

Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

In the past several years, the coinciding histories of fatherhood and masculinity have become of increasing interest to historians working in the fields of gender and social history. Modern French history has long needed a study devoted to the subject of fatherhood, especially given the many excellent studies dealing with motherhood and its importance to the formation of Third Republic and Vichy social policy and cultural attitudes about women. Kristen Stromberg Childers has filled this gap with a fascinating and thought-provoking book on fathers, men, masculinity, and social policy in early twentieth-century France.

Childers' book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on gender and the Vichy regime which has mostly focused on the regime's construction of female gender roles and its deployment of motherhood as the one true vision of womanhood. It draws on an impressive array of sources including official governmental propaganda and policies, internal governmental correspondence and documents, social commentary from a wide range of political, cultural, and religious "experts," as well as advertising and legal documents to build her case for the centrality of fatherhood and the family to conceptions of the French State between the years of 1914 and 1945. While Childers sets up her discussion of Vichy with chapters dealing with paternity and state law prior to 1940 and discursive representations of the *père de famille* in the interwar period, the book's true focus is Vichy France's treatment and construction of fatherhood and its attempts to place the father and the family at the center of the state and legal apparatus. The Vichy regime represented the pinnacle of efforts to "enshrine fatherhood as a litmus test of good citizenship" (3). Childers argues that while the patriarchal and paternalistic Vichy leaders sought to enact their reactionary domestic program, the National Revolution, with fathers and fatherhood central to its promotion of the family, it largely failed to install legislation that fundamentally prioritized either.

French social policy architects within and outside governmental structures were concerned with both the biological and social aspects of *paternité*. As we learn in Childers' book, both the biological and social functions of fatherhood were of vital importance in the creation of social policy, but they were not one and the same. It seems these conflicting meanings of *paternité* were at the root of the problems of especially the Vichy government's ideological intention to install fathers – *pères de familles* – at the heart of the regime's National Revolution. Perhaps it was also a result of this definitional confusion that the government did not succeed in its efforts, inexplicably half-hearted, to follow through on its intentions and the aims promoted by a host of natalist-familialists to integrate fatherhood into the fundamental design of French citizenship. Childers maintains it was the tension between the imagined ideal father and the

real-life one, an oftentimes much more problematic figure who was quite likely to be a POW in Germany as well as seriously conflicted about his own familial role and paternal duties, that contributed to Vichy's inability to enact measures that advanced the cause of the *père de famille*. In addition, Childers concludes that Vichy's advancement of state authority collided head-on with its efforts to shore up paternal authority in the home; a strong state conflicted with strong fathers' individual authority and were seen to be, as she states, "an impediment to greater state involvement in private life" (184). This collision ultimately limited the effectiveness of Vichy's patriarchal ideology and ultimately paved the way for a social welfare state that would prioritize children and their mothers as aid recipients, not their fathers as most pre-war and Vichy-era family advocates had wanted.

Childers' argument is much stronger on the footing of policy issues and where the Vichy regime failed to fulfill its promises for fathers by enacting measures that would have placed them as the main benefactors of the expanding social welfare state. By focusing on propaganda and policy rather than the lived experiences of fathers and their reactions to Vichy's goals and inaction, she is on less sure ground when she asserts that one reason they failed to successfully advance their vision was that "few men could live up to such expectations about their masculinity and their fatherhood" (3). One could argue that the same could be said about the contrast between Vichy propaganda on saintly motherhood and the daily lives of women. Although she states clearly that the book is about "public rather than private manifestations of fatherhood in civic society," and asserts that "the examples of 'real-life' fathers and their lived experiences would not get at the ultimate meaning in the governmental debates, the popular representations and legal controversies surrounding the very essence of paternity in early twentieth-century France" (11), it is important to note that sources documenting the lived, daily experiences of fathers during the Occupation are critical to the book's contention that Vichy failed to translate rhetoric and propaganda into measures and actions that succeeded in enshrining fathers and fatherhood as the ultimate definition of citizenship because of, primarily, the conflict between ideal and living fathers. It would be interesting to know more about how fathers who were not mobilized because of age and thus remained in their homes to face the many privations that confronted all French citizens, received the *Commisariat Général de la Famille*'s mixed messages about their place in French society.

Childers also holds that while pronatalists were key in advancing the cause of fathers and fatherhood in the late Third Republic and Vichy, that pro-family organizations made of up social Catholics must not be underestimated in their influence on the Vichy government in particular. Here, like the social Catholic familialist official Robert Talmy, who wrote one of the earliest histories of the pro-family movement, Childers oversimplifies the difference between pronatalists and family advocates.

talist and pro-family activists. If she would dig deeper, Childers would find that these groups' memberships often overlapped and that their official propaganda was quite similar at times, especially concerning gender issues and in promoting a gendered vision of the state based on fatherhood and motherhood. While natalist and familialist groups were quite different in the period preceding the Great War, they often joined forces and shared the same leadership in the inter-war period and Vichy. Talmy's artificial distinction between the two camps obscures this fact and is made, perhaps, for his own political purposes in relation to his position with the National Union of Family Associations at the time of his book's publication in the early 1960s. Further research into the organizations and the men behind them (often fathers of large families themselves) and less reliance on secondary sources such as Talmy's would have gone far in correcting this and other generalizations about those in and out of government who advanced the cause of fathers, large families, and the birthrate.

These minor critiques aside, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France* remains an important book and provides a significant and path-breaking corrective to the historiography of both the Vichy regime and the late Third Republic; it does indeed show how gendered constructions of fatherhood and masculinity indelibly shaped notions of citizenship, political participation, and social value and should be of great interest to European historians interested in questions of gender, family, the state, and social politics.

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Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power, eds., *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Like many other areas of history, studies of the right have largely overlooked women's participation. While we might secretly wish for women in the Ku Klux Klan, or Pauline Hansen, founder of Australia's extreme right One Nation Party, to remain "hidden from history," the editors of *Right-Wing Women* warn that we neglect right-wing women at our peril. Unlike earlier studies of women on the right that portrayed such women as "dupes of men" suffering from false consciousness, more recent work, including the essays in this volume, stresses that women are active participants in these movements who knowingly support right-wing agendas. The editors make clear accordingly that their main purpose in compiling this volume is to understand the right's appeal to women and the