"How 'Ending Welfare As We Know It' Did Little to End Poverty

BY JO KADLECK

Pat Hancock lost his job. It was the 1930s and like so many men from the land of Opportunity, the Great Depression left him out of work and unable to provide for his family. Pat Hancock could not accept the idea of char-

ity. After all, his Protestant work ethic and belief prof-

ounced him to be should be able to "take care of my own," his personal code.

His personal code, his son Eugene, how-

ever, responded differently to their own sense of duty. Unem-

ployment was near 80 percent in the mid-western county where the Hancock looked so unlike his father. Eugene didn’t feel any different from their neighbors and friends. Everyone, it seemed to

him, received government relief and they all did what they could to support themselves. And the young Hancock grew up dur-

ing the Depression with a differ-

e
t. "We tend to make the pendu-

lum of issues and chal-

lenges," Hancock said. "They are heroic because they have to be responsible and creative just to survive; they keep their sense of humor and often don’t have any-

thing like government institutions as a safety net."

If any real change is going to occur for the poor, Hancock believes it will have to be by cre-

ating "more humane policies." In other words, welfare reform again needs reforming and PRWORA-amendment discus-

sions should be scheduled in Washing-

ton for the next few months. That will require direction from agen-

cies like the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) of the Mailman School of Public

Health, which hopes to help focus legislative policies back on children. In fact, the NCCP plans to launch a series of publications over the next six months address-

ing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) refram-

elization, and educating policy-
makers on what research shows about the impact of TANF on children.

In another NCCP report pub-

lished last November, "Polarizing New York City’s Low-

Income Families," authors Bar-

bara Blum and Hugh O’Neill noted that the "the number of people who are working but still receiving welfare has increased sharply since 1994, from just 2 percent to 14 percent of the city’s welfare caseload. These are gen-

erally people who have gotten jobs but are not earning enough to completely leave welfare."

As a result, the report proposes sev-

eral policy recommendations for city and federal govern-

ments, including more flexibility from the city for recipients facing serious barriers to employment and amending the 1996 law’s time limits for those working full time.

As legislators debate PRWO-

RA changes, the private sector’s role responding to those in poverty cannot be underestimated. But because of both the tragedies of Sept. 11 and the resulting recession, private agencies, reli-
gious organizations, and commu-
nity programs are already seeing a huge surge in their client services swell beyond capacity as they struggle to offer assistance to those in need.

Rev. Reverend Susan Field, Univer-

sity Baptist Chaplain and co-

director of Graffiti Ministries in the Lower East Side for the past 15 years, believes more job pro-

grams that hire day laborers could help ease some of the chal-

lenges the economy has caused. Her organization hires local teenagers and welfare mothers to work as site coordinators in after school and tutoring programs or office help in the church. Field believes these types of grass-

roots efforts can help ease the challenges facing many poor families.

So with the changing economic re-

cession and layoffs becom-

ing common occurrences for families across economic lines, it seems Americans’ attitudes toward the poor will once again be challenged.

“I have hope,” Hancock says, "because there are still enough people in the right places who believe that compassionate assis-
tance is our duty.”

"Leibniz’s Metaphysics: Its Origin and Development" by Christia Merian, associate professor of philos-

ophy (Cambridge University Press, $80). This new study of ancient Egyptian history and society, pharaohs and sphinx need to room for the experiences of everyday life among ordinary people.

In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Medi- 

cines, which hopes to help

Archives catalog and

Steven Kellman, associate professor of philo-

sophy (Duke University Press, $21.95). The performances of contemporary Thai spirit mediums obliquely reveal the influence of modernity and the grand ambitions of political entities, which are a result of shifting attitudes of Americans toward poverty. In fact, Hancock says numbers at shelters soup kitchens and other agencies have increased since PRWORA. As a result, Hancock began to see that “if we were going to understand who the poor were and create policies that worked toward poverty, we had to look at the faces of those in poverty, warts and all.”

So Hancock spent the past three years shadowing three young women trying to get off welfare and out of poverty. Her book chronicles their lives: a Puerto Rican mother who had a conviction, and a Beaux mother with the drive to become a doctor. What she discovered was the gigantic maze of issues and attributes surround-

ing poor communiti-

es.

In addition to increasing costs of living, decreasing job opportu-

nities, and the recession, and complicated changes in govern-

ment assistance, these women found navigating their way through even basic survival nothing was a challenge. From the lack of afford-

able child care and difficult neighbors or family members, to lost checks in the system and shopping at three different gro-

cery stores, they were dealing with a feast of issues.

LynNell Hancock, author of LynNell Hancock, "Durable Inequality" by Charles Tilly, Joseph L. But-

tennies, associate professor of philo-

sophy (University of California, Los Angeles, $17.95). This study, which won the Eastern Soci-

ological Study Book Award, argues that persistent social inequality is a direct result of the systemic features of social organization.

"Fear: A Spiritual Navig-

ation" by Jo Kadlecek, staff writer in the Office of Public Affairs (Shaw/Ran-

dollhouse, No. 9). Using war as a backdrop in this first memoir explores its effects on a woman’s life and relationships in the con-

text of spirituality.