

trapection that she showed her shallowness. This biography is subtitled *A Life of Passion*, but it might just as well have been subtitled *A Life of Heartlessness*. True, she had many passionate affairs, but there is not much evidence that she ever cared much for the passion, or even the feelings, of others. She abandoned her first husband, a draughtsman and aspiring artist called William Sanger, though he was a decent, honorable, kindly, loving man, merely because she felt like it and wanted fulfillment elsewhere. In the process she virtually abandoned her children and it was no thanks to her that two of the three did not end up too badly. Her ideal of human relationships was that everyone should do as he or she pleased, as she herself did, without considering what, in military parlance, would be called the collateral damage. In Sanger's ideal world, everyone could have it all, all of the time; she entirely lacked the sense of the tragic, and any awareness that in order to have one desirable thing you must forgo another.

Although Sanger never campaigned for the legalization of abortion, she was a pioneer of the view that the relationship of a person with his or her own body is that of sovereignty or ownership. Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of abortion, this is a very crude attitude to human existence.

The unhappiness of her final years was a natural consequence of how she had lived. Her main battle had been won, and the struggle from which she derived most of the meaning of her life was over. There is no sadder fate for a reformer than to see his or her reforms accepted. She had sacrificed her relationships to the cause, and while she was by no means the worst of mothers, it is clear that her two sons felt no particular warmth for her, nor did they have any reason to do so. They were dutiful towards her but little more. By the time she needed their affection, it was too late for them to develop it.

Baker's biography is clearly written, not of undue length as so many biographies these days are, and while inevitably it concentrates on the subject's public activities, it succeeds in conveying her character. One characteristic

that she lacked (if the biography is accurate) was a sense of humor. The only funny thing she ever said, however, was quite good, and worth committing to memory: "The more I have to do with Congressmen, the more I believe in birth control and sterilization."

Learned helplessness

Ralph Richard Banks

*Is Marriage for White People?:
How the African American Marriage
Decline Affects Everyone.*
Dutton Adult, 304 pages, \$25.95

reviewed by Amy L. Wax

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan learned to his dismay, the topic of the black family is a minefield. In *Is Marriage for White People?*, Ralph Richard Banks, a Stanford Law Professor, goes where few dare to tread, seeking to "[r]eexamine everything . . . and tell the truth about it," in the words of the book's epigram by James Baldwin. His candid treatment of this divisive topic casts a bold eye on uncomfortable truths, but the blinders of ideology ultimately defeat him. He succumbs to the reductionist shibboleths of social science, refuses to "blame the victim," and resists explanations relying on cultural dysfunction. These defects mar his assessment of the black family's dilemma and his proposed corrective.

Banks begins with the fact that blacks are "the most unmarried group of people in our nation." Rates of matrimony have dropped steadily since the 1950s, with nearly 70 percent of black women and over half of black men failing ever to marry. This has resulted in a drastic increase in single-parent families, out-of-wedlock births, and children growing up without fathers. Though the marriage rate among less-privileged whites is also dropping, as recently noted by Charles Murray and Don Peck, these patterns generate stark racial disparities in family structure up and down the social scale.

In confronting these demographic facts, Banks insists that marriage matters. To his

credit, he acknowledges the growing social-scientific consensus that married households provide the best environment for child-rearing, which means that too many black children receive a less than optimal upbringing.

While noting that non-marriage is a formula for downward mobility, restricts the growth and security of the black middle class, and perpetuates racial gaps in achievement and well-being, the author fails to catalogue fully the effects of the black family's decay. Marriage and strong families generate and preserve wealth, fostering the creation of small businesses. Marriage causes men to become more industrious, law-abiding, and sober. The traditional family is a mainstay of care for the old and infirm. In these respects, the black community remains relatively weak and dependent, and the current trends mean the situation will only deteriorate.

The pivotal insight of this book, and the key to Banks's analysis, is that the shortage of black men conventionally considered marriageable—reasonably educated, employable, and uninvolved in serious crime—does not account for the decades-long drop in black marriage rates. Instead, Banks echoes what social scientists have known for some time: that black men are far less likely to marry than men from other groups regardless of their education and income. Although Banks doesn't specifically cite them, professional demographers like Robert Wood, Heather Koball, and David Ellwood have estimated that only a small part (at most, about a fifth) of the current black-white gap in marriage is due to a relative shortage of conventionally marriageable black men.

That is not to deny that the women who are seeking partners outnumber suitable black men—too many black men drop out of high school and there are significantly more black women than men in college. But it's not all bad news. As Banks reminds us, black men are "more than twice as likely to be in college as in jail," black men tend to earn more than black women, and, thanks to the civil rights era, there is now a substantial African-American working and middle class. Simply put, despite growing numbers of reasonably

educated, employed, and economically stable black men, the black marriage rate is at an all-time low and continues to decline. This situation persists, notes Banks, even as black women long for a traditional family structure.

Banks clearly regards black men as the main bottleneck in this situation. But the facts about the marital choices of black men create an awkward quandary. If most of the collapse in marriage among blacks can be traced to men's decision not to marry, then the oft-cited "structural" impediments to family formation, such as racism, economic hardship, incarceration, and unemployment, don't adequately explain what's happening. But then what are the causes, and what can be done?

Banks identifies a number of contributing factors. Black relationships are often troubled. Men prefer conventional dominance to the more equal partnership women desire. Women want to marry up. Men think that women are too demanding and critical. All told, mismatched expectations and feckless men contribute to the rockiness of male-female relations, and no obvious solution presents itself.

Although Banks identifies these interpersonal dynamics as contributing to the black marriage problem, they appear secondary to his real concern, which is how black men conduct their reproductive and sexual lives. In a remarkably frank chapter drawing on surveys and other social-science evidence, Banks examines male behaviors and attitudes that stand as obstacles to long-term, stable relationships. According to Banks, black men have more sexual partners, maintain more concurrent sexual relationships, and father more children by multiple women (usually out of wedlock) than men from other groups. They admit to resisting the demands of sexual fidelity, and are less likely to view monogamy as sexually fulfilling. Banks believes that these beliefs and practices interfere with stable matrimony.

The conclusions Banks draws are, however, questionable. He is determined to exonerate black men of any and all responsibility for the black family's plight. Since Banks has already admitted that black men's resistance to

marriage is a matter of preference rather than necessity, letting them off the hook requires transforming their unwillingness to marry into something other than a choice. So he argues that black men are the slaves of ineluctable social forces—of marriage markets, specifically. Relying heavily on studies suggesting that men's willingness to marry is a function of the ratio of eligible men to women, Banks argues that the relative shortage of desirable black men, while not directly accounting for low rates of matrimony, creates an invisible force-field that distorts male behavior. Playing the field indefinitely, maintaining concurrent relationships, routinely fathering children out of wedlock, and refusing to marry are "rational" responses to the plethora of sexual opportunities that a tilted marriage market creates. In Banks's world, black men are single-mindedly in pursuit of sexual opportunities.

Banks's argument—that the dynamics of the marriage-market explain the black retreat from matrimony—is ultimately unpersuasive. While the social science of marriage markets sees marital behavior as heavily influenced by sexual opportunities that exist outside of marriage, Banks's reading of the research literature lacks nuance and indulges a simple-minded determinism that distorts reality and crumbles under the weight of contrary evidence. Skewed ratios do influence marital frequency and timing, but the effects are modest, marginal, and highly variable. Groups have been shown to differ in their responses to marriage market conditions based on historical periods, customary practices, normative expectations, and moral commitments. Banks's emphasis on sexual opportunities doesn't come close to explaining the full panoply of male behavior that has currently emerged across racial lines.

College-educated white men continue to marry and stay married at very high rates. Compared to their less educated counterparts, and black men in general, they are less likely to carry on multiple liaisons and rarely father children out of wedlock. Likewise, the ethos of "no wedding, no womb," which prevails among educated white women, is distinctly unpopular among black women at all educational levels, as evinced by their vo-

cal resistance and dramatically higher extra-marital birthrate.

Better-off white men could play the field endlessly and put off marriage indefinitely—and indeed, they are in a better position to do so than black men. Refusing to marry the mothers of their children—a pattern that increasingly prevails in the rest of society—would relieve these white men of considerable bother and expense, but most decline that option. These patterns show that narrow self-interest and sexual opportunism are not the only, or even the paramount, drivers of men's sexual conduct and marital choices. The uxorious and otherwise conventional behavior of educated white men must be motivated by aspirations other than pressing their male advantage, maximizing sexual encounters, and juggling as many women as possible. And, while professional demographers recognize that the explanation for these divergent patterns is complex, Banks ignores these variations.

Why does Banks take refuge in a one-dimensional vision of black men as the passive victims of marriage markets? Banks's own comments reveal the answer: he is determined to shield black men from any and all reproach. In insisting that black men "differ from their affluent white counterparts less in their values than in their circumstances," Banks refuses to entertain the idea of cultural or behavioral dysfunction. In disparaging Bill Cosby's claim that too many blacks have "embraced deviant values," Banks succumbs to what the sociologist Brad Wilcox terms "the horror of judgmentalism." By separating sex from morality and depicting the logic of sexual liberation as relentless and unstoppable, Banks strives to depict the behavior of black men as the expected result of impersonal constraints. Banks's fatalism extends to the very concept of marriageability, whereby men become "husband material" by virtue of traits—like being educated, law-abiding, diligent, and reproductively responsible—that simply drop from the sky, the products of imposed constraints rather than deliberative choices. Banks casts black men, marriageable and unmarriageable alike, as the victims of a racist society that bars every

possible path to self-improvement. He implies that because black men's behavior is not really within their control, it's nonsensical to fault them and pointless to urge them to change.

Banks's effort to shield black men from criticism comes at the steep price of denigrating the very people Banks seems determined to spare. Banks conjures a vision of black manhood as amoral, feckless, and disabled. He depicts black men as thoughtlessly short-sighted, incapable of sexual restraint, and heedless of the harmful effects they have on the women and children in their lives. Above all, the black men that emerge from his pages do not care about the future, nor for their community's role in society. This is a dismal and deeply unflattering portrait.

Banks, by contrast, sees black women differently. His proposed solution to the black marriage crisis is for black women to take matters into their own hands and marry outside their race. This will translate into fewer unmarried black women, which will in turn reduce the power and relative scarcity of black men in the marriage market. Eventually, Banks writes, "more black men and women might marry each other."

The data Banks gathers on intermarriage shows that black women are the least likely demographic group to marry outside the race. In probing this phenomenon, Banks notes that black women's resistance to non-black partners is influenced by culture, history, and racism. Banks's call to black women to seek mates elsewhere requires a radical reorientation of what they, as black women, desire. But this doesn't stop Banks from issuing a clarion call to black women to "save the race": Black women must alter their habits and practices and start marrying men of other races.

The contrast between Banks's treatment of black men and women couldn't be starker. For Banks, women's personal and sexual choices are malleable. He wants them to transcend their own narrow appetites and cherished desires and behave like responsible human beings, capable of self-critical reflection and self-governance. He treats them as grown-ups and free agents, able to assess the implications of the status quo and to change it.

What is missing is a parallel expectation for black men. Does this double standard make any sense? One could argue that black men are more vulnerable than women to the depredations of historical exclusion and family breakdown—but are black men so damaged and poorly socialized that they cannot appreciate the consequences of their actions, alter their habits and practices, or rethink their retreat from marriage? In refusing to appeal to black men's common sense and better nature, Banks misses an important opportunity to treat them as human beings and moral agents. By putting the entire onus on women, Banks offers half a solution when a whole one is sorely needed.

Apocalypse now?

Jay Rubenstein

Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade & the Quest for Apocalypse.

Basic Books, 424 pages, \$29.99

reviewed by Blake Neff

The topic of the Crusades remains enduringly popular and has experienced a public resurgence following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Of course, as with any popular historical subject, most of the books covering it leave much to be desired, from James Reston's pulpy and inaccurate pageturner *Warriors of God* to nonsensical conspiracy works about the Knights Templar inspired by Dan Brown. Meanwhile, hefty scholarly tomes like Christopher Tyerman's *God's War* are often stultifying. The result is that despite fifty years of additional books being published and improved scholarship, Sir Steven Runciman's famously handwritten *History of the Crusades* remains the best-known work on the subject, even though it was well characterized by the modern expert Thomas Madden as "terrible history yet wonderfully entertaining."

Seeking to supplant Runciman in its telling of the First Crusade is *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* by Jay Rubenstein, a professor of history at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.