Blaming the Victim

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The classic work that refutes the lies we tell ourselves about race, poverty and the poorHere are three myths about poverty in America: - Minority children perform poorly in school because they are "culturally deprived."- African-Americans are handicapped by a family structure that is typically unstable and matriarchal. - Poor people suffer from bad health because of ignorance and lack of interest in proper health care. **Blaming the Victim** was the first book to identify these truisms as part of the system of denial that even the best-intentioned Americans have constructed around the unpalatable realities of race and class. Originally published in 1970, William Ryan's groundbreaking and exhaustively researched work challenges both liberal and conservative assumptions, serving up a devastating critique of the mindset that causes us to blame the poor for their poverty and the powerless for their powerlessness. More than twenty years later, it is even more meaningful for its diagnosis of the psychic underpinnings of racial and social injustice.

Blaming the Victim Details

Date   : Published July 12th 1976 by Vintage (first published January 1st 1971)
ISBN   : 9780394722269
Author : William Ryan
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From Reader Review Blaming the Victim for online ebook

Lauren says

Response to Moynihan

Sarah says

This book is gives me chills, it is so accurate. It was written in 1970, yet all the systems that are criticized for treating minorities unfairly (education, law) are still doing it 30 years later.

Tariq Mahmood says

This is a groundbreaking book which takes down white liberal white middle class apologists for the negro plight in the US, and still very relevant 40 years from when it was first written. The popular negative perceptions of the negro race are quite wrong but the language used by the white apologists is both subtle and convincing. Like a murderer who pleads guilty to manslaughter to avoid conviction that might lead to manslaughter, liberal America today is pleading guilty to savagery and oppression against the Negro of one hundred years ago in order to escape trial for the crimes of today.
Check out some of the other sound bites .....

He is at fault, although through no fault of his own.
Is the Negro issue primarily a problem of the larger white society or of the Negro minority?
Is he burdened or a burden?

The only issue I had with William's counter-narrative was the liberal number of studies cited in his arguments. As the book as is almost 40 years old, I found it impossible to relate to much of the arguments.

The sad bit is that even after 40 years, much of the prejudice against Negros still remain prevalent across the US, such is the power of the liberal middle class apologists.

Tanjua says

Book about poverty

Daniel says

Classic. Shows how 'Blaming the Victim', which is described by Ryan as the individualisation of blame for poverty, is an ideology that serves to take focus away from inequality of wealth and power. Written in 1971 it remains hugely pertinent today

Becky Swanson says

I had to read this for one of my education courses at Augsburg College back in the early 1980's. It was formational in my thinking about individuals, systems and institutions. I'm not sure many weeks go by where I don't think about what I learned in this book - and how many times can anyone say that about something they had to read for an undergraduate course? Watershed might be too tepid of a description for me.

Sadly, I'm not sure much has changed in our country as I see evidence of this behavior in our current public "debate" on almost every issue.

Adam Ross says

Ryan's book was originally written in 1971, and is mostly a response to the infamous Moynihan Report on the state of the black family, a report that primarily blamed black people and "black culture" for the problems of poor minorities. Ryan takes great pains to dissect every aspect of this report, many of the conclusions of which large numbers of Americans still believe. If you believe there is a lack of black fathers and this causes problems for "black culture," or that "black culture is matriarchal and therefore problematic, or any of that kind of thing, Ryan's book shows that they were lies in 1971, and recent research also shows that they are just as mythical today. These attempts to dissect "black culture" are merely attempts to blame the victim and let the real culprits, wealth redistribution upward, predatory policing, and economic and racial discrimination, keep on doing what they are doing. The book still offers valuable insight into how we might respond to uncritical claims about the problems with "black culture" today. Ryan also helpfully emphasizes that white people who blame black people for their own problems are to be treated compassionately, because they themselves are the victims of a cultural system that blinds them to the truth.

Adam says

Really interesting deconstruction of the problematic frameworks and ideologies that prevent addressing the underlying causes of systemic poverty, racism, and injustice.

Although outdated in a number of ways (which Ryan acknowledges in an intro by suggesting that the book is best kept as an incapsulation of a given er) much of his observations are still strikingly relevant. A sad truism of the unchanged scope social inequity a half century later.

Lots to think about and a powerful framework for otherwise unreflective policy makers to chew on.