WELFARE REFORM IN PERSISTENT RURAL POVERTY
RURAL STUDIES SERIES

Leif Jensen, General Editor
Diane K. McLaughlin
and
Carolyn E. Sachs, Deputy Editors

The Estuary’s Gift:
An Atlantic Coast Cultural Biography
David Griffith

Sociology in Government:
The Galpin-Taylor Years in the
U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1919–1953
Olaf F. Larson and Julie N. Zimmerman
Assisted by Edward O. Moe

Challenges for Rural America in the 21st Century
Edited by David L. Brown and Louis Swanson

A Taste of the Country:
A Collection of Calvin Beale’s Writings
Peter A. Morrison

Farming for Us All:
Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability
Michael Mayerfeld Bell

Together at the Table:
Sustainability and Sustenance in the American Agrifood System
Patricia Allen

Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life
Edited by Hugh Campbell,
Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Margaret Finney
## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments  ix  
List of Tables and Figures  vii  
Introduction  i  

1  Rural Places, State Welfare Policies, and Theoretical Bases  11  

Part I  What the Numbers Tell Us  37  

2  Welfare Caseloads: Changes in Public Assistance Program Use  39  
3  Labor Markets: From TANF to Low-Wage Part-Time Jobs  49  
4  Poverty: Family and Community Well-Being  69  

Part II  What the People Told Us  85  

5  Welfare Reform on the Reservation, South Dakota  87  
6  Welfare Reform in Appalachia, Kentucky  123  
7  Welfare Reform in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas  149  
8  Welfare Reform in the Mississippi Delta, Mississippi  189  
9  Welfare Reform in Persistent Rural Poverty  209  

Appendix A: TANF Participant Respondent Characteristics  221  
Appendix B: Cluster Counties and Reservations  227  
References  229  
Index  239
## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

### Tables

1. Demographic characteristics of the counties studied (2000) .................................................. 18
2. Largest cities in each county (2000) ....................................................................................... 20
3. Changes in AFDC/TANF caseloads ........................................................................................... 42
4. Changes in food stamp recipients .............................................................................................. 44
5. Changes in SSI recipients ............................................................................................................. 45
6. Sources of household income ...................................................................................................... 45
7. Age distributions (2000) ............................................................................................................. 45
8. Labor force involvement of persons sixteen to sixty-four ......................................................... 52
9. Unemployment rates of persons sixteen and older ..................................................................... 53
10. Work status of employed persons sixteen and older ............................................................... 55
11. Percent of employed civilian population sixteen and older in industries which produce for local consumption (2000) .................................................................................................................. 56
12. Percent of employed civilian population sixteen and older in industries which produce for export (2000) .......................................................................................................................... 58
14. Educational levels of persons twenty-five and older (2000) .................................................... 63
15. Income measures (2000) ........................................................................................................... 66
16. Poverty rates and ranks for persons in the counties studied ..................................................... 70
17. Poverty rates for persons by cluster .......................................................................................... 71
18. Poverty rates for single-mother families with related children under eighteen ....................... 72
19. Poverty rates for persons under eighteen .................................................................................. 73
20. Percent of all households that include subfamilies .................................................................... 74
Figures

1. TANF/AFDC cases, Kentucky 40
2. TANF/AFDC cases, South Dakota 40
3. TANF/AFDC cases, Texas 41
4. TANF/AFDC cases, Mississippi 41
5. Food stamp recipients 43
This study is the product of many individuals in many communities, and we would like to express our appreciation to them all. Most especially we wish to thank the numerous individuals who accepted us into their homes and graciously shared their experiences as participants in various Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs. Without their generosity and forthright responses to our questions this research would have been impossible. Through their cooperation we are able to prepare this monograph, which we hope will convey their concerns and those of millions of other TANF participants. In addition we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to our interviewers and to community residents who assisted us in the conduct of our fieldwork.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to Robert Lee Maril for his guidance in the overall design of this research. His expertise, garnered from years of ethnographic research in low-income communities in Texas and Oklahoma, was extremely valuable. To the many faceless, and sometimes nameless, toilers in the offices of local, state, and national agencies who produced for us hundreds of data tables from administrative records, we want to acknowledge our great debt and deep sense of gratitude.

In Texas, Mark Harvey thanks his interview assistants, who shall remain anonymous, for their invaluable assistance. He also thanks Sabino Garza and the staff at Community Action, Social Services, and Education (Casse), Blanca Juarez and the staff at Colonias Unidas, Amada Villarreal and the staff at Community Resource Group, and other workers at numerous community-based agencies who should also remain anonymous for providing information and putting us in contact with TANF participants. He also thanks Romelia Cardoña, John Flores, Eduardo Fuentes, Yvonne “Bonnie” Gonzales, Kelley Goran, Troy Heller, David LaGrange, Gloria Franco Lopez, Ricky McNeil, Elizabeth Cristina Miranda, Patricia Richards, South Texas Community College, and Southwest Texas Junior College.

In South Dakota, Kathleen Pickering thanks Jean Bedell-Bailey, Annabelle Between Lodges, Elaine Rodriguez, Janet Routzen, and Heather Schwartz for their interview assistance. She also thanks Connie Horse Looking, John Hotz, Terry Albers, Joyce Wheeler, Angie Eagle Bull, Elsie Meeks, Tina
Merdanian, Mark St. Pierre, the business owners in the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce, Marlese White Hat, Nora Antoine, Dr. Bordeaux, Lydia Whirlwind Soldier, Sandy Bordeaux, Matilda Black Bear, Monica Drapeaux, Monica Terkildsen, Joe Blue Legs, Imogene Stoneman, Betty O’Keefe, Jill Sells, Richard Sherman, and Viola Burnette.

In Kentucky, Gene Summers thanks Michael Loiacono, Stella Marshall, and Beverly Woliver for conducting the participant interviews and Peggy Barrett, Nelson Bobrowski, Mary Bowman, Kathy Brannon, Rev. Jamie Brunk, Ronnie Callahan, Joyce Corder, Marilyn Frye, Judge Jimmie Green, Judge Jimmie Herald, Lorette Jones, Juanita Kidd, Saunda King, Rev. Jerry Lacefield, Sister Lorraine, Bruce Murphy, Susan Ramos, Jeanette Rogers, Paul Sizemore, Charlotte Smith, Susan Stepp, Dr. Larry Taylor, Dr. Peg Taylor, Harold Terry, Tanya Treadway, Cal Turner, Lorrie Turner, and Audry Waters for their help with local affairs.

In Mississippi, Gene Summers thanks Mary Tullis for interviewing the tanf participants and Lilly Barner, Clanton Beamon, Tissi Brock, Ann Brown, Rev. Robert Brown, Yvonne Browne, Julia Carpenter, Jean Carson, Linda Day, Anita Hayes, Coy Henderson, Ethel Jean Hill, Ed Wilburn Hooker, Dr. Tony Honeycutt, Dr. Perry Jenkins, Janet Land, Dr. David Lee, Henry Lucket, Diane McCool, Jim Murphy, Judge A. Nelson, Dr. Auwilda Polk, Sylvester Roberts, Mickie Rodgers, Cynthia Stovall, and Clementine Williams for their assistance in numerous matters regarding their communities.

David Mushinski would like to thank Valerie Kepner, csu Economics, for all of her help as a graduate research assistant and Stella Coleman of the Social Security Administration for data regarding ssi use in the counties and states in the study.

This study was made possible through the financial support of the National Research Initiative of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA, Grant No. 0190121, an Annie E. Casey Foundation Grant No. 201.1855, a grant from the Southern Regional Development Center at Mississippi State University Subcontract No. 01800 280211-01, a Rural Poverty Dissertation Fellowship from the Rural Policy Research Institute’s Rural Poverty Research Center, a National Science Foundation Career Award No. 0092527, and the Monfort Family Foundation’s Colorado State University Monfort Professorship.
INTRODUCTION

Since enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), policymakers, agency administrators, community activists, and academics from a broad range of disciplines have debated and researched the implications of welfare reform in the United States. A tremendous body of literature has developed over the last seven years in an effort to assess how effectively welfare reform has accomplished the goals of PRWORA. Quantitative analyses relying on nationwide data sets focus on participants in more populated areas because most welfare participants live in those areas. Proponents of welfare reform have tended to focus on participants who, because they already had the skills, abilities, and opportunities to become employed, have easily made the transition to work.

This monograph focuses on a group of welfare participants who live in rural pockets of extreme, persistent poverty where there are few job opportunities because local formal economies and labor markets are generally weak, systems of education are poor, transportation is difficult, child care is hard to come by, and levels of human capital are extremely low. The weakness in local economies may be seen in unemployment rates in these areas, which generally exceed those observed during the Great Depression. Because of the weakness of these economies, the types of formal market relationships found in more mainstream economies in the United States are not present. Instead, extensive networks arising out of local social and cultural relationships provide support, determine outcomes in local labor markets, and generally affect implementation of welfare reform in ways that might seem unexpected to mainstream society. The qualitatively distinct nature of the local economic, political, and social conditions in these areas dictate the need for an ethnographic focus on welfare reform in areas of deep, persistent poverty.

This study focuses on eight counties that have been among the poorest in the United States for decades. These rural areas, described as “pockets of persistent rural poverty” (Partridge and Rickman 2005), differ in many ways from the places in which the average welfare participant lives, and apart from their poverty, from each other as well. Shannon and Todd counties in South Dakota are within the boundaries of the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Sioux (Lakota) reservations, respectively, with an almost exclusively Native
American population, a particular history with the land that precedes the creation of the United States, and a distinct social and cultural perspective. Owsley and McCreary counties in Kentucky lie in the Cumberland Plateau of the Appalachian Mountains, which has long depended on extractive industries for employment and has long been associated with poverty and isolation, despite an almost exclusively white population. Maverick and Starr counties in Texas are in the Rio Grande borderlands of the United States and Mexico, a historically contested territory conquered by the United States in the Mexican-American War in 1848. With populations that are almost exclusively of Hispanic origin, the counties are marked by high concentrations of non-English-speaking immigrants, numerous colonias or unincorporated housing developments, migrant farmworkers, and attitudes around family life that flow in large part from the Roman Catholic religious tradition. Finally, Holmes and Sunflower counties in Mississippi rest within the Mississippi Delta, with large African American populations, whose ancestors were part of the violent systems of slavery and Jim Crow until only forty years ago. All these communities experienced various and unique forms of social, political, and economic oppression and exhibit distinct interactions between gender, race, ethnicity, and class that influence the implementation and outcomes of welfare reform (Duncan 1996; Savner 2001, 101).

This monograph combines quantitative and qualitative pictures of these rural areas to explore how economic, social, and political conditions influence the implementation and outcomes of welfare reform under PRWORA. This exploration engages the most commonly raised questions about welfare reform. Did caseloads decline and if so, why? What happened to those who left welfare? How are current and former welfare participants, their families, and their communities faring under the new policies? We first paint a picture of these places based on quantitative measures of caseload declines, labor markets, and poverty. We then examine the details of the lived experience of welfare reform by adding qualitative ethnographic materials to the analysis. Through the voices of participants and other members of their communities, we show how caseloads, labor markets, and poverty are intricately enmeshed in culturally constructed local alternative survival strategies. We show how the promise of local administrative control through devolution was accompanied by benign neglect, profiteering, political maneuvering, and social exclusion on the one hand and a commitment to improving access to services on the other.

The economic conditions in all of these counties are unlike those experienced by the vast majority of people in the United States. The rich, deep, pervasive market economy taken for granted in the rest of the United States
does not, and may never, exist in most of these places. Instead, distinct logics of socially embedded rights and obligations, driven by factors other than hours and wages, provide the essential ingredients for survival in these communities. While some of this economic activity is reducible to dollar values and clock time, much of the breadth and dynamics of these economic relationships cannot be expressed in monetary terms. As a result, there are many unacknowledged and misunderstood aspects of survival in a world of poverty that can only be explained through the rarely heard voices of those living in these contexts (Besharov 2003, 12; Newman 1999). Our findings show extensive participation in formal and informal work and network-based reciprocal exchange that expose as false the dichotomy between the morally deserving “working poor” and the undeserving “welfare poor” put forth by proponents of the more punitive elements of welfare reform.

Following Braudel, we refer to the economies in these areas as “everyday economies” because they blend activities and resources to meet the needs of material life in the context of unrelenting poverty, played out through the “humble lives at the foot of the ladder,” far from the decision-making centers of global capital, far from the privilege to choose (Braudel 1981, 562–63). By observing these small, everyday details of economic life indefinitely repeated across apparently disparate regions of poverty, their apparent dysfunctionality is ultimately explained not as an alternative to modern capitalism but as an experience of it (Braudel 1981, 560). Sporadic and unprotected wage work, fluctuating public benefits programs, subsistence and self-provisioning, home-based enterprise, and family support all move fluidly across the artificial boundaries of formal and informal, cash-based and “free,” legal and illegal, employed and unemployed. The socially based nature of these everyday realities also demands that research on the effects of welfare reform account for the broader context in which poor families live and reflect the perspectives of the poor themselves (Blank 2002, 1119; Foster and Julnes 2001, 128; Seccombe, Walters, and James 1999, 204; Newman 1999). While the alternative aspects of these everyday economies may initially appear removed from mainstream experiences, it might be wise for us all, given the national trend toward a postindustrial economy, to become more familiar with the logic and practice of economic activities organized outside a market paradigm (Beck 2000; Peck 2001; Taylor 1996; Larson 2002; Staudt 1998).

Given that PRWORA devolved responsibility for welfare reform to the state level and below, there is tremendous variability in how reform has been implemented, making it difficult to make blanket assertions about its impacts. Reform in these areas of persistent poverty can only be understood in reference to the distinct political, economic, and institutional histories of the states in
which they are located. For example, among the states included in this study, the policies of the program known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) vary widely. The Kentucky TANF program is relatively progressive in contrast to those of other states with regard to the level of cash assistance, access to education and training, and access to work-support services and transitional assistance. Likewise, South Dakota’s cash assistance available to families who are not living in public or shared housing is extremely generous. At the opposite extreme Texas and Mississippi are among the states with the lowest benefit levels in the country, the toughest work requirements and sanctions, and the most limited access to education and work-support services.

Similarly, structures of welfare administration vary markedly across the states in the study. For example, while workforce development policy in South Dakota is set by one statewide workforce development board, the state board in Texas is divided into twenty-eight regional boards, which have some degree of autonomy in determining local policies applied to TANF participants and low-wage workers. By focusing in depth on four states and how their policies are implemented at the county level, this study complements the limited number of policy studies which attempt to compare state variability in administration in a systematic way (Blank 2002). The daunting challenges of welfare reform encompass issues of race and bureaucratic stringency, internal political favoritism and factionalism at the local level, and the tensions between adequate flexibility to meet local needs and the excesses possible with inadequate national oversight.

Regarding our findings, no county in this study experienced the widespread and dire impacts of welfare reform on material well-being predicted by its most critical opponents (Edelman 1997). In short, for most participants the negative impacts of PRWORA were largely limited to increased administrative and logistical frustrations. This is largely explained by the fact that the low benefits available through AFDC/TANF in these states were never more than supplementary or temporary sources of income for most recipients. As Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997) found in the pre-TANF urban context, families who used welfare relied much more heavily on income from work, networks of family and kin, and the more substantial in-kind forms of public assistance of housing and food stamps. It is also explained by the fact that most respondents, like most people who ever use welfare, used it only temporarily to deal with short-term emergencies (Bane and Ellwood 1994). That said, the impacts of TANF in these counties were not benign. We did find that the reliability of TANF as a means of dealing with emergencies was largely
inadequate and while it rarely caused incidents of extreme material hardship, it also failed to prevent them.

It is also crucial to note that other elements of PRWORA did in fact result in direct and significant negative impacts on family well-being, including homelessness and hunger among the small percentage of our sample that was worst off in terms of the strength of their private networks. The welfare system was the primary safety net for these families, and they fell through the holes ripped in it by welfare reform. There is no way to assess the extent to which such families were under- or oversampled in this study.

Additionally, among those families who negotiated the new policies without negative impacts on material well-being, many reported loss of access to educational opportunities such as GED classes and community college. Some were literally pulled from GED classes to perform “voluntary” community service cleaning bathrooms and offices.

Ultimately, our findings must be interpreted in light of the purpose of the welfare system in the United States in general and, more specifically, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. Welfare in this country has never been about reducing poverty or eliminating its hardships. Rather, U.S welfare policy has always been designed to enforce work and keep all but the most desperate families off the rolls (Piven and Cloward 1971; Peck 2001). The hardships experienced by the families interviewed for this study were less the effects of changes to an inadequate welfare system than the interaction of those changes with far more significant and long-standing political, economic, and social relationships that barred them from full participation in mainstream institutions. Welfare did little more than allow these families to pay a utility bill, buy diapers, baby wipes, or some clothes for their children. It is therefore not surprising that in most cases reduced access to such paltry assistance did not produce dire results.

Similarly, reform did not deliver the job opportunities and work supports promised by some proponents (Haskins 2001). The families and community leaders interviewed here expressed disillusionment with what many had seen as the promise of PRWORA to deliver new opportunities. The rhetoric of reform created expectations that participants would receive substantive assistance with education, training, and job placement. For the most part, those expectations were not met. Indeed, opportunities for education and training, and thus finding good work, appear to have existed in larger measure in these communities under the so-called welfare trap of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) than exist under TANF (Julnes, Hayashi, and Anderson 2001, 128; Seccombe, Walters, and James 1999, 204).
Even though the poverty in these counties is exceptional, and the economies exceptionally weak, the conditions are nevertheless similar to the circumstances faced by other impoverished groups in the United States generally. People who have long been marginalized in the mainstream U.S. economy are often found living in pockets of poverty within broader urban areas with vibrant economies. Indeed, the urban poor are often located far from available jobs in suburban areas (Wilson 1996; Newman 1999). An outside observer looking at the economy in the urban context might miss these pockets of poverty and thus fail to understand their isolation from the mainstream economy in the area. For example, it is easy for a politician to tour a suburban area, see a “Help Wanted” sign on a fast food restaurant, hop out of his limousine, and argue that jobs are available to people on welfare without appreciating the difficulties that people on welfare encounter in getting to and holding a job. We might view the counties we consider here as such pockets stripped of the surrounding, and obfuscating, economic vibrancy. In this sense, the lessons learned here have broader applicability.

Data Collection and Interviews

Respondents for this study were obtained through a nonrandomly selected sample of eight nonmetropolitan counties with long-standing rates of extremely high poverty. The counties were selected from the four major pockets of persistent rural poverty in the United States. These are Native American reservations, Appalachia, the Rio Grande Valley, and the Mississippi River Delta. Persistently poor counties are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as those exhibiting poverty rates of 20 percent or higher for the last four decennial censuses. While these pockets of poverty lie within the boundaries of numerous states, we chose to select from only four (South Dakota, Kentucky, Texas, and Mississippi) in order to examine state-level variation in TANF administration. Within each state, the two persistently poor rural counties with the highest poverty rates according to the 1990 census were selected for in-depth case study to monitor the impacts of work-oriented welfare reform. These were Shannon and Todd counties, South Dakota; McCreary and Owsley counties, Kentucky; Maverick and Starr counties, Texas; and Holmes and Sunflower counties, Mississippi.

To capture the particular experience of welfare reform within the context of extreme rural poverty, we applied a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The surprisingly limited secondary literature on any of these specific counties indicated the need for close ethnographic treatment of these
communities. To trace the initial and longer-term impacts of welfare reform, we conducted two sets of qualitative interviews. Between February and October of 1999, we conducted in-person interviews with a total of 73 current and former TANF participants and 80 agency personnel, community leaders, and business owners within the states and counties. Between April 2002 and October 2003, we conducted a second round of in-person interviews with another 175 current and former TANF participants and 168 agency personnel, community leaders, and business owners.

We selected the TANF participants through a snowball sampling technique. Interviews were conducted or facilitated by residents of each county who had experience working in the community, but were not employed by a state or county welfare agency (for the key characteristics of the TANF participant interviewees, see Appendix A). The interviews consisted of questions from two standardized but open-ended questionnaires. The participant questionnaire covered experiences with TANF, education and work history, and impressions of their communities’ responses to welfare reform. The community leader questionnaires covered local programs, responses to welfare reform, and economic development efforts and were further customized for social and human support service workers, educators, and business leaders. Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to over five hours. The flavor of the participants’ perspectives is conveyed through their direct comments whenever possible, but names are not used to protect confidentiality.

Data were also collected from national data archives such as the U.S. Census of Population and Housing, state and local government administrative records, and records of nongovernmental organizations for the period 1990–2002. The secondary data collection examined demographic, economic, and social conditions in these counties over the period immediately prior to and after welfare reform. Because of the small population size within each of the counties and because the participants interviewed were not selected in a fashion that permitted statistical analysis, many of the empirical methods used in national studies of welfare reform were not possible or practical for this study. The quantitative analysis also presents data on the clusters of persistently poor rural counties in which our case study counties are embedded. The clusters are comprised of counties that are contiguous to our case study sites as well as those which are contiguous to all of the counties that fall along a straight line drawn between the two sites in each state. South Dakota was the one exception to this selection rule, where all the rural counties in the state containing a reservation were selected. Data on the clusters represent more general conditions in the pockets of rural poverty (see Appendix B for a list of all counties included in each cluster).
Organization of the Monograph

The monograph is structured as follows. Chapter 1 describes the nature of the regions and counties involved, explains the basics of welfare reform and what it replaced, and explicates the theoretical framework applied in this study. Part I analyzes what the numbers tell us about welfare reform in these eight persistently poor counties by comparing them to each other as well as to their respective states and the nation as a whole. Each chapter addresses one of three key questions about welfare reform. Chapter 2 looks at what the numbers reveal in relation to caseload trends. Chapter 3 explores what the numbers indicate happened to those participants who left the programs, and whether or not they were absorbed by local or regional labor markets. Chapter 4 examines statistical evidence for indications of how current and former TANF participants are doing in the wake of welfare reform in relation to poverty, family well-being, and community strength.

In Part II, we turn to the qualitative evidence to examine how the statistical indicators are either supported or contradicted by what the people on the ground told us about welfare reform, local labor markets, and the well-being of their families and communities. These chapters present the reader with a picture of the real opportunities available to TANF participants and the constraints associated with implementing TANF from the perspectives of participants, TANF administrators, county leaders, and other community members. Chapter 5 examines in-depth the effect of TANF on reservations in South Dakota, focusing on the Pine Ridge (Shannon County) and Rosebud (Todd County) reservations. The findings highlight the special social and political influences on labor markets in this area; the best and worst of interagency collaboration within the complexities of overlapping tribal, state, and federal jurisdiction; the often ambiguous and contradictory status of women and children within a native society impacted by a century of modernization policies; and the social, economic, and political alternatives to market ideology that are asserted within the broader context of these Lakota communities. Chapter 6 examines the experiences of TANF in Owsley and McCreary counties in the Cumberland Plateau of Appalachian Kentucky. Among our case study states, Kentucky TANF policy was more liberal with regard to education. Combined with strong community leadership, high levels of community involvement, and interagency cooperation and facilitated in part by small, racially homogeneous populations, this liberality produced some positive responses to welfare reform. Chapter 7 examines welfare reform in Starr and Maverick counties, Texas, in the context of increasing in-migration and trade across, and development along, the Texas-Mexico
border. Findings highlight the widely overlooked role of local administration and implementation practices on caseload dynamics and participant outcomes; the interaction of state and regional politics with federal evaluation criteria in determining where, when, and how welfare reform was imposed; participant experiences under the “Choices” work-first program; the specific labor market hardships encountered by those who left TANF for work; and the key role of border institutions in mitigating the potentially harsh impacts of welfare reform. Chapter 8 focuses on the Mississippi Delta. In Holmes and Sunflower counties, where devolution took the form of unguarded privatization, bureaucratic stringency, and cost shifting, welfare rolls plummeted but household hardships increased, leaving poor families to find employment in a shrinking and segregated labor market with minimal training or support for education.

Chapter 9 brings together the quantitative and qualitative pictures of TANF in these pockets of persistent poverty to examine similarities and differences in welfare reform across the focus counties, and to appreciate both the dreams and the disenchantments experienced by these communities, as well as the amazing diversity across places that are lumped together as uniformly poor.

Overall, the nature of the local everyday economy, relationships of family and community, local administrative variability, and the potential dark side of devolution emerge as critical contexts for understanding the full import of welfare reform.