

task or explore the changing values of the period, Dodgson defends Kesey against accusations of racism and sexism (the former included performances in blackface), offering weakly, “Kesey was never a racist at heart” (53).

Despite these missteps, the book is clearly a labor of love, and the energy that Dodgson brings to the project is admirable. The book likely suffers from Faye Kesey and “prankster” Ken Babb’s decisions to deny Dodgson access to the unpublished manuscripts that he used for his original doctoral dissertation. In the end, *It’s All a Kind of Magic* should still be a fun read for Kesey fans, but it misses an opportunity to make a more substantial intervention.

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LIVING FAITH: Everyday Religion and Mothers in Poverty. By Susan Crawford Sullivan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011.

In late 2012, *The New York Times* followed the family of Dasani, one of New York City’s increasing number of homeless children. Mayor Michael Bloomberg explained entrenched poverty like Dasani’s to *Politiker*, “This kid was dealt a bad hand. I don’t know quite why. That’s just the way God works. Sometimes some of us are lucky and some of us are not.”

Bloomberg’s comments angered those who blame rising inequality, welfare reform that moved many mothers into severe poverty, limited jobs, and structural racism—but not the Divine—for poverty. But, according to Susan Crawford Sullivan’s *Living Faith: Everyday Religion and Mothers in Poverty*, Bloomberg might have accurately captured poor mothers’ own explanations for their poverty: God, according to many of the forty-five Boston women Sullivan interviewed, is working in their poverty, though they would disagree with Bloomberg’s implication that their suffering is inexplicable. Sullivan explores the topic with compassion and concision in her book, which has won prizes from the American Sociological Association and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

Despite the moral language aimed at poor women, few of Sullivan’s respondents attended church, where many judged themselves to be unfit to attend or feared, rightly, as some of the pastors Sullivan interviewed noted, others’ judgment (181). Yet 80% of them identified religion as personally important, and they engaged religion in their personal lives, through prayer, reading, and other practices. Importantly, they believed that God was actively intervening in their lives for their long-term benefit, even if God’s ways were mysterious or even painful. Through their trials, they believed that God was present and that they were experiencing hardships for a purpose; indeed, writes Sullivan, they are living in “an overall plan orchestrated by God with the women’s greater well-being in mind” (145). On a more practical level, their spiritual lives allowed them to live with hope and renewed strength for dealing with chaotic lives, increasing resilience and agency. Further, they saw themselves as acting on opportunities God provided. Sullivan makes a compelling case that, at least for some women, personal religiosity makes meaning out of a demeaning experience while also motivating action.

This sense of partnering with God, though, invites women to believe that “they have not tried hard enough and thus have disappointed God” or, more commonly, blame other welfare recipients for using welfare services (77). Such shaming reveals their acceptance of the (non-Biblical) claim that “God helps those who help themselves.” Indeed, nearly all accept the dominant narrative that those in poverty are at fault for their poverty, for poor people “particularly embrace the notion that hard work by self-reliant individuals yields economic success” (72). As Sullivan suggests, “[P]oor mothers’ cultural religious repertoire most often reflects the adoption of an American ideal of self-sufficiency” (53). At the same time that they are surrounded by messages that invalidate their worth as citizens, mothers, and believers, the respondents recognized the need for the government, not churches, to alleviate poverty. In this way, though these women argued that poverty is often the result of personal moral failings, they also understood poverty as a social problem to be addressed at a larger level.

Sullivan’s work reminds scholars of the work needed on the lived religions of the poor, women, and people of color. Sullivan’s work will surely be frequently invoked by scholars working at these intersections.

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COMIC BOOK CRIME: Truth, Justice, and the American Way. By Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl. New York: New York University Press. 2013.

The most important factor in writing a survey of any subject is choosing which works to consider in your survey. This step (in my other life as a statistician, we’d call it drawing the sample) often has more influence on the conclusions of the survey than any analysis performed by the author, because only those works judged worthy of consideration can influence the survey’s outcome. And, as we say in statistics, biased samples are likely to yield biased results.

One way to deal with this dilemma is exemplified by the approach taken in *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*, written by Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl. Phillips and Strobl analyzed a purposive sample of approximately 200 comic books published from 2001 to 2010 in the U.S., chosen with reference to three measures of value: sales, critical acclaim, and importance as identified by members of the comic book community (much more detail about their method is supplied in *Comic Book Crime*).

*Comic Book Crime* is one of those rare books that is both academically respectable and accessible to the general reader. After a brief history of crime and justice in American comic books, Phillips and Strobl shift their focus to how crime has been portrayed in American comics following 9/11. Individual chapters are devoted to specific topics, including terrorism and xenophobia (with ample treatment of the portrayal of Arabs in comics), apocalyptic narratives, villains, heroes, gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, types of justice, and the recurring popularity of statements of retributive sentiment, although retribution is seldom carried out, in either the comics or real life.

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