



Poverty: A History

By Bronislaw Geremek

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Widely regarded as one of the classics of post-war historical writing, this book shows how central the role of poverty has been throughout the history of Europe.

- A history of poverty in Europe covering over 1000 years.
- Translated into Italian, French, German, Spanish and Japanese.
- High profile author - a leading member of solidarity and professor at the College de France.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A wise, distinguished medieval historian, veteran of Poland's own battles with poverty, here extends himself over a millennium and a continent to illuminate the constantly-changing social conditions, definitions, explanations, political measures, and charitable actions by which Europeans have generated, mitigated, and stigmatized material hardship." *Charles Tilly*

"A serious, meticulously researched history, Geremek's is a fine account of a fascinating and perennially topical subject." *Literary Review*

From the Back Cover

Widely regarded as one of the classics of post-war historical writing, this book shows how central the role of poverty has been throughout the history of Europe. It ranges across the period from the first millennium to the present day, casting a fresh and revealing perspective on the actions of individuals, groups and nations, and on the underlying nature of the greatest social changes the continent has experienced.

Professor Geremek shows how the rich and those in authority have always expressed mixed feelings about the poor, oscillating between pity and fear, compassion and revulsion. He examines why this should have been so and discusses the effects it had on private and public actions. Even in the Middle Ages, the author suggests, there was little sentimentality. Then the poor had functions, as the means of securing divine salvation through the giving of alms, and as contractors who would pray for their benefactors.

With the economic crises that afflicted Europe in the sixteenth century, mass poverty came to be seen as harmful and destabilizing, and new principles of modern poor relief were formulated to control it. But the scale of poverty was increasing: first through rural change and then through industrial change. If absolute poverty became less evident, the gap between rich and poor had become more manifest. It is here, Professor Geremek shows, that the utopian ideals of socialism were born. Unrest could be contained in state welfare schemes, or it could be manipulated into revolution and the poor once more enslaved - this time in the name of their own interests.

About the Author

Bronislaw Geremek was lecturer at the Sorbonne (1960-1965) where he also directed the Centre for Polish Civilization until 1966. In 1965 he was appointed head of the Research Unit on the History of Medieval Culture at the Polish Academy of Sciences. For the next twenty years he was closely involved in dissident circles in Poland, taking a central role in the founding of the Solidarity trade union in Gdansk in the early 1980s. Professor Geremek still plays an important role in Poland's politics while now continuing his teaching and research both in Warsaw and in Paris.

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