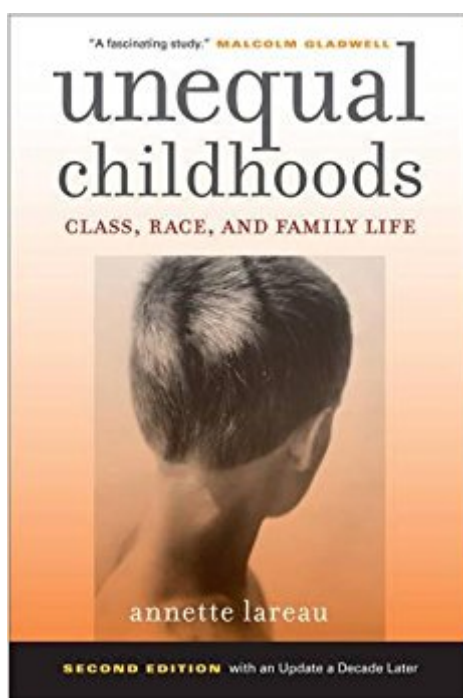


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# Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, And Family Life, 2nd Edition With An Update A Decade Later



## Synopsis

Class does make a difference in the lives and futures of American children. Drawing on in-depth observations of black and white middle-class, working-class, and poor families, *Unequal Childhoods* explores this fact, offering a picture of childhood today. Here are the frenetic families managing their children's hectic schedules of "leisure" activities; and here are families with plenty of time but little economic security. Lareau shows how middle-class parents, whether black or white, engage in a process of "concerted cultivation" designed to draw out children's talents and skills, while working-class and poor families rely on "the accomplishment of natural growth," in which a child's development unfolds spontaneously—as long as basic comfort, food, and shelter are provided. Each of these approaches to childrearing brings its own benefits and its own drawbacks. In identifying and analyzing differences between the two, Lareau demonstrates the power, and limits, of social class in shaping the lives of America's children. The first edition of *Unequal Childhoods* was an instant classic, portraying in riveting detail the unexpected ways in which social class influences parenting in white and African American families. A decade later, Annette Lareau has revisited the same families and interviewed the original subjects to examine the impact of social class in the transition to adulthood.

## Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; 2 edition (September 20, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520271424

ISBN-13: 978-0520271425

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 110 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #10,040 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Children's Studies](#) #71 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Race Relations > Discrimination & Racism](#) #217 in [Books > Textbooks > Reference](#)

## Customer Reviews

"A fascinating study." ---Malcolm Gladwell --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

¶;So where does something like practical intelligence come from?...Perhaps the best explanation we have of this process comes from the sociologist Annette Lareau, who...conducted a fascinating study of a group of third graders. You might expect that if you spent such an extended period in twelve different households, what you would gather is twelve different ideas about how to raise children...What Lareau found, however, is something much different.¶;Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*"Less than one in five Americans think 'race, gender, religion or social class are very important for getting ahead in life,' Annette Lareau tells us in her carefully researched and clearly written new book. But as she brilliantly shows, everything from looking authority figures in the eye when you shake their hands to spending long periods in a shared space and squabbling with siblings is related to social class. This is one of the most penetrating works I have read on a topic that only grows in importance as the class gap in America widens."¶;Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of *The Time Bind* and *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*"This is a great book, not only because of its powerful portrayal of class inequalities in the United States and its insightful analysis of the processes through which inequality is reproduced, but also because of its frank engagement with methodological and analytic dilemmas usually glossed over in academic texts. Hardly any other studies have the rich, intensive ethnographic focus on family of *Unequal Childhoods*." ¶;Diane Reay, *American Journal of Sociology*"Lareau does sociology and lay readers alike an important service in her engaging book, *Unequal Childhoods*, by showing us exactly what kinds of knowledge, upbringing, skills, and bureaucratic savvy are involved in this idea, and how powerfully inequality in this realm perpetuates economic inequality. Through textured and intimate observation, Lareau takes us into separate worlds of pampered but overextended, middle-class families and materially stressed, but relatively relaxed, working-class and poor families to show how inequality is passed on across generations." ¶;Katherine Newman, *Contexts*"Sociology at its best. In this major study, Lareau provides the tools to make sense of the frenzied middle-class obsession with their offspring's extracurricular activities; the similarities between black and white professionals; and the paths on which poor and working class kids are put by their circumstances. This book will help generations of students understand that organized soccer and pick-up basketball have everything to do with the inequality of life chances."¶;Michele Lamont, author of *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*"Drawing upon remarkably detailed case studies of parents and children going about their daily lives, Lareau argues that middle-class and working-class families operate with different logics of childrearing, which both reflect and contribute to the transmission of inequality. An important and provocative book."¶;Barrie Thorne, author

of Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School" With rich storytelling and insightful detail, Lareau takes us inside the family lives of poor, middle-class, and affluent Americans and reminds us that class matters. "Unequal Childhoods thoughtfully demonstrates that class differences in cultural resources, played out in the daily routines of parenting, can have a powerful impact on children's chances for climbing the class ladder and achieving the American dream. This provocative and often disturbing book will shape debates on the U.S. class system for decades to come." — Sharon Hays, author of *Flat Broke with Children* "Drawing on intimate knowledge of kids and families studied at school and at home, Lareau examines the social changes that have turned childhood into an extended production process for many middle-class American families. Her depiction of this new world of childhood--and her comparison of the middle-class ideal of systematic cultivation to the more naturalistic approach to child development to which many working-class parents still adhere--maps a critically important dimension of American family life and raises challenging questions for parents and policy makers." — Paul DiMaggio, Professor of Sociology, Princeton University "Annette Lareau has written another classic. Her deep insights about the social stratification of family life and childrearing have profound implications for understanding inequality -- and for understanding the daily struggles of everyone attempting to raise children in America. Lareau's findings have great force because they are thoroughly grounded in compelling ethnographic evidence." — Adam Gamoran, Professor of Sociology and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison "With the poignant details of daily life assembled in a rigorous comparative design, Annette Lareau has produced a highly ambitious ethnographic study that reveals how social class makes a difference in children's lives. *Unequal Childhoods* will be read alongside Sewell and Hauser, Melvin Kohn, and Bourdieu. It is an important step forward in the study of social stratification and family life, and a valuable exemplar for comparative ethnographic work." — Mitchell Duneier, author of *Sidewalk and Slim's Table*

I've assigned Lareau's original work for several years in a lower-level Race, Class and Gender Sociology course taught for elementary education majors. This is THE book students remember from the course and the one that provides them with the perspective they need to deal with educational issues connected to social class. I highly recommend this second edition as it addresses the ultimate question of what happened to the children and how their life chances varied according to social standing. Excellent read for anyone interested in parental involvement, student achievement, and the mechanisms which we use to navigate the social institution of education with varying degrees of success.

Annette Lareau updates her 2006 book with extra chapters that follow her subjects into adulthood and describe methodological strengths and issues. The core of the book is the same, and retains its finding. The last few chapters explore late teens for the students. The findings that concerted cultivation exists in the middle class continue through the college application process, with middle class teens receiving help from family and working class teens trying to get help from schools and other institutions. Chapter 14 is a rare and very honest glimpse into how research subjects feel about the research being done about them. Long story short: most do not like it. Dr. Lareau includes quotes and letters describing this, which should serve as a point-to think for student ethnographers. Chapter 15 mathematically models class and time use data from the PSID. Often second edition of books are different from the first edition in very minor ways. That is not true of this edition. I highly recommend it.

Required reading for a sociology class on family and thoroughly enjoyed reading the stories of the people involved in Lareau's research. Concepts on various forms of child rearing are not new and has led to heated debates as to what constitutes the preferred form. Lareau's research represents contrasting aspects of families, children and expectations across a backdrop of socioeconomic and environmental influences and their effect on the development of children. Add this book to my library.

Relational class issues brought to the forefront. Book seems to repeat itself as it tries to develop a narrative around an ethnographic study. Really makes you reconsider what childhood is and how it is valued. Does not discuss the development of how parenting ideals have changed, just how they are in the present. Will need to be supplemented with statistics about parenthood. Seems to downplay race in a colorblind racist sort of way.

Looking into private family/parenting styles differentiated by class and race, the book reads almost like a series of mini reality TV shows airing on the Discovery or Learning channels with the added advantage of having an academic narrating and guiding you through it all. One advantage of Lareau's lucid style, is the ease with which the book can be read (dare I say enjoyed) by most readers. This book would be useful for parents wishing to compare the impact of different parental approaches or for teachers trying to assess parenting styles/philosophies based on child behavior. Another advantage is that it could also help readers understand adults and how their

attitudes, management or decision making styles in the work place are affected by their race, class and upbringing. For instance, anyone trying to understand or perhaps even struggling to work with or manage "Generation Y" (Generation me) individuals, this is an outstanding must-read primer to other books such as "Not Everyone Gets a Trophy". Pages 165-181 and the top of page 245 relating to Stacey were so accurate that "Stacey" became office code for individuals with a high sense of entitlement coupled with a low to non-existent work ethic or performance level. For instance, 'concerted cultivation' coupled with the presumption that a higher education automatically equates to higher salary sometimes leads to: "I've been told education leads to affluence; I got the education so give me the money, I deserve it!"

This book was part of the reading material for my 400-level Purdue University Sociology course. It has taught me A LOT about the various aspects of family and child-life in the families of different SES in the US. Now, I have passed the book on to my mum as suggested reading, and she too has claimed to have learned a lot about the lives of American families, as well as opening her eyes to other aspects of child-rearing. Once again, this is definitely a book worth the read.

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