
NEW TITLES

History
**BEARING THE CROSS
Martin Luther King, Jr. and
the Southern Christian
Leadership Conference**

by David J. Garrow
Morrow, 1986
800 pp. \$19.95



Big as this book is, it is not the complete chronicle of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life (1929-68). Garrow, a political scientist at the City College of New York, focuses mainly on the years of King's civil rights activism, beginning in the mid-1950s.

One learns that the 26-year-old Baptist minister from Atlanta accepted the burden of leading the Southern black civil rights movement with misgivings. He was propelled to prominence in 1955, when organizers of the Montgomery Improvement Association, including Ralph Abernathy, asked him to lead the black bus boycott in Alabama's capital. King's rhetorical fire inspired the black citizenry to join in peaceful rebellion; his appeals to reason won him the respect of the local white "power structure." Yet, as he said upon his arrest, had he "never been born, this movement would have taken place."

Created in 1957, his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) quickly expanded, and King's face became a regular feature in the daily press. His life was a difficult balancing act, as he sought to calm quarreling black factions without alienating such allies as President John F. Kennedy. Meanwhile, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI spread tales of Communist advisers, mismanagement of SCLC funds, and King's compulsive night prowling. The ever-more-radical Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chanted "black power" and labeled King an "Uncle Tom." In addition, the mounting protest against the Vietnam War began to divert white liberals from the civil rights cause.

Garrow's well-knit chronicle, based on hundreds of unpublished manuscripts, FBI transcripts of telephone conversations, and over 700 interviews, provides a fully drawn picture of King. A man with a clear vision of society's ills, he was wracked by self-doubt and overly dependent on advisers. His assassination in Memphis not only sparked riots in black ghettos, from Watts to Washington, D.C., but also transformed King into a mythical figure. Garrow fears that the myth may ultimately weaken the cause of racial equality. The author's sentiment is best summed up in the words of black

**PAST, PRESENT, AND
PERSONAL: The Family
and the Life Course in
American History**

by John Demos
Oxford, 1986
215 pp. \$17.95

educator Charles Willie: "By idolizing those whom we honor, we fail to realize that we could go and do likewise."

In eight crisp essays, Demos, a Yale historian, looks back at difficulties that continue to beset the American family. This perspective allows him to dismiss a number of popular notions. One is that child abuse is an enduring problem in our society. In truth, he finds, it was rare in Colonial New England; when it occurred (as, for instance, in the brutal treatment of servant children), the local populace reacted with alacrity. Ways existed to locate and discover abuse.

Similarly, in the study of adolescence, which Demos says is just entering "its own adolescence," academic specialists naively assume that turmoil is a universal feature of passage into adulthood. Adolescence may not be as stressful, or important, a stage of development now as it was only decades ago. Indeed, many young Americans today seem to have "skipped adolescence entirely." Stages of life, Demos reminds us, are largely human inventions.

As for fatherhood, Demos demonstrates that "men's experience of domestic life has changed more deeply than that of all the other players combined." Pigeonholing the roles (pedagogue, caretaker, companion) that fathers have variously played since the 17th century, he concludes that paternal involvement in raising children has steadily risen.

Can knowledge of the past serve family policy today? Demos's concluding essay suggests, modestly, that it can.

**THE FOUL AND
THE FRAGRANT:
Odor and the French
Social Imagination**

by Alain Corbin
Harvard, 1986
307 pp. \$25

Like other historians of the French *Annales* school, Corbin explores what might seem to be a negligible matter in order to uncover the *mentalités* of an age. Odors, and people's attitudes toward them in 18th- and 19th-century France, lead Corbin through realms as diverse as scientific thought, social theory, medical practice, bedroom mores, and civic reform.

Smell, he relates, was central to 18th-century notions of disease. Doctors busily collected and