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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 29

Issue 1 March - Symposium on Native American  
Wellness

Article 11

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March 2002

**Review of *The Living Legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber.***

**Richard Altschuler (Ed.). Reviewed by Shana Cohen.**

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#### Recommended Citation

Cohen, Shana (2002) "Review of *The Living Legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber.* Richard Altschuler (Ed.). Reviewed by Shana Cohen.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 29: Iss. 1, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2793>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol29/iss1/11>

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## Book Reviews

Richard Altschuler (Ed.), *The Living Legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber*. New York: Gordian Knot Books, 2000. (2 volumes at \$39.95 each in paperback).

This two volume set of articles addresses the connection between classical and contemporary sociology. The articles are primarily drawn from sociology journals published during the past decade. Through the content and style of the articles, the collection both demonstrates and problematizes the purpose of maintaining disciplinary continuity. The benefit of addressing the history of the discipline is in establishing intellectual depth and relevance. However, if the accumulation of knowledge is treated as a necessary exercise but not an urgent necessity, sociological work perpetuates intellectual redundancy and superficiality. As Herbert Gans notes at the beginning of volume one, "The discussion and worship of Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and a handful of other classical and contemporary theorists, seems in fact enough to satisfy the discipline's need for collective memory" (8). The satisfaction of sociologists to rely upon the basic ideas of Marx, Weber, or Durkheim obscures both the richness of their research and that of less famous older sociologists.

The Living legacy confronts this neglect by revisiting the ideas of classic sociology through the lens of current methodologies of contemporary social questions. The authors generally either return to the original questions of the theorist, or they ask a question relevant to contemporary social life but refer to classical sociological theory as a mode of response. The topics of the articles thus range from re-analysis, for instance, of Durkheim's concept of social differentiation (see Young, Frank W., "A Neo-Durkheimian Theory of Small Communities"), to the application of a theory, such as that of the causes of suicide, on current research (see Cutchin, Malcolm P. and Churchill, Robert P., "Scale, Context, and Causes of Suicide In the United States"). The articles themselves likewise extend in their styles from excursions on the state of theory and research today to the explication of a particular research problem.

Although often fascinating on the level of individual articles, the collection stumbles in delivering its overall message.

In perhaps two of the most thematically significant articles, Arthur Vidich ("Social Theory and The Substantive Problems of Sociology") and Herbert Gans ("Sociological Amnesia: The Noncumulation of Normal Social Science") warn sociologists of an unpromising future and indeed their warnings haunt the reading of the other articles. Vidich and Gans advise their younger colleagues not to ignore "ongoing historical reality in the moving present" in favor of "Extensive preoccupation with problems of epistemology, hermeneutics, and methodology" (265) and not to shun accumulated disciplinary knowledge in favor of what is sometimes an intellectually embarrassing ahistoricism. Gans realizes that current problems engender more interest than those of the past and that the discipline offers more financial and professional reward for the belief in "ever-continuing methodological progress as well as ever continuing social change" (10). Yet, he emphasizes, the future of sociology is under threat, and the discipline needs a systematic effort to restore its political and intellectual relevance.

With more of a leitmotif of intellectual urgency, of pulling sociology together to confront the intellectual critique of ahistoricism, an absence of theoretical development, or methodological refinement at the expense of the exploration of new ideas, the collection would have represented a major contribution to sociological research and theory. Nicos Mouzelis, in a review of David Lockwood's *Solidarity and Schism: "The Problem of Disorder" in Durkheimian and Marxist Sociology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), emphasizes that it is concepts of social organization and conflict and methods of social research that make sociology valuable. He writes of Lockwood's book that "it [is] an excellent example of what sociological theory is or should be about . . . the construction of interrelated conceptual tools that can prepare the grounds for empirical sociological work . . ." (592). The collection offers an excellent reference for sociologists looking for opinions on concepts or new research addressing classic theoretical questions, such as on the division of labor or on the social significance of religion. However, whether a statistical analysis of the relation between death anxiety and religious practice among

the elderly (Duff, Robert W. and Hong, Lawrence, „Age Density, Religiosity and Death Anxiety in Retirement Communities”) or a re-translation of critical words from Weber’s “Class, Status, Party” (Abel, Thomas and Cockerham, William C., “Lifestyle of Lebensführung?”), the articles only provide fragmentary evidence for Mouzelis’ assertion and not a needed coherent illustration of proof.

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Pallassana, R. Balgopal (Ed.). *Social Work Practice with Immigrants and Refugees*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. \$49.50 hardcover, \$21.00 papercover.

In the past decade, we have seen a dramatic increase of immigrants and refugees settling in the United States. The latest census data reveal that 9.5% of the population (25.9 million individuals) were born in another country compared to 8.0% in 1990. Many of these persons have fled wars in the native lands, arrived here in a desperate search for work, or have come to be reunited with families members. Compared to previous migrations, the editor points out in his introductory chapter that “immigrants represent greater diversity with regard to country of origin, race and ethnicity, spoken language, and, often, different value systems.” Too, I would hasten to add, they present many of the same challenges that social workers faced in another era, working in settlement houses. Housing, jobs and job training, language classes, schooling for the children are usually the first line of required services while social support, income maintenance, health care, and on occasion, mental health assistance are needed as well. Social workers in most major cities in the country are facing the increasing problems and needs of these new-comers. This book, *Social Work Practice with Immigrants and Refugees*, examines and develops roles that social workers may play in assisting this population.

The reader is presented with an excellent introduction that contributes to an understanding of immigrants, refugees, and illegal aliens within the context of yesterday and today’s world. The notions of the “melting pot,” assimilation, the ugly tide of xenophobia, and cultural pluralism are explored under the rubric