

Riley despairs over the state of marriage today. In the epilogue she offers her ideas for changing the institution legally and socially in order to help families survive. She dismisses the family as a location for the preparation of young people for marriage. Instead, she would place the task in the hands of educators and clergy. Using a peculiarly western simile, Riley likens the marriage license to a gun license and recommends a "cool-down period" before the license becomes valid (148).

It is difficult to conceive of an approach to a topic as complex as marriage that could successfully encompass so many cultures and personal experiences. Riley's effort is energetic but falls short in some important ways. She gives little attention to economic and social circumstances peculiar to time, place, and culture that influence marriage and family decisions. Lacking these important historical markers, Riley's research tends to float through time. In addition, she depends too heavily on the ideas (treated as myths in recent histories of the West) of individualism and equality as factors in western marriage and divorce. That these ideas are deeply rooted in European thought complicates Riley's effort to examine non-European-American marriages. Despite her attempt to be inclusive, *Building and Breaking Families* is dominated by "Anglo" tradition, law, and ideas.

Although inaccuracies of detail mar Riley's book, she has gathered together a wealth of information that encourages us to reconsider the social history of the American West and perhaps in the future to seek to record and analyze marriages in which common goals, mutual respect, and fidelity have fostered enduring marriages.

The Girls' Reform School of Iowa, 1865-1899, by Douglas M. Wertsch. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997. xiii, 151 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$79.95 cloth.

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In *The Girls' Reform School of Iowa*, Douglas Wertsch traces the early history of this institution, the second of its kind in the United States. Drawing largely on records kept by the school itself and by the Iowa legislature, Wertsch's history emphasizes the role of the first superintendent, Lorenzo D. Lewelling, in shaping its programs.

In Wertsch's view, Lewelling and his wife, Angie, the school's first matron, successfully imprinted on the institution their vision of gentle, personalized discipline. Indeed, their influence was so strong that, while they served from 1873 until the mid-1880s, "well into the twen-

tieth century it proved extremely difficult for any successor to alter the Lewellings' program" (98).

For readers specifically interested in the school's history, the book may be helpful on two counts: it gives a glimpse into school records generally closed under state law, and it provides a biography of Lewelling. Oddly, although Wertsch emphasizes Angie Lewelling's importance, he reveals nothing about her except that she had been a Red Oak schoolteacher.

For readers with less narrow interests, however, the book is far less helpful, and it is often misleading. Wertsch writes about the state legislature's actions as if that were the only level of law operating, ignoring the complex layers of local, state, federal, and constitutional law (not to mention courts, common law, and extralegal police practices) that characterize the American system. He frequently mistakes law for practice, asserting, for example, that blacks were not "allowed" (72) to attend public schools in Iowa before 1875. That would have been news to Eudora Nuckles, who graduated from the public high school in Davenport in 1873.

Most worrisome, however, is the extent to which Wertsch adopts the cause of the Lewellings, overlooking unflattering evidence. For example, he cites the case of a released inmate who went to work as a prostitute. When faced with return to the school, she killed herself. Wertsch ponders what effect such "dramatic failures" (94) had on the Lewellings. He never considers how awful the school must have seemed to the girl, that she preferred death. In another example, he quotes from a letter written by a visitor not long after the Lewellings retired. The letter describes punishment by solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water. Wertsch dismisses this letter as uncorroborated, but an assistant matron in the same building described nearly the same practice to the *Des Moines Leader* in 1899. The assistant matron's description is part of a wealth of evidence about conditions at the school, including a published grand jury investigation and reports by the board of control, all responding to a riot in October 1899. Along with solitary confinement, these documents describe beatings, deprivation of food, and the practice of wiring girls to a log chain in a cement basement as discipline. If the Lewellings' practices were ever as gentle as Wertsch asserts, their influence dwindled swiftly after their departure. Perhaps the most telling flaw in Wertsch's book is that he never mentions the riot.

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