

Friedrichs' basic thesis is developed throughout the book and supported by a vast array of material. Nonetheless, the book would have benefited from several shifts of emphasis. The chapter on "City and Church" for instance stresses the practical and organizational aspects of that relationship to the virtual exclusion of any other. But the relationship between the community of believers and the burger community fundamentally touched the normative basis of the European city. The actual social inequality stressed so strongly by Friedrichs was counteracted, for example, by religiously founded ideas of equality, especially during the period of the Reformation, but even earlier too. Those ideas sometimes had an enormous impact on political action. How important they could have been becomes clear when Friedrichs writes that the normative centre of urban society was the guilds. Their crucial hallmark was the levelling-out idea of *Genossenschaft* – the corporative equality of their members. My impression is that by and large Friedrichs' interpretation is oriented too strongly towards government authority as the determining component of socio-political action. As a consequence, his description of attempts to regulate the problem of poverty emphasizes too little the help offered by neighbourhoods, parishes and civic corporations. The same is true of those parts of the chapter on "Urban Routine" where the maintenance of order is treated mainly as the result of the success of government action. However, modern historical anthropology stresses the importance of the organizing function of informal components of the urban political culture, of corporative-egalitarian rituals, and of social subsystems loosely connected with the civic authorities. Nonetheless, it is not my intention here to challenge the theses presented in Friedrichs' book, merely to suggest modifications that may help us to better differentiate our image of the early modern city. They by no means diminish the author's achievement.

That achievement rests not only on the author's ability to formulate a coherent argument from such abundant material. It is based too on the author's success in making his arguments comprehensible to the reader. Again and again, one is impressed by the lucidity of Friedrichs' writing. He refers to the results of case studies drawn from virtually all over Europe. He presents a multitude of sources. He also provides valuable insight into the practice of doing research. As a result readers are encouraged to formulate their own enquiries, and these will be made much easier as a result of Friedrichs' detailed bibliography and suggestions for further reading. Students will find this book a valuable introduction to an important field of historical research. But it is more than that. Because of the stringency of its arguments, it will do much to stimulate debate on the fundamental principles of urban life.

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LIS, CATHARINA and HUGO SOLY. *Disordered Lives. Eighteenth-Century Families and their Unruly Relatives*. Polity Press, Cambridge 1996. x, 230 pp. Ill. £39.50.

In *Disordered Lives* Lis and Soly investigate the phenomenon of *confinement on request* – a still little known form of imprisonment.¹ Families could request the

¹ *Disordered Lives* was originally published in Dutch: C. Lis and H. Soly, *Te gek om los te lopen?* (Turnhout, 1990).

private confinement of those relatives whose behaviour they considered to be deviant or unacceptable. Petitions for confinement had to be submitted to the aldermen of the town or community, who could place the unwanted person in a public institution. As early as the sixteenth century people were being confined at the request of their families because of their “unruly” lives, but at that time the numbers involved were few. However, during the Enlightenment the practice of confinement on request increased enormously, at least in France and the Austrian Netherlands. It is the latter region that Lis and Soly have investigated: the cities of Brussels, Ghent, and especially Antwerp and Bruges.

Earlier studies by Michel Foucault, Arlette Farge and Pieter Spierenburg dealt with private confinement in France and the northern parts of the Netherlands. Lis and Soly pay special attention to Foucault’s ideas on the moral treatment of the insane and its relationship to the power politics of the state. According to Foucault, the system of private confinement principally served the authorities since public order was synonymous with familial order.² Confinement on request was thus just one of many forms of coercion that served the purposes of the state. Lis and Soly object to this analysis because it fails to shed light on the petitioners and their unwanted relatives. Why did growing numbers of lower-class families feel the need to discipline their relatives at the end of the eighteenth century? Lis and Soly’s principal aim is to answer this question and to place the process of private confinement in a social context. The central theme is therefore the interaction between social processes and personal experiences.

The authors start with the persons involved. Which family members requested confinements, for whom, and on what grounds? It seems that most (65 per cent) of the requests for confinement related to men. In addition, most petitioners were the parents or spouses of the person confined. The authors wonder why people tried to have their relatives incarcerated even though they probably needed the income those relatives could provide. Could the behaviour of the latter have been so intolerable that it was impossible to live with them? According to contemporary reports, petitioners did indeed argue that their relatives’ behaviour was so abnormal that they were impossible to live with. Although petitioners gave insanity as a reason to get their relatives confined, most of those confined were probably completely sane. In fact, about 75 per cent of the confined were actually declared to be responsible and sane.

Many well-off families requested private confinement because of the “unruly lives” of their relatives. As petitioners increasingly came from the lower classes, the number of requests relating to alcohol abuse, prodigality and indolence increased. Most conflicts arose between parents and children or between spouses. Parents requested the confinement of their children because they were work-shy, while husbands were usually confined at the request of their wives, who claimed their husbands drank excessively and were violent. The authors argue that both financial considerations and communal disapproval were important reasons why families tried to have relatives put away. Most petitioners emphasized the shame that unruly relatives brought to the family, and this seemed to be the case in all social groups.

In order to explain why financial distress and communal pressure led to an increase in the propensity to private confinement among the lower classes, Lis

² Lis and Soly, *Disordered Lives*, p. 5.

and Soly examine the socio-economic developments of the period. It seems that during the second half of the eighteenth century structural economic changes caused proletarianization and impoverishment. Although industrial expansion created employment and enabled people to earn a wage, it did not bring welfare. These developments gave rise to growing social and economic problems, which led to uncertainty and fear. As a result, many people were inclined to keep tighter control over their lives than before. Thus proletarianization and impoverishment led to a greater frequency of all types of misconduct, while on the other hand growing numbers of families “goaded members of their ranks into disciplining those who had stepped out of line, for fear of social degradation”.³

The authors emphasize that this economic background shows not only why the number of private confinements increased during the second half of the eighteenth century, it also explains why the victims were mostly husbands and children. Proletarianization and impoverishment were a constant threat to lower-class families and resulted in more eager demands from all individuals. Economic and social pressure influenced the lives of all family members, but breadwinners were held responsible for the well-being of these family members. Thus when economic circumstances worsened, husbands and fathers in particular felt increasingly pressured. Failing to cope with the economic and social pressure, they responded by behaving aggressively and drinking heavily. Young people increasingly felt constrained as well. Although the rise of industrial production enabled them to earn their own income, it did not, however, enable them to become independent of their parents and start a life of their own. This contradiction caused frustration and dissatisfaction and resulted in criminal and rebellious behaviour against parents and urban authorities. At the same time, families increasingly needed the income of both the husband and their working children. Thus, families did not so much intend to punish their relatives as to force them to contribute to the family income. One wonders why these families did not bring these cases to court. Why, for instance, did wives not start legal proceedings against their violent husbands? The answer lies in the fact that court cases were expensive and most families could not afford such a procedure. Confinement on request was a cheaper solution. Secondly, imprisonment as a criminal was considered much more shameful than confinement on request because of unruly behaviour. The latter was awkward, embarrassing and probably economically disadvantageous, but those confined were spared the label “criminal”.

As Lis and Soly put it: “The rising numbers of confinement petitioners reflect a desperate response to practical problems.”⁴ Moreover, urban authorities were undertaking their own campaign against disorderly behaviour. Correction houses were built to help clamp down on disorderly behaviour, and this made it possible for families to put their unwanted relatives in houses of correction. While poor families tried to survive by controlling their disorderly relatives, the authorities considered confinement on request as a welcome initiative since it helped their fight against orderlessness.

In their book, Lis and Soly successfully demonstrate that private confinement served the interests of both families and the authorities. Families were well aware of the fact that their requests were more likely to be granted if they claimed their

³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

relatives were disorderly and indolent. Naturally, the urban authorities had their own objectives. However, as this study shows, families were not only the victims of power politics, they also used the means the authorities offered to control their lives. *Disordered Lives* provides a broad and plausible picture of confinement on request and successfully places private confinement in a social context. It considers both socio-economic developments and personal experiences, and it presents sound conclusions concerning the increase in the number of cases of confinement on request, the growing proportion of confinements among lower social groups, and why men and youngsters in particular were confined. Perhaps because of this, this reader also feels somewhat dissatisfied. The authors reject the idea that the increase in the extent of private confinement can be explained by a "civilizing offensive". However, Spierenburg has demonstrated that in other cities in the Austrian Netherlands the middle and upper classes remained overrepresented during the eighteenth century and, moreover, that elite families were as much inclined to confine their relatives, particularly their male ones and children. The authors barely attempt to provide an explanation for these variant findings. The question remains then whether they would not have gained from comparing their conclusions with those of Spierenburg.

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LICHTENSTEIN, ALEX. *Twice the Work of Free Labor. The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South.* [The Haymarket Series.] Verso, London [etc.] 1996. xix, 264 pp. Ill. £39.95 (Paper: £13.95.)

Antonio Gramsci, writing from an Italian prison, observed that "The selection or 'education' of men adapted to the new forms of civilisation and to the new forms of production and work has taken place by means of incredible acts of brutality which have cast the weak and the non-conforming into the limbo of the lumpen-classes or have eliminated them entirely." In the post-Civil War United States, the institution of convict labor seems to fit Gramsci's model of a "new" system of production that was firmly embedded in draconian social relations. Prison laborers in the postbellum South, overwhelmingly African-American males, were routinely beaten, starved and tortured. One foreman of a crew of prisoners who built a rail line through a thick south-eastern swamp described one method of punishment, reminiscent of the medieval water torture:

The prisoner was strapped down, a funnel forced into his mouth and water poured in. The effect was to enormously distend the stomach, producing not only great agony but a sense of impending death, due to pressure on the heart, that unnerved the stoutest.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Black Reconstruction*, argued that forced labor systems in the New South arose, in part, from the trigonal struggle between Northern capitalists and Southern elites on the one hand, and the freedpeople on the other, over the fruits of emancipation. Du Bois characterized the process that led to convict labor in the New South as "the duel for labor control". Looking back on some six decades of the convict lease and the chain gang, Du Bois ruefully noted that "The whole criminal system came to be used as a method of keeping Negroes at work and intimidating them [. . .] Above all, crime was used in the South as a source of income for the state." Alex Lichtenstein quotes one critic of Georgia's penal