



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* by Annette Lareau

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REVIEWS

INEQUALITIES

* *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, by **Annette Lareau**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 331 pp. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-520-23763-3. \$21.95 paper. ISBN: 0-520-23950-4.

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Does social class make a difference in how parents raise children? Annette Lareau answers this question with a resounding “yes” in this absorbing and thought-provoking book. Lareau and her research team spent extensive amounts of time with 12 Caucasian and African American children from middle class, working class, and poor families. The team recorded detailed field notes on the “cultural logic of childrearing” displayed by parents and the other adults in the children’s lives. In addition to lengthy home observations, the team shadowed the children at school, at recreational activities, and during free play. Beyond these case-study families, the researchers also interviewed a large sample of other parents, teachers, and activity instructors. Each chapter of the book presents a family as a case-study, and the author uses the third or fourth-grade “target” child’s activities to convey the rhythms and principles that govern family life in the different social classes.

Lareau focuses on three areas where social class impacts children’s lives: the structure of daily life, the use of language, and interactions with social institutions. Within these realms, she discovers a distinct difference between the parenting styles of middle class families on the one hand and working class and poor families on the other. Middle class parents demonstrate a parenting process of “concerted cultivation,” placing priority on helping children develop their tal-

ents through organized activities such as sports and music lessons. Conversely, working class and poor parents engaged in parenting practices that fostered the “accomplishment of natural growth” in children. These parents “direct[ed] their efforts toward keeping children safe, enforcing discipline, and . . . regulating their behavior in specific areas” (p. 66). Lareau found that race influenced some aspects of parenting, for example, the way parents interpreted children’s experiences, but overall the childrearing “logics” operated within social class categories regardless of race.

Lareau argues that the different logics of parenting emerge from and foster the re-creation of social stratification through the “transmission of differential advantages” to children raised within them. Because the values and behaviors children learn from a “cultivated” childhood are more highly valued in the dominant culture and institutions, things like teamwork, time management, verbal acuity, and assertiveness, these children are advantaged in educational and occupational settings. In contrast, the conditions working class and poor children face, and the lessons learned from them, like deference to authority, loyalty to kin, appreciation of unstructured time, and independence from adult directed activity, are less valued or actually discouraged in dominant institutions. These children, therefore, develop a sense of “constraint” and are disadvantaged in the social system.

Through rich examples from each case-study family, this book makes a compelling case for the existence of different parenting values and practices between the classes. The reader is persuaded that class is associated with two distinct patterns of caring for, disciplining, and organizing time for children. The book falters a bit, however, in exploring how and why structural position leads to each pattern. I wished for Lareau to move beyond simple description of these parental tendencies and take up the challenge of building a theoretical argument showing their connection to social inequalities. For example, it is clear that middle class parents prioritize nurturing children’s abilities, but the link

* This book was a finalist for the 2003 C. Wright Mills Award.

to their own daily experience of social environments that encourage and promote individual talent is not fully spelled out. Examples from parents' lived experiences would advance the central argument that the logic of parenting is "grounded in class experiences." The omission of an explicit link between the conditions of daily life and parenting behavior creates the risk that readers may interpret these parenting logics as natural rather than adaptive and responsive to circumstances.

More contextual examples of working class and poor parents' lives would have strengthened the presentation of their behaviors as well. The author argues that there are some advantages to the "accomplishment of natural growth" approach to parenting, but I think the opportunity was missed to show how these advantages actually play out in institutions and settings. There are merits to this style of parenting that fit and make sense for the type of existence disadvantaged children have now and are likely to have as adults. For example, the priority parents place on keeping children safe is a direct response to environments where safety cannot be taken for granted and where it must be a prerequisite to "cultivating" children. Also, knowing when to defer to authority is valuable in occupations with little employee autonomy, and close kin relations are frequently crucial to evading financial crises for poor families. Working class and poor parents, like their middle class counterparts, act in ways that reflect what they know about survival and success from their daily lives. Due to the intergenerational stability of social class, the skills they transfer are therefore practical and advantageous under many circumstances children will encounter.

The limited discussion of the link between lived experience and parenting does not detract from this book's potential to forcefully convey the profound effect social class still has on children and their future life chances. Other work has consistently found similar parenting patterns by social class, but Lareau provides a more intimate, believable picture of their enactment in everyday life. This wonderfully descriptive text is accessible to a wide audience and would be an excellent choice for instructing students about class and family life. Also, the appendix contains an outstanding, frank discussion of the diffi-

culties and necessary compromises that accompany good ethnographic research. So, in addition to providing a very enjoyable starting point for reflecting on the intersections between class, race, and parenting, *Unequal Childhoods* can serve as the foundation for a productive conversation on the merits and dilemmas of in-depth qualitative research.

Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States, edited by **Nancy Foner** and **George M. Fredrickson**. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004. 390 pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-87154-259-5.

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Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson have assembled an impressive group of historians, political scientists, and sociologists to discuss the fluidity of race and ethnicity in the United States. In particular, the editors focus on immigrants from two waves, those who arrived from 1881 to 1930, and those who arrived from 1965 to 2000. By capturing the sociocultural experiences of these two waves, the editors give the reader a broader understanding of the fluidity of race and simultaneously embark on a debate over the salience of race and ethnicity in our society. The anthology is organized into five parts to provide a foundation for concrete discussions about race and ethnicity in the United States. The anthology looks at general conceptual and historical issues; the role of state and policy; panethnicity in relations to whites; the role of socioeconomic status in the development of ethno-racial identities and relations; and the nature of intergroup relations, in particular between immigrants and African Americans. While each article establishes a firm context for further discussion, they work much better when examined collectively.

Foner and Fredrickson methodologically set up the anthology in a way that captures the reader. The articles guide the reader through immigration's past and present and show how examining immigration will trans-

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