

Reviews

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Rosalyn Benjamin Darling and Peter J. Stein (eds), *Journeys in Sociology: From First Encounters to Fulfilling Requirements*, American Sociological Association and Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2017, 238 pp., pbk US \$31.99, ISBN 13: 9781439914755.

We are very fortunate in my university department to have a brilliant Emeritus Professor of Sociology who is still writing and publishing influential and important books as he heads towards 80. But not until I read this fascinating and moving book did I ever stop to really wonder what it must be like to be so active in the scholarly world long into official retirement. Comprising 18 essays by retired sociologists, the oldest born in 1924, the idea for this book was prompted by the personal experience of retirement on the part of one of the co-editors of this book (Rosalyn Benjamin Darling) which led to the establishment of a retirement network within the American Sociological Association and thence to a call for papers through that network that led to the individual chapters in the book. The editors hoped that such a book would be of personal and professional interest to sociologists at different stages of their careers, as well as those approaching retirement; in terms of subject matter the proposed audiences included sociologists of ageing, the lifecourse and occupations, respectively. Certainly for students of ageing and the lifecourse it is a fascinating, inspiring and often moving collection of essays which grants us important insights into the post-retirement world. One such is the way a career is experienced in its various stages, intersecting with aspects of personal biography and offering an interesting and unusual take on the life review. Secondly, it offers a challenge to the dominant framework of successful ageing by demonstrating vividly the co-existence of ill-health and productivity, physical debility and personal development, ageing and innovation which may rather indicate a vision of ageing *well*, something more akin to eudaimonia, or personal flourishing and which eludes the metrics beloved by health professionals.

Each essay offers a ‘journey’ through the lives and careers of the contributors who weave theoretical insight with personal experience in a compelling pattern that highlights the influence of family, class, race and gender both on their particular sociological interests and their career trajectories. For example, Glen H. Elder Jr, who is one contributor with whom sociologists of ageing and the lifecourse will be particularly familiar, describes in his chapter how his mother introduced him to life histories, ‘about people over time’ which was a big contrast to the timelessness inherent in the dominant survey method at the time. Robert Perrucci captures the vertiginous quality of his own social mobility from a poor immigrant family

whose father had driven a cab for the Yellow Cab Company in Washington DC with the following striking image: ‘When I rode in the cab with my father, he liked to work the cab stand at the Mayflower Hotel. Ironically, many years later, I gave my acceptance address as the incoming president of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) at the same Mayflower Hotel’ (p. 30).

Most of the contributors concur in describing their careers as the result of contingency and serendipity, which contrasts with the more structured plan that usually accompanies entry into vocational professions like law and medicine. The very act of putting these stories into circulation, however, maps out the many ways such a career might be visualised earlier in life and I will certainly be suggesting to my graduate students that they read these chapters for inspiration. Gender stands out as perhaps the biggest divide in that the paths of the men tend to be far smoother than those of the women, and I was chastened to read about the many obstacles women sociologists encountered whilst trying to combine professional goals with ‘traditional’ female roles. Many universities were both blatantly sexist and unsupportive of the responsibilities of child care. Elinor E. Lurie, for example, describes a culture that required she conceal, or at least not mention, the very fact of being a parent when she was at work.

What is particularly inspirational in these essays, however, is the way that each academic continues to blossom in their post-retirement phase, some producing more than ever before, whether building on earlier research themes they had lacked the time to develop during their employment years, or sometimes forging new research paths altogether; all stressed the freedom that is a huge benefit of post-retirement life. Having said that, structures to support such retirees is starkly lacking in many cases: some lack offices, and there is a notable failure of university departments to include them in communication and department life, and a concomitant failure to capitalise on their valuable insights, for example in teaching, whilst funding bodies may be reluctant to give them funds. It is to be hoped that this collection will help to inspire the sort of institutional changes that recognise and support such post-retirement contributions of scholars for whom ‘passing it on’ has become now, more than ever, a treasured aim.

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Lawrence R. Samuel, *Aging in America: A Cultural History*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2017, 196 pp., pbk £28.99, ISBN 13: 9780812248838.

This book endeavours to deepen understanding of ageing in the United States of America (USA) from a cultural history standpoint. In the Introduction section, Samuel explains why perceptions of Americans