

Families in the U. S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics

Karen V. Hansen and Anita Ilta Garey, Eds.
Temple University Press's Women in the Political Economy Series.

Reviewed by Ginny Crosthwait Lane

Families in the U. S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics, an interdisciplinary anthology edited by Karen V. Hansen and Anita Ilta Garey, is part of Temple University Press's Women in the Political Economy series. In their astute yet accessible introduction, Hansen and Garey explain that this 920-page collection investigates the relation between the family and larger social structures. We can only understand the family, they state, by examining it "within a historical moment, an economic system, a political process that shape what is possible in family life" (xv).

Hansen and Garey have chosen essays that approach the family from a feminist perspective. Given that a basic tenet of feminism is that "the personal is political," the editors' feminist project reflects the ways in which these essays discuss the connection between family (personal) and social structure (political). The introduction explains that structural inequalities and power differences in society are often reflected and reproduced in family structure. The essays also locate the family within the larger category of "kinship systems," thus broadening the definition of family and challenging the norm of the nuclear family.

Family structure, the editors note, changes over time. In fact, family structures, and the definitions of "family" are constantly in flux, since the larger social structures which shape the family are constantly changing. By examining changes in family structure over time, as well as by situating the family in a historical and cultural context, the essays in this volume explode the idea that certain family structures or definitions are "natural," "normal," or "universal."

The anthology includes essays from a variety of fields, including social policy, anthropology, economics, sociology, and history. The essays are grouped according to analytical topics: "Families and Community," "Caregiving," and "Violence, Power, and Families," to name a few. And the editors have included a helpful "Guide to Topics" that allows their readers to develop different organizational strategies.

Of special interest to A.R.M. members is the section "Mothering, Motherhood, and Mothers," in chapter three. This section begins with Nancy J. Chodorow's classic essay "Why Women Mother" and depicts mothering both as a gendered activity and as an ideology. In accordance with the editors' aim of expanding the definition of "family," it contains essays on Chicana/o, Jewish,

lesbian, black, Native American, and disabled mothers. Grouped with sections titled "Fathering," "Kin Networks," and "Marriage and Divorce," under the larger rubric of "Webs of Family Relationships," this section situates motherhood in a larger context than the dual-parent, nuclear-family norm.

It is useful to consider the appropriateness of an anthology for a feminist project such as Hansen and Garey's. If feminism is a collective movement, then the inclusion of many different voices is an apt expression of that movement. Each essay is one voice in a larger narrative and contributes to the text of feminism itself. One might also consider the sorts of biases or assumptions that shape the compilation and organization of this anthology. The "Guide to Topics," for instance, makes clear that the editors do not distinguish between gender and biological sex, despite their attempt to broaden the possibilities for family and positions within the family. Such a distinction would allow us to pose questions like "Can men mother?" or "How does a single mother fill the shoes of an absent father?" In addition, it is revealing that the "Guide to Topics" includes the category "Men and Masculinity" but not "Women and Femininity" or another female counterpart. Perhaps this is no oversight on the editors' part, but a sign of our own times and our cultural anxiety about the role of men in the family.

The editors end their introduction with an acknowledgement of a popular misconception: that feminism and family are incompatible. It is their hope, and my belief, that this anthology counters that misconception. This collection contributes to a larger feminist project which demonstrates that, in Hansen and Garey's words, "Feminists care passionately about families" (xx).

Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins.

Carolyn Dever.
New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Monika Elbert

Carolyn Dever's book is a well-researched and excellent study about the actual medical and the idealized literary versions of mothers dying in childbirth in Victorian England. Dever claims that there are parallels between the construction of family origins in mid-Victorian novels and Freud's psychoanalytic paradigm of family and gender. They depend upon the same principle: the death of the mother, the absence of the mother, or the inefficacy of the living mother. In the Victorian and Freudian narrative, there is a longing for an