

Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles.

Edited by Lawrence D. Bobo, Melvin L. Oliver, James H. Johnson Jr., and Abel Valenzuela. Russell Sage Foundation, 2000. 611 pp. Cloth, \$49.95.

Reviewer: TORIN MONAHAN, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute*

“The road toward social justice,” as the editors of this collected volume describe it, is especially difficult to survey when cultural colors are as complex and distracting as they are in Los Angeles. The first step that this book takes is to scout out existing data that synthesizes the conditions of inequality as experienced by local inhabitants — the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality (LASUI) serves this purpose. The data for this vast study was collected in 1993 and 1994 through 4,025 survey interviews with whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos living in Los Angeles. *Prismatic Metropolis’s* objective mirrors that of LASUI: “to broaden our knowledge and understanding of how three sets of forces — changing labor market dynamics, racial attitudes and relations, and residential segregation — interact to foster modern urban inequality.” Where much recent research on Los Angeles concentrates on the historical, geographical, and political developments that have led to conditions of inequality, such as work by Mike Davis (1990; *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, Vintage Books), Edward Soja (1996; *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell), and Janet Abu-Lughod (2000; *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America’s Global Cities*, University of Minnesota Press), all the essays in this book build upon LASUI to explain current disparities through statistics.

On first pass, the findings in this collection are mostly intuitive: (1) poverty persists in spite of social programs, (2) economic hardships fall disproportionately on black and Latino communities, (3) women continue to have fewer opportunities than men do, especially black women who are not employed as frequently as Latino or Asian women in service jobs (such as nannies, day-care providers, house cleaners, manicurists), (4) employment trajectories demonstrate that black, Asian, and Latino workers tend to be relegated to low-skill positions while other ethnic groups, such as Indians and Iranians, acquire high-skill IT jobs (30-32). These findings may be expected, but they are valuable in their confirmation of extreme conditions that require immediate and sustained attention.

A closer reading of these essays reveals several more surprising results. For instance, social networks are crucial for immigrant Latinos to secure employment, but statistically insignificant in facilitating employment for native Latinos; this latter group depends much more upon English language proficiency as a passport for job opportunities. Excepting Koreans, “ethnic economies” (such as food service and retail trade) are not linked to upward social mobility and do not offer protected economic niches; these economies insulate workers from discrimination, but they

also relegate individuals to menial jobs and enforce a linguistic isolation that obstructs advancement. Finally, for marginalized and low-skill workers, especially women of color, longer commute times correlate with lower wages (even when one controls for bus usage); possible reasons for this phenomenon include racial residential segregation and gender and racial preferences (or discrimination) at places of employment.

The book's title, *Prismatic Metropolis*, is a metaphor for the many refractions of cultural diversity occurring throughout the U.S. According to the 1990 census, thirty-seven "multiethnic metros" exist, and since the national trend toward urban diversity is expected to increase, this book argues that Los Angeles should be understood as a mirror of modern America. Los Angeles, then, is simultaneously constructed as an exceptional case and a predictive model, and the city seemingly holds these extremes in a tension that is compelling for urban research but perhaps obfuscating for social advocacy.

On a critical note, the editors assert that they "aim to go further than most social science analysis, which is often constrained by reliance on the U.S. census and other highly standardized data sources," but they neglect to probe the methodological shortcomings of their research which depends almost exclusively upon quantitative representations of individual experiences. The demographic findings of LASUI may serve to create a more complex map of inequality than the U.S. census, but these findings neither convey the actual lived experiences of individuals in Los Angeles nor initiate investigation into policy changes that would address the disparities they document.

The absence of strong normative positions or recommendations for change prevents this book from fulfilling its underlying, if not explicit, goal of moving us down the road toward social justice. Readers are left wondering what personal practices or public policies are needed to dismantle structural and cultural barriers to a more just society. If Los Angeles serves as a model for emerging multi-ethnic metros, how can its problems of poverty, discrimination, and exploitation be avoided in other cities? As a guide, this book describes the landscape of inequality exceedingly well but stops short of providing any coherent directions.

Reinventing Justice: The American Drug Court Movement.

By James L. Nolan Jr. Princeton University Press, 2001. 254 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Reviewer: JASON SCHNITTKER, *University of Pennsylvania*

James L. Nolan Jr.'s *Reinventing Justice* begins with descriptions that dramatically illustrate the nature of drug courts. Setting the stage for an overarching dramaturgical theme, Nolan likens drug courts to theater and testimony to storytelling and depicts the many ways in which actors in such courts actively