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Book Review

Bradshaw, B. and Sainsbury, R., editors 2000: *Researching poverty*. Aldershot: Gower. xviii +304 pp. £45.00 cloth. ISBN: 0 75461 287 2.

This is a book of a conference – but not any old conference. The conference was held in York in 1998 to mark the centenary of Seebohm Rowntree's first survey of poverty in that city. The publication of that and other surveys a century ago provided the impetus for the social reforms brought about by the Lloyd George government to begin seriously to alleviate poverty in Britain. The results of the second survey of York in 1936 spurred on social reformers to design the welfare state, while results of the third survey in 1950 were used to demonstrate the success of the introduction of the welfare state and marked the beginning of a lull in poverty studies. This book partly tells the story of how that lull was ended and where we are now.

The book is the second in a trilogy, all edited by Bradshaw and Sainsbury and published by Gower. The first book in the series, *Getting the measure of poverty*, concerned itself largely with studies of poverty before the second world war. The third book is *Experiencing poverty*, and presents the most contemporary accounts. This book is about the ways in which poverty is now studied. It begins with a very personal account of the postwar study of poverty by Peter Townsend, the social scientist responsible for dragging poverty studies out of their postwar lull by showing the country that poverty was still widespread and so taking the Conservative government head on during the 1980s and 1990s. Townsend ends his reflections by urging researchers to look outside of the nation state for the contemporary causes of poverty in the world. He argues that we need to look to transnational corporations and international political organizations, claiming that the World Bank's 'approach both to the definition of a poverty line and the construction of anti-poverty strategies is inappropriate and even devious, and shows

little sign of dealing with a growing world problem' (p. 25).

Where has 100 years of poverty research brought us? I was a delegate at the conference and a contributor to this book – so can hardly claim to be neutral – but do have some insight as a result. My abiding memory of the conference was a feeling of guilt while drinking free wine at the reception in York as the Vice Chancellor of the University welcomed the largest collection of poverty researchers ever brought together in Britain. In just a century, a poverty industry has been created – not least from the grave – through the legacy of Seebohm's father, Joseph Rowntree, whose foundation funded the conference and much of the research presented, and sponsored this book. From Peter Townsend's introduction, you might think that we have travelled from understanding the extent of poverty in a depressed northern town in 1901 to realizing how all-pervading the extent of poverty is globally by 2001. Yet the book does mark achievements along the way.

What follows are one-sentence summaries of the remainder of the book referenced by the Book reviews 119 120 Book reviews names of the chapter author(s). David Gordon argues strongly that the accurate measurement of poverty is now achievable while Sue Middleton suggests that an informed consensus on agreeing poverty lines can be met. George Smith and Michael Noble argue that the study of poverty in Britain is now made far simpler by the availability of data but, in a reference back to Townsend's comment, note that (p. 95):

If Rowntree had been studying York at the end of the 20th rather than the 19th century, we have little doubt that he would have used such administrative data along with other sources of information, as his able successors (Huby and Bradshaw) have done in their contemporary study of York. He might, of course, have had rather more difficulty getting hold of the income data from a certain large factory in York, as it is no longer a family business but part of a multi-national corporation.

They are, of course, referring to Nestlé's acquisition of the Rowntree chocolate

factory, the profits of which first funded Seebohm's research and the later sale of which funded most of the Rowntree Foundation's sponsored research. To continue through the chapters of this book: Liz Tadd investigates the relatively new official government *Family resources survey* as providing measures of poverty. Ian Gregory, Humphrey Southall and I look at what historical, mainly census, data show for the period 1898–1998. Glen Bramley and Martin Evans estimate how government spending goes, geographically and socially. Roger Burrows and David Rhodes show how the extent of 'misery' (with living where you live) can be mapped across England. Linda Harvey and David Backwith use the example of one place, Haverhill, to show how poverty can be transformed into exclusion. Jan Pahl and Lou Opity discuss exclusion from the 'new' electronic economy. John Washington, Ian Paylor and Jennifer Harris extend the scope to studies across Europe. Finally, Ruth Lister, Peter Beresford, David Green and Kirsty Woodward ask where 'the poor' will be in the future of poverty research.

Poverty research was once the preserve of the very rich – people like Seebohm (or Engels or Booth) whose fathers owned a factory. Today, it is the preserve of largely middle-class academics, albeit with perhaps poorer roots. *Researching poverty* is a very good summary of where the 'poverty industry' is at today in Britain. We have never known more about the poor in Britain. Many of the academics writing in this volume have advised the current government and influenced its aim for the eradication of poverty – an aim uncannily similar to those inspired by Seebohm's work a century ago. If poverty research does anything, it raises consciousness. What it tends not to do is raise consciousness on poverty alleviation and how it may be achieved. If I have one criticism of the book, it is that it contains no chapter on research of how, when and where poverty has and can be ended. Perhaps that is a more general criticism of the poverty industry itself. Other than that, from my biased viewpoint, I would recommend it.

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