



Making Time: Lillian Moller Gilbreth -- A Life Beyond "Cheaper by the Dozen"

By Jane Lancaster

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Winner of the Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture (2005)

Readers of *Cheaper by the Dozen* remember Lillian Moller Gilbreth (1878-1972) as the working mom who endures the antics of not only twelve children but also an engineer husband eager to experiment with the principles of efficiency -- especially on his own household.

What readers today might not know is that Lillian Gilbreth was herself a high-profile engineer, and the only woman to win the coveted Hoover Medal for engineers. She traveled the world, served as an advisor on women's issues to five U.S. presidents, and mingled with the likes of Eleanor Roosevelt and Amelia Earhart. Her husband, Frank Gilbreth, died after twenty years of marriage, leaving her to raise their eleven surviving children, all under the age of nineteen. She continued her career and put each child through college. Retiring at the age of ninety, Lillian Gilbreth was the working mother who "did it all."

Jane Lancaster's spirited and richly detailed biography tells Lillian Gilbreth's life story-one that resonates with issues faced today by many working women. Lancaster confronts the complexities of how one of the twentieth century's foremost career women could be pregnant, nursing, or caring for children for more than three decades.

Yet we see how Gilbreth's engineering work dovetailed with her family life in the professional and domestic partnership that she forged with her husband and in her long solo career. The innovators behind many labor-saving devices and procedures used in factories, offices, and kitchens, the Gilbreths tackled the problem of efficiency through motion study. To this Lillian added a psychological dimension, with empathy toward the worker. The couple's expertise also yielded the "Gilbreth family system," a model that allowed the mother to be professionally active if she chose, while the parents worked together to raise responsible citizens.

Lancaster has woven into her narrative many insights gleaned from interviews

with the surviving Gilbreth children and from historical research into such topics as technology, family, work, and feminism. Filled with anecdotes, this definitive biography of Lillian Gilbreth will engage readers intrigued by one of America's most famous families and by one of the nation's most successful women.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Few people are so emblematic of the social revolutions of the 20th century as the subject of this engaging biography. Admired by both Herbert Hoover and Lenin, Lillian Moller Gilbreth was a psychologist and engineer who, along with husband Frank, put a human face on the scientific management movement by emphasizing congenial work environments, ergonomic equipment and production processes, and training and incentive schemes that elicited employee participation in the drive for business productivity. She was equally influential, in both her professional and personal lives, in spreading the cult of managerial efficiency to the intimate sphere of home and child rearing. The mother of 12 children (immortalized in the classic *Cheaper by the Dozen*), the perpetually pregnant engineer demonstrated that, with the Taylorite organizational methods she pioneered on the factory floor (and the assistance of live-in relatives and paid help), women could combine career, marriage and family on an epic scale. Historian Lancaster (*Inquire Within*) has penned an absorbing, psychologically acute biography that links Gilbreth's career and embrace of "the strenuous life" with the Progressive Era's conflicted ideas about gender and the rise of the "New Woman." While she cultivated her Victorian domestic goddess side to ease the anxieties of a sexist business establishment, Gilbreth's work, and example, subtly challenged women's traditional roles even as it restated them in a scientific idiom. Bridging the contradictory roles of doting housewife, multi-tasking supermom, feminist trendsetter and industrial stateswoman, her life makes for a fascinating study in the transition to modernity. Photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Immortalized as the unflappable wife and mother by the book and the original film version of *Cheaper by the Dozen*, the real Lillian Moller Gilbreth has been short-changed by her charming, but one-dimensional, legend. An engineer, a management consultant, a professor, a government advisor, and a pioneer in the innovative field of time and motion studies, Gilbreth was much more than a mere shadow of her celebrated husband. The working mother of 11 children--one died of diphtheria--she artfully juggled her responsibilities as a career woman and as a mother decades before it became acceptable or fashionable to do so. Continuing to work until her death at age 90, she made immeasurable contributions to both industrial and household management. Through it all, she managed the seemingly impossible, successfully interweaving and integrating her public and private personas into an inspiring model of efficiency and efficacy. Long overlooked by both historians and feminists, Gilbreth's amazing story should be required reading for contemporary women struggling to achieve balance in their hectic lives. *Margaret Flanagan*
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Review

"An absorbing, psychologically acute biography that links Gilbreth's career and embrace of 'the strenuous life' with the Progressive Era's conflicted ideas about gender and the rise of the 'New Woman.'"—*Publishers Weekly*

"Gilbreth's amazing story should be required reading for contemporary women struggling to achieve balance in their hectic lives."—*Booklist*

“This well-written biography has a fluid style that will engage all readers, but it will be of particular interest to historians and students of the relationship between gender and business.”—*Enterprise & Society*

Making Time is "notable for its focus on social context, and on cultural and political history. At every spot along the way, the author presents the wider background to Lilian's story... This well-written, intriguing study presents a fascinating way to learn and to teach the evolving experience of American women during the ninety-four years of Lilian Gilbreth's life."—*American Historical Review*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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