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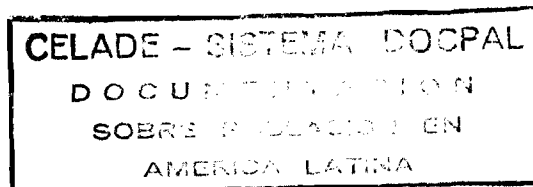
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IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF ORPHANHOOD  
IN POPULATIONS OF THE PAST : NORTH AMERICA

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## Introduction

The demographic literature on orphanhood is not vast, and much of it deals with the narrow, if properly demographic, question of the formal interrelationships between mortality and the prevalence of orphanhood. The earlier literature focused on estimating the prevalence of orphanhood, given certain mortality levels (see, for example, Lotka, 1931; Gregory, 1965; Burch, 1965). More recently there has been greater interest in using census or survey data on the prevalence of orphanhood to estimate mortality levels for populations lacking adequate registration data on deaths, an emphasis well-illustrated by this workshop.

Demographers have had less to say about the consequences of orphanhood, perhaps because of a general tendency to focus on causes rather than consequences of demographic events, perhaps because orphanhood was perceived as having no very direct demographic, as opposed to social or economic, consequences. This latter perception may have been accurate in a discipline concentrating on the size, growth and structure of large populations, on the one hand, and on individual demographic events considered in isolation, on the other. It may be less accurate or relevant for the emerging household and family demography, with its emphasis on groups rather than individuals and on sequences of individual or family events, as is family life cycle or life course analysis.

In any case, neither demographic or other social science literature provides us with a well-developed framework for studying the consequences of orphanhood. This paper begins by sketching some of the elements in such a framework, in some cases only posing questions or

issues which an adequate framework will have to address. In the second section, the paper considers in a very general way levels of mortality in historic North America and their implications for the prevalence of orphanhood and its changes since the Colonial Era. A third section gives a largely historical account of orphanhood in North America, with emphasis on consequences, perceived consequences and social response, and on what may be some key differences between the North American experience and that of other regions, notably Europe.

For purposes of this paper, an orphan is defined as a child -- that is, a person not yet capable of leading a more or less normal life as an independent adult -- who has lost one or both parents by death. The age of independence will differ, of course, from one society to another. We do not object to definitions which extend the concept of orphanhood to adults, as in analyses attempting to estimate age-specific mortality risks from survey data on orphanhood by age. But from the perspective of consequences, loss of a parent for a dependent child is a fundamentally different experience than loss of a parent by an adult.

#### The Consequences of Orphanhood: A Conceptual Framework

The first step in assessing the consequences of orphanhood is to make the traditional and important distinction among the three major types -- maternal, paternal, complete -- a distinction based on whether an individual has lost through death his/her biological mother, biological father, or both. The second step is to specify the referent of our questions about consequences: Consequences for whom? The orphaned individual, his or her siblings, the remaining parent if any, relatives, friends and neighbors, the local community, society at large? We take it as axiomatic that the consequences of orphanhood will differ markedly by type of orphanhood and according to whose perspective we assess them.

With regard to type, the most obvious point is that in the case of incomplete orphanhood, the child and other interested parties, including society at large, can look to the remaining parent for continuity in the parental role. With the loss of both parents, someone else must become a surrogate parent -- an older sibling or other relative, a friend or neighbor, society. The orphaned child will be adopted, put into service, institutionalized, or by default, will be launched into premature independence, depending on his or her age and other personal characteristics, the prevailing culture and social structure, and on other life contingencies such as numbers and location of kin and the state of the economy. Generally speaking, the negative consequences or problems associated with orphanhood would be greater in the case of complete orphans, in the sense that the individual would fare more poorly materially and psychologically and that there would be more need for community interventions. But this remains very much an hypothesis, and one can think of exceptions.

One possible exception would relate to the differential experience of maternal and paternal orphans. Given prevailing systems of sex stratification, a widower is more able to provide economically for his orphaned child(ren), and more able to purchase childcare services he himself cannot provide. In many societies, his chances for remarriage are greater than those of a widow, so that he can provide the child with a step-mother. Cultural norms commonly discourage remarriage for the woman, with some (for example, traditional Hindu) forbidding it outright, while at the same time according widows very low status.

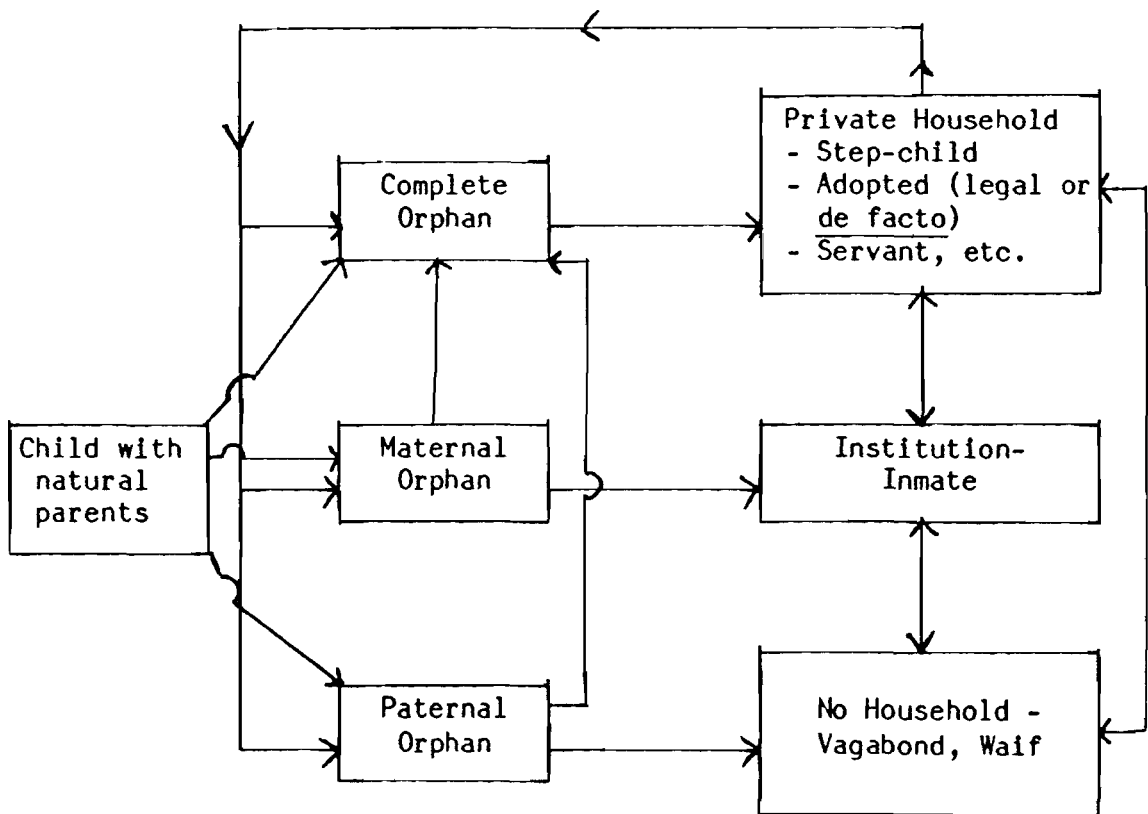
There are interesting parallels with the situation in contemporary North America, where, given custody practices following divorce and sex differences in remarriage probabilities, single-parent families headed by females are more common than their male counterparts, and generally much worse off economically.

The social consequences of orphanhood will thus depend on the relative incidence of the different types. And, although these incidences will tend to co-vary, depending as they all do on the prevailing level of mortality, non-trivial differences may occur. For example, sex differences in mortality in traditional India as compared to contemporary North America would yield marked differences in the relative numbers of maternal and paternal orphans. Similar patterns could arise from differences in age at marriage, in the age differences of spouses, and in the age pattern of childbearing. The relative numbers of complete as opposed to maternal and paternal orphans will depend on the degree of independence of the mortality risks of household or family members, which in turn will be a function of such things as the degree of age-sex stratification within the household, and the predominant causes of death. Most demographic work to date has estimated prevalence of orphanhood using the simplifying assumption of independence. Clearly, progress in understanding the consequences of orphanhood will require further formal demographic work to measure or estimate actual patterns of incidence and prevalence, according to type.

Our approach to this task may be aided by casting our questions about the orphaned child's status in terms of multi-state demography. Figure 1 illustrates the approach. We start with a child who has (and presumably lives with) both biological parents. From that state, he or she can move to one of three orphaned states. Note that a child can move to the state complete orphan directly through the simultaneous death of both parents, or indirectly.

Once in an orphaned state, a child may remain there for a time. The paternal or maternal orphan continues as such in a single-parent household. The state complete orphan would seem more unstable, insofar as dependency will generally require such a person to find parental substitutes. Where older siblings are available, they may fill that role, remaining with the orphan in the parental home.

Figure 1. Child Statuses Associated with Orphanhood



But in each case, the child will often move to a new state, as a result of efforts to recreate a more normal marriage or family situation, or to provide necessary care in some other way. Thus, the maternal and paternal orphan can move to the state step-child through the remarriage of the remaining parent. Either complete or incomplete orphans may be adopted by or put into service in another family. Either may be institutionalized. Finally, the child may become prematurely and usually marginally independent -- assuming some minimum age has been reached -- as a "homeless waif" or "street urchin." This would presumably be more common for complete orphans than for those with a surviving parent.

Where mortality is high, children whose family status is "normalized" through adoption or remarriage may become orphaned a second or even third time, through the death of the surrogate parent. This must have been particularly common with orphans sent to live with grandparents.

Figure 1 is a preliminary statement, and not without its problems. For example, some of the categories are not mutually exclusive, and it tends to mix orphanhood with household status in a way that might not be satisfactory for actual statistical estimation. But it is adequate for present purposes, to illustrate the way in which consequences depend on the particular "family career paths" taken by the orphans as their lives unfold.

Our second major point about the consequences of orphanhood is that they differ in kind and degree depending on whose point of view we take. It also is worth noting that, as with most human experiences, not all of the consequences are negative.

From the child's point of view, orphanhood involves the loss of a natural protector and advocate, and must often set the stage for loss of status and exploitation. Common experiences include the premature assumption of adult responsibilities (cf. the oldest sibling in a single-parent family), situations of service tantamount to indentured labor, and assignment to impersonal and even harsh institutional settings. Entry into stepchild status in one sense normalizes one's family situation, but the outcome is not always happy, and indeed has become the topic of a vast folklore and literature, of which Cinderella is one of the more famous examples. Sometimes, however, orphanhood must have been a blessing in the long run. For older children, it could mean the timely inheritance of the family farm, in contrast to the often painfully long wait (see Berkner, 1972). And not all parents are or were good parents with ample means of support; the shift of the orphan to a surrogate set must often improve his or her treatment and life chances.

Similarly for the orphan's close relatives, neighbors or friends, orphanhood has the double quality of responsibility and burden, but also of opportunity. In modern microeconomic terms, there are both costs and benefits associated with the responsibility of rearing a child, with the balance between the two differing markedly over time and space. Orphans often provided companions or quasi-servants for older relatives without children of their own (but so in many systems have children with both parents still alive). Where productive labor starts at an early age, all but the very youngest orphans can be easily absorbed into the labor force.

A major dividing line in regard to the consequences of orphanhood is between societies in which orphans are more or less adequately provided for by family and friends in an informal manner, and those in which the community or government feels it must intervene -- in other words those in which orphanhood has been defined as a social problem to which a formal, institutionalized response is needed. The latter situation could arise either because orphans are not being taken care of at all but becoming "homeless waifs," or because the informal arrangements for their care are seen as involving unacceptable levels of exploitation or abuse. The definition of orphanhood as a social problem thus depends partly on the factual situation (the number of orphans, state of the economy, social and economic structure, etc.) but partly on cultural definitions of acceptable treatment of children and of their role in society, and of the proper role of government or the wider society in the provision of welfare for those unable to cope for themselves. (See, for example, current efforts of political conservatives in the United States to reduce government spending on welfare by urging relatives and other private citizens to play a larger role.) This theme of the perceived need for intervention by society and government, as will be seen below, emerges as a major one in a historical overview of orphanhood in North America.

#### Incidence of Orphanhood in North America: An Historical Overview

For the early historical period in North America, we know that orphanhood was commonplace, simply because mortality levels were high, and that its incidence declined more or less steadily along with progress in life expectancy. But a detailed account of these trends, by specific region, is lacking, due to the absence of comprehensive series of life tables or other estimates of mortality. Much of our knowledge is based on historical or literary evidence.

One of the earliest accounts from colonial America that gives us a sense of the pervasiveness of orphanhood is Cotton Mather's diary of 1697. An excerpt tells of an emotional conversation with his eight year old daughter "Katy" in which he told her his death would come soon: "I gave her to understand that when I am taken from her, shee must look to meet with more humbling Afflictions than shee does, now that shee has a



careful and tender Father to provide for her" (Bremner, 1983:83). The irony of that conversation was soon apparent when Mather outlived his daughter. But, Mather's conversation must have reflected a fairly common concern among parents of that day for the welfare of their own children, since parental mortality often struck early.

In his book, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life In A Plymouth Colony, John Demos sheds some light on the extent of orphanhood in the early part of the seventeenth century by studying wills. One case involved four orphaned children from Barnstable. According to Demos, "... the children were born to Henry and Abigail (Bishop) Coggin during the 1640's. Their father died in about 1648, and their mother was soon remarried to another man, himself a widower, named John Finney. The children apparently followed her into Finney's own household. But five years later their mother too was dead, and John Finney was preparing to marry still another time" (Demos, 1976:122). We have no firm evidence that this was a typical case, but given presumed mortality levels, it must not have been uncommon. Evidence from England during roughly the same period is relevant. In his article, "Parental Deprivation In The Past: A Note On The History of Orphans In England," Peter Laslett examined the resident orphans of Clayworth, Nottinghamshire for the years 1676 and 1688. His findings reveal that almost one third (32 percent) of all resident children in Clayworth at these two dates had lost a parent by death (Laslett, 1974:13). It should be pointed out that data from England concerning the incidence of orphanhood cannot be assumed to apply directly to North America. However, it seems likely, given the harsh realities of frontier life in the New World, that levels of mortality were at least equal to and probably above those in Europe.

Well into the 18th century, the incidence of orphanhood in colonial America probably remained high and unchanged. In a study of Quaker families, Robert V. Wells provides some graphic evidence:

Before 1800, 18.8% of Quaker marriages had been dissolved by the death of one partner before the 15th anniversary had been reached . . . Fully 69 percent of all Quaker marriages studied were of shorter duration than the median length of child-rearing among that group. In fact, a Quaker widow or widower whose experience held to the median, could expect to have children to take care of for 9.3 years after the death of his or her first spouse (Wells 1971:278).

These findings also point to characteristic temporal aspects of 18th century family life. From a life cycle perspective, high parental mortality had the effect of greatly reducing both the number of separate "family life stages" as well as the time span within some. Mortality often cut short the duration of marriage, the amount of time devoted to child-rearing, and also the length of time both spouses remained together after the last child had left home.

In contrast to the relative stability and a real uniformity of orphanhood prior to 1800, the situation after 1800 changed dramatically. Orphanhood appeared to take on a rural/urban dimension primarily because America had entered a period of massive European immigration. The incidence of orphanhood in predominantly rural areas seemed to decline (responding to the steady reduction in mortality just before and after the turn of the century.) A case in point is Germantown, Pennsylvania where Stephanie Wolf discovered that from 1750-59 to 1790-99 the percentage of families losing a parent declined steadily from 23% to only 7.5% (Wolf, 1976:274). Similarly, Wells (1971) provides us with a good indication of the contrast in rural mortality levels before and after 1800. According to Wells, "the Quaker widows of the 1700's survived for an average of 13.7 years after the death of their husbands. This figure is considerably below the median length of widowhood of 18.7 years for wives born between 1880 and 1889" (Wells, 1971:279).

In contrast to rural areas, orphanhood in urban centres (particularly the large port cities of New York, Boston and Philadelphia) apparently remained high. The primary reason was immigration. The decades following 1800 saw Europe in a state of economic, social and political ferment. The French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the Irish potato famine, and rapid population growth had combined to create mass migration to the New World. The resulting problem for eastern North America arose not only from the magnitude of the immigration but its composition. Social and economic problems in Europe struck out first and foremost at the impoverished segment of the population causing the steady arrival of thousands of pauper immigrants. Slum districts soon sprang up. "In 1871 alone more than 20,000 immigrants entered the United States, of whom more than 7,600 landed in the port city of New York. From March 1818 to November of the following year, an estimated number of 28,000 arrived in the city" (Schneider, 1938:130). The massive concentration of poor immigrants into slum areas pushed mortality rates up sharply and hence orphanhood became a severe problem.

The Irish immigrants, in particular, were hard hit by mortality in most major urban centres. "In 1850, out of the 2,742 persons who died of cholera in New York City, 1,086 were Irish. . . Foreign-born peoples, as a whole, constituted 55 percent of the cholera deaths in the city" (Pickett, 1969:5). The incidence of orphanhood rose sharply in response to the high levels of parental mortality that followed such epidemics. "Only four out of every ten children apprehended by the authorities could claim that both parents still lived. In two out of ten homes the mother ruled alone. In one out of fourteen homes, the father had to manage his children without the assistance of a spouse (Pickett, 1969:5)." Orphanhood suddenly became visible to society and thus gained recognition as a social problem. It was not until the latter part of the 19th century that the incidence of orphanhood began to diminish, due to improved health conditions and perhaps to changed immigration selectivity in the face of political and economic stability abroad.

(N.B. Section to be added on estimated life tables for selected dates and their implied levels of orphanhood).

### Orphanhood: Social and Economic Consequences

The incidence of orphanhood, as indicated in the last section, was very high in both rural and urban areas prior to 1800. Yet many communities seem to have been able to provide care and protection for orphaned children without resorting to a formal institutional response. For many frontier communities, the high prevalence of orphanhood was dealt with by three interconnected social mechanisms: a form of early adoption known as "putting out", a system of social responsibility that involved an unwritten obligation on the part of relatives to substitute as parents, and finally a system of family-based inheritance that served to allocate family assets (including land) to prospective heirs. The key to these three mechanisms was a complex web of kinship ties characteristic of most frontier communities. Kinship networks functioned as a cohesive force to foster interdependence and hence, were an invaluable source of support to children that had lost one or both parents. In effect, the presence of close kinship networks cushioned the larger society against adverse social and economic consequences of orphanhood.

The colonial process of "putting out" was perhaps the most important social mechanism based on kinship. In his article, "Adoption in Early America," Yasuhide Kawashima describes the process of "putting out" in a manner indicative of the underlying importance of kinship ties within the community, and of the fact that those ties were taken for granted in testamentary provisions for one's children:

Putting out meant that children were often placed in the homes of relatives where they were put to work and maintained and trained by their masters. . . Children placed in these "foster" families were treated by the masters as if they were their natural children and frequently inherited a portion of the masters' property... Although many of these children had living parents, the majority were orphans, whose fathers or both parents were dead. . . Parents ordinarily provided for the disposition of the child in their wills and usually had him reared by a relative, elder stepbrother, grandparents, stepparent, elder brother, elder sister, aunt or uncle (Kawashima, 1982:682-683)

Even in the absence of a will or other specific arrangement, close relatives would usually assume responsibility for orphaned children. Reference can be made again to the four orphaned children from Barnstable mentioned above. In 1653 after John Finney's second marriage had ended with the death of Abigail (Bishop) Coggin, he was preparing to marry again. However, because his four stepchildren would no longer be related by blood to his new wife, Finney wrote a letter to his late

wife's father and the children's grandfather, Thomas Bishop, who was then living in England, to determine who should take custody of the four children. In his reply to Finney, Bishop's instructions concerning the welfare of the children were as follows:

The only girl, Abigail, was "speedy to come home to mee for I purpose to take her as a Daughter." As for her brother Thomas: "I Doe Comite him to your care and trust that you Doe provide for him and keep him as your owne child taking his meanes to heape to his maintenance." Another boy named John should be bound in Boston or Salem to that Trad his Genes Doe best lead him to but if it could be to a Seaman that hee might come for England some time that I might see him or if you thinke good when I send for his sister to send him alsoe with her."The third boy, Henry, must remain with Finney "as your owne sonne to Scoole and to write and Read till hee be fitt for a Master" (Demos, 1976:122).

This exchange suggests a strong sense of obligation on the part of one's close kin to become responsible parents and guardians to orphaned children related to them by blood. In the words of John Demos, "it was assumed that ultimate responsibility for the children's welfare belonged not to their stepfather (who had known them on intimate terms for some five years) but to their grandfather (who probably had never seen them at all)" (Demos, 1976:122-123).

A third important social mechanism for confronting the problem of orphanhood was a system of family-based inheritance. For most frontier societies family inheritance was organized such that orphaned children or "semi-orphaned" children received support based on their own share of an estate. Kawashima (1982) describes the family inheritance system as follows:

"In their wills, colonial fathers frequently appointed guardians for the estates of their children, but only in rare cases did they assign custody to anyone other than the mothers. Sometimes the husband-father appointed his wife guardian and placed the children under her care during her widowhood providing that certain other designated persons were to have the care of the children if she remarried. Once "putout," however, the children usually came under the guardianship and custody of those individuals who would rear them. Some testators delegated authority to their executors to bind their children out to suitable families. If a man died intestate without naming guardians for his minor sons, the court was required to bind them to some responsible persons. The masters so named, who might be brothers, stepfathers, or other relatives, friends, or neighbours, were held strictly accountable to the court (Kawashima, 1982: 683-84)."

It should also be mentioned that godparents frequently were involved in the welfare of their godchildren. According to Kawashima, "Not only did the colonists take care in bequeathing part of their property to their godchildren but they also frequently gave them their names" (Kawashima, 1982: 686). In other words, fictive kin, as well as kin by blood or marriage, were part of the orphans supportive network.

Inheritance systems reflected the complexity of the community at large in that decisions concerning the allocation of land and other family assets were directly tied to a vast social network based on kinship ties. In his article, "Kinship and Community in Rural Pennsylvania, 1749-1820", Daniel Snyder examines the importance of kinship and community with respect to inheritance. According to Snyder, "each will drawn up by family heads (usually the father) involved the choice of a set of management strategies for the family which allocated the resources of land, labour and capital in an attempt to establish the children and provide for the maintenance of the widow" (Snyder, 1982:44).

The importance of kinship comes into view when one considers how an individual wrote his or her will. According to Snyder, the complexities of drawing up a will in rural Pennsylvania were great:

Each person who drew up a will also found that these personal decisions were tied to larger social contexts through a multifactoral causal matrix; the decisions affected not only the support structures for his or her own family but also those on which other members of the community would depend as well" (Snyder, 1982:44).

When drawing up a will, there were a number of management strategies that dealt specifically with the welfare of the children. The need for such strategies came from the fact that for each family farm, some children would have to be excluded from a share in the land. In order to provide compensation for those who were excluded, many wills made provisions for children who received a greater share to make payments to those who received less (Snyder, 1982: 49-50). Strategies such as this ensured that most children who had lost one or both parents would receive a share in the parental estate.

Finally, it should be noted that for many purposes, the sense of mutual obligation among kin often was mirrored in religious congregations and in the larger community. Many farmers in time of need were forced to depend on friends and neighbours for financial support. Members of the Quaker, Lutheran and Moravian congregations encouraged this mutual dependency, which in turn was reflected in their wills (Snyder, 1982: 56). This prevailing system of mutual obligation must have been an extremely effective mechanism to care for orphaned children.

A fourth specific social mechanism not yet mentioned was that of remarriage, which presumably was frequent in colonial North America, although detailed studies are rare. Remarriage could function to provide one's orphaned child(ren) with a stepparent, as well as re-integrate oneself into the broader kinship and community network described above. One author, however, suggests that the presence of children lessened the probability of remarriage for widowers, with their felt needs for heirs, companionship, domestic assistance, and so forth already provided for:

"Remarriage was frequently associated with the death of sons within a motherless home, and virtually no widower whose wife left him childless remained unmarried. Those who never married again had from two to ten live children, at least one of whom was a boy" (Wolf, 1976: 275).

After 1800, the situation with respect to orphanhood changed dramatically with the arrival of thousands of predominantly poor European immigrants. As mentioned earlier, a substantial part of this influx concentrated in urban centres, resulting in huge slum areas ridden with death and disease. High parental mortality rates left literally thousands of orphaned children to wander the streets in search of food and shelter. Social mechanisms that had previously served to cope with society's orphans were nonexistent or ineffective in this context.

The reasons for this were twofold. First, the magnitude and the rapidity of immigration overwhelmed urban society. There were simply too many orphaned children within too narrow a time to be absorbed into the social structure. Secondly, the pattern of immigration had undergone a significant change since the Colonial era. The early colonists had often immigrated as entire family units with blood relatives already in the New World and thus had the close kinship networks described above. According to Wolf (1976), "nuclear families arrived and provided for their children within their own townships, closing the gates to newcomers, so that the places of those families that died off would be taken by the increasing progeny of the remaining groups" (Wolf, 1976: 288-289). In contrast, immigration after 1800 was more fragmented in that there were fewer complete family units. This was partly a result of the high parental mortality rate on the long overseas trips to America. However, of those families that did arrive, many had no kin connections and thus became isolated units in an alienating urban environment.

The relative ineffectiveness of the older, informal social mechanisms in dealing with orphanhood after 1800 resulted in adverse social and economic consequences for society, and led to new responses. Large concentrations of orphans in urban centres made the phenomenon much more visible in the eyes of the public and hence sparked the formation of institutional structures. Orphanhood became recognized as a

social problem that needed a quick and easy remedy. Perhaps the most significant negative social consequence of orphanhood was the growing problem of juvenile delinquency particularly in the port cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

New York appeared to have been the hardest hit, since it was saddled with the greatest burden of poor immigrants. After 1820 there was a growing conviction on the part of private philanthropists and public officials that immigration was responsible for the huge swells of dependent children and their subsequent delinquent activities. In January of 1850, New York City Chief of Police George W. Matsell estimated that there were almost three thousand neglected and vagrant children between the age of 6 and 16 wandering the streets, becoming involved in theft, prostitution and other criminal activities. According to Matsell, many of these children came from Irish and German-born immigrants who had arrived during the 1840's (Schneider, 1938: 329). A similar concern was voiced in 1854 by Charles Loring Brace, founder and secretary of the newly formed Children's Aid Society. In the words of Brace, "There are no dangers to the value of property or the permanency of our institutions so great as those from the existence of... a class of vagabond, ignorant, ungoverned children" (Bremner, 1982: 85).

Like many other public officials and private philanthropists of their time, both Brace and Mastell perceived the growing number of dependent children (many of whom were orphans) as a threat to the moral fabric and social stability of society. Thus, it should not be surprising that the heaviest period of immigration (1820-1850) into New York coincided with the establishment of scores of organizations and institutions (private and public) designed to provide food, clothing, shelter and education for orphaned children. Urban society's initial response was, thus, as much defensive as therapeutic, and it took the form of institutionalization. Some of the newly formed institutions in New York City alone during the 1830's included the Leake and Watts Orphan House founded in 1831, the Society for the Relief of Half-Orphan and Destitute Children founded in 1835, the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans founded in 1836 and the Asylum for Relief of Children of poor Widowers and Widows incorporated in 1835. It was thought that institutions of this sort, with a strict code of discipline and a strong moral doctrine, would create honest, hard-working citizens, who would not become "public charges" or a social menace.

Thus, the main line of response to orphanhood in urban centres left untouched the unprecedented breakdown of family life among poor immigrant groups. Paternal mortality left thousands of single mothers to undertake domestic duties in the home while at the same time provide the necessary income required to support themselves and their children. For many mothers this was almost an impossible task, especially if their children were too young to take care of themselves. Margaret O'Brien Steinfels describes this dilemma in Who's Minding The Children? The History and Politics of Day Care In America. According to Steinfels:

Since the larger society regarded the mother's domestic duties as primary, the working mother found herself in a dilemma. How could a child be raised properly if its mother was not there to do it? How could the child survive if its mother did not bring home the bacon? How could a home be considered normal without a mother presiding over it? How could there even be a home without the mother working to pay for it? (Steinfels, 1973: 39).

The plight of single mothers forced to double as breadwinners was to continue until approximately 1870, after which many social reformers changed their position regarding the care of dependent children. There was a growing pessimism among reformers such as Charles Brace with regard to the effectiveness of orphanages and asylums as formal institutional structures to raise orphaned children. There developed a strong motivation to keep a child within a family setting; the preservation of the family unit became a top priority with respect to social reform policies.

This new emphasis on family preservation led to the development of somewhat less formal institutional structures known as "day nurseries". Private philanthropists (many of whom were wealthy women) considered these nurseries as "family-like alternatives" that would fulfill the needs of single-parent families headed by women. The availability of day nurseries meant that many mothers with young children could now leave them in the care of female attendants and go to work. Children left in these nurseries normally received regular meals, clean clothes, education and some religious instruction. The relative success of day nurseries in caring for children of working mothers resulted in a marked increase in female labour force participation.

Day nurseries, of course, were no help to complete orphans; nor were other institutional structures designed to provide only temporary care and support. Complete orphans needed long-term care that most institutions were unprepared to offer. Furthermore, there was a concern that a long stay in an institutional setting would not provide the needed intensive social up-bringing and rearing that children would otherwise receive as members of a family unit. This led both public officials and social reformers to search for a program that would serve as a family-like alternative.

The institutional response to this was the gradual development of specialized adoption services under the auspices of temporary homes for the poor. A case in point was The Temporary Home for the Destitute in Boston, organized in 1847 for the city's poor. In the 1850's however, admission practices for the home changed, so that "fallen" women, adults and wayward children were henceforth denied any further support (Zainaldin and Tyor, 1979:26). Instead, support was provided to dependent children many of whom were complete orphans. It was thought that this particular class of children were in dire need of a type of perman-



ent care preferably within a family environment. Consequently, in 1855 the staff of The Temporary Home devised a novel policy of welfare adoption to deal with this problem (Zainaldin and Tyor, 1979:27-28). From 1851 to 1885 the home took credit for a total of 881 legal adoptions.

At the same time, however, dependent children from immigrant families (many of whom had lost one or both parents) acquired the label of a "public charge." The term itself implied that such children were to be considered nothing less than an economic burden to the community. Thus orphanhood was seen as an economic problem. In the last few decades of the colonial era and the early post-colonial years, many dependent children considered as a "public charge" in New York City were sent to the almshouse or poorhouse, along with adults more than twice their own age. A 1795 census in New York City revealed that in one almshouse alone, over 40 per cent of the population was composed of children less than the age of nine (Schneider, 1938: 185). Since the public almshouse was geared toward the care of poor adults, the welfare of its young children soon became a great concern to many private philanthropists. In response to this problem, a philanthropist organization called the Ladies Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children set about in 1806 to form the first New York Orphan Asylum Society.

The formation of the New York Orphan Asylum Society led the way for the development of scores of other privately owned institutions and agencies that dealt specifically with the care of orphaned children. However, many of these institutions ran into serious financial difficulties and were forced to rely on monetary aid from the city in the form of grants and subsidies. Such was the predicament of the New York Orphan Asylum, when in 1807 construction costs ran the organization into the "red". As a result, "the legislature authorized the New York City Board of Health to raise \$5,000 by lottery in addition to \$25,000 previously authorized and to hand over the first-mentioned sum to the Orphan Asylum Society" (Schneider, 1938: 190).

The real economic burden to hit New York City however, came during the period 1815 to 1840, with the arrival of thousands of pauper immigrants. Widespread epidemics further exacerbated the problem and New York soon became a city desperately struggling to finance its programs and institutions for the poor. This financial pressure led the city to apply for state support, and such aid was finally granted in 1817 when the city was given a flat sum of \$10,000 annually for the support of her foreign poor (Schneider, 1938: 136).

Finally, the dissolution of close kinship networks and the ensuing problems of orphanhood in many urban centres may have greatly contributed to a high level of internal mobility among young Americans. The lack of available kinship networks in most large cities probably prompted many children of immigrant families who had lost both parents to migrate westward in search of steady employment. Again we must be

reminded that many children became orphans even before they arrived in the New World because of the long hard overseas voyage. Furthermore, New York City along with other port cities was hit with a series of catastrophic epidemics that claimed the lives of thousands of poor immigrants during the first few decades of the 19th century. The result for many immigrant children was a sudden break in supportive ties with their parents, that allowed them to wander freely about cities in search of accommodations. It should also be pointed out that the impoverished state of most immigrant families meant that few parents considered it worthwhile to draw up a will. They simply did not have an estate or any appreciable assets to pass on to their children or to purchase care. This must also have been a contributing factor to migration among orphaned children.

Accounts of orphanhood in Upper Canada around the same period seem to support this view of orphans as mobile. If one can accept the household composition for Toronto Gore in the 1850's as representative of most households in large urban centres in North America, it seems probable that inter-city migration was common among orphans. In Toronto Gore, "extended households" represented nearly 41 per cent of all the households in the township between 1841 and 1871... The typical household consisted of a nuclear family as well as an assortment of relatives, boarders, servants, labourers or apprentices, and, frequently "orphans" (Gagan and Mays, 1973: 45). Many of the latter were transient. In the words of Gagan and Mays, such individuals "were not just migrants on their way to some obscure geographical destination, but young men and women in a state of transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood for whom the families of Toronto Gore were essential instruments, however briefly, of that transition" (Gagan and Mays, 1973: 46).

Not all migration on the part of orphans, however, was voluntary or, as was often the case, arranged by their kin. In New York City the activities of certain private philanthropists, notably Charles Brace, secretary of the New York Children's Aid Society, resulted in the "forced" migration of thousands of orphaned children to farm families in the American frontier. "Placing out" became the accepted name for this program, with "Brace's agency alone placing more than 92,000 children during his secretaryship" (Leiby, 1978: 84).

Mention should also be made of the extensive "placing out" program adopted in Britain during the latter part of the 19th century, whereby eighty thousand boys and girls were sent to Canada to work under indentures as agricultural labourers and domestic servants. One-third of these children were orphans. A leading proponent of this program was Dr. Barnardo, who undertook the task of establishing homes to function as child migration centres to Canada. "Half of the Barnardo emigrants were the children of widows or widowers; one in six had lost both parents" (Parr, 1980: 65). Thus, North America not only produced its own orphans, but also imported large numbers from overseas.

One consequence of this program was to increase substantially the volume of internal migration within Canada: "Barnardo girls [as they were known] moved an average of four times during their first five years in Canada, Barnardo boys an average of three times" (Parr, 1980:88). Furthermore, "of the boys in the Barnardo sample who served boarding out terms, three-quarters moved to a different county when the wage portion of their indenture began, and 15 percent were transferred from Ontario to the West" (Parr, 1980:88). The reason for this rapid movement is that their main function was to restore economic stability in rural farm areas experiencing a shortage of labor. Children were moved simply in response to competitive demands for their labour services (Parr, 1980:88).

### Conclusion

The attempt to generalize regarding the experience of orphanhood in historic North America is a rash undertaking; the diversity of time and place is too great. The habitants of New France, the Irish steelworkers of 19th century Pittsburgh, the agriculturalists (whether landowner or laborer) of the Southwest, the slave-based society of the South -- these and others represent variations in race, language, religion, economy, ecology and history that discourage summary statements, as does the sparseness of relevant scientific or scholarly literature. But a review of this literature suggests a number of important themes, at least some of which serve to contrast the North American experience with that of more settled European societies. Until relatively recently in its history, North America has consisted mainly of frontier societies, a vast, largely empty continent being filled up by immigrants and their descendants. Seemingly endless opportunities brought millions to North America, and kept them on the move once they got here. Vance Packard and other journalists may have exaggerated this element of the American experience, but it is hard to deny its centrality.

The opening sentence of My Antonia, an autobiographical novel by Willa Cather (1876-1947), can serve as a symbolic link of our topic of orphanhood with themes of migration and physical dispersal:

I first heard of Antonia on what seemed to me an interminable journey across the great midland plain of North America. I was ten years old then; I had lost both my mother and my father within a year, and my Virginia relatives were sending me out to my grandparents, who lived in Nebraska.

The journey from Virginia to Nebraska would be about two thousand kilometres.

In the early years of the continent's settlement by Europeans, orphanhood must have been quite high indeed, presumably higher on

average than in the more mature societies of Europe. Harsh climates, resistance by native inhabitants, physical isolation, lack of basic provisions, lack of physicians and of medical supplies -- all must have helped yield high levels of mortality. But, the literature suggests, early, colonial North America seems to have taken the resulting orphanhood in stride. Society was kin-based; religious idealism, opportunity, and sheer survival needs fostered a spirit of community-based cooperativeness. Orphanhood must have been routine, but it apparently was routinely handled by kin and community. For the farmer -- the typical North American--marriage was essential; remarriage presumably was the norm.

The watershed for North America seems to have been the start of the modern trans-Atlantic migration, beginning in the early years of the 19th century, and picking up speed in the latter half. This migration involved more isolated individuals as opposed to members of migrating families. The immigrants often were poor and landless, seeking to escape economic disasters at home (e.g., Ireland, Sweden); more often than not, they landed in the urban slums of the industrial, port cities of eastern North America. Mortality in transit was high; what family groups did come often were disrupted before they arrived. Slum mortality was presumably above-average for the continent or the time. In the more stable agriculture areas and small towns, by contrast, gradual mortality decline must have been lowering the incidence of orphanhood, while the informal mechanisms noted above continued to operate.

In the big cities, however, orphanhood gained recognition as a problem. Probably the incidence was higher. Stable kin networks and small communities were rarer. More women -- still the primary givers of childcare -- were forced to find employment outside of the home. Exploitation was less constrained by personal relations and common cultural norms. Juvenile delinquency emerged as a visible problem, and was consciously linked with orphanhood and family breakdown, just as it frequently is today.

Whatever the explanations, orphanhood was defined as a social problem, and various institutional responses arose in order to deal with it -- orphan asylums, daycare centers, private and public adoption agencies, organized schemes for the placement of orphans in areas of high demand for labor. These involved a mix of private philanthropy, government welfare, and commercial enterprise. Each line of solution had its attendant problems, as contemporaries worried about the effects of institutional living on children's personality development, or the opportunities for exploitation in schemes for child labor. Governments complained of the high costs. In this as in so many human endeavors, a sound fiscal basis was the key to survival, if not to success in a narrower sense of the term. The Milton Hershey School for orphaned boys, founded by the chocolate magnate in 1909, survives to this day, the beneficiary of the bulk of his substantial fortune, sole owner of

Hershey Entertainment and Resort Co., and the majority holder in Hershey Foods. It houses and educates some 1,300 children, girls being admitted starting in 1976 (Toronto Globe and Mail, 3 Nov., 1984).

Our comments and the literature relate primarily to society's perceptions of and responses to orphanhood. And those of course comprise only a small part of our assigned topic - social and economic consequences. Each of the "family career paths" of the orphans, and each of the main societal definitions and responses would need closer examination in a variety of settings over time and place, before we could even begin to answer these broader questions. And what of the consequences via the character of the orphans themselves? Does the experience mark people in a way that forever affects their functioning in society? Did orphans, as some 19th century New Yorkers and Bostonians believed, provide the bulk of recruits to juvenile delinquency, and did those delinquents graduate to careers of adult crime, including the "white collar" variety? Or did society's restorative mechanisms operate willy-nilly to produce adults differing in no systematic way from their non-orphaned counterparts?

To put it differently, is orphanhood largely a personal, private drama, whose poignancy for the individual is unmatched by broad or deep social consequences? Or, can it help shape society or change it in important ways, either directly or indirectly? The answer depends partly on sheer numbers, and thus descriptive demography has a large role to play in both clarifying the question and answering it. But the deeper consequences of orphanhood are a function of culture and social structure, and only detailed historical and sociological studies can illuminate these. The present workshop is a landmark on the way to their understanding, but it's closer to the beginning than to the end of the journey.

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