



2009

A Mother's Work: How Feminism, the Market and Policy Shape Family Life. Neil Gilbert. Reviewed by Cheryl Hyde.

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Recommended Citation

Hyde, Cheryl A. (2009) "A Mother's Work: How Feminism, the Market and Policy Shape Family Life. Neil Gilbert. Reviewed by Cheryl Hyde," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 3 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol36/iss3/20>

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Neil Gilbert, *A Mother's Work: How Feminism, the Market and Policy Shape Family Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. \$26.00 hardcover

What do women want with respect to work-family balance, and what factors are paramount in influencing this choice? These are the essential questions that guide Neil Gilbert's new book. As the subtitle suggests, Gilbert focuses largely on the ways feminist expectations, market demand and policy options frame, or in some cases constrain, the choices that women can make. Thus, he adds his voice to one of the most important political, social, economical and moral debates of our times.

The book is organized in three broad sections. First, "Responding to the Tensions of Work and Family" focuses on trends in childbearing (or motherhood in decline), labor force participation by women (the exit of women), and the division of labor in the home. Next, "Capitalism, Feminism, and the Family-Friendly State" dissects the impact of advanced capitalism, particularly materialism, the ideals of women in the workforce espoused by feminism, and the seemingly supportive policies that ultimately prove to be highly gendered. Finally, in "An Alternative to the Male Model," Gilbert presents a policy solution that allows women an alternative option to balancing the work-family juggling act, namely a home care benefit for parents to opt out of the labor force for a period of time.

Gilbert demonstrates insight and sympathy regarding the many pulls on contemporary mothers. He is particularly adept at deconstructing several myths concerning mothers' decisions to work—specifically the often unquestioned belief that it is economic necessity that drives women away from child bearing/raising and into the labor force. He argues that most families, including those in poverty, are affected by the need for purchased goods and services that 30 years ago would not have been considered essential (i.e. dishwasher, air conditioner). Raising the potency of consumerism is an important one, and should have been emphasized more as it demonstrates the insidious nature of capitalism on individual and societal "choice."

In demonstrating that economic factors alone, do not account for how or why women choose home, work, or a combination of the two, Gilbert is then able to turn his attention to social or cultural messages regarding meeting one's potential, contentment, and self-worth. He raises feminism as a primary producer of messages regarding what constitutes equality for women (fulfillment in the workforce), the nature of domestic labor (mostly drudgery), and the imagery of "having it all." Rightly so, Gilbert underscores how many of those advocating for equality through work are themselves in the better sectors of the labor market, so it is little wonder that they would see work as both desirable and the primary mechanism for gender equality. As he notes, most women, and men for that matter, labor in numbing, controlled, and monotonous environments, and for them, domestic labor could very well be seen as the more fulfilling option.

Yet at times it seemed that feminism was the "straw woman" in his account. Many of his references are not from feminist theorists or analysts, but from their critics, which means that feminist thought isn't truly allowed free reign in his discussion. While he notes that he is interested in "prevailing" feminist messages, he doesn't provide evidence to support why his version of feminism is the dominant one. This is unfortunate, because much of what Gilbert desires in terms of real options for working mothers have been considered by socialist feminists, who address the complexities that arise at the intersection of class and gender.

Gilbert settles on sequential choice as a viable option—women moving in and out of the labor force depending on personal and family needs. The key is to not penalize women in terms of economic stability and career building potential. While this isn't viable for all women, a delayed career start could work for most, provided financial considerations are met. A home care benefit is his answer.

Gilbert offers a thought-provoking analysis and policy response to an issue of critical importance. Yet one important factor is missing—the decisions of men. As long as work-life balance is termed a "women's issue," the solutions will not be sufficient. What is needed is an all out effort that reconfigures

the male work and family model, so that men, women and children all can benefit.

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Ronald P. Formisano, *For the People: American Popular Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. \$35.00 hardcover.

Academic inquiry into the nature and extent of populism has faced formidable problems over the years. The most obvious of these is the difficulty in defining populism. Although sociologists, political scientists and social theorists have attempted to analyze populism and offer a definitive account of its characteristics, there is little agreement about what populism entails. It is now generally accepted that attempts to formulate a workable definition are unlikely to succeed and that social science inquiry into this complex phenomenon should focus instead on its historical evolution and manifestations in different parts of the world.

It is in this context that Ronald Formisano has written an extremely interesting and thorough account of the history of populism in the United States from the time of the nation's founding to the mid-19th century. This may strike some as unusual since populism is generally associated with late 19th-century agrarian social movements and the campaigns of the People's Party against the gold standard. But the author shows that populist ideas and activities were at the very core of the American Revolution and that they continued to influence the country's early political development after independence. Despite their own populist proclivities, the founders had to deal with local discontent and even uprisings directed at what some regarded as their growing political elitism. Populism, he also points out, was integral to the anti-Masonic movement of the early 19th-century, the rise of evangelical fundamentalism, to Jacksonian politics and the campaign for abolition. Were the book to continue into the 20th and 21st centuries, the author would no doubt include the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger in California and the Obama campaign in his chronological catalog of American populist politics.