
THE RACIAL CROSSOVER IN FAMILY COMPLEXITY IN THE UNITED STATES*

FRANCES K. GOLDSCHIEDER AND REGINA M. BURES

This article examines the evolution of the black extended family by documenting a black-white crossover in the proportions of unmarried adults living in complex households after the middle of the twentieth century. We demonstrate significant racial differences in the trends in complex household residence over the life course, characterized by far greater declines in complex living among whites, particularly at younger ages. In this context, the higher level of family extension that recent research has found typifies black families is both a relatively new phenomenon and one that is not just limited to single-parent families; it characterizes all ages, those with and without children, and men as well as women.

It is a near truism in current research on family structure that black persons in the United States are much more likely than white persons to live in extended-family households (Angel and Tienda 1982; Beck and Beck 1989; Farley and Allen 1987; Tienda and Angel 1982). This greater level of family complexity is normally interpreted as part of a larger pattern, in which black families appear to be more closely focused on kin ties, particularly between women and their children, but to have weaker bonds between adult men and women. Evidence of the strength of ties between women and their adult children comes not just from the high levels of intergenerational coresidence but also from presumed high levels of intergenerational exchange (Stack 1975). The evidence for the weakness of the conjugal tie among blacks is their late age at marriage and the high risk of divorce among those who marry (Jaynes and Williams 1989; McLanahan and Casper 1995). Some research on black family patterns has suggested that this constellation of differences is a long-standing one, with possible roots in West Africa, the region from which many of the ancestors of black Americans originated (Morgan et al. 1993; Sudarkasa 1981).

Yet many dimensions of family structure have been changing rapidly, suggesting that many of the differences between black and white families may be in flux as well. Researchers have begun to untangle the changes that have occurred in the black family, examining them both within the black population and in the context of changes in white American family patterns. An emergent literature indicates that recent patterns may not be long standing on some family dimensions and perhaps on many. Research in the 1990s demonstrated black-white crossovers on three family-related dimensions: age at marriage (Haines 1996; Koball 1998), young adults leaving home (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1997), and coresidence with kin among adults aged 60 and older (Kramarow 1995;

*Frances Goldscheider, Department of Sociology, Brown University, Maxcy Hall, Box 1916, Providence, RI 02912; E-mail: Frances_Goldscheider@Brown.edu. Regina M. Bures, Department of Sociology, University at Albany, State University of New York. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Center Grant P30-HD28251 to the Population Studies and Training Center, Brown University, and Grant P50-HD12639 to the Labor and Population unit of RAND, both from the National Institutes for Child Health and Human Development. In addition, Dr. Bures acknowledges the support of NIA Training Grant T32-AG00243 to the University of Chicago. Thanks are also due to Irene Gravel, Ann Biddlecom, and James McNally, who helped to organize the data; our colleagues at Brown, particularly Calvin Goldscheider and Dennis Hogan; Steven Ruggles; and three anonymous reviewers.

Ruggles and Goeken 1992). These crossovers demonstrated that, in the past, blacks were more likely than were whites to leave home and marry at young ages and were less likely to coreside with other family members at older ages.

Sorting out the inconsistencies in the research evidence on racial differences in family patterns is particularly challenging: the past 50 years have seen rapid changes both in the social circumstances of the black population and in the American family. Long concentrated in the rural South, a vast number of blacks moved to northern cities during the industrial boom of the 1940s through the 1960s (Tolnay 1997) and then shared disproportionately in those cities' industrial decline (Frey and Speare 1988; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987). The post-World War II period also saw the transformation of the living arrangements of unmarried persons, with rapid declines in the likelihood of living with relatives at all ages, but particularly in young adulthood (Goldscheider 1997; White 1994) and among the elderly (Kramarow 1995; Ruggles 1996).

Using data from the U.S. Census, we examine changes in the likelihood of living in a complex, extended-family household. We frame our analyses by examining the earlier years of the twentieth century and then focus on changes between 1940, when more than 70% of the black population was concentrated in the rural South, and 1990, when less than half remained in the South and were far less rural, wherever they lived. We describe the living arrangements of unmarried persons by race, demonstrating that before the latter part of the twentieth century, unmarried black adults of all ages were less likely to live in extended families than were whites. This racial crossover in family complexity among the unmarried is not just a phenomenon of a specific portion of the life course; it characterizes nearly every age group. Furthermore, it is tied neither to southern origin and the migration out of the South nor to unmarried parenthood. By examining this racial crossover over multiple points in time, we move the discussion of changes in family patterns beyond a simple two-point comparison and focus on changes in the living arrangements of unmarried persons that have occurred during the period under study.

BACKGROUND

For an analysis of change in black-white differences in living arrangements over time, it is important to focus not only on what happened to the black population over this period but also on the rapid changes in living arrangements of the population as a whole. Changes in living arrangements have dramatically affected every portion of the adult life course. Some family trends have primarily characterized whites: the great decline in age at marriage linked with the baby boom of 1946–1962, and the even greater rise in marriage ages after the 1970s disproportionately characterized whites, not blacks (Rodgers and Thornton 1985). Other family trends, such as the increase in single-parent families starting in the 1960s, were led by blacks. Furthermore, blacks, long concentrated in the rural South, disproportionately experienced the Great Migration out of the South to northern cities. Changes in adult living arrangements in the post-World War II period were also dramatic, and the extent to which they were shared by blacks and whites is the focus of this article.

Dimensions of Changes in Living Arrangements in the Twentieth Century

The shift in patterns of living arrangements in the United States toward greater residential independence over the second half of the twentieth century has been well documented (see, for example, Kobrin 1976; Kramarow 1995; Michael, Fuchs, and Scott 1980; Pampel 1983; Ruggles 1994b; Sandefur and Tuma 1987; Santi 1988). Adults were increasingly living in simple households—either in two-adult, married-couple households or in one-adult households—with children or alone. For example, in 1910, only 12% of widows aged 65 and older were living alone, compared with nearly 70% in 1990 (Kramarow 1995).

These changes in living arrangements have been linked to demographic, economic, and normative changes favoring independence, particularly for older adults. Demographically, the evidence suggests that declines in mortality have been accompanied by declines in morbidity (Crimmins, Reynolds, and Saito 1999) and that the availability of home-based services has improved (Krivo and Mutchler 1989). Although declines in mortality have resulted in a growing number of persons surviving into the later years, increasing the availability of relatives with whom to live, declines in morbidity have increased the ability of those in poor health to care for their own needs without moving in with others. Hence, changes in demographic factors over the past several decades have shaped the population's choices of living arrangements.

Research on late twentieth-century living arrangements has shown that greater income has strongly reduced the likelihood that individuals will share housing (e.g., Angel and Tienda 1982; Kobrin 1981).¹ Trends in income, however, differed among adults of different ages. Retirement programs have increased the resources available to older persons, so that more can afford continued economic and residential independence from children or other relatives if they so desire (Easterlin 1987). At the same time, however, young adults experienced a slow growth in wages and greater income inequality (Levy and Murnane 1992), a shift that likely increased their need to share housing. The stagnation in the relative earnings of young adults may also have reinforced the importance of older persons' income in keeping adult children coresident. Hence, while it may have been economically feasible for older persons to be independent and purchase privacy, their resources had become more important to their adult children.

Lifestyle and normative changes may have reinforced these demographic and economic patterns, increasing the priority given to privacy and independence (Bellah et al. 1985) and age-segregated leisure-time activities (Robinson and Godbey 1997). Few older persons want or expect to become dependent on their families, residentially or otherwise, as they age (Lopata 1973; Wister and Burch 1987), although there is more support for coresidence with young adults (Goldscheider and Lawton 1998).

Approaching Racial Differences in Living Arrangements

Research on the black family has been subjected to wildly discrepant interpretations, from the Moynihan report (Moynihan 1965) to the present, as well as to acrimonious controversies (McAdoo 1980; Rainwater and Yancey 1967; Stevenson 1995; Wilson 1987, 1991). Wilson (1991) asserted that such controversies have led to an avoidance of analysis, with the result that not nearly enough research has been conducted to resolve the discrepancies. Furthermore, relatively little data have been available for extensive analyses of changes over time.

This historical complexity is exacerbated by the dramatic transformations that took place in the black community in the twentieth century. Although slavery formally ended during the Civil War (1863), local legislation and practices ensured not only that few blacks left the South but also that their lives changed relatively little, so that blacks remained an exploited, uneducated, agrarian labor force for nearly a century thereafter (Woodward 1966). The closing of immigration, however, provided new opportunities for blacks in the North, particularly during the more-than-full employment period of World War II (Franklin 1997), and led to the massive migration of blacks out of the South to northern, industrial cities. Both intergenerational and gender relationships were disrupted

1. Other evidence suggests that this relationship was weaker or even reversed in the nineteenth century. For example, although wealthy white widowed men were more likely than less-wealthy white widowed men to live with others in 1910, by 1960 they were more likely to live alone. Ruggles (2001) argued that at least part of this decline in intergenerational coresidence resulted from the increased affluence of the younger, not the older, generation.

as migration separated the generations and the partnership of farming couples came to an abrupt end.

As more and more blacks moved north, the southern migrants were often wrongly blamed for increasing urban woes, and discrimination against blacks increased. Researchers have debunked the notion that the movement of blacks out of the rural South and into northern cities led to greater social dysfunction (Tolnay 1999) and poverty (Long 1974; Long and Heltman 1975) in northern cities. Nevertheless, life in the northern cities was not easy for many southern migrants, whose background and education normally prepared them only for the unskilled, industrial jobs of that time, jobs that would vanish rapidly in the decades that followed. The 1960s programs aimed directly at ending racial discrimination, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1965 (Franklin 1997), created new opportunities for many blacks and fueled the growth of the black middle and professional classes. But as the rising black middle class sought to adapt their family lives to their new status, the poor sought to maintain their families with few resources.

Most of the historical analyses that have focused on the black family have been based on studies of a single locale in a limited period, normally under slavery (e.g., Kulikoff 1986; Malone 1992; Manfra and Dykstra 1985; Stevenson 1995). Such studies have provided no evidence of change and have rarely compared blacks with whites in the particular area (cf. especially Gutmann 1976). Studies that have argued for the continuity of black family patterns have been based on comparisons between the situation in the late twentieth century and a single, disconnected, point in time, such as 1910 (e.g., McDaniel 1994; Morgan et al. 1993). This strategy is particularly problematic for understanding changes in family patterns over the course of the twentieth century, a period marked by wide swings in patterns of family formation (Bean, Mineau, and Anderton 1990; Coale 1967; Haines 1996).

The most persuasive evidence of continuing black-white differences in family patterns has focused on a single dimension: the persistence of differences in out-of-wedlock parenthood (Ruggles 1994a). It is unclear how this dimension would affect racial differences in family extension. The great growth in single-parent families that occurred for both blacks and whites, but particularly for blacks, might have increased family extension if unmarried parents were more likely to coreside with other relatives (particularly parents). If so, the current patterns of high family extension for blacks may primarily reflect this change. We consider this issue as well.

There is increasing evidence, however, that black family patterns of intergenerational coresidence have been changing rapidly, not only in absolute terms, but also in relation to those of whites. Research that has found racial crossovers in age at leaving home and age at marriage among the young and in the living arrangements of the widowed, however, may reflect more general shifts in black-white family patterns. The results for marriage and leaving home focus attention on young adulthood, whereas those on widows seem to signal a major change at the older end of the adult life course. Although these results have not focused explicitly on intergenerational coresidence, such coresidence is clearly implied by trends in leaving home: even in recent decades, a substantial proportion of unmarried young adults have lived with their parents (Goldscheider 1997), and high proportions of unmarried elderly persons who were not living alone were living with their adult children (Sandefur and Tuma 1987).

Using retrospective data on marriage dates, Koball (1998) was able to replicate the racial crossover in ages of marriage that Haines (1996) found in contemporaneous data. Both approaches suggested that a crossover occurred in about 1950. Koball's analysis indicated that the move out of the South was a major factor in increasing the marriage ages of black men—men who lived in the South at age 16 married at much younger ages—and introducing this variable greatly reduced the size and significance of interaction terms between race and cohort. Koball also examined the effect of controlling for

levels of employment and found that the loss of jobs did not explain the disparate trends by race. These findings suggest the importance of examining southern background.

Kramarow (1995) examined the living arrangements of elderly widows (aged 65 and older) between 1910 and 1990 and found a racial crossover for men between 1950 and 1960. Introducing controls for employment, home ownership, and characteristics of communities did not reduce the size of the crossover. However, unlike our analysis, hers did not control for previous southern residence.

This evidence of racial crossovers in intergenerational coresidence at the two extreme ends of adulthood, from leaving home to old age, suggests that the higher level of family extension characterizing black families in recent research (Cherlin 1992; McAdoo 1998; Taylor et al. 1997; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995) may be a new development for all ages. This possibility is reinforced by research on living arrangements that was based on data from the 1960 and 1970 censuses, which were unanimous in finding inconsequential black-white differences when background characteristics were controlled (Carliner 1974; Ross and Sawhill 1976; Soldo 1977). The research presented here was designed to examine this possibility and to try to account for it.

DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS

Data

We analyzed data from the U.S. censuses of 1900 through 1990, focusing primarily on 1940–1990, a period of American history that extends from the final years of the Great Depression to the recent past. During this period, both family patterns and the black community's structural position in American society changed substantially. We focused on this period through the lens of our key concept, household complexity, which is essentially family extension.

Our data were drawn from U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Samples of 1960 through 1990; from the 1940 and 1950 Public Use Samples produced by the U.S. Census Bureau under the direction of scholars at the University of Wisconsin (Winsborough, Taeuber, and Hauser 1978); and from the Integrated Public Use Samples (IPUMS) for 1900, 1910, and 1920 (Ruggles and Sobek et al. 1997). The 1940 and 1950 censuses collected full information on all individuals but sampled individuals within households for additional information. The later samples were household based. Our analytic sample represents unmarried adults aged 25 and older, excluding those who were not native born (who were less likely to have relatives living in the United States) and those who were living in institutions.

Measures

We studied the living arrangements of unmarried adults, whose coresidence with other family members determined household complexity, our dependent variable in the analysis. A complex household is defined as a household that contains a family in which there are two or more adults who are related but not married to each other and hence could reasonably be expected to live separately. Many households include married couples, as when an unmarried 26 year old lives with his or her married parents or an elderly person lives with a married son or daughter. Unmarried adults with or without children who are living with no related adults are defined as living in "simple" households. The most common form of household complexity is that in which parents live with their adult children (78% in 1990; slightly less in earlier years). The rest live with others of the same generation (age differences of 15 years or less), most of whom are siblings. Another 2%–3% of the unmarried reside in mixed-generation complex family households (with grandparents or aunts or uncles). The distribution of complex family household types is similar for blacks and whites, with the substantial majority living in parent–adult child families.

This conceptualization of family living arrangements is based on the work of Ermisch and Overton (1985). According to Ermisch and Overton's "minimal household unit" approach, married couples are considered one unit because spouses usually live together; children are treated similarly because they typically do not live separately from their parents while they are young. Ermisch and Overton considered children to be potentially separable units when they reach age 15. We took a more familistic tack by using age 25 to establish a potentially separate unit for children. Of course, many young people live separately from their parents, residing in dormitories or barracks, marrying young, or living on their own. Descriptive analyses of the data, however, indicate that the vast majority of never-married persons younger than age 25 in each census year lived with their parents, and we wanted to be clear about the central years of the nest-leaving process, which has been studied separately (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1997).

Hence, we analyzed the status of unmarried adults aged 25 or older. Our analytic sample was limited to black and white native-born unmarried adults. On the basis of the census variable reflecting the individual's relationship to the household head, we excluded inmates and residents of group quarters. Because the main purpose of this analysis was to compare racial differences in patterns of change in complex family living across the life course, the key independent variables of interest were measures of age, race, and time. Over time, young adults have become more likely to leave home and live outside the family before marriage, and the elderly have become less likely to coreside with their adult children.

We distinguished between the different stages of the family life cycle by measuring age as a categorical variable: 25–34, 35–44, 45–54 (reference), 55–64, 65–74, and 75 or older. We measured race as a household-level indicator, based on the high levels of intrafamily racial correlation. We coded race as a dichotomous variable (blacks = 1, whites = 0) and excluded all others, who were a small percentage of the total during the first half of the period we studied. Census year was measured with a series of indicator variables representing 1950 to 1990, with 1940 as the reference year. A full set of the interactions among age, race, and census year was included in our analyses.

We included control variables as proxies for normative differences (gender), economic resources (education, income), and the availability of adult children and other kin (marital history, migration). We coded gender as a dichotomous measure (with female = 1). The level of economic well-being, or the ability to buy privacy, was represented by measures of education and income. Education was measured using categorical variables for the highest year of schooling completed: elementary school, some high school, high school graduate (reference), and some college or more. The income values were adjusted relative to 1982–1984 dollars (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2000) and standardized by census year. Relative income was a continuous measure representing the relative location of an individual's income in the sample's income distribution and measured in terms of the number of standard deviations from the mean level of income.

Marital history was represented by a categorical variable (coded 0 for respondents who were never married and 1 for those who were formerly married). The conjunction of marriage and childbearing means that formerly married persons were more likely to have adult children with whom to live than were never-married persons. But more than availability is involved; proximity is also an important consideration for determining whether a family member may share a household. Large-scale migrations have disruptive effects on families at both origin and destination. To assess the impact of the Great Migration on changes in living arrangements for blacks and to see if the impact differed from the effects for whites, we included measures that reflected lifetime mobility between the South and other regions of the United States. Individuals who resided outside the South and were born outside the South were the reference category. They were compared with (1) those who were born in and resided in the South, (2) those who resided in the South but were

Table 1. Means for Selected Variables Used in the Analyses

Measure	Total	White	Black
Ages 25–34	27.2	26.7	29.8
Ages 35–44	16.8	16.0	20.9
Ages 45–54	14.1	13.7	16.2
Ages 55–64	14.5	14.6	13.7
Ages 65–74	15.1	15.7	12.1
Age 75 and older	12.3	13.3	7.3
Not South and Born Outside the South	59.6	67.2	20.4
South and Born Outside the South	5.0	5.6	2.3
Not South and Born in the South	7.7	4.5	24.1
South and Born in the South	27.7	22.7	53.2
Female	61.9	61.4	64.3
Formerly Married	61.8	60.9	67.2
Elementary School	33.3	31.2	44.3
Some High School	16.4	15.7	19.9
High School Graduate	24.6	25.6	19.0
Some College	25.7	27.5	16.7
Income	10,330	10,954	7,223
<i>n</i>	165,760	139,515	26,245

Source: U.S. Census Microdata, 1940–1990.

Notes: Analyses are based on currently unmarried, native-born, black and white individuals aged 25 and older. For income, the population means are presented. The standardized mean for income is 0 with a standard deviation of 1. All means were weighted.

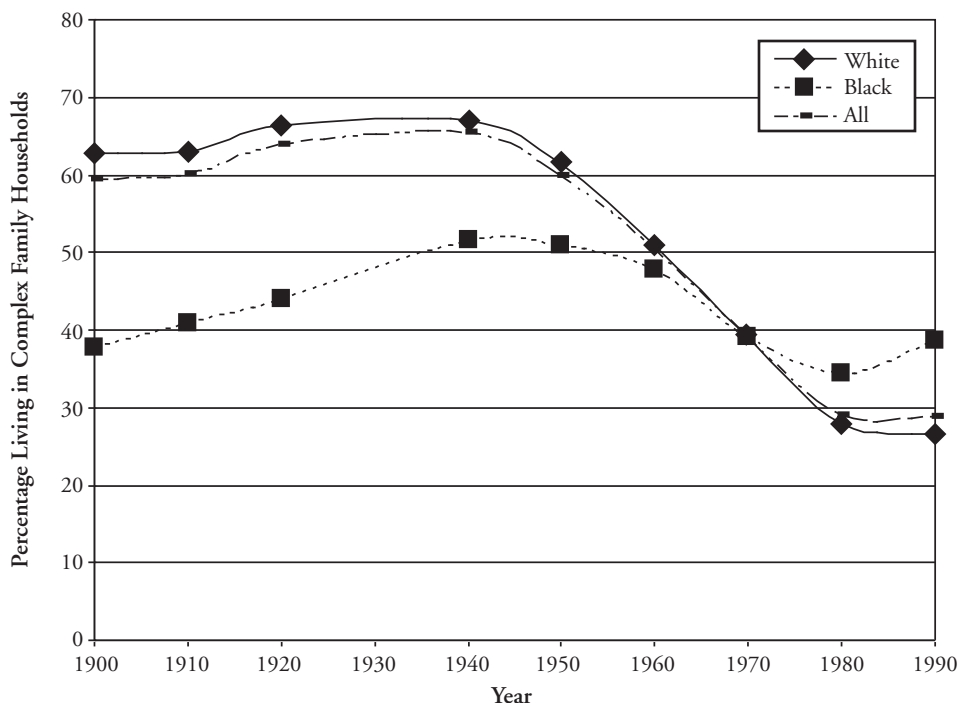
born outside the South, and (3) those who resided outside the South but were born in the South. The means of the independent variables are summarized in Table 1, for the total population and for blacks and whites separately.²

Methods

We begin by reporting trends in the bivariate relationship between living in a complex family household and race. To explore the multivariate dimensions underlying these trends, we used logistic regression to predict the likelihood that an individual resided in a complex family household. For unmarried blacks and whites, we predicted the likelihood of living in a complex family household versus living separately from adult family members. We first examined the odds of living in a complex family household by race for the entire study period. We then combined our black and white samples and tested for interactions among race, census year, and each age group.

2. In the U.S. census, the sample design varies by year. For 1950–1980, our samples are representative (weights = 1). For 1940 and 1990, we used sample weights that were normalized by dividing each observation weight by the appropriate population average. The results presented in Table 1 and our subsequent analyses were weighted in this manner.

Figure 1. Percentage of Unmarried Adults Living in Complex Family Households, by Race, 1900–1990



Note: See the text for a detailed description of the sample.

Sources: Authors' calculations from the IPUMS and U.S. Census Microdata samples.

RESULTS

Describing Trends

What were the changes in family extension among blacks and whites? Does the pattern of higher complexity among blacks found in recent analyses characterize the period as a whole? The simple answers to these questions are shown in Figure 1. In this figure, we extend our time frame back to 1900 to demonstrate the extent to which the living arrangements of unmarried adults changed over the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1940, unmarried adults became somewhat more likely to reside in complex family households, probably reflecting increases in intergenerational survivorship (McNally 1994; Watkins, Menken, and Bongaarts 1987), together with the exigencies of the Great Depression.

By 1940, 65% of unmarried adults lived in complex households, but this level was short lived. In 1960, approximately half did so, and this household choice decreased to less than a third (29%) by 1990. The 1950–1980 period saw the most rapid change; there was stability between 1980 and 1990. Living separately from adult kin, in a simple household, either alone or with no relatives other than minor children, emerged as the dominant form for unmarried adults (and for the married adults they left behind).

Our results for 1970 and later show the expected pattern of greater family complexity among blacks, but this was clearly not the case earlier. The high point for family extension

in this series was 1940, having increased through both prosperity and depression since 1900. Nevertheless, in 1940, unmarried black adults were much less likely to live in complex family households than were unmarried white adults, with barely 50% of blacks living in such families, compared with nearly 70% of whites. By 1990, 39% of unmarried blacks, but less than 30% of unmarried whites, lived in complex family households.

Hence, the decline in extended-family living that began in 1940 appears to be much more characteristic of whites than of blacks: the decline for whites was about 40 percentage points, with a continuing slight decline between 1980 and 1990. In contrast, the maximum decline for blacks was less than 20 percentage points, which ended in 1980 and was followed by a substantial bounce back—by more than a quarter of the decline of the previous 40 years—between 1980 and 1990. This crossover in complex family living occurred between 1960 and 1970, the same period in which the early studies that documented few differences between black and white families were based.

Is this crossover a characteristic of all age groups, or did the life courses of blacks and whites become more different over time? Or does increasing family complexity among blacks reflect a strategy that provided support for children? We next address these issues and demonstrate that this crossover was characteristic of all age groups and of those living in households with and without children.

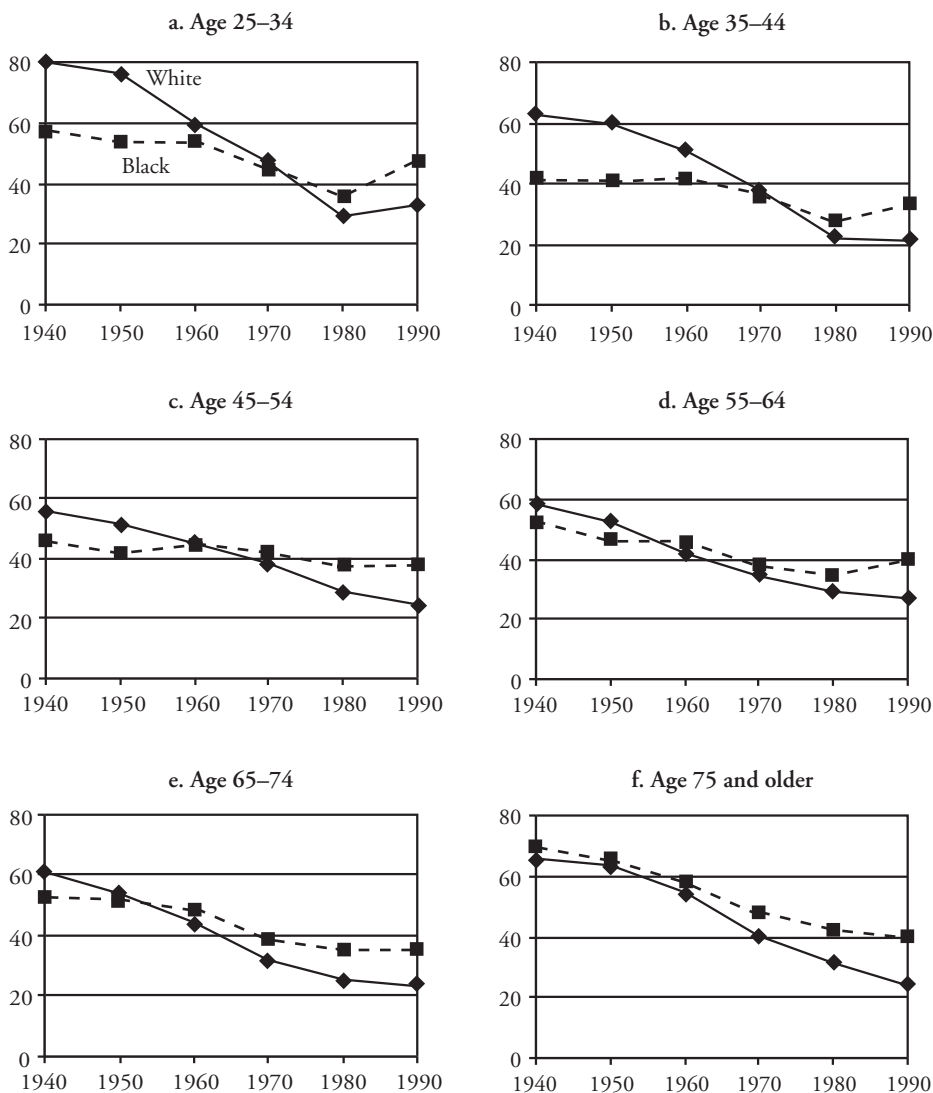
Figure 2 presents the percentage of unmarried persons who were living in complex households by race and age for the 1940 to 1990 period. It demonstrates that whether one is studying late nest leaving (ages 25–34), the major years of middle adulthood (35–44 and 45–54) or later middle age (55–64 and 65–74), the pattern of crossover appears. Unmarried black adults were less likely than unmarried white adults to be living in complex family households early in the period and were more likely to do so later. There is a clear tendency for the crossover to have occurred at earlier dates for older adults. For unmarried persons younger than age 45, the black-white crossover occurred between 1970 and 1980; for those aged 45–54, it occurred between 1960 and 1970; and for those aged 55–74, it occurred between 1950 and 1960.

Only among older adults (aged 75 and older) is there no conclusive evidence of crossover. Unmarried white and black adults aged 75 and older were about equally likely to live in complex family households in 1940 and 1950, but the censuses after 1950 show increased divergence. Data from the IPUMS suggest that for those aged 75 and older, a crossover occurred during the 1920–1940 period (data not shown). Nevertheless, in the post-World War II period, even those aged 75 and older conformed to the general pattern of increasingly greater complexity among blacks relative to whites that was characteristic of the younger adults.

The relationship between the presence of minor children and living in a complex household by race is presented in Figure 3 for the same period. Figure 3 shows, separately, the trends in family complexity for households with and without children present, and in each case the trends replicate those shown in Figure 1. Through 1960, unmarried black adults (both men and women) were less likely to reside in complex households than were unmarried white adults, whether or not children were present in the household. By about 1970, unmarried blacks were more likely than unmarried whites to reside in complex households—whether children were present or not.

Both black and white unmarried adults living with minor children were more likely to live in complex family households than were those with no such children, with differences of about 10 percentage points. However, it is clear that the disproportionate increase in single parenthood among blacks has contributed little to the overall pattern of crossover. The secular trend is similar for all four groups, with a greater decline for whites than for blacks among both those with and those without children.

Did other changes in the lives of unmarried blacks and whites contribute to the crossover? In particular, what were the roles of the Great Migration from the South, changing

Figure 2. Percentage Living in Complex Households, by Race and Age, 1940–1990

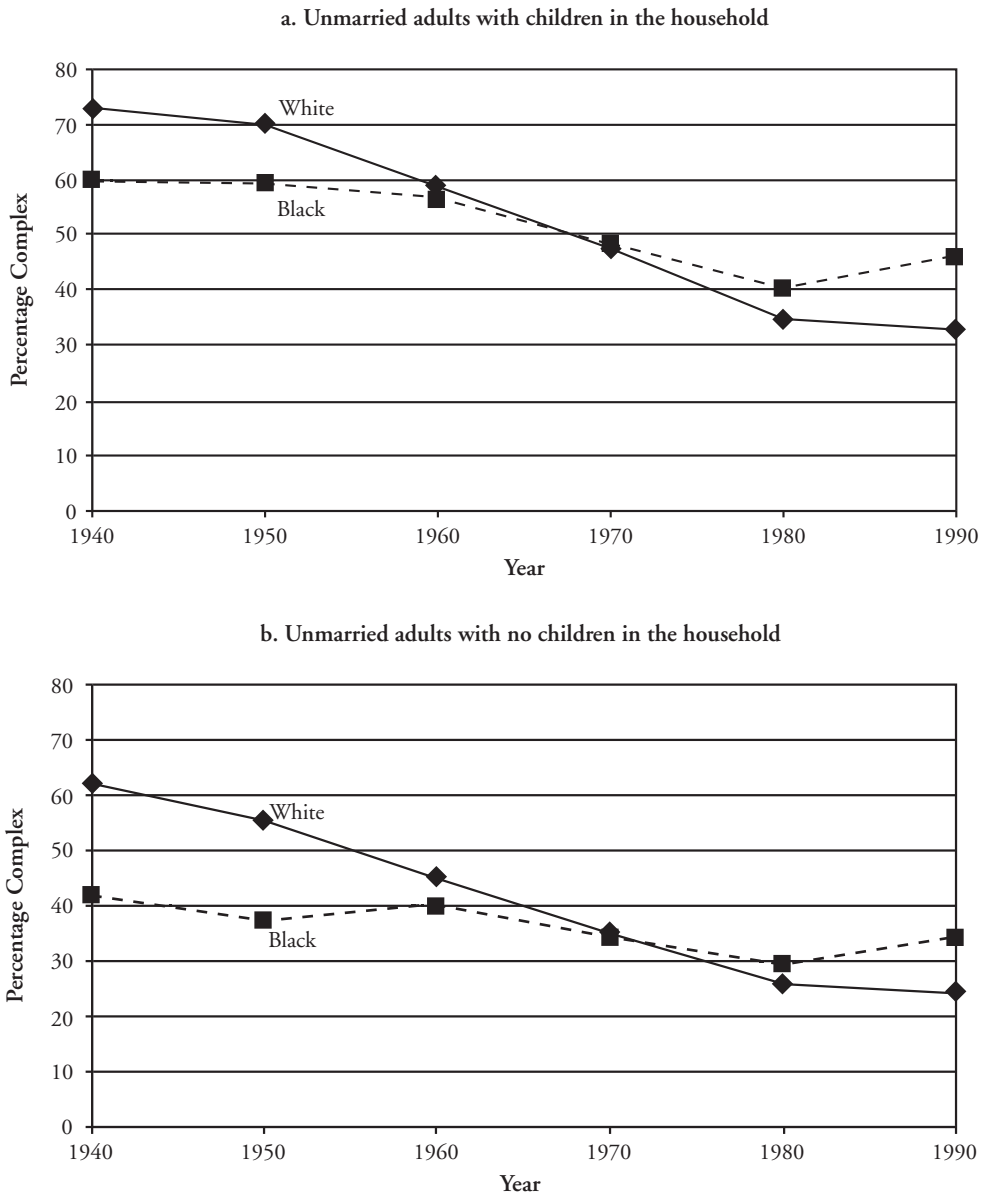
Source: Authors' calculations based on the analytic sample.

marital patterns, increasing educational status, and rising incomes? To address these dimensions, we conducted multivariate analyses for 1940–1990, when both the decline in household complexity and the racial crossover occurred.

Odds of Living in a Complex Household

We present the results of our first analysis in Table 2, which shows, separately for blacks and whites, the odds of living in a complex family household. We controlled for southern

Figure 3. Effect of Single Parenthood on Living in a Complex Household, by Race and Year, 1940–1990



Source: Authors' calculations based on the analytic sample.

birth, southern residence, and migration in and out of the South, as well as for census year, age, and the set of controls for gender, marital status, education, and income. This table demonstrates that the differences between blacks and whites for many effects were relatively small, indicating (1) that it is reasonable to pool these two populations

Table 2. Odds of Living in a Complex Family Household, by Race

Variable	White	Black
1940	1.00 (ref)	1.00 (ref)
1950	0.89**	0.97
1960	0.58**	0.96
1970	0.39**	0.70**
1980	0.25**	0.51**
1990	0.23**	0.62**
Ages 25–34	1.42**	1.09*
Ages 35–44	1.00	0.77**
Ages 45–54	1.00 (ref)	1.00 (ref)
Ages 55–64	1.00	1.02
Ages 65–74	0.93**	0.98
Age 75 and older	1.25**	1.38**
Not South and Born Outside the South	1.00 (ref)	1.00 (ref)
South and Born Outside the South	0.69**	0.69**
Not South and Born in the South	0.75**	0.83**
South and Born in the South	1.24**	1.24**
Female	0.98*	0.98
Formerly Married	0.41**	0.60**
Relative Income	0.78**	0.75**
Elementary School	1.05**	0.88**
Some High School	0.95**	0.94
High School Graduate	1.00 (ref)	1.00 (ref)
Some College	0.56**	0.86**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

and (2) where important interactions are likely to be present. Several important differences between the two groups are apparent, but it is interesting that migration out of the South is not one of them. The effects of having been born or living either in the South or outside the South and of having moved away from the South are startlingly similar for blacks and whites. For each group, those who were still living in their region of birth were much more likely to be living in complex family households than were those who made an interregional move, with small differences among movers out of the South. Clearly, migration reduced family complexity by separating the generations, and this effect was as powerful for blacks as for whites.

Both blacks and whites who were born and living in the South had the highest levels of family complexity, with a 24% greater likelihood of living in such a family arrangement than nonmovers outside the South. Whites who had left the South had dramatically lower odds of living in a complex family household (about 25% lower) than did both blacks and whites who were born and raised outside the South, although for blacks, the migration effect was somewhat weaker (a 17% decrease). Nevertheless, it is clear that

“black migration” did not have effects that differed in any way from patterns of living arrangements that resulted from “white migration.” Furthermore, it did not produce the increase in black family extension that many had posited (Frazier 1966; Lemann 1991; but see also Tolnay 1998): black migrants from the South to the North were less likely to live in complex family households than were blacks who were born and living outside the South.

The control variables also show fairly parallel effects for the two groups, with some tendency toward a greater impact for whites than for blacks. Marital status mattered more for whites than for blacks (cf. Preston, Lim, and Morgan 1992), with those who were formerly married significantly less likely to live with relatives than were those who never married. Similarly, higher education was associated with generally decreased odds of living in a complex household for both groups, but more for whites; having attended college reduced the odds of living in a complex family household by 44% for whites, but only 14% for blacks. Relative income had essentially similar effects on members of both groups, decreasing the likelihood of living in a complex household. Women were slightly less likely than men to live in complex family households (2%), but this gender difference is significant only for whites.

Both groups also had the same curvilinear pattern over age, with the youngest and oldest adults much more likely to live in complex family households than middle-aged adults. However, the relative differences of the old and young are not the same. Among blacks, elderly persons were substantially more likely to be included within complex families than young persons, whereas among whites, this pattern was reversed.

The greatest differences between the two groups, however, were those between census years, confirming the bivariate analyses. The decline between 1940 and 1990 was much greater for whites than for blacks. The odds of unmarried whites living in a complex household declined 77% during this period; for blacks, the corresponding decline was 38%. The decline in family complexity among unmarried whites occurred continuously over the 1940–1990 period, with the sharpest decrease occurring between 1950 and 1960. For blacks, we found no significant decrease in family complexity between 1940 and 1960. The primary decline in family complexity among blacks occurred between 1960 and 1970 and continued through 1980. Between 1980 and 1990, a period that saw an attenuation of the decline for whites, blacks actually experienced an increase in complex family living.

Both the bivariate results shown in Figure 2 and the multivariate results shown in Table 2 indicate strongly that there were likely to be large differences by race and age in the rate of decline in the likelihood of living in a complex household between 1940 and 1990. To test for the significance of these differences, we pooled across race and introduced interactions between the overall measures of race and census year, as well as those for the separate age groups, to the analysis. The addition of these interactions enabled us to examine changes in the differential patterns between blacks and whites by age over time, net of the effects of the control variables. With the addition of the interactions, we found no substantial changes in the effects of the control variables, although gender became insignificant (results available from authors on request).

The results of this interacted model suggest that a substantial proportion of the decline for blacks in the likelihood of living in a complex family household was the result of *compositional* shifts in the control variables, which was far from the case for whites. Interpreting a full set of time interactions (e.g., those for census year, black \times census year, and black \times age group \times census year) can be a daunting task, so we present a summary of the mean estimated probabilities of living in a complex household by race, age, and census year in Table 3.

The predicted probabilities summarized in Table 3 are consistent with the bivariate percentages depicted in Figure 2. What is most striking is that unmarried blacks were

Table 3. Mean Estimated Probabilities of Living in a Complex Household by Race, Age, and Census Year

Age Group	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
White						
All ages	.67	.60	.49	.38	.28	.26
25–34	.80	.76	.60	.48	.30	.33
35–44	.63	.60	.51	.38	.22	.21
45–54	.56	.51	.45	.38	.29	.25
55–64	.58	.53	.42	.34	.29	.27
65–74	.61	.54	.44	.32	.25	.23
75 and older	.66	.64	.54	.40	.32	.24
Black						
All ages	.51	.48	.47	.41	.34	.40
25–34	.57	.53	.53	.45	.35	.48
35–44	.42	.40	.42	.36	.27	.33
45–54	.45	.41	.44	.42	.36	.38
55–64	.53	.46	.46	.37	.34	.40
65–74	.52	.51	.48	.38	.35	.36
75 and older	.70	.64	.57	.48	.42	.40

Note: Probabilities are based on a pooled version of Table 2 with the addition of a full set of race, age, and year interactions.

significantly *less* likely than unmarried whites to reside in complex family households in 1940. The predicted probability that unmarried blacks of any age lived in a complex household in 1940 was .51, compared with .67 for whites.

The census-year patterns in the pooled, interacted model in Table 3 are consistent with those observed in Table 2. Whites of all ages experienced the greatest percentage-point decline in complex living between 1950 and 1960, whereas blacks did so between 1960 and 1970. The inclusion of age, race, and census-year interactions allowed us to observe whether these trends characterized all age groups. For whites, this decline occurred for all groups, particularly for young (25–34) and middle-aged (45–64) adults. The later decline for blacks reflects two trends: (1) an increase in complexity between 1950 and 1960 among those aged 35–54, and (2) a later decline in complex living among young adults.

In 1940, blacks aged 45–54 (the reference age) were only about 81% (.45 versus .56) as likely to have lived in complex family households as were whites. Whereas the likelihood of living in a complex household was declining for whites in this age group (45–54), it actually increased for blacks between 1950 and 1970. This increase contributed to a crossover at this age between 1960 and 1970. Did other ages experience this crossover as well, once all controls and interactions were included in the analysis? The results are the same as in the bivariate analysis: there are crossovers between 1940 and 1990 for every age group except those aged 75 and older, for which the small difference favoring blacks (1–3 percentage points in 1940 and 1950) expanded dramatically to more than 16 percentage points (.40 for elderly blacks and .24 for elderly whites).

These multivariate results parallel those presented in Figure 2. The graphs of predicted values based on the multivariate results are strikingly similar, with crossovers at

the same time. The most important finding presented in Table 3, however, is the relatively weak decline in family complexity for blacks of any age. The overall declines, particularly for younger adults, were driven primarily by the behavior of whites.

Hence, the great decline in household complexity that occurred in the United States between 1940 and 1990 occurred primarily for whites, going far beyond what would be expected as a result of increases in income, and hence the ability to “buy” privacy, and in education (often thought as increasing the “taste” for privacy). Previous research that did not examine differences by race systematically found this result for the population as a whole (Pampel 1983); however, it is clear that the rapid decline was essentially a white phenomenon.

DISCUSSION

A number of significant crossovers occurred in the family patterns of black and white Americans between 1940 and 1990. Before 1940, black men and women married at younger ages than did white men and women and left home earlier. This article has documented a third crossover: prior to the recent past, unmarried blacks were less likely, not more likely, to live in complex family households than were whites. In addition, we presented an analysis of change over time in the levels of household complexity and processes that affected whether unmarried adults live in complex family households or in simple family households (or alone). Perhaps the most striking finding was the extent to which family complexity declined among unmarried whites during the period under study.

Unraveling the complexities of changing family patterns and the theoretical positions based on them is particularly challenging. We found that regional migration affected the family patterns of blacks and whites in comparable ways. Although the move out of the South *per se* may not have contributed to black-white differences, the substantial proportion of blacks who were southern out-migrants may have contributed to the lower levels of household complexity among blacks during the 1940–1960 period.

Less clear is the effect that the position of blacks in American society as a whole had on black family patterns. The massive discrimination faced by blacks is reflected in the persistence of lower levels of income and educational attainment during this period. How did these lower levels of economic and human capital affect the vulnerability of blacks to structural changes, such as the decline in job opportunities in the central cities where blacks had moved?

The age patterns for blacks offer support for both the economic and the cultural hypotheses. The increase in the likelihood of living in a complex household for unmarried blacks younger than age 35 may reflect economic need among the younger age group. At the same time, the stability of complex household patterns later in life may reflect the resilience of cultural support for older members of society, at least as indicated by attitudes expressed in the late 1980s (Goldscheider and Lawton 1998). What is apparent is that the great increase in nonfamily living, which most researchers have interpreted as being related to a growing individualism and taste for privacy, was much more characteristic of the living arrangements of whites than of blacks from 1940 to 1990.

Clearly more research is necessary. We need to understand more about the differences in living arrangements prior to World War II, when blacks were less, rather than more, likely to live with relatives. How much of this difference reflected higher mortality among blacks, leaving young adults with fewer older relatives with whom to live than were available to whites? If higher mortality was an important factor that limited intergenerational coresidence, then the likelihood of complex family living might have actually increased among blacks as mortality declined to much lower levels, rather than remained relatively stable.

The lack of decline among blacks may also be related to the enormous decrease in the proportion of married persons that began in the 1960s, given that the unmarried are

far more likely to double up, providing more opportunities for unmarried black adults to live in complex family households. For example, in 1940 among the 25–35 age group, most of the adults with whom those who were living in complex family households coresided were married (57% for blacks and 66% for whites). By 1990, this percentage had decreased to 36% for blacks, but it remained at a relatively high level (62%) for whites. If complex family living is closely tied to marriage rates, the end of the decline in complexity among whites may be in sight, given the increases in the proportion of unmarried persons among white adults since 1970.

Census data are a valuable tool for studying changes in household structure over time. Nonetheless, these data are far from ideal for studying extended-family households. We can only speculate on the role of changing preferences in shaping living arrangements because there are no attitudinal measures to help us interpret the patterns and changes we found. Most important, censuses rarely provide much information on people who are not living in the households. Although these constraints limit the investigation of the causal mechanisms involved in family change, no comparable data resource exists that represents the entire U.S. population over such a broad period, when rapid changes were clearly under way. It is time to take up Wilson's (1991) challenge and study change in the black family with the resources we have.

REFERENCES

- Angel, R. and M. Tienda. 1982. "Determinants of Extended Family Structure: Cultural Pattern or Economic Need?" *American Journal of Sociology* 87:1360–83.
- Bean, L., G. Mineau, and D. Anderton. 1990. *Fertility Change on the American Frontier*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Beck, R.W. and S.H. Beck. 1989. "The Incidence of Extended Households Among Middle-Aged Black and White Women: Estimates From a 5-Year Panel Study." *Journal of Family Issues* 10:147–68.
- Bellah, R.N., R. Madsen, W.M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S.M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2000. Consumer Price Index—All Urban Consumers. Available on-line at <http://www.bls.gov/data/archived.htm>
- Carliner, G. 1974. "Determinants of Household Headship." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37:28–39.
- Cherlin, A.J. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Coale, A. 1967. "Factors Associated With the Development of Low Fertility: An Historic Summary." Pp. 205–209 in *World Population Conference, Belgrade, 1965: Proceedings* (Vol. 2). New York: United Nations.
- Crimmins, E.M., S.L. Reynolds, and Y. Saito. 1999. "Trends in Health and Ability to Work Among the Older Working-Age Population." *Journal of Gerontology* 54B(1):S31–S40.
- Easterlin, R. 1987. "The New Age Structure of Poverty in America: Permanent or Transitional?" *Population and Development Review* 13:195–208.
- Ermisch, J.F. and E. Overton. 1985. "Minimal Household Units: A New Approach to the Analysis of Household Formation." *Population Studies* 39:33–54.
- Farley, R. and W.R. Allen. 1987. *The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Franklin, D. 1997. *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African American Family*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Frazier, E.F. 1966. *The Negro Family in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Frey, W.H. and A. Speare, Jr. 1988. *Regional and Metropolitan Growth and Decline in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Goldscheider, F.K. 1997. "Recent Changes in U.S. Young Adult Living Arrangements in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Family Issues* 18:708–24.

- Goldscheider, F.K. and C. Goldscheider. 1997. "The Historical Trajectory of the Black Family: Ethnic Differences in Leaving Home Over the Twentieth Century." *History of the Family* 2: 295–307.
- Goldscheider, F.K. and L. Lawton. 1998. "Family Experiences and the Erosion of Support for Intergenerational Coresidence." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60:623–32.
- Gutman, H. 1976. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750–1925*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Haines, M.R. 1996. "Long-Term Marriage Patterns in the United States From Colonial Times to the Present." *History of the Family* 1:15–39.
- Jaynes, G.D. and R.M. Williams, Jr., eds. 1989. *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Koball, H. 1998. "Have African American Men Become Less Committed to Marriage? Explaining the Twentieth-Century Racial Cross-Over in Men's Marriage Timing." *Demography* 35: 251–58.
- Kobrin, F.E. 1976. "The Fall in Household Size and the Rise of the Primary Individual in the United States." *Demography* 13:127–38.
- . 1981. "Family Extension and the Elderly: Economic, Demographic, and Family Cycle Factors." *Journal of Gerontology* 36:370–77.
- Kramarow, E.A. 1995. "The Elderly Who Live Alone in the United States: Historical Perspectives on Household Change." *Demography* 32:335–54.
- Krivo, L. and J. Mutchler. 1989. "Elderly Persons Living Alone: The Effect of Community Context on Living Arrangements." *Journal of Gerontology* 44:S54–S62.
- Kulikoff, A. 1986. *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Lemann, N. 1991. *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How It Changed America*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Levy, F. and R.J. Murnane. 1992. "U.S. Earnings Levels and Earnings Inequality: A Review of Recent Trends and Proposed Explanations." *Journal of Economic Literature* 30:1333–81.
- Long, L.H. 1974. "Poverty Status and Receipt of Welfare Among Migrants and Nonmigrants in Large Cities." *American Sociological Review* 39:46–56.
- Long, L.H. and L.R. Heltman. 1975. "Migration and Income Differences Between Nonmigrants in Large Cities." *American Journal of Sociology* 80:1391–409.
- Lopata, H. 1973. *Widowhood in an American City*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- Malone, A.P. 1992. *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in 19th Century Louisiana*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Manfra, J. and R.R. Dykstra. 1985. "Serial Marriage and the Origins of the Black Stepfamily: The Rowanty Evidence." *Journal of American History* 72:18–44.
- Massey, D.S. and N.A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McAdoo, H.P. 1980. "Black Mothers and the Extended Family Support Network." Pp. 125–44 in *The Black Woman*, edited by L. Rogers-Rose. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- . 1998. "African American Families." Pp. 361–81 in *Ethnic Families in America*, edited by C.H. Mindel, R.W. Habenstein, and R. Wright. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- McDaniel, A. 1994. "Historical Racial Differences in Living Arrangements of Children." *Journal of Family History* 19:57–77.
- McLanahan, S. and L. Casper. 1995. "Growing Diversity and Inequality in the American Family." Pp. 1–46 in *State of the Union: America in the 1990s. Volume 2: Social Trends*, edited by R. Farley. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- McNally, J.W. 1994. "The Indirect Estimation of Parental Mortality: An Extension of Orphanhood Techniques to Maximum Likelihood Estimates with Bayesian Applications." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, Brown University, Providence, RI.
- Michael, R.T., V.R. Fuchs, and S.R. Scott. 1980. "Changes in the Propensity of Living Alone: 1950–1976." *Demography* 17:39–53.

- Morgan, S.P., A. McDaniel, A.T. Miller, and S.H. Preston. 1993. "Racial Differences in Household and Family Structure at the Turn of the Century." *American Journal of Sociology* 98:798–828.
- Moynihan, D.P. 1965. *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.
- Pampel, F. 1983. "Changes in the Propensity to Live Alone: Evidence From Consecutive Cross-Sectional Surveys, 1960–1976." *Demography* 20:433–47.
- Preston, S., S. Lim, and S.P. Morgan. 1992. "African-American Marriage in 1910: Beneath the Surface of Census Data." *Demography* 29:1–15.
- Rainwater, L. and W.L. Yancey. 1967. *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Robinson, J.P. and G. Godbey. 1997. *Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Rodgers, W.L. and A. Thornton. 1985. "Changing Patterns of First Marriage in the United States." *Demography* 22:265–79.
- Ross, H. and I. Sawhill. 1976. *Time of Transition*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Ruggles, S. 1994a. "The Origins of African-American Family Structure." *American Sociological Review* 59:136–51.
- . 1994b. "The Transformation of American Family Structure." *American Historical Review* February:103–28.
- . 1996. "Living Arrangements of the Elderly in the United States." Pp. 254–63 in *Aging and Intergenerational Relations: Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by T.K. Hareven. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- . 2001. "Living Arrangements and Well-being of Older Persons in the Past: A Case Study." *Population Bulletin*, Special Issue Nos. 42/43. Available on-line at http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/bulletin42_43/ruggles.pdf
- Ruggles, S. and R. Goeken. 1992. "Race and Multigenerational Family Structure, 1900–1980." Pp. 15–42 in *The Changing American Family: Sociological and Demographic Perspectives*, edited by S.J. South and S.E. Tolnay. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Ruggles, S. and M. Sobek et al. 1997. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0. Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota. Available on-line at <http://www.ipums.umn.edu>
- Sandefur, G. and N.B. Tuma. 1987. "Social and Economic Trends Among the Aged in the United States, 1940–1985." Discussion Paper No. 849-87. Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin.
- Santi, L.L. 1988. "The Demographic Context of Recent Change in the Structure of American Households." *Demography* 25:509–19.
- Soldo, M.E. 1977. "The Determinants of Temporal Variations in Living Arrangements Among the Elderly: 1960–1970." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Duke University, Durham, NC.
- Stack, C.B. 1975. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Stevenson, B.E. 1995. "Black Family Structure in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia: Amending the Revisionist Perspective." Pp. 28–56 in *The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans*, edited by M.B. Tucker and C. Mitchell-Kernan. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Sudarkasa, N. 1981. "Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organization." Pp. 37–53 in *Black Families*, edited by H. McAdoo. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, R.J., M.B. Tucker, L.M. Chatters, and R. Jayakody. 1997. "Recent Demographic Trends in African American Family Structure." Pp. in 14–62 in *Family Life in Black America*, edited by R.J. Taylor, J.S. Jackson, and L.M. Chatters. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tienda, M. and R. Angel. 1982. "Headship and Household Composition Among Blacks, Hispanics, and Other Whites." *Social Forces* 61:508–31.
- Tolnay, S. 1997. "The Great Migration and Changes in the Northern Black Family, 1940 to 1990." *Social Forces* 75:1213–38.

- . 1998. "Migration Experience and Family Patterns in the 'Promised Land.'" *Journal of Family History* 23:68–89.
- . 1999. *The Bottom Rung: African American Family Life on Southern Farms*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Tucker, M.B. and C. Mitchell-Kernan. 1995. "Trends in African American Family Formation: A Theoretical and Statistical Overview." Pp. 3–26 in *The Decline in Marriage Among African Americans*, edited by M.B. Tucker and C. Mitchell-Kernan. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Watkins, S., J. Menken, and J. Bongaarts. 1987. "Demographic Foundations of Family Change." *American Sociological Review* 52:346–58.
- White, L. 1994. "Coresidence and Leaving Home: Young Adults and Their Parents." *Annual Review of Sociology* 20:81–102.
- Wilson, W.J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- . 1991. "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations: The Challenge of Public Agenda Research." *American Sociological Review* 56:1–14.
- Winsborough, H., K. Taeuber, and R. Hauser. 1978. "Public Use Samples From the 1940 and 1950 Censuses: Opportunities for Sociological Research." Working Paper. Madison: Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin.
- Wister, A. and T. Burch. 1987. "Values, Perceptions, and Choice in Living Arrangements of the Elderly." Pp. 178–98 in *Critical Issues in Aging Policy: Linking Research and Values*, edited by E. Borgatta and R. Montgomery. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Woodward, C. Vann. 1966. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.