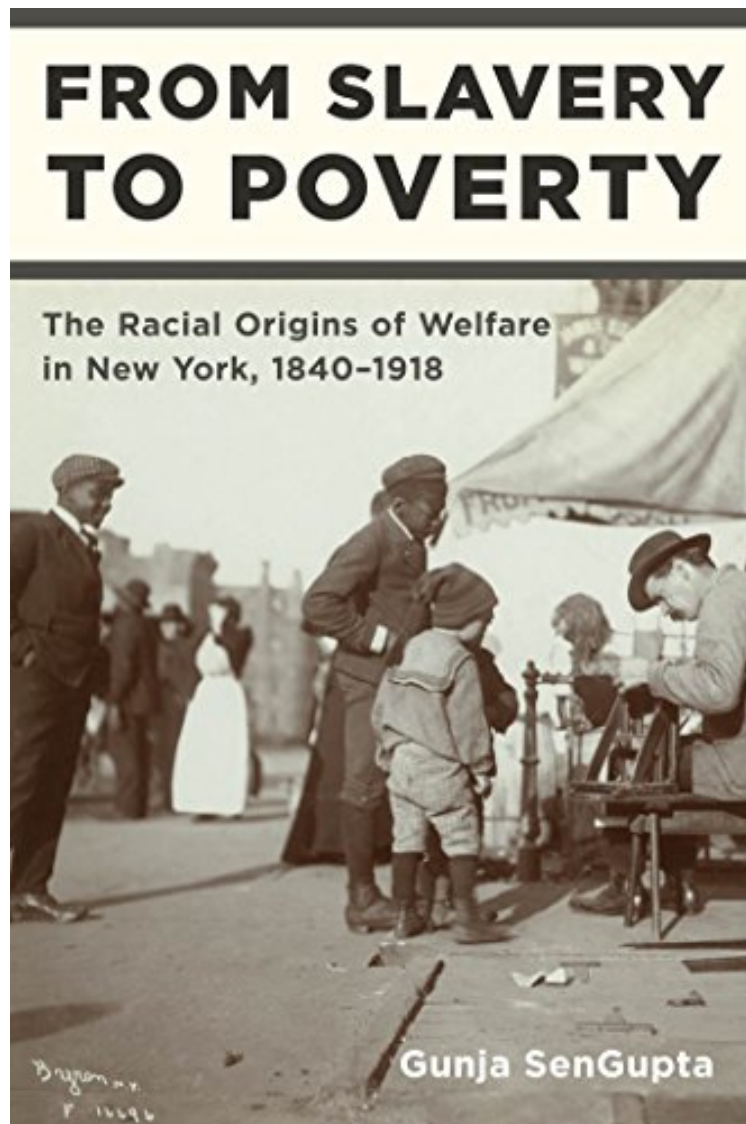


(Free download) From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918

From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918

Gunja SenGupta

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Gunja SenGupta : From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. More people should be reading this book! By Stacy Horn I read it for research, and it was just so illuminating. You can't say you know American history without knowing the history

SenGupta tells in this book. I know a lot of people think slavery happened so long ago, and no one today is still truly suffering its effects or from all the associated evils of slavery. This book connects the dots between then and now in the most meaningful way (although she stops in 1918, except for the epilogue). You see clearly how the consequences of slavery continue to ripple through from one generation and time period to the next and to destroy. Ta Nehisi Coates did this as well in his article *The Case for Reparations*. These two should be read together.

The racially charged stereotype of "welfare queen" an allegedly promiscuous waster who uses her children as meal tickets funded by tax-payers is a familiar icon in modern America, but as Gunja SenGupta reveals in *From Slavery to Poverty*, her historical roots run deep. For, SenGupta argues, the language and institutions of poor relief and reform have historically served as forums for inventing and negotiating identity. Mining a broad array of sources on nineteenth-century New York City's interlocking network of private benevolence and municipal relief, SenGupta shows that these institutions promoted a racialized definition of poverty and citizenship. But they also offered a framework within which working poor New Yorkers—recently freed slaves and disfranchised free blacks, Afro-Caribbean sojourners and Irish immigrants, sex workers and unemployed laborers, and mothers and children—could challenge stereotypes and offer alternative visions of community. Thus, SenGupta argues, long before the advent of the twentieth-century welfare state, the discourse of welfare in its nineteenth-century incarnation created a space to talk about community, race, and nation; about what it meant to be American, who belonged, and who did not. Her work provides historical context for understanding why today the notion of "welfare" with all its derogatory un-American connotations is associated not with middle-class entitlements like Social Security and Medicare, but rather with programs targeted at the poor, which are wrongly assumed to benefit primarily urban African Americans.

Indeed, though race is firmly in the foreground of this analysis, the hidden strength of this book is its abundant illustration of how poor New Yorkers, of every ethnic background, used welfare institutions to their own purposes. In the difficult task of approaching welfare history from the paupers point of view, Gunja SenGupta has succeeded... Well worth reading for those interested in the lives of the poor and the realities of social welfare, this book also provides new insights into the history of race ideology in the nineteenth century.—*The Journal of American History* SenGupta's finely crafted study of post-slavery poverty in New York City gives a much higher level of understanding of the plight and courage of African Americans in the metropolis. By illuminating the tough economics of black life in nineteenth-century New York, she adds much-needed breadth to contemporary debate over how slavery affects the conditions of urban African Americans today.—Graham Russell Gao Hodges, author of *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* "From Slavery to Poverty deserves a wide readership."