owned their land, a situation roughly paralleled in the North and Mid-
west (see figures 1.1 and 1.2).\textsuperscript{14}

Observers at the time considered tenants poorly educated transients
who overworked staple crops and exploited the soil. Tenancy, they
feared, undermined the independence and character that resulted from
land ownership. In fact, worried critics exaggerated the problem. Not
only were many tenants good farmers, in the northern states they op-
erated only a little more than a quarter of farms, and tenancy there ap-
peared more a phase in the life cycle—a step on the ladder from hired
hand to owner—than a permanent condition.\textsuperscript{15}

Rural America was home to an array of other industries besides agri-
culture, which, along with forestry, and husbandry, employed only six of
ten adult men in even the smallest communities.\textsuperscript{16} Rural mining and gen-
dered forms of rural manufacturing attracted industries employing
women and children. Cigar and tobacco factories, silk mills, and facto-
ries making men's and women’s clothes, to take three examples, ap-

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Percentage of Farmers Who Are Tenants, by Region and Age of
Household Head, 1910}
\end{figure}

\textit{Note:} In most parts of the country, younger farmers were much more likely to be
tenants rather than to own land. In the South, however, even among farmers in
their forties and fifties, a large proportion remained tenants. \textit{Source:} Data from
Ruggles et al. (2004).
peared in areas known for mining coal and iron. The silk industry, for instance, was found in the anthracite coal-producing portion of Pennsylvania. Jobs for women and children undoubtedly compensated for the seasonal layoffs of men who worked in rural manufacturing and mining and in slack times, unlike factory workers, in cities, could not find alternative work nearby.

A major industry in early twentieth-century America, mining employed more than a million workers; 47 percent of the value of its products came from coal with the next most important item, petroleum and natural gas, accounting for only 15 percent. It was, moreover, highly concentrated by geography: for instance, iron mining dominated the Lake Superior District encompassing Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and anthracite coal mining Pennsylvania’s northeastern region. Mining’s products were worth more than $1.2 billion, an amount that had increased an astonishing 52 percent in the previous seven years. In large part, mining’s heightened productivity reflected increased use of machinery. But the use of machinery varied greatly by region, from 42 percent in Pennsylvania to 17 percent in Arkansas. The rise in horsepower

Figure 1.2 Tenants as Percentage of All Farmers, 1900

Note: Although farm tenancy was not unknown in the Midwest, the highest rates were in the South. In many counties, more than 60 percent of farmers were tenants, usually because of the proliferation of sharecropping. Source: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 197-(date uncertain).
gun to join the American Indians in the vast stretches from the Canadian to the Mexican borders west of the Mississippi (see figure 1.3).27

Nonetheless, population was shifting out of villages and towns—places with fewer than 1,000 residents declined from 63 percent of households in 1880 to 42 percent in 1920; in the same years, cities grew, and the share of households in medium-sized towns held steady at around 10 percent.28 In 1906, one observer lamented:

Many towns are injured . . . by the proximity of stronger industrial and social centers. Their citizens go abroad for trade, for acquaintance, for social fraternization, and even for school and church. They look to the adjacent thriving village or city as their true centre with consequent alienation from their own political and social circle. The trolley widens the sphere of this influence; the rural delivery of mails diminishes contact with the village; and the telephone, though it unites the people, keeps them also apart.29

Still, despite the loss of population and competition from large towns and cities, it is a remarkable and important fact to remember that even after World War I and decades of high immigration and rapid industrial-

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**Figure 1.3 Persons per Square Mile, U.S. Counties, 1900**

*Note: In 1900, population concentrated in the Northeast and around the Great Lakes. Most of the nation remained lightly populated, with fewer than forty residents per square mile. Source: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 197-(date uncertain).*
ization more than half of American households were still in villages and small or medium-sized towns.

Hundreds of thousands of native whites left the northeastern, southern, and midwestern states in the century’s first decade—only the West gained native-born residents. More than 1.1 million native whites, for instance, left the states in the north central census division and more than 1.3 million moved west—often following the same latitude—in just these ten years. (Farmers stayed in the same latitude to capitalize on their human and physical capital because their knowledge of soil conditions, crops, and other factors and the seeds and livestock were adapted to a specific climate.) The outcome was regional population diversity, with significant variation from state to state in the origins of their populations.

Clearly, in the early twentieth century, Americans were a restless, ambitious people, leaving their native states by the thousands in search of new opportunities. Except for the far West, 30 to 60 percent of adults had left the states of their birth (see figure 1.4). The lure of opportunity farther west drew many from the Midwest, sometimes to fertile land in a

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**Figure 1.4 Population Change, U.S. Counties, 1900 to 1910**

![Map showing population change in U.S. counties from 1900 to 1910.](image)

*Note:* Between 1900 and 1910, most of the fastest-growing counties were in the mountain and Pacific states; counties in the eastern half of the country by and large grew more slowly. Significant parts of Iowa, Missouri, and other midwestern states lost more than five percent of their population during the decade. *Source:* Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 197-(date uncertain).
major trades, these cities shared a dazzling industrial diversity. Although textiles remained the largest industrial employer, iron and steel along with engineering and machinery led in investment and industrial output. These massive industries notwithstanding, the historian Walter Licht stresses, “it is the completeness of the manufacturing system that deserves emphasis.” Americans produced everything—and in settings that ranged from great iron and steel mills in Pittsburgh and huge meatpacking plants in Chicago to small manufactories turning out limited amounts of fine goods in cities and towns throughout the nation. To be sure, manufacturing was located disproportionately in large cities—home to 19 percent of the population in 1900, cities of over 100,000 produced 40 percent of the total value of manufacturing products. But small cities and towns remained significant industrial locations, too: those with a population under 10,000 produced 31 percent of the total value. Manufacturing was ubiquitous, diverse, and specialized.38
ity, race, gender, and location. For example, in older, stagnant communities, such as Chelsea, Vermont, it was retired parents who most often lived with kin. In Indianola, Mississippi, among poor, sometimes fragmented African American families, relatives were more often grandchildren, nephews and nieces, or siblings. Families based in professional and white-collar work were the first to adopt new family strategies. Working-class families followed more slowly, not because middle-class norms somehow trickled down or were diffused, but because it took longer for their life circumstances to change enough for new strategies to make sense. Within immigrant groups, the second generation usually pioneered new family forms when they surmounted the tenuous foothold in the American economy that had attached the first generation to the security of older family strategies. Widows were, in important ways, a case apart. Dependent throughout most of the twentieth century, as they had been in earlier times, on the wages of working children supplemented by income from boarders, their family strategies changed the least.

Most families, it is true, were nuclear: fewer than one in three housed a relative, as is clear in figure 1.6. But this is a misleading statistic because families were too large and death came too early for all but a small minority to include a member of the older generation at any one time. In fact, in the early twentieth century, most of the elderly lived with one of

Figure 1.6 Presence of Relatives and Nonrelatives in Households, by Age of Householder, 1910

<table>
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<th>Relative Present</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nonrelative Present</th>
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<td>20–24</td>
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40% 35% 30% 25% 20% 15% 10% 5% 0% 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

Note: The composition of households varied across the life cycle. For example, relatives more often lived in households with older heads while nonrelatives (mainly boarders and servants) more often lived with younger families. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
Figure 1.7  Change in Standardized Marital Fertility Ratio, by Ethnicity and Occupation, 1880 to 1910

Note: Between 1880 and 1910, married couples began to have fewer children. This trend held among all ethnic and occupational groups except Italian-born. For example, marital fertility declined 27 percent among U.S. blacks and 13 percent among laborers. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).

'Number of children zero to four per 1,000 married women, fifteen to forty-nine years of age. Figures are age-standardized using the aggregate distribution of the married female population for the three census years.
boarders to augment their inadequate household incomes, and they also helped kin. Compared to whites, blacks more often housed boarders and relatives—only the relatives, more than among other groups, were grandchildren, cousins, aunts, and uncles. For hardship left many black families in fragments, with young children or unattached relatives in need of home and care.123

Working children played an increasingly important part in older families. Overall, in 1910 families were 1.5 times more likely to include an employed child than in 1880 (see figure 1.9). In 1910, 52 percent of forty-five- to fifty-year-old parents, well over 60 percent of those in their fifties, and over 70 percent of those sixty or older lived with at least one working child. Within families of practically every rank, the prevalence of working children increased, though least often in families of professionals. They also were more prevalent among black than white families, but differences in race and ethnicity were not large.

It seems odd that more families included a working teenager in 1910 than in the late nineteenth century. With teenage school attendance rising, the trend should have gone in the opposite direction. “Education,” Thwing claimed, “has come to be the dominant force in modern American life.” Education also promoted individualism at the expense of families. “In education the family and the school exist for the individual. . . . The presence, therefore, of education, as the most potent of all social

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**Figure 1.8** Percentage of Households with a Boarder Present, by Occupation of Household Head, 1880 to 1910

*Note:* Boarders became more common between 1880 and 1910. The increase was especially high in the households of service workers (57 percent) and laborers (34 percent). *Source:* Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
Figure 1.9 Percentage of Households with a Working Child Present, by Ethnicity and Occupation of Household Head, United States, 1880 to 1910

Note: Children’s wages were a critical element of the family economy during the early 20th century. Between 1880 and 1910, the proportion of households with an employed child of any age increased among all occupational groups, except professionals, and among all ethnic groups as well. For example, among managers, the proportion with an employed child living at home rose 21 percent and among the German-born, 74 percent. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
School attendance among older teenagers remained strongly dependent upon family background in 1910. The son of a professional was three times more likely to attend school than that of a laborer. The children of second-generation ethnics were generally more likely to attend than those of immigrants. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
The intricate family patterns etched onto America’s social landscape in the early twentieth century led, then, to two dominant strategies: protective and anticipatory. The first responded to the pressures of poverty and crisis with long-standing practices for increasing income and security based on the family’s resources. Practiced by farmers, laborers, operatives, and many craftsmen, protective strategies combined sending children to work with taking in boarders and lodgers and, at the same time, keeping the number of their children high enough to guarantee security in old age. Women who headed households also practiced protective strategies, notably relying on the work of their children and income from boarders as well as help from co-resident relatives. Still, all families were changing in some of the same directions. Even the groups that practiced protective strategies were reducing their fertility and the size of their households. The protective strategy was a variation within a larger story.

Professionals and white-collar workers took another tack by responding to new structures of work and opportunity with anticipatory strate-
nearly one of every three employed Americans worked in agriculture. In 2000, the ratio was only one in forty-seven. Manufacturing employment, however, was not the major beneficiary of the emptying out of agriculture. It grew from 20 percent in 1910 to a peak of 27 percent in 1960 before falling to 15 percent in 2000. Growth occurred proportionally more in the professions, business, and the public sector. By 1990, professional services employed more people than manufacturing, for instance. Outside of agriculture, even early in the twentieth century, most people worked for someone else. The self-employed made up 15 percent of the nonagricultural workforce in 1910 and 10 percent of the entire labor force in 2000. In its towns and cities, the idea that America once was a nation of independent craftsmen, professionals, and small businessmen is a myth.

As the balance among industries shifted during the twentieth century, the demography and content of occupations changed as well. Several examples illustrate their varied histories. Some occupations simply did not

Note: America’s labor force went through two revolutions during the twentieth century. Between 1920 and 1940, manufacturing replaced agriculture as the nation’s largest industry. Later in the century, professional services overtook manufacturing. At the end of the century, agriculture employed only two percent of the labor force. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
Figure 2.2  State Poverty Rates, 1949 and 1999

Poverty Rate 1949

- More than 5 Percent Below Average
- Within 5 Percent of Average
- More than 5 Percent Above Average

Poverty Rate 1999

- More than 5 Percent Below Average
- Within 5 Percent of Average
- More than 5 Percent Above Average

Note: In 1949, fifteen states had poverty rates more than 5 percent above the national average. All but New Mexico were located in the South. By 1999, almost all states were within 5 percent of the national average. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
industries and in teaching—thus began to crumble in the face of labor shortages and the demands of educated women. Nonetheless, in 1960 paid work remained a minority experience for married women; by 1990 it had become the norm. Single women, of course, always worked more often than those who had married, but the difference between single and married women narrowed over the century. As a result, the sex composition of the American labor force looked very different at the century’s beginning, middle, and end. In 1940, only about one-quarter of the labor force consisted of women; by 2000, the proportion had reached nearly half.\textsuperscript{21}

Of course, married black women always had worked more than white women, but the difference narrowed sharply as married white women entered the labor force (see figure 2.4).\textsuperscript{22} The trend among one category of white and black women, however, went in an opposite direction. This was women-on-their-own (women with an absent spouse, formerly married women, or those who had never married). In 1950 and 1960, young white women-on-their-own began to work more than black women. In fact, the labor force participation of black women-on-their-own began to fall until 1970 when it turned upward. In 2000, though, it still remained below the rate for white women. Why did this happen? It did not result

\textit{Note: After 1940, the percentage of married women who worked outside their homes went up dramatically. In 1900, less than 10 percent of married women held a job; in 2000, almost 70 percent of them did. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).}
from the shift of black women out of agriculture—it took place regardless of where they lived. Nor did it happen because welfare allowed some unmarried black mothers to withdraw from the labor force. Rather, job opportunities for black women declined when domestic labor—their principal form of work—nearly disappeared. Domestic service was women’s major non-agricultural occupation at the start of the century; by century’s end, it had dwindled to insignificance. The alternative occupations into which women first moved, however, still represented an extension of their traditional work—taking care of children, tending the sick, or minding the home. Clerical work was the exception, and its rise was spectacular—from 9 percent of employed women in 1910 to 35 percent in 1970. Increasingly feminized, clerical work lost its place as the first step on the ladder to management, becoming, instead, a largely permanent status identified not by decision making but instead by the exercise of routinized skills such as typewriting. In part, but only in part, the shift of women into clerical work responded to changes in occupational structure—the growing prominence of office work in the economy. But women’s clerical employment grew at nearly twice the rate of clerical work itself and outstripped overall job growth.

Figure 2.4 Female Labor Force Participation, by Marital Status and Race

Note: Early in the twentieth century, married black women held jobs much more often than married white women. In 2000, the proportion of both black and white married women with jobs had increased steeply, and the difference between them had nearly disappeared. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
among women. The feminization of the office, then, represented a real shift in women’s work (see figure 2.5), not simply a response to compositional changes in workforce demography or occupational structure.

In the 1880s, technological change—specifically, the widespread adoption of the typewriter, which had been patented in 1868—transformed clerical work. Other new technologies soon followed: cash registers and machines for dictating, mimeographing, calculating, and tabulating the 1890 census. A second surge of office machine invention followed in the 1910s. A list of the machines commonly found in American offices in 1919 included thirty items, none of which had been available before the 1880s. Machines facilitated the standardization of tasks. In 1871, one authority described clerical work as requiring “knowledge of languages, skills in accounts, familiarity with even minute details of business, energy, promptitude, tact, delicacy of perception”; by the early twentieth century, for most office workers, it had become “routine and mechanical” (see photograph 2.3).

However, even before machines were introduced a great deal of clerical work was nonetheless dull and routine, and most male clerks spent

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**Figure 2.5 Percentage of Women Workers in Selected Occupational Categories, 1900 to 2000**

*Note:* During the twentieth century, clerical and sales work replaced domestic service as the typical “women’s” job. The proportion of women employed as domestic servants went down dramatically, from 25 percent to less than 5 percent, and the proportion with clerical jobs increased sharply, from 9 percent to 30 percent. *Source:* Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
year-old African American men living in institutions—mainly prisons—increased by a third, from 9 percent to 12 percent. In the late twentieth century, 49 percent of prisoners were black compared to 13 percent of the overall population. On any given day, one of three black males aged twenty to twenty-nine “is under some form of criminal justice supervision . . . either in prison or jail, or on probation or parole” (see figure 2.7). The growth of African American men’s incarceration fuels inequality. Since 1994, Congress has prohibited inmates from receiving Pell Grants with which to continue their education, and many states have cut back on education for inmates who leave prison lacking the skills needed to find employment. With employers reluctant to hire ex-convicts, and without job skills, former inmates have great difficulty finding work. One consequence is the high rate of black men who remain outside the regular labor force.52

*Note: At the beginning of the century, men—both black and white—were rarely out of the labor force. With the decline of the Southern agricultural economy, however, black men’s rate of joblessness increased sharply and then stayed high for the rest of the century. In contrast, in 1900 black women were much more likely than white women to be working outside the home, but by the end of the century their labor force participation rates had converged. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).*
At the start of the twentieth century, the structure of black inequality reflected the powerful convergence of geography and work. Clustered in the rural South, African Americans worked mainly in agriculture and household service. As they left agriculture, black women in the workforce passed through two phases: movement into household service—the first major employer of black women who moved North—and, after 1940, out of personal service into an array of other industries. Helped by education and the growth of government and service sector jobs, they began to find white-collar work.

Black men took longer to leave agriculture. In the manual working class into which they moved, they held skilled craft jobs less often than white men and more often worked as laborers. As they left agriculture, black men faced a declining job market for industrial work and often exclusion from the best industrial jobs that remained. With industrial opportunities pretty much gone, they found themselves less able than black women to enter white-collar jobs or find any work at all.38 There never was a golden age when most African American men worked at well-paying industrial jobs. The difficulties black men faced finding work in the regular labor market did not arise from the deindustrialization of the 1960s and 1970s, and were not solely the consequence of incarceration.

Figure 2.7 Percentage of Black Men Living in Institutions, by Age, 1980 to 2000

Note: One reason that black men were so often out of the regular labor force is that a very large and growing share of them were in prison and other institutions. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
The origins lie, rather, in the shift of black men out of agriculture and their relative inability to move into other forms of work. Black men displaced from agriculture landed often on the margins of the economy, chronically detached from the labor market, with a lack of education and skills compounding the racist discrimination they faced when looking for work.\textsuperscript{54}

Many black men found employment in public and state-related jobs (that is, jobs that were nominally private but depended on public funding).\textsuperscript{55} In 2000, these state-related industries employed 19 percent of black men. Public and state-related employment proved even more important for black women: at century’s end nearly half (43) percent of black women worked in state-related industries (see figure 2.8).\textsuperscript{56} Another 39 percent (compared to 35 percent of men) worked in retail and service jobs. The movement of black women into white-collar work had been stunning. In percentage terms, blacks, led by women, outpaced white movement into white-collar work by a wide margin. These were real changes,

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.8.png}
\caption{Percentage of Women Over Eighteen in State-Related Industries by Ethnicity}
\end{figure}

\textit{Note}: In 1950 less than 15 percent of black and Mexican American women held state-related jobs. By 1980, more than a third of Mexican American women and two-fifths of black women were employed in this sector. \textit{Source}: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
poverty rates, relatively few African Americans worked in industrial jobs. Instead, government employment, which accounted for 60 percent of the variance in black poverty rates across the fifteen cities, reduced poverty and proved the best predictor of those rates (for the increase in white-collar work across the board, see figure 2.9). Not only did public employment reduce poverty by providing steady, well-paid jobs. African American access to public employment also signaled increasing black political influence, which, in turn, encouraged local welfare bureaucracies to respond more generously to black need. Thus, in cities with the highest levels of public employment more blacks escaped poverty through public transfer programs—the size of black public employment explained 33 percent of the effectiveness of cities’ public assistance programs. Overall, the correlation between the black poverty rate and black employment in government was a striking -.762.

This work history increasingly differentiated African Americans by industry and occupation, sorting them into the familiar ranks of America’s
percent in 2000; for women it grew from 40 percent to 96 percent, near parity. Women’s earnings gains, however, proved precarious. They began to erode in the 1980s and 1990s, not because the absolute earnings of black women dropped but because the earnings of white women rose faster. Still, black women’s relative earnings remained far higher than in 1940. Although poverty rates plummeted for all groups, including African Americans, the differences among groups remained surprisingly durable. Black poverty dropped from 75 percent in 1939 to 24 percent in 1999. Nonetheless, it was about twice the white rate in the first and quadruple in the second year.

Measures of economic well-being need to distinguish between individual and family earnings. With family earnings the measure, black women’s earnings, relative to white women’s, went down late in the century.68 The reason was that many more black than white women were single mothers, surviving on one income (chapters 3 and 4 discuss black family structure). At work, a black woman earned as much as the white

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**Figure 2.10 Difference Between Earnings of College Graduates and of White, Male High School Graduates**

*Note:* Until 1970, white women and black college graduates earned less, on average, than white male high school graduates. After 1990 all groups gained relative to high school graduates although a college degree benefited white men more than any other group. Figures are real 1990 dollars. *Source:* Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
woman with a similar education who sat next to her. But she more often went home to a husband who earned less than the white woman, or to no husband at all. She also lived in a household with few assets other than earnings.69

Whether black men experienced mobility during their prime working
years depended in part on when they were born. Those born earlier in the century made the most dramatic gains as the post–World War II economic boom combined with migration from southern farms to boost their earnings throughout their working lives. Men who entered their prime working years during the difficult period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s did not experience the same economic mobility. Their adult earnings hardly budged over time (for a breakdown of earnings over time by age, see figure 2.13). Indeed, among men the black-white earnings ratio reversed direction and declined during the economic hard times of the 1980s, when most workers’ incomes—regardless of race or ethnicity—went down (see photograph 2.5).70

Earnings are only one component of family wealth. Others include real property, savings, and securities—assets held much less often by blacks than whites, as the research of Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro and of Dalton Conley has shown.71 Throughout the twentieth century, a smaller fraction of blacks than whites owned homes, which is one reason

Figure 2.12 Percentage of Total Population Living in Poverty, by Ethnicity, 1940 to 2000

Note: Poverty declined rapidly for all ethnic groups between 1940 and 1980. However, the poverty rate of blacks and Mexicans remained more than twice that of whites. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
why blacks have much less wealth than whites, whatever their incomes. Among both groups, homeownership rose after 1940. Figure 2.14 tracks homeownership by ethnicity in the United States from 1940 to 2000. In 1940, the black-white ratio was 49; it reached a high of 67 in 1980 and stood at 66 in 2000 when 72 percent of whites and 47 percent of blacks owned their own homes. The homes that blacks did own were worth less than those owned by whites, although their relative value increased greatly over time—from 20 percent in 1940 to 67 percent in 2000.

A view that combines earnings, education, and property qualifies the record of black economic progress. Blacks less often acquired a four-year college education; men (but not women) who did enter remunerative jobs earned less than whites; whatever their jobs or educations, they could not bundle individual into family earnings as large as those of whites; more of them were poor; more men were in prison; they owned

Note: Black men who were born early in the century experienced very rapid earnings increases as they aged, thanks to their move to the urban North and the decline in overt discrimination. Those born after 1936 began their careers with higher average wages, but did not enjoy as rapid an increase over their working life. Figures are real 1990 dollars. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
It was through this process of differentiation—the accumulation of many small and not-so-small distinctions—that black social structure increasingly came to resemble that found among whites and that black inequality endured despite individual and group mobility.

**Immigrant Generations**

There is a heart-warming story usually told about immigrants who arrived from southern and eastern Europe early in the twentieth century. Poor, uneducated, but hard-working, they found jobs in America’s factories. Over time, their pay increased. With ruthless underconsumption, they managed to save enough to buy homes and move from poverty to modest security and comfort. Their children, educated in American schools, found even better work and joined the great American middle
in the late 1970s and 1980s, it would have been odd, indeed, if Mexican Americans had proved an exception. Between 1970 and 2000, the share of Mexican and Mexican American men in the poorest income quintile increased as their share among the top two quintiles declined. Women—both immigrants and Mexican American—were overrepresented in the two poorest quintiles and badly underrepresented in the top two. Thus, it is not surprising that a large fraction—smaller among Mexican Americans than earlier twentieth-century immigrants—lived in poverty. In general, Mexican poverty rates hovered between that of native whites and blacks.

Especially among men, the upward trajectory of income, occupation, and educational attainment seemed to halt or, even, stagnate and drop back a little. In this it might be thought that Mexican Americans diverged from descendants of eastern and southern European immigrants. But

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**Figure 2.15 Average Occupational Score by Length of Residence in the United States, Selected Immigrant Groups**

*Note:* Male Mexican immigrants improved their occupational standing slowly as their length of time in the United States increased. Their occupational standing and rate of improvement were quite similar to those of Italians and Poles earlier in the century. Like Italian and Polish women, Mexican women’s occupational progress outpaced that of their male counterparts.

The dependent variable is the Duncan socio-economic score, see O. D. Duncan (1961). These are results of a general-linear model controlling for age differences between groups. Mexican data include 1980 through 2000 censuses. Polish and Italian data include 1910 and 1920 censuses. *Source:* Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
there is another way to look at the matter. At both ends of the century, the histories of immigrants’ children and grandchildren reflected broad economic trends shaping working-class experience. With census statistics, we pick up the incomes of the second generation southern and eastern Europeans only in the aftermath of World War II during a period that combined the fruits of newly won unionization, an expansive welfare state, and tremendous economic growth. Income, education, and opportunity were increasing throughout the nation, benefiting both the children of immigrants and everyone else.

Early twentieth-century immigrants, the usual argument asserts, prospered thanks to the availability of jobs in heavy industry, which now has nearly vanished, leaving the Mexican immigrants without a comparable initial rung on the ladder of economic success. In pay and working conditions, however, the industrial jobs that employed earlier immigrants were no worse than the construction, agricultural, and service work available to today’s Mexican immigrants. What differ are labor

Figure 2.16 Mean Wage and Salary Income, by Gender, Nativity, and Age, 2000 Controlling for Educational Attainment

Note: The apparent earnings gap between Mexican American women and white women virtually disappeared when educational differences are taken into consideration. In contrast, Mexican American men with a similar educational background earned, on average, much less than white men.

General linear model results, estimated marginal means, controlling for educational attainment. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
Life expectancy has differed by race as well as by gender. Indeed, race differences have inscribed one of the nation’s most durable inequalities into patterns of life and death. Black death rates, like white, went down sharply during the last half of the twentieth century. But the difference between races remained about the same. Blacks improved their absolute chances, but their relative disadvantage hardly changed. In 1950, the death rate for infants (per one thousand live births) was 26.8 for whites and 43.9 for blacks; in 2001, the rates, respectively, were 5.7 and 14.0—a larger gap than at mid-century. These differences persisted into adulthood. At age forty-five to fifty-four, the death rate in 1950 for white men was 984.5 and for black men 1905; in 2001, the two rates were 501.3 and 996. At both times, black men were about twice as likely to die as white men of the same age. The story was similar for women—a decline from 546.4 to 286.8 for white women and from 1576.4 to 579.1 for black women—whose relative disadvantage had worsened.9

Longer lives changed the shape of the nation’s age structure. In 1900, the median age of the population was only twenty-three; by 2000, it was thirty-five.10 The average American did not, however, grow older at an even pace. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, fertility dropped to its lowest point in American history and remained low until after the war. By mid-century, the median age had reached 30.2 before dropping
York Times reported in 2005, "intergenerational help is now moving in a new direction. ‘Thirty, 40, years ago, the money went up; you helped your grandparents, you bought them this or that, they might have moved in with you,’ said Timothy M. Smeeding, a professor of public policy at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, ‘but now, all the money comes down’" (see figure 3.2).22

On the surface, young people appeared to have returned to the long road to independence characteristic of the early twentieth century. The situation was, however, in fact very different. The economic reciprocity between parents and children so common then had given way to a mainly one-way flow of resources, and the years of delayed adult responsibility were much more often passed living alone or with roommates or partners than with parents or other families. A new life stage, Furstenberg and his colleagues argue, had emerged. They call it early adulthood; others, less sympathetic, see it as a phase of indulgent and delayed maturity. A 2002 Newsweek story termed it adultolescence. In recent decades “structural and cultural changes,” the sociologist Marlis Buchmann writes, have “made youth as a life stage increasingly obsolete, while they have simultaneously extended it indefinitely.”23

This pattern characterized the experience of whites more than blacks. African American experience became most distinct late in the century.
As a result of marrying less and divorcing more often, in 2000, only a minority of black men—34 percent of thirty-five-year-olds—lived with a child (see figure 3.3).

This new family and life course pattern appeared first in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. The timing is important because it coincides with trends in inequality and economic stagnation—a point to which we return. The trend did not signify a rejection of marriage. In 2000, by the age of forty, 73 percent of black women had married. Parenthood was preceding marriage, not replacing it. However, young black women may not replicate the relatively high eventual marriage rate of their elders. At age forty, many fewer of them, than of women born earlier in the century, have married. This disconnection of marriage and parenthood does not mean that black women are having more children. Although the fraction married went down, the share with chil-
the Pennsylvania Commission on Old Age Pensions pointed out that children and relatives would:

make greater sacrifices . . . to keep an aged mother at home and prevent her going to a poorhouse, than they would for an aged father or other male relative. Aside from the sentimental reasons involved, the presence of an old woman around the house—unless she is absolutely invalided—entails little burden, as she can be made useful in numerous ways. This, however, is not the case with an aged man.44

The family living arrangements of the elderly took one of two quite different forms. Either the elderly remained heads of their own house-
elderly moved into retirement communities—developments of single-family homes restricted to senior citizens or continuing care or assisted-living facilities—as well as nursing homes. Medicaid—the income-tested public health insurance program—covered most of the 1.5 million seniors living in nursing homes in 2004, but the expansion of other residential options resulted from the elderly’s new economic status. Between 1998 and 2001, the number of assisted living facilities increased 48 percent. In 2004, nine hundred and ten thousand seniors lived in thirty-six thousand assisted-living facilities and six hundred thousand lived in twenty-one hundred continuing care communities.

The ability of so many to afford expensive options reflected both the increase in Social Security benefits as well as post–World War II pensions and the great rise in the value of the homes now owned by most elderly Americans. Earlier in the century—with children more likely to take in their mothers than their fathers—most of the elderly in old-age homes were men. By the century’s end, with women living much longer than men and widowhood the main spur to institutional living, most of the residents of nursing homes and assisted-living facilities were women. The feminization of old-age homes is one of the major institutional stories of the twentieth century. Together, independent living and, later, in-

Figure 3.5 Household Status, Persons over the Age of Fifty, 1900 to 2000

Note: Early in the twentieth century, most older Americans lived with their children. By the end of the century, most older Americans lived in empty-nest households or alone. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
part, with education controlled, the similarities rather than the differences among groups stand out. With fertility, as with earnings, reported in chapter 2, by the end of the twentieth century, education trumped race. In family as well as income, a college education had become the prime agent dividing the experience of women.

America’s durable inequalities registered most visibly in the history of out-of-wedlock births. The stark numbers underline the growing disconnection of parenthood from marriage evident, as well, in measures that describe routes to adult independence. The first point to emphasize is that the rise in out-of-wedlock births did not signal an “epidemic of teenage pregnancy,” as alarmists in the 1980s claimed. Teen pregnancy has not varied a great deal in past decades; recently it has been going

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**Figure 3.6 Age-Specific Fertility Ratios for Women Aged Fifteen to Forty-Nine, 1880 to 2000**

*Note: As couples began to control their fertility, the most striking change was the rapid decline in the fertility of women in their thirties and forties, a decline interrupted briefly by the baby boom. After 1960, however, the fertility of women in their twenties declined steeply, while that of women in their early thirties began to rise after 1980. By the end of the century, women in their twenties were having fewer children than at any time in American history, but women in their thirties had fertility ratios comparable to those of the pre–World War II generation. (Fertility ratio is number of children, 0–4, per 1,000 married women.) Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).*
percent in 1960, and 25 percent in 2000. Among these families, the drop in
the fraction with a nonworking spouse was even greater: from 52 percent
in 1900, to 33 percent in 1960, and to 8 percent in 2000 (see figure 3.7).

Changes in the content of these family and household forms and the bal-
ance among them, however, had strained the conventional meaning of
family. Nonfamily households were either young adults working for a
few years before marriage or cohabiting couples rather than, as earlier in
the century, immigrant men in boarding houses or sharing rooms while
they earned money to send back to their families. Empty-nest house-
holds were couples looking forward to old age alone together or in a re-
tirement facility rather than women and men anticipating a move in with
children when they grew feeble or ran out of money. Single mothers
were divorced or never married rather than, as earlier, widows. In 1900,
these were the approximate shares of different household and family
types: traditional families 55 percent, nonfamily households 10 percent,
single-mothers 28 percent, and empty-nest households 6 percent, with
a small remainder of different forms. By 2000, the balance had shifted
dramatically: traditional families 25 percent, nonfamily households 25
percent, single-mother families 30 percent, empty-nest households 16
percent. As never before, the question—what is a family?—required a
new answer.

Note: The proportion of traditional family households—married couples with
children—in the population declined from 62 to 30 percent during the twentieth
century. They were replaced by “empty-nest” families and nonfamily house-
holds. Although single-mother households provoked much anxiety, they
increased only from 8 to 10 percent of all households between 1900 and 2000.
Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).
made up 45 percent or more of all households went from 14 percent to 25 percent. A quarter of all the people in these suburbs now lived where, at a minimum, just under half the households were empty nests. This signaled an extraordinary departure from the original, postwar meaning of suburb. In the central cities, however, the share of residents living where empty nesters made up at least 45 percent of the households dropped from 30 percent to 21 percent. This signified an extraordinary departure from the original, postwar meaning of suburb. In the central cities, however, the share of residents living where empty nesters made up at least 45 percent of the households dropped from 30 percent to 21 percent. There, immigration joined with the growth of nonfamily and female-headed households to dilute the impact of increased numbers of empty nests (see figures 3.9 and 3.10).

The emergence of this new domestic landscape rearranged the geography of inequality. In the postwar decades, the simultaneous movement
of middle- and upper-income families to the suburbs, and the migration of poor blacks from the South to the North and Midwest, drained older cities of wealth and increased poverty within them. Poverty not only urbanized; it increasingly concentrated within districts of central cities. This newly concentrated and isolated poverty, the intense focus of social science research, intersected with the history of families because such a

Note: In 1970, households consisting of married couples with children dominated Chicago’s suburbs while the city itself had relatively few. By 2000, this sharp split was no longer evident. Source: Data from Geolytics, Inc. (2005).
large share of the poorest families were single mothers. The increase in their numbers reshaped the geography of poverty. Although in a number of cities—especially in the Sunbelt—the concentration of poverty went down between 1990 and 2000, poverty remained far more highly concentrated than in 1970—and there was no sign that this situation would change any time soon. In fact, the concentration of poverty spread out-
wanted to add “mixed race” or “multiracial” as one racial option on the census. The “mark more than one” option, they argued, perpetuated false essentialist notions of race, whereas the reaggregation of individual responses into a version of the old ethno-racial pentagon perpetuated the scientifically worthless and politically harmful one-drop rule. Some multiracial leaders wanted to do away with any racial questions on the census. Multiracial activists were not the first group to request special recognition on the census. Many ethnic groups had made similar demands. The multiracial advocates, however, were the first to claim “ethno-racial self-identification” as “a person’s right.”

By the summer of 1993, civil rights organizations had concluded that a “multiracial” option on the census could shrink their demographic base, affecting the distribution of federal funds, the implementation of affirmative action, and congressional redistricting. The multiracial movement, they believed, threatened their political and legal interests by

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**Figure 4.1 Cross-Ethnic Marriages, Thirty- to Thirty-Nine-Year-Olds by Year of Birth**

*Note: Only one in a thousand white men and women born between 1866 and 1895 married someone from another ethnic group. Among those born between 1966 and 1975, nearly 10 percent intermarried. White women remained the least likely to be married to someone from another ethnic group, while 18 percent of Hispanic women and 21 percent of Asian American women had intermarried. Source: Data from Ruggles et al. (2004).*