

## The State of Marriage

**Contemporary Marriage.** Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Institution. KINGSLEY DAVIS, Ed., in association with Amyra Grossbard-Schechtman. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1986 (distributor, Basic Books, New York). xiv, 432 pp., illus. \$29.95. Based on a conference, Stanford, CA, Aug. 1982.

For the better part of half a century, Kingsley Davis, social scientist provocateur, has been taking the temperature of the American family, with a concerned eye to the future well-being of this "troubled" institution.

In one of his early assessments (in his classic 1949 textbook, *Human Society*), Davis remarked:

Most social research into the family has had an immediate moral purpose—to eliminate deviations like divorce, desertion, illegitimacy, and adultery—rather than a desire to understand the fundamental nature of social institutions . . . reputable social scientists therefore shy away from it.

Before the family became a respectable arena for social science inquiry, Davis was one of a few social scientists who wrote intelligent and illuminating comments on sexual jealousy, intermarriage, prostitution, love—subjects considered by many to be too intimate for scientific scrutiny. Eventually, Davis turned his primary attention to the study of population processes, primarily in the developing world, but he never abandoned his interest in charting family change in developed countries, especially the United States.

In *Contemporary Marriage*, Davis offers his most recent assessment of the state of marriage, introducing a collection of papers from a conference on family change that he organized. If there is any question that the study of marriage and the family is now able to attract serious scholars, a list of the participants from disciplines as diverse as economics, anthropology, history, sociology, psychiatry, and law is likely to dispel any lingering doubts. The papers are of uneven quality, but the best are quite good indeed, and most are informative. From varying disciplinary vantage points, the contributors take up the causes and consequences of change in marriage during the post-war period. Though most of the volume is given over to demographic analyses, especially of the United States, a number of the best papers in the book deal with changes in the Third World.

Taken one by one, the papers in *Contemporary Marriage* stand up better than read as

a collection. Of course, this is the inevitable result of what are really the proceedings of a conference, polished up a bit in its aftermath by the authors but never absorbed, much less integrated, by the editor.

It is not that Davis refuses to draw broad conclusions about the state of marriage in the Western world. Despite a strong public commitment to it, marriage, Davis believes, has been weakened over the past 40 years. Gender equality, easy divorce, and the availability of contraception have eroded the institution and compromised its ultimate function—the licensing of reproduction. Should this trend continue, Davis warns, the demise of industrial societies will be an inevitable consequence.

[Industrial societies] are not replacing themselves now, in either number or quality of the next generation. The non-industrial two-thirds of the world, ill equipped to provide adequate education, is producing 92 percent of the world's next generation.

The image of the declining, decadent West giving way to the less civilized world has troubled Davis for some time. If one revisits Davis's early writings on the family, as I did after reading his introductory essay, one can find strong lines of continuity in his thinking about patterns of family change. Call it intellectual integrity or call it ideological rigidity, Davis's theoretical framework, rooted in functional analysis, only takes him so far in interpreting what is happening to the Western family.

At the dawn of the post-war baby boom, when Davis addressed the problem of the modern family in *Human Society*, he wrote:

Wedlock has so far lost its connections with the rest of the social order that it has become merely a vehicle for sexual gratification and companionship . . . The current emphasis on companionship and happiness in marriage has lost sight of the main social function of marriage. If marriages were not for the purpose of having children there would be no purpose in them at all, because companionship could be had without the formalities of wedlock.

Davis's prediction of continued fertility decline associated with the rise of companionate marriage could not have been less accurate for that period or the decade that followed—an era of domestic mass production. Marriage age reached all-time lows as the younger population, almost in lockstep, rushed into matrimony and parenthood. Indeed, in a 1972 essay written in the wake of the baby boom for a report of the U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, Davis issued a revised

assessment of the vitality of the American family:

[The family] is showing no loss of appeal; and it seems unlikely that in the next two or three decades the birth rate in the United States will be reduced by extensive celibacy.

In the same spirit of optimism, Davis predicted that the emerging liberal standards of sexual behavior accompanied by contraceptive use and abortion and the growing participation of women in the labor force were not likely to have a significant effect on marriage age or fertility. And he saw rising non-marital fertility as an unlikely threat to the integrity of the nuclear family. Apprehensions about divorce, he wrote, were overstated as well, for many divorcing couples are childless and most who leave marriage eventually return to the fold. Davis was clearly bullish on the American family in 1972.

Now, as expounded in *Contemporary Marriage*, Davis's gloomy view of the American family has reemerged. Little wonder that he feels distressed by the turn of events, for his prognosis of the vitality of the institution is primarily based on low marriage age and high fertility. But it is questionable whether short-term demographic changes ought to be read as vital signs of the family's well-being. Late marriage age and low fertility can have positive benefits for the family and the larger society. If it teaches us nothing else, the experience of the post-war period ought to make us more humble about forecasting demographic changes in the family. Perhaps we are emulating the least commendable qualities of economics—instant analysis and prognostication on the basis of uncertain and ambiguous indicators. In this regard, demographers and sociologists are likely to fare no better than the practitioners of "the dismal science."

Several of the most commendable papers in the collection, John Modell's historical survey of marriage trends in America and the excellent papers on Japan by Joy Hendry and on China by Margery Wolf, indicate that we would do well to take a longer view of family change than the one adopted by Davis and some of his collaborators. A reading of the Japanese family immediately after World War II or the Chinese family shortly after the Revolution offers a deceptive impression of the extent of change. Significantly too, Asian family systems may not be following the same trajectory of individualization that appears to be characteristic of Western systems.

And even among Western nations, the idea of a grand pattern of convergence—what some believers refer to as the post-modern family—may be concealing a more variegated picture of family change. Cohabi-

tation may be on the increase in Sweden, France, and the United States but may represent quite different patterns in the three nations. Over time and within nation states, divergent patterns may be appearing that will confound predictions that marriage and therefore fertility are on the wane. Formal, state-sanctioned marriage has virtually disappeared among younger Swedes, but Sweden now has one of the higher total fertility rates in Western Europe and is one of the few countries to be experiencing a minor resurgence in its birth rate.

Of course, we are not going to wait until the dust settles to draw implications from the bewildering changes that have taken place in the institution of marriage. The dust may never settle. Indisputably, the meaning of marriage has been changing and with it the form of the family. As an institution, marriage still represents a pooling (though less a gender-based exchange) of labor. No longer rooted in a domestic economy, partners are more interchangeable. As the bonds of marriage have become more voluntary, the premium placed on emotional gratification has risen. Children are valued not for their contribution to the domestic economy as they once were but for their emotional "pricelessness," to borrow a term used by Viviana Zelizer in her brilliant analysis of the changing meaning of children (*Pricing the Priceless Child*, 1985). Accordingly, the quality (as measured by the emotional rewards they offer to their parents) of children rather than their quantity has assumed much greater importance in the reproductive process.

For better or for worse, these changes have profoundly and permanently altered the marriage institution. Davis clearly feels the change is for the worse, though not all contributors to *Contemporary Marriage* share his judgment. Davis's view that the emerging form of the family in the West will ultimately compromise its political and economic position is debatable. European nations such as West Germany and Switzerland, boasting strong economies, are experiencing high rates of cohabitation, late marriage, and low fertility. Perhaps the other shoe has not yet dropped; perhaps it never will.

Undeniably, the transformation of the family in this country has produced serious dislocations for women and children, which are well described in the papers by Thomas Espenshade (on marriage patterns of blacks and whites) and Lenore Weitzman (on effects of changes in divorce laws) contained in *Contemporary Marriage*. The economic and emotional restructuring of the family that began well before the 20th century has been accomplished only rarely by design and

often with considerable resistance. There is no lack of suggestions for meliorating the problems created by this rapid transition. Almost all are distasteful to those who would like to see the old order restored rather than replaced. The problem is, as Davis concedes, that there is no way of putting Humpty Dumpty back together again.

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## Spoils of War

**The Paperclip Conspiracy.** The Hunt for the Nazi Scientists. TOM BOWER. Little, Brown, Boston, 1987. x, 309 pp. \$17.95.

This is the third book by Tom Bower to center on the moral compromises made by the United States and Britain during the occupation of Germany following World War II. The two earlier works dwelt on the deficiencies of denazification and the protection of Klaus Barbie and other former Nazis by American intelligence officers. This one chronicles the drive to exploit or keep out of Soviet hands numerous German military researchers and technicians, often at the price of overlooking or even concealing their involvement in Nazism and war crimes.

As befits a former producer of documentaries for the BBC, Bower's skills lie in assembling and telling a story. His readable narrative begins arrestingly with the contention that German military technology was superior on land and sea and in the air to that of the western Allies during the Nazi era, and, with few exceptions, to that of Soviet Russia. Indeed, the victors not only were aware of this in 1945 but also determined to rectify the situation in the only way they thought reliable—by plundering vital know-how. The result was a competitive scramble after German scientists, engineers, blueprints, and testing facilities that took most extreme form in the massive deportations conducted by the Americans from Thuringia and by the Russians from East Berlin before the year was out.

However, when U.S. personnel hit on the notion of employing their human prizes on research projects stateside, the round-up became enmeshed in the larger conflict over American occupation policy between officials intent on punishing Germans for past misdeeds and those preoccupied with their future uses. As the former group, concentrated in the middle echelons of the state and justice departments, persisted in demanding

careful background checks before issuing visas to German technicians, the latter group, comprising mostly soldiers and senior diplomats, resorted increasingly to deception. Not content with sanitizing security reports on the scientists selected for "Project Paperclip"—some of whom had been members of the Nazi Party or the SS and associated with the use of slave labor or experimentation on concentration camp inmates—American military agencies even spread the completely false claim that the typical German recruited had been arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned. Haltingly but inexorably, Bower maintains, such mendacity succeeded. By 1948, the United States emerged with the lion's share of potentially valuable German scientists, some of whom made important contributions to American armament in the Korean War, not to mention to the conquest of space. But among the perhaps 800 technical people brought to America were also many of only modest gifts, whose chief attraction was their willingness to work on military projects at low pay by American standards. In the end, Project Paperclip amounted to turning a blind eye to evil for the sake of expediency.

Despite the author's fluency and his apparently diligent work in recently opened American and British records, he has not written a valuable book. It offers little information, aside from anecdotal detail, not already available in Linda Hunt's succinct and generally accurate essay in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (April 1985, pp. 16–24). Moreover, Bower is given to erroneous and exaggerated statements on matters small (Heidelberg is not on the Rhine; p. 226) and great. His discussion in chapter 1 of the evolution of the *Blitzkrieg* concept and of tank tactics prior to World War II borders on mythology; his claims for German military equipment late in the war are vastly overdrawn (particularly with regard to the Me163 rocket plane, the Me262 jet, and ground-to-air missiles; see Karl-Heinz Ludwig, *Technik und Ingenieure im Dritten Reich*, Königstein, 1979); and his attribution of the postwar German economic miracle to hidden loot from the conquest of Europe in his somewhat gratuitous final chapter is simply fantastic. Throughout the book, Bower characterizes individuals as "ardent" Nazis, usually without specifying, let alone evaluating, his evidence. One person whom he dubs a "known war criminal" (Karl Wurster, p. 97) was, in fact, acquitted on all counts by an American court that did not shrink from condemning other defendants. By proceeding thus, Bower seriously misleads his readers, for the genuine difficulty of affixing these labels was critical to the