



The Underclass

Ken Auletta

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Originally published as a three-part series in *The New Yorker*, Ken Auletta's seminal piece of reportage, *The Underclass*, has been deemed the classic study of poverty in America. Now with the boom years of the Reagan era and its concomitant recession behind us, Auletta revisits his subject, examining whether the "war on poverty" has made any progress in the fifteen years since the book's first publication. In the process, Auletta investigates the epidemic of violent crime that swept America in the late seventies and early eighties, and the reasons why welfare rose even while poverty and unemployment declined. The core of his study follows the diverse efforts of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, which targets hardened members of the underclass and helps them to reconstruct their lives and return to functional roles in mainstream society. Through the men and women he encounters, Auletta provides insight into the critical issues of "What went wrong -- and right -- with the Great Society?" As pertinent today as it was upon first publication, *The Underclass* is essential reading for anyone concerned about American society and its social ills.

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