

Why, after the greatest economic expansion in history and endless proclamations of recovery, do most Americans have to step over the homeless nearly every day? How has the richest country on earth created a spectacle of public misery that paralyzes politicians and policy-makers while forcing average citizens to run a gauntlet of direct moral challenges every time they walk the streets? In *The Visible Poor*, Joel Blau gives provocative answers to these and many other questions about one of the most difficult issues of our time. Disproving many convenient myths--that most of the homeless are crazy, drug-addicts, drunks, or lazy misfits who brought their sufferings on themselves--and moving far beyond conventional political explanations, Blau shows that the current crisis was an inevitable result of economic and political changes that swept through American society in recent decades: the explosion of low-wage jobs, systematic cutbacks in social welfare benefits to maintain the work-incentive, governments failure to provide adequate low-cost housing, and its virtual abandonment of the mentally ill. Blau argues that current government policies at every level are mired in pointless head-counting and quick-fix solutions that only push the homeless out of sight without touching underlying causes. He advocates instead a range of social reforms--including a national standard for welfare benefits, a higher minimum wage, and establishment of a social sector for non-profit, affordable housing--that will meet stiff resistance from those entrenched forces in the labor and housing markets that created widespread homelessness in the first place, but that may be our best hope for resolving the current impasse. A powerful contribution to public debate on homelessness, *The Visible Poor* must be read by concerned citizens as well as by policy-makers and advocates.

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