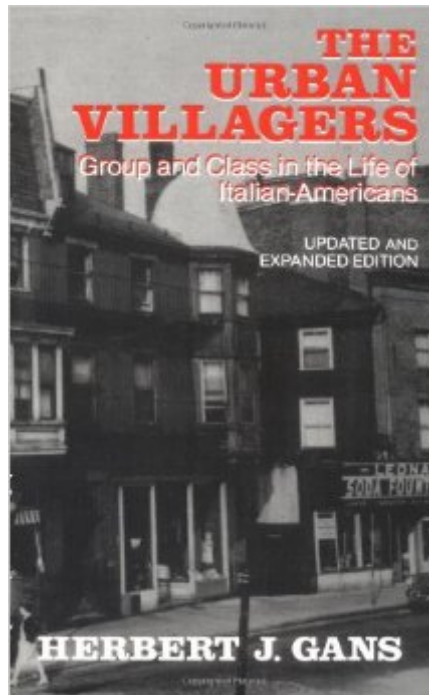


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Urban Villagers: Group And Class In The Life Of Italian-Americans



Synopsis

A sociological study of the native-born Americans of Italian parentage who lived in Boston's West End during the fifties.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

During the early 1970's, I lived Philadelphia. Working class communities in South Philadelphia were ethnically and religiously homogeneous, quite parochial places where "working class" had not yet become coterminous with "working poor." It was commonplace for close relatives to occupy row houses next to each other. I now live in West Virginia, where rural neighborhoods are commonplace. Frequently, such neighborhoods are organized around a collection of extended families. Distances among the homes which make up the neighborhood may be substantial, thereby making informal dropping-in less convenient than in a town or city. Nevertheless, even though contacts among like-minded West Virginians may be comparatively infrequent, when they occur they are based on the accurate presumption that participants have lived similar lives, think alike, see the world in the same way, and can deftly and unself-consciously take the role of the other. Herbert Gans' classic *The Urban Villagers* provides another look at the concept neighborhood. Much as in South Philadelphia, the Urban Villagers were close-knit groups of Italian families who lived working class lives. In the case of the Urban Villagers, however, the large, unattractive buildings they occupied made it easy for an outsider to mistake a community for an impoverished ghetto. One consequence of this is that the Urban Village no longer exists: relegated by city and federal officials to the status

of a slum, it fell victim to urban renewal, and was bulldozed to make room for upscale apartment buildings. The Urban Villagers is a fascinating book that shows how ethnography should be done. It also enables us to see that neighborhoods, from time to time and place to place, take many forms. Surely, a resident of Boston or Philadelphia driving down Route 10 in West Virginia would not recognize a neighborhood if he or she saw one. Proponents of urban renewal made the same mistake in Boston.

I bought this recently, again, to give someone and was shocked to find it has no pictures. I remember pictures! I must have read an article in the same time frame. (I live in Boston and the subject of the West End comes up frequently.) His tracing the current culture he saw while researching in Sicily effected how I looked at the world tremendously. I was young. Don't know what you're supposed to do with such info. Put it in your head to percolate and effect your world view, I guess.

I was pleased with the amount of information found in this informative book. I already knew about the Italian aspect of the Boston area, but I was surprised to read the extensive research in the "Urban" text. This is a great piece of work for all sociology courses. It is definitely a classic in the field of social development.

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