

Varieties of Family History

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A DOZEN YEARS AGO, Carl Bridenbaugh in his presidential address before the American Historical Association spoke of the pressing need for research on the history of the American family.¹ Such calls to action have a way of going unheeded; but in this case Bridenbaugh succeeded in predicting, if not calling into being, an important trend in social-history research. Today the history of the family exists as a distinct and thriving field within the larger enterprise of social history. Its borders are vague. On one side, family history merges into the historical study of small communities, neighborhoods, social classes, and other groups; on the other, it becomes indistinguishable from biography. But at its center is one of society's most important—and, in the case of historians, most neglected—institutions.²

Why it should be a good thing that family history exists is, I trust, obvious. For the individual in every society, the family constitutes a link to the larger social structure. Through family socialization, each person is taught to be good and to do his or her duties as these are defined in the society. "Thus it is *through the family* that the society is able to elicit from the *individual* his necessary contribution."³ By this line of argument, the family tends to be a conservative force. Yet societies change and very often show symptoms of conflict and stress as they do so. A number of broad and difficult, but intriguing, questions suggest themselves as a result. Do the structure and function of the family change as society changes? Could the study of family change provide us with indices to, and insights into, broader social change?

The author, a member of the Department of History at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, read an earlier version of this paper at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, on October 3, 1974, in Toronto.

¹ Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Great Mutation," *American Historical Review*, 68 (January 1963), p. 327.

² Family historians have their own newsletter, *The Family in Historical Perspective*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1972-). Important articles in the field have been published in many other journals, particularly the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. For a recent sampling of work see Michael Gordon, ed., *The Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, 1973). A family history training institute has been held the past three summers at the Newberry Library under the direction of Richard Jensen. A fourth institute is scheduled for the summer of 1975.

³ William J. Goode, *The Family* (Englewood Cliffs, 1964), p. 3; see also Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure* (New York, 1964), p. 148.

How has the rearing of children changed over time, and what have these changes meant for the formation of adult personalities? The ambitions of family historians, then, extend far beyond the boundaries of the family itself; their hope, and the source of their enthusiasm, is that the family may be a kind of key to the understanding of the entire society as it has changed over time.⁴

In the present essay I shall briefly discuss some of the trends in research and over-all interpretation in American family history. Rather than offer a bibliographical survey or a discussion of the role of the social sciences in family history—a task already accomplished by Tamara K. Hareven⁵—I want to survey the very broad schools of thought in the field and to note some of the important debates about how to proceed. I shall suggest a few of the basic findings upon which family historians seem to be converging at this still preliminary stage in the development of the field. My comments will, then, be a guide to what is going on rather than a thorough look at techniques or at some of the important issues of theory which family historians discuss.⁶

Archivists are probably most familiar with a traditional form of family history, that pursued by the amateur genealogists. Genealogy as a hobby seems to be enjoying a burst of popularity right now, a development probably made possible by the high levels of educational attainment in American society and related to the large number of older persons.⁷ Genealogists can tax the professional and material resources of libraries and archives; at the Newberry Library in Chicago, which boasts a substantial collection of genealogical and local-history materials, genealogists are the most frequent users of the library; books in the genealogy and local history collection are dog-eared and annotated by the many amateurs who believe they have discovered errors in the printed sources.

It is easy to poke fun at the genealogist with his or her tunnel vision and determination to win a bit of reflected glory by proving descent from some illustrious historical personage. More serious limitations to genealogy exist, too. It has mainly been a pursuit of old-stock Protestant Americans who trace their cultural roots back to colonial times.

⁴ Tamara K. Hareven, "The History of the Family as a Research Field," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (Autumn 1971): 400; Philip J. Greven, Jr., et al., "Change and Continuity in the Family Structure," *Family in Historical Perspective* no. 5 (Fall 1973): 7-13.

⁵ Hareven, "The History of the Family as a Research Field"; Richard Jensen, "Archives and Ancestors: The Study of the American Family," paper delivered before the SAA and the Society of California Archivists, San Francisco, December 1973.

⁶ For techniques the most useful sources are E. A. Wrigley, ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (New York, 1968); Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, Eng., 1972); Wrigley, ed., *Identifying People in the Past* (London, 1974); and T. H. Hollingsworth, *Historical Demography* (Ithaca, 1969). Research notes in *Family in Historical Perspective* and in *Historical Methods Newsletter* (1967-) are also helpful.

⁷ See the recent articles on genealogy in the *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine*, 16 June 1974, and *Detroit News Sunday Magazine*, April 13, 1975.

For the historian of other, more recently-arrived groups, genealogical sources have less to offer.⁸ Moreover, by its very nature, genealogy overemphasizes the study of large families with continuous histories over several generations. The eighteenth-century husband and wife who had no children rarely turn up in genealogical or local-history writings, for they were nobody's ancestors. Similarly, genealogy tends to overemphasize American elites of the past, both because wealthy and powerful ancestors seem more interesting and because records of such ancestors are more likely to exist.

But genealogists both individually and through their societies do an enormous amount of important record-searching and record-transcribing for the professional historian. As genealogy flourishes, technical family-history will surely become more manageable. Important recent studies of New England towns by Philip Greven and others have relied heavily on local histories and genealogies produced in the nineteenth century.⁹ John Modell serendipitously discovered that all the 1820 census data for all households in Indiana has been keypunched onto IBM cards by genealogists at the Indiana State Library. Thanks to this effort he was able to produce an important article on family structure and fertility in the early nineteenth-century Midwest.¹⁰ Such examples could be multiplied.

Standing somewhere between traditional genealogy and technical family-history would be the enterprises in amateur family biography and community history which David Culbert has discussed. Here again we have non-professionals at work; the distinctive features of this rapidly growing form of grass-roots history seem to be, first, that it generally proceeds under the supervision of a trained historian, and second, that a greater variety of local sources can be put to use for an enterprise somewhat broader than pure ancestor-hunting.

Though the usefulness of these family biographies to the professional scholar has yet to be established, the enterprise is extremely important for several reasons. Students and other amateurs, like genealogists, can ferret out sources, often in private hands, which scholars might be glad to know about. In the small town where I live, enthusiastic local citizens have indexed the proper names in the weekly newspaper which runs back to the 1870s, collected old city directories and telephone books, and started a local-history room in the remodeled basement of the town's Carnegie library. More records will be located and preserved as part of our local Bicentennial observances.

Amateur family biographers can provide data also on intimate family

⁸ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Immigration Studies Collection at the University of Minnesota," *American Archivist* 32 (April 1969): 139-45, surveys the subject.

⁹ Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Land, Population, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970); Bernard Farber, *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800* (New York, 1972); Michael E. Frisch, *Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge, 1972).

¹⁰ John Modell, "Family and Fertility on the Indiana Frontier, 1820," *American Quarterly* 23 (December 1971): 615-34.

matters such as child-rearing practices or sexual division of labor within the home. Most important, this sort of enterprise seems a promising way of involving citizens actively in historical study; it may thereby encourage their support for the preservation of local and family records and the teaching of history of all sorts. It can promote good relations between the community and the academy, though obviously much depends on the finesse of the instructor or supervisor of such amateurs. Such hopes, at any rate, are behind the current widespread introduction of family-biography and local-history projects at many community colleges, including courses held in the evening for older persons. For college students we have the Anonymous Families History Project, of which Tamara Hareven is codirector.¹¹ And there is some discussion of developing a grass-roots family-biography program as part of the American Bicentennial celebration. If this comes to pass, historians and archivists will probably be able to obtain packages of materials which would enable them to interest and direct members of their local communities in family-biography research.

For many years scholars too have used the biographical approach to the study of eminent families involved in politics or commerce. A book like *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts*, by John Waters, or the two-volume *The Browns of Providence Plantations*, by James Hedges, can be extremely revealing about the way in which kinship ties operated to facilitate commercial bonds or political alliances, and can show something of the process by which successive generations of a single family were socialized into acceptance of the family identity and purpose, and how they in turn responded to the challenges of change in the non-familial environment.¹² A forthcoming study, James R. McGovern's *Yankee Family*, traces two New England families from the seventeenth century to 1920, using family papers and diaries; it promises to be the first such family biography informed by the specific perspectives of the new social history of the family.¹³

¹¹ Guidelines of the Anonymous Families History Project can be obtained through the Department of History, Clark University. For an anthropological reporting form see George Baslow and Eliot D. Chapple, "A New Life History Form, with Instructions for its Use," *Applied Anthropology* (1945): 1-19. For a collection of family biographies with instructions on how to write one, see Jim Watts and Allen F. Davis, *Generations: Your Family in American History* (New York, 1974). See also David H. Culbert, "Undergraduates as Historians: Family History Projects Add Meaning to an Introductory Survey," *The History Teacher* 7 (November 1973): 7-17; and Kirk Jeffrey, "Write a History of Your Own Family," *ibid.* 7 (May 1974): 365-73. For bibliographical aid see Kirk Jeffrey, "Family Biography: A Guide to Resources," *Access to History* no. 1 (1975), forthcoming.

¹² John J. Waters, Jr., *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, 1968); James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1952-68). See James P. Baughman, *The Mallorys of Mystic: Six Generations in American Maritime Enterprise* (Middletown, 1972); Eugene Exman, *The Brothers Harper* (New York, 1965); Alice P. Kenney, *The Gansevoorts of Albany: Dutch Patricians in the Upper Hudson Valley* (Syracuse, 1969); Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven, 1972); Ross E. Paulson, *Radicalism and Reform: The Vrooman Family and American Social Thought, 1837-1937* (Lexington, 1968).

¹³ James R. McGovern, *Yankee Family: A Social History* (Cottonport, Louisiana, 1975).

What I have discussed up to now, family *biography*, is a bit different from the present central thrust of historical family studies. While family historians joyfully make use of findings about individual families, whether anonymous or distinguished, the historians are really centrally concerned with a great many families—that is, with comprehending broad patterns of family structure and change for large groups, or, potentially, for the entire population of the nation.

Tamara Hareven has recently surveyed the field of family history and considered the contributions which various allied disciplines (such as demography and anthropology) potentially have to make. My purposes are more modest: I want only to distinguish in a rough and ready way between two approaches widely used today to the history of the American family. A kind of cultural-history approach, arising out of the American Studies movement with its interest in recreating the values and assumptions of past generations of Americans, has attracted a number of scholars in the past few years. They have tended to focus less on the family than on certain of its fragments, such as the role of women, the treatment of children, and sexual attitudes. An essay like Barbara Welter's well-known "The Cult of True Womanhood," because it tells us how middle-class Americans of the antebellum era thought about the role and sphere of woman, contributes to family history.¹⁴ More recently we have seen more sophisticated approaches which do much the same thing: imaginatively reconstruct the world of values and perceptions of Americans at home. I think of the sections of John Demos's *A Little Commonwealth* in which Demos discusses the implications for family interaction of the small, cramped houses of seventeenth-century Plymouth Colony; and of Alan Macfarlane's fascinating book *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman*.¹⁵ Using Josselin's diary and account books, Macfarlane was able to analyze Josselin's family finances, describe the effective expanse of his kinship network, discuss daily routines and the private marital culture within the Josselin household, and even analyze the old man's dreams, thirty-four of which were recorded in the diary.

It is apparent that cultural studies of past family life are a perfectly worthy extension of cultural history as long practiced.¹⁶ Cultural historians use familiar sources such as private letters and journals, or sermons and didactic writings advising family members how to behave.

¹⁴ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74; for other examples see Richard L. Rapson, "The American Child as Seen by British Travelers, 1845–1935," *ibid.* 17 (Fall 1965): 520–34; Kirk Jeffrey, "The Family as Utopian Retreat from the City: The Nineteenth-Century Contribution," in Sallie TeSelle, ed., *The Family, Communes, and Utopian Societies* (New York, 1972), 21–41; Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child-Nurture* (Philadelphia, 1968).

¹⁵ John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970); Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (Cambridge, England, 1970); see also John Demos's essay-review of Macfarlane in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (October 1973): 493–503.

¹⁶ David M. Potter's seminal *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago, 1954) included a chapter on child-rearing.

Indeed, one might argue that for family history we have hardly begun to exploit such sources adequately. Languishing in many archives there must be women's and teen-agers' diaries, for instance. At almost every archives I have visited in the past three years, I have found a number written by women who were not notable.¹⁷ At the other extreme of size, Demos and Clifford Clark, in a forthcoming article on Victorian houses, have shown how the study of domestic architecture can contribute to the history of family life.¹⁸

Cultural family studies borrow from cultural anthropology, and the underlying aspiration seems quite close to that of many anthropologists: to recreate and capture the fleeting, intimate configurations of domestic relationships as they existed at some moment in the past; and second, to link these recreated patterns to larger generalizations about culture configurations in non-domestic areas of life. Cultural family studies are thus normally synchronic or snapshot history; they are concerned with one of the historian's basic questions: what was it like to have been a member of that society in the past?

However, the cultural-history approach to the study of past family life may be facing important but exceedingly difficult problems with inadequate concepts and assumptions. Let me mention two of these in particular. There is, first, the problem of the relationship of literary or subliterate sources (such as novels depicting husband-wife relations, conduct-of-life books, children's magazines) to the actual behavior and actual day-to-day values of the American public. Any study which generalizes broadly about what the American people as a whole felt and did on the basis of such sources is treading on very thin ice indeed. The process of dissemination of "popular values," and the degree to which Americans at large have actually accepted the values ascribed to them by historians, remain obscure.¹⁹

An equally difficult problem with cultural studies of family life is their limited help in comprehending processes of long-term social change. Self-consciously synchronic rather than diachronic, cultural historians tend to depict family values and relationships within discrete periods of the American past rather than exploring how these may have changed, say, between the Jacksonian period and the beginning of the twentieth century. To be sure, many cultural historians have pointed to tensions within American value-systems and implied that in the long run, such tensions must have induced change in values and behavior. William E. Bridges, for example, has noted the anomaly of

¹⁷ Robert Asher et al., "Archival and Manuscript Resources for the Study of Women's History: A Beginning," Social Welfare History Archives Center, University of Minnesota, April 1972; Kirk Jeffrey, ed., "Christian Nurturer: The Diary of Mary A. White, 1840-1855," forthcoming. Eva Moseley, "Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 215-22.

¹⁸ Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, forthcoming.

¹⁹ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York, 1969), esp. p. 106 et seq.

the nineteenth-century sentimentalization of domestic bliss at the same time that child-rearing practices seemed to be contrived to foster "impersonality and emotional nondependence" in individuals.²⁰ But this is a hint, not a systematic effort to describe and explain change.

For one period of very rapid and crucial change in family life, the two generations or so between the Revolution and the Age of Jackson, which John Demos has called "the critical era in the history of American family life,"²¹ we have virtually no studies whatever from a cultural historian of the family. For a later era of significant change, the years from the 1890s to the 1920s which saw the breakup of the Victorian value synthesis, there is plenty of evidence of transformation—the rise of the birth control movement, the collapse of the "conspiracy of silence" about sex, the increasing employment of women and their final drive for the vote. But so far there has been little effort to analyze all these trends as interconnected aspects of some larger set of changes rather than as discrete *events* of the sort historians have always dealt with. And there has been little attempt by nonquantitative historians to relate these changes to what has gone before in the history of family life.²²

Yet the basic questions posed by the cultural historian about family life seem shrewd and important. The cultural historian has been perceptive, too, in seeking to relate the family to the larger social system through the analysis of roles, values, and particularly of child rearing and personality formation. But before cultural family studies can proceed much farther, some outside assistance may be needed.

To introduce quantitative family history, an approach closely allied not to cultural studies but to the "new" social history, in this way implies that quantification is a *deus ex machina*, ready to trot in to solve the problems of traditional historians brought to an impasse.²³ Such is

²⁰ On synchronic approaches see John William Ward's retrospective critique of his book *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*, in L. P. Curtis, Jr., ed., *The Historian's Workshop* (New York, 1970), p. 217–18. William E. Bridges discusses child nurture in "Family Patterns and Social Values in America, 1825–1875," *American Quarterly* 17 (Spring 1965): 3–11. Cultural values often become most evident in moments of change or conflict. But such moments do not always coincide with the conventional watersheds of American historical periodization, drawn from political history. Cultural historians have not been clear enough in attempting to identify cultural changes; they rely still on traditional periodization. The most successful attempt at a survey of American family history which falls within the "cultural" category is John Demos, "The American Family in Past Time," *American Scholar* (Summer 1974): 422–46.

²¹ Talk given at the Newberry Library, Chicago, October 1973.

²² David M. Kennedy, *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* (New Haven, 1970); William L. O'Neill, *Divorce in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, 1967); John C. Burnham, "The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes toward Sex," *Journal of American History* 59 (March 1973): 885–908. Daniel Scott Smith, "The Dating of the American Sexual Revolution," in Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, pp. 321–35; and Jill Conway, "Women Reformers and Female Culture, 1870–1930," *Journal of Social History* 5 (Winter 1971–72): 164–82, are exceptions. Lois Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (New York, 1974), chaps. 1–3, offers the best synthesis.

²³ Richard Jensen in his address before this organization, "Archives and Ancestors,"

not the case, since quantitative approaches cannot, at least not yet, even begin to get at some important questions in the field—questions having to do, for instance, with child nurture and personality change. But the quantifiers can deal with long-term social change; they can help the rest of us in the field with the broad interpretive framework which needs to be sketched out before we go much further with narrower studies of family life in specific time-periods.

Quantitative family studies is a diverse field though its practitioners remain few in number. Perhaps we can reasonably divide it into two sub-areas, "demographic analysis" and "historical population studies," to borrow the well-known distinction suggested by Hauser and Duncan. Demographic analysis, by their definition, "is confined to the study of components of population variation and change." Historical population studies, by contrast, focus "on the relationships between population changes and other variables—social, economic, political, . . . geographical, and the like."²⁴

True demographers have made many contributions to the study of the family; social historians, indeed, are only just beginning to go back to the technical journals in the field to discover and apply what demographers discussed years ago. Perhaps the most important single finding from demographic history concerns the decline in American fertility during the nineteenth century. Precise figures are not agreed upon, and regional variation was considerable; but fertility declined in every region. In 1800 the American birth rate was around 50 per 1000; in 1860 it had dropped to about 40, and it continued to decline until the baby boom of the 1940s and 1950s. Another way of describing what occurred is to say that completed fertility for white women in 1800—that is, the average number of children born assuming a woman survived to the end of her childbearing years—was just over 7. In 1900 it was 3.5.²⁵ Today it is 1.9. This finding raises a great many questions for the social historian of the family. Why did this fertility decline occur when it did? What groups were affected first? How did the pattern in America compare with those in European societies? What methods were used to limit fertility? What did it mean for female lives that a woman would bear 3 or 4 children instead of 7? What did it mean for internal family culture? What did it mean for the size and significance of each family's kin network?

December 1973, makes somewhat stronger claims for quantitative approaches to family history. For a brief but vigorous manifesto of the new social historians, see Samuel P. Hays, "Historical Social Research: Concept, Method and Technique," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (Winter 1974): 475-82.

²⁴ Philip M. Hauser and Otis Dudley Duncan, eds., *The Study of Population* (Chicago, 1959): 2-3.

²⁵ These findings are summarized in James Potter, "American Population in the Early National Period," in Paul Deprez, ed., *Proceedings of Section V of the Fourth Congress of the International Economic History Association* (Winnipeg, 1970): 55-69; see also Wilson H. Grabill, et al., *The Fertility of American Women* (New York, 1958), and especially Ansley J. Coale and Melvin Zelnik, *New Estimates of Fertility and Population in the United States* (Princeton, 1968), chap. 4.

Demographers have generally worked at the level of states, regions, or the entire society. Practitioners of historical population studies, by contrast, have often tried to get down to microcosms such as individual villages. In doing so they often rely on the technique of family reconstitution, developed by French social historians in the 1950s.²⁶ Family reconstitution essentially involves the recording and sorting out of vital events as recorded in parish registers and other community records and reconstituting the families in which these events occurred, by linking names into family units. A number of important studies have been published for the United States, particularly for the colonial period, and they show promise of giving us a more complex understanding of the long-term changes which demographers have traced for the society at large. Daniel Scott Smith used published genealogies for a reconstitution study of Hingham, Massachusetts, which stretches from the early years of settlement in the seventeenth century down to 1880. He supplemented his published sources with the town records, which included vital registration data, tax lists, and wills.²⁷ Parts of Smith's study have been published. They indicate that from the mid-eighteenth century onward, traditional family controls over individuals were in decline. He shows, for instance, that the incidence of naming infants for parents and other kin fell off, and that children were more likely to marry out of their birth order as time passed.²⁸

Peter Uhlenberg, to take another example of historical population studies, has done a simple and elegant study of cohort life cycles of Massachusetts women born at intervals between 1830 and 1920. Uhlenberg demonstrates, among other things, that for the women born in 1830 (the 1830 birth cohort) the life cycle idealized as desirable and "typical," whereby a woman would grow up, marry, have a family, and survive with her husband until all the children were grown, was actually lived by only about 1/5 of the women in the cohort (the others died early, never married, married but had no children, or otherwise did not live that life cycle).²⁹

As I remarked earlier, the great power that quantitative studies bring to the discipline of history is that they can develop quantitative indicators of social change over very long periods of time. To do so they normally eschew the study of change, at least of family change, over periods as short as a generation. The family, after all, is a small and

²⁶ On family reconstitution see E. A. Wrigley, "Family Reconstitution," in Wrigley, ed., *An Introduction to English Historical Demography*, pp. 96-159; Hollingsworth, *Historical Demography*, pp. 181-95.

²⁷ Smith, "Population, Family, and Society in Hingham, Massachusetts, 1635-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1973).

²⁸ Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (August 1973): 419-28; "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1 (Winter-Spring 1973): 40-57.

²⁹ Peter R. Uhlenberg, "A Study of Cohort Life Cycles: Cohorts of Native Born Massachusetts Women, 1830-1920," *Population Studies* 23 (November 1969): 407-20. This study was not based on family reconstitution.

rather simple institution, and many family-related indices—age at marriage, say—change within fairly narrow limits. We would not expect to find drastic change in such short periods. But trends over longer periods can be derived by comparing populations at the same moment in time which may be more or less advanced with respect to the variable being studied (urban and rural populations studied for fertility, for instance); or the historian may dip into records for 1790, 1880, and 1970 in order to get a sense of the broad patterns of change over two centuries. Developing detailed statistical time-series for the periods in between would be helpful in elaborating the story, but not necessary for a start at periodizing and describing broad trends.³⁰ Thus, for example, we know that the family in the eighteenth century seemed to harbor servants and apprentices; in the nineteenth century, boarders and lodgers; today, neither group of outsiders. How these changes occurred and what they mean are problems that can be attacked once the changes are determined.³¹

Since convulsive events of the sort traditional historians delight in are almost nonexistent in family history, the sketching of long-term trends by quantitative historians is of extreme importance. But, as many quantifiers would readily acknowledge, a goal in all this is to return eventually to those vexed questions raised by the cultural historians.³² How did people feel about domestic life at different times in the past? How were children raised? What forms did paternal authority take in the lives of adolescents and young adults? How did husbands and wives interact at different stages in the life cycle of the family? How were changes in social attitudes toward the family and in internal family interactions related to the quantifiable changes in size and structure which have been identified? We may not be ready to address such questions yet—but nobody doubts their significance and few would deny that we may someday be able to deal with them.

Studies of the family so far have tended to focus on two periods: the colonial era up to the eve of the Revolution, and the second half of the nineteenth century. Why is that? Primarily it has been a matter of the availability of records. Enough genealogies, town histories, and surviving local records exist to permit family reconstitution for certain areas of the colonies. After the Revolution, though, geographical mobility in-

³⁰ Michael Anderson, "The Study of Family Structure," in Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Society*, discusses this point; for an example see Smith, "The Dating of the American Sexual Revolution." On indicators of social change the basic work is Eleanor Sheldon and Wilbert E. Moore, eds., *Indicators of Social Change* (New York, 1968).

³¹ On pre-nineteenth-century household composition see Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, eds., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, England, 1972); for nineteenth-century America see John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (August 1973): 467-79. Daniel Scott Smith has discussed this point in an informal talk at the Newberry Library Family and Community History Training Institute, June 1974; see also Smith's review of Laslett and Wall, in *The Family in Historical Perspective*, no. 6 (Spring, 1974): 14-18.

³² Jensen acknowledged this in "Archives and Ancestors."

creased, the size of places grew, and the conscientiousness of local officials in keeping records apparently declined. To continue with the same techniques often becomes quite difficult. Beginning in 1850 the manuscript U.S. census returns contain enough information about age structure to permit some detailed demographic inferences and attempts at the reconstitution of households. But not until 1880 did the censuses include a question about the relationship of the individual to the household head. The 1890 returns were almost completely destroyed by fire years ago, and the 1900 returns have just been opened for scholars. Many state censuses exist for this period, and one can expect their greater use in the future.³³ For some reason, perhaps the very richness of the record, with government data and social research, historians have not yet delved far into twentieth-century family history.

Still, on the basis of the two periods which have been studied, plus a general sense of the trends in the twentieth century, it has been possible for a few family historians to begin to sketch a broad periodization for the history of the American family.³⁴ As data on the fertility transition suggest, we will probably have the nineteenth century as a long era of transition between two distinct eras in family history, a premodern and a modern one. Most indices seem to fit this periodization—household size, fertility, divorce rates, and others. The family, that is, will be treated in a framework of modernization theory. Sociologists too have discussed the modernization of the family, but generally without actually looking in detail at the processes of long-term social change.³⁵ As Philip Abrams has recently written, "The point [for sociology] . . . was not to know the past but to establish an idea of the past which could be used as a comparative base for the understanding of the present."³⁶ So historians may have a contribution to make in the refurbishing of modernization theory.

It may turn out that modernization theory is an awkward or inadequate framework for family history. The theory should be regarded not as a paradigm but as a heuristic framework, a tentative way of organizing the data and suggesting to scholars what topics are important, what findings suprising. In all this, one can feel optimistic that we

³³ Mark Friedberger, "Cohorting with the State Census," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 6 (December 1972): 1-4.

³⁴ Smith has been most explicit. See also William J. Goode, "The Theory and Measurement of Family Change," in Sheldon and Moore, *Indicators of Social Change*, and Abbott L. Ferriss, *Indicators of Change in the American Family* (New York, 1970), for the twentieth century. Neil J. Smelser, "The Modernization of Social Relations," in Myron Weiner, ed., *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (New York, 1966), pp. 110-21, offers a helpful theoretical perspective.

³⁵ For sociological critiques of the modernization concept, see Robert H. Lauer, "The Scientific Legitimization of Fallacy: Neutralizing Social Change Theory," *American Sociological Review* 36 (October 1971): 881-89; S. N. Eisenstadt, "Post-Traditional Societies and the Continuity and Reconstruction of Tradition," *Daedalus* 102 (Winter 1973): 1-28; Reinhard Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 9 (April 1967): 292-346.

³⁶ Philip Abrams, "The Sense of the Past and the Origins of Sociology," *Past and Present*, no. 55 (May 1973), p. 28.

will be able to report a fruitful combination of talents and perspectives among cultural and quantitative social historians of the family, rather than the mutual suspicion and splitting apart which are sometimes alleged to occur inevitably when the two approaches co-exist within a discipline.



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