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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joel Perlmann, Robert A. Margo. *Women's Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. x + 188 pp. $32.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-66039-4.

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Published on EH.Net (July, 2002)

Women's Work is an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort by two well-known scholars. Joel Perlmann, trained as a social historian, is Levy Institute Research Professor at the Jerome Levy Economics Institute of Bard College. Robert A. Margo, trained as an economic historian, is professor of economics at Vanderbilt University and a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Together they explain women's integration into the teaching profession in the United States over more than two centuries. The tale stops in 1920 because by that point, in their view, the die had been cast. Teaching, especially at the elementary school level, had become *Women's Work*. Despite the wrenching social, economic, demographic, and political upheavals of the subsequent eighty years, women's predominance in the elementary school teaching field was one feature of American life that remained unchanged.

This work is an exemplar of excellence in interdisciplinary social science research. The authors note in their preface that: "The issues the book addresses, and the formulations with which it discusses, would have differed considerably had either of us tried to carry out the research, or write the book, alone." Scholars will be grateful for the collaboration.

The approach of Perlmann and Margo makes use of the regional character of the feminization process. Feminization advanced first in the Northeast and only much later in the South. The North-South differential was retained as the population moved West, finally disappearing in the early-twentieth century, when teaching was established as *Women's Work* nationwide.

Following a Preface and Introduction, the book is organized into five separate chapters. Chapter One is a survey of schools and the teaching profession in New England as these institutions evolved over the first two hundred years of European settlement. Perlmann and Margo argue that the early development of the two-tier public education system was key in creating the first feminine toehold in the profession. The upper tier was devoted to Latin instruction, reserved for boys, and taught in winter by men; the lower tier taught reading and later writing to young children – girls as well as boys. It was taught in the summer and from a remarkably early date it was often taught by women. Perlmann and Margo speculate that women may have predominated among teachers in this lower tier, summer session, as early as 1750. Economic and cultural forces, including the thinness of the population, the parsimony of local school boards, the young age of the students, the availability of an educated female population, and the "ideals of the revolutionary era" which supported "more basic learning for the people" all played a part in rationalizing the employment of women. In outlying hamlets with populations that were too small to warrant the two-tier system, Latin was downplayed and women were hired as teachers for what was in effect a one-tier system. "Some women were already teaching in the winter sessions in 1830, well before Horace Mann or other reformers of the common school era began to call for that change" (p. 27).

Chapter Two contrasts developments in the South of the same period. Here public primary education was much less well supported than in the North. Families with adequate resources hired private teachers for their children. The state supplied vouchers for children whose families were too poor to pay. For a variety of reasons, the two-tier system does not seem to have developed in

the South and, perhaps as a consequence, women teachers were far less common in Southern as compared with Northern schools. Perlmann and Margo consider a host of alternatives to this institutional explanation, including social structure, demography, and gender wage ratios. None of these alternatives appear to offer as compelling an explanation for the patterns they observe.

Chapter Three examines women's involvement in teaching as the population moved westward over the course of the nineteenth century. The authors choose Illinois for their detailed assessment because it was settled by migrants from both the North and the South and displayed a wide range of local arrangements for the education of the young. They find that differences across counties in economic conditions, population concentration, fertility rates, and women's education, explain only a little more than half of the differential in the use of female teachers in the northern and southern counties of the state. That leaves settlers' state of origin to account for over forty percent.

If these regional institutions are so powerful then how does one account for the eventual feminization of teaching even in the South and in regions settled by former Southerners by 1920? That is the subject of Chapter Four, "Explaining Feminization." Perlmann and Margo cite four factors. The first is the experience with women teachers during the Civil War. The departure of male teachers to either fight or to take other jobs to more directly support the war effort forced school districts to hire women. Perlman and Margo document increases of ten percentage points and more in women's share of teaching between 1860 and 1870. In many areas, the experience of having female teachers during the Civil War appears to have permanently changed the attitudes of school board members, because the female share did not return to the pre-war level. For Perlmann and Margo, this evidence suggests that the women were doing a good job:

At the same time, the fact that the shift could be so great and that so much of the effect was sustained rather than erased after 1865 also suggests that there was a certain fit between the effect of the wartime shock to the system and the social and cultural conditions on the eve of the war. Large gains for female machinists during World War II, after all, were not sustained after 1945 (p. 89).

In a section entitled "Dynamics of Diffusion" the authors neatly summarize other events that operated to bring women into teaching. Over time, they argue, even the last bastions of male hegemony were removed. These events were temporary financial strains, women's "increasing mastery of the advanced rural school curriculum," apparent improvements in pupils' behavior while in school, and the sex-typing of school teaching as women's work.

In Chapter Five, "Labor Market Outcomes in Urban Schools – The Role of Gender," the authors switch gears to examine gender differences in the structure and rewards to teachers in bureaucratic urban schools. They make use of detailed personnel records to document discrimination against women in both pay and promotion. They suggest that women's curtailed geographic mobility may have allowed local school boards to act as monopsonists, while men's mobility caused them to be paid a wage closer to that of a competitive market.

Did it matter that women played such a prominent educational role so early in American history? Absolutely! The use of female teachers reduced the cost of human capital development.

Because female teachers were cheaper to hire than male teachers were, the economic cost of producing human capital was cheaper than it otherwise would have been, providing a boost to its production and hence to long-term economic growth. Regions that lagged behind in their exploitation of female teachers in this sense, such as the South, lagged behind in the production of human capital and, in consequence, in per capita incomes and economic development (p. 129-130).

In addition, the lure of teaching raised girls' incentive to attend school; mothers who were former teachers probably instilled the importance of education in their children; and the teaching style of females may have been the source of a national character that internalized the need for good behavior. It doesn't get any better, as long as you don't think about the low pay.

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Citation: Susan B. Carter. Review of Perlmann, Joel; Margo, Robert A., *Women's Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920*. EH.Net, H-Net Reviews. July, 2002.

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