A Survey of West Indian Family Studies
M. G. Smith

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The family life of West Indian 'lower class' Negroes or folk presents a number of equally important academic and practical problems. In this region family life is highly unstable, marriage rates are low, especially during the earlier phases of adult life, and illegitimacy rates have always been high. Many households contain single individuals, while others with female heads consist of women, their children, and/or their grandchildren. The picture is further complicated by variations in the type and local distribution of alternative conjugal forms; and, characteristically, differing communities, social classes and ethnic groups institutionalize differing combinations of them. Excluding legal marriage, mating is brittle, diverse in form and consensual in base among these Creole or Negroid populations. The implications of this mating structure for the composition and stability of familial groups is perhaps most easily appreciated by comparing these Creole patterns with others current among East Indians of comparable socio-economic position in British Guiana and Trinidad.

Among these local East Indians, men settled in differing villages arrange the first unions of their children during early adolescence and celebrate these marriages by tradi-

tional Hindu or Muslim rites. The girl then leaves her natal village to join her husband in his father’s community. Between one-fifth and one-quarter of these arranged marriages recurrently dissolve, usually not long after their celebration and before children are born to the couple. Following this the girl almost always resumes cohabitation with another partner, often after returning briefly to her parental home. If the earlier marriage had not been registered as legal, this second union may be legalized by such registration. Otherwise, although non-legal, it is usually lifelong.¹

Creole ‘lower class’ mating patterns differ from those of the local East Indians in two important ways. Firstly, all Creole systems for which we have adequate data institutionalize extra-residential, non-domiciliary, or visiting relations as one of several alternative conjugal patterns. In this conjugal form the partners live apart with their separate kin while the man visits his mate and contributes to the support of herself and their children. According to Stycos and Back, this extra-residential pattern is the most common form of mating among ‘lower class’ Jamaicans, especially during the earlier adult years.² It is also the most diverse in its content and social contexts, the most brittle and formally unstable type of union; and, given the partners’ domestic dispersion, the most vulnerable to disruptive inclu-


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fluences of various sorts. For this reason among others, durable visiting relations are generally converted into cohabitation, whether legal or consensual by their principals. When these unions break down, the children usually remain with the unmarried mother or her kin.

Among East Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana this pattern of extra-residential mating is either absent or extremely rare;⁶ and in consequence the great majority of East Indian children usually grow up in their father’s home and under his care. Among West Indian Creoles, given their predilection for unstable extra-residential unions, the reverse is more nearly the case. For example, of children living in the Creole households studied in Carriacou, Latante and Grenville in Grenada, and in Kingston and rural Jamaica, only 37.6 per cent, 52.6 per cent, 35.7 per cent, 34.7 per cent, and 49.3 per cent were found in homes containing their fathers;⁴ and as Edith Clarke shows [in *My Mother Who Fathered Me*: see selection 16, above], the pattern of domestic dispersal by which children are separated from their fathers is heavily influenced by the character of their parents’ conjugal union and by the children’s birth status.⁵ Clearly these differences in the mating organizations of the ‘lower class’ Creoles and East Indians correspond with parallel differences in their modes of institutionalizing paternal roles and in their emphases on nuclear families as the basis of domestic organization. Despite comparable ‘denudation’ of domestic nuclear families through widowhood, migration and other conditions, these ethnic differences in family patterns are striking.³

The second major difference between these Creole and East Indian family systems consists in the age and condi-


⁵M. G. Smith, *West Indian Family Structure* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), Table 17, p. 239.


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...ations under which cohabitation and marriage are institutionalized. In the Caribbean, as elsewhere, East Indians prescribe cohabitation by customary rites of marriage at an early age for both sexes. Among lower-class Creoles the ideal and modal ages of marriage are both much higher; and typically consensual cohabitation with the same or other partners precedes marriage by several years. Thus, whereas East Indians marry before having children, lower-class Creoles normally marry in middle or later age after the women have ceased to bear children or are already grandparents.7

These differences in the age and conditions of marriage among the East Indians and Creoles have obvious and important effects on the organization and stability of family life and on the average number of mating unions that characterize the two ethnic groups. Few East Indians engage in more than two conjugal unions and despite differences of ecological and social context, apparently at least three-quarters have only one.8 Per contra, among 'lower class' Creoles few individuals have only one conjugal union; however, this may be defined; and a substantial proportion engage in three or more. Thus whereas East Indian mating practice institutionalizes lifelong unions following early 'marriage', that of the Creole lower class encourages serial matings of varying form and conditional character, with legal marriage as the terminal type of union. In consequence, whereas East Indian families are nucleated in separate domestic groups, among the Creoles nuclear or elementary families are systematically fragmented and dispersed throughout two or more households as a direct effect of their mating organization; and whereas among East Indians paternity is relatively fixed and constant in its form, content and context, among the Creoles its modes and effectiveness vary as a function of differing conjugal forms and their combination.9

2

The numerous practical or social problems presented by the characteristic patterns of West Indian (Creole) mating and lower class family life have attracted continuous attention ever since 1938 when a Royal Commission appointed by the British Parliament to survey the social and economic conditions of this region and to recommend appropriate programmes for action, dwelt on the evident 'disorganization' of family life and on the apparent increase of 'promiscuity' as against faithful concubinage, the 'common law' or consensual cohabitation which had hitherto been accepted as the Negro peasant's equivalent of marriage, and the basis of his family life. To halt this presumed spread of 'promiscuity', in 1944–45 Lady Huggins, wife of the then Governor of Jamaica, launched an island-wide campaign to marry off consensually cohabiting couples and any others whose mating status and relations seemed to warrant this. This Mass Marriage Movement was initiated in response to the Royal Commission's demand for 'an organized campaign against the social, moral and economic evils of promiscuity'.10 However, being based on ignorance of Jamaican folk society and family life, the movement was equally misconceived in its methods and goals, and proved unsuccessful. At its greatest impact the movement lifted the Jamaican marriage rate from 4.44 per thousand in 1943 to 5.82 in 1946. By 1951 the marriage rate and the correlated illegitimacy ratio among annual

7 Stycoos and Back, op. cit., pp. 318–24; Roberts and Braithwaite, op. cit., p. 205; Jamaica, Department of Statistics, Population Census (1960); Some Notes on the Union Stastics, Marital Status and Number of Children of the Female Population of Jamaica (n.d. 1962), pp. 15–16, 21; O. C. Francis, The People of Modern Jamaica (Jamaica: Department of Statistics, 1964), Ch. 5.


9 M. G. Smith, op. cit., pp. 368; Roberts and Braithwaite, op. cit., pp. 204–17.

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births had reverted to their earlier level.\textsuperscript{11} By 1955 the Mass Marriage Movement had petered out.

Several conditions ensured the failure of this Mass Marriage Movement, despite the energy and skill with which its director, Lady Huggins, marshalled the churches, schools, press, radio, welfare agencies and 'national' associations behind it. Above all, the campaign was based on the erroneous notion that because the élite and lower class employed a single word, marriage, to denote a particular conjugal institution, this had identical or very similar meanings, value and significance among these social strata. We now know that this view is only superficially correct, for reasons indicated below. Being thus conceived in error, the Mass Marriage Movement could hardly succeed; and its early signs of failure indicated the need for systematic sociological studies of those unfamiliar familial institutions with which the problems of 'promiscuity', marital instability, defective paternity and child socialization, high illegitimacy birth rates and low rates of marriage were all evidently linked, though in obscure and problematic ways. It was in this context that T. S. Simey visited the West Indies to survey its social conditions and to advise the recently constituted agency responsible for Colonial Development and Welfare. It was in these circumstances also that the Colonial Social Science Research Council in Britain asked Edith Clarke to undertake and direct a formal study of Jamaican family life. During the course of field-work she was joined by Madeline Kerr, a social psychologist from Bedford College, London. The object of the Survey was to obtain factual information on family and social life in a selected number of villages.\textsuperscript{12} While Edith Clarke studied the sociological contexts and features of the family organization, Dr Kerr concentrated on the social psychology of Jamaican class and community life, and on the distinctive features of socialization among its rural people. Together these two reports still represent the most com-

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prehensive and detailed account of any West Indian family system yet published; and despite their different orientations, data and emphases, the two studies are remarkably congruent in their major conclusions and in the picture that they separately present.

Several of the most intractable social problems that confront West Indians centre on these conditions and patterns of mating and family life. The complexity of these problems is easily illustrated. For example, in its report the Royal Commission stressed that 'the policy of land settlement to which some West Indian governments are heavily committed depends for its success on the existence of a cohesive family unit';\textsuperscript{13} but, as Edith Clarke demonstrates, land ownership often promotes 'cohesive family units', sometimes to an excessive degree. Similar uncertainties apply to public programmes in the fields of health, housing and especially education. Grossly inadequate as are the local school systems in their physical and educational provisions, these deficiencies are magnified by the desultory attendance, and high drop-out rates associated with extensive child dispersal, weak family organization, defective paternity, and other social and economic conditions.\textsuperscript{14} As regards the effects of such disturbing familial and educational contexts on the development of stable and well-adjusted adult personalities, Madeline Kerr concludes that the modal personality type of the Jamaican 'lower class' or folk is characterized by deep-set defensive mechanisms and tendencies to shift blame or responsibility for any lapse or misfortune to other persons or to external circumstances—an orientation which clearly minimizes adult learning capacities and reflects childhood experience.\textsuperscript{15} In Kerr's view, two of the five major social situations giving rise to tension in Jamaica are: (1) dichotomy of concepts over parental roles; (2) lack of patterned learning in child-


\textsuperscript{12} Madeline Kerr, \textit{Personality and Conflict in Jamaica} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951), p. xi.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{West India Royal Commission Report}, 1945, p. 424.

\textsuperscript{14} C. A. Moser, \textit{The Measurement of Levels of Living with Special Reference to Jamaica} (London: H.M.S.O., 1956); Kerr, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 74–84.

\textsuperscript{15} Kerr, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 115 ff., 165–74.
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Both are directly connected with the modes of family organization and child rearing.

The material difficulties of West Indian economic and social development are thus compounded by instabilities and fluidities in the family organization on which the society depends both for the effective socialization of its young and for the adequate motivation of its adult members to participate vigorously in the social and economic life. These familial conditions affect labour productivity, absenteeism, occupational aspirations, training and performance, attitudes to saving, birth control, and farm development, and to programmes of individual and community self-help, housing, child care, education, and the like.

West Indian social and economic development accordingly presupposes adequate scientific study of these basic institutions, in order that programmes of public action to improve living standards, national integration, productivity and the quality of citizenship may be appropriately designed and effective. If the Mass Marriage Movement did little else, it should surely have served to demonstrate this vital need for adequate knowledge of West Indian social conditions in advance of the 'organized campaigns' mounted to remedy or reduce them. Intensive sociological research designed to elucidate the forms, 'causes' and implications of West Indian family organization should thus rank very high on the list of essential steps towards the reconstruction and development of local society; and the very limited and costly advances achieved by various schemes of social development launched during the past twenty years merely demonstrate the fundamental character of this need.

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for scientific knowledge of these social conditions before proceeding with further schemes of this sort.

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Jamaican family life cannot be adequately understood in isolation. The Jamaican family is merely one of several similar systems which share many common properties of form and history, while differing in consequence of their particular social contexts and internal constitution. Most of these related systems are to be found in the Caribbean, especially among its Creole populations; but systems of similar character and historical derivation are current also among the Negroes of the United States, where they were first subject to careful study and controversial interpretation during the late 1930's and early 1940's. In that initial phase the late Franklin Frazier, who pioneered this enquiry, debated with Melville Herskovits the relative influences of African cultural persistence of New World slavery and *post bellum* socio-economic contexts on the determination and distribution of family forms, especially among the Negroes of the United States.

This debate was essentially directed at problems of social causation and historical derivation. Both Herskovits and Frazier agreed that the Negro family in the U.S.A. and Caribbean was especially distinctive in its high rates of illegitimacy, marital instability and 'maternal' households consisting of a woman and her children, with or without her grandchildren. Herskovits argued that these organizational patterns were of African derivation; and that they

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were effects or correlates of practices through which Old World polygyny had been modified and reinterpreted by institutionalized serial matings. Frazier countered this argument by assembling voluminous data on the social history and situation of Negroes in the United States to demonstrate the influence of differing social and economic contexts on their mating and family patterns. For example, among Negro professionals and propertied families in Northern cities of the United States, marriage is the normal basis of family life and illegitimacy is very rare. Conversely, among southern rural immigrants in these cities, 'maternal families' and illegitimacy were common, while marriage rates were relatively low.

Although, like many other scientific controversies, this debate between Frazier and Hershkowitz was inconclusive, most subsequent studies of Negro families in the New World have adopted Frazier's orientations and hypotheses rather than those of Hershkowitz. Thus, in discussing West Indian family organization, Simey and FernandoHenriques both accept Frazier's thesis that the social and economic conditions of slavery precluded development of stable nuclear families among New World Negroes; and both writers stress that the continuing 'disorganization' of West Indian family life expressed by the high incidence of conjugal turnover, illegitimacy and 'maternal' households, reflect the continuing situation of the West Indian Negroes as an economically and socially depressed class. Both Simey and Henriques further emphasize that in Jamaica and other West Indian societies, 'illegitimacy,' maternal families and concubinage or common-law marriage are socially accepted and statistically modal conditions of lower class life. Henriques further distinguishes West Indian family structure from that of the Negroes in the U.S.A. as a natural development of local society and a system with its own distinctive properties. Both Henriques and Simey emphasize the relations between differences of mating and family organization and differences of socio-economic class; and both writers provide similar typologies of West Indian domestic families in this connection.

For Simey, the four principal 'family' types to be found in West Indian society were as follows: (1) 'Christian' families, defined as 'patrilocal' units based on legal marriage; (2) 'Faithful concubinage,' also 'patrilocal' but without legal sanction; (3) 'Companionate' unions or consensual cohabitations of less than three years' duration; and (4) 'Disintegrate' families, consisting of women with their children or grandchildren. Henriques merely renamed the 'disintegrate' family as the 'maternal' or grandmother family and the 'companionate' as the 'keeper' family or union.

Though suggestive, neither of these classifications was grounded on detailed study of the household or conjugal units to which they referred; and although both these familial typologies rested on distinctions of conjugal form and status, neither Henriques nor Simey gave explicit attention to extra-residential mating as a widespread institutional pattern. In brief, these early studies, however illuminating, lack the data essential for an adequate analysis of West Indian mating and family organization.

Only in 1956–57 were the first systematic studies of West Indian family systems published, by R. T. Smith on Guianese Negroes and by Edith Clarke on Jamaica respectively. These two studies share numerous common features. Each reports and compares family organization in three selected communities by analyses of detailed censuses of household composition in these areas. Both studies emphasize the influence of current social and economic con-

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22 Henriques, *op. cit.*, pp. 103, 111.


conditions on the organization and development of household
groups; and both seek to 'explain' the observable variety of
domestic groups by reference to current social and eco-
nomic conditions and practices rather than by reference to
the past. The two studies also differ in certain fundamen-
tal ways, notably in their analytic models and implied or
expressed 'explanations', and since these differences have
influenced subsequent work, they merit special attention.

R. T. Smith offers an analysis of family life among the
Guianese and West Indian 'lower class' Negroes which
rests on a series of interconnected propositions. These may
be summarized briefly as follows: (1) the household is the
natural unit of family organization and its sociological
analysis.25 (2) 'Common-law' unions and legal marriage
are sociologically identical, at least in these lowly strata of
West Indian society. It is neither necessary nor appropriate
to distinguish between them.26 (3) Children derive noth-
ing of any importance from their fathers, who are margi-
nal and ineffective members of their families of procrea-
tion, even when resident. It is indeed indifferent whether
these husband-fathers live with their families or not, or even
whether their children know them personally.27 (4) Most
or all Negro 'lower-class' households are 'matrifocal' and
dominated by women in their combined roles of mother
and wife; and this female dominance increases as children
grow up and daughters bear other children whose fathers
live elsewhere.28 (5) Most or possibly all households be-
gin as domestic nuclear families and all share a common
cyclical pattern of growth, expansion and decay which

25 Ibid., pp. 51–52, 94–95, 108–13, 146, 257; R. T. Smith,
"The Family in the Caribbean," in Vera Rubin, ed., Caribbean
Studies: A Symposium, Jamaica, Institute of Social and Eco-
nomic Research, University of the West Indies, 1957, pp. 67–68;
R. T. Smith, "Culture and Social Structure in the Caribbean:
26 R. T. Smith, The Negro Family in British Guiana, pp. 97,
27 Ibid., pp. 147, 153, but also see p. 258; R. T. Smith,
102, 142, 150, 223–24; "The Family in the Caribbean," p. 70.

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varies in its phases within fixed limits, but which generally
involves a period when its matrifocal character and or-
organization is most pronounced and short matrilines of
mother, daughter and daughter's children (Frazier's 'ma-
ternal' family) are usually present, with or without resident
husbands and sons.29 (6) Such matrifocality of household
organization and the correlative marginality of men as hus-
bands and fathers, is characteristic of low ranking sections
in ascriptively stratified societies; these patterns are di-
rectly associated with ascriptive stratification, low rates of
social mobility, restricted public roles for adult men, and
an absence of 'managerial' functions, political responsibili-
ties and status differentiation among them.30 Thus where-
ever such rigid, typically racial, status ascription obtains,
we should find similar conditions of male marginality in
familial contexts and matrifocality in domestic organiza-
cion, coupled with a single standardized developmental
cycle for household groups based on the nuclear family in
its initial phase. (7) Only those patterns of sexual associa-
tion which involve co-residence of the partners merit
classification as 'conjugal' unions or direct analysis in the
study of family life. This is so because the family involves
close and continuous association of its members; it is
therefore inherently a domestic unit, and households and
families are identical. Hence, men are truly marginal
members of families begotten in extra-residential mating.31

Thus having eliminated several critical elements of the
local family structure by denying their relevance, and hav-
ing identified the nuclear family as the necessary basis for
domestic organization, R. T. Smith has to seek the factors
which determine the development and matrifocal qualities
of these units in extrinsic conditions of social stratification.
In his view the common distinctions between legal and con-
sensual cohabitation, and between legitimate and illegiti-

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mate children are sociologically irrelevant. He likewise excludes extra-residential mating from the category of con-
jugal union relevant to analysis of these family systems;
and finally he dismisses the internal differentiations among
these villagers as irrelevant to his analysis, asserting that
such differentiations are minimized because they are 'in-
consistent with the criteria on which the colonial system of
social stratification is based, and to which the inferior
stratum must normatively subscribe'.92 Why either of these
two latter conclusions should hold is never revealed; and
during Smith's field work in British Guiana, both the
Negro and East Indian low status sections of the colonial
society supported a political movement which he describes
as 'truly revolutionary' since it sought to disrupt and dis-
card 'the existing authority system' and explicitly rejected
the European domination on which the ascriptive colonial
stratification was based.83

Later, among the Guianese East Indians who rank be-
side or below the Negros on ethnic and occupational
grounds, R. T. Smith and his colleague Jayawardena
found a distinctive 'Indian' system of status differentiation
linked with prevailingly 'patrifocal' family organization,
despite status deprivations imposed by the wider society
quite as severe as any to which the Negros were subject.84
Smith accounts for the patriarchal character of family or-
ganization among these low-ranking East Indians by ap-
ppealing to conditions of ethnicity, cultural autonomy and
social separation,85 but the Negro villages he first studied
enjoy very similar conditions of isolation and ethnic homo-

82 Ibid., pp. 181, 195–96, 210–12, 223; see also pp. 39–47,
191–220.
83 Ibid., pp. 199–200.
84 R. T. Smith, "Family Structure and Plantation Systems
in the New World," pp. 153–59; "Culture and Social Structure
in the Caribbean: Some Recent Work on Family and Kinship
Studies," pp. 41–43; R. T. Smith and Jayawardena, "Marriage
and the Family Amongst East Indians in British Guiana."
85 R. T. Smith, "Family Structure and Plantation Systems
in the New World," pp. 158–59; "Culture and Social Structure
in the Caribbean: Some Recent Work on Family and Kinship

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geniality. It is also clear that these villagers are part of a
culturally distinct section of Guianese society; and as such
they possess some autonomy which, however limited, is
imposed on them by their social situation. Under these
conditions it would be remarkable if the villagers lacked
their own internal system status differentiation.86 Evi-
dently Smith made little attempt to study this system in de-
tail, or to appreciate its criteria and functions in sustaining
the cohesion and solidarity of these 'black people's vil-
lages'.97 Instead he dismisses the villagers' internal differen-
tiations of age and sex as trivial, although his careful
tabulations indicate that legal marriage is closely associated
with increasing age in both sexes;88 and it is also evident,
despite his attempt to equate them, that marriage is re-
garded by these Negro villagers as having greater prestige
than other forms of mating, and as the appropriate status
for men and women of middle or senior age. If so, then
marriage late in life can rarely fail to enhance the status
and authority of men as 'husband-fathers' within and out-
side their homes, by simultaneously legitimating their uni-
sions and children and by conferring higher status on their
wives while achieving corresponding increments themselves
through their personal fulfillment of community norms.

Despite such data, R. T. Smith prefers to treat the peo-
ple's community values and status structure as irrelevant
or trivial and to analyse their familial institutions within a
'theme of reference' of the 'total social system' in which,
by virtue of their low ascribed status, internal differentia-
tions among these Negro villagers are indeed irrelevant,
together with their institutional practice. Thus although 84
per cent of all domestic unions in the three villages studied
were based on legal marriage, Guianese élite regard
common-law unions as 'exclusively lower-class custom' and
as 'part of the lower-class cultural tradition'.89 From this
vantage point, Smith ignored the distinction between

45–46, 89–90, 208, 223; see also pp. 203–20.
87 Ibid., pp. 183 f., 203–6.
89 Ibid., p. 182; see also p. 259.
common-law and legal marriage which his villagers' conduct show that they emphasize.

Such procedures represent a remarkable departure from the standard practice of social anthropologists, whose work repeatedly demonstrated that social analyses which are not based on a thorough and infinite appreciation of folk values, distinctions, conceptions and modes of thought can rarely if ever avoid serious error and misrepresentations of the people's way of life and social organization. Some illustrations of this truism in R. T. Smith's work have already been cited; for example, the arbitrary exclusion of extra-residential mating from the category of conjugal relations on which his analysis of nuclear family organization rests; the unsubstantiated assertion that resident husband-fathers are simultaneously marginal members of their own homes, and undifferentiated members of their local communities; the misleading equations of legal and common-law marriage, household and nuclear family; and the surprising assertions that differences in the closeness, continuity and quality of father-child relations are socially irrelevant, or that these Negro villagers fully accept the low social status ascribed to them and the criteria on which this ascription is based, although they supported a political movement expressly committed to overthrow the colonial social order.

In Grenada, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad and in other West Indian societies whereascriptive systems of stratification also employ racial criteria, distinctive status structures have been reported even among the lowest people in all rural communities where they have been sought.\(^9\) These com-


By combining specialized definitions, value judgments, exclusions of relevant data, and by assimilating dissimilar units and relations, R. T. Smith seeks to generalize Frazier's theory of the influence of the depressing social and economic conditions on the family organization of American Negroes to all low-ranking sections of ascriptively stratified societies. As hypothesis or generalization, this formula is only meaningful on the following assumptions: (1) that the members of these disprivileged strata accept the system of values with which the structure of social inequality and their own deprivation is identified as normatively valid; (2) that they lack distinctive status structures for their own internal differentiation which are relevant to the familial roles of men as husbands and fathers; (3) that alternative patterns of mating, parenthood and nuclear family organization current among such people are irrelevant to the constitution and development of their family and household units alike. Unless these three conditions are simultaneously present, the generalization cited above cannot apply.

Like other social institutions, family systems have internal and external aspects which are clearly related, though variably so in differing cultures and societies. These family systems may thus be analyzed with primary reference to their internal constitution and consistency, or with primary reference to their congruence and articulation with the wider social system in which their adult members participate. However, analyses of this second sort presuppose prior detailed knowledge of the internal organization of the family systems and societies concerned.

As social systems with clearly defined boundaries, family systems consist internally in a variable organization of several distinct modes of social relation, such as mating and affinity, filiation and parenthood, or descent and extended kinship, through which such units as nuclear or extended families, households and conjugal unions are established. Thus to analyze such systems we must examine closely their intrinsic components, that is, the elements and relations that give them their particular qualities and form; and in this task it is necessary to observe carefully all local distinctions between different types of relation whose mutual connections and relative weight constitute the system. In such analyses, mating forms and conditions clearly deserve most meticulous attention, since these relations are prerequisites of parenthood, and affinity and nuclear or extended families alike.

In this regard R. T. Smith's method of family analysis is most instructive. He begins by excluding extra-residential mating, with which the conditions of 'matrifocality' and 'male marginality' are closely linked, and by assimilating legal and 'common-law' unions, although these are clearly distinguished by the community and society alike. In this way, Smith defines conjugal relations exclusively by the criterion of co-residence, though the villagers clearly do not; and on this ground he identifies the formation of household groups with the establishment of nuclear families consisting of couples and their children, whereas many nuclear families are never co-resident, and many households neither begin nor develop on this basis. By the same token, since he denies the conjugal status of the widespread extra-residential form of mating, Smith denies the sociological relevance of paternity in such unions and accordingly interprets the presence of young women and children in their mothers' homes as evidence of familial matrifocality rather than as necessary and inevitable consequences of the mating pattern. Likewise, having identified the formation of household groups with the establishment of nuclear families by his exclusive definitions of conjugal and paternal relations, Smith concludes that a single model of their domestic form and development applies to virtually all these Negro families with limited variation. Indeed, having ignored locally significant differences between the roles of men as fathers and husbands in extra-residential, 'common-law' and legal unions, all must be equally 'marginal' or central to family life; and since most children generally remain with their mothers during and

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after extra-residential or other types of union, male marginality is rather more evident than the alternative. Thus by eliminating these internal differences of mating form and parenthood, and by ignoring their implications for domestic grouping, Smith is free to seek the ‘causes’ or correlates of this male marginality in other spheres of the social system which, being non-familial, can only be either communal or societal. Here again, for reasons which are not quite clear, he elects to ignore the external social system of greatest immediacy and significance to the people concerned—their local community—and derives instead the predicated marginality of these Negro men from their uniformly low status in the colonial society. In short R. T. Smith combines a cavalier treatment of the features intrinsic to the family system with major emphases on the decisive influence of extrinsic societal conditions.

In his pioneer studies of American Negro family life, Frazier had tried to combine both planes of analysis, although he also over-emphasized the influence of external conditions and devoted little attention to its intrinsic elements. Since he was mainly concerned to contrast the family organization of plantation slaves and share-croppers in the Deep South with those of rural immigrants and ‘black bourgeoisie’ in the Northern cities, Frazier’s failure to analyse the internal components of these differing structures, and particularly the relations between their patterns of mating and family form and development, escaped general notice; but it was precisely on these grounds that Herskovits challenged the general thesis of socio-economic determination of family form on which Frazier’s analysis rested.

Following Frazier, and being unaware of the statistical and structural significance of the extra-residential mating pattern, Simey first sought to interpret West Indian family patterns in terms of economic conditions, ‘companionate’ and ‘faithful’ concubinage being associated with low levels of income while ‘Christian’ marriage was linked with higher income levels, and the ‘disintegrate’ family was inferentially derived from the two preceding ‘lower class’ types. In his turn Henriques, following Simey, noted differing social histories of West Indian and American Negroes and emphasized that West Indian family forms are sui generis, natural developments of local society, and not by-products of migration and urbanization such as Frazier had observed in Chicago and New York. However, like Simey, Henriques also failed to isolate the extra-residential mating pattern which Stycos and Back have recently shown to be the most common form of mating and the almost universal practice in early unions among ‘lower class’ Jamaicans. Accordingly, like Frazier and Simey, Henriques had to seek explanations for the prevalence of ‘grandmother’ or ‘disintegrate’ families in extra-familial social conditions. Like Simey too, he distinguished between stable and unstable consensual cohabitations on the one hand, and Christian marriage on the other, primarily by reference to differences of economic situation. The ‘grandmother’ family was again derived from unstable ‘keeper’ unions, at least by inference. However, once we recognize the prevalence of extra-residential mating, especially during the early years of adult life, its pivotal significance for the organization and development of elementary and domestic families alike is immediately evident; and these earlier attempts to ‘explain’ West Indian family forms and their variations by reference to extrinsic economic and societal conditions lose their relevance and validity until the effects of these inner components have been clearly identified.

As an elementary rule of sociological method, it is always first essential to examine the interrelations, requisites and implications of elements intrinsic to any social system, family or other, in order to determine its structure and conditions of change or self-perpetuation, before seeking extrinsic determinants. By ignoring these intrinsic components and their integration within the family system, and seeking instead their determinants, requisites, or correlates in external social spheres, R. T. Smith combined an oversimplified model of Guianese Negro family organization with a premature and misleading explanation which substitutes the societal stratification for earlier emphases on eco-


nomic and social contexts of 'disorganization'. But this 'stratification' theory of the 'matrifocal' West Indian family organization which treats men as marginal husband-fathers, assumes that local differences of conjugal union and paternity are irrelevant, and also ignores local status structures which differentiate people by reference to sex, age, land ownership, conduct, marital and familial status and by locally relevant occupational and economic differences. Such an interpretation depends for its value on the demonstrable validity of the various assumptions, value-judgments and exclusions of data on which it rests. Instead of seeking 'explanations' of institutional systems in the remoter conditions of their social context, we must first attend meticulously to the specific distinctions, relations, and forms institutionalized within them, to determine the limits, degrees and conditions of their closure as self-perpetuating bodies of custom, and so to identify their extrinsic requisites and susceptibilities.

Indeed, by its careful analyses of household composition in relation to the mating status of household principals and the fragmentation of nuclear families within and beyond them [My Mother Who Fathered Me], conclusively indicates the deficiency of those attempts to 'explain' West Indian family patterns which assert the influence of extrinsic conditions on grossly oversimplified models of them. Whereas R. T. Smith chose to interpret West Indian family organization, kinship and mating from the perspective of the household group, and to interpret the community differentiation from the perspective of the colonial society, Edith Clarke shows how alternative types of mating relation influence the constitution and stability of household groups, and how differences in the organization and character of local communities are associated with significant differences in their patterns of family organization.

One of the major contributions of My Mother Who Fathered Me is to demonstrate the influence that community organization and ethos have on local patterns of family life.

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Such community variations show how misleading it is to assume an undifferentiated and uniform pattern of family organization among the Creole 'lower class' which may be analysed without further qualification, as R. T. Smith, following Sinney and Henriques, seeks to do. Careful comparisons of varying community patterns of family organizations also show that simple economic differences are not themselves evident 'determinants'. Thus, despite its higher level of average income, Sugartown, for obvious reasons, has a lower ratio of domestic nuclear families and higher rates of individual isolation and marital instability than Mocca; and despite their differences of wealth and status, 'Mocca and Orange Grove, in their different ways, are integrated societies in which kinship plays an important role, whereas Sugartown is ... a conglomerate of disparate sections, held together only by common involvement in a sugar estate'. In Mocca, despite its 'extreme poverty' where the conjugal pattern is concubinage for life, the family is all-important', and 'the pattern of descent is predominantly patriarchal'. In Orange Grove, marriage is 'part of the class structure and is reinforced with strong social sanctions'. By contrast, 'there was no adult pattern of male conjugal or paternal responsibility' in Sugartown. 'It is to Orange Grove and Mocca that we have to turn to find examples of fathers lavishing care and affection on their children and carrying out conjugal and paternal duties.'

The typical basis and form of cohabitation, the modal size, composition and stability of household groups, the differing modes of paternity and their statistical distribution, and the quality, range and density of family relations, all vary directly with differences in the composition, character and cohesion of the communities concerned. Clearly the 'integrated societies' of Mocca and Orange Grove possess dissonant communities'.
distinctive status structures which are normatively effective in regulating individual conduct at the familial and community levels. At Orange Grove this status system takes the familiar form of internal class divisions which, however insignificant at the national level, are locally influential and reinforce male responsibility and authority in conjugal and paternal roles. At Mocca, our data indicate that status allocations rest primarily on criteria of sex, age and familial position; thus while one-third of the Mocca girls aged between 15 and 19 marry—presumably for religious reasons and to men some years older than themselves—‘concubinage increases rapidly in the next ten years until it reaches ... 61 per cent for the 25–29 age-group, marriages decrease in the same period, but climb again between 30 and 40, until at 35 the entire population is living in a conjugal union, fairly evenly balanced between marriage and concubinage’. Such data indicate that while cohabitation in legal or common-law unions is prescribed for adults in their mid-thirties at Mocca, among younger people, mating is modally extra-residential. As age increases, so do the ratios of married and consensually cohabiting couples whose nubile daughters are beginning to bear children in their parents’ homes through early extra-residential liaisons. Among Grenadian and Jamaican peasants this customary prescription of alternative conjugal forms as appropriate or inappropriate at successive phases of the adult life cycle has a similar character and supports very similar family structures at both the domestic and extra-domestic levels. By contrast, in the Grenadian and Jamaican towns of Kingston and Grenville, conditions very similar to those at Sugartown prevail, consequent on the disruption of this peasant mating sequence by proletarianization, migration and exposure to ‘élite pressures and stimuli’. For Jamaica the independent enquiries of Stycos and Back have recently confirmed these general findings. A careful reading will reveal that these recent advances in our knowledge have their foundation in the present book.

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Briefly and schematically, among the West Indian Creole folk or ‘lower class’, young people typically begin their mating career with extra-residential relations of varying duration and publicity. According to folk tradition these unions should receive the consent of the girl’s parents; but often they are clandestine. Particular unions may or may not lead to childbirth or to consensual or legal cohabitation; but when sanctioned by parental approval and public recognition, these extra-residential relations provide an adequate institutional context for the young couple’s mating. They also ensure in advance acknowledgment of paternity for any children begotten in these relations. During such mating the young girl normally remains in her parental home until such time as she has achieved her ‘womanish’ by bearing one or two children. Normally she will then be willing to set up a joint household with her current mate; and if their union later breaks down, she returns to her former home until she finds another. Most successive matings begin as extra-residential liaisons, but in each later union the interval between the initiation of mating and of cohabitation typically decreases; and by their thirtieth year most women are living in conditional but often stable consensual cohabitation (concubinage) with a man and their common children. At this stage, unless their union is childless, the couple’s children by previous matings are usually dispersed in other homes, typically with the children’s maternal kin, lineal or collateral.

Such consensual cohabitations face three possible courses of development: disruption by desertion, conjugal disagreements or widowhood; conversion into legal mar-

81 Ibid., p. 115.
82 M. G. Smith, West Indian Family Structure, pp. 198–242.

riage; or persistence without formal change until widowhood occurs. At Mocca, and in those communities which Stykos and Back designate as the 'Jamaican foothills', for example, in the parishes of St Catherine and coastal St Thomas, consensual cohabitations are prevalent and often lifelong, while marriage is statistically marginal. However, in most peasant communities of Jamaica, marriage is prescribed as the appropriate form of cohabitation for women in their fortieths, and few women remain in consensual cohabitation as 'common-law' wives past their 54th year.  

The serial distribution of these alternative mating forms as normatively appropriate or inappropriate at successive phases of the adult life cycle is inevitably identical for both sexes, except that men typically begin their mating careers rather later than girls, are typically some 5 years older than their current partners, and generally die first, leaving their legal or consensual widows with or without children and kin at home.

Ideally in those peasant systems that institutionalize all three conjugal alternatives, a young couple may convert their relation from visiting to consensual cohabitation and so to marriage at their own discretion. Alternatively a young girl may marry one of her earliest suitors, who is then generally several years her senior. Both possibilities are rarely realized, and as a rule adults of either sex move through these successive phases of their mating careers by unions of varying form, length and fertility. Some women never cohabit, but maintain visiting relations with a succession of men whose children they bear, as for example in the case of Nesta described below. For various reasons, this type of adaptation is also relatively rare. So are reversions from marriage to 'common-law' cohabitations, which are strongly disapproved in settled peasant communities whose age-graded status structure ensures elders

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the immunities required to act as spokesmen for the local mores. Thus, as individuals increase in age, social maturity, parental responsibilities and local prominence, they are normally constrained by individual and social conditions to convert their non-domiciliary liaisons into stable consensual cohabitation, and in most peasant communities of Jamaica and Grenada, to convert these 'common-law' unions into marriage during middle or late middle age, marriage being institutionalized as the appropriate mating status for senior members of the community.

In rural and urban proletariats this serial order by which these alternative mating forms are integrated with advancing social maturity in the individual life cycle has limited validity, though many rural immigrants use it to orient their conduct. In these proletarian contexts, of which Sugartown is an excellent instance, all forms of mating are always simultaneously available to anyone, without normative restriction; and, if my data from Greenville are valid and generally representative, under these conditions marriage lacks finality, and after their desertion, separation or widowhood, men often revert to consensual cohabitation. In such conditions many cohabitations are 'non-purposive', 'companionate' or 'keeper' households in contradistinction to the 'faithful concubinage' characteristic of peasants during and after their thirties. Likewise, in these proletarian contexts, non-domiciliary relations are often casual and promiscuous rather than sexually exclusive and durable. By comparison with settled peasant communities, among these proletariats the proportionate incidence of single-person households is generally higher, together with the ratio of 'denuded' households, especially those consisting of women, their children and/or grandchildren; but, while the ratio of households containing three generations declines, the ratio of households based on cohabitation remains constant at about 40 per cent, although the proportional incidence of marriage falls sharply. In short, increased instability of mating organization in pro-

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85 Clarke, op. cit., pp. 82, 121–23; Francis, op. cit., Ch. 5, pp. 7–11; Stykos and Back, op. cit., pp. 327–30.  
86 M. G. Smith, West Indian Family Structure, Table 7, p. 147.  
88 M. G. Smith, West Indian Family Structure, Table 7, p. 114.  
89 Ibid., p. 242.
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Many contexts are associated with increasing fragmentation of nuclear families and with the dispersal of their elements in smaller households of shallower generation depth. It is also associated with a general increase in the diversity and instability of household groupings.

This analysis demonstrates the orderly arrangement of alternative conjugal forms in a series integrated with advancing social maturity and status at successive phases of the individual life cycle in these peasant communities. It serves to show how differences in local systems of mating underlie differences in the domestic and familial organization of these communities; and it also shows how these family structures vary in consequence of differences in the complement, organization and incidence of these conjugal alternatives. For illustrations immediately to hand we need only compare the proportionate distributions of households classified in Appendix 9 by family type and by the conjugal status of their principals at Sugartown, Orange Grove and Mocca. The relevance for studies of marital stability and fertility of these differing community mating structures, which are clearly integrated with the local systems of status allocation, has lately been shown by Stycos and Back. 61

Recently also K. F. Otterbein has attempted to show how imbalances in the adult sex ratios of local populations, produced by movements of men to seek wage employment, 'determine' the 'family systems' of Caribbean communities. 62 To demonstrate this determinism, Otterbein calculated

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lates correlation coefficients between adult sex ratios on the one hand, and percentages of consensual unions in local cohabitations and of homes with female heads, on the other. Both calculations yield high positive correlations, indicating close associations between the variables concerned; and both are vitiated by unnecessary errors or inappropriateness in the data on which they are based. For example, to derive ratios of homes with female heads in Sugartown, Mocca and Orange Grove, Otterbein selects from Appendix 9 below the percentage ratios of denuded and single-person households classified as 'female', and simply sums them. Thus, although Edith Clarke expressly refrains from classifying domestic groups based on conjugal couples by the sex of their head, Otterbein treats all such households as units having male heads. Likewise he assembles the wrong data on the percentage of consensual unions among cohabitating couples from my survey analyses. However, these errors of data compilation are more easily corrected than the conceptual blunders on which his analysis rests.

Briefly, Otterbein assumes the detailed and uniform constitution of the family system whose 'major determinant' he identifies as imbalances in the adult sex ratio. It is easy to show that this procedure and analysis is empirically and theoretically invalid. For example, in my rural Jamaica sample where the adult sex ratio was virtual parity (1 male: 1.04 females), 30.1 per cent of the households had female heads and 41.2 per cent of all cohabitations were consensual. In Latante and Grenville, Grenada, and in Carriacou, where sex ratios were considerably less equal (1: 1.24, 1: 1.29, and 1: 1.92, respectively) consensual cohabitation accounted for 26.4 per cent, 42 per cent and 8 per cent of all domestic conjugal units. 64

Otterbein's argument assumes stable ratios of 'single' males and females engaged in extra-residential mating inter se; and it also assumes that all other extra-residential

61. Stycos and Back, op. cit.
63. Ibid., p. 72, Table 1; Clarke, op. cit., pp. 205–6, Appendix 9; M. G. Smith, West Indian Family Structure, Table 22, p. 242.
64. Ibid., pp. 226–27, 243.
relations hold between married men and 'single' women, most of whom presumably live in homes with female heads. But clearly the relative incidence of extra-residential matings and cohabitations, whether legal or consensual, is a function of the mating organization rather than of simple shifts in the adult sex ratios. The addition of another 50 men in a population of x adults with a previous surplus of 100 females will leave the percentage ratios of homes with female heads and consensual cohabitation completely unchanged if this male increment is accommodated in extant units, and if they remain celibate, mate extra-residentially, or contract consensual and legal cohabitations in already current proportions. Alternatively, this increment may decrease the ratio of households with female heads if its members establish so many single-person units, as for example at Sugartown where 34 per cent of the households surveyed contained single individuals, 110 men and 41 women. In such a case, this change in the ratio of households with female heads proceeds without any corresponding change in the ratio of consensual unions. The point surely is that increases or decreases in the adult sex ratios depend for their familial effects on the local patterns of mating, kinship and domestic organization which accommodate them and regulate their effects. That a large surplus population of adult women need not entail the presence of any households with female heads whatsoever would be apparent to anyone who has studied an African polygynous society. To say that such African comparisons are irrelevant merely indicates that the 'determination' of West Indian family systems by differential sex ratios presumes the specific patterns it seeks to account for. If West Indian societies institutionalize consensual cohabitation and other modes of mating together with female household headship, these are surely features

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of the social organization rather than simple functions of demographic and economic structures. Consequently shifts in the relative incidence of female household headship or of common law unions represent changes or adjustments of the domestic organization, and may proceed without any changes in the local adult sex ratios.

These demographic factors cannot possibly 'determine' the 'family system'-by which Otterbein evidently means the statistical distribution of certain arbitrarily selected features of the domestic organization—for the obvious reason that family systems and demographic ratios are drawn from quite different levels of social organization. For example, in Carriacou, St Helena, and the Long Bay Cays, Bahamas, the marginal incidence of consensual unions is clearly a function of distinctive kinship and mating structures rather than the 'demographic-economic' variable to which Otterbein appeals. Indeed, his entire argument rests on the cultural prescription that men should own their homes in order to undertake marriage. This institutional prerequisite is said to motivate male migration in search of the necessary money. If so, the resulting disbalances of adult sex ratios are themselves 'determined' by the mating and familial organization whose conditions and variability they are then employed to explain. Otterbein's argument is another illustration of the deficiencies of 'causal' analyses of unfamiliar systems in terms of inappropriate extrinsic variables.

Another favourite method for such extrinsic causal analyses involves the interpretation of West Indian family organization by reference to economic conditions. This tran

Stycos and Back also investigate the system of economic support for non-domiciliary mates and for the children of broken unions. They report that over 85 per cent of the 1,359 women in their sample who were engaged in extra-residential mating received economic support from their mates. Excluding their current partners, many women also received external support for their children, generally from their own kin or from the children's fathers; but as the woman's marital status changes from 'single' to consensual and to legal cohabitation, the contributions received from these absent fathers decline, and it seems quite clear that many men contribute little towards their children's care after their conjugal unions have ended. Even so, more than one-third of the current mates of these women, and close to two-thirds of their extra-residential mates over 40 years of age, contributed to the support of 'outside' children. Approximately one-half of all the men aged over 40 with whom these women were mating contributed towards the support of at least some of their children by former unions. Stycos and Back conclude that 'a remarkably consistent picture of adjustments of the family system to the exigencies of the fluid pattern of mating and childbearing emerges, a system in which resources are pooled in order to provide economic and child rearing support for children occurring out of wedlock'.

Its normative character and status present yet another important focus of current interest in the study of West Indian marriage and family systems. T. S. Simey and Madeline Kerr both explored this problem in different ways, but perhaps Henriques first expressed the central issues most cogently. He described Jamaica as 'a society in which there is a contradiction as regards conjugal unions between what is legally accepted as the norm for the whole society and what is socially accepted. This contradiction or opposition between legal and social acceptance applies to

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other institutions as well as the family.' On other grounds also Henriques dismissed the social distinctions between 'official legal (Christian) and 'common-law' marriage as 'official legal and legal but quite useless sociologically'; but although stable common-law unions and legal marriages as treating stable common-law unions and legal marriages as functional equivalents, be distinguished between the familial and household groupings they identified.

Following Henriques several writers, including Edith Clarke, have documented this thesis of normative dualism and institutional alternatives in mating and family organization of West Indian societies. In general these analyses have confirmed Henriques' observation that among the West Indian 'lower classes' the attitude towards legal marriage is ambivalent. Although no social stigma attaches to the unmarried state and "living in sin" is not a term of reproach, marriage is often regarded as an ideal which is not within the woman's reach.

On these questions among others our most systematic data lie in this text, in chapters 3 and 4. This shows clearly how folk attitudes to marriage and its alternatives vary in the different communities that Edith Clarke studied; and it also shows that while legal marriage ranks above other forms of mating in folk opinion, in some communities, e.g. Sugartown, there is 'no social disapproba-

87 Henriques, op. cit., p. 106.
88 Ibid., p. 106; see also p. 86–89.
89 Clarke, op. cit., p. 77–84, 104–5, 108–10, 157–58;
80 Henriques, op. cit., p. 107; see also p. 86.
81 Clarke, op. cit., p. 82.
82 Ibid., p. 92.
tion has persisted from Macmillan onwards. In general, these 'economic interpretations' concentrate on 'explaining' the variable incidence of marriage and common-law unions by reference to differences of income and economic situation; and sometimes the present text is cited as evidence of this relation. Certainly Edith Clarke dwells on the economic preconditions and correlates of marriage in contrast to those of concubinage. Thus she says, 'in general marriage is associated with a higher economic status ... [and] by and large concubinage is an institution of the poor'. But besides stressing the similarities between 'purposive concubinage' and marriage, Edith Clarke insists that the incidence and stability of unions of either type is a function of the community organization; and she observes that 'in Sugar town and Moccia, there is, in fact, no apparent real association of marriage or concubinage with the economic status or class structure'. At Orange Grove 'marriage ... is part of the class structure'. Elsewhere it 'occurs ... as a later stage in an association begun in concubinage ... the seal of a proven conjugal union'.

Other students who have closely investigated the relation between differential mating forms and economic levels have come to similar conclusions. These are most succinctly expressed by Cumper, who concludes a detailed analysis of these relations in Barbados with reservations about the influence of economic conditions on family organization, due to the presence of intervening 'cultural prescriptions'. For Jamaica, Stycos and Back have also

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M. G. Smith tried to measure the associations of alternative conjugal forms with such variables as age, community type and employment statuses of husband and wife. They find salient differences in the distributions of these conjugal alternatives between women of identical age groups settled in different types of communities; and also between women of differing age groups in the same type of community; but they fail to find any direct evidence of correlations between marriage rates and the 'occupations'—by which they refer mainly to differences between wage and own-account employment—of these women's partners. Such differing incidences of marriage as these writers find in the unions of men of differing 'occupations' are complicated by differences in the average age of these groupings. 'Age is still a most important correlate, marriage increasing and visiting decreasing with age in every instance. The woman's employment status is also important. ... The occupation of husband is still related, but its relation is neither as pronounced nor as clear-cut as the other two variables.'

These scholars then investigate relations between the marital and employment status of women of different age groups whose 'spouses' are classified as wage or own-account employed. They conclude that, irrespective of the woman's age and of her 'husband's' employment status, marriage is associated with higher rates of female unemployment than other forms of mating; but this conclusion is only borne out by their data for women in their thirties. Among women aged between 15 and 24 years, few legal wives are found among the unemployed; and in the succeeding age-group, 25–29, 'common-law' and legal wives are equally among unemployed women. Thus are represented equally among unemployed women. Hence it may be argued that the women's employment status is not a variable of marriage generally, but only among women who are busy with children and home.
Nonetheless, though these communities differ in the norms that they institutionalize and in the weight and sanctions that they attach to their observance, in all areas 'sexual exclusiveness is the ideal mode of behaviour, whether in marriage or concubinage'. In extra-residential relations women are also required to remain faithful to their partners; and it is by reference to these norms of sexual exclusiveness that adultery and unfaithfulness are distinguished from casual or promiscuous intercourse to which no such conditions attach.

That the normative dualism identified by Henriques is not restricted in Jamaica to modes of mating is further evident from Edith Clarke's discussion of family land in Chapter 2, and from the distinction she draws between social and legal legitimacy and between adoption and the rearing of 'schoolchildren'. But many instances of this pervasive normative dualism could be cited from other fields of social life, particularly religion, politics and social stratification.

However, Judith Blake has recently asserted that marriage is the only form of mating which Jamaican women of the 'lower class' approve and desire; and by so doing, she has concentrated current interests in the normative structure and integration of West Indian society directly on the analysis of mating and family norms among West Indian folk. In discussing R. T. Smith's work above we have touched on another aspect of this basic problem.

Blake rests her analysis on replies to questionnaires on attitudes to mating and fertility which were administered to 99 women and 53 men in Jamaica in 1953–54 by a staff of 'trained' interviewers drawn from the local 'middle class'. The appropriateness of her sample and field procedures has already been criticized; but her conclusions are also suspect on other grounds. Briefly, Blake's thesis is that Jamaican 'lower class' women regard legal marriage as a norm and disapprove morally of illegitimacy and extra-legal mating in all its forms. As evidence, she cites her questionnaire responses which indicate the women's expressed preferences and attitudes; and she refers to the familiar increases in the ratios of married persons as age advances.

To account for the grave divergences between actual behaviour and expressed preference or 'norm'—an inference or equation for which Braithwaite properly criticized her—Blake relies on two major arguments, both supported by her questionnaire replies. First she tries to show that young Jamaican girls become pregnant in their early liaisons through innocence and ignorance about sex, in consequence of their inadequate and misguided socialization and their exploitation by philandering males. Secondly she argues that in consequence of these early errors, 'the bargaining position' of these unmarried mothers deteriorates 'in the courtship market', since no men want to marry such women and to bring up other men's children. The woman is thus driven by economic need and by her expressed desires for marriage into a further series of extra-marital unions of visiting or co-residential types, in each of which she willingly risks further pregnancies in

90 Braithwaite, op. cit., pp. 541–45; see also Rodman, op. cit., pp. 444–49.
the hope of ‘cementing’ the current union and ‘earning’ its conversion into marriage. These are the two basic arguments by which Blake seeks to account for the observable gap between women’s expressed ‘ideals’ or norms and their actual conduct.

Though these Jamaican lower-class women are said to express active discontent and hostility to extra-legal associations and to the bearing of illegitimate children, we are informed—somewhat inconsistently—that whereas these women put the ‘median ideal age’ of marriage at 20 years, they put the ‘median ideal age’ of their first union—defined by Blake as any association involving sexual contact from rape to lifelong marriage—at 18.4 years; and that in fact half of them began mating during or before their sixteenth year, the median age of first union for Blake’s sample being 17.0 and of (actual) marriage 25.6. Thus to adopt Blake’s method of reasoning, these women clearly distinguish sexual intercourse (unions) and marriage at both the ideal and behavioural levels. Instead of identifying, they segregate them, and apparently they regard pre-marital intercourse as a normatively indispensable prerequisite for marriage. Under such conditions, granted the virtual absence of any attempts to prevent conception, their premarital pregnancies seem inevitable, and it is thus pointless to attempt to transfer the responsibility for these developments to licentious males or to inept and restrictive parents, as Blake tries to do. In short, Blake’s questionnaire responses themselves reveal the normative dualism she seeks to disprove.

Moreover, both the arguments by which Blake seeks to accommodate the evident discrepancies between these women’s expressed ‘norms’ and actual behaviour are controverted by the data furnished by Stycos and Back. These writers show that only one-half of the women in their much larger sample became pregnant during their first unions, which they carefully define as ‘sexual association lasting for more than 3 months’, thereby excluding casual liaisons. Even so, very few of these women entered their second union in marriage. Accordingly it appears that these young girls are not entirely the victims of innocence and ignorance, male exploitation and parental folly, as Blake would have us believe; and this, coupled with their expressed desires for premarital intercourse, disposes of her argument from ‘ruined innocence’.

Furthermore Stycos and Back conclusively show that in Jamaica the chances of lower-class women securing marriage on entering each successive union are unaffected by the presence or absence of children by previous unions. This finding disposes of Blake’s second assumption, and her supplementary argument of the ‘deteriorating bargaining position’ of unwed mothers by showing that in the local ‘courtship market’ this condition is irrelevant for marriage. Indeed, if Jamaican men prefer to seduce and abandon virgins, and refuse to marry unmarried mothers, it is difficult to see how anyone ever got married in the island at all.

There remains the statistical pattern of increases in marriage ratios with increasing age, which Blake cites in support of her thesis that women are normatively committed to marriage as the only morally appropriate basis for reproduction and family life. In doing so she commits precisely the same methodological sins of which she accuses Simey, Henriques and others, but more grossly. W. J. Goode, who employs the same argument, at least commits no overt inconsistency in the process.

Clearly Blake’s elaborate argumentation rests on serious misconceptions of the meanings of ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ among her respondents—with whom indeed she had very little, if any, personal contact. As marriage is evidently

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87 Ibid., pp. 14 footnote, 50–51, 135; on median and actual ideal ages of marriage and first intercourse, see pp. 45–47, 50–51, 135.
89 Ibid., pp. 345–49.
neither normatively prerequisite for mating, nor parenthood, and as most couples marry late in life, often after the woman’s reproductive career has ended, many married couples lack common children although either partner may have several by previous matings. These simple facts—that ‘lower-class’ Jamaicans begin mating extramaritally, at an early age and typically marry rather late in life after having had several children—should indicate to anyone that the folk conception of marriage differs sharply from that of the local upper classes, for whom it is the essential precondition of procreation and family life—at least in class-endogamous matings. Blake however has chosen to give these folk concepts of ‘marriage’ and ‘legitimacy’ their standardized middle-class meanings in American and West Indian middle-class society, thereby creating the false problem of apparent differences between conduct and norms at which she addresses her dialectic in a futile effort to ‘prove’ that marriage is the only ‘norm’ recognized by Jamaican women, who are the unwilling victims of social circumstance, forced against their will to mate and bear children outside of wedlock, and thus neither responsible for their actions, nor deviant from their own moral convictions.

This is precisely the pattern of self-vindications which Madeline Kerr identified as distinctively Jamaican and perhaps West Indian; and the administration of Blake’s questionnaire which left respondents free to attribute responsibility as they willed, without any objective checks, and to misrepresent or rationalize their attitudes, motivations, goals, experiences and circumstances, provided a perfect opportunity for these women to demonstrate by their vicarious self-exculpations the invalidity of Madeline Kerr’s psychological analysis. It is therefore interesting that throughout her discussion Blake should ignore the much-publicized Mass Marriage Movement which was still under way in Jamaica in 1953 during her visit, and with which her respondents may quite well have confused her questionnaire enquiries, especially because the topics and personnel engaged in both campaigns were strikingly similar. Surely if Jamaican lower-class women were as fervently committed to marriage and as hostile to other forms of union as Blake asserts, this Mass Marriage Movement under militant if misguided leadership, backed by a well-organized Federation of Women with access to ample funds, should not have proved such a dismal failure. But then neither should the ‘median ideal ages’ of marriage and first sexual intercourse be so sharply separated by these female respondents.

Rodman has stressed the dangers of applying ‘middle-class’ meanings and assumptions to such common terms as marriage, family, legitimacy and land ownership in sociological studies of West Indian folk.99 Blake’s analysis merely demonstrates the relevance of Rodman’s caution. All our data presently go to show that whereas marriage, household and family are often congruent, their association is neither ideally prescribed nor empirically modal among West Indian Creoles of the folk or ‘lower class’. Many, perhaps most, individuals and couples throughout Jamaica and other West Indian territories bear and rear children outside of wedlock; and in such Jamaican parishes as St Thomas and St Catherine, rates of consensual cohabitation have remained equally high and stable from 1943 to 1960.100 On such evidence it is not merely meaningless but misleading to predicate a uniform ‘lower-class’ regard for marriage as the normative basis for family life. Mocca, described in this book, is a quite representative instance of those communities in which marriage is not prescriptively institutionalized. In urban proletarians and plantation areas such as Sugartown, marriage, despite its high public esteem, can neither be regarded as a local ideal, nor as the binding and morally obligatory rule of conduct which corresponds to the accepted sociological meaning of ‘norm’. Among the West Indian upper and middle classes there is no doubt that marriage is normatively requisite in their matings with one another, though

99 Rodman, op. cit.
100 Jamaica, Department of Statistics, Population Census, 1960. Some Notes on the Union Status, Marital Status and Number of Children of the Female Population of Jamaica (Jamaica, 1960), pp. 7–11.
taboo in their matings with the folk; and, with due exceptions, among West Indian peasants in general, marriage is institutionalized as the appropriate personal status and basis for cohabitation during middle or later age. It is thus rather as an essential condition of maturity and social status in these rural communities than as the basis or 'context of social reproduction' that marriage has its decisive and distinctive significance for the West Indian rural folk; but of course, once this is realized the apparent divergence between expressed norms and actual conduct on which Blake and Goode both dwell, simply disappear. There is in fact no contradiction between statements that marriage is preferred or required and participation in premarital unions during early and middle life—provided only that marriage is usually reserved for later years. Likewise there is no contradiction between normative emphases on legitimacy and high illegitimacy ratios in the annual birthrates, provided only that we distinguish as Edith Clarke does, between folk concepts of social legitimacy which require free acknowledgment of paternity, and legitimacy as defined by law and the upper classes. In most West Indian rural communities, marriage is indeed valued as the appropriate status for mature and independent couples of middle or senior years. The unmarried age-mates of these elders lose social status by their failure to fulfill these norms where the community institutionalizes marriage in this way. Thus in these West Indian communities marriage has dual meanings, as a condition of personal status, and as the most esteemed form of mating, though neither the sole nor the obligatory one. Its association with parenthood and the family accordingly varies individually and for couples as an effect of differences in their community situation and in their individual mating careers. In consequence its general equation with 'common-law unions' among these people is a major sociological error, as Edith

\[\text{M. G. Smith}\]

Clarke carefully indicates. This is so because the people concerned distinguish these conditions sharply, and invariably ascribe marriage higher status. Moreover, as we have seen, differing communities may institutionalize the alternative patterns of mating in differing ways.

In summarizing these recent developments in the study of family organization among the West Indian folk or Creole 'lower class' I have touched on no subject that is not treated concretely and with insight in this book, but perforce I have omitted several topics, such as the dispersion of children, diversity of parental roles and surrogates, differential fertility rates associated with different types of mating, land tenure, and recent changes in family organization associated with urbanization, and increases of social mobility. Several of these topics have been studied by others; but undoubtedly much work remains to be done, especially in the critical areas of social economics, psychology, education, legal reform, fertility control, and in the study of the processes and conditions of socialization begun by Madeline Kerr nearly twenty years ago. In attempting to review these recent developments and advances in this branch of Caribbean sociology, I have dwelt rather on the strictly sociological issues of method and theory, in an attempt to summarize the present state of our knowledge and to indicate recent advances in West Indian family studies by elliptic discussions of certain central themes and controversies. Perhaps there are few other tropical areas in which family organization presents as many academic and practical problems and opportunities as the West Indian area; and perhaps in no other comparable region has the family been studied so extensively over the past decade. Inevitably these later studies have raised new issues and interpretations, some of which have been mentioned here; but they also rest on earlier work; and in

\[\text{Clarke, op. cit., pp. 29–30, 73–77, 108–9.}\]
this context the present book, which provides the most careful and systematic account of this family system and its principal variations available to us, holds a central position.

SELECTED READINGS


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