

Cycles of poverty and crime in America's inner cities **by Lewis D. Solomon**

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This is a concise and well-written book. Over a total of five chapters, the author does an excellent job of describing the plight of the inner city poor (Chapter 1), assessing the effectiveness of federal programs designed to improve employment opportunities for the underclass (Chapter 2), advocating for underused short-term strategies to improve employment opportunities for the “disconnected and formerly incarcerated” (Chapter 3), and suggesting alternative skills training as a near-term strategy (Chapter 4). Finally, in Chapter 5, the author argues that it is time to rethink three existing policies that represent “barriers” to employment opportunities.

Chapter 1 contains an excellent portrayal of the social problems that disproportionately affect inner city African-Americans and the devastating effect the “War on Drugs” has had on black families and African-American communities. Mr. Solomon accomplishes this by providing a summary of the current and best research in the area. While criminologists and sociologists may not learn much from this section, most politicians and the general public would learn a great deal. Throughout the chapter (and many other places in the book) the author inserts the word “black” before every pathology he discusses (e.g. underclass, unemployment, unmarried fathers, teenage moms, children from chaotic homes). I am concerned that some readers (perhaps many) will come away with the idea that these are issues that only impact African-Americans and African-American communities. I kept asking myself: are White people, who suffer the same pathologies, immune from their effects? Another troubling issue is the treatment of “class- and race-bound effects on childrearing practices” as separate and distinct (pp.15–18). I think he is spot-on about the class effects, but given the strong correlation between class and race, it is extremely difficult to identify race effects. To be fair, Mr. Solomon begins the book by noting that “America continues to experience the problem of black urban poor pathologies.”

Federal programs to facilitate workforce development and prisoner re-entry are discussed in Chapter 2. The Work Investment Act (WIA), enacted in 1998, offers programs for the disadvantaged along with the 700,000+ ex-offenders released each year. There is a very short section on job search training, occupational skills development,

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