

The publication of John Demos’ A Little Commonwealth in 1970 is generally regarded as the beginning of the modern study of the history of the American family. In the intervening 17 years, there has been a literal explosion of scholarly work in this field. Moreover, other areas of study either closely related to the history of the family or sub-specialties within the field have likewise undergone an efflorescence: the history of childhood, the history of adolescence, the history of women, the history of men (or more accurately, of male social roles), the history of old age and middle age, the history of social policy, and the history of attitudes toward all of the above. The two works reviewed here reveal much about the current state of family history.

Past, Present, and Personal is a collection of eight articles by one of the pioneers of American family history. Taken together, the articles provide an invaluable overview of the field of family history, not least because each “was conceived as a project of outreach to non-historians and non-specialists.” The subtitle “The Family and the Life Course in American History’’ suggests the thrust of the book. The first two chapters, by themselves, provide an invaluable synopsis of the current state of family history, enriched by Demos’ own well thought out conclusions about some of the more controversial issues in the field. “Digging Up Family History: Myths, Realities, and Works-in-Progress” is perhaps the best brief description available of what has been learned in the past decade and a half about the American family. Demos describes the four approaches that have characterized family history: demography, structure, affect, and function. He provides concise summaries of what has been discovered, discusses the work that still has to be done, and offers his own sometimes controversial views of missteps that may have been taken, especially in regard to the role of affect and emotion in family dynamics. The second chapter,
"Images of Family, Then and Now," describes what Demos perceives to have been the three prevailing images of the family in America: community, refuge, and encounter group. His suggestion that Americans have isolated family life as the primary — and sometimes, it seems, the only — setting for caring relations is both persuasive and thought-provoking.

The next two chapters also deal with the family, but with more specific content. "Changing Faces of Fatherhood" is a suggestive history of the role and ideal of the father over the past four centuries, paying particular attention to the impact of the separation of work and home and the devolution of childbearing responsibilities upon the mother. The chapter on "Child Abuse in Context: An Historian's Perspective" challenges the "whig interpretation" that family life has necessarily improved over time. Demos' careful analysis of data from seventeenth century Massachusetts demonstrates that child abuse, far from being common in this past time and place, was rare. His discussion of the reasons for the current seeming epidemic of child abuse, while not original, is given an added dimension by the historical comparison.

The next three chapters deal with the life course and provide valuable examples of a new and useful perspective on the past experience of men and women. "Old Age in Early New England" remains a model of social historical writing, with its imaginative use of evidence and its illuminating conclusions. More controversial and less widely accepted is Demos' discussion of adolescence, which suggests this stage in life is of recent origin, emerging in the nineteenth century as more and more young people were faced with life choices unknown a century earlier. His chapter on middle age is exactly as he describes it, preliminary and incomplete. Yet here, as in so much of his work, Demos has set the parameters for the future. The final chapter, "History and the Formation of Social Policy Toward Children: A Case Study," is very different from the rest of the book, yet in its way, fascinating. Demos describes his experience as the historian on the Carnegie Council on Children and wrestles with the age-old question of the usefulness of history. While he expresses his own doubts about the value of his work to the final report, his description of the questions that the historian can pose to the policy makers and the ways in which the answers to such questions can shift the ground of the debate provide a telling example of the uses of history.

Despite its undoubted value, Past, Present, and Personal has certain limitations. Because of Demos' own research interests, it is too firmly
rooted in the New England experience to provide the overview of the history of the American family that we so sorely need. Perhaps, as some suggest, it is too soon for this synthesis, but those who labor in the vineyards of family history hope that Demos' next book will be in fact the history of the family and the life course in America.

The second book under review is very different in scope and purpose, yet also sheds considerable light on the history of the American family. Viviana A. Zelizer, Associate Professor of Sociology at Barnard College, has written a book chronicling "the changing social value of children." *Pricing the Priceless Child* describes the shift in attitudes toward children that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Zelizer argues that "the expulsion of children from the 'cash' nexus at the turn of the past century, although clearly shaped by profound changes in the economic, occupation, and family structures, was also part of a cultural process of 'sacralization' of children's lives." As children lost their economic value, they became instead the priceless objects of love and affection.

Zelizer makes imaginative use of evidence. She describes the dismayed reaction to the heavy toll in children's lives that automobile accidents took, which led first to personal attacks on the perpetrators, then to memorials to the dead children, and finally to a nationwide safety campaign. She discusses the controversy over child insurance, with opponents objecting to placing any price on a child's life. She talks of the changing legal evaluation of children as tort law began to consider not merely the economic value of the lost child but also what he or she meant to the parents emotionally. She notes the shift in adoption practices, as adoptive parents sought cute and lovable infants and toddlers rather than potentially useful older children.

Most illuminating is Zelizer's discussion of the debate about child labor and the attempts to redefine "the economic world of children." The efforts of social reformers to limit the work performed by children have generally been seen as indications of the progress of society and opponents have usually been portrayed as selfish employers and laissez-faire absolutists who would sacrifice young lives in the interests of their profits or their philosophy. Zelizer demonstrates that there was more to the debate. Indeed, opponents of child labor laws were often sincerely devoted to the traditional idea of the useful child. There was also a class bias. Middle-class reformers believed that working-class parents were exploiting their children, while working-class families depended on the contributions of their sons and daughters for their economic well-being.
The little work that has been done on families in Pittsburgh underscores these different attitudes. In their book, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960*, John Bodner, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber provide many examples of the role of "useful" children among working class Poles and Italians who added their wages to the family coffers and gained their sense of value from their economic role. On the other hand, no better description of the useless but priceless child could be found than that in the memoirs of the upper-middle class *Spencers of Amberson Avenue*.

Zelizer, though a sociologist who is chiefly interested in discovering "the general nature of the relationship between economic and non-economic factors in social life, between price and value," and in challenging "the absolutization of the market" in social and economic thought, has nonetheless produced a work of great value to historians of childhood and the family. She also provides insightful comments about the impact of these changes in attitudes about children on parents and on children themselves. Her final chapter, like Demos', provides a clear example of the usefulness of historical understanding when confronting current problems. "From Useful to Useless and Back to Useful? Emerging Patterns in the Valuation of Children" discusses the current concern with the role of children and teenagers in the family. Are they being rushed too quickly into adulthood or are they being denied the opportunity to be useful and productive, at least within the home? Those asking such questions would do well to read *Pricing the Priceless Child* before they offer their answers.

Jean E. Hunter  Duquesne University

By Simon Baatz.

An agricultural society in Philadelphia? According to Simon Baatz's 'Venerate the Plough': A History of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, 1785-1985, the PSPA has not only endured but has remained remarkably resilient amidst social and economic change. Written to commemorate the PSPA's bicentennial, Baatz presents a