Poppendieck (2008) From Hunger to Inequality

1 day late

Poppendieck, Janet


In this article chapter, Poppendieck questions the issues based around poverty and the fight to end hunger. She brings to attention the amount of food waste in America stating that there is not a shortage of food but rather an inequality within society that prevents people from acquiring an abundance of food. Dan Glickman, Agricultural Secretary at the 1997 National Summit on Food Recovery and Gleaning, states, “There is simply no excuse for hunger in the most agriculturally abundant country in the world.” (Poppendieck 2008, 573).

Trying to further alleviate hunger issues within America, federal programs, volunteers, food drives and banks are set up throughout the nation to provide yet another service and opportunity for food. In fact, 14 federal food aid programs and thousands of local and volunteer based programs exist to put an end towards hunger (Poppendieck 2008, 573). The problem with hunger draws attention to the uneven distribution of resources within our society and to the false idea that ending hunger can end poverty. Between the media constantly bringing attention to hunger, food drives set up outside your local supermarket, boy scouts knocking on your front door for a can drive, or participating in your local soup kitchen, the hunger issue is thought to be under control (Poppendieck 2008). The idea that donating or volunteering in such programs, and the ever present attention toward hunger gives comfort to everyday Americans in the idea that they are helping to save one's life or that the issue is going to be fixed. However, how is solving hunger going to stop overall poverty within our society?

Poppendieck then goes on to further discuss the uneven distribution of wealth resources food and the inequalities within our society and how hunger is just a small part of the underlying problem. On page 578 she states, “Many poor people are indeed hungry, but hunger, like homelessness and a host of other problems, is a symptom, not a cause, of poverty. And poverty, in turn, in an affluent society like our own, is fundamentally a product of inequality.” Poppendieck also discusses issues that arise with food stamps and how people can trade them for cash or other products within the black market. With this she brings attention to the idea that poor people not only need food but they also need shelter, warmth, clothing, etc. and the trade of food stamps, or buying and reselling of food may be to only cushion the other financial difficulties such as paying the heating bill or buying school clothes for one's children (Poppendieck 2008, 579-580). To finish the article she describes how the main issue is no longer hunger but rather the broad gap between society and the underlying problems with inequality and uneven distribution.

I found this article to be very intriguing with the attention the author put on paid to distribution and inequality. I found it interesting how Poppendieck described hunger, not as a symptom, but a cause of poverty. Also, when she further elaborated on how food stamps are often traded for cash, it really made it clear how food will always be used as a decision when it comes to paying bills and getting necessary items. What I mean by this is, no matter what the circumstance, food is the easiest thing to go without and possibly the most easy to acquire and will therefore always be in the questioning whether someone should pay the heating bill or get food, school clothes or food, electricity or food, Christmas presents or food, etc.