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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 41

Issue 2 June - *Austerity Versus Stimulus:  
International Challenges for Social Welfare*

Article 14

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2014

## Review of *Family Policy and the American Safety Net*. Janet Zollinger Giele. Reviewed by Mary Ann Kanieski

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### Recommended Citation

Kanieski, Mary Ann (2014) "Review of *Family Policy and the American Safety Net*. Janet Zollinger Giele. Reviewed by Mary Ann Kanieski," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 2 , Article 14. Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol41/iss2/14>

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reviews a wealth of research on the many problems in contemporary mental health systems, as well as a wide variety of promising innovations.

*Christopher G. Hudson, School of Social Work,  
Salem State University*

Janet Zollinger Giele, *Family Policy and the American Safety Net*. Sage (2013). \$26 (paperback).

In *Family Policy and the American Safety Net*, Janet Zollinger Giele brings a sociologist's perspective to understanding family policy. While most introductory books are written by and for family practitioners, Giele's book provides a sociological analysis of family policy. What makes Giele's book unique is that, as a sociologist, she applies a structural functionalist perspective to understand the social contexts within which family policies emerge. Giele views family policy as an adaptive societal response to social change in the family and society. The application of a structural functionalist perspective is both a strength and weakness of Giele's work.

Giele argues that to understand family policy, one must understand the functions of the family, which she identifies as care-giving, economic provision, residence, and the transmission of cultural identity and citizenship. Giele finds that changes in the roles of women and the structure of the economy have made it difficult for families to meet these functions, thus family policy is a necessary societal response. The book begins with chapters on the emergence of family policy and changes in family structure and gender roles. She then organizes chapters around each of the four functions by explaining the challenges of contemporary families and corresponding policies. In the last chapter, Giele provides a discussion of the process through which family policies emerge. A great strength of Giele's work is that she expands family policy beyond the usual discussions of care-giving and income support to include housing and laws related to immigration and citizenship. Giele's use of functionalist theory is quite effective as a rhetorical strategy for arguing for a stronger role for family policy in the United States.

However, Giele's work has a weakness typical of the functionalist perspective. Giele argues that social welfare states have developed similar family policies because they are responding to modernization. But by attempting an analysis at the system level, she draws attention away from human agency. Viewing family policy as a response to system-needs raises questions as to why the United States has much weaker family policies than other industrialized nations or why there has been such a strong political movement to scale back family support policies, despite high maternal employment and high unemployment and poverty rates in the United States. To be fair, in the last chapter, Giele does present a theory that outlines the various groups involved in devising family policy. But tying this process to system-needs denies the contentious politics around family policy in the United States.

Unfortunately, the most original part of Giele's work, her chapter on heritage, identity, and citizenship, is also her least successful. The chapter relies on Talcott Parsons' study of the assimilation of Catholics and Jews to understand the process by which African Americans and immigrants might be integrated into American society. Because Giele relies on a model of assimilation, she focuses on identity. With largely anecdotal evidence, she argues that in the past, African Americans internalized a stigmatized "Negro" identity as a means of adapting to and accepting their lower status in society. However, Giele overlooks years of struggle and resistance by many African Americans, even in the worst days of terror and segregation. Giele emphasizes the importance of maintaining an "immigrant orientation" to facilitate upward mobility but neglects a discussion of inequalities in opportunity. As a result, she fails to address much of the literature on racial stratification.

Overall, there is much promise in Giele's work, especially for those interested in a work that combines demographic knowledge with a structural-functionalist perspective. Giele's work is useful because it provides rhetorical tools to argue in favor of policies to support families and for its expansion of family policy to include issues such as housing and immigration. However, it is difficult to recommend the chapter on cultural identity to a broader audience because of its neglect of the larger literature on racial stratification.

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