Young Adulthood as a Factor in Social Change in the United States

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THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION in the United States, which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, transformed the way Americans worked and had a profound effect on family life. People left rural farms to migrate to the cities for factory work. Fertility and family size declined, as did mortality, especially among infants. The divorce rate rose. Parents who had previously educated their own children informally were for the first time required to send their children to school. And yet, despite all the changes that the industrial revolution brought, some aspects of American family life remained surprisingly unchanged. Same-race heterosexual marriage remained virtually the only type of romantic union that existed in the United States. Nontraditional types of unions, such as interracial unions, same-sex unions, and extramarital heterosexual cohabitation, were almost absent.

By the late twentieth century, interracial unions, same-sex unions, and extramarital cohabitation had all increased sharply, so that the types of romantic unions Americans form are now much more varied (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). Assuming that the nature of human desires has not fundamentally changed, it stands to reason that the near absence of nontraditional unions during the industrial revolution in the United States was the result of the orderly reproduction of the traditional family form and the effective suppression of nontraditional family forms. If the industrial revolution transformed society and the family so thoroughly, how did industrial society manage so effectively to suppress the formation of nontraditional unions?

Recent research on young adulthood in the United States has suggested that the process by which young people become adults has changed fundamentally in recent decades (Arnett 2004; Arnett and Taber 1994; Buchmann 1989; Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999; Hogan 1981; Modell 1989; Setterstein, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). Young adults are marrying

later, getting more education, and traveling more. Single young adults are much less likely to live with their parents than was the case in the past (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). Young adults experience the new life stage of residential independence, higher education, and delayed marriage as a period of social independence, free from the immediate constraints of family.

The changing transition to adulthood offers clues to why nontraditional unions were rare during the industrial revolution, but have flourished in the late twentieth century. Families weathered the social changes of the industrial revolution together. Most single young adults in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remained in their parents' homes until they married. When young adults lived apart from their parents in the past, they usually lived with relatives or were servants in another family's household. Coresidence with young adult children gave parents (or parental surrogates) a significant degree of supervision over their children's social lives and made it much more difficult for young adults to form the kinds of unions that their parents would not have approved of. From the 1960s on, the increasing residential and social independence of young adults has reduced parental supervision over their children's courtship activities, and increased the heterogeneity of the potential mates whom young adults encounter, which in turn has contributed to the rise of nontraditional unions.

Rosenfeld and Kim (2005) examined the influence of the new "independent life stage" on the late twentieth-century growth in nontraditional unions, using census microdata. They showed that geographic mobility away from the state of birth was strongly correlated with the formation of nontraditional unions in 1990 and 2000, controlling for socioeconomic and other factors. The paucity of nontraditional unions in the census data from the industrial revolution precludes a similar analytic approach. I use newly available census microdata from the nineteenth century to demonstrate that familial control in the United States was much stronger during the industrial revolution than most observers then or since have realized.

The idea of family government and social control of marriage from the colonies to the late nineteenth century

Young adults were less able to form nontraditional unions in the past, even during the upheavals of the industrial revolution, because they were subject to what colonial leaders called "family government" (Morgan [1944] 1966). Family government was the way that colonial leaders ensured that traditional family norms, including the norm of heterosexual same-race marriage, were respected and renewed with every generation. In the American colonies people were obliged to be part of a family throughout their lives. Whether young people lived with their parents or were servants in

another family's home, the adults were expected to supervise, educate, and socialize the young. Because colonial governments were weak, family government was practically the only kind of government there was. Colonial leaders were so fearful of the potential destabilizing force of young adults living outside of family government that in several colonies it was illegal for young adults to live on their own. Married people separated from their spouses were ordered to send for them. Bachelors in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were (save for special exceptions granted by colonial leaders) required, subject to imprisonment, to marry, move in with an established family, or leave the colony (Morgan [1944] 1966).

In Puritan New England, colonial parents had final legal authority over the disposition of their children in marriage. The legal right of parents to choose their children's mates was sometimes overlooked, but parents and even community members were expected to exercise a veto over marital choices perceived to be inappropriate (Demos 2000; Godbeer 2002; Grossberg 1985; Morgan [1944] 1966). Before a couple could get married they were expected to post notices (banns) in the church or the town square on three occasions, which allowed parents and neighbors a chance to block marriages that were seen as transgressive or unacceptable. If the parents were still in Europe, a marriage of young people might be delayed for months while written parental approval was obtained (Calhoun [1917] 1960: 156).

In Pennsylvania and the Delaware River Valley, the colonial settlements dominated by the Quakers, family government was less authoritarian and patriarchal than in Puritan New England. Quaker women were allowed to be preachers, and Quaker children were encouraged to express themselves freely (Fischer 1989). Although the Quakers had an egalitarian view of family life in some respects, Quaker society exercised strict control (stricter even than the Puritans) over the mate selection of young adults. Marriages to non-Quakers were viewed as "mongrel marriages," and were absolutely prohibited (Fischer 1989: 485). Before a wedding could be celebrated, formal approval had to be obtained from both sets of parents of the affianced, as well as from the entire community of Friends. The communal control over the marriage choices of the young resulted in later marriage, more spinsterhood, and lower fertility for the Quakers compared to other religious groups in colonial North America (Shammas 2002: 105).

The social system of Virginia and the southern colonies was less strict and less theocratic than Puritan New England, but their social and political system was more aristocratic (Fischer 1989; Morgan 1952). The upper echelons of Virginia society took English law and custom with regard to marriage (including the posting of the banns and the necessity to formalize the marriage in church) very seriously. For families with substantial plantations, the marriages of their children were a serious matter because the family fortune could be easily frittered away by an unworthy son-in-law. Among

the great majority of white Virginians who were not landed gentry, there was less oversight of children's choice of mate because the families had, economically speaking, less to lose (Morgan 1952). Southern morality was reputed to be more tolerant of personal and sexual transgression than were the New England Puritans, as long as the transgressions remained informal and discreet. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, carried on what scholars now understand to have been a decades-long liaison with his slave Sally Hemings. Jefferson haughtily denied the relationship when his political opponents made an issue of it, and his word was good enough to quiet the critics and secure his reputation during his lifetime (Ellis 2000; Gordon-Reed 2000).[1]

In the remote colonial settlements beyond the control of the towns, informal marriage (i.e., common law marriage not formalized in a church) was the norm. Itinerant preachers who railed against informal unions as tantamount to adultery were always coming into conflict with rural residents who resented their intervention (Godbeer 2002). After the American Revolution, the European settlers expanded their settlements westward, and the sparsely populated border areas expanded. The result of this westward expansion in the early American republic was that more citizens were living in areas that were temporarily beyond the social controls based in church and town.

The independent spirit of the early nineteenth century was, however, short lived. Parents and civic leaders, fearing their own loss of communal authority over the younger generations, created state and local government institutions to step into the social void and regulate family behavior. Over the course of the nineteenth century, religious leaders and family reformers enlisted the growing power of the state to marginalize informal marriages and enforce a system of state-licensed matrimony (Grossberg 1985). Parents, social reformers, and church leaders responded with a broad wave of mobilization and legislation against prostitution, homosexuality,[2] birth control, and "indecency." The temperance movements, the Young Women's and Young Men's Christian Associations, and other religiously oriented civic institutions worked tirelessly to enlist the lost souls of the city and to castigate and marginalize those who could not be enlisted. The American Medical Association worked with religious groups to make abortion illegal in the United States for the first time in the late nineteenth century (Smith-Rosenberg 1985). After the emancipation of the slaves in 1865, all states of the old Confederacy (and many border and western states) enacted laws against racial intermarriage, and these remained in effect in most of those states until 1967 when the Supreme Court's ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* finally made the laws against intermarriage unconstitutional (Moran 2001; Wallenstein 2002).

In the early 1870s, a young dry goods dealer named Anthony Comstock was working with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of New York to fight against sexually explicit pamphlets, newspaper advertisements,

and books. Frustrated by the law's apparent inability to curb what he saw as rampant indecency, Comstock went to Washington to lobby Congress for stronger legislation. In 1873 Congress passed the Comstock Act, and Anthony Comstock was appointed as a postal inspector to enforce the new law. In the next four decades, with the support of the YMCA and leading New York industrialists like J. Pierpont Morgan, Comstock led a religious crusade against newspapers, publishers, gambling houses, night clubs, artists (including the Art Students League for advertising a nude painting), avant-garde theater, prostitutes, advocates of birth control, feminists, and free thinkers of all types (Bates 1995).

The industrial revolution in the United States thus took place during a period of Victorian social entrenchment. Family government, which had been subverted during the first few decades after the American Revolution, was firmly restored by the late nineteenth century.

Industrialization and the family

The Amoskeag textile mill (which in the late nineteenth century was the largest textile mill in the world) selectively recruited entire families to move to Manchester, New Hampshire (Hareven 1982). Family recruitment had several benefits for the company. First, by recruiting families the company ensured their future work force because in each family the parents socialized their children to work at the mill. Sometimes the children worked as assistants to their parents and were apprenticed to them directly. More often, the children learned indirectly from their elders about the specialized kinds of textile work (and how to avoid their inherent dangers) and about which factory foremen were the best to work for. Since industrial work was fundamentally different from the subsistence farming most families had known before, family socialization to factory work was crucial to the successful recruitment of new workers. Second, since Amoskeag had built not only the world's largest textile mill but also an entire city to house mill workers, the company had an interest in community stability, which they furthered through family recruitment and the maintenance of family government.

The Amoskeag company especially recruited French Canadian families to the mills, in part because French Canadians had higher fertility and therefore brought more children to Manchester when they migrated. Tamara Hareven notes that there were also "mill girls," single women who worked at the mill and lived in company dormitories. The company subjected these women to various social constraints: no alcohol was permitted and all women had to be in their rooms alone by 10 PM. The company was explicit in its recruitment advertisements that the management treated workers in the same paternalistic way as families treated their own children. Hareven's anal-

ysis of Manchester's textile industry shows how industrialism, rather than undermining the family, relied on and reinforced family mores and family government.

City life certainly presented new challenges to late-nineteenth-century families. Industrialism changed the rhythms and obligations of the workday. Factory work and wage labor changed the economic organization of families (Smelser 1959; Thompson 1963; Tilly and Scott 1987). In preindustrial times all members of the family, including servants, had worked together. Industrialism separated work from the home (Tilly and Scott 1987). By the later stages of industrialism, when factories were larger and children were prevented from working by child labor laws, employment kept family members apart (Smelser 1959). Because of this separation of family members during working hours, and because the first available data on industrialism were workplace data rather than household survey data, scholars like Neil Smelser tended to overstate the impact of industrialism on the internal structure of families. In contrast to workplace data, which suggested something like the disintegration of the family, household survey data such as the United States census (or such as Hareven's retrospective interviews with families of factory workers) show that the internal social structure of the family remained stable through the industrial revolution.

Scholarly perspectives on family change in the industrial revolution

The social sciences as we know them were created in Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by scholars who observed the effects of the industrial revolution. Little wonder, then, that even well into the twentieth century, scholars saw the industrial revolution as the period that divided historical time into before and after. Marx and Engels's sweeping analysis of history made the rise of industrialism and the bourgeois class the crucial fulcrum of historical change ([1848] 1978).

Frédéric Le Play, a politically conservative nineteenth-century Frenchman, thought the industrial revolution was radically undermining the traditional family. He referred to the nuclear family as the "unstable family" because such families sustain themselves in place for only one generation, after which the children moved away and the family, in a traditional sense, disappeared (Le Play [1872]1982). Le Play did not understand how cultural traditions and values could be transmitted from elders to the younger generation in the absence of long-term coresidence and without parental control over their children's inheritance.

Arthur Calhoun, the first true social historian of family life in the United States, published a three-volume social history of the American family in 1917–19 (Calhoun [1917] 1960, [1918] 1960, [1919] 1960). Calhoun is now

long out of print and his influence largely forgotten, but his work provides insight into how American scholars at the end of the industrial revolution viewed the effect of industrialization and modernization on the family. Calhoun's work reflected the common wisdom that in the preindustrial family three or more generations lived together, that preindustrial women married in their early teenage years, and that most preindustrial people lived their entire lives in the communities of their birth.[3] Like many other scholars and cultural observers of his day, Calhoun thought that the industrial revolution had completely remade the family. He was so impressed by the changes of industrialism and urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and, perhaps, carried away by enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution of 1917) that he predicted that marriage, capitalism, and prostitution would soon all be extinct in the United States.

Calhoun's history of the American family was written without the benefit of demographic or household data. The advent of historical household data, either from government censuses or created by researchers from parish registers or other archives, overturned some of the classic assumptions about family and history. Before scholars had historical demographic data at their disposal, they generally assumed that family life in premodern Europe was similar to family patterns that they observed directly in the less industrialized parts of their contemporary world. In other words, they inferred historical changes from geographic and cultural variety, a fallacy that Arland Thornton (2005) describes as "reading history sideways."

Peter Laslett's 1965 book *The World We Have Lost,* with reconstructed family data from parish records, showed that age at first marriage in Europe had been in the 20s as far back as the sixteenth century (Laslett [1965] 1971). John Hajnal (1965) and Laslett both argued that the premodern European family had always been nuclear and that the premodern European extended family (what Le Play referred to as the "stem family") rarely lived together under one roof (Laslett and Wall [1972] 1977). Laslett's research deflated prior assumptions about the way industrialization had affected family structure. Around the same time as Laslett and Hajnal were publishing their influential work on the preindustrial family, several American sociologists also become skeptical of the supposed influence of the industrial revolution on the family (Furstenberg 1966; Goode [1963] 1970).

Scholarship on the history of the family can be divided between those who emphasize the continuity of the Western family system over time (such as Laslett and Hajnal) and those who emphasize changes in family over time (Ariès 1962; Calhoun [1919] 1960; Le Play [1872] 1982). Each side in the debate has produced scholarly and rhetorical excesses. While Laslett's use of parish records and preindustrial censuses revolutionized the study of the preindustrial family, the quality of the data did not always match Laslett's sweeping claims. In many cases the parish registers and premodern cen-

suses did not specify the age of household members, or household members' relationships to one another; Laslett and his group had to make assumptions about family structure and interrelationships, the very matters upon which their empirical claims rested. Lutz Berkner (1975) was especially critical of the data's ability to support Laslett's claim that the premodern European family was exclusively nuclear.[4]

Census data

Even though the United States industrialized relatively recently, individual-level census data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have only been made available to researchers in the last decade. The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, or IPUMS project (Ruggles et al. 2004), based at the University of Minnesota, has converted previously inaccessible census records into an easily accessible, historically coherent data source. Nationally representative census data are clearly an advantage over the fragmentary local data from different sources that Laslett had to work with.

To quantify the changes in family structure over time, I rely on US census microdata from IPUMS 1850–2000 (which excludes 1890 and 1930) as well as published census and vital records reports on such things as life expectancy and divorce. The US census data make clear that the industrial revolution was a time of enormous change, but also in some ways a time of stasis in family life. The mixed record of family change and stasis undercuts the all-or-nothing tendency in the literature on family history. Comparing the demography of the family during the industrial revolution to the remarkable record of family change in the late twentieth century also provides clues to the sources of the more recent and radical changes in family life. Table 1 presents summary statistics for a variety of household characteristics that changed during America's industrial revolution.

The United States industrialized a century after England, and even then the process was far from uniform. New York and Philadelphia were great industrial centers by the mid-nineteenth century, while the western territories and the southern states did not see much industry until decades later (Furstenberg 1966). The Civil War was a stimulus for industrialization in both the North and the South. The North had to use and increase its industrial might to win the war, while in the South the loss of the war shattered the main obstacles to industrialization: the planter aristocracy and slavery. Although industrialization began at different times in different regions of the country, it is possible nonetheless to draw a general picture of industrialization in the United States.

The industrial economy of the nineteenth century was organized around the population centers of the cities, which had access to shipping lanes and the necessary population density to supply wage laborers to the factories. In the mid-nineteenth century, the United States was still mainly

TABLE 1 Changes in selected family characteristics in the United States between the industrial revolution and 2000

Characteristic	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Percent of households who farm	57.6	52.5	44.9	46.8		42.5	37.0	33.1		25.1	16.9	9.5	4.5	2.7	1.8	1.2
Percent of persons living in urban centers	7.9	12.3	13.4	15.0		23.0	27.9	32.0		33.5	31.2	37.0	34.5	29.2	22.3	27.1
Mean household size	5.54	5.3	4.99	4.8		4.56	4.32			3.63	3.36	3.35	3.13	2.73	2.57	2.49
Life expectancy at birth (years)						47.3	50.0	54.1	59.7	62.9	68.2	69.7	70.9	73.7	75.4	77.0
Divorce rate (per 1,000 married couples)		1.2	1.5	2.2	3.0	4.0	4.6	8.0	7.5	8.8	10.2	9.2	14.9	23.9	22.2	20.1
School enrollment rate aged 5–19 (percent)	54.0	57.8	47.5	51.2		54.9	63.4	68.6		74.1		84.3	88.0	88.8	88.9	93.4

SOURCES: Percent of households who farm is the percentage of households with a US-born head that included at least one full-time farmer, from weighted census data (via IPUMS). Percent of persons living in an urban center excludes suburbs and is derived from weighted census microdata (via IPUMS). Household size from weighted census microdata (via IPUMS) for US-born persons in nongroup quarters. Life expectancy for 1900–70 from US Bureau of the Census (1975: 55), and for 1980–2000 from US Bureau of the Census (2003). Divorce rate 1910–2000 from US Bureau of the Census (1975: 49; 2003). Divorce rate 1860–1900 from Jacobson (1959: 90). School enrollment from weighted census microdata (via IPUMS) for US-born persons aged 5–19.

a preindustrial agricultural country. Table 1 shows that in 1850, only 8 percent of Americans lived in cities while 58 percent of American families had at least one full-time farmer in the family. From 1850 to 1920, the cities swelled with immigrants from abroad and from rural America. Over the course of 150 years from 1850 to 2000, the percentage of American families involved in farming dropped from 58 percent to 1 percent.

Along with migration to the cities and the decline of farming, fertility fell and average household size shrank from 5.5 members in 1850 to 4.3 in 1910. The decline in mean household size continued through the twentieth century (except for the 1950s baby boom). Life expectancy improved steadily after 1900, mostly due to a sharp decline in infant mortality. The increasing life span of adults has changed the balance of time adults spend being married, being the parents of minor children, and being widows or widowers (Watkins, Menken, and Bongaarts 1987).

School enrollment grew sharply in the early twentieth century, with the spread of mandatory public primary schooling (Katz 1987; Kett 1977). Table 1 shows a decline in school enrollment for persons aged 5–19 from 58 percent in 1860 to 48 percent in 1870, but this is an artifact of the changing racial composition of the census. In 1860 the black population of the United States was mostly still enslaved and not surveyed. By 1870 the slaves had been emancipated and were therefore surveyed in the census, but white society especially in the South did not furnish blacks with schools, so the black school attendance rate in 1870 was less than 10 percent. School attendance for blacks rose sharply after 1880, reaching 35 percent by 1900. Both black and white school attendance rose after 1900, but black school attendance did not approach white levels until 1980.

Given the decline of farming, the growth of the cities, the rise of divorce, public school's encroachment into the education of the young, increasing life spans, and the decline of fertility, it is easy to see why scholars assumed that the industrial revolution and its attendant demographic effects must have completely reshaped the American family. Both progressives such as Arthur Calhoun and conservative social critics such as Anthony Comstock believed that the traditional family was near extinction at the beginning of the twentieth century (Bates 1995; Calhoun [1919] 1960). Herbert Spencer (1880: 737) wondered, "Is there any limit to this disintegration of the family?"[5]

It is true that the industrial revolution had a noticeable effect on some aspects of family life in the United States. Other aspects of family life, however, were unaffected by industrialization. Age at first marriage remained constant. Most unmarried young adults continued to live with their parents. Heterosexual extramarital cohabitation remained rare. Interracial marriages were few.

Table 2 presents IPUMS data on family characteristics that were static during the industrial revolution, but have changed rapidly after 1960.

TABLE 2 Indicators of the stability or reinforcement of family government in the United States during the industrial revolution and its decline in the second half of the twentieth century

Indicator	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Median age at first marriage (years)													
Women	22.0		22.4	22.4	21.9		22.0	20.8	20.2	21.0	22.5	24.3	25.5
Men	25.4		26.1	25.6	25.4		25.0	23.5	22.5	22.8	24.5	26.6	27.4
Percent of unmarried young adults living with their parents													
Women	68.4		70.2	70.8	73.1		71.1	65.4	56.1	49.6	39.1	38.9	36.2
Men	59.0		60.4	61.1	68.4		74.9	66.0	56.3	51.6	45.3	45.1	41.6
Percent of unmarried young adults who head their own household													
Women	2.4		2.2	2.4	1.8		2.9	5.2	10.8	18.2	30.4	30.4	35.6
Men	4.5		4.6	4.0	2.6		2.7	2.8	7.6	14.5	26.8	24.3	28.0
Percent of young men unattached	5.7		6.5	5.5	3.8		3.5	2.7	4.7	8.9	22.0	27.8	35.1

SOURCES: All data are author's tabulations from weighted census microdata (via IPUMS). Median age at first marriage is calculated for US-born men and women. Unmarried young adults are US born, aged 20–29, never married. Unmarried young adults who head their own households exclude those who lived with their parents. Unattached young men are heads of household aged 20–39, who lived in nongroup quarters, and were neither married nor living with parents.

Median age at first marriage for US-born women remained at about 22 years of age from 1880 to 1940, reflecting little change during the last part of the industrial revolution. Fragmentary local records suggest that women in the New England colonies may have had a median age at first marriage of roughly 22 years (Fischer 1989; Greven 1970).[6] The changes in the age at first marriage for women in the last 50 years are especially impressive given the historical record of the stability of age at first marriage throughout the industrial revolution and even earlier (Cherlin 1992; DaVanzo and Rahman 1993; Thornton and Freedman 1983).[7] Since World War II the age at first marriage for women in the United States has undergone a rapid decline during the baby boom, followed by a rapid increase beginning around 1960. American women are now marrying later than ever before. From 1960 to 2000 the age at first marriage for women climbed sharply, by more than one year per decade, to 25.5 years in 2000.

In colonial times, when unmarried children lived with their parents, late marriages were a sign of children's dependence on their parents (according to Philip Greven 1970). In the American colonies couples could not marry without financial assets even if both sets of parents endorsed the match. The main asset of value was land. In order for young couples to gain title to the land, their parents had to give it to them; this meant the parents had to give up control over their own livelihoods, which many parents were unwilling or unable to do.

In the late twentieth century, late age at first marriage was a result of increased independence. Single young adults no longer live with their parents; young men and women with some education and modest labor market skills can support themselves and do not need to marry in order to survive.

Between 1880 and 1940 the percentage of single young adults (20–29) who lived with their parents rose from 68 percent to 71 percent for women and from 59 percent to 75 percent for men. This rise was due in part to the increasing life span of older Americans (Ruggles 1987). In the early part of the twentieth century, as life expectancy increased, more and more unmarried young adults lived with their parents because parents were more likely to be alive, because living with parents was the normative behavior, and because other practical options were few.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, the long-established norm of intergenerational adult coresidence began to change. After 1950, even as parents were living longer and longer, the percentage of adult children living with their parents began to decline. Between 1950 and 2000, the percentage of single young women who lived with their parents dropped from 65 percent to 36 percent. The modern residential independence of single young adults represents a reversal of the old system of family government, which was based on coresidence and surveillance.[8]

Like all census analyses, the data in Table 2 represent snapshots over time. In 1970 about 50 percent of single US-born women aged 20–29 lived with their parents, and an equal percentage lived separately from their parents. For individuals, separation from parents is a reversible process. In fact, individual young adults may return to the parental home several times before moving out for good. One cannot deduce individual life course paths from census records of reversible events (Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg 1978). One does not know, for instance, how many years any individual spent living on his or her own before marriage. The census data do, however, provide insight into the typical family structure at the time of the census.

Although 68 percent of unmarried young US-born women lived with their parents in 1880, the actual percentage who were subject to some kind of family government was much higher. Most of the remaining single women were either living with other relatives or were servants, lodgers, or boarders in another family's household. In other words, of the 32 percent of young single women who did not live with their parents, fewer than one in ten (or 2.4 percent of all unmarried young women) were heads of their own households. Lodging and boarding families were surrogate families (Modell and Hareven 1973). Adult supervision of servants was usually expected to be at least as strict and as vigilant as adult supervision of their own children. While some scholars have likened servitude to independence (Reher 1998) because it permits residential independence from parents, the preindustrial roots of household service were based on occupational apprenticeship and on strict family government, albeit by the surrogate family. In the American colonies, even some well-to-do families bound their children out as servants, in order to give them occupational training, in order to gain income from their children (the servant's wages were usually paid directly to the servant's parents), and in order to instill discipline (Fischer 1989; Kett 1977; Morgan [1944] 1966).

Household arrangements such as servitude, boarding, and lodging fell into steep decline toward the end of the industrial revolution (Modell and Hareven 1973). Because family government over young adults was maintained in so many different ways in the past, the declining percentage of single young adults who lived with their parents does not convey the full measure of the decline in family government over time.

The prevalence of heads of household who are neither married nor living with their parents is a better measure of independence from family government, because this was the living arrangement that society worked hardest to suppress. Among unmarried young adults in 1880, only 2 percent of women and 5 percent of men headed their own households and did not live with their parents. This percentage declined between 1880 and 1920. The percentage of unmarried young adults who headed their own households began to rise after 1950, growing rapidly until 1980, when 30 per-

cent of young unmarried women and 27 percent of young unmarried men were heads of their own households. If young people living in dormitories and group quarters (who generally cannot be the head of their household) are excluded from the sample, the growth in residential independence for young adults after 1950 would be even greater.

The last row of Table 2 starts with the population of young male heads of households and displays the percentage who were unattached, that is, neither married nor living with their parents. This share, in the neighborhood of 5 percent, changed little from 1880 to 1960, but it increased steadily thereafter, reaching 35 percent in 2000. The same analysis cannot be repeated for women because nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century census enumerators nearly always listed a man as the head of household if a man was present. The census listed women as the head of household only if they were unattached.

American society in the past was careful to ensure that young adults were nearly always subject to family government of some sort. The data on intergenerational coresidence, on unmarried young adults heading their own households, and on unattached young men support Hareven's (1982) argument that the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century did not break families apart. Families moved together from rural areas to the cities, family government was maintained, and transgressive unions continued to be prevented. When unmarried young adults lived apart from their parents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were nearly always subject to the government of a surrogate family. The contrast with the modern period is striking. Living on their own, single men and women in late-twentieth-century America have had the freedom to meet, form romantic unions, and experiment beyond the watchful eyes of parents or parental surrogates in ways that would have been mostly unknown in 1900.[9]

Nontraditional family outcomes

The mate selection system has quantifiable outcomes that can be measured with some consistency from census to census. Noteworthy is the prevalence of mate selection outcomes that were repressed or disfavored in the past. Interracial marriage and heterosexual cohabitation are two forms of unions or living arrangements that can be measured back to the nineteenth century. For the purposes of examining historically comparable outcomes, I ignore types of nontraditional unions that were not captured in the US census during the nineteenth century, such as Hispanic–non-Hispanic unions and same-sex unions.[10]

One measure of the greater flexibility in mate formation in the late twentieth century is the rise of heterosexual cohabitation. Extramarital het-

erosexual cohabitation or coresidence represents the ability of couples to live together without the need to solemnize the union in church and without the formal approval of the state. In most of colonial North America, both parental and community approval were necessary before a young couple could be married (Fischer 1989; Godbeer 2002; Morgan [1944] 1966). In the nineteenth century, religious leaders and social reformers led a long and ultimately successful battle to nullify common law marriages (that is, marriages without formal state approval) and force all couples to come to the county courthouse for an official marriage license (Grossberg 1985). Couples who persisted in living together without a marriage license risked bastardizing and disinheriting their children.

Colonial and nineteenth-century American society exerted control through law, custom, and social pressure to prevent young people from forming unions that were deemed inappropriate. Because marriage was tightly controlled, divorce nearly impossible, and premarital sex criminal (though hardly unknown), the process of mate selection was tightly constrained. Heterosexual nonmarital cohabitation is an unfettered informal union whose prevalence in the late twentieth century is an example of the new freedom young adults have to make their own mate selection choices.

Before 1990, the US Census Bureau did not distinguish between unmarried partners and roommates (Ruggles et al. 2004). "Partner" and "roommate" carry different meanings, of course. The vast majority of roommates in the period under study here have been same-sex roommates. Opposite-sex roommates or boarders were frowned upon in the past because of the appearance of impropriety. Nonmarital heterosexual cohabitation raised the possibility of sexual access, which in turn would have challenged the exclusive status of heterosexual marriage. Same-sex roommates did not raise a specter of impropriety in the nineteenth century in part because Americans at the time were generally naive about homosexuality (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Faderman 1991; Faderman [1981] 1998). To make a historically consistent comparison of heterosexual coresidence and cohabitation over time using census data, it is necessary to include both "partners" and "roommates," which is not so problematic since American society in the past was suspicious enough about the distinction to make either category rather rare.[11] Table 3 tracks the prevalence of cohabiting couples from 1880 to 2000: cohabiting couples are those in which the male householder and his female roommate or partner are unrelated by blood, both unmarried, both living apart from their parents, and of similar ages (both 20–39 years of age). The male householders were all US born (so as to exclude immigrants separated from their partners) and all living in private homes or apartments rather than in group quarters. I include the following relationships among the cohabiters: friends, partners, roommates, boarders, and lodgers, but I exclude domestic employees such as servants or nannies.

TABLE 3 The prevalence of nontraditional family outcomes in the United States, 1880–2000

Outcome	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Percent of young men cohabiting with women	0.1		0.1	0.1	0.1		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	2.8	5.3	7.6
Intermarriages to blacks per 1,000 married whites													
Men	0.5		0.2	0.3	0.3		1.0	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7	1.4	2.0
Men (in legal states only)	0.6		0.2	0.1	0.3		0.7	0.5	0.6				
Women	0.6		0.5	1.5	0.4		1.1	0.8	0.7	1.0	2.3	3.7	5.4
Women (in legal states only)	0.6		0.6	0.8	0.4		0.8	0.6	0.6				
Intermarriages to Asians per 1,000 married whites													
Men				0.0	0.1		0.0	0.1	0.8	1.8	4.8	7.5	9.2
Women				0.1	0.2		0.2	0.2	0.5	1.0	2.0	3.1	3.4

SOURCES: All data are author's tabulations from weighted census microdata (via IPUMS). Male heads of household (the denominator population for heterosexual cohabitation) were aged 20–39, US born, and not living in group quarters. In order to be counted as heterosexual cohabiters, the male householders must have been living with a woman (not related by family) in the same age range, both unmarried, and neither living with their parents. Census categories of cohabitors include friends, lodgers, boarders, roommates, and partners. Whites and blacks include Hispanics for consistency with pre-1970 data. Laws against racial intermarriage were unconstitutional and therefore unenforceable in the United States after 1967 (Wallenstein 2002).

Between 1880 and 1960, the fraction of American-born male heads of household aged 20–39 who were cohabiting with young women remained steady at 0.1 percent, or one per thousand. By the late twentieth century, however, a new pattern emerged. The fraction of young men cohabiting with women outside of marriage rose steadily, reaching 8 percent in 2000.

The other two panels of Table 3 show that interracial unions have increased (as a percentage of married whites) at the same time as the independent life stage has given young adults greater freedom. The trends for black–white intermarriage show no significant increases during the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century. In 1880 fewer than one in a thousand married white men and married white women had black spouses. By 1920, the intermarriage rate had fallen for both white men and white women. Black–white intermarriages during the industrial revolution were equally scarce in states that made racial intermarriage illegal (Wallenstein 2002: 160) and in states that had no legal bar to racial intermarriage. The real barrier to racial intermarriage, in other words, was social rather than legal.

After 1960, the rate of intermarriage between whites and blacks began to rise, especially for white women. By 2000, 5.4 out of every 1,000 married white women were married to black men. The rate of intermarriage between whites and blacks remains low, although the youngest and most recently married couples have much higher rates of intermarriage.

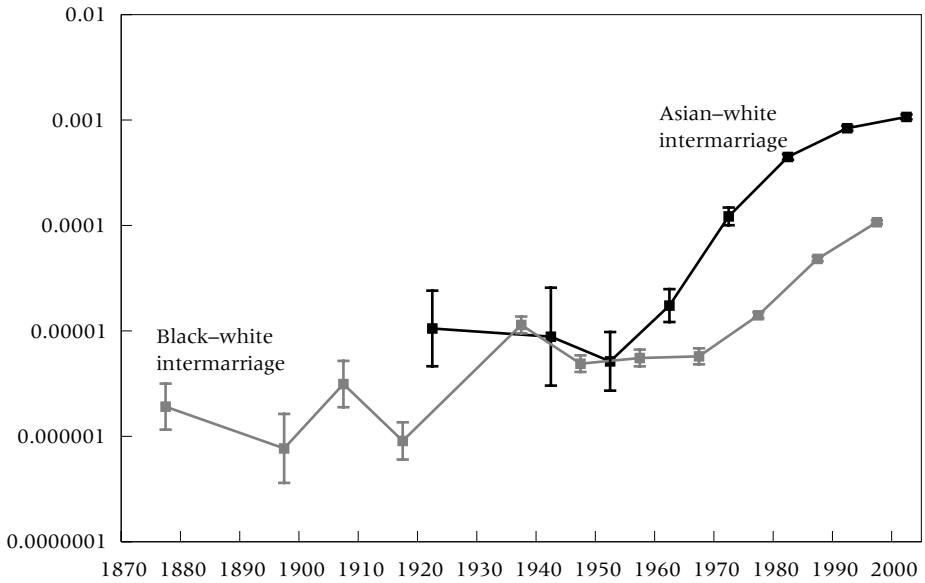
Reliable data on Asian–white intermarriage do not extend back to the nineteenth century because the number of Asians in the United States before 1900 was too small to have an effect on the marriage patterns of whites. Between 1910 and 1950, far fewer than one in a thousand whites were married to Asians, and these numbers did not rise substantially until after 1950. Between 1950 and 2000 the number of whites (especially white men) who were married to Asians rose sharply, reaching 9.2 per thousand married white men in the 2000 census. As with black–white intermarriage, these all-ages data are subject to societal inertia: most married couples in the census are older people who were married at least a decade earlier. The younger generations intermarry at higher rates, and their intermarriage rates are substantially higher than the societal mean. The gender gap in interracial marriage is an interesting subject in its own right. The prevalence of white men in Asian–white intermarriages owes something to the two generations of men who served in the American military in Asia, while the gender gap in black–white intermarriage is less well understood (Jacobs and Labov 2002).

The black and white populations of the United States have been roughly proportionate in size since 1880, but the Asian population has grown dramatically since the mid-1960s. To determine whether the rise in Asian–white marriage over time is a result of the greater freedom of young adults to choose mates rather than the simple result of the growing Asian popula-

tion, I used odds ratios to control for the sizes of each racial group (Rosenfeld 2002; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005).

Figure 1 shows the odds ratios of racial intermarriage, on a logarithmic scale, for US-born persons of all ages. Between 1880 and 1920 the odds ratio of black–white intermarriage fluctuated around 10^{-6}, meaning the odds of being married to a black person were as much as a million times higher for blacks than for whites. Odds ratios for black–white intermarriage rose sharply between 1920 and 1940 and rose again between 1970 and 2000, while Asian–white intermarriage rose sharply from 1950 to 2000.[12] Since the odds ratio controls for the sizes of both groups, it would remain flat if the increase in Asian–white intermarriage were due solely to the increasing Asian population in the United States. The increasing odds ratio for both types of racial intermarriage indicates that both types have increased in part because of declining social barriers against racial intermarriage. The confidence intervals for the intermarriage odds ratios are much wider before 1950 because the counts of racial intermarriage in the census were much lower, so uncertainty about the odds ratio was greater. All of the odds ratios in Figure 1 are significantly less than 1, because racial segregation, social pressure against intermarriage, and legal barriers have all kept the number of racial inter-

FIGURE 1 Odds ratios of racial intermarriage in the United States, 1880–2000, with 95 percent confidence intervals



SOURCE: Weighted census microdata 1880, 1900–20, 1940–2000, via IPUMS. Odds ratios derived from two-race tables, with other races excluded. Data include US-born married persons of all ages. Data points are slightly offset from census years to improve readability.

marriages far below the number that would result from random mixing (Massey and Denton 1993; Moran 2001; Wallenstein 2002). The lower odds ratio of black–white intermarriage reflects the fact that the black–white racial division remains the sharpest social division in American life (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Massey and Denton 1993; White 1987). Although racial intermarriage was suppressed in some states by law, the pattern in all states (including states like New York, which had substantial minority populations and never had laws against racial intermarriage) was similar.

Figure 1 suggests that the industrial revolution in the United States had no effect on black–white intermarriage. The number of racial intermarriages in this period was so low, and the confidence intervals were correspondingly so wide, that it is difficult to identify any intermarriage trend. Since 1960, on the other hand, interracial marriage has increased sharply and significantly.

Discussion

The fact that interracial marriages and nonmarital cohabitation have increased in the United States just as young adults have attained greater independence from their parents and more freedom from family government does not prove that the independence of young adults is the cause of the diversification of types of partnership. Complex social systems resist simple causal theories. Evidence in the scholarly literature has been mounting that the transition to adulthood in the United States has fundamentally changed in the past 40 years (Arnett 2004; Modell 1989; Setterstein, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). Late-twentieth-century America has seen many changes—from the civil rights movement to the women's movement, to liberalization in laws about sexuality and birth control, to the striking down (in 1967) of the remaining laws that prohibited interracial marriage in some states (Koppelman 2002; McAdam 1982; Moran 2001; Wallenstein 2002)—all of which can be counted alternatively as causes or effects of broader social and demographic changes. Some scholars have identified an ideational shift toward greater individuality driving the recent demographic changes in family structure (Lesthaeghe 1983; Shorter 1975).

Although Le Play assumed in the nineteenth century that the nuclear family system in Europe would be too individualistic to transmit cultural norms from generation to generation, nuclear families in the United States managed to reproduce a unitary system of heterosexual same-race marriage from generation to generation without much deviance from the norm until fairly recently. During America's industrial revolution the nuclear family system was subjected to new stresses and changes, including urbanization, factory work, and compulsory schooling for children. Mortality dropped, life expectancy rose, divorce increased, and fertility declined. To some ob-

servers at the time, it seemed as if the entire fabric of family life was being undone. Yet census data reveal that nonmarital heterosexual cohabitation remained rare and interracial marriages were few.

One reason the economic and demographic upheavals of the industrial revolution did not result in a diversity of family forms was that young adults were nearly always subject to family government. Young adults in the late nineteenth century either lived with their parents or were servants in another family's home; or, if they lived in group quarters such as a university or factory-sponsored dormitory, they were subjected to strict rules and regulations.

Arthur Calhoun, who worked in the 1910s, was quite unaware of the extent to which family government over young adults had been maintained during the industrial revolution. Ellen Rothman's (1984) history of courtship in the nineteenth-century United States, based on women's diaries, suggests that well-educated white women believed they had nearly complete freedom to marry whomever they chose. Such women may indeed have had free reign to choose a husband from among their circle of eligible mates. The near absence of interracial marriage and heterosexual cohabitation in the nineteenth century demonstrates, however, that there were strong constraints on the kinds of partnership such women could enter into. Living with one's parents or with surrogate parents must have constrained and shaped the composition of the social circles of young adults in the past. Individuals tend to be most keenly aware of the kind of freedom that allows them to choose between two or three potential mates. They are necessarily less aware of how family structures such as intergenerational coresidence may exclude others from their circle of acquaintances.

Census microdata for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were unavailable to researchers until the 1990s. To the extent that census data provide a new window into the past, the data show that family government and family structure were maintained during the industrial revolution to a far greater degree than scholars or diarists realized at the time. Since the 1960s, family government over young adults in the United States has weakened substantially, and nontraditional unions have rapidly grown in number.

As a potential factor in historical change, young adulthood may seem to be a peculiar stage of the life course on which to focus. It is a transitional stage, between the family of the parents and the new family with a spouse or partner. Progress through the various phases of leaving the parental home, finishing school, starting work, and beginning a new family may entail enough detours and reversals to make young adulthood seem directionless to the young adults themselves and to the researchers studying them (Rindfuss 1991). The protean nature of young adulthood, however, is the very feature that makes young adults potential agents for change in the family system.

Notes

1 What Jefferson could not have foreseen was the DNA tests 170 years after his death that demonstrated his paternity of Hemings's descendants (Ellis 2000).

2 In colonial times sodomy had generally been illegal (and continued to be illegal in some states until the 2003 Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*), but the term "homosexuality" was unknown—that is, there was no language denoting different sexual orientations. The term was a creation of the late nineteenth century (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Foucault [1976] 1990).

3 Calhoun ([1917] 1960); Elder (1981); Goldthorpe (1987); Smelser (1959). For additional arguments from the modernist school, which argued that the industrial revolution was the fundamental engine of change in family history, see Ariès (1962); Shorter (1975).

4 Scholars have also debated the extent to which mortality would have limited the number of three-generation households in any preindustrial household census, an issue first raised by Levy (1965). Wachter, Hammel, and Laslett (1978) used computer simulations to argue that mortality, or demographic constraints more generally, could not explain the absence of three-generation families in preindustrial censuses. Ruggles (1987) used a different computer simulation program, along with different assumptions, to come to the opposite conclusion—that demographic constraints were indeed the reason that preindustrial censuses found so few three-generation families in England (see also Anderson 1980; Ruggles 1994).

5 Spencer was an Englishman, but his concern about the disintegration of the traditional family was most acute for the United States, where he thought the scourge of individuality had reached its apex.

6 Limited data from colonial Virginia suggest that white women in that colony married at around age 17, substantially younger than white women in New England (Fischer 1989: 284).

7 The irreversibility of the transition to first marriage allows for inferences about the age at first marriage from census data with reasonable precision. The literature of historical demography starts with a different kind of data (marriage records from churches or from town halls) and arrives at a different measure of age at marriage, the average age at marriage for those who marry. The average age at marriage tends to be higher than the median age at first marriage because the reconstructed historical demographic data are usually unable to discern first marriages from second or third marriages, which occur later in life. Additionally, the census data calculations of the median age at first marriage take into account the population that never marries, a population that is missing from the town hall registry of marriage licenses granted. For examples of age at marriage from reconstructed parish records, see Greven (1970) and Laslett ([1965] 1971; 1977).

8 It is also interesting to note that whereas young men had more residential autonomy from their parents at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the end of the twentieth century young women were less likely than young men to live with their parents. The independent life stage has been empowering to women, who were especially constrained by the previously dominant patriarchal family forms.

9 Some contemporary young adults who live on their own are financially dependent on their parents (Schoeni and Ross 2005). Even if the parents pay the bills for higher education (as most do) and even if college students live with their parents (as some still do) while attending school, college nevertheless paves the way for financial and social independence after graduation. College education gives young adults labor market skills, and the labor market skills enable them to work outside of the family business or trade in cases where one still exists.

10 Hispanicity was introduced into the census in 1970 (Bean and Tienda 1987; Ruggles et al. 2004). Same-sex cohabitation was first coded distinctly from same-sex roommates in 1990. Since most roommates are same-sex roommates rather than romantic partners, the Census Bureau's pre-1990 policy of combining partners with roommates made same-sex cohabiting partners invisible. Research on His-

panic–non-Hispanic unions and same-sex unions suggests that these types of nontraditional couples are rapidly increasing in numbers (D'Emilio 1993; Rosenfeld 2002), consistent with the trends I describe below for interracial married couples and heterosexual cohabiting couples.

11 In the 1970s, the US Census Bureau introduced a new and unwieldy phrase for this theoretically unwieldy mixture of partners and roommates: "People of the Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters," or POSSLQ.

12 In Figure 1 the odds ratios of intermarriage and confidence intervals are calculated individually for each census year and each racial intermarriage pairing. Black–white intermarriage, for instance, is the cross-product of the 2 x 2 cross-tabulation of husband's race and wife's race, excluding racial groups other than white and black. Figure 1 includes US-born married persons of all ages. Limiting the data to younger married couples or including foreign-born persons results in a similar pattern. Even with all ages included, there were not enough Asian–white intermarriages in the census prior to 1920 to allow for a meaningful calculation of the odds ratio. Odds ratios are based on household-weighted census data, whereas confidence intervals are based on unweighted counts (Agresti 1990; Clogg and Eliason 1987).

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