

No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City

By Katherine S. Newman



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"Powerful and poignant.... Newman's message is clear and timely." --*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

In **No Shame in My Game**, Harvard anthropologist Katherine Newman gives voice to a population for whom work, family, and self-esteem are top priorities despite all the factors that make earning a living next to impossible--minimum wage, lack of child care and health care, and a desperate shortage of even low-paying jobs. By intimately following the lives of nearly 300 inner-city workers and job seekers for two years in Harlem, Newman explores a side of poverty often ignored by media and politicians--the working poor.

The working poor find dignity in earning a paycheck and shunning the welfare system, arguing that even low-paying jobs give order to their lives. **No Shame in My Game** gives voice to a misrepresented segment of today's society, and is sure to spark dialogue over the issues surrounding poverty, working and welfare.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Harvard anthropologist Katherine S. Newman explodes the myth of America's unmotivated poor in *No Shame in My Game*, a study of low-wage workers and their job-seeking peers in central Harlem. This is a frontline perspective: in addition to hundreds of interviews, Newman also put her research assistants behind the counters of the fast-food restaurants alongside the study's subjects. The results show that America's largest group of impoverished citizens is not the unemployed, but the working poor. But what will move readers most is the struggling workers themselves, who suffer the indignities, exhaustion, and low compensation of jobs as "burger flippers" because, as one fast-food restaurant employee, Larry, says, "It's my job. You ain't puttin' no food on my table; you ain't puttin' no clothes on my back. I will walk tall with my Burger Barn uniform on." Newman explains how obstacles such as cuts in welfare, lack of health insurance (almost half of employed Americans under the poverty line have no coverage), and substandard education undercut even the most determined efforts of working poor like Larry. Fortunately, she also offers a thick list of old and new potential solutions to this crisis, from Earned Income Tax Credits to new training programs linking private industry to public schools with at-risk youth. An essential, eye-opening read. --
Maria Dolan

From Publishers Weekly

After writing two books on the American middle class (*Falling from Grace* and *Declining Fortunes*), Newman delivers an eye-opening look at the urban working poor. First of all, she makes clear that the vast majority want to work—even when their lives would be made easier by relying on public assistance. Newman, a cultural anthropologist and Harvard urban studies professor (formerly at Columbia, where she launched her research), conducted a two-year study of more than 200 African-American and Latino fast-food industry employees in Harlem. She found a strong commitment to the work ethic, even though these minimum-wage "McJobs" keep workers below the poverty line and offer little hope of advancement. Using case histories and interviews, Newman delves deeply into the aspirations and frustrations of her subjects—adult or teenage, native-born or immigrant—who try to make ends meet in a community hard hit by drugs, crime, a shrinking job base and underfunded schools. Among the policy initiatives Newman proposes are school-to-work transition programs, designed to forge close relationships between high school students and prospective employers, and employers' consortia to move inner-city workers into better jobs. She cites the promising results of private-public partnerships in Milwaukee and San Antonio, which combine job training and placement with provision of support services like day care, transportation and health care. Readers numbed by the familiar laments over poverty and by sermons on the bootstrap value of hard work will find Newman's book clearly a product of sustained attention paid to the working poor—bracingly refreshing.

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From Library Journal

This is the fourth book from cultural anthropologist Newman, a professor of urban studies at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Here she studies the working poor in Harlem, providing readers with insights into the plight of blue-collar workers who persevere at jobs nobody wants. Tragically, they never seem to get ahead, yet their own value structure tells them to continue because they are doing the right thing. Newman takes us on an unforgettable journey inside the lives of many of the people she and her student researchers came to know during her two-year study. Pertinent demographic data and analysis are interspersed with these poignant glimpses. Because education plays such an important role in personal

economics, educators should read this book in order to understand how some of their students live on a day-to-day basis. Highly recommended for all students of anthropology, sociology, and social work. ASandra Isaacson, OAO/U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Las Vegas
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Douglas Gibson:

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