

## LECTURE 4

### THE FAMILY IN THE PAST II

Read: Welter, The cult of true womanhood: 1820-1860

Hareven, Continuity and change in American family life

Gutman, Persistent myths about the Afro-American Family

Hutter: Immigrant Families in the City

- I. Note: These pieces are not written to be in college textbooks
  - A. E.g., Welter, Gutman, don't worry about details, try to get the flavor, the methodology, try to be critical of sources
    1. Pass over the debates internal to the scholarly field, and the details, and get the general picture
    2. For example, Barbara Welter's piece: it shouldn't take long to absorb her point
    3. The same for the Cott article we read for Tuesday
      - a. This article, the Gutman piece and the Welter piece give you a look into how historical research is done
        - 1) Show the different kinds of historical documents scholars can work with
      - b. What do we learn of importance from studying the divorce laws?
        - 1) About attitudes towards marriage
        - 2) Gender role expectations
        - 3) Tests of the double standard of sexual morality
        - 4) What the laws say, and what the judges and courts actually do when the laws are broken

- B. Hope you noticed the abundant quantity of cited sources in today's readings, and those for Tues.

## II. Studying the past helps us understand the present

- A. Various authors we're reading try to debunk our myths about the past—"the way we never were" was how Coontz put it in an earlier book

## III. Discussion of Gutman

- B. Difficult for you to read

1. Sometimes it's hard to grasp that an author is paraphrasing someone else, often not agreeing with this other author
2. Irony and understated critique, sometimes hard to catch in this day of flaming
3. But worth the struggle
  - a. Shows the bias that occurs all too often in scholarship
  - b. Shows what careful historical research—here using several kinds of archives—can accomplish

- C. Examples he gives of racism in the earlier scholarship?

1. Horrendous
2. So, how was Frazier's study of the Black American Family, written in the 1930s an improvement?
  - a. Frazier's argument was based on slavery's social structure rather than racism (Blacks, because they were black, were said to not be able to form a family, to not be capable of deep emotions, etc.)

3. But Frazier ignored lots of evidence

D. Gutman's findings?

1. Class alone didn't determine composition of Negro family—this was Frazier's notion of "two streams"

2. Gutman's work illustrates the importance of using good sources

a. And, again, the piece illustrates bias:

1) "The Negro male has, in a sense, been the victim of social and economic emasculation which has perpetuated and reinforced the matriarchal Negro family structure created by slavery" (Hauser)

2) Just not true

b. Frazier had a problem because he depended upon the testimony of white travelers and missionaries, the writings of ex-slaves, the oral recollections of blacks many decades after that time

3. Anecdotes about what happened after emancipation

a. "The drifting masses were left without any restraint upon their vagrant impulses and wild desires..."

b. "The Negro orphans lost nothing in losing their parents, but lost everything in losing their masters"

4. No evidence for all such assertions

a. Even Andrew Billingsley said: "Emancipation had some advantages for the Negro family"...but brought about "a catastrophic social crisis for the ex-slave...Reconstruction...a colossal failure"

1) Emancipation *had some advantages*??????

5. Real picture?

a. Gutman found 30 types of Afro-American families

b. South: farmers, laborers on farms

1) North: unskilled

c. Composition of the black household was affected by, but independent of, income, skill, property

d. How *common* was the 2-parent household?

1) No fewer than 70 percent and as many as 90% in a sample contained a husband and wife or just a father

2) How to derive the “matriarchal family” from this?

3) There are, to be sure, variations, but “chaos” and “disorder” just don’t describe them

e. Stable marriages

1) 46%, 43%, 36% had resided together at least 10 years

2) And death and force (forced separation under slavery) account for 48.5%, 31% of why marriages ended

f. We can hardly conclude that slaves didn’t have a consciousness of normal slave marriage relations

1) They had this consciousness before, in

slavery...were illiterate

- g. Clear data that they tried to reconstitute former slave families—which explains geographical mobility
- h. One final point: single women far outnumbered those who headed households with children, and 4 times as many Richmond and Mobile women were married than headed households with children
  - 1) Furthermore, there was an imbalance: for every 100 women there were only 57 black males
  - 2) Actually, we have to ask why were there so *few* female-headed Negro households? (We don't know why)

III. Back to general history of American family: new ideas that came on the scene in the 19th century

A. Gender roles—shifts in definitions

- 1. The notion that woman was more religious than men appeared: a new idea in 19th century
  - a. The opposite notion prevailed earlier
  - b. Welter provides ample evidence
- 2. It is interesting how often the notion of woman's power is addressed in these publications:
  - a. If a woman manages to withstand man's assaults on her virtue, she demonstrates her power over him
  - b. Don't compromise the "source of your power"
  - c. "Let her lay aside delicacy, and her influence over our

sex is gone”

d. Nursing the sick increases women’s influence—she is in authority

3) ...“thus gratifying their medical vanity and their love of power by making him more dependent upon them”

e. As a mother: “to give a correct and elevated literary taste to her children and to assume that influential station that she ought to possess as the companion of an educated man” (a ladies’ seminary statement)

1) “If in becoming a mother...you have also taken a higher place in the scale of being...you have gained an increase of power...”

2) “...for thou mayest affect the world.”

3) The mother who raises her sons to be good Americans has power through their acts

f. Marriage is an increase in authority for women “because it gives her higher aims, and a more dignified position”

3. Another theme is that of sacrifice for, duty to, society

a. Man was “woman’s superior by God’s appointment, if not in intellectual dowry, at least by official decree...[she should submit to him] for the sake of good order at least”

1) The notion of women inherently inferior to man—as opposed to *acting* as though she were—carries up to the recent present

a) “Has a head almost too small for intellect but just big enough for love”

- 2) If women read too much “such reading will unsettle them for their true station and pursuits, and they will throw the world back again into confusion”
4. There **are** contradictions in the literature of the 19th century
- a. For example, the role of knowledge. Sexual knowledge in particular
  - b. History is good to read because it shows the depravity of the world
  - c. Loss of innocence almost equals loss of ignorance. Young girls taught what about sex? About reproduction, menstruation, etc.?
    - 1) “A few facts to set her mind at rest”
    - 2) Parallels the debate going on today about sex education
  - d. Another publication says women should “become as little children” and “avoid a controversial spirit”
  - e. Contradicts the notion of housekeeping as a demanding career, a science, which calls for a superior mind.
    - 1) Women should know medicine, etc.
    - 2) Be able to apply leeches (what is a leech?) and not be too delicate
  - f. The infant mind is “like wax beneath the plastic hand of the mother”—transforming such a mind takes knowledge, intellect

5. Marriage is loss of innocence, of purity by definition, if virginity=purity, then chastity within marriage not the same thing
  - a. Continues today with regard to the degree to which women are allowed to be sexual—to what degree this helps their marriage is a big debate
6. Women who achieve (and there were some of them in the 19th century) are being unwomanly
7. The question about whether women are intellectually inferior or not?
  - a. Woman should reverence husbands' wishes even when they do not agree... "hard though it was because in her heart she knew she was right and so could afford to be forgiving."

IV. What else can we say about the past versus the present?

- A. A claim is often made that the interstices between society and family have disappeared
  1. Examples?
    - a. Communities
    - b. Churches
    - c. Cafés, taverns, other neighborhood gathering places
    - d. Volunteer societies, social clubs
    - e. Larger kin networks
  2. What do these "mediating institutions" accomplish in the way of helping the family and helping families *against* the state?

- a. First, they take some of the pressure off of the family to be everything for every member
- b. These groups can organize, become politicized, as happened earlier and continues today
- c. According to some theorists, the decline of these institutions resulted in more control from the centralized authorities
  - 1) Although note that according to Hareven migration to industrial communities did not break up traditional kinship ties...families used these ties to facilitate their own transition into industrial life
  - 2) Similar to the situation of migrants from the third world today
- d. This kind of argument states that the family became overburdened
  - 3) Can it satisfy all the emotional and social needs of its members?
- e. Another result: increase in privacy
  - 1) Demos and Morgan noted that the Puritan community had a significant ability to penetrate into families
  - 2) Families early in the industrial revolution
    - a) Did take in strangers: boarders, lodgers, apprentices, servants
      - (1) Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, 1/4 to 1/3 had lived in

someone's household or had taken in boarders or lodgers at some point in their lives (Hareven)

b) It was an entirely different concept of family life...not a private retreat but the site of a broad array of functions and activities

1) Now: an increase in solitary living...almost unheard of in 19th century

f. So, for these theorists, the state penetrates into these interstitial areas

1) The family relinquishes care for the elderly and young children

V. Is the family overburdened or underburdened? Different opinions

A. In terms of what it used to do, all the functions it performed, some say the family is underburdened

1. Earlier: families were workshops, schools, churches, asylums

a. There were common economic activities: much more interaction

b. Women were economic assets rather than burdens

1) Even with large numbers of children women invested relatively less time in motherhood than their successors in the 19th and 20th century

2) Other relatives participated in childrearing

c. There was not such a clear separation between family life and work life

- B. But perhaps overburdened in terms of what it took over from the mediating institutions we mentioned
  - 1. The family has to see to almost all emotional needs
    - a. Passionate love, tenderness, raising children, exclusive companionship (intimate friends are an exception in some families), occupying leisure time
  - 2. A polarization of job and family
    - a. This happened in the 19th century (Welter)
      - 1) Family became a physical refuge and a symbol

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