

## Each Year 4,000 Michigan Children Born to Life of Stigma and Poverty

Have You Met? . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Jones, of 348 Arlington? These former De-  
baters have two children, Robin  
and Carson. Mr. Jones is a certi-  
fied public accountant.

By Esther Van Wagener Taft  
WASHINGTON—More than a  
4,000 illegitimate children are be-

ing born in Michigan each year  
to a life of stigma, and in many  
instances, poverty.

A comparison of Michigan laws  
with the laws of other states on  
children born out of wedlock re-  
veals that Michigan is more pro-  
gressive than the majority in hand-  
ling the problem, which has be-  
come more acute since the end of  
the war.

Yet the illegitimate child in  
Michigan has little more chance  
than the illegitimate born in old  
colonial days when the unwed  
mothers were branded with a scar-  
let letter. He would have a better  
chance if born in New York and  
less if born in Texas and most  
southern states.

### Repercussions Grow

Nineteenth century laws and at-  
titudes are being used on a twen-  
tieth century problem with grow-  
ing repercussions.

In 1946, there were 3,866 re-  
ported illegitimate births in Mich-  
igan. Of these, 2,689 were white  
and 1,177 were non-white.

This is an alarming increase  
over a prewar year like 1940,  
when the total number of illegiti-  
mate births in Michigan was 2,659,  
of which 1,771 were white and 498  
were non-white.

The great increase, according  
to reports at the National Office  
of Vital Statistics, has come from  
girls 15-19 years of age who are  
not yet women but whose acts  
foretell them to face desperate de-  
cisions.

What faces these 4,000 inno-  
cent babies?

First, take the birth certificate.

### "Short Form" Is Good

This must be shown at certain  
times. (Many a soldier refused to  
sign up for officers' school for  
fear his illegitimacy would come  
to light.)

The awful word "illegitimate"  
does not appear on the Michigan  
birth certificate. . . that is, it does  
not appear on the "short form"  
used in most civil affairs. The real  
record does contain the informa-  
tion, but that is classed as "con-  
fidential" and can be seen only  
by the mother or child or by court  
order. That's a good mark for  
Michigan. But Michigan does not  
do so well with its paternity or  
support laws.

### A Criminal Procedure

In Michigan, suing for support  
is a criminal procedure (not the  
recommended civil) and is enacted  
not for the welfare of the child,  
apparently, but to save money for  
the state. The mother is forced to  
bring action against the father  
only when "likely to become a public  
charge."

If the father cannot support  
the child (that is, if he fails to  
comply with a court order to sup-  
port the child) he goes to prison  
for one year. Afterwards, he can  
apply under the Poor Prison Law  
for release. At that time another  
action to make him pay can be  
brought by the mother.

Another law discharges the father  
from liability by compromise  
agreement involving a lump sum  
settlement.

A few states, like New York,  
have recently revised their laws  
to handle mounting illegitimacy  
in the most civilized manner pos-  
sible.

### Point to New York Method

Sociologists point to the New  
York approach as the most mod-  
ern method to deal with an un-  
fortunate problem to the best ad-  
vantage of society as a whole.

The New York law makes the  
"parents" liable for the necessary  
support and education of the il-  
legitimate child. A complaint  
against an alleged father is a civil,  
not a criminal proceeding, and it  
offers a period of compromise be-  
tween the mother and the father  
before a warrant is issued for the  
arrest of the father.

When court proceedings are  
held, the law permits only per-  
sons directly interested in the  
case to be present at the court.  
It permits the receiving of evi-  
dence on blood typing—a test  
which will not necessarily deter-  
mine who is the father, but will  
rule out many who are not.

### Emotional Approach

If the finding is against the  
accused father, the court deter-  
mines what amount he should pay  
for support and education, accord-  
ing to his ability to pay.

The greatest safeguard for  
falsely-accused men is that the  
New York laws makes the filing of  
false complaints punishable as per-  
jury.

Miss Maud Morlock, consultant  
at the U. S. Children's Bureau  
and perhaps the best authority in  
the nation on the problem of ille-  
gitimacy in the states, says: "We  
have long approached this prob-  
lem on emotion and prejudice  
rather than on logic. There is  
really no ideal answer to the un-  
fortunate situation of a child born  
out of wedlock. All we can hope  
to do is to be as fair as possible  
to all parties concerned."

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