



Isabel Heinemann (ed.)

INVENTING THE MODERN AMERICAN FAMILY

*Family Values and Social Change
in 20th Century United States*

campus

Inventing the Modern American Family

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Introduction: Inventing the “Modern American Family”: Family Values and Social Change in 20th Century United States

Isabel Heinemann

In the United States the family has always been perceived as the most important social unit next to the individual. While American presidents used to evoke notions of the family as the “cornerstone of society” (Lyndon B. Johnson) or standing “at the center of our society” (Ronald Reagan), debates on family norms and values have always referred to the core of the American nation, notwithstanding its self-perception as a modern and complex society.¹ In the period from the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution to the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of the extended family as an economic and social network was replaced by that of the nuclear family as the national ideal, consisting of two generations, parents and children, character-

The idea for a volume on family values and gender norms in the 20th century was conceived in the framework of our Emmy Noether Research Group on Family Values and Social Change at Münster University <<http://www.uni-muenster.de/Geschichte/en/hist-sem/NwG-ZG/index.html>>. I am deeply indebted to the German Science Foundation (DFG) not only for the generous funding of our group but also for sponsoring two international research workshops in 2010, which helped us to sharpen our ideas on the crucial link between normative transformations and processes of social change, and to discuss them with international specialists. Also, I would like to thank my colleagues in the research group, Andre Dechert, Anne Overbeck and Claudia Roesch, for their insightful comments on this text as well as on the entire volume. Special thanks go to research assistant Jana Hoffmann, who carried out the final editing of the manuscript, and to Benjamin Jurgasz and Anika Mester for their invaluable assistance during the editing process. Dr. Tanja Hommen from Campus Verlag strongly encouraged the project of an edited volume and Dr. Alex J. Kay brushed up our English. Any mistakes remain exclusively our own.

1 Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fullfill These Rights: Remarks of the President at Howard University, June 4, 1965,” in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report*, ed. Lee Rainwater and William Yancey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 125–32; Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on the American Family,” June 16, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, 2011, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40053>, accessed June 7.

ized by separate spheres with a homemaking mother and a breadwinning father. In 1955, sociologist Talcott Parsons coined the term “modern isolated nuclear family” to describe this bi-generational family unit, bereft of kinship networks and extended family ties.² Facing the diversity of American society, with its sharp ethnic and class divides, this “hegemonic family model” nonetheless provided the basis for public debates on what constituted a family and which values were the appropriate ones.³

Although the historical works on the social history of the American family are legion, almost no study deals with the entire 20th century. Most of them either focus on a specific decade or on issues of motherhood/femininity, fatherhood/masculinity, childhood, or sexuality.⁴ Whereas debates on the hegemonic ideal of the white middle-class nuclear family and the related issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality have been quite controversial, the transformation of family norms and values during the era of modern industrial society, in contrast, has not been the subject of close scrutiny.⁵ But if we want to better understand how people adapted to modernity and how society and its core values changed during the 20th century, we need to analyze the changing notions of the family—given its centrality within the self-conceptions of the American nation and people.

2 Talcott Parsons, “The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and the Social Structure,” in *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, ed. Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales (New York: Free Press et al., 1955), 3–33.

3 As this volume’s contributions focus exclusively on the negotiation of family values and norms in the United States, we chose to use the term “American” in the entire volume in the sense of “US-American”.

4 See for instance Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Elaine Tyler-May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, (first ed. 1988) 1999); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930–1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom and Social Change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010); Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995)—to name only a few.

5 With the notable exception of the works of Stephanie Coontz: Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Stephanie Coontz, Maya Parson, and Gabrielle Raley, eds., *American Families: A Multicultural Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

To fill this gap, the present volume investigates the negotiations and transformations of family values and gender norms in 20th century USA in relation to the far reaching processes of social change in the period. It combines long-term approaches with innovative analysis, thus transcending not only the classical dichotomies between Women's Studies and Masculinity Studies but also offering a substantial contribution to the cultural and gender history of the United States.

Most papers are enlarged and refined versions of presentations given at two international research workshops on "*Concepts of Motherhood*" and "*Men and Masculinities*", both held at the University of Münster in 2010. The workshops were part of a larger research project in the framework of the *Emmy Noether Junior Research Group "Family Values and Social Change: The US-American Family in the 20th Century"*, established at the Department of History in Münster in 2009.⁶

The volume presents not only the initial results of the working group's research, but contrasts them with and enlarges them through the important works of international scholars. Taking into account such diverse examples as immigration, juvenile delinquency, welfare policy, reproduction, the impact of nationalist women's organizations and social experts as well as gender concepts in film and TV, the contributions focus on the transformation of masculinity and femininity concepts, of mother and father roles in a modern society from different angles. Presenting their latest research, the authors shed new light on normative transformations of family values and gender roles and paint a vivid picture of the continuous relevance of the family as unit of national reference.

"Inventing the Modern American Family": Analytical Approach and Central Questions

In the present volume, we understand the terms *family values / family norms / family ideal* as definitions and projections of an (imagined) ideal family and

⁶ Within this framework, four research projects address public debates surrounding divorce, women's work and reproduction (Isabel Heinemann), the discourse on African American mothers and its implications for welfare policies (Anne Overbeck), the interpretations and imaginations of Mexican American families by social experts (Claudia Roesch), and concepts of fatherhood as represented in TV family comedies in the 1980s (Andre Dechert).

its specific place within the nation. The family concept applied here is that of a bi-generational unit, including families with both parents present as well as single-parent families, biological families as well as step-families, and patchwork-families.

Within the overall aim of offering new insights into processes of value change and gender history in a modern society, the objectives of the volume “Inventing the Modern American Family” are manifold: First of all, we want to uncover how broader processes of social change in a modern society stimulated transformations and adaptations in the realm of norms and values, specifically regarding family and gender roles. This endeavor seems quite promising, as public debates on family values touch deeply on a society’s self-conceptions and its notions of the relationship between state and individual. To reliably trace changing family concepts and altering notions of femininity / masculinity one needs to look at longer time spans. Thus, most contributions chose a longitudinal approach, whereas closer inspections of specific decades serve to exemplify crucial turning points in the negotiation process of normative change. Next, all contributions ask for the relation between dominant and marginalized family concepts, taking into account the crucial categories race, class, gender, and sexuality. This is especially important as most public debates surrounding family values and gender norms have attempted (and still do) to persuade immigrant, minority, or working-class families to adopt the values of the white middle-class, embodied by its socially and ethnically exclusive hegemonic family ideal. Although many families and individuals did not want or could not afford to live up to this norm and the numbers of single parent households, patchwork families and childless couples have been constantly rising, the picture of the happy, suburban family continues to dominate public discourse and the media.

This hegemonic nuclear family model was not only reproduced in countless commercials and iconic TV series and films, it also inspired presidential policies—welfare policies being the most notable example—as well as court decisions and controversial press coverage of issues such as divorce, abortion, same-sex marriage and women’s work. Furthermore, this hegemonic family ideal may have prompted people throughout the nation to adjust their individual lifestyle accordingly, an important factor being its omnipresence in the media. Our volume will thus ask whether the prevalence of this specific family model put pressure on alternative family concepts or, positively, served as a path to assimilation for immigrant families. Of special interest is the influence of visual media in affirming family norms in the second half of the

20th century—and the specific use made of it by producers, politics, and federal institutions such as the FBI. To shed more light on this matter, a section on “Media and the Family” will analyze how film and TV created and transported certain notions of the family and question their impact on negotiations of race relations and gender roles from the Cold War era to the early 1990s.

Another important question is who “invented the modern American family,” which groups of actors helped establish the white middle-class nuclear family as the national ideal. Next to the media and advertising campaigns, social experts heavily engaged in debates on the state of the “modern American family”. Specifically since the mid-century, social scientists, psychologists, and doctors have started to play an increasingly important role in public debates, mostly addressing the paradigmatic white middle-class family and its well-being, reproduction and welfare. As a result, single black mothers as well as Mexican American families and other immigrant or minority groups became subjects of re-education policies and welfare cutbacks intended to teach them “proper family life.” To evaluate experts’ influence, a section of the volume investigates the relevance of expert advice in public debates on reproduction, in medical discourse and healthcare advertisements. Another section will discuss the construction of a national master narrative of the American family as the core unit of the nation by Americanization experts, immigrant women and nationalist women’s organizations.

Obviously, the ideal of the white middle-class nuclear family did not prevail unchallenged but rather became a site of cultural struggle. While the women’s movement fought for women’s equal rights and reproductive control, the student protests and the civil rights movement challenged the moral repressiveness of the middle-class nuclear family model and its racial exclusiveness. Another central objective of this volume is to discuss in how far these and other social movements inspired long-term changes in gender roles and specifically in inter-generational relations. A section on parents and their children will analyze how parents were addressed by social experts, social workers, state officials, and the media as being both the source of and the potential cure for families beset by defective or neglected offspring and juvenile misdemeanor.

Family Values and Social Change in Modern Western Societies

The international research literature on the history of the family in Western societies describes changing family structures during the 20th century, but does not raise the question of whether family values changed as well—a gap that this volume strives to fill. Another objective is to provide some clarification of the notions of “modernity” and “modernism” implied when describing transformations of family norms and gender values – also largely untouched in the recent research literature on the family.⁷ In this volume, we use “modernity” and “modern society” not in a normative sense but as a label for the heyday of industrial society ranging from the last decade of the 19th century well into the seventies.⁸ Referring to American anthropologist James C. Scott, German historian Ulrich Herbert has coined the term “high modernity” to describe this period in Western Europe.⁹ Although the term is well suited to express the contemporaries’ experiences of high industrialization, mass society and acceleration in all fields of life, it nonetheless includes certain semantic problems: Scott defines *high modernism* as a political ideology that merged absolute belief in progress with visions of technocratic and authoritarian omnipotence, regulating people’s values and lifestyles through central planning. Due to Scott, *high modernism* has to be seen as an inhumane culmination of modernity.¹⁰ In his definition, the term is well suited to characterize the extreme fervor displayed by social engineers and experts, eager to rationalize fields as diverse as urban planning, human reproduction, and development policy. As an analytical framework for studying American society and family values during the 20th century, however, it seems less appropriate. Consequently, this volume’s contributions will instead speak of

7 One important exception is Daniel Bell’s lucid analysis of the terms “modernity” and “modernism” and their cultural and political implications. Daniel Bell, “Resolving the Contradictions of Modernity and Modernism,” *Society* 27, no. 3 (1990): 43–50, no. 4: 66–75.

8 Roughly the same period is investigated for example by *Modernism/modernity*, the Journal of the Modernist Studies Association, which since 1993 publishes interdisciplinary exchanges on the history of modernism and its relations to modernization.

9 Ulrich Herbert, “Liberalisierung als Lernprozess: Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte—eine Skizze,” in *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1980*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 7–45, esp. 36, 49; Ulrich Herbert, “Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century,” *Journal of Modern European History* 5 (2007): 5–21.

10 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

the epoch of “modernity.” When analyzing the idealized vision of “the modern American family” as a guideline for social policies and Americanization programs, we are fully aware of its character as a heuristic construct that nonetheless entailed severe sociopolitical consequences.

With regard to the volume’s interest in exploring the linkage between processes of social and normative change, we also employ the term “modernity” to express the contemporaries’ feeling of acceleration and change.¹¹ Finally, instead of referring to the economic-technical or political modernization, we rather focus on the “modernization of lifestyles, norms and political attitudes in the sense of participation, pluralism and the reduction of hierarchical and authoritarian structures.”¹² In this context we refer to Daniel Bell, who, in his 1990 essay on modernity and modernism, declared the respect of individual rights a constituent of a humane understanding of modernity: “*Modernity is individualism, the effort of individuals to remake themselves and, where necessary, to remake society in order to allow design and choice. ... It is the nineteenth-century heritage at its best: individuals, liberty, and the sanctity of life.*”¹³ Bell’s rather positive framing of the term “modernity” does—in the framework of this volume—not mean to blur the racist and socially repressive character of the hegemonic family ideal or the family and welfare policies conceived to foster this ideal. On the contrary, the contributions demonstrate how the modern American family was constructed at the expense of nonwhite single mothers, immigrant families and working-class youth—just to give some examples. Here, expert and state intervention thoroughly revealed the repressive side of modernity and modern policy-making in the sense of James Scott’s *high modernism*.

Other concepts like that of *multiple modernities* coined by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt or even Shalinia Raderia’s notion of *entangled modernities* are quite useful for describing global forms of cultural modernity—as coeval but nonetheless differing processes.¹⁴ For writing the history of Western societies

11 Well-described by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Modern, Modernität, Moderne,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch zur politisch-sozialen Sprache*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck, Werner Conze, and Otto Brunner, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Phylax, 1978), 93–131.

12 Herbert, “Liberalisierung,” 12–4.

13 Bell, “Contradictions,” 72.

14 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” in *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29; Shalinia Raderia, “Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne,” in *Zukunftsentwürfe: Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung*, ed. Jörn Rüsen, Hanna Leitgeb, and Norbert Jegelka (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), 87–96.

the fluidity of the term *multiple modernities* and its disregard for the individual pose some problems. Nonetheless, Christof Mauch and Kiran Klaus Patel in their comparative study on Germany and the United States in the era of high industrialization employed the approach quite successfully.¹⁵ Although one may ask whether the modernization processes in the two countries were really as “competitive” as the two authors contend, the bi-national comparison revealed interesting results in fields as diverse as the welfare state, religion, the media and gender relations.¹⁶ Taking account of the quite heterogeneous character of North American society this volume however follows a national approach, using comparisons with other Western countries as—at best—points of reference to further highlight national traits and developments.

The end of the era of modernity is less contested than the term itself. Unanimously, most authors define the 1970s as a watershed between industrial and post-industrial society, signifying the beginning of the era “after the boom.” This epoch is commonly understood as being marked by the successive challenging of categories such as progress, dynamics, productivity and accumulation of wealth, well described by Natasha Zaretsky in her study of the 1970s American family.¹⁷ As a study of processes of normative change does not primarily reflect economic caesura, some of the contributions of this volume extend the scope of their investigation well into the 1990s, which allows them to take into account the effects of the expansion of the Christian right and also of the conservative rhetoric of the Reagan administration on family values and gender roles.

15 Christof Mauch and Kiran Klaus Patel, eds., *The United States and Germany During the 20th Century: Competition and Convergence* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010). First ed. in German: *Wettlauf um die Moderne: Die USA und Deutschland 1890 bis heute* (München: Pantheon, 2008), 18.

16 Eileen Boris and Christiane Eifert, for example, demonstrate in their article on gender relations in the two countries that, before World War II, German wives participated twice as much in the labor force as their American sisters—thus contradicting the cliché of the German housewife. Eileen Boris and Christiane Eifert, “Gender: Equality and Differences”, in *The United States*, ed. Mauch and Patel, 161–79.

17 Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick, NJ, London: Rutgers University Press, third ed., 2000); Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo, 2002). Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, second ed. 2010).

While interested in uncovering processes of normative change regarding family and gender roles, this volume also proposes a new understanding of the paradigm of value change based on broad empirical data. The first scholars hinting at the importance of processes of value change in modern industrial societies were Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba who in their pioneer study *The Civic Culture* (1963) introduced the term “political culture” into the social sciences. Investigating people’s attitudes to politics and democracy in five countries (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Mexico) they described three ideal types of political culture—parochial, subject, and participant—and argued that a well-balanced mixture of these would provide for stable democracies.¹⁸ Building on these early forms of value surveys, Ronald Inglehart’s study *The Silent Revolution* (1977) put the phenomenon of value change at the center of thorough investigation.¹⁹ He diagnosed an important inter-generational shift in norms and values in the advanced industrial societies, arguing that in the Western societies since the late sixties / mid-seventies a majority of people no longer regarded material well-being as their highest goal, but strove for a better quality of life. The younger generation, according to Inglehart, thus expressed a rather post-materialist conviction and sought individual self-fulfillment instead of simply providing for the family home, household appliances, and consumer goods. He explained this shift in values and attitudes as an element of a major cultural transformation within the modern industrial societies, arguing that greater economic and social security had enabled large parts of the population to turn to more pluralist values instead of adhering to traditional religious and cultural norms.²⁰ Inglehart’s sources consist exclusively of rather selective value sur-

18 Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture revisited: An Analytic Study* (Boston et al.: Little, Brown, 1980).

19 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). See also the further developments and actualizations of these observations in the following studies: Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

20 Inglehart, *Silent Revolution*. See also Ronald Inglehart “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies,” *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971): 991–1017; Ronald Inglehart, *Kultureller Umbruch: Wertwandel in der westlichen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 1989); Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ronald Inglehart, ed., *Human Values and Social Change: Findings from the Values Surveys* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

veys, which—although allowing broad international comparisons—in some respects seem of limited heuristic value, especially through the suggestive character of some of the questions posed. From today's point of view, this approach and interpretation themselves seem to deserve further historical analysis to reveal their specific time-bound character. Additionally, it has been asked whether the diagnosis of a major transformation from material to post-material values can be applied to the realm of the family where immaterial values like altruism, trust, and reciprocity still have strong currency.²¹

While in Western European societies and especially in West Germany a broad discussion of Inglehart's diagnosis and its consequences emerged among sociologists, his findings did not spur an equally heated debate in the United States.²² Historians basically accepted the value change hypothesis, but resorted to researching changes in the family structure instead of dealing with changing family norms in depth.²³ Nevertheless, a broad consensus emerged among contemporaries that the 1970s formed a period of intense economic and social transformation. Most prominently, sociologist Daniel Bell indirectly reiterated Inglehart's argument of a decisive shift in attitudes and values during the late 1960s and early 1970s when exploring what he termed the post-industrial society. Specifically, when analyzing modern capitalism he came to the conclusion that the traditional work ethic was being undermined by the quest for immediate personal gratification, one of the central features of modern society.²⁴ During the 1980s and 1990s the debate on normative transitions in modern societies and their effects was dominated by those sociologists and historians who considered them a threat to the American family. For example, David Popenoe and Christopher Lasch not

21 Daniel Scott Smith, "Recent Change and the Periodization of American Family History," *Journal of Family History* 20, no. 4 (1995): 329–46, 341.

22 Helmut Klages and Peter Kmicciak, eds., *Wertewandel und gesellschaftlicher Wandel* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 1981); Helmut Klages, *Wertorientierungen im Wandel: Rückblick, Gegenwartsanalyse, Prognosen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1984); Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *Werden wir alle Proletarier? Wertewandel in unserer Gesellschaft* (Osnabrück: Edition Interform, 1979); Andreas Rödter and Wolfgang Elz, eds., *Alte Werte—Neue Werte: Schlaglichter des Wertewandels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

23 For a structural approach see Steve Ruggles, "The Transformation of Family Structure," in *American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1994): 103–24. Among the rare examples of historians dealing with normative change are the works of Stephanie Coontz and Judith Stacey. Coontz, *Way We Never Were*; Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

24 Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

only referred to changes in the family structure, but also to a – in their view – deficient value system of modern societies when diagnosing a “family decline”.²⁵ Equally, in the debates on women’s reproductive rights and same-sex families, especially conservatives hinted at processes of value change when demanding either a return to “traditional family values” or refuting normative changes altogether. To date, no solid attempt to historicize Inglehart’s concept of value change and its effect on the family ideal has been undertaken. To fill this gap, the case studies of this volume seek to identify processes of value transformation within the American family and the gender roles attached.

Complementing the findings of the value surveys, family sociology has provided precise demographical and statistical data concerning changing family structures by the means of *longitudinal studies*.²⁶ For the historian, these studies provide rich source material, especially for re-considering the processes of value transformation described above. First monographs on American society in the 1950s and 1960s that draw on the material from such longitudinal studies have already been published (Elaine Tyler May, Jessica Weiss) and changed our view of American attitudes on family life, marriage and reproduction. Another important desideratum would be a historical analysis of the famous *Middletown Study* by Helen and Robert Lynd from the 1920s and 1930s on Muncie, Indiana.²⁷ Interestingly, both the pioneer

25 Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); David Popenoe, *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1988); David Popenoe, “American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review and Appraisal,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55, no. 3 (1993), 527-42.

26 See for example the Longitudinal Study of Generations at the University of Southern California, Vern L. Bengtson, Timothy J. Biblarz, Robert E. L. Roberts, *How Families Still Matter: A Longitudinal Study of Youth in Two Generations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Tyler May, in her important study of postwar families, draws on the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS), a long-term interview study with 300 married couples, interviewed from the 1930s to the 1950s at the University of Michigan. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, (first ed. 1988) 1999). Of equal interest are the studies of the Institute of Human Development (IHD) at the University of California at Berkeley. Two of the IHD’s studies provide the source base for Jessica Weiss’ analysis of postwar gender roles: Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*.

27 Robert S. Lynd and Hellen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929); Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937); Theodore Caplow et al., eds., *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

Middletown Study and a follow-up study from 1982 come to the conclusion that Middletown Americans remained largely untouched by processes of social and normative change. If the inhabitants of Middletown are to be considered the quintessential average Americans, as both studies suggest, this observation opens up a whole new set of questions for historians to answer.

Another interesting corpus of sources provided by sociologists are interpretative models. Above all Talcott Parsons' description of the "modern isolated nuclear family" had a tremendous influence both on historical interpretations and contemporary assumptions on the ideal American family.²⁸ It not only shaped public debates on the state of the American family and its values, strongly influenced assumptions on what one needed to be considered "American" and even helped to dismantle the welfare state—as some of the contributions of this volume will argue—but it also helped Western sociologists in general frame their findings on the modern family.²⁹ Regarding the tremendous popularity of this interpretative model historians nonetheless need to reconsider sociologists' influence in describing structural and functional ideal types and thus constructing a specific family ideal. The notion of the "modern isolated nuclear family" changed its character in the course of public debates: What started as a scientific tool to describe a social phenomenon ended up as a seemingly appropriate diagnosis of social reality. Thus, the historical re-evaluation of the findings of family sociology and social scientific research on value change as time-bound interpretations of modernity remains an important task. Consequently, this volume strives to advance the historical analysis of family values in a modern society and to make a relevant contribution to the debate.

28 Parsons, "American Family;" Parsons, "The Normal American Family," in *Family in Transition: Rethinking Marriage, Sexuality, Child Rearing and Family Organization*, ed. Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick (Boston: Pearson Education, 1971), 397–403.

29 Historians of the family and sociologists alike referred to Parsons when describing the modern American family and exploring its values. See for example Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Frances K. Goldscheider and Linda J. Waite, *New Families, No Families? The Transformation of the American Home* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Tamara K. Hareven, "The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change," *American Historical Review* 96, no.1 (1991): 95–124. Criticizing Parsons' model from a feminist perspective: Stacey, *In the Name*.

Gender History and the Family: Notions of Masculinity and Femininity

During the last decades, the transformation of gender roles in Western societies since World War II has received broad attention among historians. This holds especially true for the history of the United States, because Women's Studies and Gender Studies as historical disciplines received crucial stimulation from the works of American historians. After the pioneering works of Mary Beard and others during the postwar period, more female historians started to challenge conventional historiography when questioning women's place in history in the context of the second wave of the women's movement of the late sixties and seventies.³⁰ During the eighties, Joan W. Scott's concept of gender as a category of historical analysis set new standards in understanding gender as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" between men and women, combining cultural symbols, normative concepts and subjective identities.³¹ Furthermore, Scott and others powerfully rejected the public-private binary that tended to obscure women's individual agency through the assumption of "separate spheres", with men acting in the public space and women taking care of the home.³² During the nineties, gender historians and theoreticians of gender followed, broadly speaking, three different, albeit partly intersecting paths: First, the relevance of the

30 Mary Beard, *Women as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Macmillan, 1946); Gerda Lerner, *The Majority finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 83–103; Joan Kelly Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 137–64.

31 Joan Scott, "Gender—A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75; Cathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (1994): 368–404; Jean Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology, and Periodization*, ed. Alexandra Shepard and Walker Garthine (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 133–65; Joan Scott, "Millennial Fantasies: The Future of 'Gender' in the 21st Century," in *Gender, Die Tücken einer Kategorie: Joan W. Scott, Geschichte und Politik*, ed. Claudia Honegger and Caroline Arni (Zürich: Chronos, 2001), 39–64.

32 Michelle Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross Cultural Understanding," *Signs* 5 (1980): 392–416; Karin Hausen, "Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit: Gesellschaftspolitische Konstruktionen und die Geschichte der Geschlechterbeziehungen," in *Frauengeschichte—Geschlechtergeschichte*, ed. Karin Hausen and Heide Wunder (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1992), 81–8.

body in the framework of gender relations was re-introduced by Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu and others. Also, they suggested taking into account the socially constructed cultural divergences between the sexes.³³ Second, “gender” as a historical category of analysis was linked to those of “race”, “class” and later also “sexuality”—leading to the new paradigm of “intersectionality”.³⁴ Finally, following Raewyn Connell’s approach of investigating the notion of “hegemonic masculinity”, an entirely new branch of historiography started to study the history of masculinities, of concepts of fatherhood, of male agency and experience. Innovative studies questioned the effects of “hegemonic masculinities”, propagated by both men and women, in marginalizing alternative forms of masculinities.³⁵ Contemporary trends of gender research comprise a critique of the biological determinism of evolutionary

- 33 Judith P. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Pierre Bourdieu, *Die männliche Herrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).
- 34 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 251–74; Bonnie Thornton Dill, “Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood,” *Feminist Studies* 9 (1983): 131–50; Patricia Hill Collins, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood,” in *American Families*, ed. Coontz, Parson, and Raley (New York: Routledge, 2008), 173–87; Elena Gutierrez, *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican Origin Women’s Reproduction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Helma Lutz, *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Ann Phoenix, ed., *Intersectionality* (London: Sage, 2006); Carol Hardy-Fanta, ed., *Intersectionality and Politics: Recent Research on Gender, Race, and Political Representation in the United States* (New York et al.: Haworth Press, 2006).
- 35 Jürgen Martschukat and Olaf Stieglitz, *‘Es ist ein Junge!’ Einführung in die Geschichte der Männlichkeiten in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: edition diskord, 2005); Jürgen Martschukat, *Väter, Soldaten, Liebhaber: Männer und Männlichkeiten in der Geschichte Nordamerikas: Ein Reader* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007); Kimmel, *Manhood*; Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and Raewyn W. Connell, *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Martin Dinges, ed., *Männer—Macht—Körper: Hegemoniale Männlichkeiten vom Mittelalter bis heute* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005); John Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” in *Masculinities and Politics in War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 41–58. On the concept of hegemonic masculinity see also Felix Krämer, “Playboy tells his story: Geschichte eines Krisenszenarios um die hegemoniale US-Männlichkeit der 1970er Jahre,” *Feministische Studien* 27, no. 1 (2009): 83–96; Daniel Wickberg, “Heterosexual White Male: Some Recent Inversions in American Cultural History,” *JAH* 92, no. 1 (2005): 136–59; Bryce Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 274–304; Martin

psychology, especially when explaining differences in behavior and emotions of men and women by means of their different reproductive functions—instead of accepting gender as a social construct.³⁶ Moreover, historians try to integrate “sexual preferences” as another category that determines an individual’s attitudes and behavior in the realm of gender relations, and to regard “sex as a historically variable construct” (Joan Scott).³⁷ Furthermore, many authors raise the important demand to enlarge the focus of gender research, also integrating the experiences of men and women from non-Western countries and going back in time way beyond the late 19th and early 20th century—thus acknowledging the historical diversity of gender norms and human experiences.³⁸ Within the context of a broad and integrative understanding of gender research, our volume seeks to bridge the heuristic divide between Men’s Studies and Women’s Studies by providing rich empirical contributions that pay reverence to both fields. Also, we are interested in finding out more about the trans-generational communication of gender norms and the relevance of inter-generational relations in general for processes of normative change, especially regarding family values.

Important insight into the transformation of family values and gender norms also came from historical works that did not choose a specific gender perspective but provided a closer inspection of crucial decades during the 20th Century. Specifically, the 1950s were re-interpreted as a period of transformations instead of domestic stagnation and seen as an antecedent to the 1960s protest movements, especially regarding gender struggles. Elaine Tyler May’s informative account of Cold War families and prevailing nuclear families in a period of national uncertainty proved an important starting point.³⁹ Nevertheless, it was soon challenged by scholars who argued that this decade also saw striking varieties and a multitude of options for women, ranging from paid labor to grass-roots activism and gender struggles that materialized

Dinges, “‘Hegemoniale Männlichkeit’—ein Konzept auf dem Prüfstand,” in *Männer—Macht—Körper*, ed. Martin Dinges (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 7–36.

36 See for instance David Gary Shaw, “The Return of Science,” *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 38, no. 4 (1999): 1–9, and the critique by Scott, “Fantasies.” See also *The Return of Science: Evolution, History, and Theory*, ed. Philip Pomper and David Gary Shaw (Lanham MD, Boulder, CO: Rowmann & Littlefield, 2002).

37 Scott, “Fantasies,” 20–1. Joanne Meyerowitz, “How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Constructionist Thought,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (2010): 1057–84.

38 Higginbotham, “Metalanguage,” 274; Boydston, “Gender,” 142–7.

39 Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*.

in rising prescriptions of tranquilizers to women.⁴⁰ Moreover, new studies in the history of sexuality traced long term processes of sexual liberation, which were by no means limited to East and West Coast student milieus and the sixties as such.⁴¹ These observations not only underline the relevance of adopting a long-term perspective, but also hint at the importance of changing sexual morals and practices for concepts of motherhood, fatherhood and the family as such.

Motherhood has remained a contested concept throughout the 20th century, mostly colorblind and unaware of diverging social conditions. Loaded with the notion of something essential, motherhood was depicted and discussed as being the very foundation of society. Correspondingly, mothers who seemed unable to match the standards met harsh criticism. At the extremes, mothers were either accused of being over-protective moms who emasculated their sons or of being a threat to society as irresponsible, uncaring (and mostly non-white) welfare mothers. Thus, concepts of motherhood and debates on what makes a woman a “good mother” allow us to access self-conceptions and core values of the American nation over a period of intense social, economic and normative change as the 20th century was. In particular, the relationships of state and individual, the influence of factors such as race and class, gender relations, diverging notions of sexuality, and social realities of family life, but especially short-term changes and long-term transformations of family norms can be discussed while focusing on concepts of motherhood.

The same holds true for changing concepts of masculinity and fatherhood. Not only was the concept of separate spheres (and with it men’s exclusively public role and their function as sole breadwinners) massively challenged since the beginning of the 20th Century, also gender roles and concepts of fatherhood / motherhood / childrearing became sites of constant cultural struggle. Despite the variety of masculinity concepts (African American masculinity, Mexican American masculinity, working-class masculinity, gay masculinity)—a white and thoroughly middle-class ideal dominated public discourse and defined proper manhood, fatherhood and family life. This focus on the “white heterosexual male” (as Daniel Wickberg put it)—to

40 Feldstein, *Motherhood*; Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*; Jonathan Metzl, “Mother’s Little Helper: The Crisis of Psychoanalysis and the Miltown Revolution,” *Gender & History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 228–55; Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*; Plant, *Mom*.

41 John d’Emilio and Estelle Friedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997); Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

which one should add “middle-class”—in all its racial and social exclusiveness is perfectly illustrated by the concept of white middle-class hegemonic masculinity, and, linked to it, notions of periodical crisis of this ideal masculinity. But even an investigation of these predominant patterns can be used to uncover the marginalized masculinities as well as their ambivalent and complex histories of adaptations to and distinctions from the white model. Due to its focus on family values, this volume emphasizes fathers (caring or uncaring, present or absent, ambivalent or engaged, biological or foster, existing or imagined) and “cultures of fatherhood” (Ralph LaRossa) as well as gender-relations, including conflict and competition as well as love, romance and sexuality.⁴² Of special interest are women’s roles in the construction of hegemonic masculinity and masculinity concepts framing the debate on juvenile delinquency.

“Inventing the Modern American Family”: Contributions

The volume is divided into four sections, each investigating a crucial aspect of the transformation of family values in the United States. The first section “*Building the Nation: The American Family*” investigates family ideals propagated by actors as diverse as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the Americanization authorities in the State of California, and immigrant textile workers in New York. All contributions ask for specific roles attributed to women and mothers in sustaining their families and building the nation, and analyze the effects of generational conflicts. Importantly, they question the relevance of family values propagated by non-state-actors in strengthening the American nation.

As Barbara Antoniazzi shows in her contribution, not only middle-class Progressive New Women propagated rather conventional notions of motherhood for working and immigrant women through reform projects and advice books—not seldom laden with eugenic subtexts. Also, working immigrant women themselves developed individual notions of femininity and motherhood, freeing themselves not only from their ethnic patriarchal family ties, their bosses’ paternalism, and Progressive women’s maternalism: Imitating the symbols of middle-class lifestyles they renounced maternity

⁴² Ralph LaRossa, “The Culture of Fatherhood in the Fifties: A Closer Look,” *Journal of Family History* 29, no. 1 (2004): 47–70.

and instead insisted on being treated as ladies—thus making an important, albeit largely un-researched, contribution to the repertoire of New Womanhood from the margins of working-class and immigrant womanhood.

Focusing on the United States' largest and oldest organization of nationalist women, the DAR, Simon Wendt demonstrates how conservative family values were transported in historical memory by these activist women, praising the nuclear family and defending traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. Specifically, the DAR combined conservative family values with a particular nationalist ideology, considering the society's traditional gender order the foundation of national identity, unity, and stability. Interestingly, Wendt's contribution argues that the members of the DAR in their commemorative policy not only worshiped a notion of martial manhood and hegemonic masculinity as an important pillar of the American nation, but made sure women as mothers and wives had to instill and sustain these qualities in men.

Whereas the DAR members saw themselves as a major factor in transmitting national memory and preserving the American nation, ethnic immigrant women were considered crucial for the success of Americanization programs by social workers and social experts alike. In her article on Americanization classes for Mexican immigrants in California during the 1920s, Claudia Roesch shows how mothers were assigned a double role of biological reproduction and conveying values such as thrift, modernism, civics and personal hygiene to their children. While fathers were only regarded in their reproductive and breadwinning functions, Roesch argues that mothers were both targeted as primary transmitters of values and in the same discourse blamed for poverty, disease, juvenile delinquency and bad housing conditions of immigrant families.

The next section "*Social Experts and the American Family*" investigates the impact of experts on family values and gender roles. Besides asking who these male and female experts were and what kind of advice on the subject of the family they exactly provided, it raises the question of whether they conceived their expertise as an answer to the challenges of modern society. Correspondingly, notions of female and male health displayed in medical publications, advice literature and advertisements and their respective developments are investigated.

In her contribution on masculine health and the family Tracy Penny Light argues that medical discourse in the fifties established a link between male health and good fatherhood which immediately resonated in commer-

cial advertisements. Promoting consumer goods as diverse as family cars, life insurances or drugs, companies targeted male buyers in magazine ads hinting at their double obligation as providers and family fathers. By this we notice a crucial shift in male gender roles both in medical and commercial discourse, favoring more paternal involvement beyond mere breadwinning. The same discourse nevertheless accepted that men still were to make the important family decisions, even if it was through buying products to promote their health or simply coping with professional stress by using the right medication. In showing how medical expertise and advertisement strategies both helped to shape a specific notion of middle-class masculinity, Light points towards an important aspect of normative change at mid-century: the influence of experts and advertising campaigns.

Obviously, not only the issue of male health instigated popular mid-century debates. In my article, I propose a closer inspection of the debate on working women's mental health in correspondence with their reproductive capacity that touched popular fears of (white middle-class) family decline. During the 1950s and 1960s, doctors, psychologists, and demographers engaged in a vivid discourse on whether women's paid work would lead to a decline in fertility and a rise in neurosis and depression especially among white middle-class women. By the beginning of the 1970s, however, as a new generation of experts shifted their attention from American family values to a more global perspective, the debate saw a characteristic twist: With women's work now appearing both as an expression of equal rights and as a social reality, and the abortion debate stretching the boundaries of conventional reproduction discourse, not only a more liberal gender norm but also race and class biases were enhanced in expert writing and public discourse. The experts' assumptions on higher reproduction ratios and lower attainment of non-white, non-middle-class minorities produced a racially coded "rationale" of inequality, easily transferable to the emerging pseudo-scientific *Zero Population Growth* movement.

The following section on "*Failing Parents and Problematic Youth*" turns to family relations and closely examines the underlying assumptions on the functioning of the child-parent-unit within the ideal American family. Contributions describe the changing notions of "deviant" family life over the course of the century and trace the importance of the factors of race and class for defining "failure" and "deviance" within family relations. Also, they ask who sets the standards for "normal" family life and investigate parents' and children's reactions to such norms.

In her article on the so-called *Crack Baby Crisis* of the 1980s and 1990s, Anne Overbeck shows how different negative stereotypes of black motherhood that had been established throughout the 20th century added up to depict a relatively small number of crack abusing mothers and their children as a threat to American society as a whole. By analyzing written newspaper articles as well as the photo material accompanying the articles she shows how these black mothers were constructed as an anti-family along the analytical lines of race, class, and gender and how the black press tried to alter this perception.

Following this discussion of a specific case of marginalized motherhood, Catherine Rymph's contribution focuses on a significant aspect of fatherhood concepts in the postwar era: Analyzing experts' discourse on the role of foster fathers she hints at a crucial inconsistency in the 1950s perception of fatherhood: Although childrearing manuals, social experts, TV sitcoms and the popular press by then embraced a more involved, emotionally invested father, this middle-class ideal was not applied universally. In the foster care system, with its continuously scarce supply of families willing to temporarily care for infants from disadvantaged families, foster parents and especially fathers were not expected to meet high standards. In contrast to the rather strict adoption procedure, social workers were ready to accept diverging norms of working-class fathers and African American fathers to meet the demand for foster parents. Rymph hints at the crucial relevance of the categories of race and class when arguing that not only were concepts of fatherhood perceived as diverging between middle-class, working-class and African American families. Furthermore, children in foster care, coming overwhelmingly from poor and / or nonwhite backgrounds and perceived as suffering from numerous problems, were less valued than children in intact families or those available for adoption.

Using the vibrant postwar debate on the issue of juvenile delinquency as an analytical lens, Nina Mackert proposes a closer inspection of the popular perception of the crucial parent-child relation. Investigating the construction of parenting practices and the perception of parents in the multi-vocal discourse on juvenile delinquency, Mackert shows that juvenile delinquency worked as a powerful signifier incorporating different constructions of problematic and more positively connoted juvenile behavior. As juvenile delinquency was discursively linked to defective family structure, the factors of race and class served to identify aberrant youth and incompetent parents. Focusing on the construction of masculinity within the delinquency dis-

course, Mackert finally demonstrates how the category of masculinity itself was shaped by class, race, space, and age.

The last section on “*Fatherhood / Motherhood and the Media*” investigates the visual media’s impact on the negotiation of family and gender ideals in specific historical contexts. Drawing specifically on film and TV family comedies, the three contributions illustrate how the iconographies of the family enter public discourse and determine contemporary assumptions on gender roles and the family by the illustrative character of the moving image. Furthermore, the authors trace race, class, and gender stereotypes in the imagery of the American family on the screen and ask whether specific concepts of fatherhood / motherhood serve as a marker of race or class. Also, they question under which circumstances and to what extent films and TV refer to marginal / marginalized concepts of motherhood / fatherhood.

Jürgen Martschukat offers a lucid analysis of Charles Burnett’s film *Killer of Sheep* (1977), which rose to relative popularity during its re-release in 2007. The film tells the story of black slaughterhouse worker Stan from Watts / Los Angeles who tries his utmost to be a good husband, father, and provider while facing poverty, racism, and violence. Martschukat demonstrates how Burnett not only criticizes the predominantly negative discourse on African American families and black fatherhood but also affirms the hegemonic model of the nuclear family with breadwinning dad and home-making mom—as Stan constantly struggles to provide his family a life according to this ideal. Referring to the example of Stan, Martschukat hints at the complicated dynamics and interactions of class and race, severely limiting the options of the individual.

In his close reading of one of the most important anti-Communist movies of the Cold War era, *My Son John* (1952), Olaf Stieglitz enters deep into the visual semantic of the period. He convincingly argues that the dense presence of families in *My Son John* and comparable productions served to integrate the private realm into the anti-Communist “crusade” and to promote the nuclear family with traditional gender roles as a securing bulwark in the Cold War. While the film remains within the confines of contemporary *Momism*, blaming the mother for her son’s weakness and resulting fling with Communism, it nonetheless permits an ambivalent reading of the female character, thus enlarging the conventional conception of motherhood and female gender roles. In confessing her son’s political conviction to the FBI agent—presenting himself as a therapist offering healing to a disturbed

family and nation—John's mother helps not only to heal the family but also to save the nation endangered by Communism.

Finally, Andre Dechert analyzes the popular discussion around the launch of the family sitcom *Home Improvement* (1991–99). The popular sitcom told the story of the Taylors, a white middle-class family consisting of the parents Tim and Jill and their three sons. Dechert argues that, contrary to the multifaceted debate on family values during the 1980s, the sitcom was based on traditional assumptions about an ideal family, subscribing to the hegemony of whiteness, heterosexuality and being middle-class. Yet, on the other hand, the sitcom itself and its overwhelmingly positive reception reveal a gradual change in gender roles emphasizing the equality of man and woman: Tim, the father, not only struggles daily to be a good and involved father to his kids, he also has to adjust to a working wife. Despite all his shortcomings he is embraced as being a family man, the positive resonance to the sitcom being largely built on the couple's cordial and unanimous way of managing the family. This positive evaluation of engaged fatherhood and celebration of the virtues of the middle-class nuclear family is remarkable in an era where absent fathers and broken families seemed a significant problem. While telling three different stories at different points in time, the two films and the sitcom demonstrate impressively the vast influence of visual media in shaping notions of family and gender roles, be it on the precarious position of African American fatherhood, the cordoning function of the family during the Cold War or white middle-class families in the 1990s.

In sum and each by itself, the contributions offer fresh insight into an important field of the United States' sociocultural history in the 20th century: the realm of the family and its values. Combining long-term approaches with innovative analysis, the volume transcends not only the classical dichotomies between Women's Studies and Masculinity Studies. It also re-evaluates the vast impact of the factors of race and class in the way Americans organized their most private realm and in the normative framings provided by the state, social experts, and the media.

Section I
Building the Nation:
The American Family