Figure 1.1  Married Men Ages Twenty to Forty-Nine, with Children Under Age Eighteen, Who Were Employed in Manufacturing, Construction, or Transportation, by Race, 1880–2010

Source: Ruggles et al. (2010).
Figure 1.2  Married, U.S.-Born Men Ages Twenty to Forty-Nine, by (Nonfarm) Occupational Group, 1880–2010 (Whites) and 1900–2010 (African Americans)
Figure 2.1  Children Ages Ten to Fifteen Who Were in the Labor Force, by (Nonfarm) Occupation of Household Head, 1880–1950

Source: Ruggles et al. (2010).
of family life that had first emerged among native-born Protestants in the early 1800s.9

The idea of a wife who was solely involved with domestic activities was beyond the reach of most working-class families. Nevertheless, it was an influential model. And about 1890 a new word appeared in the English language that had the connotation of a wife who was fully immersed in domestic activities and who earned no income either outside or inside the home: “homemaker.” We can see the emergence of the term “homemaker” with the aid of a massive data set of published words. In 2004 Google began a project to scan every word of millions of books, including more than 5 million published from 1810 to the late 2000s—about 4 percent of the books ever published. The resulting database can be searched for words or short phrases by year of publication. Figure 3.1 shows the frequency of the words “homemaker” and “housewife” per million words in books pub-

Figure 3.1  Number of Times the Words “Homemaker” and “Housewife” Appear per 1 Million Words in Books Published in the United States, by Decade, 1810–1819 to 2000–2007

Source: Davies (2011) and Michel et al. (2011).
of life. It provided a label for a range of behaviors that went beyond whether or not a person was doing industrial labor. This usage reached a high point in the 1970s, just as the growth of industrial employment was slowing, and then it declined. The fact that the usage of “white collar” also grew through the 1970s and then declined suggests that the two metaphors had become linked. The distinction between blue-collar work and white-collar work had become part of the language and the culture.32

The “blue collar” metaphor had both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side, Americans thought of blue-collar workers as embodying virtues such as hard work and personal responsibility. Of course, working with one’s hands had long been celebrated in America—think of the legend of John Henry the steel driver, building the railroads during the nineteenth century, or of Paul Bunyan, the giant lumberjack. And farm families had long been seen as hardworking: up before sunrise to feed the animals, working until dark to harvest the crops. But as the urban population soared and industrial employment grew as well, the

Figure 4.1  Number of Times the Phrases “Blue Collar” and “White Collar” Appear per 1 Million Words in Books Published in the United States, by Decade, 1810–1819 to 2000–2007

Source: Davies (2011) and Michel et al. (2011).
they could contribute a good income, therefore increasing their likelihood of marrying. We could call this an income effect: the more income women have, the more they marry. Second, women’s increased earnings could have reduced their desire to marry by providing them with an independent source of income. We could call this an independence effect: the more income women have, the less they marry. In practice, among women without bachelor’s degrees, the independence effect seems to have been stronger: between 1980 and 2010 these women became less likely to have ever been married. Perhaps the independence effect won out because so few young men had good earnings prospects that an acceptable marriage partner was hard to find and remaining single seemed the better option. The availability of cash assistance to low-income mothers from government social welfare programs may also have strengthened the independence effect. For instance, spending on the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which assists low-income parents with children, rose sharply after 1985. In any event, an increasing number of young women without bachelor’s degrees never married. They did not, however, forgo childbearing as much, leading to a rise in the proportion of children who were born to cohabiting couples or single mothers.\(^9\)
Figure 5.2  Children Living with an Unmarried Mother, by the Mother’s Education, 1980–2010

Source: My tabulations, pursuant to Stykes and Williams (2013), from the IPUMS data.

rangements of children whose mothers had bachelor’s degrees or more, the group that I have called the college-educated middle class. You can see how short the black bars are compared to the gray and white bars, and you can see that the height of the black bars does not change much over time. This means that only a small proportion of children were living with
second most important increased over time, especially in the more recent surveys. In contrast, the percentage who rated the characteristic “work important and gives a feeling of accomplishment” as most important or second most important decreased over time. The trends were very similar for women—this was not just a shift in values among men. As with high school seniors, American adults seem to have shifted toward valuing less-demanding work and away from the intrinsic rewards of work.6

Yet what is notable is that the shift in preferences shown by the GSS occurred not only among the less-educated adults whom some have labeled as not industrious enough, but also among highly educated adults. Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of twenty-five- to forty-four-year-old men who rated “working hours are short, lots of free time” as the most important or second most important job characteristic, by educational group. The line marked with squares shows the overall trend: an increase from 13 percent