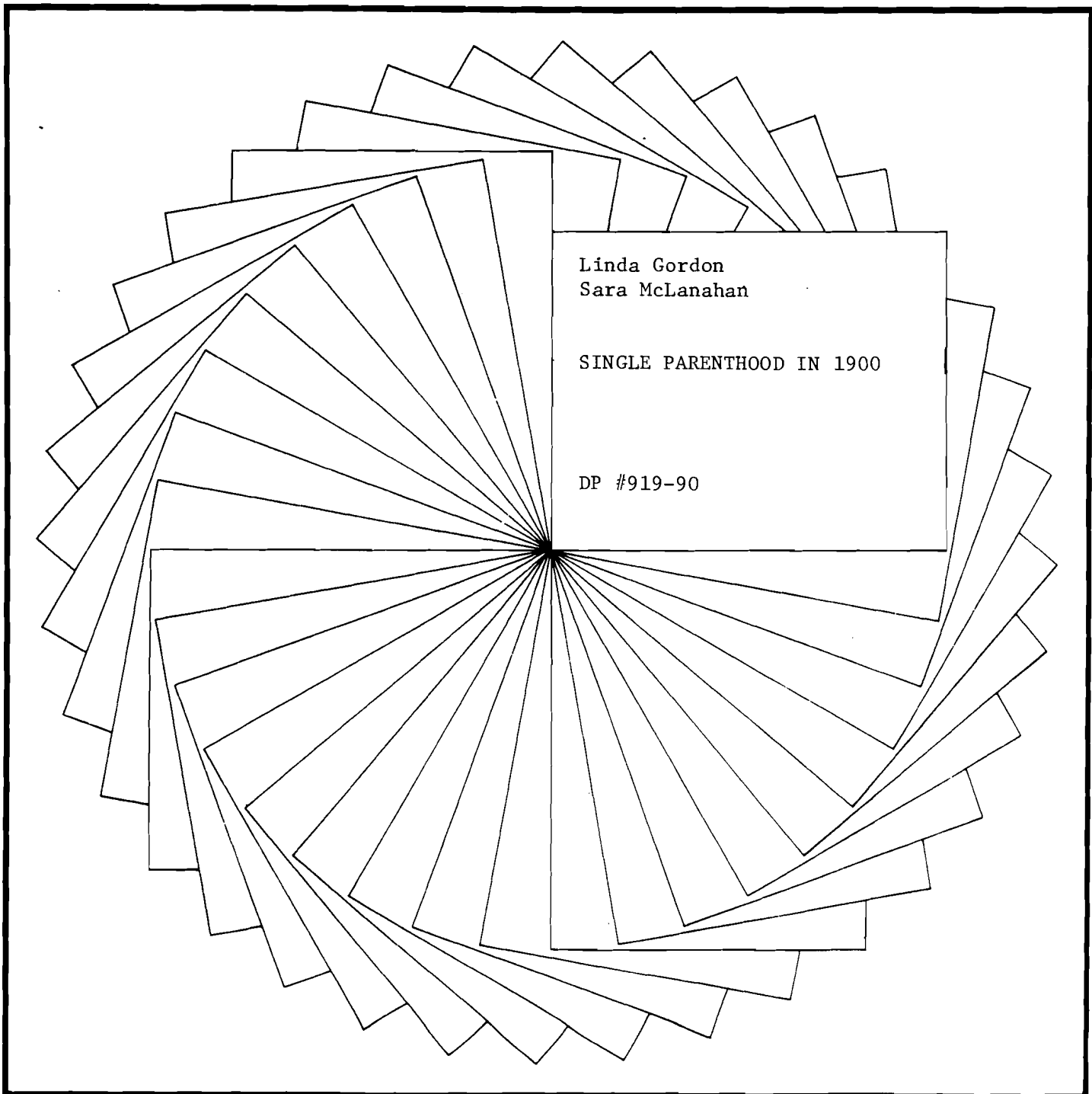




# Institute for Research on Poverty

## Discussion Papers



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SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN 1900

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**SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN 1900**

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## **Abstract**

This research employed the Public Use Sample of the 1900 census to examine single parenthood, with children as the unit of analysis. Two sets of analyses were performed: one at the national level, and one focusing on eleven particular areas (seven cities and four predominantly rural states). The latter involved hand-coding from individual census household records and allowed us to calculate the number of single-parent children living in subfamilies, a substantial group that has been missed by reports based only on published census statistics. The study finds that the proportion of children living with single parents in 1900 approximated that of 1960, but that in 1900 the parents of these children were less likely to head their own households and more likely to live in subfamilies. Contrary to expectations, no important differences were found in the prevalence of single-parent children among immigrants, migrants, and nonmigrants. Important racial differences were present: black children were more likely than white children to live with single parents, especially in urban areas. There was significant geographic variation in the likelihood of children to have single parents. The study suggests various causal hypotheses which could be examined with further research.

## **SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN 1900**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Precise figures concerning single parenthood have been available only since 1940. Obtaining an understanding of longer-term trends in this phenomenon would seem important, however, especially since a great deal of contemporary policy debate assumes, either implicitly or explicitly, that single parenthood--which is primarily single motherhood--is a new arrangement. This orientation directs discussion of causation toward more recent social and economic factors, which may result in failure to examine long-run factors in the construction of single-parent families. Another stream in the debate, that concerning black single motherhood, locates quite distant origins, in the legacy of slavery; this causes discussion to minimize more recent social and economic factors.

The two of us came to our interest in the history of single parenthood from different perspectives. Linda Gordon recently completed a history of family violence since the 1870s, using Boston as a case study. In this work she found high numbers of single mothers represented in her sample of the case records of three social-work agencies; the question then arose of how representative those figures were of the general population in Boston. Since the state of Massachusetts conducted its own more detailed censuses in 1885, 1895, and 1905, Gordon had found high numbers of female-headed households there, and was interested to see what the national figures looked like (Gordon, 1988). Sara McLanahan's interest in single parenthood grew out of her sociological studies of single parenthood in the United States (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986) and trends in women's poverty since World War II (McLanahan, Sorensen, and Watson, 1989). While single mothers and their children have long been overrepresented among the poor, increases in marital disruption and nonmarital births during the last three

decades have highlighted the economic vulnerability of single mothers and raised concerns about the well-being of children who grow up in such families.

This study focuses on the living arrangements of children in the United States in 1900, as reported in the 1900 census. Our primary finding is that the proportion of children living with single parents in 1900 approximated that of 1960, and that the phenomenon mainly involved single mothers. In 1900 approximately 14 percent of children were living apart from one or both parents (See Table 1 below); in 1960, the comparable figure was 12.3 percent (U.S. House of Representatives, 1989, p. 54). In 1900 8.5 percent of children lived with single parents; in 1960 this figure was 9.1 percent. Since 1960 single parenthood has increased substantially, the proportion of children living with one parent moving from about 9 percent to about 24 percent and the proportion living with two parents declining from about 88 percent to about 73 percent. But single parenthood was by no means unprecedented when the recent increase began.

Our second finding reveals a major difference between 1900 and the present: single-parent children today are more likely to be living with parents who head their own household than was true at the turn of the century. This shift has taken place despite the declining number of widows, a category of single mothers particularly likely to head households, and the increasing number of never-married mothers, a category more likely to live in the households of others. The increase in female-headed households therefore reflects factors other than the changing marital status of single mothers, including increases in prosperity, a culture of independent living, and women's aspirations for autonomy.

Third, contrary to our expectations, we found no significant<sup>1</sup> difference in the prevalence of single-parent children among immigrants, migrants, and nonmigrants. This belies historical notions of the centrifugal effect of immigration on marriages. We did, however, find that immigrant single parents were more likely than nonimmigrants to form independent households.

Fourth, we found several important differences between black and white<sup>2</sup> children's living arrangements. Black children were more likely than white children to live with single parents in 1900, especially in urban areas. We also found that, among single-parent children, fewer black than white children lived with single fathers. Contrary to our expectations, we found little black-/white difference in the propensity of single parents to form their own households as opposed to living with relatives. We did find, however, that black children were more likely to be living with relatives other than parents.

Finally, we found considerable geographical variation in the living arrangements of children across cities and across different rural areas in 1900. These variations suggest further research questions.

## **METHODS: DATA AND VARIABLES**

The data used in our study were taken from the Public Use Sample (PUS) tape of the 1900 U.S. Census. The PUS is a nationally representative sample of 27,069 households containing 100,438 individuals, representing 1/760th of the total population of the United States in 1900. The file contains a household record for each household, with variables describing the location and composition of the household, followed by a record for each individual who resided in that household (Graham, 1980). For our study of single parenthood the unit of analysis is children; the sample includes 34,051 children (persons 15 years of age and under.) The data include information on the sex and marital status of all household members and the relationship of each member to the head of household (hereafter called householder). This information was used to classify children according to whether they were children of the householder, relatives of the householder, or boarders or employees of the householder. The data also include children living in institutions.<sup>3</sup>

We performed two sets of analyses. The first included all the children in the sample and was the basis for our findings for the nation as a whole. In the national analysis, children living with a householder were further classified according to whether the householder was married or single, and in the latter case, whether the householder was a mother or father. Children living with stepparents were classified as living with two parents. A census question about extended family type allowed us to identify children who lived in subfamilies.<sup>4</sup>

The variables directly available from the census had several major shortcomings for our purposes. Most important, they did not provide information on the sex or marital status of the parents of children who lived in subfamilies. For example, if a child was listed as "granddaughter of householder," there was no easy way to determine if a parent was present in the household or the characteristics of the parent(s). Thus, while we were able to determine the presence of subfamilies, we were not able to classify children in subfamilies as to whether they lived with a mother or father or both.

For these reasons, we performed a second set of analyses. We selected seven cities and four predominantly rural states where there were enough children in each location to allow analysis. The cities were San Francisco, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston; the states were Maine, Alabama, Kansas, and California. For this subset of children, which we call Sample B, we printed out the information on the entire household for children in subfamilies in order to determine whether or not a parent was present and whether that parent was the mother or father. Sample B was also used to examine regional variation within the United States in 1900.

## THE NATIONAL PICTURE

What were the living arrangements of children in the United States at the turn of the century? To answer this question, we estimated the percentage of children living with two parents (including stepparents), with one parent, and with neither parent. We also calculated the proportion of children living in subfamilies as opposed to living with a householder. And for children living with a single-parent householder, we looked at the sex of the parent. The percentages are presented in Table 1.

The Table shows that the overwhelming majority--about 86 percent--of children were living with two parents in 1900. The rest were living with one parent (about 8.5 percent) or another relative (3.2 percent)<sup>5</sup>; with parents who were boarders or employees of the householder (.4 percent) or the children were boarders or employees themselves (.9 percent), or were living in institutions (.5 percent).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most striking starting point is that the proportion of children living with a single parent was about the same in 1900 as it was in 1960. This belies the assumption in much contemporary discussion, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, that single motherhood is a new phenomenon.

For the majority of children, living with a single parent meant living with a household head (82 percent of all children with single parents). It also meant living with a mother as opposed to a father: among children living with a single-parent householder, 71 percent were living with mothers. Since the PUS variables do not report the sex of the parent among children living in subfamilies, we could not determine the exact number of single mothers and single fathers for all children in the national sample. However, we made three different estimates of these numbers. First, we assumed that all children living in single-parent subfamilies and all children living with employees or boarders were living with their mothers. This assumption yielded a figure of 7

**Table 1**

## Living Arrangements of Children, 1900

|   | N      | % of All Children |
|---|--------|-------------------|
| <u>Living with Two Parents</u>                    |        |                   |
| Parent is household head                          | 29,083 |                   |
| Parent is in subfamily                            | 285    |                   |
| Total   | 29,368 | 86.25%            |
| <u>Living with One Parent</u>                     |        |                   |
| Parent is household head                          |        |                   |
| Male householder                                  | 661    |                   |
| Female householder                                | 1,660  |                   |
| Sex of parent unknown                             | 15     |                   |
| Subtotal  | 2,336  |                   |
| Parent is in subfamily <sup>a</sup>               | 559    |                   |
| Total living with one parent                      | 2,859  | 8.50              |
| Living with Relative <sup>b</sup>                 | 837    | 2.46              |
| Living with Relative, no information on parent    | 264    | 0.78              |
| Child Is Household Employee <sup>b</sup>          | 112    | 0.33              |
| Child's Parent Is Household Employee <sup>c</sup> | 22     | 0.06              |
| Child Is Boarder <sup>b</sup>                     | 197    | 0.58              |
| Child's Parent Is Boarder <sup>c</sup>            | 122    | 0.36              |
| Child in Institution                              | 179    | 0.53              |
| Miscellaneous <sup>d</sup>                        | 19     | 0.06              |
| Information Missing                               | 36     | 0.11              |
| TOTAL   | 34,051 | 100.00            |

Source: Data for Tables 1-10 are from the Public Use Sample tape of the U.S. Census of 1900.

<sup>a</sup>The census does not allow determination of sex of parents in subfamilies.

<sup>b</sup>No parent present.

<sup>c</sup>We suspect that these are mainly single-parent children but we exclude them from all further figures on single-parent children.

<sup>d</sup>Miscellaneous category includes head, wife, cohead, child-in-law, visitor, companion, friend, pauper in private household, worker in group quarters, and household employee. They are grouped together because of small cell sizes.

percent of children with single mothers and 1.9 percent with single fathers, and represents a high-bound estimate of the proportion of single-parent children living with mothers. Next, we made the opposite assumption--all single-parent children living in subfamilies or with employees or boarders were living with fathers. This yielded a low-bound estimate of 4.9 percent living with mothers and 4.0 percent living with fathers. Our third and best estimate, we think, arises from what we learned from the hand-coded data in Sample B (described below). In that sample about 80 percent of children in single-parent subfamilies were living with their mothers. Extrapolating from this number, we estimate that in 1900 about 6.6 percent of children were living with single mothers, and 2.4 percent were living with single fathers. To put it in other terms, nearly three quarters of single-parent children were with their mothers. (Note that in 1988 about 90 percent of single-parent children lived with their mothers.)

For single parents who were heads of households, we were able to identify the marital status of the parent. These results are reported in Table 2.<sup>7</sup> The most striking finding in this table, even more so than we expected, was the high proportion of single-parent children living with a widowed parent--83 percent of those living with fathers, and 77 percent of those living with mothers. The next most common residence arrangement was with a separated parent. Only 2 percent of children were with a divorced parent, and only 3.4 percent were living with a never-married parent.<sup>8</sup> With widows and widowers accounting for more than three-fourths of the single parent children, one would have expected a more equal distribution of single mothers and single fathers. In fact, it is remarkable how few children lived with single fathers, given that death was the primary cause of single parenthood. A likely explanation for this discrepancy is that widowers were more likely than widows to remarry or put their children into the care of relatives.

The relevance of economic factors in children's living arrangements becomes evident in Table 3, which reports figures on homeownership. Forty-five percent of children in two-parent

**Table 2**

**Marital Status of the Children's Single Parents  
Who Were Household Heads**

|               | <u>Fathers</u> |       | <u>Mothers</u> |       |
|---------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|               | N              | %     | N              | %     |
| Widowed       | 551            | 83.4  | 1,282          | 77.2  |
| Spouse absent | 91             | 13.8  | 269            | 16.2  |
| Divorced      | 18             | 2.7   | 32             | 1.9   |
| Never married | 1              | 0.2   | 77             | 4.6   |
| Total         | 661            | 100.0 | 1,660          | 100.0 |

**Table 3****Homeownership and Children's Living Arrangements**

| Category                      | Children in Category Who<br>Lived with Homeowners |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Child of Household Head       | 44.7%   |
| Two parents                   | 45.4  |
| One parent                    | 36.2  |
| Male                          | 42.8  |
| Female                        | 33.8  |
| Missing                       | 13.3  |
| Child in Subfamily            | 50.8  |
| All children                  | 45.0  |
| (No Information on Ownership) | (13.6)  |

families lived with parents who owned their own home, as compared to only 36 percent of single-parent children. It is interesting to note that children who lived in subfamilies were more likely to live with homeowners (51 percent) than children who lived with householders. This suggests that families (including single-parent families) were more likely to move in with their relatives when the latter were prosperous enough to own their homes.

### **Urban-Rural Differences**

It has been hypothesized that single parenthood is a phenomenon of urban areas. This has been argued historically with several kinds of evidence. First, there were increasing illegitimacy rates, beginning in some places from the early eighteenth century, in others in the mid-nineteenth century (M. Gordon, 1978, p. 173; Tilly and Scott, 1978, pp. 97-98; Wells, 1980). John Gillis has called this a shift in the balance of sexual power, created both by the greater distance of young women from their families as they became urbanized and by the lesser power of families over young men, also a product of urbanization and wage labor. Preindustrial norms made premarital sex acceptable when it rested on a betrothal, an understanding that pregnancy would be followed by marriage. In England perhaps half the brides were pregnant (Gillis, 1974, 1985).

Urbanization, and especially the migration and mobility associated with cities, sent many young women to jobs far from their parents--in the case of migration to the United States, even across an ocean. Young men found independence on the basis of wage labor and were no longer dependent on inheritance from their fathers. Women experienced not only greater independence, but also less parental protection against men's sexual irresponsibility (Gillis, 1974; Tilly et al., 1976; Wells, 1980).

Second, the relative anonymity of large cities combined with the stresses of wage labor seemed to increase marital separation and desertion rates in cities. Gordon found evidence of

this in Boston in her work on the history of family violence, and throughout U.S. cities social workers, starting about 1890, grew alarmed over high rates of marital desertion by men, often frustrated and angry by their inability to meet new expectations of supporting their families single-handed. (Most city residents at this time were recent migrants or immigrants from agrarian societies in which the whole family functioned as an economic unit; as a consequence rural economic failure did not weigh exclusively on men, and a family often stayed together to weather hard times; see Gordon, 1988, Chap. 4.)

This historical evidence led us to expect to find more single motherhood in the cities. In fact, the proportion of children living with single parents was only slightly higher in urban than in nonurban areas.

Nationally, the percentage of children in urban areas living with single parents was quite similar to that of children in rural areas: 9.3 percent as compared with 8.3 percent (Table 4). Nor was the sex distribution among single parents very different. In urban areas 71.6 percent of single-parent children lived with mothers; in the countryside the number was 70.9 percent.

Table 5 reports rural-urban differences in single parents' marital status. Our findings here were also surprising. We had expected, as indicated by historical scholarship, to find fewer widows and more never-married, divorced, and separated mothers in urban areas than in rural areas. Instead we found exactly the opposite--the proportion of single-parent children living with widowed mothers was higher in urban areas. Note that the figures exclude single-parent children in subfamilies, which will be discussed below. Note also that the proportion of single-parent children living with widowed fathers was higher in urban areas than in rural areas, but this represents only a small proportion of all children living with single parents.

These findings suggest that further work should be done on the question of whether there is an association between processes of urbanization and single parenthood. It is possible that some

**Table 4****Urban-Rural Differences in Living Arrangements of Children**

|                              | Urban |      | Rural  |      |
|------------------------------|-------|------|--------|------|
|                              | N     | %    | N      | %    |
| Two parents <sup>a</sup>     | 6,442 | 85.5 | 22,681 | 86.5 |
| One parent                   | 703   | 9.3  | 2,168  | 8.3  |
| Head                         | 585   | 83.5 | 1,717  | 79.8 |
| Male                         | 165   | 28.1 | 490    | 28.3 |
| Female                       | 420   | 71.6 | 1,227  | 70.9 |
| Subfamily                    | 116   | 16.5 | 438    | 20.2 |
| Other relatives <sup>b</sup> | 180   | 2.4  | 913    | 3.5  |
| Other <sup>c</sup>           | 214   | 2.8  | 460    | 1.8  |
| Total                        | 7,539 |      | 26,222 |      |

<sup>a</sup>Percentages of children in two-parent subfamilies are not reported in this or any subsequent tables due to the small number of cases.

<sup>b</sup>Children living with relatives and no parent or where there is no information about presence of parents.

<sup>c</sup>Other includes household employees, children of employees, boarders, children of boarders, children in institutions, as miscellaneous as defined in Table 1.

**Table 5**

Marital Status of the Children's Single Parents Who Were Household Heads,  
by Rural or Urban Residence

|               | Rural   |       |         |       | Urban   |       |         |       |
|---------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
|               | Fathers |       | Mothers |       | Fathers |       | Mothers |       |
|               | N       | %     | N       | %     | N       | %     | N       | %     |
| Widowed       | 423     | 86.3  | 928     | 75.6  | 122     | 73.9  | 346     | 82.4  |
| Spouse absent | 53      | 10.8  | 202     | 16.5  | 38      | 23.0  | 64      | 15.2  |
| Divorced      | 13      | 2.7   | 26      | 2.1   | 5       | 3.0   | 6       | 1.4   |
| Never married | 1       | 0.2   | 71      | 5.8   | 0       | 0.0   | 4       | 1.0   |
| Total         | 490     | 100.0 | 1,227   | 100.0 | 165     | 100.0 | 420     | 100.0 |

of the pressures breaking down betrothal commitments and leading to marital separation were occurring in rural as well as urban areas as a result of a growing wage-labor economy. Recent historical scholarship has suggested many ways in which the social transformations that accompanied the spread of wage labor and its pressure against family commitments affected the countryside as well as the cities (Jensen, 1986; Armitago and Jameson, 1987).

### **Immigrants and Migrants**

On the basis of previous historical studies we hypothesized that high rates of single parenthood might have been influenced by high rates of immigration. Numerous studies have suggested that immigration has the effect, at least temporarily, of separating families, increasing illegitimacy rates, even increasing bigamy. Again, this hypothesis was not borne out by the census analysis.

The numbers in Table 6 indicate that children of immigrant and migrant parents were slightly more likely to live with two parents than were children of nonmigrant parents. There were no important differences in the distribution of single mothers and fathers associated with the migrant status of children.

Migration and immigration did make a difference, however, in the propensity of single parents to form separate households. Children of foreign-born parents were more likely to live with a single parent who was a household head than were children of domestic migrants or nonmigrants. Nearly 12 percent of children of immigrant parents were living in subfamilies as compared to 23.2 and 20.9 percent of children of domestic migrant and nonmigrant parents respectively. This suggests the unsurprising conclusion that immigrants were less likely to have kinfolk with houses and budgets large enough to take them in than were nonimmigrants.

**Table 6****Migration of Parents<sup>a</sup>**

|             | Foreign-born<br>Parent |      | Domestic Migrant<br>Parent |      | Nonmigrant<br>Parent |      |
|-------------|------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|----------------------|------|
|             | N                      | %    | N                          | %    | N                    | %    |
| Two Parents | 8,440                  | 89.2 | 7,756                      | 86.5 | 13,172               | 84.3 |
| One Parent  | 721                    | 7.6  | 797                        | 8.9  | 1,377                | 8.8  |
| Head        | 635                    | 88.1 | 612                        | 76.8 | 1,089                | 79.1 |
| Male        | 181                    | 28.5 | 184                        | 30.1 | 296                  | 27.2 |
| Female      | 451                    | 71.0 | 425                        | 69.4 | 784                  | 72.0 |
| Subfamily   | 86                     | 11.9 | 185                        | 23.2 | 288                  | 20.9 |

<sup>a</sup>Percentages are based on all children in the sample. However, children not living with either parent are not included in this table since we have no information on the migration history of their parents.

Women, as always, constituted most of the single parents among both migrants and nonmigrants. In all migration categories, children were more than twice as likely to be living with a single mother than a single father. Migration thus seems not to have changed the likelihood that children would live with single mothers rather than single fathers.

### **Black/White Differences**

Finally, we used the national sample to examine racial differences in children's living arrangements in 1900. Because of the nature of the census data, we were able only to compare "Negroes" to "whites"; these categories are obviously vague and arbitrary, and they leave out other groups which might have been considered racial minorities, such as Asian Americans and Mexican Americans.

The highly politicized controversy concerning race and family structure has included some historical hypotheses, based on fairly limited evidence. In the last few decades the discussion has been polarized around Moynihan's 1965 report which cited pathological black family structure as a cause of disproportionate poverty, and highlighted single motherhood (mistakenly labeled matriarchy) in that family structure (Moynihan, 1965). In fact, black observers from as early as the turn of the century--W.E.B. DuBois, for example--have been concerned about rates of single motherhood and have attributed these, variously, to slavery, economic discrimination, and a woman-dominated sex ratio in large cities (DuBois, 1899, pp. 55, 67, *passim*; Frazier, 1939). Whereas past researchers have used local records and documents from specific cities to show that most black children were living with both parents in the early part of this century (Gutman and Glasco, 1968; Gutman, 1975, 1976). The PUS data provided an opportunity to use national figures and to replicate some of the city-based studies.

Table 7 reports black-white differences in children's living arrangements in 1900 in both rural and urban areas. Since 75 percent of whites and 92 percent of blacks were living in rural areas in 1900, the estimates for the rural population are quite similar to those for the total population. Therefore, the latter are not included in Table 7.

Looking first at the estimates for children in rural areas (columns 1 and 2), we find that 88.6 percent of white children and 75.1 percent of black children were living with two parents at the turn of the century. Stated another way, the proportion of children living with a single parent was relatively low for both blacks and whites, although blacks were about twice as likely as whites to live with a single parent (14 versus 7 percent). Among children living with one parent, in the great majority of cases that parent was a household head: 80 percent of white children and 78 percent of black children. The proportion of children living in subfamilies was only slightly higher for blacks than for whites (21.9 versus 19.6 percent).

The fact that black children in rural areas were only slightly more likely than white children to be living in a subfamily seems somewhat surprising, given popular assumptions about the prevalence of the extended black family. These figures suggest that, for blacks as for whites, the romantic view that prevailed for many decades of a past golden age of extended-family households was mainly a myth. The majority of households were neither prosperous enough nor large enough to take in subfamilies. Moreover, some historical evidence suggests that mothers, even young mothers, probably preferred residential independence from parents or other relatives when possible (Gordon, 1988, chap. 4).

The figures in Table 7 confirm a general understanding that black children are much more likely than whites to be living with relatives other than parents. Eight percent of rural black children lived with relatives, whereas only 2.7 percent of white children did so.<sup>9</sup> Note that the main living arrangements of rural black children throughout the United States in 1900 were as

Table 7

Black-White Differences in Children's Living Arrangements,  
by Rural or Urban Residence

|             | Rural  |      |        |      | Urban  |      |        |      |
|-------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|
|             | Whites |      | Blacks |      | Whites |      | Blacks |      |
|             | N      | %    | N      | %    | N      | %    | N      | %    |
| Two Parents | 19,649 | 88.6 | 3,032  | 75.1 | 6,235  | 86.7 | 207    | 59.0 |
| One Parent  | 1,597  | 7.2  | 571    | 14.1 | 621    | 8.6  | 82     | 23.4 |
| Head        | 1,284  | 80.4 | 446    | 78.1 | 520    | 83.7 | 67     | 81.7 |
| Male        | 411    | 32.0 | 79     | 17.7 | 162    | 31.2 | 3      | 4.5  |
| Female      | 867    | 67.5 | 360    | 80.7 | 356    | 68.5 | 64     | 95.5 |
| Subfamily   | 313    | 19.6 | 125    | 21.9 | 101    | 16.3 | 15     | 18.3 |
| Relatives   | 592    | 2.7  | 321    | 8.0  | 142    | 2.0  | 38     | 10.8 |
| Other       | 347    | 1.6  | 113    | 2.8  | 190    | 2.6  | 24     | 6.8  |
| Total N's   | 22,185 |      | 4,037  |      | 7,188  |      | 351    |      |

follows: 75 percent lived with two parents, 14 percent with one parent, and 7.8 percent with other relatives. Thus a pattern of extended-family child care accounted for a substantial proportion of the black children living outside of two-parent households--about one third. This finding corroborates many qualitative studies and much literary evidence about the importance of extended family responsibility for black children, and reminds us that household boundaries by no means represent the boundaries of family and kinship support networks.

Another notable racial difference among children living with single parents in rural areas is the small number of black children living with their fathers. Looking just at children of single-parent householders, the ratio of single mothers to single fathers was slightly over 2 to 1 for whites (67.5 to 32 percent), whereas it was 4.6 to 1 (80.7 to 17.7 percent) for blacks. Expressed differently, among children of single-parent householders, 17.7 percent of rural black children were with their fathers as compared with 32 percent of rural white children.

The patterns described above apply to black/white differences among children in rural areas and in the United States generally. If we look only at those children living in urban areas, the racial differences are much more striking. The most important difference is the substantially higher proportion of black children living with single parents in the cities. In 1900, 59 percent of children in urban areas lived with both parents, as compared to 75 percent in nonurban areas; among whites the two percentages were nearly identical. This finding may lend support to the view that the labor market conditions and other urban stresses made it harder for black couples to form and/or to stay together. These conditions may include employment disadvantages for black men and employment opportunities for women, and the two may be related. Clearly it would be useful in further research to combine closer studies of single parenthood in particular cities with research about employment opportunities.

A second major difference that arises from racial comparison across urban and rural areas is the sex of the single parent. Extremely few black children in urban areas were living with single fathers. Whereas in rural areas 80.7 percent of black single-parent children lived with their mothers, in urban areas that figure was 95.5 percent. There was virtually no urban/rural difference in proportion of single-mother and single-father households among whites.

In interpreting these findings of racial differences, the reader should keep in mind that only 8 percent of black children were living in urban areas at the turn of the century, as compared with 25 percent of white children. The total number of black children in our urban sample was only 351, as compared to 7,188 urban white children. Thus the estimates for the urban black population are based on a highly selective sample of black families. Nevertheless, the patterns that appear in Table 7 may be important in helping us understand the underlying causes of racial differences in children's living arrangements today. For example, the numbers show that the proportion of black children living with single mothers in urban areas was about the same in 1900 as it was for the entire black population in 1980. Given the urbanization of blacks during the past century--approximately 80 percent of blacks live in urban areas today--these numbers suggest that at least some of the increase in single motherhood among blacks may be due to urbanization. It also suggests that we should look more closely at what it is about urban conditions that promotes the growth of single-mother families, especially among blacks.

Table 8 reports racial differences in the marital status of single parents. Here and in subsequent tables the racial comparisons are based on the total sample of children rather than being broken down by rural/urban status, as they are in Table 7, owing to the small sample size of urban blacks. We do, however, discuss urban differences in the text.

According to Table 8, the major cause of single parenthood for both black and white children was a parent's death. Regardless of whether a child lived with a single mother or single

**Table 8**

**Black-White Differences in Marital Status of  
the Children's Single Parents Who Were Household Heads**

|               | <u>White</u> |         | <u>Black</u> |         |
|---------------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
|               | Fathers      | Mothers | Fathers      | Mothers |
| Widowed       | 84.5%        | 79.0%   | 76.0%        | 72.2%   |
| Spouse absent | 12.9         | 16.9    | 19.3         | 14.2    |
| Divorced      | 2.6          | 1.8     | 3.4          | 2.3     |
| Never married | 0.0          | 2.9     | 1.1          | 11.4    |
| Total N's     | (573)        | (1,229) | (88)         | (431)   |

father, nearly 80 percent were living with a widowed parent. The only major racial difference in parents' marital status was the category of never-married parent, which was much more common among blacks than among whites. We also examined racial differences in parent's marital status separately for children in rural and urban areas, and found that the patterns were quite similar.

We must treat the figures on out-of-wedlock children with several grains of salt. Embarrassment about "illegitimacy" made whites reluctant to disclose to any official agents, including census-takers, that no marriage had taken place, while greater black respect for unmarried mothers probably made them more honest. Other evidence suggests substantial white illegitimacy rates and patterns of deception in reporting it (Gordon, 1988, Chap 4), but this is unlikely to erase the race difference. Yet another factor which could make these figures misleading is that many out-of-wedlock children did in fact have two parents actively engaged in parenting, sometimes even two parents living together but unmarried. In a period in which divorce was rare, formerly married and separated individuals were likely to form new couples without legal marriage, and these relationships may have been missed by, or even kept from, census-takers. This pattern was common among whites as well as blacks at this time, and it is difficult to say what its effect on the overall figures would have been. Still, the most striking fact here is the dominance of widowhood among both races.

Racial differences in the marital status of single parents may account for some of the racial difference in the sex of the single parent. When single parenthood was due to widowhood, fathers were likely at least occasionally to become single parents. When single parenthood was due to a birth out of wedlock, mothers almost always kept the children. Since premarital birth was more common among blacks, we would expect the ratio of single mothers to single fathers to be higher. However, since the great majority of black children were living with a widowed parent,

differences in parents' marital status can account for only a small portion of the racial difference in the sex of single parents.

We also looked at black/white differences in homeownership, as reported in Table 9. As would be expected, many fewer blacks than whites owned their homes. According to Table 9, 24.5 percent of black children lived with a homeowner as compared with 48 percent of white children. As we saw earlier, single-parent children living in subfamilies were more likely to live with homeowners than single-parent children living with householders, and this patterns holds for blacks as well as whites. At least two racial differences in home ownership patterns are noteworthy. First, the disparity between children in two-parent households and single-parent households is much more pronounced for black children than for whites. Among blacks the ratio of ownership is 2 to 1 (two-parent to one-parent), whereas among whites it is only 1.12 to 1. Second, black children living with single fathers have an extremely low incidence of home ownership. Whereas single-parent white children are somewhat more likely to live with homeowners when they live with fathers as compared with mothers, among black children the opposite is true: living with a homeowner is more than four times more common among black children living with single mothers than among children living with single fathers. This suggests that very few single black fathers owned their own homes, even when they had sole responsibility for their children. We also compared racial differences in home ownership patterns by rural/urban residence. Although ownership was less common in urban areas, the black/white ratio remained constant, favoring whites by over 2:1.

Finally, we looked at racial differences in the effects of migration on children's living arrangements. In examining migration patterns, we excluded foreign immigrants because there were too few black children in this category. According to Table 10, domestic migration among whites was not related to children's living arrangements, whereas among blacks the children of

**Table 9****Black-White Differences in Homeownership**

| Category                | Children in Category<br><u>Living with Homeowners</u> |        |
|-------------------------|---|--------|
|                         | Whites  | Blacks |
| Child of Household Head | 47.4%   | 24.4%  |
| Two parents             | 47.8  | 26.2   |
| One parent              | 42.9  | 13.3   |
| Male                    | 48.9  | 3.4    |
| Female                  | 40.2  | 15.6   |
| Child in Subfamily      | 60.8  | 25.2   |
| Without any parent      | 61.6  | 24.9   |
| With one parent         | 56.5  | 22.7   |
| With two parents        | 61.5  | 24.4   |
| All Children            | 48.1  | 24.5   |

**Table 10****Black-White Differences in Domestic Migrant vs. Nonmigrant Parents\***

|             | <u>Whites</u>       |                 | <u>Blacks</u>       |                 |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
|             | Domestic<br>Migrant | Non-<br>migrant | Domestic<br>Migrant | Non-<br>migrant |
| Two Parents | 87.6%               | 87.7%           | 79.9%               | 72.0%           |
| One Parent  | 8.3                 | 7.0             | 13.5                | 15.4            |
| Head        | 74.6                | 80.6            | 86.3                | 76.6            |
| Male        | 32.5                | 33.8            | 20.6                | 15.6            |
| Female      | 67.0                | 65.6            | 79.6                | 83.1            |
| Subfamily   | 25.4                | 19.4            | 13.7                | 23.4            |

\*Percentages are based on all children in the sample. However, children not living with either parent are not included in this table, since we have no information on the migration history of their parents.

migrants were somewhat more likely to live with both parents than were children of nonmigrants. Moreover, among white domestic migrants, single-parent children were less likely to be in parent-headed households than were children of nonmigrants (74.6 as compared to 80.6 percent among nonmigrants), whereas among blacks, children of migrants were more likely to be in parent-headed households (86.3 as compared to 76.6 percent among nonmigrants). The latter finding was also true of black children living in urban areas, which suggests that migration is not the critical factor in accounting for higher proportions of single-parent black children in the cities. This finding undercuts the hypothesis that migration in itself was de-stabilizing to the black family, and thereby parallels and supports the similar finding regarding the effects of immigration on the total population.

A final caution about our findings on racial differences is necessary: there is a probability that the census undercounted blacks, which may have biased these figures in unpredictable ways. The 1870 census, it was widely agreed at the end of the century, had undercounted the South by 1.2 million and blacks by .5 million, or 10 percent of the whole black population. For political reasons no such evaluation was done of the 1900 census, but the most likely reality is that there was an undercount of some degree (Anderson, 1988). Generally those who study the census place its margin of error between 10 and 18 percent (Anderson, private communication), and it seems reasonable to assume that the error regarding African Americans would have been at the high end. On the other hand it would also be reasonable to suppose that families with children would be counted more often than childless individuals, since the presence of children contributes, all other things being equal, to residential stability.

## A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF SELECTED AREAS

We separated out data for eleven areas--seven cities and four predominantly rural states, from which we excluded major cities--in a preliminary attempt to look at geographical difference in our findings. This data we call Sample B. The major benefit of this procedure was that it allowed a closer examination of the composition of subfamilies. The small size of the samples from each of these eleven areas allowed us to print out and code by hand each household record in order to match children in subfamilies with their parents. We were thus able to get a more reliable count of single- parent subfamilies and the sex of single parents than was available in the compiled data. On the other hand, another consequence of the small size of these local samples was that, even when we chose relatively large cities, the numbers of children were often too small to make significant comparisons possible. (For example, the Public Use Sample contained only 92 children in Washington, D.C.)

In the analysis of Sample B we found sharp variations from place to place in children's living situations, as shown in Table 11. Washington, D.C., for example, had three times the proportion of children with single parents as did Chicago. Even if we eliminate Washington, which had an unusually high proportion of children in single-parent families, the variation across cities is still substantial, Boston having 170 percent of Chicago's proportion of single-parent children. Variation appears in the states as well: rural Alabama had twice the proportion of rural Maine.

Also interesting was the local variation in how single-parent children lived, whether with householders or in subfamilies. Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia approximated the national figure which, to repeat, was about 80 percent with householders and about 20 percent in subfamilies. In two areas, rural Maine and Baltimore, single-parent children were more likely to live in subfamilies than in parent-headed households, and by about the same proportion--57-58 percent. In Maine this likely reflected the prevalence of established farm households large

Table 11

Children's Living Arrangements in Selected Cities and States  
(Percentage of all children in each location)

|                            | Selected Cities |              |               |            |           |         |               | Selected States <sup>a</sup> |         |        |            |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|------------------------------|---------|--------|------------|
|                            | Boston          | Philadelphia | New York City | Washington | Baltimore | Chicago | San Francisco | Maine                        | Alabama | Kansas | California |
| Two Parents                | 82.8            | 84.5         | 88.1          | 75.0       | 86.3      | 89.5    | 82.8          | 90.7                         | 84.9    | 87.8   | 85.0       |
| One Parent                 | 12.6            | 11.8         | 8.2           | 22.8       | 9.0       | 7.4     | 9.1           | 5.3                          | 11.3    | 9.7    | 9.9        |
| Head                       | 10.3            | 9.3          | 5.8           | 15.2       | 3.8       | 6.5     | 7.1           | 2.2                          | 8.2     | 8.0    | 6.0        |
| Male                       | 2.3             | 2.3          | 2.3           | 3.3        | 0.0       | 2.6     | 4.0           | 0.9                          | 1.8     | 3.3    | 0.9        |
| Female                     | 6.9             | 7.0          | 3.5           | 12.0       | 3.8       | 3.9     | 3.0           | 1.3                          | 6.4     | 4.7    | 5.1        |
| Subfamily                  | 1.7             | 1.7          | 1.9           | 7.6        | 4.3       | 0.9     | 2.0           | 3.1                          | 3.1     | 1.7    | 3.0        |
| Male                       | 0.0             | 0.2          | 1.0           | 0.0        | 0.0       | 0.2     | 0.0           | 0.4                          | 0.4     | 0.0    | 1.2        |
| Female                     | 1.7             | 1.5          | 0.9           | 7.6        | 4.3       | 0.8     | 2.0           | 2.7                          | 2.6     | 1.7    | 1.8        |
| Boarder                    | 0.6             | 0.8          | 0.6           | 0.0        | 0.9       | 0.0     | 0.0           | 0.0                          | 0.0     | 0.0    | 0.9        |
| Male                       | 0.6             | 0.4          | 0.1           | 0.0        | 0.0       | 0.0     | 0.0           | 0.0                          | 0.0     | 0.0    | 0.0        |
| Female                     | 0.0             | 0.4          | 0.5           | 0.0        | 0.9       | 0.0     | 0.0           | 0.0                          | 0.0     | 0.0    | 0.9        |
| Relatives                  | 2.3             | 1.2          | 1.3           | 0.0        | 0.9       | 1.2     | 1.0           | 2.2                          | 2.7     | 2.0    | 2.7        |
| Alone                      | 1.7             | 1.0          | 0.1           | 0.0        | 1.4       | 0.2     | 2.0           | 1.3                          | 0.4     | 0.2    | 0.3        |
| Institution                | 0.6             | 1.5          | 2.1           | 2.2        | 2.4       | 0.9     | 4.0           | 0.4                          | 0.0     | 0.3    | 0.6        |
| Miscellaneous <sup>b</sup> | 0.0             | 0.0          | 0.2           | 0.0        | 0.0       | 0.3     | 1.0           | 0.0                          | 0.6     | 0.0    | 0.3        |
| Missing                    | 0.0             | 0.0          | 0.1           | 0.0        | 0.0       | 0.2     | 0.0           | 0.0                          | 0.0     | 0.0    | 1.2        |
| Total N                    | 225             | 483          | 1,443         | 92         | 212       | 647     | 99            | 225                          | 947     | 639    | 333        |

Source: "Sample B," selected from census data. See text for information.

<sup>a</sup>Population in large cities excluded.

<sup>b</sup>Miscellaneous includes head, wife, cohead, child-in-law, visitor, friend, companion, pauper in private household, worker in group quarters, and household employee. They are grouped together because of small cell sizes.

enough to take in (or to keep) single parents and children. About Baltimore we have no hypothesis.<sup>10</sup> Everywhere else single-parent children were more likely to live with household heads.

In all these areas, as in the country in general, single-parent children were more likely to live with their mothers than with their fathers. This was true both for those living with householders and for those in subfamilies. Nevertheless, there was substantial variation on this point. Children in female-headed households outnumbered those in male-headed households by as much as 5.6 to 1 in rural California, 3.6 to 1 in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, down to a factor of 1.4 to 1 in rural Maine. Among subfamilies the sex ratios were usually even more overwhelmingly tilted toward those headed by women, and in four of the seven cities there were no children in male-headed subfamilies. The scarcity of single fathers in subfamilies probably reflects both the family history--children with single fathers were most likely to be in that situation owing to the death of a mother, and widowers were more likely than separated or never-married parents to maintain their own households--as well as gender difference in economic independence--returning to the dependent status involved in living in another person's household was less necessary for men because of their greater earning power.

We also used our local data to consider the possibility that urban/rural differences in black family structure were an artifact of North/South differences. Since no Deep South city had a large enough population of children to use in our comparisons, we created our own subsample from a composite of three cities in Georgia--Savannah, Atlanta, and Augusta--which we call "urban Georgia." These data confirmed the finding that urban/rural differences among black families existed even within a geographical region in 1900. In urban Georgia, only 49 percent of black children lived with two parents, 36.7 percent lived with one parent, and 10.2 percent lived with other relatives. Comparable white rates here were 89.4, 10.6, and 0 percent. To repeat, in

rural Alabama (These data are not reprinted in tables.) 77 percent of black children lived with two parents, 15.5 percent with one, and 5.4 percent with other relatives. In other words, the urban pattern that prevailed among black families nationally was characteristic of the Deep South as well.

Local differences in the living arrangements of children merit further study. One hypothesis that should be investigated is that single parenthood was correlated with more employment opportunities for women. Nancy Folbre's study of two western Massachusetts towns in 1880 showed a positive correlation between female employment and single motherhood (Folbre, 1990). Table 12 compares the percentage of children living with single mothers in each of our local areas with the percentage of women employed in each location.

In the cities, the correlation between women's employment and the proportion of children living with single mothers is .75, which suggests that there is a strong relationship between them. However, if we were to exclude Washington, D.C., which we have already suspected to be anomalous, the correlation drops to .045, indicating no relationship.

In the rural states the correlation between women's employment and children with single mothers is .54. Our figures on women's employment in these states, taken from the published 1900 census, are based on the entire population rather than persons living in rural areas, in contrast with our figures on children with single mothers. However, since these states were predominantly rural in 1900, we do not believe the figures would be very different if they had been limited to rural areas. If, as with the cities, we exclude the state with the highest female employment rate and the largest proportion of children with single mothers, Alabama, the relation between women's employment and single-parent children is considerably weaker.

Much further research will be needed before the hypothesis concerning a correlation between women's employment and single motherhood can be supported. We need to know the

**Table 12**

Proportion of Women Employed Compared to Proportion of Children  
with Single Mothers, Selected Locations, 1900

|                      | Percentage of<br>Women Employed <sup>a</sup> | Percentage of Children<br>with Single Mothers |
|----------------------|--|---|
| <u>Cities</u>        |  |   |
| Washington, D.C.     | 37.0   | 19.6  |
| Boston               | 33.1   | 8.6   |
| Baltimore            | 30.6   | 8.1   |
| New York             | 29.3   | 4.0   |
| Philadelphia         | 2.3  | 8.5   |
| San Francisco        | 25.2   | 5.0   |
| Chicago              | 25.1   | 4.7   |
| <u>States</u>        |  |   |
| Alabama              | 30.4   | 9.0   |
| Maine                | 20.5   | 4.0   |
| California           | 18.7   | 6.9   |
| Kansas               | 12.3   | 6.4   |
| <u>United States</u> | 20.6   | 6.5   |

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census, 1900 (Washington, D.C.: 1901), I, 131-34.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of female population aged 16 or over classified as "breadwinners" in 1900 census.

ages of the employed women, since different regions and different industries draw different cohorts of women into employment. We need better data on differences between black and white, migrant and nonmigrant women; and between single-mother heads of household and single mothers in subfamilies. And above all we need to attend carefully to questions of causality: do opportunities for women's employment encourage women to become single mothers through marital separation or out-of-wedlock birth? Or does single motherhood and economic need lead more single mothers to areas where there are existing job opportunities?

Our local data also allowed us to check the relationship between immigration and single parenthood from a different perspective. Our national data, it will be remembered, showed no relationship between migration and the propensity of children to live with single parents. It seemed possible that even though there was no direct relationship between parents' migration status and single parenthood, there might be something about the conditions of cities populated largely by immigrants that made children more likely to have single parents. Looking at the eleven local areas, we compared the proportion of children with single parents with the overall proportion of the foreign-born residents in these areas (taken from the published 1900 census).

The results presented in Table 13 support our earlier finding: there is no relationship between migration status and single parenthood. Even if we exclude Washington, D.C., which had a very high proportion of children with single parents, there is no indication that the immigrant cities were associated with single parenthood.

As we have mentioned before, the numbers of black children in the eleven local areas we studied were too small to allow us to make any racial comparisons about children's living arrangements in specific areas. However, we were interested in the fact that, among blacks, a high proportion of children in urban areas lived with single parents. Since most of those children were with single mothers, the question arose, could it be that a preponderance of women in the

**Table 13**

Proportion of Population Foreign Born Compared with  
Proportion of Single-Parent Children, Selected Locations

|                  | Percentage of Population<br>Foreign Born, 1900 <sup>a</sup> | Percentage of<br>Children Living with<br>Single Parents, 1900 |
|------------------|---|---|
| <u>Cities</u>    |   |   |
| New York         | 37.0  | 8.2   |
| Chicago          | 34.6  | 7.4   |
| Boston           | 35.3  | 12.6  |
| San Francisco    | 35.1  | 9.1   |
| Philadelphia     | 22.9  | 11.8  |
| Baltimore        | 13.6  | 9.0   |
| Washington, D.C. | 7.3   | 22.8  |
| <u>States</u>    |   |   |
| California       | 24.7  | 9.9   |
| Maine            | 13.4  | 5.3   |
| Kansas           | 8.6   | 9.7   |
| Alabama          | 0.8   | 11.3  |

<sup>a</sup>Source same as Table 12.

black population accounted for single motherhood? We looked at the sex ratios from these specific areas, taken from the published census. Our findings appear in Table 14.<sup>11</sup>

In almost every location the white sex ratios were close to 1. The black sex ratios, by contrast, show a preponderance of women in four of the six urban areas. The proportion of blacks in the population did not seem to affect these ratios. The Alabama figures suggest that the unbalanced sex ratio was not characteristic of a southern rural area, adding some weight to our findings that black family composition changed in urban settings. We did not examine whether there was a correlation between sex ratios and single parenthood with these data, because the 1900 Public Use Sample had so few black children in the cities. This question could better be studied with the somewhat larger 1910 PUS or with the entire census for selected cities.<sup>12</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND INTERPRETATION

We take the main significance of our findings to be that single-parenthood--primarily single motherhood--has been for at least a century a common experience of a considerable minority of children. We found the proportion of children with single parents in 1900 comparable to that in 1960. Thus, up until the last three decades, there is no reason to attribute single parenthood to any singular, novel developments. We found, for example, that the experience of migration was not correlated with the likelihood that children lived with a single parent. In the population as a whole, the proportion of single-parent children was similarly unrelated to urban living conditions. It is possible that the erroneous assumptions and hypotheses attributing single parenthood to immigration or urbanization result from a tendency to consider single motherhood more abnormal than it is, and therefore to associate it with other social phenomena which, at the time, appeared abnormal, such as immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and increasing women's rights.

**Table 14**

## Single Parenthood and Black and White Sex Ratios

| Location         | % Black | Black Sex Ratio (M:F) | White Sex Ratio |
|------------------|---------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Washington, D.C. | 31.1    | .79                   | .94             |
| Baltimore        | 15.6    | .79                   | .92             |
| Philadelphia     | 4.9     | .85                   | .96             |
| Boston           | 2.1     | 1.04                  | .96             |
| New York         | 1.8     | .82                   | 1.50            |
| Chicago          | 1.8     | 1.13                  | 1.04            |
| Rural Alabama    | 45.2    | .98                   | 1.04            |
| United States    | 11.6    | 1.00                  | 1.04            |

Looking at the circumstances of single parenthood, we found some surprises and some not so surprising results. Even though we expected that mothers would be the caretakers of the vast majority of single-parent children, we were surprised that the proportion was so high, given the high rates of widowhood. The role of mothers when they are single, the responsibility laid upon them for earning and caring for children, may also help explain why single parenthood has been falsely considered so aberrant: single motherhood was such a violation of norms in a society that defined a two-parent family as "male-headed" that its occurrence created alarm and denial.

Our data corroborated another line of continuity over the past century: that single motherhood and the sharing of child-raising among a wider net of kinfolk have been more common among African Americans than among whites. It was particularly striking, in view of contemporary causes of single-parenthood, that in 1900 this status resulted primarily not from out-of-wedlock births but from widowhood among both blacks and whites.

Another important finding is the urban/rural difference in the living arrangements of black children. They were considerably less likely to be living with two parents in urban than in rural areas in 1900, while white children's urban/rural patterns were the same. The black levels of single motherhood observed today, when over 80 percent of blacks live in urban areas, are comparable to those in urban areas in 1900. For example, in 1900, 59 percent of urban black children lived with two parents, whereas in 1970 the figure for all blacks was 58.5 percent. We must be cautious in interpreting this finding because so few African Americans lived in urban areas in 1900. Nevertheless, the data suggest that several factors interact in creating black/white differences in children's living arrangements. The fact that among rural Americans as early as 1900 black children were more likely to live with single parents and with relatives other than parents rather than with two parents suggests that factors other than urban, industrial patterns of race discrimination (in jobs and housing and education, for example) were involved. These rural

differences may have been created by autonomous African American family and cultural values, such as approval of out-of-wedlock childbirth and extended-family and out-of-household child-raising responsibility; or by differences in rural economic conditions for blacks and whites; or both. Certainly the census data cannot distinguish among the different causal factors.

By contrast, these data do tell us unequivocally that something about urban living conditions affected black children's propensity to live with single parents, because the black/white difference was much sharper in the cities. Even though there were few urban blacks in this Public Use Sample, the rural/urban differences in children's living arrangements were so strong that they cannot be disregarded. Whatever factors were involved in creating rural black family patterns, urban living conditions contributed something new. This finding suggests that the even higher incidence of black single-parent children in the last three decades is related to particular conditions of urban life, which contrast with southern agricultural conditions, despite their great injustices and insecurities, which most blacks experienced in 1900.

The main contribution our small study can make is the identification of hypotheses for further research. We believe the data here suggest that subfamilies should be included in studies of children's living arrangements. Employment patterns for both sexes should be studied and their relationship with family patterns examined. The black/white difference in urban sex ratios needs more attention. Cultural differences between groups other than blacks and the residual category, "whites," should be scrutinized. The ages and sexes of children could be identified and their relationships with the children's living arrangements examined: for example, were boys more likely to stay with fathers? older children? Were fathers more likely to keep children in agricultural areas where children were more economically helpful? Because the Public Use Samples from other early-twentieth-century years are larger, they could be used to produce more significant comparisons between different locations than we were able to obtain.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this article we use the term "significant" in its common, not its statistical, sense. We did not perform statistical significance tests on our data.

<sup>2</sup>A note concerning our capitalization of "Black" but not of "white" may be in order here. In this paper, "Black" refers specifically to African Americans, i.e., to a specific ethnic/racial group. To our regret, we were not able to specify findings in relation to any other such groups. Thus "white," by contrast, refers not to a specific group but to a residual category.

<sup>3</sup>Nineteen children were household heads, spouses of heads, visitors, or workers in group quarters. These are included as "other" in Table 1 below.

<sup>4</sup>The census supplied the following categories: (1) an individual without children, (2) two or more individuals without children, (3) individual with children, (4) two or more individuals with children, (5) couple without children, (6) couple with children, (7) two or more couples with children, and (8) complex combination. Children living in types 1, 2, and 5 were coded as living without a parent, those in types 3 and 4 were coded as living with a single parent, those in types 6 and 7 were coded as living with both parents, and those in type 8 were coded as living with relatives, with no information regarding parents.

<sup>5</sup>Thus assumes that children in the "relatives-unknown" category are not living with a parent.

<sup>6</sup>This percentage is much higher in urban areas (1.27 percent) and higher still in some of the cities we examined. See below.

<sup>7</sup>For the sake of simplicity, we have excluded the categories of boarder, child of boarder, employee, child of employee, child in institution, and miscellaneous from this and subsequent tables.

<sup>8</sup>There may have been many more out-of-wedlock children whose parents subsequently married.

<sup>9</sup>In rural areas 7.9 percent of Black children lived with relatives, while 2.6 percent of white children did. These figures include those living with relatives in a household in which the census taker was not sure that no parent was present. If we were to exclude the unknowns, the percentages would be 6.6 for Blacks and 2.5 for whites.

<sup>10</sup>We were struck by the great differences between Baltimore and nearby Washington, D.C. Washington had 2.5 times the proportion of children with single parents as Baltimore; in Washington single-parent children were also more likely to have parents who headed households.

<sup>11</sup>Thanks to Susan Traverso for the research on sex ratios.

<sup>12</sup>These sex ratios may be telling us something about patterns of migration. Newly urbanizing economies often attract single young women whose parents remain on the land. For example, many single young white women came into Boston in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from northern and western New England. This would account for Boston's majority of women among whites. By contrast, Boston's black population was less migratory, because it was far from the South; it would be expected that the older, more settled small black population would consist more of families and would thus produce an approximately equal sex ratio. It is also worth considering the hypothesis that women migrants did not travel as far as men, which would also have made Boston a less popular destination for black women. In New York in 1900 the preponderance of overseas immigrants probably accounts for the dominance of males among whites. In Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, all of which had female numerical dominance among blacks, there was a large black migration from the South, which may have attracted women coming alone or with young children. In rural Alabama the black-white

difference in sex ratio was small; indeed it resembled that of the United States as a whole. Here the small black/white difference may have been caused by higher death rates for black males.

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