
Introduction to the Second Edition

SINCE 1970, AMERICAN FAMILIES have undergone a dramatic diversification produced by high rates of divorce, cohabitation, unwed motherhood, the new visibility of same-sex relationships, the (re)-emergence of stepfamilies and working mothers, and a sharp rise in the number of single-person households, where once married-couple households were the norm. Racial-ethnic diversity has also increased. By 2005, nearly 13 percent of Americans were foreign-born, not quite as high a percentage as a century earlier, but an unprecedented figure in the memory of Americans alive today. Unlike the overwhelmingly European immigrants of 100 years ago, today's immigrants come from around the world, including many non-white and third world countries, and they have rapidly spread beyond the big-city enclaves in which immigrants used to cluster. Coupled with expanded internal migration of African-Americans and Hispanics to the suburbs and the Sunbelt, these trends have created greater and more widely distributed cultural and racial-ethnic diversity than ever before. Whites are now a minority in almost one-third of the nation's most populous counties.¹

As Americans attempt to adjust to these changes, our assumptions about how family life should be organized and what the future holds for the younger generation have also been impacted by a realization that postwar social scientists were wrong in predicting that class divisions would gradually recede. Instead, these divisions have deepened and in some ways become more intractable.

The revolution in women's roles since the 1970s adds further uncertainty about the future of the family. The male breadwinner family, a comparatively new family model that became a reality for most Americans only in the 1950s, is now rejected by many Americans, and is unattainable for many others who may still believe that this is the Gold Standard for family life.

The intersection of old and new types of diversity has led to much debate about the origins and consequences of contemporary family change. Some leaders of the "family values" movement suggest that family "breakdown," especially the rise of cohabitation and unwed motherhood, is now the major cause of socioeconomic inequality and childhood disadvantage in America. Kay Hymowitz of the Manhattan Institute argues that today's race and class inequities stem less from discrimination or economic change than from willful abandonment of marriage and nuclear-family commitments by people influenced by feminism and the sexual revolution. Columnist George Will claims that "what is called the race crisis is a class problem arising from dysfunctional families and destructive behaviors." He believes that a largely African-American "underclass" has rejected family commitments and the work ethic and is thus responsible for its own poverty and isolation.²

Other observers dispute the view that family diversity is a sign of cultural deviance or collapsing values. Some argue that dysfunctional families are the result rather than the cause of race and class inequalities. Others suggest that many “deviant” family forms are not dysfunctional at all, but are highly adaptive, flexible arrangements for coping with distinctive challenges posed by class, race, and gender injustices. These authors argue that as white, middle-class families lose access to the economic and political support systems that sustained the stable male-breadwinner families of the 1950s and 1960s, they can learn a great deal from the more flexible and inclusive family norms of other racial-ethnic groups.³

This volume brings together articles by leading researchers in the field of family diversity to shed light on these debates. Their work reveals that in every historical period, including the present one, several different but interconnected family systems have coexisted within a larger constellation of power relations, unequal access to resources, and struggles over ideological representations of family life. The articles in this reader examine the changing interactions between class, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic inequality and family forms, values, and definitions, as well as relations between men and women, parents and children. Because they explore diversity in family behaviors and values in the context of group differences in social power, status, and resources, we describe this book as a multicultural reader on families rather than a reader on family diversity *per se*.

There are trade-offs in this choice. We have not been able to include any of the rich research on the differing dynamics of male-breadwinner/female-homemaker, dual-earner, and remarried families, divorced or never-married parents, and cohabitating couples, whether same-sex or heterosexual. Nor, except for the selection by David Adams, do we examine religious diversity, despite fascinating interactions (and disconnects) between people’s religious or moral beliefs and their family experiences. For example, African-Americans are more likely to disapprove of cohabitation than whites, but are also more likely to engage in it. Rates of divorce and unwed motherhood are higher in the so-called Bible Belt than in the more liberal states of the Northeast. Evangelical Christians divorce at about the same rate as atheists and agnostics, and Pentecostals have higher divorce rates than either.⁴ In all these cases, socioeconomic hierarchies interact with people’s belief systems in complex and contradictory ways.

We focus in this reader on patterns of difference created by conflict, accommodation, and interaction among groups of differing power, cultural acceptance, and socioeconomic status. An underlying issue is the question of how to conceptualize diversity in a way that takes account of relationships among different groups rather than studying racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic categories in isolation from each other. That question even caused us to debate use of the word multicultural in the title. Two of the authors whose work we include in this volume have argued elsewhere that “multiracial” is a better term for describing the “primary and pervasive” role of race in organizing the differences in family life and gender roles within the United States.⁵

Certainly, an emphasis on culture rather than race can understate the powerful force of the color line in determining the place of families within the U.S. constellation of power and prestige. Immigrants such as Hispanics, for example, often come from countries where the concept of racial groupings has been more subtly intertwined with social class and less dichotomized by skin color than in the United States. Once they enter the United States, however, the prevailing racial ideologies in this country tend to rearrange immigrant hierarchies and opportunities on the basis of color, with darker-skinned Hispanics experiencing greater residential segregation and diminished job opportunities. Similarly, immigrants of European origin have an advantage that transcends skill differences. Germans and Poles typically receive higher incomes than more-educated Iranians or

Indians, and low-skilled Portuguese do better than Mexicans or Dominicans, even though the educational attainments of these groups are comparable.⁶

Race continues to matter for native-born Americans as well. In July 2007 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the unemployment rate of African-Americans with a high school diploma was higher than that of white high-school dropouts, while blacks with a doctorate earned, on average, \$12,000 less per year than whites with a comparable degree.⁷

We feared, however, that for some readers, the term “multiracial” would reinforce the myth that race is a biological fact. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham warns that race language tends to obscure other organizing principles such as gender or class, and also “blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay” with these other power relations.⁸ That is why we chose to call this a multicultural reader, defining culture as the set of learned values and behaviors and the “ideological frame of reference through which people attempt to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves”—circumstances in which racial and class hierarchies often play a pivotal role.⁹

The term multicultural has its own difficulties. Too often, multicultural studies simply serve up a buffet of different family arrangements and values, without specifying the relationships and struggles between different groups. A “celebration of diversity” may mask the differences in power and resource among groups, and overlook their symbiotic (or parasitical) relationships. John Garvey suggests that multicultural education can become a kind of managed care, offering the palliative relief of “tolerance” rather than aggressively treating the disease of oppression.¹⁰

Alternatively, some cultural approaches suggest that people occupy different class positions or are assigned lower places in the racial-ethnic hierarchy *because* of their shared group values. Several of our authors explicitly argue against this approach, proposing that many “cultural” differences are the product of enforced inequalities in access to resources, or emerge in the course of coping with such inequities.

Recognizing the social origins of many cultural values and family behaviors is not the same thing as a victim-model of family diversity. The rich historical traditions and creative contemporary adaptations described in this volume demonstrate the tremendous resourcefulness of “minority” families and individuals. But unless we understand how societal relations of race, gender, class, and ethnicity influence personal decision-making, we can mistake creative, even heroic, adaptations for unconstrained choice.

As Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill write, “intersecting forms of domination produce *both* oppression *and* opportunity.”¹¹ Domination places some families at the top of a social hierarchy and others at the bottom, shaping the choices that all families make. The hierarchy is not static, and even at the bottom, some types of oppression open up opportunities for personal action or collective organization. Yet many of the gains achieved by families or individuals remain limited by larger power and productive relations.

When a woman charms her way out of a speeding ticket, she is not demonstrating that men and women each have their own set of advantages, but rather that the stereotypes perpetuating male dominance can sometimes be manipulated to individual advantage. When an African-American or Puerto Rican woman strikes out on her own, acting independently of men in a way that white middle-class women have sometimes envied, how much of this is gender equality and how much dire necessity? When a Black defendant with a good lawyer directs attention away from damaging evidence by focusing on the racism of the police, he is not proving that African-Americans now have an advantage in the legal system. He is using to his own benefit the demonstrable fact that the justice system routinely *does* discriminate against Black men.

The key to understanding how individuals and families make choices, without denying the constraints under which they operate, is to recognize that power is never a one-way street. The slave family, for example, was not a simple imitation of the slave-owner's family nor a helpless victim of the traffic in human beings. Neither, however, was it a self-made creation free from the restraints of white owners. Yet the families of the slave-owners were *also* molded by slavery. Their internal relations were profoundly affected by external racial hierarchies and by anxieties about social control.¹²

Today, white and "minority" families both develop their strategies and perceptions in the context of growing income inequality, declining gender inequality (although created as much by a fall in men's real wages as a rise in women's), and the de-legitimization of overt racial discrimination, coupled with the persistence of *de facto* segregation in schools and housing. People of color have entered formerly lily-white professions and income levels in significant numbers, while a large segment of white workers, especially less-educated males, has lost ground in comparison to more educated sectors of the working class. Yet the ranks of the extremely poor are still filled largely by African-Americans and dark-skinned Latinos. Historically-constructed feelings of entitlement on the part of whites have been shaken up without really leveling the playing field.

A good example of the confusion generated by these changes is the question of whether the United States has become—or should become—a color-blind society. With statutory segregation abolished and overt racial discrimination illegal, some people believe that America has moved beyond racism. And in many ways, progress has been remarkable. African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans now occupy powerful and prestigious positions in government, business, education, and popular culture.

In personal life as well, there is much less overt racism than in the past. In 1967, interracial marriage was still illegal in many states, and as late as 1970, nearly one-half of all Americans still favored such laws. Today, only 10 percent of Americans, and only 4 percent of young adults, would favor banning interracial unions. In 1970, less than 2 percent of married couples were interracial. By 2005 that had climbed to more than 7 percent. A majority of young Americans say that they either have dated someone of another race or would be willing to do so.¹³

Black-white intermarriage remains rarer than other forms of interracial unions, however, and biracial and multiracial African-Americans have less leeway to choose among different racial categories than other multiracial individuals, in part because of the historic legacy of the segregationist rule that "one drop" of Negro blood classifies a person as Black. Some authors fear that as Asians and Hispanics are seen as being somehow closer to white, blacks may be left behind yet again.¹⁴

How much of this gap is caused by class and how much by race? The residential segregation of African-Americans has always been far greater than can be explained by the average difference between whites and blacks in socioeconomic status (SES). Yet those historic patterns of segregation and job discrimination have also left poor African-Americans especially vulnerable to being stuck in racially isolated areas of concentrated poverty, decaying infrastructure, and few job opportunities. Since 1990, socioeconomic status has come to explain a larger share of the segregation between whites and African-Americans than in the past.¹⁵

The result has been a conflation of color and class into a new, culture-coded racism that is particularly insidious precisely because it does allow for exceptions, as long as an African-American "proves" that he or she should be exempted from the default association that popular culture makes between blacks and "street" life. A black person who displays an affluent (but not ostentatious) middle-class persona and signals rejection of anything associated with "ghetto culture" may find

personal and social acceptance. But those who cannot or will not do so are often perceived as part of a dangerous or dysfunctional “underclass” and discriminated against in jobs and housing.

Recently, researchers randomly assigned names associated with African-Americans or whites to fictitious resumes that were otherwise identical in qualifications. Names such as Greg and Emily received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews than names like Lakisha and Jamal. It is unclear how much of this stems from racism pure and simple, how much from a cultural chauvinism that penalizes African-Americans for celebrating a distinctive heritage, and how much from a class-biased assumption that a “black-sounding” name signals a lower-class origin.¹⁶

Many articles in this volume emphasize the increasing significance of class over race in explaining differences in family life. Clearly, however, even very successful African-Americans frequently find themselves subject to racial prejudice when they step outside their own circle of friends, colleagues, and peers. As Jodie Kliman and William Madsen point out, a black executive may be able to hire and fire white employees, but he often “has less *effective* class standing than subordinates when trying to hail a cab, join a country club, buy an elegant home”—or even protect his children from racial profiling by police. Ellis Cose has eloquently described the frustration of “privileged” African-Americans who are either categorized as specialists in “black” issues or face censure if they call too much attention to racial issues.¹⁷

Still, there are certainly new opportunities for many African-Americans and other minorities to succeed in America, while being white confers fewer guaranteed privileges than in the past. Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that racial hierarchies once imposed primarily through coercion now rest on “a complex system of compromises, legitimizing ideologies, . . . political rules and bureaucratic regulations.” Racism is no longer monolithic, despite the persistence of racial discrimination and the concentration of poverty among inner-city African-Americans and Latinos, and there are new limits to its sway over people’s lives. The result is a “messy racial hegemony,” marked by contradictory, conflicted, and ambiguous relationships.¹⁸ Several articles in this book suggest that the same kind of messiness is emerging in gender relations as well.