

deny independent checkweighmen and cash wages was the immediate catalyst for the rebellion. As Shapiro rightly notes, the miners did not attack the state directly; nor did they march on operators' headquarters. Instead, miners struck at a vulnerable spot — the convict lease, a blurry boundary between state and corporation. In the early years of the modern American bureaucratic state, the miners developed a strategy that turned a nascent regulatory apparatus against capital to damage operators financially. Simultaneously miners rallied community support, lobbied legislators, and worked to control their public image in the press. From the late twentieth century, this campaign looks remarkably like the “comprehensive” campaigns increasingly waged by American unions, in which labour marshals government regulatory agencies, community coalitions, corporate finance tactics, and political allies to pressure employers to recognize and bargain with unions. And modern comprehensive campaigns similarly aim at the interstices of state and corporate power — tax subsidies, government contracts, and the like — to wrest state power into labour's service. That American workers in the twenty first century must resurrect the tactics of 1890s miners is a telling commentary. What better illustrates the deterioration of American labour rights?

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Fred Siegel, *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

At the dawn of the millennium, scholars and social pundits alike have been scrambling to understand why the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the wholesale decline of American inner cities. How could it be that many thriving American metropolises of the 1940s and 1950s devolved into crime-ridden, economically devastated, wastelands by the 1980s? How could it be that poverty is even higher now than it was thirty years ago, that race relations are as polarized as ever, and that inner cities are the very last place one might look for business vitality? Many who tackle this question believe that the answer lies in an analysis of the grand socioeconomic experiment that began in the mid-1960s called the “Great Society.” It was, after all, the Great Society liberals who made it their mission to eliminate America's urban woes, to end poverty nationwide and, as importantly, to address once and for all the brutality of racial discrimination both *de jure* and *de facto*.

Historian-turned-journalist Frederick Siegel has embarked on just such an inquiry in his recent book, *The Future Once Happened Here*. This is not Siegel's first foray into this subject. His caustic treatment of the Great Society

experiment in his earlier book, *Troubled Journey: From Pearl Harbor to Ronald Reagan*, earned him the appellation “neoliberal.” And though Siegel takes the time to assert his still-liberal credentials in his new book (by noting, for example, that famed socialist and poverty expert Michael Harrington was one of his good friends and that he actually lives in New York City), his moniker now might well be that of full-fledged conservative. What ostensibly begins as a thoughtful and scholarly examination of inner city decline, escalates into a harangue on African American culture as well as the poor and public sector unions, and ends with an unabashed call for the return of unbridled free-market capitalism to cure urban ills.

Siegel’s book takes the reader into the bowels of three major American cities, New York, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles, to make the overarching case that, because sixties liberals corrupted what was good about New Deal liberalism, it was they who sent inner cities into an seemingly intractable downward spiral. Sixties liberalism, Siegel maintains, demonized the work ethic, deregulated morals, encouraged economic dependency, fostered crime, and smothered economic initiative. While Siegel concedes that these liberals began with the best of intentions, he argues that eventually they were blackmailed by militant black nationalist zealots whose constant threat of civil disorder held liberal politicians and policy makers hostage to the very people whom they so wanted to help. Because of their fear of riots, and fear of being labeled racists, sixties liberals ultimately fostered both “social license and economic restrictions” (xi) and, thus, “the great causes of thirty years ago have degenerated into a series of squalid shakedowns.” (235)

To prove this controversial contention, Siegel first traces New York City’s history from its New Deal roots through the high point of the Great Society’s War on Poverty. It was then, he suggests, that the “consensus” upon which New Deal Liberalism had been erected shattered as black militants and white leftists alike bullied their own self-interested and myopic agenda to the policy fore. New York was never the same, Siegel argues, after the chaotic battles of the 1960s such as that over community control in Ocean-Hill Brownsville or the disorder designed to make welfare more accessible to the poor that gripped NYC in the mid-1970s. (32, 44, 53) Before long, crime was out of control, the city government became increasingly dependent on federal dollars and taxation to support its “underclass” who wanted welfare not work, and social pathology flourished alienating “workaday business people” and private investors alike.

In D.C. the tale of decline is even more sordid since the District never had a real New Deal tradition (nor a solid white working class to clamor for it), so its tumultuous drive for statehood was founded on the alienating principles of black nationalism and supported blindly by Great Society liberals. According to Siegel, D.C. mayor Marion Barry was a black nationalist who played upon fears of black insurrection to create a shameful regime of personal excess and

corruption, fiscal mismanagement, and social chaos. (61) The longer that Barry ruled, the further that the principles of Great Society liberalism atrophied fueling greater poverty, propelling a wholly incompetent black middle class leadership to power, weakening the D.C. police department with budget cuts and collapsing standards, and creating a center of crime and racial entitlement that sent law-abiding citizens scurrying for the affluent suburbs. For Siegel D.C. is the example par excellence of what happens when liberal plans to aid the poor and adjust racial imbalances are taken to the extreme and administered by incompetent but threatening Black Power hacks.

In Los Angeles Siegel finds a more complicated and slightly less depressing story. The fact that L.A. has a large Asian and Hispanic immigrant population, which has been willing to work for low wages in an attempt to inch up the ladder of success, leads Siegel to argue that there are clearly “different ways to be poor” (116-117). The poor can attempt to grab the opportunity that America has to offer through hard work and sacrifice like these recent immigrants do (and older immigrants did), or they can scream and threaten for greater governmental assistance and reject the values and cultural norms of the larger society as do the “South Central gangsters” and the “gang apologist[s]” like Congresswoman Maxine Waters. (138, 140-141)

According to Siegel, however, the problem for America’s urban centers is that its poor blacks are unlikely to follow the immigrant model. Inner city blacks have roots in Southern “tobacco country,” which imbibes them with a “tradition of violence” that is hard to shake, and they are further handicapped because they come from generations of sharecroppers, who “were largely excluded from the discipline and self control imposed by industrial and bureaucratic work.” (5, 26) Instead of behaving like other immigrants, Siegel suggests, blacks have been “largely left to cultivate their bitterness” (26) and are ever ready to blame others for their shortcomings. When black “gangsters and murderers,” who see themselves as “black heroes and revolutionaries,” (142-143) continue to engender fear and engage in crime, middle class homeowners such as those in L.A. are alienated and the viability of the city is compromised. (142-143) But sadly, according to Siegel, even the hard working immigrants contribute to L.A.’s urban problems. As he puts it, “you can’t reduce poverty by continuously importing more poor people” and it is unrestricted immigration itself which erodes the possibilities for a healthy economy with viable wages by, among other things, causing the proliferation of sweatshops. (152, 155) Additionally, because L.A. is so multi-ethnic, efforts to promote a “common” culture and a “shared set of civic values” are always thwarted. (xi) Because L.A. is not as willing to kow tow to the threats of the black nationalists as are other cities (the L.A. Riot, Siegel points out, was not followed by a new influx of federal aid), and because it is more willing to promote new high-tech industries, L.A. is better positioned than both D.C. and New York to escape the sixties liberal legacy of dependency and inefficiency.

Siegel's book ends back in New York City where he chronicles what he sees is the ultimate fall-out of sixties liberalism through a series of graphic anecdotes. Siegel details individual cases of deranged homeless people offending and scaring law-abiding citizens, of black militants using anti-Semitism and gruesome violence to extract personal gain, and of teen mothers who have all of the aid that they possibly could need but still live the morally and culturally degenerate lives that led to their poverty in the first place. According to Siegel, "despite unparalleled spending, poverty has grown; more importantly it had deepened as shorter and shorter generations of dysfunctional family fragments reproduced themselves." (210) Lest there be any doubt that these New York atrocities are directly connected to the social and economic policies of the 1960s, Siegel tries to show that it is the liberal programs themselves which caused these unsavory events and that the liberal "do gooders" actually became dependent on the continuation of dysfunction and poverty so that they could remain employed and secure. As he puts it, "poverty programs that were created to bring minorities in to the economic mainstream have over the years metastasized in to an alternative economy" fiercely protected by social workers and public sector employees alike. (212)

Following his city-by-city analysis of national urban collapse, and his recounting of grisly New York anecdotes, Siegel concludes with the sweeping statement that "urban liberalism died not because the federal government was insufficiently generous [as numerous well-respected economists and historians have argued] but because the money that was sent for social services sowed the seeds of self-destruction." (239) The self-destruction to which Siegel refers included the social and moral degeneracy of the inner city black family (59-60, 96), the refusal of the poor — particularly poor blacks — to work "dead end jobs" preferring to sponge off of welfare (218), the rise in homelessness not because there was any lack of decent housing but because of the homeless's own personal distress and dysfunction (182), and finally the disastrous baiting and threatening of well-intentioned middle and working class whites by "fascist," "gangster," black nationalists (and the moral degeneracy which they promoted) which sent whites, and their tax base, fleeing to the suburbs. (170)

The future is, however, not doomed. According to Siegel, by seriously considering immigrant restriction and anti-affirmative action legislation such as the controversial California Civil Rights Initiative (155, 166), by cutting welfare (247), by reigning in the excesses of over-paid and lazy public sector employees (198, 201, 203), and by insisting upon the poor's greater inculturation into time-honored "American" values of social and personal responsibility (134), we can finally create "the possibility for business expansion and new jobs" that our cities need. (247) As Siegel sees it, "the promise of inner city economic development draws on the now-forgotten arguments for capitalism." (238)

Significantly, the path that Siegel suggests American inner cities take to

redeem themselves is fully dependent upon an acceptance of his particular version of what went wrong between 1964 and 1994 — a version that time and again confuses cause and effect and, even more problematically, completely ignores the numerous historical and economic findings of recent years which strongly undermine his analysis.

Take, for instance, Siegel's key opening premise that black militants shattered the "consensus" upon which New Deal liberalism was erected, thus alienating working and middle class whites and pushing liberal policy makers to abandon the New Deal's recognition that there are worthy and unworthy poor people. (46) It is difficult to see how Siegel can make this case in light of recent works on the urban center such as Tom Sugrue's *The Origins of Urban Crisis* or Arnold Hirsch's not so recent *The Making of a Second Ghetto*. Each of these historians clearly show, through painstaking and sophisticated research, that this notion of "consensus" is largely a myth; one that obscures the depth of African American exclusion from opportunity and equality just as it overlooks the preponderance of brutal acts committed by urban whites determined to maintain control of the city and its liberal coalition. Even a cursory reading of the best recent history on the city would indicate that all clearly was not "fine" until the black militants came along to exploit a situation to their unfair advantage. Similarly, it is difficult to reconcile Siegel's reverence for the New Deal State's differentiation between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor in light of the recent spate of excellent historical monographs on both poverty and welfare. How can Siegel celebrate the glory days of New Deal welfare selectivity, engage in a caricaturing of the culture of the poor or, for that matter, even employ the term "underclass" when historians like Michael Katz and Linda Gordon, not to mention the fine scholars in Katz's' recent volume *The Underclass Debate*, have problematized each of those notions beyond redemption?

And what of Siegel's argument about the causes and consequences of urban rioting from the 1960s to the present day? His contention that riots were the highly effective tools first of Black Power extremists, and then of gangster thugs masquerading as political rebels, to extract more hand-outs from guilt-ridden liberals seems nothing short of bizarre if one were to even glance at the detailed information on urban riots recently offered in edited collections such as Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* or Mark Baldassarre, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons of the Urban Future*. It is as if Siegel has willfully ignored the preponderance of evidence indicating that the L.A. Riot was, as Mike Davis puts it, "a major post-modern bread riot" which erupted in response to the extreme economic evisceration of South Central L.A. that had taken place after 1980.¹ Perhaps Siegel would do well to grapple not only with the boon of statistical and analytical information available in the recent riot historiography but also with the analyses of "gangsters" offered by scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley and

Mike Davis in much more intellectual depth that he is able to provide.² At the very least, given his particular “take” on the motivations of urban rioters, Siegel should account for the detailed findings of scholars like Michael Omi and Howard Winant that, in fact, “the L.A. riot was not simply a black affair.”³

The one indisputable fact that Siegel does pin most of his larger arguments on, however, is that poverty did indeed rise dramatically in between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. Yet while Siegel suggests that this is evidence of the *failures* of sixties social welfare policy, virtually every economist and historian who has taken the time to track the political and economic changes that took place between 1974 and 1994 sees a notable disengagement from a commitment to welfare spending, a greater concentration of wealth into the hands of America’s elite, a process of devastating de-industrialization that began not during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson but rather during that of Eisenhower, a consistently falling annual wage rate, and a significant drop in the number of living-wage jobs available in the inner city between 1974 and 1994. None of these devastating poverty-inducing realities were caused by sixties liberals, indeed the majority of them are evidence of the extraordinary backlash to sixties liberalism that was taking place no sooner had the ink dried on the Economic Opportunity legislation.

Siegel too conveniently ignores the statistical findings of economists like Rhonda Williams that in L.A., for example, “the earnings of young black men relative to their white counterparts declined at every educational level between 1973 and 1989” or that “over 50% of young black and Latino high-school graduates earned less than the two-adult, two-child, poverty-level hourly wage in 1989, a dramatic increase from the late 1970s.”⁴ Most interestingly, in his zest to finger sixties liberals for the rise of poverty, Siegel ignores the fact that between 1978 and 1982, there were massive plant closings in Los Angeles County and, simultaneously, that there was a wholesale “defunding of community-based initiatives and other safety-net programs” which left those laid off with little to sustain them.⁵ Finally, and most importantly, Siegel completely ignores the key fact that it was “Republicans [who] have been in the White House for all but four (the Carter Years) of the past twenty years” during which the greatest increases in poverty, crime, and urban devastation took place.⁶

Just as Siegel fundamentally misunderstands the roots of escalating poverty between 1974 and 1994, he similarly misunderstands why crime, homelessness, decriminalization and de-institutionalization also rose during these years. For Siegel it is as if crime sprang out of nowhere in the 1980s. (160) In his estimation, the poor became more of a criminal element as the 20th century progressed *because* they were dependent on welfare. Again, one can only wonder if Siegel has read the vast literature which chronicles the direct connection between the erosion of a living wage economy (as well as *cuts* in social welfare) and the escalation of the illegal economy of drugs and

guns. Is it coincidental that the teens who used to have summer jobs through federal funds were replaced by teens selling crack when those funds so completely dried up in the 1980s? How can Siegel ignore the connections between the decrease in affordable, federally-subsidized housing, the virtual explosion of the high-priced private real estate market in the speculative 1980s, the de-industrialization of virtually every urban center, and the dramatic rise of homelessness — including family homelessness — during that same decade? How did the “do gooders” cause this? Similarly, and perhaps most curiously, how is it that the sixties liberals should be blamed for the rise in the numbers of mentally ill Americans who now are roaming the streets, or criminals who often are released prematurely or never incarcerated at all? Not only is his evidence for this purely anecdotal, it literally ignores the fact that it was during the budget slashing 1980s that mental hospitals (notably those whose patients were on General Assistance) were forced to close their doors and that it was only when the viable wage economy was replaced by the drug economy (and the penal system became overloaded) that suspended sentences and premature probation became unavoidable. Siegel’s claim that decriminalization was the product of “reformers straining to be hip” (174) is nothing short of hysterical.

Time and again in this book Siegel disregards the spate of historical and economic evidence that not only would challenge his conclusions, but would actually render the premises which underlie them invalid. Because Siegel chooses to ignore this literature, his prescriptions for a better future are hard to swallow. In the end we are indeed persuaded that he, *personally*, is disgusted by the poor, by black urban culture, by public sector employees, and with sixties liberals, (because these personal feelings so obviously fuel his page-by-page rant) but he never is able to persuade the reader that what disgusts him was actually caused by the sixties liberal experiment itself. Siegel disparages the “Old Believers” who still maintain that capitalism is inherently exploitative and, thus, that it is the government’s job not only to regulate the capitalists, but also to provide aid for those chewed up, spit out, or overlooked by them. If Siegel would stop even for a minute to read the wealth of material on “what went wrong” that he is so suspicious of, if he would look carefully at the numerous European social democracies which spend far more on social welfare, yet have far less crime, than America ever did, and finally if he would look more critically at the laissez-faire 19th century capitalist world that he now promotes, even he might see the deep analytical flaws in *The Future Once Happened Here*.

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¹Mike Davis, “Uprising and Repression in L.A.” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* (New York 1993), 142.

²Davis, 146-148; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York 1994); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston 1997).

³Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "The Los Angeles 'Race Riot' and Contemporary U.S. Politics," in Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King*, 110.

⁴Rhonda Williams, "Accumulation as Evisceration: Urban Rebellion and the New Growth Dynamics," in Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King*, 84, 87.

⁵Melvin Oliver, James H. Johnson, Jr., Walter C. Farrell, Jr., "Anatomy of a Rebellion: A Political-Economic Analysis" in Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King*, 124, 126.

⁶*Ibid.*, 125.

Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

In 1929, Virginia Woolf recorded — in *A Room of One's Own* — that "what one wants ... is a mass of information" about women's lives in the past. Looking on the library shelves for the "books that were not there," she wondered if some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton might not supply a history of women to supplement the history of men; in an even more ambitious move, Woolf suggested that such a student might even rewrite history itself. In the last decades, an explosion of interest in the history of women and of gender within the academy has begun to supply the "books that were not there" when Woolf wrote her essay almost seventy years ago. Where Woolf found only empty shelves, we can now find — in most if not all university libraries — rows and rows of books. In *The Gender of History*, however, Bonnie Smith suggests a new context in which to read Woolf's complaint. The books Woolf wanted were "not there," Smith's study implies, not because they had not been written, but because a university library was the wrong place to look for them. And the brilliant students of Newnham and Girton were not necessarily the ones to write them.

The assumption that most of the history written in the last two centuries has been written by and about men depends, Smith argues, on the assumption that the only history worth talking about is "professional" history, history written from within the academy and to the exacting standards of professional scholarship. On the contrary, Smith points out, women have had a lively interest in the writing of history since at least the eighteenth century. Women have, however written history as *amateurs* and not necessarily for a scholarly audience. The emergence of history as a scientific, professional discipline, according to Smith, was predicated on the discrediting of this amateur historical vision. The "founding practices" of the historical profession were themselves implicated in a gendered hierarchy. The historical profession, in effect, emerged not just without women but in opposition to them and to what