

conversations in which Cubans grapple with the difficulties of the present and uncertainties of the future. As one young documentary filmmaker muses, pondering how little people have to show for the sacrifices they made: “I don’t have the solution. I don’t know if there is a solution” (249). It is a simple statement that reveals the immense challenges Cuba faces.

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CHILE’S MIDDLE CLASSES

Identity Investments: Middle-Class Responses to Precarious Privilege in Neoliberal Chile. By Joel Phillip Stillerman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022. Culture and Economic Life Series. Pp. 304. \$95.00 cloth; \$32.00 paper.
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The working class and the urban and rural poor have been the subjects of much scholarship on Chile over the past century. With some notable exceptions, the middle class has largely been neglected; in some cases, authors attempting to cover class in Chilean history and society seem to be uneasy and unsure about how to treat the middle class. In recent years though, scholars have turned to the middle class as a subject worthy of study. Through interviews and participant observation from 2008 to 2010, Joel Phillip Stillerman’s book takes the reader into the world of middle-class Chile in the early twenty-first century.

Stillerman develops four categories of middle-class people in Chile: activists, moderate Catholics, pragmatists, and youngsters. Even though differences exist within each group, they are held together by their members’ analysis of, and action around, neoliberalism and culture. This gets to the central theoretical category in the book: identity investments, defined as “the set of motivations and practices that guide economic decisions so that they affirm individuals’ deeply held values” (7). Importantly, these identity investments not only intersect with class, but also with political and religious ideas, much of which are “preexisting” and help to shape action and self-perception (8). Stillerman’s second main theoretical push is precarious privilege, a “relative prosperity alongside their [middle-class] fragile hold on their occupational positions” (10).

One of the problems of working on the middle class is defining the category itself. Stillerman divides the middle class into upper and lower, using factors such as education level and income. Although this is not my area of expertise, I do wonder about the limits of the category because these parameters classify half of the population as middle class.

Across six chapters, Stillerman crosses his four categories of middle-class Chileans with employment, housing, school choice for their children, activism at school and the community, home decorations, and leisure. Considering Stillerman's earlier work on metalworkers in the second half of the twentieth century, it is no coincidence that all sections contain a good amount of history, which will be of great use to any reader unfamiliar with Chile. More than simply context, though, Stillerman argues that histories of politics, activism, and religion are central for understanding middle-class behavior when it comes to everything from school choice to leisure activities. Many of the parents who supported their children's activism, for instance, did so because they themselves had been activists as young people. Countering studies on the middle class that suggest that school choice is mostly about "social class reproduction," Stillerman points to the parents who picked schools precisely because of the history of organizing at that school (128).

The book is about Chile, but it is also about two specific parts of Santiago: Ñuñoa, a "traditional, urban middle-class community," and La Florida, "an emerging middle-class suburb" (23). These two communities have quite distinct historical roots, and the people living in them also have considerably different backgrounds; nevertheless, both are categorized as middle class. Although some readers might think this limits the study, the geographical restriction allows Stillerman to build up both areas and dig deep into middle-class history and visions of self.

Published in 2022, the book is also concerned with understanding the history of the *estallido social* (massive protests beginning in 2019). In the conclusion, Stillerman argues that we can see a direct family history of people born in the 1960s, who were activists during the dictatorship in the 1980s, and whose children were part of the Penguin Revolution of 2006–2008 (which the parents supported). Members of that younger generation would become some of the key political figures of the 2010s. Stillerman described this as "intergenerational transmission of partisan identities" (216). All of this, of course, would also be understood by the four categories of middle class in different and sometimes overlapping ways.

Written with an eye toward individual stories and broader conceptual tools, this book is an essential work for understanding contemporary Chile.

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