



Beside the Golden Door: Policy, Politics, and the Homeless (Social Institutions and Social Change)

Joel A. Devine, Beth A. Rubin, James D. Wright

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James Wright's *Address Unknown: The Homeless in America* focused on the problem of homelessness during the mid-to-late 1980s, making an important contribution to the then-emerging public debate of a rapidly growing and increasingly visible social problem. *Beside the Golden Door* updates the story and our knowledge of homelessness through the middle 1990s, advancing the thesis that an emphasis on factors such as mental illness or substance abuse is descriptively accurate but fails as a causal account of the rise of homelessness as a social problem. The authors reject efforts to cast the issue in "either-or" terms, as social structure versus individual deficiencies, arguing that poverty and housing trends have created a situation where some people are destined to be homeless, but personal factors such as mental illness or substance abuse are critical in predicting who those people turn out to be. *Beside the Golden Door* details numerous dimensions of the homelessness issue: the rise in poverty; the decline of low-income housing; conceptual, measurement, and practical problems of counting the homeless and the Census Bureau's ill-fated 1990 effort to do so; the role of familial estrangement, mental illness, and substance abuse; and health status and behaviors. It concludes with discussions and comparisons of rural versus urban homelessness, street children in North and Latin America, and homelessness in post-industrial societies. The material in *Beside the Golden Door* will be accessible to undergraduate students and interested lay readers as well as specialists. "Both the content and style of this book make an excellent instructive read for students, practitioners, and scholars, alike."--*Social Forces* James D. Wright is Charles and Leo Favrot Professor of Human Relations, Department of Sociology, Tulane University and author of over thirteen books including *Address Unknown* and *Crime and Violence in America*. Beth A. Rubin is associate professor, Department of Sociology, Tulane University. She is the author of *Shifts in the Social Contract: Understanding Change in American Society*. Joel A. Devine is professor, Department of Sociology, Tulane University, and coauthor of *The Greatest of Evils: Urban Poverty and the American Underclass*.

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