

New Book Provides Fresh Perspective on the Pervasive Poverty and Homelessness in NYC

Offers a history of public policies and private initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty, along with personal stories of those who witnessed and lived the experience of destitution

With nearly 49,000 people living in city shelters, including almost 21,000 children—a modern-day record that may well be broken—there has never been more of a need to step back and understand how New Yorkers have confronted poverty and homelessness over time. *The Poor Among Us: A History of Family Poverty and Homelessness in New York City*, published today by White Tiger Press, puts current policies in perspective through the lens of nearly 300 years of public and philanthropic efforts to alleviate poverty in New York City.

Authored by Ralph da Costa Nunez, president and CEO of the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness and professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, and Ethan G. Sribnick, senior research associate at the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, *The Poor Among Us* uses more than 100 photographs, etchings, and maps to bring the reader face-to-face with the experience of poverty and homelessness throughout New York City's past and present. Dozens of accounts of children and adults—from those experiencing poverty firsthand to the philanthropic reformers working on their behalf—provide a window into what it was like to live during each time period.

"Only by embracing the lessons embedded in our city's history can we avoid repeating the failed policies of both the recent and distant past, and have true clarity about what action is required to correct today's public policies. *The Poor Among Us* is not just a history; it is a foreboding and a call to action," says Ralph da Costa Nunez.

Conditions that perpetuate homelessness and poverty today have deep roots in America's past. *The Poor Among Us* explores the world of New York's poor children and families, from the era of European settlements to the present day: their physical and social environments, the causes of their poverty, and the institutions and social movements that evolved to improve and regulate their lives. This comprehensive history examines the successes and failures of past efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness, providing the historical context that is often lacking in contemporary policy debates.

"Recurring themes emerge throughout the history of New York City with regards to public policy. Even though the city has changed immensely, these themes are important for debating policy and giving us an informed perspective on how to move forward," says Dr. Nunez.

Many of the issues being debated in our classrooms, legislative bodies, and community meetings are illuminated by this look at history.

- **Housing:** To properly understand the debates over affordable housing in this city, it is important to consider the decades-long efforts to improve the quality of housing stock and the decisions on the local, state, and federal levels that have limited the number of available low-rent units as well as public housing and subsidies.
- **Immigration:** Debates over immigration are not new. The role of immigration and migration has long been debated in New York City, even as immigrants and migrants have shaped the city's economy.
- **Homelessness:** There are more homeless families in New York today than ever before. A homeless family in the late 1700s or early 1800s would most likely have ended up in the almshouse, a public institution created to care for those unable to work and punish those unwilling to do so. By the mid-nineteenth century a family in danger of becoming homeless was likely to give up their children to an institution or send them via an "orphan train" to be placed with another family. After the Panic of 1873, homelessness became synonymous in the public mind with the image of the tramp, a single man looking for work. It was only in the 1980s that the declining value of welfare payments, together with the imperative to keep families together, led to an increase in family homelessness and the rise of policies to deal directly with the family as opposed to single adults.

Available May 22, 2013, *The Poor Among Us: A History of Family Poverty and Homelessness in New York City* (320 pages; soft cover; 130 photographs, etchings, and maps; \$15.95) can be purchased through whitetigerpress.org, ICPHusa.org, and Amazon.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ralph da Costa Nunez, PhD, is president and chief executive officer of the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. He has worked on behalf of homeless families for almost 30 years at the city and state levels of government and in the nonprofit sector. Dr. Nunez holds a PhD in political science from Columbia University, where he is also a professor at the School of International and Public Affairs.

Ethan G. Sribnick, PhD, is a senior research associate at the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. He is a published historian with expertise in child welfare and public policy and holds a PhD from the University of Virginia.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) is an independent nonprofit research and policy analysis organization based in New York City. ICPH studies the impact of poverty on family and child well-being and generates research that will enhance public policies and programs affecting poor or homeless children and their families. Specifically, ICPH examines the condition of extreme poverty in the United States and its effect on educational attainment, housing, employment, child welfare, domestic violence, and family wellness. www.ICPHusa.org

ABOUT WHITE TIGER PRESS

White Tiger Press is an independent publisher of books about family poverty and homelessness for both children and adults in collaboration with the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. www.whitetigerpress.org

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