

**Deciding to Discipline:  
Race, Choice, and Punishment at the Frontlines of Welfare Reform**

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## **Biographies**

Sanford Schram teaches social theory and policy at the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr College. He has published articles in the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science* and numerous other journals. His most recent book is *Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance, and Globalization* (Temple 2006).

Joe Soss is Cowles Professor for the Study of Public Service at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. His published articles have appeared in *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics* and other journals. He is the author of *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (Michigan 2002) and co-editor of *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Michigan 2003) and *Remaking America: Democracy and Public Policy in an Age of Inequality* (Sage 2007).

Richard Fording is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Kentucky. He is also Associate Director of the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research. His published research has appeared in the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics* and other journals. He is co-editor of *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Michigan 2003). The research analyzed in this paper comes from a larger research project: [http://www.uky.edu/~rford/Home\\_files/page0001.htm](http://www.uky.edu/~rford/Home_files/page0001.htm). The results from this project will be reported in a book tentatively titled "Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race."

Linda Houser is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research at Bryn Mawr College. Her doctoral dissertation examines factors affecting child care disruption and care-related interruptions in employment and, specifically, how such factors may be experienced and operate differentially by place.

## **Deciding to Discipline:**

### **Race, Choice, and Punishment at the Frontlines of Welfare Reform**

Welfare sanctions are financial penalties applied to individuals who fail to comply with welfare program rules. Their widespread usage reflects a broader turn toward disciplinary approaches to poverty management. In this article, we investigate how implicit racial biases and discrediting social markers interact to shape officials' decisions to impose sanctions. We present experimental evidence that case managers are more likely to recommend sanctions for Latina and black clients – but not white clients – when discrediting markers are present. These findings, based on hypothetical vignettes, are triangulated with analyses of state administrative data. Although our results for Latinas are mixed, we find consistent evidence that the probability of a sanction rises significantly when a discrediting marker (i.e., a prior sanction for noncompliance) is attached to a black rather than white welfare client. Overall, our study clarifies how racial minorities, and especially African Americans, are more likely to be punished for deviant behavior in the new world of disciplinary welfare provision.