

Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920, by Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. x, 188 pp. Tables, notes, appendixes, index. \$32.00 cloth.

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Cliometrically inclined historians have performed a useful service for exploring the past by vigorously testing hypotheses with quantitative data. By zeroing in on conventional interpretations, they are able to jettison findings that were reached by traditional methods. Joel Perlmann and Robert Margo have written a carefully argued study that provides some fascinating insights into the feminization of teaching. They concentrate on primary school patterns in rural areas and small towns. A section of the book is devoted to post-Civil War Iowa.

They begin by investigating the origins of primary schools in New England to pinpoint the origins of the feminization of teaching. They show that in colonial times schooling was divided into two types: the dame school, where women taught young children to read in the summer, and the Latin school, where men taught boys in a longer winter term. Crucially, school administration was a colony and town concern, and the cultural makeup of New England stressed female education from settlement. Moreover, by the 1830s, the separate spheres ideology, which emphasized women in nurturing roles, permitted females to become a dominant force in primary schools: by 1860, 84 percent of New England teachers were women.

A different picture emerged in the South, where only 36 percent of teachers were women in 1860. Here the authors use quantitative evidence to explain why males dominated. First, schooling was a private, not a government, enterprise. Contrary to conventional wisdom, middle-class southern women were employed outside the home nearly as commonly as New England women; however, they did not teach. It appears that southern schooling was an entrepreneurial endeavor. Teachers had to recruit pupils and run a business. Southerners thought such activity was unsuitable for females.

In the Midwest, not surprisingly, the ethnocultural model helped explain feminization before the Civil War. Yankee migration brought New England cultural baggage with it, while southerners tended to replicate their traditions of teacher employment. In Illinois, 55 percent of teachers were female in northern Yankee-settled counties; in southern counties the count was only 24 percent.

How did culture, geography, and time of settlement affect the feminization of teaching in Iowa? As the state was settled later and was more northerly than Illinois, patterns were not as pronounced before the Civil War. Still, northern tier Iowa counties had more female primary school teachers than did southern tiers of counties. The Civil War had a pronounced impact on the gendering of teaching in Iowa as well as in other states. Men left teaching to fight and take other jobs. As a result, one-room country schools and town schools were increasingly feminized. By 1880, fully 92 percent of all primary schoolteachers in Iowa were women.

The authors explore the reasons behind these shifts. Did thrifty farmers on open country school boards want to keep taxes low by employing their unmarried daughters for a term or two in the local school, or were there more subtle trends at work? In an article in *Civil War History* in 1980, Thomas Morain suggested that whereas school-teaching provided men with a chance to supplement income in the slack season, the attraction of a job that needed no preparation was eliminated when the school year was extended and teachers institutes were introduced. Teaching became a "para-profession"; in other words, a little professionalism drove men away. Perlmann and Margo's rigorous quantitative analysis showed that this hypothesis was invalid, however. The introduction of teachers institutes had only a marginal effect on strengthening women's ranks (only a 2 percent increase). Rather, Perlmann and Margo suggest a more nuanced view of the hypothesis of school board parsimony. Using regression analysis, they show that women's salaries rose at a greater rate than men's, suggesting that although male salaries were marginally higher, school boards were prepared to pay higher salaries to attract suitable candidates. Boards considered women teachers to be more utilitarian: they could not only nurture small children, but they could also discipline older pupils. In addition, with the money saved on women's salaries, boards could pay for improvements—buildings, privies, heat, even books.

The authors acknowledge that women experienced discrimination in teaching. They had to leave when they married, administrators were invariably men, and pay scales were lower for females. In an era when few other professions were open to women, however, teaching offered young educated females a degree of autonomy that they did not have elsewhere.

A short review hardly does justice to this book. My only criticism is that the authors failed to use the 1915 Iowa manuscript census to analyze salaries. That unique document provides data on income, occupation, education, and religion.

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