Illegitimacy

Bastardy and Its Comparative History. Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan. PETER LASLETT, KARLA OOSTERVEEN, and RICHARD M. SMITH, Eds. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1980. xvi, 432 pp., illus. $35. Studies in Social and Demographic History.

Illegitimacy recently has become a matter of much concern to the American public. During the 1980 Presidential campaign, for example, the "moral majority" pointed to the increases in the number of out-of-wedlock births among adolescents as an index of moral decay among Americans today. But historians during the last 15 years have uncovered and documented very high rates of out-of-wedlock births in the past that place our contemporary experiences in a different perspective.

Using a ratio of illegitimate births to the total number of births, historians have concluded that illegitimacy was also very high in much of Western Europe during the late 16th century and the late 18th and early 19th centuries. But these historians continue to disagree among themselves on the exact pattern of illegitimacy, the reasons for the dramatic increases and decreases in the illegitimacy rate over time, and the cultural and social implications of these changes.

Most of the discussions of the nature and extent of illegitimacy in the past during the 1960's and early 1970's turned to sweeping generalizations. The rise in out-of-wedlock births in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was explained as the result of the sexual liberation of single women moving into urban areas and working in the factories. These early studies relied heavily on literary sources rather than analysis of empirical data. In order to advance the investigation of illegitimacy by providing a more empirical and systematic analysis of this phenomenon in the past, the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in England sponsored the present collection of essays. The 20 essays analyze illegitimacy in various periods in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica, and Japan to provide the most thorough and extensive scholarly treatment of this topic to date.

Though the authors of the essays by no means agree on the extent and meaning of illegitimacy in the past, some general findings do seem to emerge. For example, whereas earlier studies emphasized a higher rate of illegitimacy in urban and industrial communities, more refined and careful analysis of the data finds little rural-urban difference in this regard. In fact, some of these studies report rural illegitimacy actually exceeding urban illegitimacy—thus undermining much of the fragile statistical underpinning for the argument that the sexual liberation of women in the urban and industrial areas of Western Europe was responsible for the great increase in illegitimacy during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

One of the most interesting findings is the importance and persistence of regional differences in illegitimacy. Despite the great changes in the levels of illegitimacy over time, the regional differences persist—leading to the suggestion by Peter Laslett and others that there may exist a "bastardy-prone subsociety." According to this concept, bastard-producing women, living in the same area and often related to each other, pass on the associated values and practices to their children and thus perpetuate this subsociety.

The question of whether there are groups within society who deviate from the established norms and pass on their values and behavior through their children has attracted much attention among the American public. During the 1960's and early 1970's we focused on the "culture of poverty." Today, a similar concept is being applied to the problem of adolescent pregnancy. Many members of Congress, for example, accept the idea that the daughters of today's teenagers will themselves become adolescent mothers unless government-funded programs intervene to break this cycle of early childbearing.

Despite the popularity among portions of the public and the academic community of the concept of a subculture of poverty, adolescent childbearing, or illegitimacy, empirical validation of this important thesis is still lacking. Though several of the authors of these essays suggest the existence of a "bastardy-prone subsociety" in the past, others reject the validity or even the usefulness of this construct. Unfortunately, most of the authors were not able to test the question rigorously by means such as network analysis. Instead, they simply point to the possible existence of such a subculture by noting the similarity of surnames among bastard-producing women in local communities.

One of the virtues of this collection of essays is its emphasis on comparison. Rather than trying to explain or account for the rise or decline in illegitimacy only in a particular community or culture, the authors try to analyze their findings within the context of changes in other areas and time periods. As a result, though each of the essays is in essence a case study, they are unusually well integrated not only among themselves but with other work in the field.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this collection is that it provides a large amount of new empirical information on the extent and nature of bastardy in the past. Yet the quality of the analysis varies considerably within the volume. Many of the essays rely almost exclusively on descriptive statistics, and only a few, such as the essay by John Knodel and Steven Hochstadt on illegitimacy in Imperial Germany, employ sophisticated statistical analysis to test their hypotheses. Furthermore, given the problems of under-registration of illegitimate births as well as the varied definition of the term illegitimacy across different cultures and time periods, conclusions drawn from many of the analyses must of necessity be very tentative. The authors, however, are well aware of the shortcomings of their data and usually make only very careful and limited inferences from them.

Overall, this collection of essays will undoubtedly become indispensable reading for anyone interested in the issue of illegitimacy in the past. Though the conclusions of the authors may be modified or even reversed as more detailed studies of the subject become available, this collection of essays should provide scholars with a very useful starting point for their own investigations.

Unfortunately, while the book is important for scholars working in this area, it is less useful for general readers because of the focus on the technical issues

of measurement and analysis. Though the essays are usually clear and concise, many of them are not particularly well written for a general audience. Furthermore, though the volume is ideal from a scholarly perspective in that it includes extensive statistics and ample documentation, it is often difficult to follow because of the unusually small size of print of the footnotes—a result, undoubtedly, of the effort to keep the size of the volume within reason.

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Learned Men's Home Lives

Behind Every Successful Man. Wives of Medicine and Academe. MARTHA R. FOWLKES. Columbia University Press, New York, 1980. xvi, 224 pp. $17.50.

It is an economic imperative of human existence in our time that the demands of work color every other aspect of life including family and marital relationships. In this book the author draws upon her study of 20 women married to university professors and 20 married to physicians to describe in detail the way in which the structure and demands of the husbands' work influence the families' general lifestyles, the amount of time the husbands spend with the families and something of the quality of that time, the major activities the wives engage in, and the wives' feelings about their husbands' work and about their lives together.

The people described are similar in many respects. Race is not mentioned. They range in age from 29 to 50 and have been married from 7 to 25 years. All but three couples are in their first marriage, all but two have two or more children, all children save one are between the ages of 6 and 18. The families, then, are in mid-cycle, with childbearing years gone but the children still living at home. The husbands are in mid-career as well, established and successful, none of them world renowned but all presumably well thought of by colleagues and peers, and all with many productive years ahead. There are some important differences between the groups of wives, however, the academic wives being better educated and more of them working. But despite these differences, all the couples divide the work of earning a living, maintaining a home, and bringing up children along "traditional" lines.

The author states that the wife relates to and affects her husband's work life in three major ways. As an adjunct, she helps him directly with the work itself; as a source of emotional support and nurturance, she enables him to continue to work; and she makes family life a reality for him while protecting him from its time-consuming demands, doing "double duty" by playing the chief role in the household and in caring for children.

The specifics of the wifely role performance vary by the husbands' occupations. As adjuncts, the wives are "girl Fridays," ready to do whatever is needed. However, the doctor's wife represents him in the community by engaging in good works as a volunteer, through the medical wives' auxiliaries or other prestigious organizations. She maintains an elaborate home, a lavish life-style, and an attractively groomed physical appearance. She participates fully in a lively round of social entertaining, chiefly within the medical community. The wife thus helps her physician husband to be connected to colleagues from whom referrals flow and to maintain social distance from, while showing concern for, the lay community that provides his patients. Whereas the nearest the doctor's wife usually gets to the office is to help to decorate it or offer advice about the interpersonal tensions of the personnel around her husband, the academic wife is more likely to be directly involved with her husband's work product, typing, correcting papers, serving as a sounding board for ideas, or helping to locate them as a sort of low-level assistant.

As the person who provides emotional support and nurturance, the doctor's wife is there at the day's end providing ego support for the weary, harassed husband, who can rest and seek leisure in an atmosphere separate from work in the physical sense but imbued with the deference for The Doctor that he finds at work and in the community. The academic husband is more likely to work at home for part of his day; his needs for quiet and uninterrupted time to work are met by the wife's keeping the swirl of household activities away from his study. She offers her opinions to him as an equal rather than as an emotional prop when he discusses the problems that disturb him. When it comes to their double duty, all the wives take on the chief responsibility for home and child care. Fourteen of the 20 academic wives report no hired help in their homes, whereas 13 of the doctors' wives report such assistance. Help costs money, and the doctors make far more of it than do the academic husbands. In fact, the income distribution is virtually nonoverlapping; one physician and one professor earn between $32,000 and $40,000 a year; all the rest of the professors earn less and the rest of the doctors earn more. But in every comparison, the physicians seem to be far more difficult to live with. One could jest here about how maternal admonitions to upwardly aspiring daughters might need some rethinking. The author comments far more appropriately, however, that "the regimen of medical training . . . is poor preparation for a profession supposedly dedicated to caring as well as curing, since it precludes the opportunity for a doctor's personal growth and time to spend in caring for persons as intimately connected with him as his own wife and children" (p. 197).

The doctors are described as more distant emotionally, more finicky about household standards, less likely to be at home at times of crisis, including childbirth, less involved with their children, less sharing than the professors. All the wives, however, are described as subordinating their own career and educational goals to their husbands', moving when the husbands needed to move for their careers, starting and stopping their own educational and work activities in relation to spouse and children in a way that the husbands did not need to and never did in fact do. Of the entire sample, only two couples (one academic, one medical) share a good number of work and family-life tasks, and in both cases they are involved in *his* work.

Some of the women express disappointment over their lives, and the doctors' wives long for more of their husbands' time and affectionate attention; most of the women, however, have accepted the major dimensions of their lives and feel fairly satisfied. Few of the wives are prepared at this point to be independent economically if the need arose, nor have most made plans for filling their time with deeply satisfying activities once their children leave home.

This book is most useful when it shows the specific ways in which the husbands' occupations, which assume competition and production on the job, fulfillment of timely requirements of career lines based upon a family-free model, and adherence to customary organizations of work, influence family life. The author does her best work when she stays close to the data gathered in her interviews and questionnaires and de-