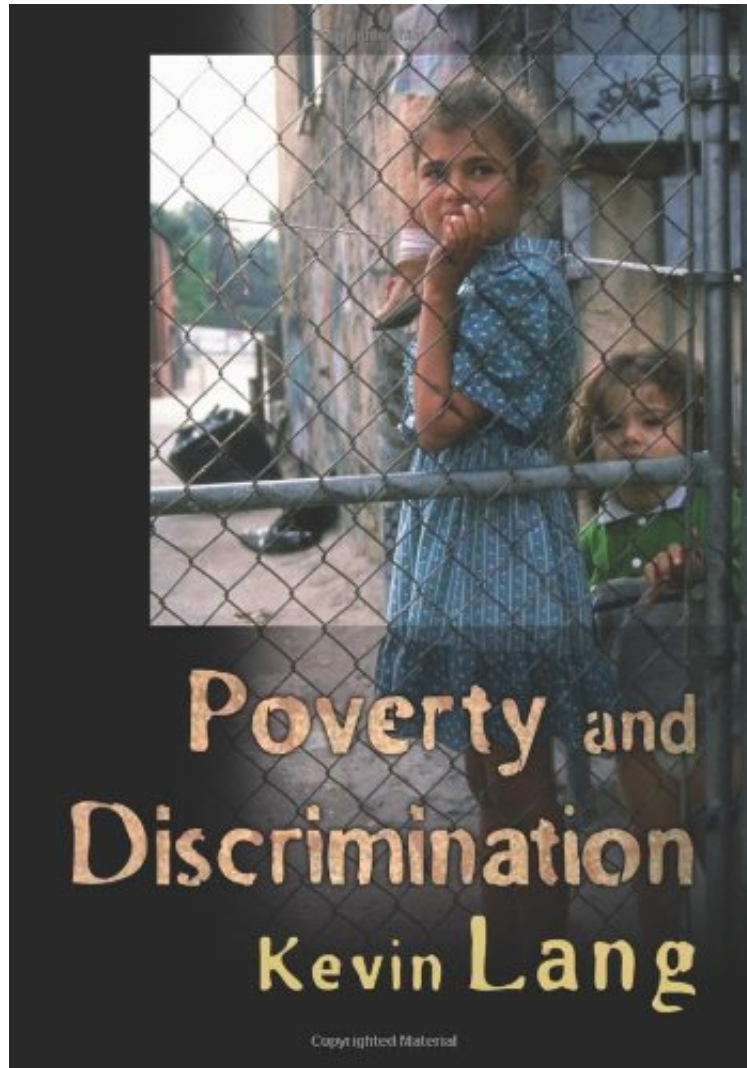


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Poverty and Discrimination

Kevin Lang

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#1017519 in Books Princeton University Press 2007-01-22Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 10.28 x 1.26 x 7.34l, 2.03 #File Name: 0691119546424 pages | File size: 74.Mb

Kevin Lang : Poverty and Discrimination before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Poverty and Discrimination:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. ThoughtfulBy Peter McCluskeyThis book is designed to make you feel less sure of your knowledge, and it succeeds in that goal. That's a worthy accomplishment, although it provides much less satisfaction than a book that provides a grand vision for solving problems would. At some abstract intellectual level I liked the book, but my gut feelings often told me that reading the book was unrewarding work that I shouldn't do unless it was assigned reading for a course I needed.The book will dissatisfy anyone who wants to view politics as a fight between good and evil. For many issues such as the minimum wage, he provides strong arguments

that the effects are small enough that we should doubt whether the issue is worth fighting about. He gives good explanations of why it's hard to even have clear concepts of poverty and discrimination by providing examples of how seemingly trivial or unobservable differences can create results that our intuitions say are important to our moral rules. He provides clear evidence that some discrimination still exists, and then thoroughly explains why there's large uncertainty about how harmful it is. He presents one moderately unrealistic model in which discrimination is common but doesn't affect wages. Then he presents a somewhat more realistic model in which a tiny bit of discrimination produces large wage differences. But those wage differences may overstate the harm done, because they're partly due to minorities spending less on education and to women pursuing careers in lower risk occupations or careers which allow more flexibility to take time off. There are only a handful of places where I doubted his objectivity. He reports one study showing evidence of racial discrimination in home loans, but fails to mention any of the contrary evidence such as the Anderson and Vanderhoff paper showing higher marginal default rates for blacks. The final few pages on policy implications seem poorly thought out compared to the rest of the book (he says that's the least important chapter of the book). He claims that income taxes on the bottom quintile can be reduced to zero by a 10% increase on the top quintile, but that claim depends on assumptions about how reported income changes in response to tax increases. He doesn't indicate what assumptions his claim depends on. He claims "The high rate of incarceration in the United States and the high level of inequality are related." He gives a plausible theory about why inequality causes the wealthy in some countries to spend a lot protecting their wealth from the poor, but provides no evidence connecting that theory to U.S. incarceration rates.

Many ideas about poverty and discrimination are nothing more than politically driven assertions unsupported by evidence. And even politically neutral studies that do try to assess evidence are often simply unreliable. In *Poverty and Discrimination*, economist Kevin Lang cuts through the vast literature on poverty and discrimination to determine what we actually know and how we know it. Using rigorous statistical analysis and economic thinking to judge what the best research is and which theories match the evidence, this book clears the ground for students, social scientists, and policymakers who want to understand--and help reduce--poverty and discrimination. It evaluates how well antipoverty and antidiscrimination policies and programs have worked--and whether they have sometimes actually made the problems worse. And it provides new insights about the causes of, and possible solutions to, poverty and discrimination. The book begins by asking, "Who is poor?" and by giving a brief history of poverty and poverty policy in the United States in the twentieth century, including the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. Among the topics covered are the changing definition of poverty, the relation between economic growth and poverty, and the effects of labor markets, education, family composition, and concentrated poverty. The book then evaluates the evidence on racial discrimination in areas such as education, employment, and criminal justice, as well as sex discrimination in the labor market, and assesses the effectiveness of antidiscrimination policies. Throughout, the book is grounded in the conviction that we must have much better empirical knowledge of poverty and discrimination if we hope to reduce them.

Honorable Mention for the 2007 Best Professional/Scholarly Book in Sociology and Social Work, Association of American Publishers "This volume could be usefully employed as a textbook in upper-level undergraduate and more advanced courses in poverty and discrimination, as well as a reference work for specialists. . . . Highly recommended."--Choice "Poverty and Discrimination is social science at its best. The issues are interesting, the analysis is first rate, the organization is excellent, and . . . [the] data is exemplary."--Arnold Kling, *EconLog* "Kevin Lang has written a significant book that assesses recent developments in the study of poverty and discrimination, reviews the formal theories, and provides insight into their validity through statistical analysis; in essence, a book that addresses the basic issues of poverty and discrimination. It is an excellent text for economists, social scientists, and public policy makers."--Kathryn Goering Reid, *Journal of Children and Poverty* "Readers of the book will become better critics of statistical evidence used in policy debate and more skeptical of strong claims about a policy's success (or failure). They also will more fully understand the difficulty of conducting highly credible policy research and crafting effective policies."--Robert D. Plotnick, *Industrial and Labor Relations* "Lang has written an excellent book that can serve as a useful tool for researchers, students, and policymakers. The author clearly is an expert in the field who has thoroughly researched his topic."--Casey P. Homan, *Monthly Labor Review* "Poverty and Discrimination provides a wide-ranging discussion of all the aspects of social policy that are related to economic disadvantage, from welfare programs to education to labor markets, with a particular emphasis on discrimination. The text provides an excellent overview of facts, of research results, and of policy debates. Interspersed in this discussion are many good lessons in data analysis and research methodology. This book is a great reference and review of many areas and will work as an excellent text for undergraduate and graduate-level courses on poverty, inequality, or discrimination."--Rebecca M. Blank, University of Michigan "Kevin Lang's new textbook on poverty and discrimination is at once lucid, rigorous, and topical. He shows how the conceptual insights of modern economic theory can be combined with state-of-the-art statistical techniques in order to answer the questions, 'What do we know

about poverty and how do we know it?' This elegant, learned, and highly accessible book will, I predict, exert a major and beneficial influence in the years ahead on the study of poverty and discrimination in the United States."--Glenn C. Loury, author of *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*"Kevin Lang is engaging and always thought-provoking, and he covers a lot of ground. I don't agree with him on all issues, but that is really the point of the book--to show that reasonable people can differ on some of the most important social issues of our day and then give students the tools to assess arguments critically and make their own decisions. This book is an excellent resource for any class on poverty issues."--Janet M. Currie, author of *The Invisible Safety Net: Protecting the Nation's Poor Children and Families*"This volume will be an extraordinarily helpful tool for anyone teaching in the field of poverty and discrimination. It assembles the latest data, weaves it together with competing theories, and highlights the policy options and dilemmas that we struggle with in the United States. We have not had a textbook like this in decades and it will be a tremendous asset to students and faculty alike."--Katherine S. Newman, author of *Chutes and Ladders: Navigating the Low-Wage Labor Market*"This book provides a theoretically grounded and empirically up-to-date review of both economic research and economic policies related to poverty and discrimination. It is a welcome contribution reflecting Kevin Lang's broad knowledge of both the massive academic literature and current policy debates."--Joshua D. Angrist, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

About the Author Kevin Lang is Chairman of the Boston University Department of Economics and a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research. He is coeditor of the journal *Labour Economics*.