Belgians, who founded the ITU in 1931, Americanism lent itself to the struggle for socialism. Radical union leaders such as Joseph Schmetz, for example, self-consciously sought to "Americanize" his European socialist vision by quoting freely from the founding fathers to justify his social democratic project of building a politically active and militant industrial union. While in office, Schmetz's brand of Americanism—defined by its progressive and democratic elements—held the more conservative French-Canadians in check.

The left's hegemonic discourse was subsequently transformed from within by World War II. The federal government, intent on eradicating discriminatory practices that impeded the war effort, launched an intensive propaganda campaign for "cultural pluralism," in which "hate-mongering" in any form was denounced as treasonous. With racism, sexism and nativism redefined as anti-American, criticism of capital came to be seen as another form of bigotry and hence unpatriotic. As the wartime celebration of cultural pluralism continued into the postwar period, the democratic and progressive components of Americanism that had earlier sustained the struggle against capital were gradually displaced by anti-communist nationalism and Catholic traditionalism. Capitalizing on this discursive shift, French-Canadian conservatives captured the ITU, doing so—as the radicals had before them—in the name of Americanism.

The argument here is fresh and, for the most part, convincing. Gerstle has produced a first-rate social history, rich in theoretical insight and interpretive possibilities. While clearly intended as a work of history, Working-Class Americanism raises important questions that are still with us about our political system, language and the continuing marginality of that other "L word," the left.

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Nathan Glazer, professor of sociology and education at Harvard, has given us an insightful collection of essays on poverty and welfare with a trenchant analysis of government policies aimed at the amelioration of the social problems which beset the underclass.

The opening chapter develops Glazer's view of social policy. As an academic who joined the Kennedy administration, Glazer had high hopes for the programs which social scientists had designed to bring the poor into the mainstream of society. Now, sifting through extensive evaluations of these programs, he finds that despite the more generous provision of food, housing and medical care for the poor over the last three decades, there have been only modest gains or even negative effects in terms of such basic indicators as educational attainment, labor force participation, welfare dependency and family stability. The tens of billions of dollars spent on educational programs such as Head Start, and the myriad job training programs (Glazer lists a mind-numbing 17 of them) have had at best minimal results and at worst were a dismal failure.

However, this is not the main theme of Glazer's book. Rather, his particular insight "derived entirely from my experiences with social policy ... was that we
seemed to be creating as many problems as we were solving and that the reasons were inherent in the way we—liberals, but also moderate conservatives—thought about social problems and social policy” (p. 2). This mind-set suggests an historical paradigm: the market economy excelled at creating wealth and maximizing opportunities for individual advancement, but in the process it created inequalities of wealth and power with many falling by the wayside through unemployment, sickness and old age. In the liberal view, government moves in to stem the tide of misery by enacting the familiar reforms typified by US social legislation in the 1930s and the 1960s.

The problem as Glazer sees it is that the powerful forces of an egalitarian revolution, underway since the last century, have sensitized us to inequalities once tolerated as natural, and raised our expectations as to what the state can do by way of remedies. Unfortunately, the social policies we developed to deal with the breakdown of the traditional institutions for handling distress—the family, the church, the ethnic community-support groups—have further weakened these traditional structures. And despite increasing expenditures, both in real terms and as a percent of the GNP, there seems to be general dissatisfaction with the results of the newer social programs.

The more generous welfare benefits of the 1960s and '70s—food stamps, free school lunches, medicaid, OEO health clinics, housing subsidies, legal services, preschool programs, education and job training—were associated with a sharp rise in the percentage of males who abandoned women and children to the state agencies for support, a rapid growth in teen-age pregnancies, a drop in the labor force participation rate of inner city youth, higher crime rates and greater involvement in the underground economy. Again, children from welfare families and those who live in public housing units do less well in school and in future employment than children from comparable low income households who do not participate in these welfare programs. It is hard to escape the conclusion that there are some significant adverse effects generated by programs which we expected would have only substantial social benefits.

Unlike Charles Murray in Losing Ground, who favors a gradual dismantling of the public welfare system, Glazer would try to overcome the negative effects of welfare on employment incentives by making low-skilled jobs more attractive by adding fringe benefits such as medical coverage and vacations with pay. This emphasis on incentives contrasts with the approach taken by Lawrence Mead in Beyond Entitlement who faulted the welfare agencies because they failed to impress upon clients their obligation to accept jobs or enroll in training programs even if passive acceptance of welfare payments seemed more attractive—a refusal he believed should result in a partial loss of benefits. Recent welfare changes made by Congress embody to a limited degree both incentives and sanctions: medicaid coverage has been extended for a period of time to welfare clients who accept employment, and states will lose some federal payments if they do not place at least a low percentage of welfare recipients in jobs or enroll them in training or education programs. At the same time eligibility has been liberalized; all states are now required to provide welfare for qualifying two-parent families.

Glazer would no doubt approve of these changes but anticipate only minimal effects. A sub-theme running through his book is that although the “nothing works” conclusion is too drastic, social scientists have been over-optimistic about the efficacy of large scale programs to bring about social improvements; typically, our knowledge of complex social problems is still too limited to enable us to devise really effective solutions.