



Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North (Gender Relations in the American Experience)

Stephen M. Frank

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Who was the Victorian patriarch, and what kind of father was he? In this richly documented study, Stephen M. Frank presents the first account of nineteenth-century family life to focus on the role of fathers. Drawing on letters, diaries, memoirs, and other primary sources, Frank explores what fathers thought about their family responsibilities and how men behaved as parents.

His findings are often surprising. Beneath the stereotype of the starched Victorian patriarch, he discovers fathers who were playful, demanding, uncertain of their authority, and deeply anxious about their children's prospects in a rapidly changing society?men with strikingly modern attitudes toward parenthood. Focusing on Northern, middle-class families, he also uncovers the social origins of the "family man" ideal and explores how this standard of middle-class propriety found its way into practice.

Life with Father looks beyond the well-known nineteenth-century fascination with motherhood to discover a social order that valued a "father's care" no less than a "mother's love" as a basis for stable family relationships. This compelling social history engages readers with the story of how families in the past struggled with economic and social changes that required fathers to reassess themselves as parents and as men.

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