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Review of *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success*. Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis and Melissa Osborne Groves. (Eds.). Reviewed by Larry Nackerud.

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They paint a picture of housing units where residents were held to firm rules, but also took great pride in their units and their complexes, planting flower gardens, tending one another's children, and feeling a true sense of a community bound together by the dream of a better life in America. For most of these tenants, their life in public housing was vastly superior to their dwellings prior to being approved by the CHA.

This is a compelling look at the lives of working-class Chicago residents, many of whom went on to great success, which they attribute in large part to the environment of public housing in the 1940s-60s. The book is quite moving by virtue of its use of interviews with residents. For a reader raised with the media image of big-city congregate public housing as a hotbed of drugs, gangs, and violence, these portrayals of an idyllic era are quite enlightening.

Fuerst offers an excellent and highly analytical look at the reasons for the failures and successes of Chicago public housing over the last half century; he points out current projects in other cities that still abide by careful tenant screening, skilled management, and community development activities that characterized the CHA in the past. This book strongly makes the point that poverty is an economic condition, not a statement of character or ability. We must remember this when our current public housing policy seems to be more focused on integrating the poor into other socioeconomic classes (another way of saying that we must separate them from one another due to a dysfunctional "culture") and abandoning any notion of staff and resident responsibility and accountability for their homes and their lives.

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Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne, (Eds.),
Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
\$35.00 hardcover.

Bowles, Gintis and Osborne have recruited a strong array of economic scholars to compile an impressive book focused

on family background and the part it plays, or does not play, in economic success. In addition, the book includes a heavy dose of philosophy about social justice and what part the family plays in creating, sustaining, or advancing economic advantage, to the loss and gain of other families.

The reader is informed that the book results from a number of papers presented at a workshop held at the Santa Fe Institute. At a minimum, the workshop must have been a stimulating academic event. The chapters in the book that emanate from those revised papers are not only thought provoking, they are thought perplexing. Is the book a tough read, particularly for non-economists? It most certainly is. Is the book a worthy read, for economists and non-economists, alike? It most certainly is.

The book is structured in a fairly traditional manner. The three editors, Bowles, Gintis, and Groves expertly execute the introduction. Nine chapters follow and each has a solid focus on intergenerational transmission of economic success. While a majority of the chapters, and material in the book, seem to have a domestic U.S. focus there are two chapters that specifically speak to the book's central theme, but place the discussion in China and Sweden. The chapters of the book form a coherent whole and together provide the reader with meaningful dialogue about the book's overall theme. It is, however, up to the reader to maintain an awareness of this theme, since the individual chapters sometimes become minutely focused on a particular variable, like the transmission of personality traits. Individual chapters often relate to the previous chapter and provide the reader with an easy extension of thought. A good example is the first two chapters which are appropriately titled, "The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree," and "The Apple Falls Even Closer to the Tree than We Thought."

The book has a number of strengths, not the least of which is that it is a very scholarly production. Claims made in the separate chapters are presented with clarity and are well substantiated. When results of analyses are provided, they are accompanied with information about the source of data on which the analysis is based, the format of the analysis, and both the strengths and shortcomings of the data. Hertz's chapter, titled *Rags, Riches, and Race: The Intergenerational Economic Mobility*

of *Black and White Families in the United States*, and Groves' chapter on *Personality and the Intergenerational Transmission of Economic Status* exemplify this strength. Consistent with the highest achievement of scholarly academic dialogue, the authors do not force the reader into a conclusion. They put forward thoughtful questions and conclude by letting the reader enjoy the perplexity of the questions and the pursuant discussion. No author does this better than Swift in the final chapter in the book, titled *Justice, Luck, and the Family: The Intergenerational Transmission of Economic Advantage From a Normative Perspective*. Swift asks the reader to consider the question of what is legitimate and what is morally required of parents who are concerned both for the creation of advantage for their children within a family structure and what is legitimate and morally required of parents who aspire to uphold a Rawlsian sense of social justice. It is perplexing for the reader to consider if a balance can be struck? The author even asks the reader to deliberate about whether social policy to limit or expand a family's opportunities for advantage intrudes into the sacred sphere of "family life."

The book has few weaknesses. However, readers need to be prepared, particularly non-economists, to slog on through some dense material. Not every reader will appreciate the book's reliance on the secondary analysis of large data sets, the use of multi-variate analysis, and economic modeling. Nevertheless, the overall theme of the book is highly appealing to a broad audience of social scientists and students in the behavioral and social sciences, but the book's technical knowledge requirements may limit its appeal. However, the book stimulates thought and discussion. As stated by the editors in the book's introduction, the volume is "optimistic concerning the power of social policy to enhance equality of opportunity." If asked, it appears the authors of the chapters could add the caveat "yes, but only with good data, extensive analysis, and the inclusion of a process of dialogue, academic dialogue preferred."

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