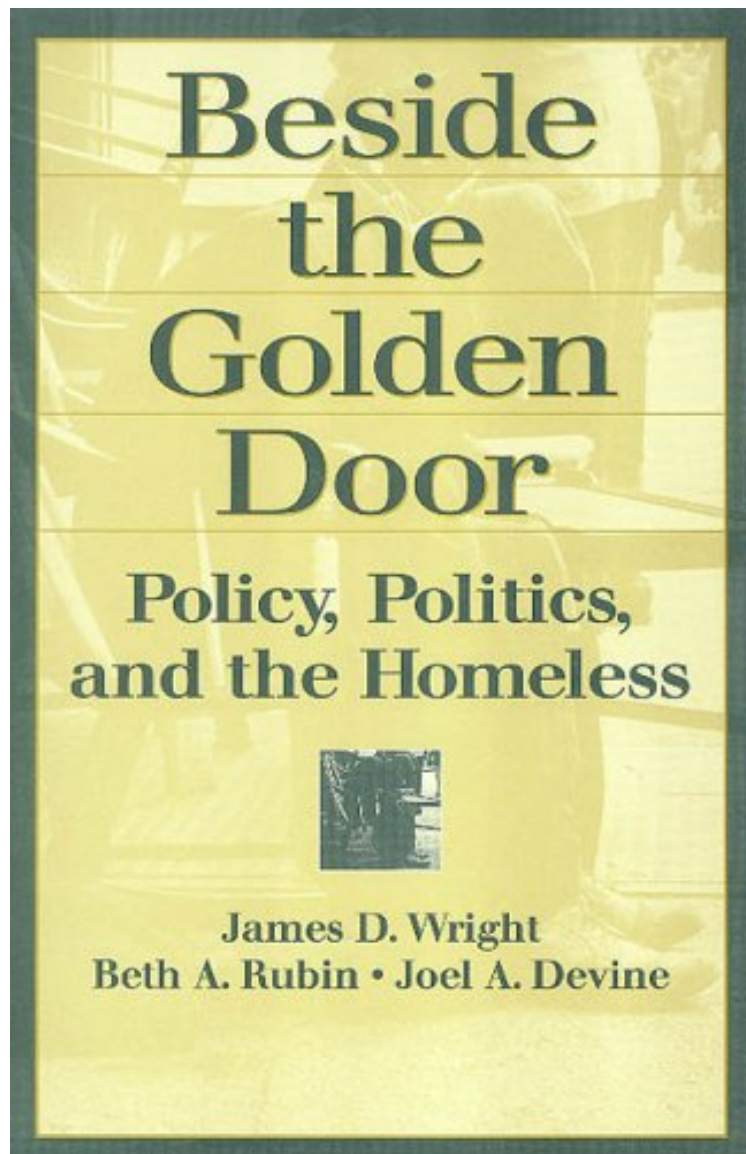


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Beside the Golden Door: Policy, Politics and the Homeless (Social Institutions and Social Change)

Beth Rubin

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Door: Policy, Politics and the Homeless (Social Institutions and Social Change):

James Wright's *Address Unknown: The Homeless in America* focused on the problem of homelessness during the mid-to-late 1980s, making an important contribution to the then-emerging public debate of a rapidly growing and increasingly visible social problem. *Beside the Golden Door* updates the story and our knowledge of homelessness through the middle 1990s, advancing the thesis that an emphasis on factors such as mental illness or substance abuse is descriptively accurate but fails as a causal account of the rise of homelessness as a social problem. The authors reject efforts to cast the issue in "either-or" terms, as social structure versus individual deficiencies, arguing that poverty and housing trends have created a situation where some people are destined to be homeless, but personal factors such as mental illness or substance abuse are critical in predicting who those people turn out to be. *Beside the Golden Door* details numerous dimensions of the homelessness issue: the rise in poverty; the decline of low-income housing; conceptual, measurement, and practical problems of counting the homeless and the Census Bureau's ill-fated 1990 effort to do so; the role of familial estrangement, mental illness, and substance abuse; and health status and behaviors. It concludes with discussions and comparisons of rural versus urban homelessness, street children in North and Latin America, and homelessness in post-industrial societies. The material in *Beside the Golden Door* will be accessible to undergraduate students and interested lay readers as well as specialists. "Both the content and style of this book make an excellent instructive read for students, practitioners, and scholars, alike."--*Social Forces* James D. Wright is Charles and Leo Favrot Professor of Human Relations, Department of Sociology, Tulane University and author of over thirteen books including *Address Unknown* and *Crime and Violence in America*. Beth A. Rubin is associate professor, Department of Sociology, Tulane University. She is the author of *Shifts in the Social Contract: Understanding Change in American Society*. Joel A. Devine is professor, Department of Sociology, Tulane University, and coauthor of *The Greatest of Evils: Urban Poverty and the American Underclass*.

Wright et al. have skillfully assembled a competent and readable introduction to the issue of homelessness in the US. Their firsthand involvement with various projects such as the New Orleans Homeless Substance Abusers Program, Health Care for the Homeless, and efforts during the 1990 census to count the homeless will also provide undergraduates with valuable examples of linkages between sociological theory and practice, and demonstrate how both are relevant to the creation of public policy [I]t represents a solid background resource General readers; upper-division undergraduates. M. A. Olshan, *Choice* [I]nformative and thought provoking The book reads well and provides a good overview of the field. Timothy P. Johnson, *Journal of the American Planning Association* In this well-written, jargon-free book, Wright, Rubin, and Devine argue for the complexity of homelessness Both the content and style of this book make an excellent instructive read for students, practitioners, and scholars alike. Each will find the book eye opening and the issues it raises troubling. James W. Trent, *Social Forces* About the Author Joel A. Devine is chair of the Department of Sociology at Tulane University. James D. Wright is an author, educator, and the Provosts Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Central Florida. He has written twenty-four books and more than 300 journal articles, book chapters, essays, reviews, and polemics.