



Charitable Choices: Religion, Race, and Poverty in the Post-Welfare Era

John P. Bartkowski, Helen A. Regis

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Congregations and faith-based organizations have become key participants in America's welfare revolution. Recent legislation has expanded the social welfare role of religious communities, thus revealing a pervasive lack of faith in purely economic responses to poverty.

Charitable Choices is an ethnographic study of faith-based poverty relief in 30 congregations in the rural south. Drawing on in-depth interviews and fieldwork in Mississippi faith communities, it examines how religious conviction and racial dynamics shape congregational benevolence. Mississippi has long had the nation's highest poverty rate and was the first state to implement a faith-based welfare reform initiative. The book provides a grounded and even-handed treatment of congregational poverty relief rather than abstract theory on faith-based initiatives.

The volume examines how congregations are coping with national developments in social welfare policy and reveals the strategies that religious communities utilize to fight poverty in their local communities. By giving particular attention to the influence of theological convictions and organizational dynamics on religious service provision, it identifies both the prospects and pitfalls likely to result from the expansion of charitable choice.

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