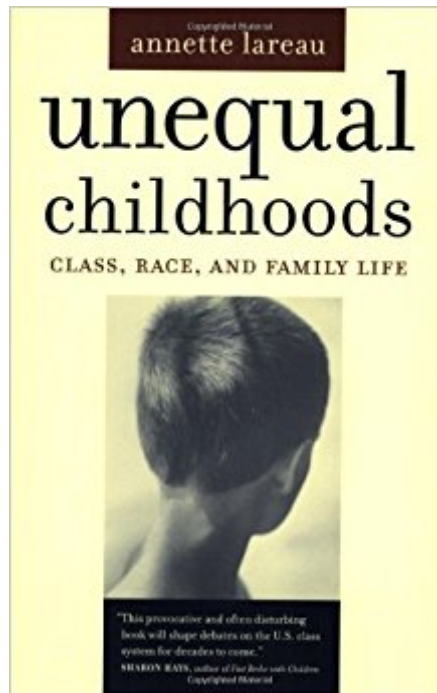




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# Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, And Family Life



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

*Unequal Childhoods* is a worthy sequel to Annette Lareau's immensely popular ethnography *Home Advantage*. In *Unequal Childhoods* Lareau addresses many of the same issues, especially the

structure and functioning of the affluent middle class family with high aspirations for its children, and the much less affluent working class family that wishes its children well, but has no strict regimen as to how academic and material success should be achieved. To overstate the case, the affluent parents with high aspirations for their children subject them to a rigorous, structured, and very busy schedule of study time and extra-curricular activities. They are preparing their children for admission to a selective college or university, and they expect them to succeed there. Furthermore, they expect their children, once they are adults, to carry this demanding socialization process with them, governing their lives, and, in due course, the lives of their children. By sharp contrast, the less affluent families remind me very much of my own upbringing in the '50's and '60's.

Out-of-school-time, especially during the summer months, was my own. Baseball, BB guns, long bicycle rides to nowhere in particular, B-grade movies, sneaking cigarettes, and a lot of TV. Parental discipline and supervision were limited almost entirely to seeing that we stayed out of trouble and avoided injury. Childhood was devoted, in traditional form, to being a child. Working class parents valued education, but they gave it little thought. My expected destination after high school was an in-town state college. Two years before it had been a state teachers college, still referred to by many as "the normal school." Tuition was \$150 a month, which I paid for by earnings from a part-time job.

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!"; regardless of actual output, performance or competence, which then leads to "This is a mundane task and beneath me, I didn't get a Masters degree for this. This is boring. I also need constant direction and feedback on my performance. I was top of my class and my parents told me I was special...

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