



American Families Past and Present: Social Perspectives on Transformations

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American families today are noted for their wide variety of guises. Among the mix are single-parent families, childless-by-choice marriages, nuclear families, multigenerational families, and same-sex couples. Although this diversity has come under the scrutiny of everyone from politicians to the media, family diversity is not a recent development of contemporary culture. While nuclear families with a mother, a father, and children are the presumed historical norm, people have always resided in an assortment of family formations.

Bringing together essays by twenty-one distinguished scholars who have helped shape the field of family sociology in the last decade, this interdisciplinary anthology examines variation within family experience, especially as it has evolved across racial, ethnic, social, gender, and generational lines. The essays place historical and institutional frameworks at the center of the discussion.

The first part of the book focuses on the development of socially constructed dominant ideologies, demographic shifts in family composition, and historical perspectives on family rituals and mythmaking. Essays in the second part provide a historical perspective on the interdependence between the family as a social institution and other institutions. Selections highlight changes in women's roles, the impact of economic, racial, and social inequalities on household labor and child care, the effects of war and military service, and the implications of the political climate for family welfare policy.

In-depth chapter introductions along with critical questions to spark class discussion make this an ideal text for courses focusing on family composition, trends, and controversies in the United States.

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