

Critical issues
contributing to the
persistence of
poverty in our affluent
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Critical Issues Contributing to the Persistence of Poverty in our Affluent Society Ruth Sidel's *Keeping Women and Children Last: America's War on the Poor* (1998) is not a book that can easily be swallowed without some serious reflection and, for some, verification. According to Sidel, the main cause of the persistence of poverty in the United States may be traced to society's neglect of women and their children, causing them to suffer the deplorable conditions brought about by hunger, homelessness, poor health care, and lack of education. Sidel traces the problem to Bill Clinton's policy declaring "the end of welfare as we know it," which effectively withdrew critical support from women, particularly single mothers, and consequently the children they are committed to raise.

Shocking as her claims seem to be, Sidel's facts appear to concur with official statistics by research institutes and policy studies by international organizations. Sidel presents trends and data from the 1970's to the 1980's. However, well, into the 1990s, the trends she wrote of continue to hold. In the following table are data compiled by the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College that shows women are worse off than men in both income and asset poverty.

It has also been reported that the proportion of the poor in female-headed households climbed from 1959 (17.8%) to 2005 (31.1%). The poverty rate for women-headed households is a much higher figure than other types of households. This trend has led to the development of a phenomenon termed "the feminization of poverty" by researchers. (Sawhill, 1996)

It was also Sidel's contention that in the late 1970s and 1980s, the United States had the highest poverty rate among Canada, France, Germany, the

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Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. A more recent study dated 2003, the poverty rates and percentage of low-wage workers among several countries showed the same trend to persist, with the United States exhibiting the highest rates in both measures.

From the foregoing table, it is verified that in the 1990s, the United States continued to register the highest rate for poverty (10.7%) and low wage workers (25%) than the other six countries mentioned by Sidel, confirming her assertion that these are due to conditions prevalent in the United States that are not present or are present to a lesser degree in the other countries.

To say, however, that the persistence of poverty in the United States compared to other countries is due entirely to the plight of women and children is generalizing too much to the point of ignoring other issues. For instance, Rector (2006) attributes the poverty problem to the continued and unabated influx of poorly skilled, poorly educated illegal immigrants, half of which are Hispanics. To his mind, low-skill immigrants, numbering six million legal and five million illegal, pay hardly any taxes but in their lifetimes will cost the U. S. taxpayers more than half a trillion dollars in support and benefits. The situation is expected to exacerbate the poverty condition for generations to come. (Rector, 2006)

Taking another view, Christie (2008) focuses on the worsening condition of rural poverty in the country, alleging that an equitable amount of attention has been devoted to urban poverty while ignoring those living far from the metropolitan centers. Bradbury and Katz (2002) are of the opinion that the problem lies in the lack of income mobility across the family groups, such that despite economic progress in the nation as a whole, rich families get richer and poor families poorer. Patillo-McCoy (1999) points to the plight of <https://assignbuster.com/critical-issues-contributing-to-the-persistence-of-poverty-in-our-affluent-society/>

the African-American, as with several other authors who believe that the poverty problem is largely influenced by racial discrimination particularly in opportunities to avail of better education, better employment or promotion. These issues are, to be sure, salient; the poverty problem is complex and, by all means, not easy to resolve. They are not even contradictory because, if anything, they even reinforce each other. Were the proper data available, it may likely be that even accounting for race, mobility and status, the dilemma of worsening poverty is more pronounced for women, and women with children, an aggravating factor to an already bad situation. Sidel is right in this respect. To stave off poverty, women and children should be provided better support for sustenance, health and education, since it is this sector that defines the next generation.

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