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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 42  
Issue 3 September

Article 12

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2015

## Review of *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*. Jessi Streib. Reviewed by Mary Ann Kanieski

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### Recommended Citation

Kanieski, Mary Ann (2015) "Review of *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*. Jessi Streib. Reviewed by Mary Ann Kanieski," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 3 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol42/iss3/12>

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political influence over its design or implementation. The increasingly important role of disability advocates is given due consideration.

*Benjamin W. Veghte, Social Security Works*

Jessi Streib, *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*. Oxford University Press (2015), 290 pages, \$24.95 (paperback).

Sometimes a researcher finds such a fruitful research question that it is surprising that no one has asked it before. Jessi Streib has found such a question in her study of what happens when people raised in different social classes marry each other. By interviewing 32 White, heterosexual couples who share white-collar occupations and high levels of education but are divided by class origin, Streib finds that class background shapes one's sensibility or "default ways of thinking about everyday events, such as how to use resources, divide labor and raise children" (p. 7). Thus, class origin, rather than current class status, is most important for shaping family life. Streib's book is not only a fascinating read about the role of class in marriage but also an important contribution to the sociology of marriage and family and the sociology of class.

Streib begins her book by discussing the importance of class differences in marriage. Streib argues that contrary to theories of cultural matching, which emphasize the importance of similarity in selecting a marriage partner, cross-class couples were actually attracted to the class-based cultural differences of their partners. Yet while class diversity might have brought cross-class couples together, it was often a source of conflict as couples clashed about decisions related to money, work, leisure, parenting, and even expression of emotions. Streib devotes subsequent chapters to examining each of these important aspects of marriage to understand the implication of class for marriage. In general, Streib finds that those from white-collar origins take a managerial approach to life by carefully planning spending decisions, career strategies, and leisure time and by controlling emotions. By contrast, those with blue-collar origins tended to have more *laissez faire* approaches to life through spontaneous approaches to spending money,

embracing unstructured leisure time both for their children and themselves and freely showing emotions. At times, however, gender interacted with class origin, as white-collar origin women sought to enroll their children in many structured activities to the dismay of their blue-collar origin husbands. By contrast, white-collar origin husbands tended to defer to the parenting decisions of their blue-collar origin wives. Another gender-class interaction was related to housework, as men of both classes were less likely to perform housework. However, women from white-collar backgrounds had higher expectations of shared housework than women from blue collar backgrounds. Consequently, they were more frustrated with their husbands than were blue-collar origin women.

The strength of Streib's work is her focus on couples who share the same race and current class status, as this allows her to capture the importance of class origin. She makes an important contribution by demonstrating the importance of habitus, as it seems that there is something about the class in which we were raised that shapes us for life. Streib's work also sheds light on the challenges of social mobility. Despite the fact that white-collar sensibilities are more likely to be rewarded in middle class institutions of work and education, those with blue-collar origins were unwilling or unable to adopt middle class sensibilities, even if their spouses were willing to teach them. In addition, Streib develops more nuanced understandings of class-linked parenting styles and gender conflicts over housework by incorporating the importance of class origin.

As Streib herself acknowledges, her sample lacks racial diversity, focuses on heterosexual couples, and is limited to those cross-class marriages that have survived. She cannot say anything about couples for whom cross-class differences were too difficult to overcome. In addition, Streib doesn't study cross-class couples who have disparate levels of education, income or occupation. If couples who shared high levels of education and similar occupations faced conflicts over their class-based sensibilities, what about those who don't share a current status?

Despite these limitations, this work is an excellent example of qualitative sociology and it is a pleasure to read. Streib is a natural story-teller who has a gift for telling the narratives of her respondents. The highest praise I can think of for a

work of empirical sociology is to recommend that non-sociologists read it. In particular, those who are currently living in a cross-class marriage should read this book. Many a cross-class couple might see themselves in conflicts over spending money, raising children, or planning vacations. *The Power of the Past* promises couples and sociologists greater understanding of how family life is shaped by the past.

*Mary Ann Kanieski, Saint Mary's College*

Clare Huntington, *Failure to Flourish: How Law Undermines Family Relationships*. Oxford University Press (2014), 352 pages, \$45.00 (hardcover).

In *Failure to Flourish: How Law Undermines Family Relationships*, legal scholar Clare Huntington argues that "negative family law" in the U.S. gets in the way of supportive family relationships. She proposes a new vision for responding to family disputes and engaging the state proactively in supporting families. While the critique is thought provoking and generally well-informed, Huntington's vision is less clearly developed and compelling.

*Failure to Flourish* includes two parts. In part one, Huntington explores the conflict between the conditions necessary for positive family relationships and the negative family law she finds in the U.S. She uses findings from research in the social, behavioral, and biological sciences to describe the importance of "strong, stable, and positive relationships" to the well-being of parents and their children, focusing on young children. She draws particular attention to how changes in family structure—particularly the frequency of divorce and children being raised in single-parent families—and the social forces contributing to those changes both reflect and contribute to harmful relations between family members. Huntington then examines how the "pervasive state" engages in regulation of the family, both direct regulation (e.g., deciding who can marry and who has the legal rights of a parent) and indirect regulation (e.g., incentives and subsidies, seemingly unrelated laws such as zoning ordinances, and the state's influence on social norms). She argues that the extent of this regulation belies what she calls the "myth of family autonomy" in