

EDITOR'S REMARKS

This issue signifies the purpose of *ILWCH*: to change the character of historical conversation by expanding its scope, enlarging its options, and changing its terms. Premised on seeing families, in their variety, as pivots of working-class history, the papers in the controversy section, the review essays, and the research report contest basic issues of conceptualization, periodization, and ways of working. How should rational strategic action by family actors be conceived? Can the different shadings of voice of demographers, anthropologists, and historians discover a complex harmony? How, if at all, can we best move back and forth between "state of the art" technical innovations in estimation and more traditional methods? In studies of the family, what is the most appropriate scale of analysis (with options ranging from the interdependent world economy to the microsituation of men, women, and children in individual families)? Are variations in family types and between styles of adaptation of individuals and genders to situations created by large-scale historical processes more deserving of attention than are features families share in common in spite of vast differences of time, space, and experience? Can policy implications for the present be extracted from considerations of the past? Most fundamental, within what larger orientation to working-class formation should the robust and complex tale of family, gender, economics, politics, and social reproduction be embedded?

It is a great merit of David Levine's "Punctuated Equilibrium" to grasp that all such accounts necessarily are constituted by metanarratives and their simplifying assumptions. As Sewell points out in his comment, most historians of the working class have assumed a heroic, "soft Marxist" vision of the proletariat. This focus on agency implicitly has discounted hegemony and domination, stressing working-class potential rather than the constraints of asymmetries of power, technical capacity, and time horizons that distinguish dominant from subordinate classes. Levine calls for a thoroughgoing revision of perspective. For working-class solidarity, he substitutes that of the bourgeoisie; for Marx and E.P. Thompson, Foucault and Jacques Donzelot; for a plurality of points of struggle, the congealed quality of command across institutional spheres; and for the state viewed as a tool that might be put to use against capital, a masterful and commanding state that pursues the re-creation of class structure as assiduously as any capitalist ruling class. Dublin, Gillis, and Sewell rejoin with complaints about a paranoid style and one-dimensional history, and with pleas about complexity, agency, and the multiple meanings of a congested term like hegemony. While there is much to be said for their objections and their preference for historiographical balance, the power of Levine's argument is precisely that it charts a research program without much apology or qualification. I share many of the reservations of the three commentators, but the challenge of Levine's alternative metanarrative will not easily be put aside.

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Indeed, as demonstrated by the informative review essays on historical demography and on domestic labor by Ittmann and Tilly, respectively, as well as by Levenson's fascinating research report on an emergent, marginal teenage culture in Guatemala, a great deal of ethnographically rich and methodologically creative empirical work on families suffers from a certain lack of reflectiveness about implicit narratives, and about context and comparison. Read as a whole, this issue significantly advances scholarship on the family, and, more broadly, on working-class history. There are enough good leads and ideas to keep scores of historians and social scientists at work for a long time.

A personal note: The chance to take up, with Helmut Gruber, the editorship that David Montgomery has recently left, is an exciting, yet daunting, prospect for me. The fundamental significance of David's work for this journal and for labor and working-class history in general need not be rehearsed here. If, down the road, we continue to produce issues as interesting and suggestive as this one, I believe his legacy for *ILWCH* will have been well-served.

I.K.

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