

# THE FAMILY IN HISTORY – 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Industrial Society

**Background** The industrial revolution first took shape in Britain, then in other parts of the West from the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries onward. It would develop in Japan and Russia beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then after World War II, and particularly by the 1980s, became the dominant economic form throughout most of the world. The shift from agriculture to industrial base had deep consequences for the family, just as the earlier advent of agriculture had done. This short chapter captures essential features which were then combined with regional traditions and distinctions over the course of the last two centuries.

**Purpose** The most sweeping change involved the virtual elimination of the family as a production unit, aside from some small shops and (declining) family farms. Economic functions remained, but they became somewhat more diffuse. In many cases also, work itself moved outside the home, necessitating difficult decisions about adult family roles and household care. On the other hand, with economic functions shifting, other family purposes might receive greater emphasis, for example as sources of emotional and sexual satisfaction. Over time also, families surfaced an additional role as a consumer unit, for example with the emergence of family vacations or the advent of television as a source of family entertainment.

**Children** Changes in the location and organization of production reduced the economic contributions of children, though child labor might remain a vital resource for some families for some time. New technologies eliminated some children's tasks and also created new safety hazards. Many families also disliked the idea of having their offspring work for total strangers in the new, impersonal settings. To these changes were added laws restricting certain forms of child labor and requiring schooling, though enforcement varied. All of this added up to a redefinition of children from economic assets to liabilities. In turn, this required parents ultimately to move toward a lower birth rate. The typical industrial family ultimately involved 2.5 children or fewer, compared to the earlier 8 or more. Parental expectations had to adjust to this new restriction, which might also encourage much greater attention to the individual child. Birth control methods also gained new importance in marriage, and in some cases the role of marriage as a source of sexual pleasure expanded.

**Child mortality** Industrialization broadly construed also generated the new public health measures and living standards, particularly in the growing cities, that began to cut into traditional levels of child mortality, mainly from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. Higher survival rates added to the reasons to cut birth rates, as families realized the implications. But they also freed families from the expectation that one or more children were likely to die (and children from the deaths of siblings). This might make the deaths that did still occur even more painful, but it dramatically changed the emotional experience of most families.

**Gender** Industrializing societies have all generated new educational opportunities for women and this along with the birth rate change raises important questions about traditional patriarchal family relations. These questions might be further sharpened when daughters and particularly wives took jobs outside the home. Generally, women continued to be held to special family responsibilities, but their voice in family decisions often increased (particularly when they brought in a wage of their own). Opportunities for dispute might also become more common.

**Extended family** On the whole the importance of the extended family declined. With industry, many young people moved to the cities, which automatically attenuated family ties at least for a generation or two. The same shift resulted from the ability to earn money independently in young adulthood, without waiting for property inheritance. Often these changes also saw a decline in arranged marriage. Extended family relations did not disappear, particularly amid some regional cultures, but the centrality of the nuclear family increased. At the same time, greater life expectancy might increase interactions between grandparents and grandchildren, though it might also produce new pressure on adult children to care for ageing parents.

**Conclusion** Families managed to adjust to the industrial revolution – another sign of the resilience of the institution. But they had to negotiate a number of changes and on the whole their importance probably declined. On the other hand, in many cases the family's role in providing active emotional support and affection may have increased. A number of cultures saw an increase in discussions of the importance of familial love, both in marriage and in parent-child relations. Overall, the industrial family was a considerably different institution from its more traditional counterpart, though some adjustments were and are painful and regional variations on the industrial pattern were (and are) important as well.

### Study questions

1. Why did industrial societies ultimately require a redefinition of childhood?
2. Why did industrialization ultimately require some shuffling of adult family roles?
3. How did families compensate for the decline of their production functions?

### Further reading

Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Turn in World History* (Routledge, 2016)

Edward Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family* (Basic Books, 1975)

## The Western Family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Context** Western European families in the 19<sup>th</sup> century must be approached from several angles. First, they dealt with some of the trends already emerging in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including new interest in romantic love and new sexual patterns. Second, they were the first families to react to the industrial revolution. Third, their patterns revealed new kinds of social divisions, not only urban-rural but also middle-class/working-class. The results were not uncomplicated. They reflected a mix of some standard reactions to industrialization with some distinctive Western features. Finally, basic Western trends now applied not only to Western Europe but to the settler societies: United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, though with some special features attached to high rates of immigration and the treatment of the indigenous minority. (All the settler societies experimented with trying to destroy indigenous cultures by forcing children into boarding schools, with hideous consequences.)

**Middle-class families** Middle-class families, a rapidly-growing minority in the cities, quickly began to set up some distinctive family styles and goals, that are sometimes covered under the heading of the "Victorian" family. They tended to react to early industrialization by defining the family as a place of emotional and moral refuge from the brutishness of business life – a "haven in a heartless world", as one American manual put it. In this vision, women were withdrawn from the workforce; they were held to possess the special qualities needed for nurturing children and maintaining an emotional oasis. Men were the breadwinners – extending an old tradition of male responsibility – but were supposed to be able to control their more aggressive impulses in the family context. No longer a production unit, the family became a consumer center, now adorned with fashionable goods like a family piano, and of course an emotional refuge. The practice of family vacations began to develop, though men often stayed at work at least part of the time.

**Courtship and marriage** Formally arranged marriages declined, though parents still oversaw the courtship process. Courtship itself presumably allowed a couple to get to know each other and fall in love, ultimately leading to marriage. Men could not participate in this process until they were on a sound economic footing, so normally there was an age gap of five years or more with the objects of their

initiatives. Men clearly wielded economic power within a marriage, but wives had moral authority as well as the time available for family matters, so the union was seen more as a partnership at least in principle, sustained as well by ongoing affection. Urbanization raised challenges for finding a suitable partner. In most cities, newspapers began to carry marriage want ads, to facilitate matches in an unfamiliar environment; the new messages mixed economic appeals – the practical needs for a partner – with more novel aspirations for love.

**Sexuality** Middle-class families reacted strongly against the sexual revolution of the lower classes, and they also took the lead in reducing the birth rate – in some cases, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. Initially, birth rate reduction required periods of sexual abstinence within a marriage, as well as avoidance of activity during courtship. By mid-century, thanks to the vulcanization of rubber, new devices like condoms and diaphragms (called pessaries) became available, but respectable middle-class people were slow to adopt these, fearing they would encourage sexual license. Victorian respectability involved a belief that women had low levels of sexual desire and thus could appropriately regulate overall sexual behavior in courtship and marriage alike. This did not always work – courtship intensity might go too far – and young men (and doubtless some husbands) also might avail themselves of prostitutes or abuse the family servant. But the culture remained vigorous through the middle decades of the century, including fierce efforts to prevent masturbation. In the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century interest in sexual pleasure did gain ground, though haltingly, and some use of birth control devices within marriage also took hold.

**Childrearing** The middle-class family ideal emphasized the importance of mutual love between parents – particularly mothers – and children. Smaller family size encouraged more attention to the individual child. A growing interest in assuring children's happiness showed in the new tradition of celebrating their birthdays, a practice that gained ground during the middle decades of the century. The rapid decline of the infant mortality rate between 1880 and 1920, throughout the Western world, further encouraged these patterns. Mothers now assumed a growing responsibility for moral guidance, and middle-class parents also took the lead in promoting education for their offspring, at least through primary school levels and often beyond; children were not expected to hold jobs. In other words, the middle class sponsored a considerable redefinition of childhood and of the role of children in the family.

**Working-class patterns** The working class might be influenced by middle-class family values – and their family habits were often criticized by middle-class observers, but their patterns differed in several ways. They were slower to reduce birth rates, continuing to expect, or hope for, some economic contribution from children. When the class realized that traditional rates were economically damaging, thanks to limited child labor opportunities, they still maintained higher levels than their middle-class counterparts. Achieving lower rates often required difficult periods of sexual abstinence, for birth rate devices were often either unavailable or expensive; levels of abortion rose as well, though illegal. Marriages were not formally arranged, but they were often negotiated within the urban working-class community, sometimes after a girl had become pregnant. The pattern here was not traditional, but it also deviated from the starchy-eyed courtship ideals of the middle class. Finally, working-class families typically developed particularly tight bonds between mothers and daughters, which often extended into the adulthood of the latter, even after marriage, as both men and women sought somewhat separate entertainment options.

**Immigrants** The immigrant experience in the settler societies offered special features of its own. Many immigrants were expected to send money to families back home, reflecting older ideals of economic responsibility. Immigrants often brought high birth rates into their new settings. In some cases, as with Jewish immigrants to the United States around 1900, they quickly learned novel birth control goals from co-religionists already in the country; in other cases, it took a generation or more to drop to native working-class levels. Immigrants also had to decide about family control over children, amid new public school requirements and work opportunities. Again in the United States for example, Slavic families were generally willing to let daughters work as domestic servants, but Italians strove to keep daughters engaged in operations within the family.

**Extended families** In all urban families, extended families took a hit with the process of urbanization itself; this was one of the reasons that formally arranged marriages declined. Unexpectedly however extended households actually became more common in the urban environment, in both working- and middle classes. The typical pattern involved an older parent – most commonly, a woman given higher life

expectancy rates – moving into the household of an adult daughter, both to seek support but also to provide child care services. This trend would only begin to be reversed from the 1920s onward, as co-residence began to recede.

**Schooling** All Western families were deeply affected by the expansion of school requirements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though attendance was not yet rigorously enforced. This played a role in birth rate decisions, and it also contributed to changing gender dynamics as the education gap between boys and girls steadily declined. Famously, French peasants began to decide that it was important to let their offspring go to school by the 1860s and 1870s, even as they still hoped to preserve a family-based economy. Boys now needed literacy and numeracy to facilitate better farming practices and more effective marketing; girls might qualify for jobs as teachers that would provide family resources at least for a while. In the process, of course, the authority of parents over children – after their early years – declined, not infrequently leading to new tensions, particularly around the period now newly defined as “adolescence”.

**Divorce** All Western societies displayed an increase in the divorce rate, though levels differed depending on religious framework (lower in Catholic societies) and differing legal provisions. The decline in arranged marriage and extended family controls, in some cases marriage at earlier ages, and new disputes about family goals and achievements fueled this new instability – including complaints about consumer living standards or about the absence of sufficient affection. Divorce was not yet common, though in the United States there was talk of a “crisis” by the 1870s, but it was definitely becoming a new factor in family life. For men particularly, it was now economically possible to do without a family, and this could promote some change as well. In another important shift, when divorce did occur with disputes over child custody, the new culture led to the practice of awarding to mothers, assumed to be the natural custodians of the young child – another sign that traditional patriarchal assumptions were eroding.

**Conclusion** Three points stand out, amid a welter of significant changes and adjustments. First, obviously, no single Western family model emerged; class and gender differences complicate generalizations. Second, some of the changes in family life were distinctively Western, reflecting special cultural features like greater individualism; Western patterns of adjustment to industrial conditions were not necessarily attractive outside this cultural zone. But third, Western attachment to their new family values, including the standards of the Victorian family, provided a new basis for judging the habits of other societies, and often finding them uncivilized. This would affect the family policies of Western colonial administrations, but it would also put cultural pressure on independent regions like the Ottoman Empire or Japan.

### Study questions

1. What were the main differences between middle- and working-class families?
2. Why did Victorian culture generate new concerns about sexuality, and with what results?
3. What was the impact of new schooling requirements on family life?
4. What were the main functions of the Western industrial family by 1900? How did they compare to more traditional functions?

### Further reading

Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: a portrait of domestic family life in Victorian England* (Norton, 2004)

Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (Norton, 1995)

Wally Secombe, *Weathering the Storm: working-class families from the industrial revolution to the fertility decline* (University of Chicago Press, 1993)

Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Longman, 2005)

## The Impact of Imperialism

**Context** The 19<sup>th</sup> century was famously a century of European imperialism despite the recognition of independent nations in the Americas. The British tightened their hold on India, while several European countries divided almost all of Africa, pressed further into Southeast Asia and took over Pacific Oceania (along with the United States). The main goals of the effort involved economic exploitation and power political position, not family life. But imperialist expansion inevitably produced new opportunities to evaluate family practices (whether real or partly imagined) and introduce at least some changes. Where imperialism was accompanied by massive Christian missionary efforts, as in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, efforts at reform were particularly extensive. (Note that now Protestants were just as active as Catholics in missionary outreach.) In India, missionary inroads were limited and changes in family practices more modest as a result.

**Limitations** Even in places like Africa European pressures were sometimes cautious. Again, family reform was not a major goal, and colonial administrators were eager not to provoke local hostility. Thus in northeastern Africa, British and French officials did little to combat the genital mutilation of women, though they disapproved; they simply recognized the depth of the regional tradition and left it alone. Only after World War II were halting efforts ventured. We will see that in India, even when some changes were attempted – for example, in efforts to limit child marriage – they did not always proceed very far. In some ways the imperialist period did more to introduce new themes, very tentatively, that are still in play in the societies involves – more than changing practices directly at the time.

**Rationale** Given the intensity of many specific family values in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century West, it was hardly surprising that many colonial administrators felt at least some impulse to intervene in some local family practices. Christian missionaries were even more ambitious, now including the Protestant as well as Catholic initiatives. In this case, some interventions were similar to those in Latin America earlier, but some represented more recent emphases – such as a greater urge to promote schooling for children (while usually still utilizing their labor). Finally, historians have emphasized the role of colonial wives. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and improved medical remedies, male colonial administrators and merchants typically went out on their own, leaving whatever families they had behind; often, they developed new liaisons with local women. Now, however, Western wives often came along, and they were eager to shield their spouses from local temptation. Interactions with local groups became more limited, but disapproval and suspicion mounted – particularly with regard to imagined levels of traditional sexuality.

**Schooling** Given developments in the West itself, educational initiatives were more prominent in this phase of imperialism than before. There was more interest in training lower-level local officials as well as bringing the presumed benefits of literacy (often in a Western language) and some Western culture; some efforts were even extended to girls. Some older children were even sent to Europe for further study. This might significantly affect family life in some cases, though aspiring students – like Gandhi in late-19<sup>th</sup> century India—might promise to adhere to traditional family values. On the other hand, schools did not reach large numbers of people, particularly in the countryside, so this impetus to family change should not be exaggerated.

**India** English interventions here included strong efforts to ban the practice of *sati*, and in this they were joined by Indian reformers – and the practice did decline (without disappearing). British efforts also sought to provide new protections for widows' property and a right to remarry, and there were also some attempts to limit child marriage (a clearer thrust after 1900). Attacks on widespread female infanticide were sporadic but may have had some effect over time. The British also imposed their own law against homosexuality, against regional tradition, and this was only recently repealed. Overall, probably the greatest British influence involved the creation of a somewhat more Western-oriented group of civil servants – including some Indian nationalists – who accepted the importance of education for children and somewhat less restrictive social interactions between men and women. British authors even ventured a series of manners books directed at facilitating social occasions involving both Indians and Westerners, while some educated Indian women began campaigning on issues such as child marriage.

**Sub-Saharan Africa** Western initiatives in Africa pushed in several, potentially contradictory, directions. On the one hand, missionaries and others pressed to abolish the practice of polygyny, and recorded

gradual progress in areas where Christian conversions were extensive. On the other hand, European-led economic initiatives, such as mining, disproportionately recruited male workers, leaving many women with fewer economic resources, often back in the villages. Some colonial laws actually sought to restrict women's work opportunities, sometimes on grounds that these encouraged licentious sexual behavior. A number of programs aimed at making women "purer wives and better mothers", cutting back larger families roles that women had previously maintained. Economic changes could cut into traditional marriage arrangements, as when young men came back to the villages for a visit, flush with money wages and eager to strike up sexual liaisons. While the bulk of the African population remained rural, growing cities created new consumer opportunities for some young people, which in turn might tempt them away from obligations to the extended family. Patterns of change were varied, but not surprisingly some African scholars and feminists have emphasized overall damage to family solidarity as well as the position of women in family and society alike.

**Polynesia** 19<sup>th</sup>-century missionary work in Polynesia focused strongly on altering traditional sexual practices, beginning with imposing more concealing dress and attempting to curb traditional, presumably provocative dances like the hula. Abortion and infanticide were attacked. As in Africa, women's work roles outside the home were criticized in favor of a more strictly domestic family role. Efforts to limit the extended family also placed more childcare burdens on individual wives.

### Study questions

1. Why did many customary family practices persist in many imperial holdings?
2. Why did Western efforts to "protect" women have such complex results in family relationships?
3. Overall, did imperialism result in significant changes in family life and structure?

### Further reading

Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakaniye Musisi, eds., *Women in African Colonial History* (Indiana University Press, 2002)

Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: gender and sex in an African society* (Zed Books, 1987)

Patty O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse: exotic femininity and the colonial Pacific* (University of Washington Press, 2007)

J. Krishnamurty, *Women in Colonial India* Oxford University Press, 1989)

Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context* (Routledge, 1995)

Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the making of empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)

## Ottoman Empire

**Background** The 19<sup>th</sup> century was not a period of major change for family life in the Ottoman Empire. A major reform movement, the Tanzimat reforms, developed in the 1830s, and while it did touch on family life it did not venture too deeply. Vigorous debates occurred between reformers and conservatives, the latter urging more rigorous enforcement of traditions including women's veiling. Reformers were echoed by Western critics, eager to push for more modern education for children and greater freedom for women. Overall, however, the family was substantially off limits in terms of major alterations in this period, even as greater changes were ventured in some other domains.

**Continuities** Patriarchal extended families remained common; many people would spend a part of their lives in a large household centered around an older male. However, when the latter died the family divided on a more nuclear basis, though other relatives often lived nearby and a random uncle or cousin might be included in the household directly. Wider kinship ties provided protection and economic support, as well as powerful identities. Family honor remained a powerful concept, particularly around the preservation of female virtue – including virginity at marriage. "Honor killings" of women who violated the

code were not unknown. Islamic rules on property, however, did provide women with some economic protection once married.

**Reform implications** The Tanzimat reforms did include some efforts to expand education for women, with a new school for midwives organized in 1850. Women were also trained as teachers. New laws in 1854 abolished the sale of female slaves and the practice of concubinage—a substantial change in practice and symbolism alike. Attacks on the harem system mounted steadily, from Western and liberal critics. One sultan was forced to disband his harem in 1909, but full abolition of the harem system came only with the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923. On a larger scale, some expansion of education affected the position and responsibilities of children, but it was noteworthy that schooling spread far more rapidly among the Christian and Jewish minorities than in the Muslim population.

### Study questions

1. Why, in the eyes of reformers, was some change essential in Middle Eastern family life?
2. What were some of the reasons that actual changes proved limited?

### Further reading

Margot Badram, *Feminism, Islam and Nation: gender and the making of modern Egypt* (Princeton University Press, 1995)

Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: past and present* (Princeton University Press, 2007)

## Changes in Japan

**General** Not surprisingly, Japan's more dramatic embrace of reform in response to Western military and economic threats, from 1868 onward, included substantial changes in family life. These are less well known than efforts in the economic and political sphere, but they merit careful attention. At the same time, the Japanese sought to avoid a fully Western version of the modern family.

**Childhood** Key changes deeply affected the roles of children in the family, including new public health measures that cut into levels of child mortality. The 1872 educational act required primary schooling for both boys and girls. Implementation was somewhat gradual, given resource constraints and continued needs for child labor, but by 1900 a substantial shift had occurred. Some resistance developed among the peasantry, but previous educational traditions and the larger umbrella of Confucianism assured a relatively smooth transition. Some daycare centers emerged as well. For smaller groups, including some women, education began to extend beyond the primary level. As in the West earlier, these changes also began to generate a birth rate decline: parents were adjusting in various ways. Japanese reformers also pressed for wider attention to childhood in other ways, often copying Western expert arguments about the importance of more careful parenting. Children “will become learned and virtuous if the training methods are appropriate, stupid and bigoted if they are not,” as one authority noted in 1874. Advice manuals proliferated after 1900 along with new periodicals such as the *Family Magazine*, which urged adults to convert to the realization of the “child as treasure”. Finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, Japan became a world leader in the production of child-centered toys, by the 1920s.

**Distinctiveness** With all this, Japanese authorities also sought to differentiate Japanese children from their Western counterparts by insisting on the importance of group and family solidarity (along with nationalism and loyalty to the emperor). After brief flirtation in the 1870s, the government came down hard against individualism. An 1879 Memorandum insisted on “the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, honor and duty, which have been cultivated for several centuries.” This approach influenced parental goals and tactics, including strong reliance on shaming wayward children, and also the ties Japanese youngsters developed with their parents and peers. Similar conservatism dictated a domestic emphasis for women despite their educational advances (though this was not entirely dissimilar from patterns in the West). Even upper-class girls in secondary schools were urged to develop their capacities to become a “good wife, wise mother”. Feminist initiatives developed but they were constrained.

**Marriage** Japanese law unabashedly supported patriarchal authority, deep into the reform decades. The legal code of 1898 required a husband's consent for a wife to sign a contract. Women's adultery might be

punished as a criminal offense, but the same did not apply to men. Marriage required a father's consent (this for both men and women, until age 30 for men, 25 for women). In a divorce, custody of the children rested with the father. More than laws were involved. As contacts with Westerners increased, the Japanese upper classes resisted the tradition of the mixed-gender dinner party, after a brief flirtation: the Japanese did not like to have their wives along (but valued geisha company, which disconcerted Westerners); and they definitely wanted daughters to stay home, lest paternal authority to arrange marriage be disputed. Japanese of all social classes, and not just the elite, began to be urged to maintain greater control over sexuality.

**Adjustments** Here too, however, there were important changes. At the legal level, concubinage was outlawed, a huge redefinition of family at the upper-class level. More broadly, industrialization increasingly took Japanese men out of the home, giving mothers huge new authority and responsibility. Some new family activities were encouraged, even by the government: for example, dinners at home with husband and wife together. Dining tables became a popular new furniture item. By the 1920s, discussions of the importance of love as a basis for marriage increased, with some widely-publicized cases (including at least one suicide) where young women resisted parental arrangements in favor of the inclinations of the heart. Not surprisingly, the modern Japanese family as of the turn of the century was a complex mix of tradition and genuine innovation. Here, clearly, was an industrial style family with a distinctive link to earlier patterns.

### **Further reading**

Mark Jones, *Children as Treasures: childhood and the middle class in early twentieth century Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

Michael Kinski, *Kinderheit/Childhood In Japanese History* (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016)

Marnie Anderson, *A Place in Public: women's rights in Meiji Japan* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2010)