



Volume 43
Issue 1 *March*

Article 14

2016

Review of *The Hero's Fight*. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. Reviewed by Katrina Bell McDonald

Katrina Bell McDonald
Johns Hopkins, mcdon@jhu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

McDonald, Katrina Bell (2016) "Review of *The Hero's Fight*. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. Reviewed by Katrina Bell McDonald," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol43/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



present moment about living and working in a part of the U.S. where numerous refugee populations reside. I agree. It is the case that, for the first time since the Southeast Asian refugee crisis of the late-1970s and 1980s, migrants are risking their lives in significant numbers in search of safety and stability. Refugees produced today as casualties of wars on terrorism and drugs:

are immediately cast as threats, not victims. Today's refugees are construed as an entirely unique racial problem that reflects the public's anxieties over national security and is managed by practices such as racial profiling, surveillance, and detention, rather than humanitarian resettlement. (p. 176)

What Tang has given us with this book is a clear warning that refugee resettlement, if practiced as usual, will not offer the new refugees what they so desperately seek and what indeed they ought to have: safe resettlement.

*Robert Farrant, History Department,
University of Massachusetts Lowell*

Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, *The Hero's Fight*. Princeton University Press (2015), 422 pages, \$21.00 (hardcover).

I come to this review of *The Hero's Fight* from a unique vantage point. Soon after I met Fernandez-Kelly in 1994 when I joined the Johns Hopkins faculty (where she still practiced), we became friends, and that meant learning to keep up with this very active, vivacious woman who spent a good deal of her time traveling around the city in a cab driven by D. B. Wilson (Chapter 1). I observed her first-hand interacting with the urban black families in a way I had never seen—maintaining a professional and scholarly posture, while all the while displaying close-up compassion in a myriad of ways. Now I fully understand the excellence of her ethnographic method: rich field notes on each and every encounter in the field that has ultimately resulted beautifully here in "ethnographic narratives while honoring theoretical analysis" (p. 13). The final product is also an accurate description of the world of West

Baltimore that I, too, witnessed first-hand.

Why, she asks, does deep poverty among urban blacks persist in a nation of such wealth as this? Fernandez-Kelly strongly believes that the answer lies in a clear understanding of "the relationship between the American state and the urban poor" (p. 1). And therein lies the strength of this text: its explanation of a broad range of macro structures and processes that hide the truth of what is disposing of people on the ground. Further, the "great ideological divide" highlights the limitations of public policy that has been mired in backward thinking about causes and effects. While the nation overall has progressed tremendously over the centuries, even through rough recessions, the "persistence of impoverishment over time is a blotch in the otherwise luminous trajectory of the nation," due to an insistence among many that the poor are fundamentally different from the rest of the good folks. Such a condemnation ignores the structural problems that have plagued the urban poor and would have plagued any other group under the same conditions in places like Baltimore.

Fernandez-Kelly does a masterful job of implicating a number of societal missteps in the dilemma: the decline of manufacturing; the undermining West Baltimoreans in race, gender, and class specifics; the trajectory of urban development; the close scrutiny of poor people by government agencies—i.e., the work of "distorted engagement" and "liminal institutions" (Chapter 6); and the crippling of the poor by specific government agencies, such as child protection agencies (Chapter 8). Her argument is made all the more potent by her craftsmanship in interweaving the personal stories of those poor families she has come to know in West Baltimore and who exemplify what is wrong with our system.

Fernandez-Kelly also spends careful time theorizing at a level that helps us to understand how and why these individuals have suffered so throughout the course of their lives. Among other things, she ponders: what role does social and cultural capital truly have in why some individuals have managed to rise above the fray while others have been crushed? She suggests that while things like opening up opportunities for young urban children to receive structured mentoring is vitally important, so too is relieving the gross racial

segregation and government intrusiveness that cripples such urban spaces. Further, she looks deeply into how the poor evoke religious faith as a means of projecting their humanness and their sense of honor and respect for themselves and others.

Lastly, in a chapter that I personally had some difficulty integrating into the whole, Fernandez-Kelly offers a somewhat unique parallel concern for urban blacks and their drive for entrepreneurship. She offers that entrepreneurship could be a fruitful way to lift many urban blacks, particularly men, out of their poor circumstances, if only they were given a chance to adequately compete for the important resources that are necessary to start and advance a business endeavor. These men, as well as their neighborhoods, are bound to thrive with financial support, wealth circulated locally, and a strong community for everyone's benefit.

Every teacher of race, gender, or class (the poor) will find this book extremely instructional, and their students will very likely renew their concerns for or finally find good reasons to care for their black urban poor neighbors.

*Katrina Bell McDonald, Department of Sociology,
The Johns Hopkins University*

Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, *Feeling Lonesome: The Philosophy and Psychology of Loneliness*. Praeger (2015), 203 pages, \$60 (hardcover).

Mijuskovic's book adds an existential philosophical perspective to theory and research on loneliness. Loneliness has been studied from many other perspectives including the social psychological, neurobiological, epidemiological, and psychoanalytic (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009; Spira, Richards, & Lynch, 2013; Weiss, 1973; Wilson & Moulton, 2010). Certainly, the findings of sociologists, social psychologists, neurobiologists, epidemiologists and psychoanalysts provide useful insights for social welfare policy makers and field workers because they demonstrate the impact of loneliness on mortality and morbidity, emotional well-being, self perceptions and the formation of social bonds. For example, psychoanalytically-oriented attachment theorists such as John Bowlby can inform child welfare policies by pointing to the lack of a secure home