PART II

THE MATRIX PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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3 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND REGULATION OF FAMILIES

This photo was taken on March 21, 2019, at the border between the U.S. and Mexico, in El Paso, Texas. Detained migrants were forced to wait behind bars before being transported to a more permanent detention center by the U.S. Border Patrol. On the campaign trail, President Trump blamed immigrants for many of the social problems faced by the nation, and relied on a centuries-old narrative of foreign invaders taking jobs away from American-born workers. He promised to force Mexico to build a wall between the two nations, to cut off immigration from Central America. While this did not happen, Trump held record-high numbers of children in custody.

Credit: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Describe the historical forces that have influenced the intersection of race and family in the United States.

3.2 Examine the current stock theories that explain family inequalities across racial and ethnic lines.

3.3 Apply the matrix lens to an understanding of family inequality.

3.4 Identify alternatives to the current matrix of inequality among families.

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In August 2019, Miguel cried and waved at his mother as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials took her away, her hands tied together. Miguel's family is from Guatemala, and his mother worked in a poultry processing plant in Mississippi. When ICE employees invaded the plant, which is surrounded by barbed wire, every worker was required to show paperwork and undergo a search of their belongings. Similar raids were carried out in numerous plants in other small Mississippi towns. In all, the 600 ICE employees put 680 people, mostly Latinx, on busses to a National Guard hangar for processing. This was one of the largest raids to date carried out by the Trump administration. The raids had a devastating impact not only on the families directly affected, including Latinx U.S. citizens, but also on the towns themselves, and their local economies. These very public raids have increased fear among Latinx families and children across the nation (Fowler, 2019; Solis & Amy, 2019).

In 2019, over a million people were detained at a point of entry into the U.S., with the majority entering at the border with Mexico. Adults as well as children are held in a variety of locations, including jails and contract detention facilities owned and operated by private prison corporations. Thousands of children are detained on their own, either separated from family members at the border, or those who cross the border alone. When Donald Trump became President, the U.S. held 2,700 children in custody. In 2019 the number had increased to 13,000; their average length of stay was 55 days. Children are held in dismal conditions. These children do not have adequate healthcare (including mental health), and an average of 1,000 incidents of sexual abuse are discovered each year (American Immigration Council 2020).

Under President Trump, an Asylum Transit Ban prevented many people seeking humanitarian asylum in the U.S. from crossing the U.S./Mexican border. This race- and nation-based ban targeted immigrants from Central and South America, treating these immigrants differently from those entering at other ports, most likely from Europe and Asia (American Immigration Council 2019). In September 2020, reports were released charging that a detention center in Georgia had sterilized many women without their knowledge or consent (Amnesty International 2020).

The conditions facing families today are far different than they were just a decade ago, and they continue to be shaped by race, and the intersection of race with gender, class, immigration status, nationality, and more.

In this chapter we explore the historical development of the institution of the family, popular and sociological stock stories about family, concealed stories and stories of resistance which reveal the ways in which family narratives are used as an instrument of power and social control, and apply the matrix theory.

THE FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION

When you hear the word *family,* what image comes to mind? In American society's idealized family, the father is the head of household and breadwinner, and the mother is comfortably enshrined in the domestic sphere, where she nurtures the couple's biological children and socializes them for middle-class adulthood. This stock story depicts the family as a private haven,

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separate from the public sphere. We tend to think of this family form as having a long history and being somehow natural. However, the specific family form of a married couple and their children did not rise to prominence until the mid-1800s (Coontz 2010a).

The narrative of the ideal traditional family as "natural" conceals narratives of the family as an institution constructed through domination, and by law and policy defining "appropriate" families and devaluing others (Collins 1998). But sociologists have offered alternative conceptions. **Family** has been defined as "a social arrangement that contributes to economic stability and support and advocacy systems for children and adults and is a central institution in shaping gender socialization and establishing parameters of control" (Hunt et al. quoted in Zambrana 2011: 48). We will examine a variety of family formations in the following sections.

Early Families

In 1500, an estimated 10 to 20 million indigenous people lived on the land we now call the United States, and even greater numbers ranged across the rest of the Americas (Vizenor 1995; Feagin 2000). Historians have documented great variation both in family forms and in the division of labor and power within the family (Amott and Matthaei 1996, 33).

Native American Families

Constructions of gender were essential to competing notions of the family. Many tribes were fairly egalitarian. In some tribes, women were recognized as warriors, and in others, they played the role of peacemaker. The Iroquois Confederacy's 1390 constitution gave all members of participating nations (Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, and Oneida), including women, the right to vote (Amott and Matthaei 1996, 33).

Degrees of power and status among men and women varied across different tribal nations. Many agricultural tribes were matrilineal and/or matrilocal. Some tribes had more flexible gender roles, allowing women or men to take on the traditional roles of the other gender, to move between roles, or to occupy additional genders, and to even marry someone of the same sex (Herdt 1996; Roscoe 1998; Towle and Morgan 2002).

Among many North American indigenous tribes, kinship was a central locus of community organization. Most economic production and distribution, political structures, disputes, conflicts, and battles were handled by extended kin groups. Land was not seen as private property but was often controlled by the kin group.

When European settlers began colonizing the Americas, the colonists interpreted the cultures they encountered through their own **ethnocentric** lens, seeing their own ways of life as superior, natural, and commanded by God. Many settlers were startled seeing Native women engaged in difficult physical work, which conflicted sharply with their own gender roles and ideas about appropriate work for women among the upper classes. For example, among upper-class Europeans, activities like hunting and fishing were considered leisure activities; for indigenous tribes, men hunted and fished to provide sustenance for the tribe. The Europeans did not recognize this as work, and stereotyped native men as lazy and effeminate. Native women were seen as "beasts of burden" forced to engage in agricultural labor, which settlers assumed to be men's responsibility.

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Early European Colonist Families

For the European colonists, marriage was an economic relationship, and wives and children were essential family workers. On average, a White woman in colonial America gave birth to five to eight children, and it was not uncommon for women to have eleven or twelve children (Hill 2005; Hymowitz and Weissman 1978; MacLean 2014). A colonial woman's risk of dying in childbirth could be as high as one in eight, and most families experienced the death of one to two children (MacLean 2014). The colonists' definition of family at this time was not based on blood ties, but included all those living in the same household under a male household leader.

Mothers performed essential labor, meeting families' basic needs. Husbands and wives often worked side by side, and both engaged in child-rearing and training their children in gender-appropriate skills (Amott and Matthaei 1996, 98–99). Some women worked outside the home in various trades, and many lived very public lives. Nevertheless, a gendered division of labor prevailed (Hymowitz and Weissman 1978).

English common law upheld the patriarchal family. Upon marriage wives lost all legal status and all rights to their belongings, property, and income. They could not sign contracts or file lawsuits. If widowed, they could not be legal guardians to their own minor children. The notion that women literally disappeared as individuals is perhaps best demonstrated by the law's failure to recognize marital rape (Zaher 2002).

The Effects of Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism describes an outside group that permanently settles in a new land and dominates the indigenous peoples through relocation and genocidal practices, establishes its own model of society, and becomes the dominant political and economic force (Veracini 2010). By the late 1800s, Native Americans had largely been forced to reside on reservations located in barren lands the Europeans saw as the least valuable. The settlers continued to colonize new land, drawing and redrawing the boundaries of the new nation they were building for themselves.

Surviving Native Americans were expected to assimilate—to adopt European lifestyles and modes of organization in their communities and families. Missionaries also played a key role in destroying indigenous culture and family formations. In the 1870s, the reservations were divided among 13 Christian denominations, and a federal boarding school system was created to fully assimilate the next generation of Native Americans. Children were taken from their families and cultures, forced to abandon their native languages and religious beliefs, and given new names (Vizenor 1995). Luther Standing Bear wrote: "One day when we came to school there was a lot of writing on the blackboards.… Our interpreter came into the room and said, 'Do you see all these marks on the blackboard? Well, each word is a White man. They are going to give each one of you one of these names by which you will hereafter be known'" (quoted in Vizenor 1995: 9). This policy of forced assimilation destroyed many families and future generations' family relationships. Many Native Americans resisted attempts to force them to assimilate into European cultural roles, while others saw their boarding school experiences as a path to becoming successful in the settler society.

In 1887, Congress passed the **Dawes Act**, requiring Native American nations to divide their communal reservations into individual plots of 160 acres, with each assigned to a family head.

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In 1879, The Carlisle Indian Industrial School, in Carlisle, PA, was the first government-run boarding school, established in abandoned Army barracks. Hundreds more would follow. As this photo reveals, students were banned from wearing traditional tribal clothing as one step in the process of forced assimilation. Hundreds of children died at the school due to the harsh conditions, disease, and inadequate care. 186 children remain buried at the site.

Credit: Everett Collection Historical/Alamy Stock Photo

The remaining land was given to White homesteaders and various corporations, such as railroads and ranching companies. European notions of the family were reproduced and written into policy. In response to strong Native American resistance, one compromise was made: The allotments would be made to each person, rather than only to male family heads, in acknowledgment of the fact that Native cultures recognized the rights of Native women to own property (Amott and Matthaei 1996).

Colonial practices and Eurocentric notions of family had negative impacts on every minority racial and ethnic group. The culture and practice of slavery tore apart African families, beginning with the separation of individuals from their families in Africa and the common experiences of loss on slave ships. Pregnant women and infants born on the transatlantic voyage were often thrown overboard so as not to be a burden to the captain. Further, every African was insured as property, so that a dead African could be more profitable than an unhealthy living one. For slave owners, each slave was a commodity, and husbands and wives were often separated when sold; children were taken away from parents to be sold for the slave owner's profit. Slave owners often raped women slaves to produce children to be sold. The institution of slavery made it nearly impossible for Africans to maintain family relationships, yet many tried as best

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they could. Slaves resisted their torment in many ways. Slavery was so inhumane and horrific that some mothers would go so far as to kill their infants before they could be taken away, to protect the children from life as slaves. Patterns of intermixing produced lighter-skinned Africans, which created new status dynamics that continue into the present. The impact of the slave trade, slavery itself, and then hundreds of years of continued oppression have had far-reaching, even unimaginable effects on the formation of Black families in the United States.

Domesticity: The Emergence of the Ideology of Separate Spheres

In the early 1800s, the number of jobs outside the home was growing, and White men increasingly moved out of the domestic sphere. White women's lives became sharply defined by an **ideology of domesticity** and the creation of a public/private dichotomy. While the notion of a new version of "ideal" family took hold, diverse family formations were simultaneously evolving (Coontz 2010a). In working-class families, children and mothers had no choice but to work to help support their families. In the emerging middle class, the woman's role was seen as that of housewife and mother, responsible for the home and children, while work and politics became defined as men's sphere. Privileged White women were exalted by this "cult of domesticity," and consumer culture, such as magazines and catalogs, espoused that women's natural place was in the home and economically dependent on their husbands.

With the growth of the middle class, many families had access to domestic workers, often young European immigrant women. Working-class White families could not afford servants, and wives often had to seek paid work. European immigrant families often had to send their children to work to help the family survive. Thus, this ideology rationalized White middle-class and upper-class privilege as a result of their ability to achieve and maintain this new ideal family formation that reified inequitable gender relations.

This model, however, was actually the result of specific changes in the economy and the organization of work, and it was short-lived. It rose to prominence between 1860 and 1920, after which White women began to enter the paid workforce in greater numbers. Family sociologist Kingsley Davis (1984, 404) concludes, "Clearly, the division of labor that arose historically from the separation of the workplace and the home is not the 'normal' or 'traditional' pattern." Why, then, has this particular family formation remained the ideal?

The Legacy of Immigration

While we often refer to the United States as a nation of immigrants, neither African American nor indigenous communities are immigrant populations. Native Americans were here long before Europeans arrived, and, excluding later populations of Blacks who chose to emigrate from Africa and the Caribbean, the African American community is the historical product of slavery. Both populations, and many Mexicans, were forced to largely abandon their own cultures and family traditions. However, they were not the only racial and ethnic groups to face government regulation and intervention in their formation of families.

The Irish constituted the first significant influx of non–Western European immigrants in the 1840s, followed by Eastern and Southern Europeans and Jews. These new arrivals prompted

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a crisis in how Whiteness was defined. Through the end of the 19th century, being legally defined as White was critical to gaining the rights of citizenship and property ownership, so the racial classification of new immigrant groups was key to their future success in the United States. The Irish were referred to as the "Blacks of Europe" and encountered blatant discrimination by employers (Tehranian 2009, 22). Italians were also linked to Blacks by means of the common nickname "guinea," which had its origins in the European term for the western coast of Africa.

The Expanding Category of Whiteness

Different paths to assimilation were embraced to join the established dominant Northern European ideal. For Jewish immigrants, marriage was a step in the direction of Americanization but also a form of resistance. In the United States, marriages could be freely chosen and based on love, a practice that was a rejection of traditional Jewish authority regarding the arrangement of marriages. In adopting American values of freedom, love, and pleasure, Jews modeled modern American families. At the same time, they resisted Americanization through marriage by overwhelmingly marrying other Jews (Prell 1999).

Diverse immigrants turned to the law to define themselves as White, and thus as eligible for naturalization, the legal process to gain citizenship. Between 1878 and 1952 there were 52 "naturalization" trials. As Ian Haney Lopez concludes in *White by Law,* the legal apparatus played a central role in the social construction of race. It was immigrants' ability to perform Whiteness that was under scrutiny in these cases, and "the potential for immigrants to assimilate within mainstream Anglo-American culture was put on trial" (Haney Lopez 1996, 40, Tehranian 2009).

Eventually, European American ethnic immigrant groups were seen as assimilated enough to be defined as White, and the boundaries of Whiteness expanded (we look at some of the economic reasons for this shift in Chapter 4). Marriage and family formation were signs of Americanization (Prell 1999). At the same time the children of immigrants were being encouraged to assimilate through intermarriage, interracial intermarriage was illegal. The boundary between Blacks and the expanding group of Whites was being more firmly drawn.

Immigration Policy and Family Formation

In contrast with European immigrants, Asian American immigrants were excluded from the expanding category of Whiteness. The first wave of Asian immigrants came from China in the mid-1800s, primarily men who came to work in the California gold rush, in agriculture, or in railroad construction. Labor recruiters sought married men willing to leave their families in China, because they could be paid less (Yang 2011) and would eventually return home. Initially many single Chinese women immigrated, working as sex workers to support themselves, until the U.S. government enacted the 1875 Page Law, a landmark attempt to limit the immigration of "undesirables" (Luibhéid 2002, 277). The predominant view was that Chinese sex workers spread disease and debauchery among both Chinese and White men, threatening the integrity of the White family.

The scarcity of Chinese women did not mean that male Chinese laborers had no families in the United States, however. Many created family formations by establishing clans, associations based on kinship and lineage and open to people with the same last name. Following the

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anti-immigration Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese continued to arrive but at a slower rate. Many petitioned to bring "paper sons," young men from China posing as their U.S.-born sons, a relationship that could not be disproven after all birth records were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. It was not until 1943 that Chinese people could again immigrate to the United States (although only 105 Chinese were allowed to enter per year) and finally apply to become U.S. citizens.

After the supply of Chinese labor was cut off in the late 1800s, the first large groups of Japanese laborers were recruited to work in agriculture, lumber, and mining on the West Coast and in Hawaii. As the numbers of Japanese increased on the mainland, so did racism against them. Japanese were barred from joining workers' unions, and various stereotypes arose as they were scapegoated by White labor. Eventually, in 1907–8, the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement was reached, whereby Japan agreed to stop allowing Japanese men to emigrate and

The gender balance in Chinese immigration shifted after World War II, when the War Brides Act permitted Chinese wives and children of U.S. soldiers into the United States, followed by other laws that allowed American soldiers' fiancées to enter. Eventually the McCarran-Walter Act (1952) permitted Chinese wives of Chinese men in the United States to join them here, bringing the "bachelors' society" to an end and allowing Chinese people to play a greater role in shaping their own families in the United States.

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the United States agreed to admit the family members of those men who had already immigrated. Approximately 100,000 Japanese joined their husbands, fathers, and sons in the United States, as did about 20,000 "picture brides" of arranged marriages, who often had nothing but photos or letters from the unknown husbands they were about to meet. Julie Otsuka's novel *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011, 18) brings together the voices of these women, drawing from collected historical documents and interviews:

> On the boat we could not have known that when we first saw our husbands we would have no idea who they were. That the crowd of men in knit caps and shabby black coats waiting for us down below on the dock would bear no resemblance to the handsome young men in the photographs. That the photographs we had been sent were twenty years old. That the letters we had been written had been written to us by people other than our husbands, professional people with beautiful handwriting whose job it was to tell lies and win hearts. That when we first heard our names being called out across the water one of us would cover her eyes and turn away—I want to go home—but the rest of us would lower our heads and smooth down the skirts of our kimonos and walk down the gangplank and step out into the still warm day. This is America, we would say to ourselves, there is no need to worry. And we would be wrong.

Japanese families became moderately successful in agriculture and family farming and worked hard to keep their cultural traditions alive, turning to schools, religious organizations, and Japanese-language newspapers. Between 1913 and 1920, however, despite resistance, a series of "alien land laws" were passed, banning noncitizens from purchasing land. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, all Japanese Americans were immediately suspect. While not one charge of espionage was ever reported, more than 110,000 first- and second-generation Japanese Americans were forced to abandon their homes, property, possessions, and businesses and were relocated to 10 internment camps in various western states. There, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards, they faced harsh weather, low-wage labor, and lack of privacy. Family life changed dramatically. Some scholars note that internment led to some increased liberty for women, who were freed from much housework and cooking, and many young women were allowed to leave the camps for college. Nevertheless, internment was devastating for the community, and by the time they were freed in 1945, many Japanese Americans had nothing left to return to.

Both Chinese and Japanese immigrants faced a paradox when it came to the subject of assimilation. Mary Tsukamoto, in conveying her life story to an anthropologist, succinctly identifies this dilemma:

> You see, we were accused of not being assimilated into our American life, but we were always kept in limbo because every time we turned around there was some group trying to agitate to send us back to Japan or send us away from California, so we never knew for sure whether we should sink our roots deeply. And we never knew for sure if we should spend our profits building a new home and living in nice homes like we wanted. So we endured living in shacks that weren't painted because any day we might be driven out. (quoted in Buss 1985, 91–92)

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RESISTANCE STORIES: ART AS RESISTANCE

Mr. Wong's Theatre Company, by Roger Shimomura

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Americanese: 180 Degrees, by Margaret Kasahara

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Literature and the arts have frequently been embraced as tools for challenging and resisting oppression. These two works are examples.

The 2001Shimomura painting connects many of the most virulently racist stereotypes of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. The biography on the artist's website states: "Roger Shimomura's paintings, prints, and theatre pieces address sociopolitical issues of ethnicity. He was born in Seattle, Washington, and spent two early years of his childhood in Minidoka (Idaho), one of 10 concentration camps for Japanese Americans during WWII" (http://www.rshim.com).

On her website, artist Margaret Kasahara says: "As an Asian American of Japanese descent, that identity crosses two disparate cultures. I don't view it as a negative or a positive reality, it simply is. . . . I often appropriate cultural symbols and the traditional iconography of Japan and America, and place them in a personal and contemporary context. . . . One person's 'exotic' was my 'everyday,' and I was left with the feeling of not quite being allowed to belong" (http://margaretkasahara.com).

Changing Families, Changing Attitudes

The **nuclear family** is often envisioned as a mother, a father, and children (biological or adopted), living together. Today, the majority of families do not fit this definition (U.S. Census 2020). The census definition of a family household, while broader, is limited to people related by birth, adoption or marriage, excluding long-time cohabiting heterosexual and gay and lesbian couples. Family formations today are very diverse:

- 64% of families with children under the age of 15 have two employed parents (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020).
- Only two fifths of families have children (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020).
- The number of children living with cohabiting (not legally married) parents has increased (United States Census Bureau 2018).
- The median age of marriage has increased to 30 for men and 28 for women (U.S. Census 2020b).
- More young adults (58% of all 18–24 year-olds) are living at home with their parents (U.S. Census 2020b).
- The numbers of single parents (divorced, widowed, and never married), blended families (families with children from the adult partners' previous relationships), multigenerational families (families with three or more generations residing together), and interracial and same-sex marriages have all increased.
- Postponing parenthood, never marrying, and having fewer children are increasingly common (DePaulo 2017).
- 28% of all households are one-person households, more than double the number in 1960 (U.S. Census 2020b).

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- Abortion rates are declining, in part because of increased reliance on a variety of birth control methods (Jones and Jerman 2017).
- Families today are more likely than their counterparts in the past to be caring for elderly relatives at home, while we also see increasing numbers of single grandparents living with grandchildren as their primary caretakers (U.S. Census 2020b).
- About half of the number of single parents have been previously married, and they tend to have higher levels of education than cohabiting parents (Livingston 2018).

Table 3.1 provides greater insight into the kinds of families children now live in, as shaped by race and income.

While family forms are quickly changing, the gendered expectation for mothers and fathers is not. Research finds that wives still do considerably more housework and childcare than husbands, even when both are employed full-time outside of the home (Bunning 2019). Research finds that greater social supports and policy changes, such as extending opportunities for increasing men's use of parental leave, can help fathers take a more active role in the home (Bunning 2019, Tamm 2019).

Critical Thinking

1. Have you witnessed attitudes about families changing during your lifetime? Provide examples. How do you think the prevailing attitudes about families in the city where you grew up may have differed from those in other cities? Explain.
2. Can you trace your family history back to its roots in what is now the United States? How do you think those earlier generations were shaped by the practices, policies, and formation of the United States?
3. How do you think your family life was shaped by race, class, and other social identities?
4. What kind of family structure did you grow up in? Did your family or your parents' families face any stigma based on those structures?

THEORIES OF FAMILY INEQUITY

Existing sociological theories approach the family as an institution implicated in the system of race relations. Next we look at the common stock stories as well as counternarratives and critiques based on concealed and resistance stories.

Stock Stories and Assimilation

Recall that stock stories are the predominant, seemingly commonsense narratives circulating in society that naturalize inequality. The functionalist perspective sees society as an ordered system that the family helps to reproduce through the processes of assimilation and socialization.

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TABLE 3.1 ■ Race and Income Can Affect Living Arrangements for Children Under Age 18

	Total	Living with both parents		Living with mother only					Living with father only					Living with neither parent
		Married to each other	Not married to each other	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	No parent present
RACE														
White alone	53,291	37,593	2,157	564	452	3,389	1,451	3,398	78	122	1,098	307	744	1,939
Black alone	11,044	3,969	418	196	160	778	436	3,744	37	38	118	36	327	787
Asian alone	4,004	3,392	83	72	33	107	45	84	4	-	46	9	31	98
All remaining single races and all race combinations	5,401	2,992	349	113	33	328	192	820	5	5	76	33	136	317
RACE														
Hispanic[2]	18,665	11,409	1,092	336	102	1052	788	2,369	34	18	197	89	402	778
White alone, Non-Hispanic	37,244	27,514	1,236	265	354	2,520	754	1,595	45	104	931	218	444	1,263
All remaining single races and all race combinations, non-Hispanic	17,832	9,023	679	344	223	1,030	582	4,082	44	44	210	78	392	1,100

(Continued)

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TABLE 3.1 ■ Race and Income Can Affect Living Arrangements for Children Under Age 18 (*Continued*)

		Living with both parents		Living with mother only					Living with father only					Living with neither parent
	Total	Married to each other	Not married to each other	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	No parent present
FAMILY INCOME														
Under $2,500	2,898	348	386	73	41	171	135	766	-	2	48	28	48	851
$2,500 to $4,999	665	154	71	19	5	62	46	256	-	-	2	-	26	24
$5,000 to $7,499	829	169	65	27	10	88	99	319	-	6	6	1	10	30
$7,500 to $9,999	911	156	59	31	2	142	53	346	1	-	9	4	23	84
$10,000 to $12,499	1,347	300	119	55	30	214	128	391	1	3	7	13	22	64
$12,500 to $14,999	908	185	68	56	13	98	97	283	1	11	2	3	24	66
$15,000 to $19,999	2,404	637	199	65	62	317	179	670	1	2	54	13	77	128
$20,000 to $24,999	2,918	1,081	233	81	50	224	200	700	6	4	48	24	129	137

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	Total	Living with both parents		Living with mother only					Living with father only					Living with neither parent
		Married to each other	Not married to each other	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	Married spouse absent	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Never married	No parent present
$25,000 to $29,999	2,923	1,202	316	71	36	243	166	615	9	9	76	26	44	110
$30,000 to $39,999	6,276	2,830	341	110	81	696	311	1,211	5	3	162	75	165	285
$40,000 to $49,999	5,434	3,110	301	59	80	533	166	601	26	17	110	41	168	221
$50,000 to $74,999	11,543	7,912	418	120	132	729	286	890	39	39	268	49	225	437
$75,000 to $99,999	9,500	7,350	203	76	49	538	119	484	15	23	227	34	104	279
$100,00 and over	25,185	22,513	229	102	87	548	139	512	18	46	320	72	172	426

Source: United States Census Bureau (2018), Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement Internet Release Date: November 2018.

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Many functionalist scholars have pointed to **assimilation** to argue that new racial and ethnic groups entering the United States follow specific paths of integration, gradually accepting and adapting to the cultural patterns of the dominant group. To explain the patterns of new European immigrants that we discussed earlier, sociologist Milton Gordon (1964) identified seven stages of assimilation, beginning with adoption of the dominant language and cultural patterns and advancing to increased interaction with and relationships among minority and majority group members, reduced levels of prejudice and discrimination, intermarriage, and eventually full integration and acceptance.

Assimilation theory has been criticized for a number of reasons:

1. It assumes that non-European racialized groups should and can follow the same path as European immigrants.
2. It assumes that non-Whites want to abandon their own cultures and become fully "Americanized."
3. It assumes that the dominant White culture is ideal and superior to all other cultures (Myers 2005, 10).

Conflict theorists highlight these unspoken assumptions and bring issues of power into the picture, emphasizing that the dominant group seeks to protect its economic and political interests by controlling minority groups' labor and resources. Research from a conflict perspective emphasizes the concealed story that minority groups have not all been equally welcome to assimilate and asks us to consider who benefits from the smooth functioning of an unequal society. In reviewing the research on families and race relations, scholars often draw from both functionalist and conflict perspectives, asking questions about the history of initial contact and exposing the ways in which minority groups have been both included in and excluded from the dominant group (Myers 2005).

The symbolic interactionist perspective shifts our focus to a micro level of analysis, examining how individuals and families give meaning to cultural phenomena, family relationships, and interactions, and how families struggle to pass on their own cultural values and traditions in the face of demands for socialization and assimilation. We saw clear examples of this struggle in our brief discussion of indigenous families facing cultural genocide. Families may do this by eating traditional foods, listening to music, carrying out religious and spiritual practices, or dressing in ways that reflect the traditions of their culture. Conflict between maintaining cultural practices and assumptions about assimilation are ongoing and easy to identify once we look for them—for example, consider debates in the United States over English-only rules, and in many European countries regarding the banning of burkas.

The dominant society's continued embrace of the Ideal Traditional Family are rooted in the concept of **separate spheres**, a feature of the ideology of domesticity. They are informed by a functionalist perspective that assumes this is the best family model for a well-functioning society—an essential unit that fulfills a particular function in a particular way. From this perspective, any families not fitting the ideal are defined as dysfunctional.

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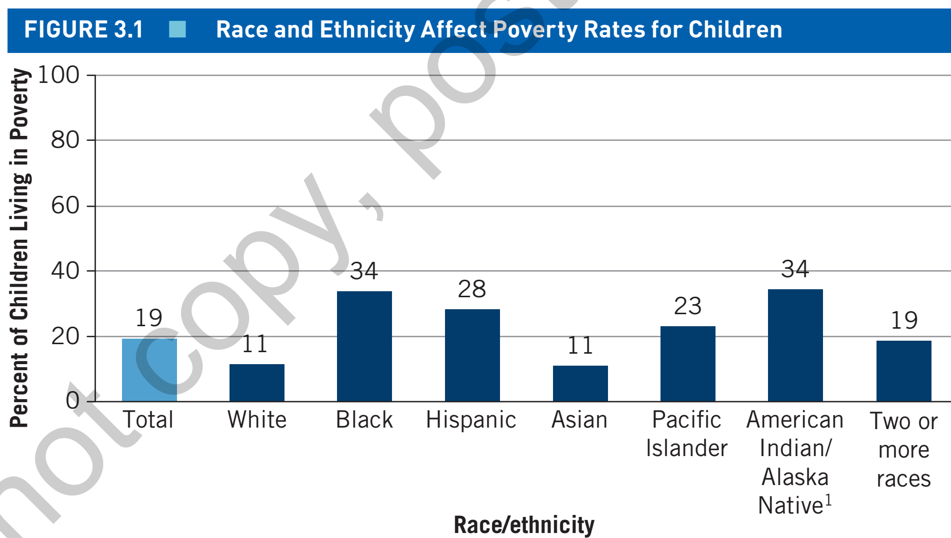
This logic also underlies research and public discourse about Black and Latinx families that blames them for their own presumed failure to assimilate. Here, we see how family and nation are intertwined—the ideal nuclear family is emblematic of the national family. To belong is to accept and emulate the dominant middle- and upper-class, Christian, heterosexual White cultural ideals of family.

From a conflict perspective, this family model operates explicitly to benefit some more than others. It not only reproduces inequality among racial and class groups but also reproduces gender and sexual inequality, valuing hierarchical gender roles, patriarchy, and heterosexuality. For example, consider the phrase "the African American family." What images come to mind? For many, it is a picture of a single mother raising numerous children on welfare. While African American families in reality are quite diverse, this image of the dysfunctional Black family has been especially predominant since the 1950s, when the "culture of poverty" thesis was advanced, and many politicians still rely on it to explain the high rates of African American poverty.

This narrative derived from the functionalist stock story argues that Black families are "pathological" because they do not replicate the traditional nuclear family model, and it blames poverty and other social problems on Black families themselves (Hattery and Smith 2007; Hill 2005). Single mothers are depicted as overbearing, and fathers as weak or absent. The stock story claims that these "dysfunctional" family forms are a part of U.S. Black culture, passed down over generations and firmly entrenched. Black families are often compared to other racial

FIGURE 3.1 ■ Race and Ethnicity Affect Poverty Rates for Children



Note: Data shown are based only on related children in a family; that is, all children in the household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. This figure includes only children related to the householder. It excludes unrelated children and householders who are themselves under the age of 18. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2016. *See United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2017) Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 102.60.

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and ethnic groups and are faulted for not "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps" as other immigrant groups are believed to have done.

Poverty is one of the most significant problems facing America's children (see Figure 3.1). Single-female-headed families have significantly higher poverty rates than other family types, and the percentage of single-female-headed families is much higher in the African American community than it is among Whites and other racial groups (U.S. Census Bureau 2015, 2016). Further, every racial/ethnic minority group has higher rates of childhood poverty than Whites. While marriage is frequently offered as the solution for Black poverty, Black males face such high unemployment, underemployment, and imprisonment rates that marriage to Black men is not likely to raise Black women and their children out of poverty.

Concealed Stories: The Legacy of Slavery

At least two sociological counternarratives, the legacy of slavery thesis and the revisionist thesis, have emerged to critique the assumption that African Americans are inherently inferior and incapable of sustaining proper families. These theories have roots in conflict theory, and each focuses on different historical facts—or different concealed stories—to support its arguments. Concealed stories here consist of missing or ignored history, experiences, and data, as well as alternative theoretical perspectives. Contemporary scholars have leveled critiques at both theories, pointing out that they generally accept the assumption that the traditional nuclear family is indeed ideal and focus on explaining why Black families have had a difficult time replicating that ideal. One scholar argues that even social scientists attempting to refute racist assumptions about Black families have themselves taken for granted many of the Eurocentric and race-based assumptions embedded in U.S. culture about what a family is (Dodson 2007). These theories have implications that extend far beyond the level of abstract theorizing; they inform public policy and have real impacts on people's lives.

The Legacy of Slavery Thesis

The **legacy of slavery thesis** attempts to shift the focus from Black culture as pathological to the argument that pathological family structures are the result of a long history of structural inequality. The thesis begins with the fact that slavery entailed the capture of Africans who were torn from their families and communities and thrown into a foreign culture where they had little control over their lives. E. Franklin Frazier, an African American sociologist, published two groundbreaking books in the 1930s about Black families. He was one of the strongest advocates of this approach. He embraced the "race relations cycle" proposed by W. Lloyd Warner and Ezra Parks, which posited that all racial and ethnic minority groups would eventually assimilate into U.S. society and values.

Frazier argued that the legacy of slavery had previously made assimilation impossible for Blacks, but that it would eventually become a reality (Hattery and Smith 2007; Hill 2005). According to this perspective, Black single-female-headed families have their roots in the history of slavery, which forced Black women to become strong and independent, without husbands to rely on. Black men were denied the privileges of paternity and the role of head of household that dominant narratives construct as the natural position of men in the family. This

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violation of the gender roles at the heart of the traditional nuclear family ideal became the basis for defining Black families as a problem.

With the end of slavery, opportunities for African Americans to form stable families did not improve. In the South, Black men were largely forced to become sharecroppers and faced lynching and imprisonment. Many children were taken from their families and forced into labor or placed in orphanages if their parents were not married or working. During the 20th century's **Great Migration**, as millions of Blacks moved to cities in the North from the rural South, many women found jobs as live-in domestics, which prevented them from forming or maintaining their own family relations. They remained vulnerable to sexual assaults by White men and they cultivated skills of resistance and resilience. Black men did not find the opportunities they sought in the North either, taking low-wage jobs instead and facing disproportionately rising rates of imprisonment for insignificant crimes. Black women often had no economic incentive to marry, because marriage could not provide a path out of poverty.

In sum, the legislation, ongoing discrimination, and high unemployment all continued to undermine Black families (Hill 2005). With the rise of the "cult of domesticity," they became increasingly defined as pathological for failing to fit the ideal.

During the Great Migration, many Black women found work as live-in domestic servants for White families, which made forming their own families difficult.

Credit: Bettmann/Getty Images

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The legacy of slavery theory was repackaged in 1965 in a controversial report on the state of the Black family by sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor (and later U.S. senator) Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Single-women-headed families were increasingly in the public eye as a result of the high concentration of African Americans in impoverished urban centers and the increased access of Black women to public safety-net programs from which they had previously been excluded. Moynihan argued that single-women-headed families were keeping the Black community trapped in poverty and attributed a host of other problems to "dysfunctional" Black families, including crime, delinquency, and dependence on the government for financial support (Hattery and Smith 2007; Hill 2005).

The Revisionist Thesis

Scholars applying the **revisionist thesis**, including John Blassingame, Eugene Genovese, Robert Hill, and Andrew Billingsley, have responded directly to the legacy of slavery theorists by arguing for the strength and resilience of Black families (Hattery and Smith 2007; Hill 2005). These theorists have provided evidence to counter the dire stereotypes of a Black community racked by poverty, with few intact nuclear families. For example, Billingsley has pointed out that in metropolitan neighborhoods, two out of three Black families include both a husband and a wife, half of the families are middle-class, and nine out of ten are self-sufficient and have no need for welfare (cited in Dodson 2007, 57).

Revisionist scholars have drawn on concealed stories to argue that slave families were "functional adaptations" to the conditions of slavery. Families and extended kin were viable sources of strength and support, and essential to survival. Revisionist research also has demonstrated the extent to which Black fathers during slavery tried to protect their wives and children and keep their families together at any cost. Renowned historian John Hope Franklin (1947) documented the many efforts of runaway slaves to return to their families and argued that the institution of the family was central to slaves, who were denied access to other social institutions for support (see also Hill 2005). Revisionist research has drawn on basic precepts of both functionalism and conflict theory, redefining Black families as functional and as a refuge, given the context of oppression and White supremacy. Other scholars, like Carol Stack, have sought to explore the value in multiple family forms by highlighting the ways that low-income Black single mothers often join with extended kin and other households, creating functional family formations to better meet their needs. Joining to share resources, these families demonstrate that isolated nuclear families are not always the best option (Marks 2000, 610).

Revisionist scholars reveal concealed and resistance stories of African American agency, seeing their family structures not merely as the unfortunate results of slavery and inequality but as viable alternatives they formed to improve their quality of life and enable them to maintain kin connections that serve them. As revisionist theories demonstrate, it is possible to construct various stories about the past depending on which facts we highlight and which we ignore.

The Pathology Narrative and Latinx Families

The stock story of pathology for failure to assimilate was also applied to Latinx people, currently the largest minority population in the United States. According to Calderon (2005), the basic

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assumptions of assimilation are problematic because they imply that Chicano/as have faced a history similar to that experienced by European immigrants and can therefore follow the same path to success. Chicano/as, however, had much of their lands stolen and were forced into wage labor that was dangerous and low-paying. Their failure to achieve the levels of success reached by European Americans has led some to blame the Chicano community itself (Calderon 2005, 107). Calderon (2005, 110) argues that American schools teach children that the United States purchased the Southwest from Mexico, and that they do not learn "about the many that resisted lynching, murders, theft of land, and resources."

There are also significant numbers of Americans with roots in Cuba and various South and Central American nations. Recognizing this diversity makes it problematic to talk about Latinx families in general. The diversity among these groups is not only a product of their cultures of origin, but of the specific time period in which they immigrated, the immigration laws and restrictions in place at the time, the work opportunities available, and the communities they settled in. Before 1970, the majority of Latinx in the U.S. were from Cuba or Puerto Rico. After 1990, we see large numbers of Mexicans, and smaller numbers of immigrants from numerous other countries including El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Colombia, Honduras, and elsewhere. The experiences of these families vary greatly depending on where they settled. Research demonstrates that family formations are impacted by all of these factors (Zambrana 2011). For example, foreign-born Mexican families are more likely to have larger households with extended kin, whereas Cuban households are most likely to have higher incomes and only two people.

Nevertheless, the typical Latinx family has been stereotyped as highly patriarchal, devoutly Catholic, committed to rigid gender roles for children, and valuing family over education. Some of these characteristics are more common among low-income Mexican Americans, the primary population that has been studied over the past 40 years, than among other Latinx groups. However, findings from the research are often generalized to all Latinx families, portraying them as static and unchanging and reinforcing the notion that they are all the same.

Many policy-makers, service providers, and educators have accepted these stereotypes and the assimilationist ideal (Zambrana 2011). The resulting expectations are problematic because they lead to demands that Latinx abandon the cultures, traditions, and language that for many are sources of pride and identity. The concealed story here is that the most significant obstacles to advancement are economic inequity, the criminalization of Latino men in many regions, racial profiling to identify undocumented immigrants, ongoing discrimination and racism, and barriers to opportunities in education, healthcare, and other institutions.

Critical Thinking

1. Historically, why has assimilation been emphasized so strongly in the application of stock sociological theories to immigrant families? What do you see as the costs and benefits of assimilation?
2. What might the policy results have looked like if the theories applied to various racial and ethnic groups had instead highlighted the value of maintaining diversity among families?

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3. What role has racial ideology played in shaping the structures of families historically?
4. How are views about individual families depicted in the stock and concealed stories?

FAMILY INEQUALITY THROUGH THE MATRIX LENS

Our application of the matrix perspective to stock, concealed, and resistance stories reveals that ideologies about the family, as well as policies affecting real families' daily lives reproduce race, gender, class, and sexual inequality while also constructing a definition of the nation that privileges Whites (Collins 1998, 65). The family becomes a metaphor for both race and nation, with borders that require policing to prevent the invasion of "outsiders." In addition to allowing us to examine the construction of race as it intersects with other social identities, the matrix framework asks that we consider narratives, institutions, and structures as they interact with and shape each other. Finally, we also must examine resistance and agency, and all within specific social, historical, economic, and geographical contexts.

Through the matrix lens, a different narrative of family formation emerges, drawing on a wide range of research and theorizing. Our review of history was from a matrix theoretical perspective, and raised essential insights:

- Families are social constructs, and there is no single, "natural" family form.
- A diversity of family forms has always existed.
- Families are not static. They change over time, across generations, and across geographical spaces and local contexts, and they are constantly being rearticulated in new ways.
- What is considered the "ideal" family form varies historically and cross-culturally.
- Stock stories promoting hegemonic family ideals reproduce racial and other forms of inequality, privileging some families over others, and some family members over others. Examining these inequities intersectionally is necessary.
- Research presents a narrative about families that is often influenced by the culture and values of the researcher and the broader dominant culture, reproducing relationships of power, privilege, and oppression.
- Family formations are shaped by many structural factors, including material and economic, historical, and public policy and legal factors (such as immigration law and welfare policy) and other social institutions (such as criminal justice, education, and health).
- The traditional ideal family of our stock stories will not solve structural problems such as unemployment and poverty (and our focus on it as the answer prevents us from discussing real solutions).

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- Gender is central to an understanding of different family formations across history and cultures, and gendered power relations influence our definitions of acceptable and dysfunctional families.
- Racism and other systems of inequality shape family formations, the experiences of individual families.
- The family, as an institution, is central to the construction of definitions of both nation and race, and their shifting boundaries over time.
- Families socialize the next generation into hierarchical systems of nation, race, gender, sexuality, and age, among others. They also can, and often do, resist such hierarchies.
- Whose stories are heard, and who tells them, shape the factors considered.

The matrix approach directs us to look at recent research that challenges the simplistic stock stories about families head-on and highlights new concealed and resistance stories that add greatly to our understanding of families.

Women's Concealed Stories

As more women have become sociologists and their research has been accepted as legitimate, we have learned more about the importance of gender and other identities in examining Black families. Sociologist Shirley Hill's work on Black families dismisses the functionalist assimilation approach we examined earlier in this chapter. Hill (2005, 10–11) argues that "race and class oppression has left most [African American families] at odds with dominant societal ideals about the appropriate roles of men and women and the proper formation of families." At the same time, the results of this oppression have been blamed on African Americans themselves, rather than on the true underlying causes.

The legacy of slavery and revisionist scholars also debated the extent to which African culture was decimated or maintained by slaves. However, family formations and culture are dynamic and are constantly re-created within specific contexts. Accumulating research provides insight into the diverse contexts that shaped the transmission of African culture over time, for instance. Josephine Beoku-Betts studied the African American Gullah community (descended from slaves) on the Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands. The Gullah were isolated and they did not face the conditions of African Americans on the mainland. Thus, they were able to maintain cohesive communities that preserved important features of African culture. For example, they spoke their own language and passed on to successive generations traditional crafts, African birthing and naming traditions, folktales, religious beliefs, cooking techniques, and more (Beoku-Betts 2000; Joyner 2000). Beoku-Betts (2000, 415) argues that because most of these tasks have been seen as part of women's natural role in the family, they were not studied in the past. Her research uncovers a previously concealed story about what are only now being recognized as practices significant to the "maintenance of tradition."

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Many women scholars have continued to make women's experiences visible, revealing further concealed stories and examples of resistance. Donna Franklin (2010) examined the Victorian era, when married Black women were largely working outside the home, often in professional careers. Many White women, in contrast, were relegated to the domestic sphere and believed they could not be successful and advance in professional careers if they were married. As Franklin observes, "Black women seemed to have an easier time juggling the role of activist with the role of mother and wife.... Historian Linda Gordon found that 85 percent of black women activists were married, compared to only 34 percent of white women activists" (64).

Black women who were both activists and working professionals were often married to professional men. Work was not stigmatized for Black women as it was for White women; rather, it was seen as contributing to the common cause of advancing the Black community. Further, because slavery had "rendered black men and women equally powerless," it had "leveled the gender 'playing field'" (Franklin 2010, 65). Among married adults today, Black women are more likely than White women to have higher salaries than their husbands, and Black husbands contribute slightly more to household chores than do White husbands (Franklin 2010).

The Concealed Story of Invisible Fathers

There is a common myth, a stock story, that the absence of Black fathers is responsible for the poverty of Black families. We see all around us stereotypes of the irresponsible Black father. We know that Black fathers are less likely to be married due to high rates of incarceration, unemployment, and changes to the welfare system (Lemmons and Johnson 2019). However, while Black fathers are less likely to marry the mothers of their children than are other fathers, this fact alone does not support the common assumption that they are not good fathers (Coles 2009). The rates of unmarried fathers and mothers living together with their children has been increasing, as more couples choose to cohabitate rather than marry. The stereotype of the absent Black father that looms so large in our culture has concealed the story of Black fathers who are strong presences in their children's lives. Research has found that people actually underestimate the numbers of interactions children have with Black fathers, for example, in daycare settings (). In fact, many Black fathers are more highly involved in their children's lives than are White or Hispanic fathers. (Blow 2015; Edin et al. 2009). Other research has found that unmarried African American fathers are more likely than their White or Hispanic counterparts to contribute to costs during pregnancy and to offer in-kind support and care for their children (Coles 2009).

- These findings are especially meaningful given the unique challenges these fathers face. They are more likely than White fathers to reside in poor communities with fewer resources available to support parents.
- They experience lower rates of education and employment.
- They are more likely to be employed in part-time and low-paying jobs that offer fewer benefits, for a variety of reasons discussed on in our chapter on work (Abdil 2018, Lemmons and Johnson 2019).

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Coles (2009) conducted one of the first major studies of Black single fathers with custody of their children and found that in addition to these challenges, many experienced obstacles dealing with legal and social services, including suspicion and assumptions that they could not be good fathers, as well as institutional and policy barriers. For example, the inability to pay child support impacts the amount of time fathers are able to spend with their children. However, even without economic means, fathers can still make a positive difference in their children's lives (Harris 2018). Coles and other scholars conclude that these men are generally highly motivated, and can be and often are successful fathers even when they are not married to their children's mothers (Abdill 2018, Harris 2018). Coles implores us to see that "these are caring fathers: as good, loving, and motivated as any other father. Their existence and their experiences deserve public articulation. . . . Their stories provide a counterweight to the predominant image of black fathers" (14).

Within the larger Black Lives Matter movement, we see an emphasis on the intersectional reality of Black lives, highlighting the experiences of violence aimed at disabled, trans, and queer Black people.

Credit: David Grossman/Alamy Stock Photo

Oppression and Privilege: Support for White Families

The state's part in shaping family and reproduction practices is clearly a racialized and gendered process. It is almost always women's bodies that are targeted for control by courts and legislatures, despite the fact that men play a role in reproduction as well (Flavin 2009). Race, class, and age all influence how the state treats women's reproductive capacity, with effects on family formation.

By the 1950s, every U.S. state had passed laws preventing pregnant women from working, while at the same time withholding unemployment benefits from them (Solinger 2007). Prior to increased women's activism and the sexual liberation movement in the late 1960s, few options were available to single women who became pregnant. There was a strong culture of punishment at the time, which saw women's sexual behavior as unacceptable and unfeminine, and as breaking the hallowed bounds of the ideal nuclear family. A woman facing an unwanted

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pregnancy could petition the medical community for a "therapeutic" abortion based on psychiatric grounds; however, approval was hard to obtain, and if it was granted, the woman was usually also sterilized at the same time. Other alternatives varied by race. To avoid the shame of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and preserve their daughters' marriageability, White families that could afford it would hide their single pregnant daughters, sending them elsewhere to live, or confining them in maternity homes and putting their babies up for adoption. Single Black women who became pregnant were barred from Whites-only maternity homes and were more often embraced and accepted by their families and extended kin. Nevertheless, they were stigmatized and inserted into the dominant narrative as examples of broken Black families and communities (Solinger 2013).

While the public in general viewed both White and Black unmarried mothers negatively, the White women were nonetheless seen as producing a valuable commodity for which there was high demand among White married couples unable to have children. In the 1960s, welfare programs began linking the receipt of benefits to compulsory sterilization for many women, especially women of color. African American and Puerto Rican community activists fought these abuses, which were not brought to the public's attention until the mid-1970s (Flavin 2009). In 1968, more than one-third of women in Puerto Rico between the ages of 15 and 45 had been surgically sterilized, often without their knowledge, as a means of controlling the population (Lopez 1987).

In the 1950s and 1960s, numerous U.S. states passed "man in the house" laws, which gave welfare agencies the ability to cut off payments to single women who were suspected of engaging in sexual relations. The assumption was that if a woman was involved with a man, he should be "man of the house" and support her and her children, even if they were not his. In essence this law allowed the state to control women's sexual activity in a punitive fashion. This and other welfare and social programs were unevenly applied based on race, and racism often shaped the forms these policies took (Kohler-Hausmann 2007; Lefkovitz 2011). Such uneven enforcement fostered the image of the promiscuous "welfare queen" living on the public dole while indulging her own pleasures (Kohler-Hausmann 2007). This stereotype became increasingly useful in the backlash against welfare among many politicians.

The Social Security Act of 1935 established the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, which became known as "welfare." ADC was not written to benefit all families equitably, however. Entire categories of workers (domestic workers, agricultural workers), those with high representations of people of color, were excluded from the benefits of the program. As a result, Whites were the primary beneficiaries of welfare. White women were often encouraged to stay at home and focus on raising their children, while women of color were strongly urged to work in the fields or as domestics (Solinger 2010).

Beginning with the President George W. Bush administration, so-called **marriage promotion programs**—programs that aim to encourage marriage by teaching relationship and communication skills—were offered as a solution to poverty for single mothers. These programs are funded by federal and state taxes on the continuing assumption that single parenting is a primary cause of poverty and marriage is the solution (Carter 2018; Heath, Randles, and Avishai 2016).

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As part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services, "The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative" is a $150 million grant program to support organizations promoting marriage as the means to reduce family inequality. It was first authorized in 2005, reauthorized in 2010, and then again under the Trump administration. The government offers a publicly funded website that provides tips and activities for dads, including communication tips, "Dad Jokes," and suggestions for weekly activities such as celebrating "Winnie the Pooh Day," and "dad and son" dance-offs (https://www.fatherhood.gov/home).

Marriage and fatherhood promotion programs are not based on any research evidence and they reproduce the myth of the ideal family, which is dependent on a strong father. They ignore structural causes of inequality and social, historical, and economic context, instead reinforcing the belief that poverty is simply the result of individuals' poor choices. However, research finds that "the most important predictors of marriage and divorce are not whether an individual has mastered good communication skills but whether he or she has a stable job and a college education" (Avishai, Heath, and Randles 2012, 37; Carter 2018).

The Socialization of Children

A large study of mothers and their children found that when mothers had experienced racism (including verbal insults and discrimination), children struggled in school and faced more social and emotional problems (MSN News 2012). Families are a key site of future generations' socialization into the hierarchies of oppression and privilege. As groundbreaking sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 64) observes, "Individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation and social class in their families of origin." In communities of color, parents are forced to prepare their children to enter a world that is often hostile toward them and thus dangerous, or at best simply biased against them (Blake and Epstein 2019; Meadows-Fernandez 2020). As James Baldwin explained in his 1963 book *The Fire Next Time*:

> [The child] must be "good" not only in order to please his parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. (40–41)

Contemporary writers continue to express this. One researcher found that the Chicana mothers she interviewed engaged in "psychological protection" of their children while also teaching their daughters "how to resist their subordination" (Hurtado 2003, 78–79).

White parents need not confront the challenging topic of race with their children, and often do not even consider it. Numerous studies have found that White parents report rarely talking about race with their children (Perry, Skinner, and Abaied, 2019; Vittrup 2016). Many embrace a color-blind perspective, assuming that if they do not talk about race, their children will grow up to

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see everyone as equal and the same. Results find this is not the case, however, and that bias awareness is more successful (Perry, Skinner, and Abaied 2019). Children as young as 6 months old recognize differences in skin color, and by the age of 7 they have already formed conclusions about race, with White children identifying Black children as more likely to be "mean." Further, living in a diverse community or attending a diverse school does not reduce these effects. The only thing that does is White parents' talking to their children about race: "This period of our children's lives, when we imagine it's most important to not talk about race, is the very developmental period when children's minds are forming their first conclusions about race" (Bronson and Merryman 2009).

There are currently many books and other resources available to help all parents in addressing race with their children at any age. Even more important than talking to children about race is the choices privileged parents make that, often unintentionally, shape their children's experiences and knowledge of race. White, class-privileged parents are likely to choose "good neighborhoods" with "good schools." However, these are the least likely to be diverse. As a result, White children with class privilege often have very little interaction with children of color, and racial segregation persists across all socioeconomic strata (Hagerman 2018).

Critical Thinking

1. Have any of the historical factors that we have examined in this section surprised you? Which points do you think are most important for people to know?
2. How have social institutions (e.g., the criminal justice system, economies, government policies) created obstacles for some families while providing a hand up for others? Do you believe investing public funding into marriage promotion programs is worthwhile? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe that the mythical "ideal" family formation should remain the ideal for all families? Explain.
4. What did you learn about race as a child? Did your family talk about race often? If so, what kinds of issues and messages do you remember?

TRANSFORMING THE NARRATIVE OF THE IDEAL FAMILY

The myth of the ideal family obscures the reality of the diverse families we live in. Rather than asking why certain families do not conform to the ideal nuclear family model, many researchers are reframing the question, asking whether the nuclear family is necessarily the best model for all families at all times (Coontz 2010a; Hill 2005; Risman 2010).

The Rise of Multigenerational Households

While the number of multigenerational households decreased from 1900, when the number was one out of every four homes, until 1980, when they hit a low of 12%, they have been increasing since and currently comprise about one out of every five homes. About 20% of those 65 and

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older live with one or more members of the next generation (the vast majority with younger family members) (Cohn and Passel 2018). Both increasing economic inequality and increasing racial diversity have contributed to this gain.

Hispanic/Latinx and Asian immigrants are the vast majority of immigrants in the U.S. today, and they are more likely to live in multigenerational households (Wu, Sah, and Tidwell 2018); 25% of Asian, 23% of Black, 22% of Hispanic, and 13% of White households are multigenerational.

For many years, families resided in multigenerational homes so younger members could provide care for the older members of the family. One factor in the recent rise is that now grandparents are increasingly providing care for the grandchildren and contributing economically to the household, as it has become more difficult for young adults to establish financially stable homes (Miller and Nebeker-Adams 2017). In homes with children, parents, and grandparents living together, more resources are spent on children's education, and less on childcare (Amorim 2019). Additionally, many grandparents are raising their grandchildren on their own. There are approximately 1.3 million grandparents that live with, and work in the labor force to support, at least one grandchild (Census 2020). At the same time, many of our nation's aging population have no one able to provide necessary care, and subsidized and accessible housing for the elderly has declined, leaving more elderly people homeless than in the past (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2019).

When the Ideal Family Is Not Ideal

Examining family violence also challenges the myth of the ideal family. Research has found that a third of women have experienced physical violence, and a quarter have survived severe physical violence (beatings, burnings, sexual violence, and other forms of violence, often leading to mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress). Men are not immune, as one in nine men have experienced domestic abuse. Close to one-third of women who are murdered are killed by their partners (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2015).

While one in ten women experience rape perpetrated by their intimate partner, until the 1980s marital rape was not even a crime in many states (Hattery and Smith 2016). Domestic violence is a leading cause of the health problems and complications faced by pregnant women (Pan American Health Organization, n.d.). Native American/American Indian women are most likely to experience domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault. More than fifty percent experience sexual assault and/or intimate partner violence. Compounding the problem is the lack of culturally competent healthcare, and a lack of healthcare and domestic violence shelters or places to seek safety on reservations (National Coalition on Domestic Violence 2020).

Domestic violence has been called "the second pandemic" accompanying COVID-19. Abusers frequently isolate their targets from support systems, including family and friends, and the pandemic has provided this scenario. Couples and families are forced to spend 24 hours a day together, and as stress and anger increase as a result of isolation and economic uncertainty, the opportunities for domestic violence become more prevalent, and there are fewer options for escape. This public health problem was identified early, but measures were not put into place to deal with the predicted crisis. Calls to domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines have increased, and rates of abuse have increased and have become more severe (Fang 2020; Sharma

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and Bikash Borah 2020). The impact is worldwide, according to the United Nations secretary-general, who declared, "For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes.… We have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence" (Fang 2020). Increased parental burnout, job loss, and amount of time spent at home with children has contributed to a disturbing increase in psychological and physical child abuse (Griffith 2020; Lawson, Piel, and Simon 2020).

According to Hattery and Smith () between 4.5 and 5 children die every day as a result of child abuse, most often at the hands of family members (). This is up from 3.6 in 2000. Children with disabilities are at greater risk, and all children suffer higher risks when living in foster care. African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American children are more likely than White children to be removed from their homes and placed in foster care, putting them at greater risk. The most common form of child abuse is neglect, and some of this is a result of a single parent having to work full-time who cannot afford childcare. Daycare would consume the entire amount of income earned by minimum wage workers (Hatter and Smith 2020). For parents living in poverty, the very limited government support available makes it impossible to provide adequate housing and food for their children. This kind of abuse, severe illness, and death are all easily preventable if we, as a society, value the lives of the very poor.

Girls and women are more likely than their male counterparts to experience child sexual abuse and elder abuse, and African American girls and elderly women face much higher rates of abuse than do their White counterparts (). Boys who witness domestic violence while growing up are three times more like to become abusive towards their own partners. The ideology of the family as a private sphere has kept violence within families hidden from public view. Intimate partner violence often remains unreported and undetected. Hattery and Smith's (2007) research has shown that forcing poor women to find mates to escape poverty locks many into a cycle of abusive relationships. Abused women often feel they cannot leave their abusers, and those who do leave still face challenges. Many end up homeless or in other abusive relationships.

In the midst of stay-at-home orders, parents working full-time who are also providing childcare themselves are at greater risk of burnout than ever before. Parental burnout puts children's health and well-being at greater risk. Research finds that parents facing higher levels of burnout report higher levels of conflict with partners (if present), and engage in higher levels of child abuse and neglect. Research also finds that burnout is correlated with domestic violence (Griffith 2020).

Transmigration

We began the chapter with an examination of the detention of transmigrants and immigrants taken into detention centers, and often deported without their families being alerted. Some historical background and insight into the lives of undocumented Latinx peoples is important as context. The ancestors of many Chicano/as lived in regions that were once part of Mexico but today fall within the United States. National borders in these areas have been fluid over time, and for many Chicano/as, they remain so today. Many Latinx are **transmigrants**, people who "live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embed

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Many Latinx residents of the area around the U.S.-Mexico border are transmigrants, living their lives in both countries. Many cross into the U.S. to work, often in agriculture.

Credit: inga spence/Alamy Stock Photo

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them in more than one nation-state" (Glick-Schiller 2003, 105–6). Soehl and Waldinger (2010, 1496) found that the majority of Latinx transmigrants maintain activities of connectivity with their home countries, making phone calls, visiting, and sending remittances back home. Those with children or assets in their home countries engage in these activities more frequently (1505).

Undocumented immigrant parents must make difficult decisions based on their desire to do what is best for their families given their circumstances. Across the United States, close to 6 million children live with one or more undocumented family members, and more than four million live with an undocumented parent. These children live with the fear that parents or other family members could be removed from the home and deported at any time. Research is increasingly documenting the traumatic impact this is having on children, who are experiencing higher rates of "toxic stress," anxiety, depression, and behavioral and physical changes (American Immigration Council 2019; American Psychological Association, n.d.). Some scholars are also looking at the strategies that lead to family resilience in the face of such vulnerability and risk.

Reproductive Technologies

Technologies have changed the reproductive possibilities available to families, and innovations in this area will continue into the future. These technologies further destabilize our stock story that the ideal traditional family is rooted in nature.

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Gestational surrogacy is deeply entwined with race and class. Hiring a surrogate in India can cost less than half what it does in the United States.

Credit: Mint/Hindustan Times/Getty Images

The United States is one of only a small number of countries in the world that allow **gestational surrogacy**, in which a woman carries an implanted embryo to term for another couple or parent but has no genetic tie to the child herself. There are currently 20 states that allow gestational surrogacy, but the regulations and legal conditions vary by state. In only some of these states is it legal to compensate the surrogate. The demand for gestational surrogates has been increasing for many reasons, including the availability of abortion and birth control, which has limited the number of White babies available for adoption. At the same time, women are marrying later and delaying attempts to get pregnant.

France Winddance Twine (2011) examines gestational surrogacy as a form of labor deeply imbued with hierarchies of race, class, and gender. She finds that it is predominantly White middle- and upper-class women and couples who are able to afford to hire surrogates, while surrogates are most often poor White women and women of color in the United States and poor women in developing nations. As Twine points out, while "contemporary gestational surrogates 'voluntarily' enter into these commercial contracts and willingly sell their 'reproductive' labor, their agency occurs within a context of a stratified system of reproduction" (15).

It is very difficult to obtain up-to-date and accurate data on surrogacy because the only source is reports obtained from medical clinics.

The number of in vitro fertilizations that involved a gestational carrier between 1999 and 2013 increased from 1 to 2.5% (Perkins, Boulet, Jamieson, Dmitry, and Kissin, 2016).

Interracial Marriage

The stock story tells us that we reside in a color-blind nation today, but intermarriage rates reveal that this is not the case; more than eight out of ten people marrying today still choose to

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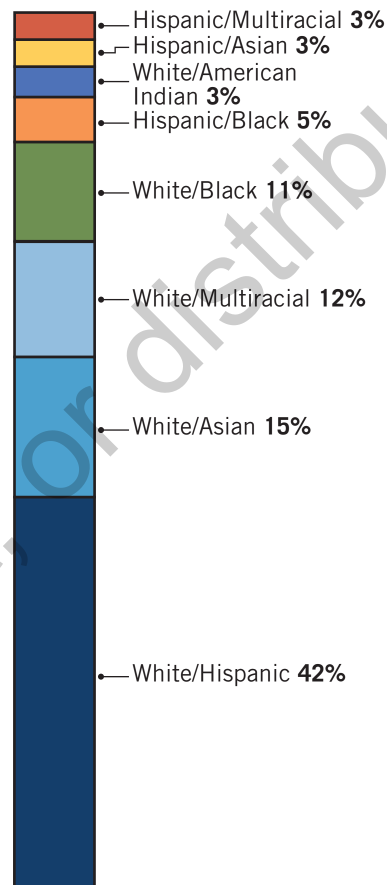
marry someone of the same race, and gendered bias against interracial marriage persists (Skinner and Hudac 2017). Laws against interracial marriage were not declared unconstitutional in the United States until 1967. Since then, rates of interracial marriage have been climbing, most quickly in recent years. In 1970, only 1% of all U.S. marriages were interracial. By 2015 the number of new marriages that were interracial grew to 17% (Bialik 2017; Livingston and Brown 2017).

FIGURE 3.2 ■ Rates of Interracial/Interethnic Marriage in the U.S.



Note: Racial and ethnic combinations with values of less than 2% are not shown. Whites, Blacks, Asians, and American Indians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Asians include Pacific Islanders.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2014-2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

Figure 3.2 provides us with insight regarding who is more likely to marry whom, which reflects, in part, people's attitudes toward other racial groups. Whites are the least likely to intermarry, at 11%, and are significantly more likely to marry Hispanics and Asians than Black people. This mirrors historical constructions of different racial groups, the dynamics of colorism, and the power of continuing stereotypes of African Americans (Bialik 2017).

American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics are most likely to marry outside their racial groups. There are generational differences as well, especially among immigrant compared to U.S.-born populations. Among U.S.-born Asians and Hispanics, 46% and 39% respectively are marrying outside their race.

Intermarriage rates also provide insight into the intersections of race and gender. For example, African American men are twice as likely to marry a White woman, than vice versa. We find the reverse dynamic with Asian Americans, where Asian American women marry White men twice as often as Asian American men marry White women (Qian and Lichter 2018). Clearly, gender stereotypes pervade our narratives and attitudes about marriageable partners. While Black women have been defined in largely negative terms as unfeminine, angry, and independent, Asian women have been depicted as exotic, erotic, and submissive (Choi and Tienda 2017; Wang, 2015; Zhenchao and Lichter 2018).

Geography is an important factor. Honolulu has the greatest number of intermarriages by far, with over 40% of recent marriages between people who identify differently by race. Of the ten cities with the least amount of outmarrying, eight are in the south (Livingston and Brown 2017). Hispanics

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residing in traditional Hispanic enclaves, where there is a greater concentration of Hispanics, are less likely to marry out. Whether members of racial/ethnic groups cross racial boundaries through marriage is dependent on a wide range of factors, and cannot be characterized as simply a measure of assimilation and integration (Qian, Lichter, and Tumin 2018).

As one might expect, the numbers of multiracial children are also increasing, and at last count, in 2015, were 14% of all births. More than one-fourth of these births are to couples with one Hispanic and one White parent (Bialik 2017). Parents' identity, however, may not determine how their children self-identify. There are a wide range of terms that have been embraced, including multiracial, biracial, and frequently children take on the racial/ethnic identity of the group that most closely approximates their physical features, or the identity of the group they most identify with. These are very personal choices. It is not uncommon for siblings to choose different racial classifications to describe themselves. These choices are always constrained by social factors, of course. How one classifies themselves may be at odds with how other people classify them based on assumptions, stereotypes, interacting characteristics of gender and class, as well as geographical location. Multiracial people who do not look White usually encounter discrimination and oppression, independent of whether they identify as White. As a group, multiracial people frequently experience this incongruence and mislabeling (Glover and McDonald 2019).

LGBTQ+ Families

Perhaps one of the most visible ways in which the family is changing is in the growth in numbers of openly gay and lesbian families. All the stock stories about the family that we have examined are predicated on the assumption of heterosexuality. We actively construct heterosexuality as normative, just as we construct patriarchy and Whiteness as normative (Ingraham 2013). The notion of the ideal traditional nuclear family is one of the most important sites of this construction. Same-sex desire and sexual behavior that fall outside our definition of heterosexuality have always existed. These concealed stories have often been ignored or written out of history, as heterosexuality became defined as the only "natural" and legitimate form of relationship on which to base a family. As a result, heterosexuality has been reinforced as the invisible, privileged norm.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), the fundamental right of same-sex couples to marry has been protected in the United States, and valid same-sex marriages sealed in other jurisdictions are recognized. A Gallup poll in June 2016 found that about 123,000 same-sex couples had married since the Court's decision, bringing the national total to about 491,000. About one in ten LGBT adults is now married to a same-sex partner, up from 7.9% prior to the Supreme Court ruling (Jones 2016). Across the U.S., 39% of married, heterosexual couples are raising children. The rate among married lesbians is 30%, and 13% among gay married couples (Goldberg and Conron 2018). Marriage comes with many rights, including the right to make medical decisions for one's spouse, to inherit from one's spouse, to qualify for spousal Social Security, veteran's and other benefits, and to jointly adopt or foster children. However, many states have passed laws denying married same-sex couples some of these benefits, and allowing religious and state officials to refuse to officiate at weddings for

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same-sex couples. Battles over many of these issues are currently taking place in the courts (Movement Advancement Project 2017). The majority of LGBT-identifying people are White (58%), followed by Latinx (21%) and then Black (12%). On the other hand, White people are least likely to report that they identify as LGBT, and men are less likely to do so than women (Goldberg and Conron 2018;). White and class privilege may make the transition to marriage and parenthood a little bit easier. While they still face homophobia, discrimination, and structural barriers, White gays and lesbians have had the privilege of not having their loyalty to their racial community challenged (Moore 2011).

RESISTANCE STORY: NANCY MEZEY

I grew up in an upper-middle-class White suburb of New York City. My family had progressive and openly gay friends, providing me with White, economically successful role models who crossed sexual boundaries. So when I came out as a lesbian in the mid-1990s, my family and friends were neither surprised nor disappointed. Years later, I met my partner, also a White middle-class professional, who shared my desire to have children. Our White middle-class status helped us find other lesbians who were birthing and adopting children, a privilege to which Black working-class lesbians in the area did not have access.

Indeed, networking through a lesbian mothers' group, we found a fertility specialist who helped us have two children. Until that point, my partner and I had felt largely unscathed by homophobia and heterosexism. Our first real experience with individual discrimination occurred when we tried to find childcare for our oldest child. I called daycare centers in our midwestern town and explained that my son had two mothers (careful not to use the word lesbian), only to have the providers explain that "other parents would be uncomfortable" and they could not accept our child.

Later, we experienced institutional discrimination in our [pre-2015] effort to both become legal parents to our children. That process required going through a second-parent adoption in which we paid thousands of dollars for a home study, even though I was our children's biological mother and my partner and I had raised the children together in our home from birth. This was followed by my giving up my legal rights to our children in court, only to adopt them back with my partner.

When we moved to New Jersey, we found a much more welcoming environment. Our privileged status allowed us to move into a largely White middle-class town with a strong public school system. In two obvious instances, our children lost friends after their parents realized our children had two mothers. But for the most part, my partner and I buffered our children by having proactive meetings with teachers and screening parents at social events. I often wondered if the few homophobic parents we met knew that we were protecting our children from them as much as they thought they were protecting their children from us. In my personal life, transformation comes through the interactions my family and I have with others on a daily basis that create a new normal of wider acceptance.

Because of the importance of social context in family formation, the experiences of gay and lesbian families themselves differ across race and class lines. On the one hand, "Black cultures, ideologies, and the historical experiences of Black women structure lesbian identities"

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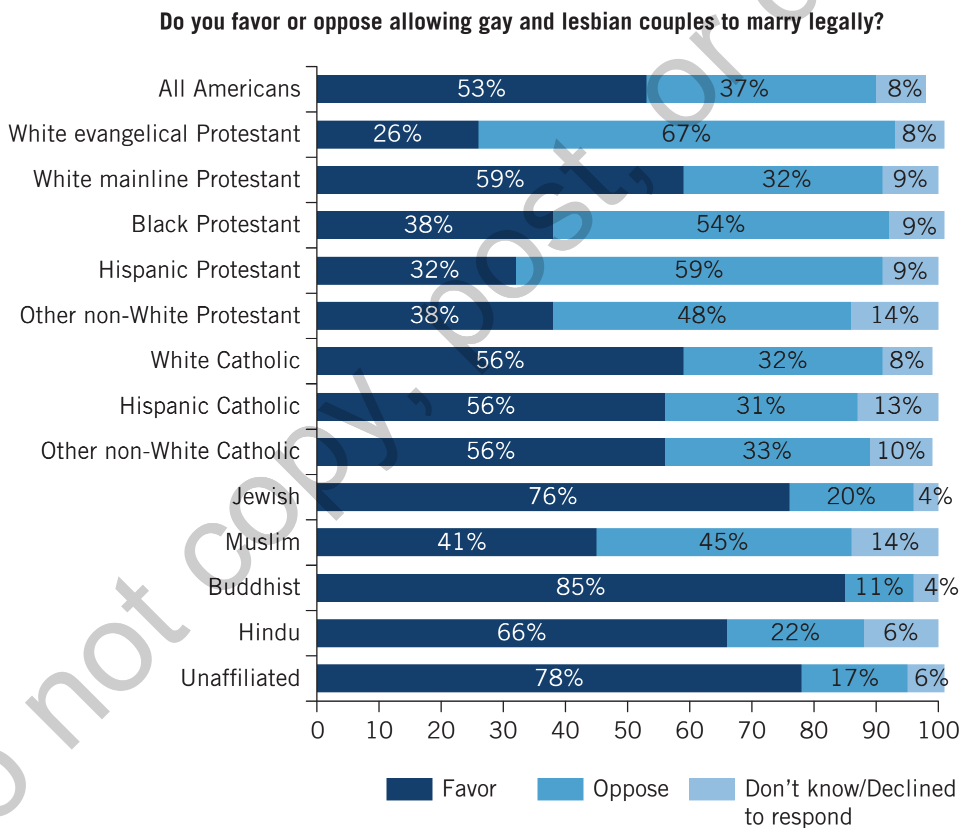
(Moore 2011, 3). At the same time, Black lesbians exert influence over their own family formations and family lives. For example, Moore (2011) found that "respectability" was a strong theme for the Black lesbian women she studied. Consistently defined by the dominant culture as lazy, poor, hypersexual, and immoral, Black women have employed numerous strategies to present themselves as "respectable" while at the same time asserting their own sexual autonomy.

Attitudes about gay and lesbian marriage have changed dramatically from 2004 to 2019. In 2004, 60% of Americans opposed, while 31% were in favor; this completely flipped by 2019, when 61% were in favor and 31% opposed (Masci, Brown, and Kiley 2019). These views also vary by race, gender, location, political party affiliation, age, and religion. Figure 3.3 provides a snapshot of the intersections of religion and race.

FIGURE 3.3 ■ Views on Same-Sex Marriage Vary by Race and Religion



Note: Totals for each category may add up to more or less than 100 due to margin of error.

Source: PRRI 2015 American Values Atlas.

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The Power of Social Movements

LGBTQ+ social movements have fought not only for the right to marry, but for equal rights in every arena. They have fought to make discrimination in the workplace, housing, and businesses illegal. Most of these battles have been fought at the state level, and protections vary by state. In the past decade, LGBTQ+ movements have increasingly engaged in coalitional politics to achieve successful outcomes. For example, Adam (2017) has analyzed the collaboration between LGBTQ+ movements and immigrant rights movement in both Washington and Arizona. These two movements united to support or defeat a variety of policy proposals. These included campaigns to secure financial aid for undocumented immigrant students; a referendum to provide many of the benefits that accompany marriage to domestic partners in Washington; fighting a bill in Arizona that would have broadened the scope of the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which would permit businesses to refuse to serve members of the LGBTQ+ community; and campaigns to gain marriage equality in both states. These huge victories, battles which had been lost in the past, have been attributed, in part, to these coalitions.

These movements found common ground as the foundation around which to unite. Of greatest significance was their embrace of a shared civil rights model based on previous social movements, as well as the identification of their common foes. They discovered that the movements fighting against immigrant rights were usually the same forces working against LGBTQ+ rights (Adam 2017). This example represents the power of intersectional social movement organizing, confirming the early argument of intersectional scholars who argued that intersectional movements are more successful than those which focus on a single axis of oppression (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Ishkanian, Armine, and eña Saavedra 2019).

Challenging the Narrative of Family

As we broaden our understanding of what counts as a family, we must reassess historical narratives that have excluded certain family formations. Researchers are not exempt from the prejudices and assumptions of the broader culture. As family researcher Stephen Marks (2000, 611) reflects: "Most family scholars continue to be White, heterosexual, married persons such as myself. The research published ... reflects the interests of those who do the studies." However, as more and more research is conducted by scholars previously excluded—men and women of color, White women, LGBTQ+ people, and working-class people, for example—the kinds of subjects that are being studied, the questions that are being asked, and the concealed stories and voices of resistance that are being brought in are changing the field. As Marks goes on, "These scholars have challenged their exclusion ... and some of us from the dominant groups who earlier saw families in a White, male, middle-class image have been listening and learning" (611).

Thus, we see broadening recognition and research on a wide array of family formations and experiences. At the same time, we need to cultivate more curious citizens who will ask the unasked questions and challenge narratives that distort the realities we see all around us.

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Critical Thinking

1. How have technological changes opened up new family formations? What changes do you foresee in the future owing to technology, especially in regard to social identities including race, gender, and dis/ability?
2. How have very recently enacted government policies and laws affected families, including those formations discussed in this last section of this chapter?
3. How does the history of slavery, genocide, immigration, and inequitable access to resources help explain contemporary interracial marriage rates? How do you think future race relations will be affected by rising rates of intermarriage?
4. What other significant changes do you see taking place among families today or in the future?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

3.1 Describe the historical forces that have influenced the intersection of race and family in the United States.

Family formations were inextricably shaped by culture and race in the American colonial era. Native Americans had diverse family structures that were greatly affected by colonization, and African family structures were disrupted when Africans were ripped from their families, transported overseas, and subjected to a system of slavery that consistently broke up families, as each individual was viewed as a commodity. Various immigrating European ethnic groups and Asians were restricted in their family formation by shifting immigration laws that often dictated who could enter the United States. Today family formations continue to shift and remain diverse.

3.2 Examine the current stock theories that explain family inequalities across racial and ethnic lines.

A variety of social theories have emerged to explain inequality among families. Stock stories include the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives. The primary stock story has revolved around theories of assimilation. In order to explain the less prevalent assimilation of Africans and African Americans, other theories have revealed concealed stories examining the impact of slavery. Some of these same theories and debates have been applied to Chicanos/Latinx.

3.3 Apply the matrix lens to an understanding of family inequality.

More recent theorizing has taken an approach that explicitly addresses issues raised by the matrix perspective. Assimilation theories have been reinterpreted as maintaining inequality. Theories that have posited low rates of marriage among African Americans as the leading cause of Black poverty have been directly challenged by examinations of women's lives in particular, as well as by research into the realities facing Black men

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and their roles as fathers. Government funds that could contribute to decreasing family poverty have instead been directed to programs encouraging marriage, which primarily benefit White families. Some scholars have challenged the notion that the mythical ideal family is ideal at all. Inequality inevitably shapes relationships within families.

3.4 Identify alternatives to the current matrix of inequality among families.
Contemporary trends are changing the face of families. Rates of interracial marriage are increasing, and the legalization of same-sex marriage has expanded the rights of people to marry whom they choose. The phenomenon of transmigration and the explosive rise of new reproductive technologies are complicating the lives of families and will continue to do so. Our very definitions of family are shifting, as they always have.

KEY TERMS

assimilation
Dawes Act
family
gestational surrogacy
Great Migration
ideology of domesticity
legacy of slavery thesis
marriage promotion programs
naturalization
nuclear family
revisionist thesis
settler colonialism
separate spheres
transmigrants

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