



All Our Kin

Carol B. Stack

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All Our Kin is the chronicle of a young white woman's sojourn into The Flats, an African-American ghetto community, to study the support system family and friends form when coping with poverty. Eschewing the traditional method of entry into the community used by anthropologists -- through authority figures and community leaders -- she approached the families herself by way of an acquaintance from school, becoming one of the first sociologists to explore the black kinship network from the inside. The result was a landmark study that debunked the misconception that poor families were unstable and disorganized. On the contrary, her study showed that families in The Flats adapted to their poverty conditions by forming large, resilient, lifelong support networks based on friendship and family that were very powerful, highly structured and surprisingly complex. Universally considered the best analysis of family and kinship in a ghetto black community ever published, All Our Kin is also an indictment of a social system that reinforces welfare dependency and chronic unemployment. As today's political debate over welfare reform heats up, its message has become more important than ever.

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