

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to the simple premise that distributional issues of inequality and poverty must be approached with the same seriousness of purpose that is currently accorded the analysis of economic activity and output. Given this premise, an important goal is to develop a comprehensive framework for measuring poverty and inequality, ideally a framework truly the equal of our comparatively well-developed system for monitoring economic output. We have approached this formidable task by assembling an all-star cast of economists, sociologists, and philosophers and asking them to weigh in on the conceptual challenges that must be met in devising new approaches to measuring and understanding inequality and poverty.

The result, we think, is an extraordinary document that breaks new conceptual ground and provides the beginnings of a road map for measuring contemporary poverty and inequality. In some respects, it is fortunate that a comprehensive monitoring system has yet to be institutionalized, as it makes it possible to more readily build a new approach that is unencumbered by the narrow income-based formulations of the past. Although our contributors harbor no illusions about the difficulty of developing a true multidimensional monitoring system, there is much consensus that such a system should be our objective and that the conceptual and methodological obstacles, while daunting, can ultimately be overcome.

We well appreciate that some readers may approach a book on the conceptual foundations of poverty and inequality measurement with healthy skepticism. After all, haven't academics been discussing, debating, and documenting poverty and inequality endlessly, and isn't it high time to turn now to action rather than yet more debate? In the United States especially, the long-standing tendency has been to regard all academic study quite cynically,

as a ritualized prelude to action that is as functionless as throat clearing is to speech. We can surely understand the frustration and indeed share it insofar as we too would have hoped that by now a consensual system for measuring poverty and inequality would be in place. However, the unfortunate fact of the matter is that such a system is not in place, and we can at least exploit this current deficit by taking into account emerging conceptual developments and thereby fashioning a system far superior to what was earlier imaginable.

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We are likewise grateful to the editorial staff at Stanford University Press (SUP) for so patiently tolerating our long delays in delivering the book. We especially thank Patricia Katayama for her early support for this project, Judith Hibbard for unusually skilled production editing, and Carmen Borbon-Wu for her expert editorial assistance throughout. The very important task of editing the submitted materials and converting them into a coherent whole was completed most successfully by Frank Samson. Finally, we should note that Kate Wahl, our current SUP editor, seems constitutionally incapable of providing anything but sage advice, a rare and happy character trait that has served us extremely well. We are most grateful for her help.

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