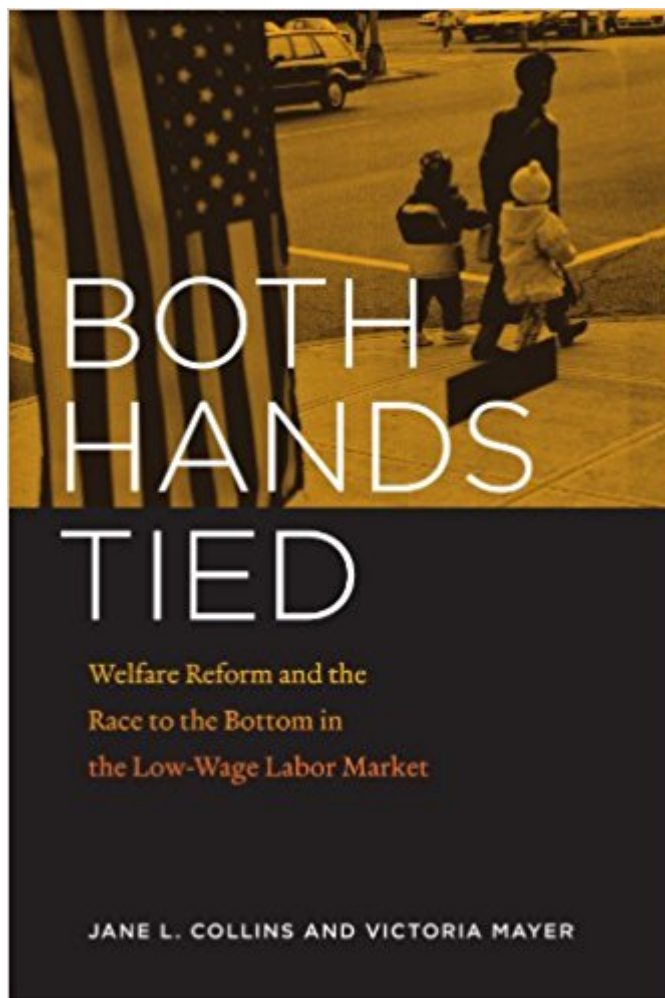


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# Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform And The Race To The Bottom In The Low-Wage Labor Market



## Synopsis

Both Hands Tied studies the working poor in the United States, focusing in particular on the relation between welfare and low-wage earnings among working mothers. Grounded in the experience of thirty-three women living in Milwaukee and Racine, Wisconsin, it tells the story of their struggle to balance child care and wage-earning in poorly paying and often state-funded jobs with inflexible schedules "and the moments when these jobs failed them and they turned to the state for additional aid. Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer here examine the situations of these women in light of the 1996 national Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and other like-minded reforms "laws that ended the entitlement to welfare for those in need and provided an incentive for them to return to work. Arguing that this reform came at a time of gendered change in the labor force and profound shifts in the responsibilities of family, firms, and the state, Both Hands Tied provides a stark but poignant portrait of how welfare reform afflicted poor, single-parent families, ultimately eroding the participants' economic rights and affecting their ability to care for themselves and their children.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The originality of Both Hands Tied lies not just in its rich case study interview materials - in poor women's voices and the trajectories of their work and home lives - but in its careful tying of those materials to shifting national, state, and local economic policies." - Micaela di Leonardo, Northwestern University"

Jane L. Collins is the Evjue Bascom Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the author of *Threads: Gender, Labor and Power in the Global Apparel Industry*, among other titles. Victoria Mayer is assistant professor of sociology at Colby College.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, is the backbone of the welfare system available to low income families in the United States. TANF replaced pre-existing welfare programs and introduced employment and training requirements that make it so most moms must leave home to attend the mandatory training programs in order to receive the benefits. To make this possible, TANF-eligible mothers are provided with subsidized childcare. *Both Hands Tied* is a metaphor the authors use to illustrate how TANF detracts from the single mother's ability to manage their responsibilities as a worker and as a caretaker. How does it do this? The authors explain that, on the one hand, recipients do not have the option to raise their children at home. On the other hand, the mandatory training programs do not lead to gainful employment with benefits or family wages (143). It doesn't allow room for the single mother to excel in either role. The book also brings a constitutional perspective on the idea of exchanging rights for a federal benefit program. TANF requires that its recipients agree participate in certain employment, training, or educational programs and accept community service placements. The authors use a constitutional basis to support that a person's ability to choose where to work is a fundamental right of citizenship, and that forcing recipients to accept employment positions at places they don't want to work, for less than minimum wage, is arguably unconstitutional (82, 139 - 141). Recipients do have a choice, but it's only one of two: take the assignment or lose your benefits. In theory, the idea behind the concept is quite basic and reasonable: that adults in the real world have limited options when we need income and employment opportunities. When you are offered a job and you have bills, you take the first thing that comes. This book suggests, though, that incorporating this philosophy into the receipt of public assistance raises both ethical and constitutional questions. It is a very thoughtful read.

The description is a bit confusing in that it makes it sound as if the book deals with the entire country. The study was done in Wisconsin, which the book itself makes quite clear. It is a compelling study that I would like to see expanded to other parts of the country as well. I recommend this book highly - and I'm not from Wisconsin.

Commentators have noted what a sham welfare 'reform' has been. BOTH HANDS TIED helps us see why that is, and appreciate the high cost of the retreat for all concerned....except the 'new' employers who have been given our support for offering less and less to their employees. It's a disgrace. When will our policies renounce hatred of the poor?

Perfect item delivered quickly for a great price.

help me a lot. great, Received as described. for a host , Love! Sharp, cuts well, and feels balanced.

I have been fortunate enough to take a course with Prof. Collins at Wisconsin and this book only deepened my respect for her and her work. This is precisely the type of research that makes sociology such an important and dynamic field--understanding the effect social policy has on the way actual people live their lives.

It waste my money to buy it. The book itself did not do anything wrong, I hate it because I was insane to sign up the course which needs this book and I get nothing from it. Sociology sucks!

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