

Alan B. Spitzer — *The French Generation of 1820*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. Pp. xvi, 335.

Like any good book Alan Spitzer's *The French Generation of 1820* raises as many questions as it answers and demands of the reader a reaction to its theoretical framework. The concept of the "generation" has for a long time interested the author and he is fully aware of all of the possible nuances in the use of the term and all of the possible objections which can be made to those uses.

His "generation of 1820" comprises 183 individuals born between 1792 and 1803. Their generational identity is connected to the fall of the Empire and to the fact that those born before 1792 would have been too old to participate in the Imperial educational system, and those born after 1803 would have been too young to have reached maturity by the time of the death of Louis XVIII in 1824. The latter boundary is admittedly arbitrary.

The "generation" of 1820 is predominantly Parisian, educated in the great schools, largely upper class and dependent for its fame and its identity on predominantly literary activity. The peasants of the *Massif Central* do not appear, nor do the silk workers of Lyon.

Having carefully qualified, defined, carved out his "generation" Spitzer proceeds to an analysis of what the characteristics of that generation might be. Perhaps what intrigues him most is the interconnectedness of the members in identifiable groups formed to express their generationism. We are provided with sociograms indicating for example the ramifications of Auguste Comte's wedding party as well as the personnel associated with the *Globe* and the *Producteur*. But where Spitzer is best is in fact re-creating the ideational content of the minds of a group of young men at the beginning of the Restoration very much under the influence of a 23 old professor, Victor Cousin. These young men taking a posture against the retrograde tendencies of the Restoration in the secresies of the *Carbonari* or the publicities of a *Globe* and a *Producteur* whose mission was to revitalize literature and all society, had a consciousness of self and of mission, of seriousness of purpose, of genius and of destiny which do give them a particular character associated with a particular time.

Spitzer writes of his generation with a richness of knowledge, a subtlety, a sympathy and occasionally a caustic wit. One finds one's self nodding in agreement with judgments of persons and movements. The argument he advances, contrary to the usual "lawyers without cases, doctors without patients" that 1820 was *le beau temps pour paraître* and that there were more spaces on the employment ladder than under the Empire is intriguing. Could it be that with armies demobilized and Empire dismounted there were proportionately more aspirants for the available places? It is in the end disappointing to come to the conclusion as Spitzer does that this self-regarding generation over-estimated its own capacities and was in effect a failure. "One man's treason is another man's maturity" (275).

One is not totally satisfied with the conclusion. As Spitzer points out this is the generation of Balzac, Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Thiers and a number of others whose political and intellectual influence is best judged not in the 1830s but in the 1880s. One can argue that significant numbers of the generation of 1820 continued to act as a cohort. One can argue that 1830 after all represented or appeared to represent, what 1820 was about. Spitzer nods affirmatively in the direction of a continuing role for the Saint-Simonians in the 19th century. Others may have equal claims. There is finally the question of the generation. When one has to define so carefully and so reductively what the "generation" is, is it at best any more than a *façon de parler*? Spitzer discusses in his introduction the importance of the social network. In the end this appears to be what we have been reading about — a social network whose members shared those characteristics Spitzer gives to the French generation of 1820.

Too, there may be a specter haunting Spitzer. Although Delphine Gay born in 1804, is dismissed rather quickly, George Sand, born in 1804, is mentioned not at all. Given Spitzer's framework there are good reasons for the exclusion, but one does have the uneasy sense that in the generation of 1820 there are too be found the seeds of feminism.

There is much to argue about in the *French Generation of 1820*, but the arguments themselves can only be a source of pleasure and of a clearer understanding of Restoration France.

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Mark J. Stern — *Society and Family Strategy: Erie County, New York 1850-1920*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. Pp. xiv, 172.

The dramatic decline in childbearing in the United States between 1800 and 1920 represented a virtual revolution in human behaviour. In 1800 the yearly birth rate of white Americans stood at around 55 births per living American; it was halved by 1920. Mark Stern offers a unique, and compactly written study of Erie county for the period after 1850. The study is unique in two respects. First, it is based on a very large nominal data set, using samples drawn from the federal census of 1900 and the New York state censuses of 1855 and 1915 for Buffalo and Erie county. Second, the study takes the question of fertility decline as central to wider questions of changes in class structure, educational opportunity and family economy.

The analysis is tightly organized into six chapters. The first reviews historical explanations of fertility decline in the U.S., and draws on the important recent European and international studies. A critical, but admiring view of Caldwell's emphasis on the effects of mass education on fertility and family strategy informs Stern's core analysis.

Chapter two reviews the county's economic and social structural changes from the mid nineteenth-century to 1920. A theoretically grounded class analysis is introduced, emphasizing the split between the old, entrepreneurial business class and the emerging white-collar stratum, and a parallel division between primary and secondary workers (skilled and unskilled), as well as ethnic divisions. The categorization of occupational data into class strata, rather than status ranks, is convincing, but problems of classification and boundary drawing are not fully resolved, nor discussed (semi-professionals and government employees are included in the "old" propertied business class). A key to the subsequent analysis appears in aggregate evidence and 1918 cost-of-living data showing that after 1890, for the first time, local economic conditions provided a modestly secure standard of living for skilled labour.

Chapter three traces differential fertility among specific occupational groups, larger class strata (old and new business and working classes) and among nativity and ethnic groups. Stern adopts the standardized child-woman ratio as a measure of fertility, with only the most abbreviated discussion of its limits. Fertility differentials are analysed for occupational, nativity and ethnic groups and in terms of the varying shapes of age-specific fertility curves for three census cross-sections. The latter leaves room for alternative interpretations. The general fertility transition of Erie county (and by inference of the U.S.) is revealed to be composed of a set of "mini-transitions" among occupational and ethnic populations. Each class stratum experienced declining fertility in different ways, with professional and business employees leading the way; skilled workers led the unskilled. Natives had lower fertility than immigrants and old immigrants lower than new. There is evidence that families controlled fertility first by birth spacing, later, by practicing family limitation. Stern might have indicated that, despite nominal data, the series of cross-sections do not trace individual women over time to detect the effects of class mobility, rather than class position, on fertility.

With a strong emphasis on the leading role of changes in opportunity structures, Stern follows Joseph A. Bank's early study of Victorian England (*Prosperity and Parenthood*, London, 1954) suggesting that fertility declines were endangered by the emergence (not diffusion) of different, but parallel, middle-class cultures among the new salaried business class and among skilled workers.