

shows the various sides on the debate over genetically modified food, and Harriet Friedmann concludes the volume with an ambitious vision for the establishment of polycultural communities. Although some of the conclusions might be open to challenge, the issues raised warrant much more debate.

There are, however, a few concerns with the book. There is little, if anything, on those rural communities that are not depopulating but are, in fact, growing as bedroom communities. How does suburban sprawl affect rural areas and agriculture? As well, there is very little on the role that food processors played and continue to play in the agricultural sector. Increased corporate concentration in the food industry has been its hallmark in recent years, and this concentration has had a highly negative impact on small-scale farmers. As such, this issue should have been addressed to a much larger extent. Finally, although some solid historical overviews are presented in the collection, the inclusion of historians would have helped this volume, which tends to contain an over-representation of sociologists. Historians would have been able to provide some context and long-term perspectives to the issues discussed and would have undoubtedly provided additional insights.

These concerns aside, *Fighting for the Farm* is an ambitious and impressive work. The authors do not pretend to have the answers for the questions that they raise, and implicit in their work is the idea that more research into rural North America is badly needed. Moreover, by selecting the authors that she did, Adams is able to demonstrate the many ways in which current problems can be addressed. Her collection provides a solid foundation upon which to base new research in an often overlooked but vitally important area.

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Carol Blum — *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. Pp. xiii, 261.

According to modern estimates, the population of France grew by about one-third over the course of the eighteenth century, from approximately 21.5 million in 1700 to about 29 million a century later. However, among eighteenth-century commentators, there was near consensus that the population of France was in decline. Carol Blum's lively and stimulating book analyses the rich eighteenth-century literature on the perceived causes for and proposed solutions to the problem of population decline. Blum identifies eighteenth-century natalism as a critical site on which Enlightenment writers re-imagined gender relations and projected critiques of the Catholic Church and the absolute monarchy. To stimulate population growth, Blum argues, writers proposed a range of more or less radical reforms of sexual behaviour and gender relations, including the reduction or interdiction of celibacy, the legalization of divorce and polygamy, the elimination of various sexual taboos, and the decriminalization of incest and rape.

Although Blum traces the origins of eighteenth-century population concerns to the late seventeenth century, she regards Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721) as a critical reformulation of the depopulation question. Montesquieu identified Christianity, and more particularly Catholicism, as a source of depopulation, implying that the Catholic prohibition on divorce, combined with clerical celibacy, left Catholic nations vulnerable to being surpassed by their Protestant neighbours. Following Montesquieu, Blum argues, numerous writers criticized the Catholic Church for its "unpatriotic infertility" (p. 30). The controversy over clerical celibacy pitted terrestrial values against a religious sacrament, she observes, facilitating the replacement of sacralized conceptions of social relations with secular ones.

Blum suggests that the emergence of fertility as a value superior to religious precepts left the door open to a vast array of schemes for the reconfiguration of sexual relations. Commentators questioned taboos against divorce, polygamy, incest, and rape. The threat of infertility occasioned by unhappy but indissoluble marriages was a stimulus to a campaign in favour of divorce. Writers speculated that polygamy, incest, and rape might have been natural male rights lost through the advent of a corrupting civilization.

By far the most significant body of ideas to emerge from this rethinking of sexual relations, according to Blum, was Rousseau's reinvention of the patriarchal family. Rousseau's contribution to fashioning a new ideology of domesticity is by now well known. The contribution of the lengthy chapter on Rousseau in this work is to suggest that natalist concerns were a crucial grounding for Rousseau's new vision of gender relations and family life. While Rousseau's initial response to natalism in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1755) was to label the family an unnatural institution and to represent population growth as the cause of humankind's "fall" into society and civilization, he reversed himself in *Émile* (1762), arguing that the family was natural after all and that a large population was the best index of good government. He suggested that French population had been undercut by the unnatural behaviour of women who attended the opera or the salon instead of taking care of their children. The reform of women, he argued, would put an end to France's demographic problems.

With the coming of the Revolution in 1789, some of the numerous populationist proposals of the eighteenth century could actually be translated into law. Blum suggests that revolutionary reforms such as the abolition of clerical celibacy, changes in illegitimacy law, and the divorce decree of September 20, 1792 were responses to the populationist debates of the preceding half-century. Many of these changes proved evanescent. Ultimately, Blum argues, it was Rousseau's conception of the family, grounded in natalist thinking, that emerged as the lasting legacy of eighteenth-century populationist thought.

As an exploration of arguments for "a 'rational' use of women in a masculine world liberated from the tyranny of the Catholic Church and ruled by objective numerical data" (p. 81), *Strength in Numbers* recovers a fascinating chapter in eighteenth-century French cultural history. It is not, however, a comprehensive analysis of the population question. One mystery the book leaves unsolved is why, for nearly a century, so many people believed that the population of France was declining.

Blum's focus is almost entirely on the ideological uses to which this "fertile error" was put. The interpretative framework in which she places population thought is the Enlightenment critique of the Catholic Church and the absolute monarchy. However, the fact that worries about population were useful to the *philosophes* does not explain why their readers found the notion of population decline so compelling. The stubborn tenure of this false idea on the public mind undoubtedly has to do with the social, economic, and political context in which population thought was articulated, but Blum has little to say about this context.

Some readers may also be surprised at the relatively slight attention Blum pays to the literature linking depopulation to economic debility. Population was a central problem in eighteenth-century political economy, so much so, in fact, that the Institut National d'Études Démographiques sponsored a single bibliography of eighteenth-century population thought and eighteenth-century economic literature, *Économie et population : les doctrines françaises avant 1800* (Paris, 1956). Blum includes elements of the political economic debate in her argument, notably when she deals with writers who argued that luxury or the poverty of agriculture, rather than clerical celibacy, were the fundamental sources of population decline. In general, however, her focus on the relationship between natalism and the imaginative reconfiguration of gender and sexual relations tends to occlude the economic dimension of population thought.

If *Strength in Numbers* is not an exhaustive account of the population question in eighteenth-century France, it is nonetheless a work of originality and insight. It explores a completely neglected dimension of French population thought, and in so doing adds depth and context to the historiography of eighteenth-century ideologies of gender. Finally, Blum also contributes significantly to our understanding of the new secular social imaginary developing in the Age of Enlightenment as Providential conceptions of social relations began to give way to the "rule of numbers".

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Laurent Bourquin — *La noblesse dans la France moderne (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris, Éditions Belin, 2002, 267 p.

Laurent Bourquin, professeur d'histoire moderne à l'Université du Maine, propose ici une synthèse des connaissances sur la noblesse française sous l'Ancien Régime. Cette étude arrive à point nommé dans le contexte d'un profond renouvellement de l'historiographie au cours des dernières années sous l'impulsion de Michel Nassiet et de Bourquin lui-même. En effet, l'auteur remplit efficacement l'objectif qu'il s'est fixé : définir les valeurs et les aspirations de ce groupe social, évoquer son fractionnement et ses modes de renouvellement, et insister sur son apport au jeu politique et social de la période. Ainsi, il se démarque non seulement en définissant la noblesse, mais en expliquant aussi sa transformation aux XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles au rythme de la « modernisation » de la société.