

Andrew J. Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981, 142 pp., \$14.00 (cloth).

This monograph is the first volume of a series entitled *Social Trends in the United States*. As stated in the forward, the purpose of the series is "not to break new ground in social analysis, to analyze new data, or make comprehensive statements about . . . research in a particular field" (viii). Instead, the intention is to publish works that review a body of literature on topics of interest to the general public. With the increasing tendency toward research on specialized and narrow issues, broad works like this that contribute to the stock of social knowledge are important channels of communicating with the general public.

The focus of this volume is marital formation and dissolution. The first chapter delineates historical trends in marriage, cohabitation, marital dissolution (through death, separation, and divorce), and remarriage. The long-term trends are relatively clear; declining childbearing, declining marital dissolution by death of a spouse, rising rates of divorce (and by implication separation), as well as rising rates of remarriage after divorce. On the basis of these long-term trends, Cherlin identifies those periods that deviate from the pattern. Unlike the popular view, Cherlin notes that marital behavior of the 1950s was just as unusual as the 1960s and 1970s if one adopts an historical perspective. The 1950s are problematic because marital behavior seemed to reverse historical trends while marital behavior of the 1960s and 1970s reversed the trends of the 1950s and surpassed the projections based on historical trends. In addition, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the dramatic growth and institutionalization of separation, cohabitation, single-parent families, and remarriage as prevalent states of "family" life.

The second chapter attempts to explain why the postwar period reversed and then accelerated earlier historical trends. Why did a greater proportion of women in the 1950s marry earlier, have at least two children, have child sooner after marriage, have their children closer together, and divorce less often?

Cherlin reviews two explanations offered in the literature. The trends of the 1950s were either the result of changed attitudes (a period explanation) or the distinctiveness of the cohort based either on some shared set of childhood and adolescent experiences during the Great Depression and World War II or the small size of the cohort with its' favorable labor market position. Cherlin concludes that

both...period- and cohort-based effects were operating and...they reinforced each other...The childhood and adolescent experiences...predisposed them to place a greater value on home and family and...when the general shift in values about family life occurred in the 1950s, they may have been in the vanguard. Moreover, the small size of the cohorts of the 1920s and 1930s worked to their advantage during the postwar economic boom. (44)

Alternatively, what caused the change evident in the 1960s and 1970s? Five explanations are examined for the turnaround. Married women working outside the home, a tougher economic situation, improved contraceptive techniques and practices, a decline in traditional attitudes, and the existence of a "marriage squeeze" (a sex-ratio imbalance in the numbers of "eligible" marriage partners) have all been offered as explanations for rising divorce rates, rising age at marriage, declining birth rates, a pronounced rise in cohabitation and a dramatic rise in single-parent families (75% of which have a female head). Cherlin downplays the significance of each of these explanations except women's labor-force participation, which he believes "ultimately will be seen as the most important stimulus to the initial rise in age at marriage and in divorce after 1960" (59). He concludes that each of these theories explains part of the change, although "it is not possible to state definitely which of the effects... was more important (59).

The third chapter discusses the consequences of changes in family life now that people of all ages regardless of marital status are more likely to establish independent households than in the past. Cherlin concentrates on the problems of divorce,

single-parent families, and families of remarriage. Cherlin critically reviews several important works on the effects of divorce, and makes three recommendations to ease the emotional strain children experience, including regular visits by the non-custodial parent, refraining from involving children in disputes between parents, and re-establishing household routines typically disrupted by separation.

The three main problems of single-parent families are responsibility, task, and emotional overload, and Cherlin explicitly refutes the widespread belief that "fatherless families" produce a number of social "pathologies" from juvenile delinquency to sex-role ambiguity. He maintains that the most detrimental aspect of female-headed families is not the absence of a father but the absence of a male's income. As Cherlin notes, divorce enhances the financial position of the male while the financial position of the female declines.

Since over 75 percent of divorced people remarry (about 50% do so within 3 years) the family of remarriage is becoming an increasingly prevalent family form. However, these marriages are not problem-free since they are slightly more likely than first marriages to end in divorce. If there are children involved, the situation is complicated further because a mutually satisfactory relationship between step-parents and children can be difficult to establish. According to Cherlin, the chief problem of families of remarriage is the lack of "institutionalized... ways of resolving problems" (87). His concern for "established rules of behavior" (87) or normative prescriptions and proscriptions reveals the functional underpinning of his view of human interaction. His view, put bluntly, is that people in remarriage experience a *roleless-role* because the functional imperative that patterns and organizes interpersonal relations is missing.

Cherlin makes the important theoretical insight that families of divorce or remarriage are "complex" families that no longer correspond to individual households. Even the conception of "the family" varies from individual to individual, revealing that reality is socially constructed. Cherlin states: "after divorce, mother, father, and children all may have a different conception of who is in their immediate family. In fact, one can longer

define 'the family' or 'the immediate family' except in relation to a particular person" (85). For this reason alone Cherlin's apparent longing for institutionalized roles of "the step-parent" or "the step-child" seems curious, if not contradictory. Surely these relationships are individual and socially constructed also.

In the last chapter Cherlin identifies a number of black-white differences, and explores several possible explanations for them. The trends include later marriage for blacks (a trend that began around 1950), a convergence of the percentage of blacks and whites pregnant with their first child at the time of marriage, a sharp increase in the percentage of premarital births for blacks compared to a slight increase for whites. In addition, blacks have a greater probability of separating than whites, tend to remain separated longer before obtaining a divorce, and to remain divorced longer before remarrying.

After discussing these trends, Cherlin examines three explanations found in the literature. Are these trends (1) rooted in the slave experience, (2) the result of black migration and urbanization in the early twentieth century (moving from a "folk" to an "urban" society) or (3) the result of recent developments such as high unemployment, government social welfare policies, the lack of educational attainment or the emergence of a "black underclass?" Cherlin rejects both the remnant of slavery and transition from folk to modern society theses, and concludes: "that a substantial part of the current differences between black and white family patterns are of recent origin. The contemporary divergence goes back no further than the depression and has accelerated since 1960" (103-104). Although he maintains that "no single explanation... of the postwar trends in marital stability among blacks is entirely satisfactory" (109), he inclines to blame "life in the cities today" (104). Using educational attainment as an indicator of social class Cherlin found that changes were greatest for blacks with less education, but phrased his conclusion in a tentative way.

[A] substantial portion of the postwar changes in age at marriage and in marital stability among blacks may represent the response of the poorest, most disadvantaged segment of the

black population to the social and economic situation they have faced in our cities over the past few decades. (108)

Here, the limitations of Cherlin's analysis are laid bare. Is it really the cities that are responsible for the social and economic situation in the U.S. or the creation of an "underclass," whether black or white? Cherlin's social-structural analysis is inadequate. Failure to recognize the real forces that shape the American political-economy that create and perpetuate class differences, with direct and indirect effects on family-life allowed Cherlin to deal with aggregate trends, which depict the U.S. as a homogeneous society where Catholics are like Jews who are like Protestants regardless of social class, except of course, blacks whose differences from the statistical mainstream can not be ignored. Why not include other minority groups such as Native Americans (certainly the bottom layer of the underclass) or Hispanics (which might reveal something about the interaction of class, ethnicity, and religion). Cherlin dismisses the necessity of fully analyzing the data because of space constraints, but adds the "the postwar trends... have been parallel for most groups" (93). No evidence is provided for such an assertion, nor does it exclude significant differences between groups. Furthermore, if black-white differences are not attributable to slavery, migration, or race but are class differences, how can one avoid a class analysis for the population as a whole?

His discussion of the relationship between attitudes and behavior is also weak, and leads to an ecological fallacy. For example, in his explanation of rising divorce after 1960s, Cherlin maintains that attitudes changed *after* behavior (although he posits an "attitude-behavior feed-back loop" (59) so that attitudes and behavior reinforce each other). He bases his contention on public opinion polls (aggregate data). In doing so, Cherlin does establish that public opinion was, in general, hostile to *changing divorce law to make divorces easier to obtain*. However, he commits the ecological fallacy by inferring that particular individuals who divorced shared this opinion with the majority. Indeed, individuals who have the attitude that a divorce

is out of the question do not divorce with great enough frequency to account for the trend. Furthermore, the question of changing the difficulty or ease of obtaining a divorce is only an indirect (perhaps invalid) indicator of an individuals' attitude toward divorce. An individual could, with perfect consistency, believe that divorces should be difficult to obtain and that it is an acceptable and necessary means of ending an unsatisfactory relationship as a "last resort." This contradiction between aggregate and individual phenomena, and the unjustified attribution of particular motivations to individuals runs throughout the book.

This is essentially a demographic study with all the strengths and weaknesses of demographic analysis of aggregate trends. The strength is revealed in the first chapter where the historical trends are documented and illustrated with helpful visual aids. However, except for the final chapter comparing the differences between blacks and whites, all the other trends are based on aggregate data that fail to take into consideration important ethnic, social class, regional, or religious differences. When Cherlin attempts to explain the trends he resorts to either global concepts such as the process of "modernization" or industrialization (which he fails to define, much less elaborate), or attributes the trends to mass social-psychological consequences of historical events such as the Great Depression or World War II. Despite these drawbacks, Cherlin does offer relevant evidence on a number of important issues in the literature, has abandoned the notion of "the family" (even if he retains other portions of this normative view), and spares the reader the moral weight of the decay/social pathology view of current family relations as well as the *Dr. Pangloss* position that "this is the best of all possible worlds."

University of Kansas

Robert John

Mary Lorenz Dietz, *Killing For Profit*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983, 230 pp., \$22.95 (cloth).

Killing For Profit focuses on the social organization of felony homicide. Growing out of eight months of field work with the Detroit Police Department in 1974, Dietz brings one very close to a firsthand account of the social dynamics of felony homicide. Using police files and homicide accounts of defendants, witnesses, intended victims, and victims who did not immediately die, Dietz manages to bring a well deserved sense of horror to a subject where horror is too often lost in statistical analyses.

The book is organized into three parts. In part one Dietz offers an overview of felony homicide research, a theoretical perspective, and a methodological note on her study. Part two focuses on three kinds of felony homicides: robbery, execution, and sex killings. Part three employs an interactionist framework to explore the patterns in homicide encounters.

Chapter one is a good summary of research that has used an interactionist approach to understand criminal violence. These qualitative studies challenge many assumptions once held about homicide and produce three important findings. First, all interactionist research notes a general absence of pathology in the people who engage in homicide violence. Dietz (vi) describes how her own thinking changed during her research: "I have moved from the idea that people who engage in violence are mentally ill and out of control to the belief that they are for the most part no different from everyone else, apart from their willingness to kill." Second, the depersonalization of victims is found in many felony homicides. Third, felony homicides are increasingly multiperson encounters, which suggests the importance of understanding the interactional aspects of these deadly encounters.

Chapter two focuses on socialization towards violence. As Dietz points out, the use of violence requires both physical and mental training, and the social nature of the mental training is a primary focus of the book. Although Dietz discusses the norms of street violence, she gives inadequate attention to the