explains a portion of the overall decline in the birth rate during the 1960s, the incidence of wanted births also declined markedly. Yet this receives practically no emphasis. Moreover, with the exception of Ryder's work, nuptiality and changes in the timing and spacing of births are basically ignored as determinants of national fertility levels, although these were of critical importance during the baby boom. Why not during the birth dearth as well?? Indeed, a legitimate question is whether a book that is about only one of the components of growth—fertility—adequately treats a population's movement toward stationarity.

Unfortunately, this volume does not deal with these issues adequately and, in my opinion, contributes less to professional development and to public knowledge about demographic matters than it should. However, when combined with other sources of information, this is an extremely useful book.