

Daniel Fridman

Freedom from Work: Embracing Financial Self-Help in the United States and Argentina

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Reviewed by: Caroline W Lee, *Lafayette College, USA.*

Uber drivers, LuLaRoe moms, telemarketers, and truckers of the world, unite! There is a bumper crop of new studies in economic and cultural sociology documenting the endless transformations of neoliberal subjects, from always-connected tech workers to constantly-surveilled truckers and mall sales staff to ever-reinventing independent contractors and laid-off jobhunters. How do workers and would-be workers understand their agency within the larger system in today's lean and precarious versions of capitalism? To what resources do they turn to make sense of their fates – and potential futures – when the creativity and flexibility today's market supposedly offers fails to afford them and their families a living? As often as not, manifestos for the self-managing come in the form of self-help.

That is why Daniel Fridman's *Freedom from Work* is one of the best of these new ethnographies, coming as it does from the standpoint not of a particular occupation or workplace but a globally popular self-help series, the *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* books by Robert Kiyosaki, and an accompanying game called Cashflow, intended to allow Kiyosaki acolytes to practice their way to wealth. Cashflow clubs in the USA and Argentina become sites for Fridman to compare how everyday people in countries with very different economies use financial advice tools both to connect with the right people and to fix their faulty relationships with money and risk. Renouncing the comforts of school, old friends, and family may also be required. Get rich quick this is not.

The elaborate tools and belief systems of his subjects allow Fridman to combine Foucaultian theories of governmentality and technologies of the self with approaches to performativity and financialization from economic sociology – standard resources for scholars in understanding neoliberal cultures – but the study has the added benefit of a comparative design that allows the reader to see practical effects and real limitations of financial self-help in both places. Kiyosaki's bestselling series is an obvious choice because of its global dominance in the field, but its discourse is rooted in situationally specific rhetorics of dependence borrowed from Ayn Rand and Alcoholics Anonymous. In addition, its advice is focused on taking advantage of 'passive' investment opportunities in the USA, and requires quite a bit of interpretation for Argentine enthusiasts. *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* does not just offer technical instructions but also its own social theory of contemporary capitalism and its failings, most notably a critique of corporate rhetorics of fulfilment, community, and creativity within the workplace itself. For Kiyosaki's 'street smart' devotees, freedom means liberation from the labour market entirely; the point of wealth is not a certain amount of money but autonomy, a soul-changing state of abundance.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the book focus on the subjectivities of financial self-help readers and Chapter 3 on the process of Cashflow play. Chapter 4 provides a fascinating look at the 'collective dynamics' of self-interest in self-help, and how this plays out with respect

to controversial subjects like multi-level marketing schemes and financial gurus profiting from the self-help market. For students of glocalization, Chapter 5 explores how groups in Argentina make sense of the Kiyosaki phenomenon, with its emphasis on 401(k)s, Warren Buffett, and dreams of Montana fishing cabins. The Conclusion extends the argument by investigating the rage for 'financial inclusion' policies and entrepreneurship and literacy programs as remedies for global inequality. The writing is concise and accessible enough for use with undergraduate classes on economic and cultural sociology, with plenty of explicit connections to the Protestant Ethic, recovery movements, and libertarianism, among other subjects familiar to students; for scholars of neoliberalism, there will be much that reinforces the existing consensus, but also new insights on contemporary political culture, including more than a few references to Donald Trump's self-help empire, including a 2006 book called *Why We Want You to Be Rich*, co-authored by Kiyosaki and Trump (pp. 130–131).

Nicole Biggart's 1983 work on the central importance of self-management in American success books of the 20th century seems remarkably prescient in describing the unique rationality of our maddeningly unsettled times. Fridman argues that today's most successful financial self-help works because it links techniques of calculative mastery to gooey human potential psychology and just the right amount of screw-the-system social critique. The newly wise see security and stability not as the long-sought promises of the social contract, but a trap for suckers and conformists. The peculiar facts that corporate and state actors can now transparently profit from public monies without censure, that today's antiheroes boast of their generosity and self-interest in the same breath, are all expected political consequences of the rich narrative Fridman tells.

References

Biggart N (1983) Rationality, meaning, and self-management: Success manuals, 1950–1980. *Social Problems* 30(3): 298–311.

Michèle Lamont, Graziella Moraes Silva, Jessica S. Welburn, Joshua Guetzkow, Nissim Mizrahi, Hanna Herzog and Elisa Reis

Getting Respect: Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil & Israel

Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2016, £32.95 hbk (ISBN: 9780691167077), 400 pp.

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Getting Respect offers a rich and deeply textured portrait of how marginalized ethnoracial groups experience and respond to discrimination and stigmatization in the United States, Brazil, and Israel. Drawing on over 400 in-depth interviews with African Americans, Black Brazilians, Ethiopian Israelis, Arab Palestinians, and Mizrahim, the authors (Michèle Lamont, Graziella Moraes Silva, Jessica S. Welburn, Joshua Guetzkow, Nissim Mizrahi, Hanna Herzog and Elisa Reis) make visible the various textures and tones of ethnoracial exclusion in various national contexts. While discrimination and stigma are a fact of life for all these groups, their salience, and individuals' responses