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David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, eds. *Family Life in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. 450p.

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The third and final volume in the *The History of the European Family* series, this book not only explores phenomena affecting the European family in the last century, but also asks whether the various European societies became more or less similar during “the most violent century” in terms of family. The essays cover a wide range of topics including: economy and family organization; the state, church, and family; demographic forces; and family relations. Throughout the text, the editors and authors maintain a strong focus on the changes in political geography and the increasing political heterogeneity in Europe, with movements toward political homogeneity coming at the end of the 1980s and with the founding of the European Union.

During those hundred years, the changes from agricultural to industrial society were marked, leading to systemic and personal changes in economics and social life. The authors and editors have explored in depth these changes and have provided a valuable resource for students of twentieth-century language and literature seeking to understand those social, economic, and political forces that affect language usage, conveyance of ideas, and social and political philosophies.

An interesting focus emerges throughout nearly all the essays, and that is the focus on women and their roles both within the family and within the larger society. As Chiara Saraceno points out in “Social and Family Policy” (Chapter 7), social legislation affected the view of men as the chief income suppliers for the family and women as the caretakers of children and the home. Following changes in legislation and the labor demands of the two world wars, “working women were all potential wives and mothers.” Who became chiefly responsible for the children and the family income became a serious issue as birth rates declined.

The essays demonstrate a close connection between economics, politics, and society, with the particular focus on family life. Just as working women increased the family income, their absence from full-time management of the children and the home affected the society, with women then asking for equal gender treatment on the job, better pay, and better facilities for child care. Women found it difficult to have large families and manage their major roles in the family, and as a result the birth rate dropped. In return, various European countries legislated different policies regarding women, and thus the family, and in some cases, governments (as France) became involved in birth rate consideration (e.g., distributing income according to number of children, as our own IRS system that provides deductions for unlimited child dependents rewards those who produce more children).

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Other government policies and laws affecting the family are also explained in detail. For example, in the section on Demographic Forces, Theo Engelen discusses the family from the perspective of fertility and divorce, providing excellent data on first marriages, extra-marital births, number of children per woman, divorce, percentages of one-person households and average family/household size, etc. He also considers the decline of the birth rate and demonstrates its connection to a shift from marriage to cohabitation, shifts in parent-child relationships following divorce, a change from preventing conception to “self-fulfilling” conception (purposeful conception, planned families), and the major change linked to all of those factors: a movement from “uniform to pluralistic families.” In all cases, the role of the woman is strongly emphasized, as is the situation of identity: who serves in which role. As the families of the twentieth century shifted from a somewhat autocratic paternalistic model to one with more power for the women/mothers, the family structure shifted to an “individualistic and relational family, centered on people rather than on things” enabling each member to “construct his or her social and personal identity.”

This book contains interesting theses and plenty of supporting evidence to demonstrate that extraordinary changes in family life occurred in Europe during the twentieth century. And, although the focus is somewhat broad on the “European family” and may not consider detailed differences from one country or culture to another, the authors have provided tables and graphs that clearly show the relationships of the data to a general perspective on families on the continent; the book also includes a quite comprehensive reference section and index. Volume III in the series on the history of the European family completes the collection that begins with family life in 1500, moves through subsequent centuries, and ends with the twentieth century. This volume provides the student of modern European history and language with excellent background on the geopolitical and demographic changes that affected society, economics, and politics, and in turn discusses their effects on the family. The essays are interesting, well written and edited, and they encourage further research on family and society in particular countries and in other continents as well. ✱