



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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The Changing Family: How changes in the Family Reflects Social and Economic Changes in Society

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The study of the family, in American society, has been and continues to be a monumental task complicated by the very things that make America what it is. While studying the family in most societies social historians, et al, are confronted with a very laborious task of sifting through mountains of family records and comparing then with changes in society. Nevertheless, it's burden is somewhat lessened by the fact that a particular people (or culture) is being studied. That is, the birthrate, death, age at marriage, size of family, members of family, sex roles, etc. are studied and changes in the social/economic makeup of society that is influenced by or that influences those family patterns are examined. The American family, on the other hand, presents a much more difficult task. If the "melting pot" theory really existed in America it would ease the burden. However, it doesn't. Consequently, a study of the American family consist of a study of all the aforementioned aspects of the family. In addition, it must include a breakdown of society that is probably unique to America. One must study those family traits in an agricultural society as well as an urban/industrial setting. You must study the family in the context of a pre and post Civil War era. You must study it in light of a pre and post sexual revolution as well as a feminine movement. One would have to study the working class family, the middle class family, the affluent family, the poor family, the white family, the black family and the various ethnic families.

American society is a society of immigrants that brought with them an already established outlook about the composition of the family (some preferred to keep those views while others opted to shed then). What proves true of the family in one of these ethnic groups does not necessarily prove true with another group. Is there a single family type, in America, that we all identify with? Do we all strive to emulate the story book family or the perfect television family (both parents at home. Dad working, mom taking care of the house and joining the civic groups. In addition to that there are usually two children—three at the most—and the spotted puppy). Or, do we have as many family types as we have ethnic groups and/or social classes?

In spite of the difficulty of the task we, nevertheless, will learn (via our study) that the family is (1) the body entrusted with the task of caring for and training the children of our society. Secondly, this body is also expected to care for the elderly and the sick of our society. Thirdly, we will learn that changes in our society—social programs, agencies and institutions—have taken some of the responsibility away from the family and placed it in the hands of the state (children that were educated at home during the nineteenth century are now educated at schools. The mentally and physically handicapped that was once cared for at hone are now institutionalized. Social Security replaces the need for children to care for parents in their older

years, and medicare eliminates the need of involvement by offsprings, in some cases, just to cite a few examples). We will also observe the link between what Tamara K. Hareven refers to as “family time” (the time when certain events take place within the family, such as marriage, the birth of children, and the age that children left home, etc.) and “historical time” (the time that changes occur in society, such as the change from an agricultural economy to an industrial one, a pre and post Civil War society, etc.). Lastly, we will observe the high nobility that has characterized our development (the early colonist moved here from the lands of their ancestors seeking a better way of life. Later, generations to come would constantly move west as long as land and gold opportunities existed. Today, we move wherever and whenever job opportunities beckon us to do so). I should mention here that mobility is not a uniquely American phenomenon. However, nomadic tribes of the past moved as a group (taking with them their culture and possessions). Americans moved as individuals, or nuclear families that were willing to “start over” in their new lands.

In essence, the composition of the family has, according to Niles Newton, changed to reflect changes in the “economic and social organization of our world.... We are living a world that was traditionally agricultural but has since evolved into an economy based on industrial manufacturing. Here, “wages and salary” helps to determined the relationship between families and family members. The drive to get ahead, the willingness to relocate and the demands of “the industry” were greater influences on relationships than the old concerns of family unity and autonomy.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to give students (and teacher) an opportunity to examine and understand the relationships between changes in the family structure and changes in the social and/or economic makeup of society. This unit should also serve, if desired, as a followup to my unit last year. That unit, “Communities In Transition”, sought to examine the arrival of various ethnic and/or cultural groups into American society and communities. It hopes to show the impact of those groups on their neighborhoods (how their lifestyles and attitudes changed or complimented them). This unit, instead of looking at the larger picture, will examine the individual family (how their composition was and is determined by those forces in the larger community). Thus, from the “group” to the “family” seems like a logical progression that should end with a unit on the individual.

At the end of the unit mastery of the following objectives should be accomplished:

1. Student will be able to define the following terms as they relate to the study of the family unit: monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, matrilineal, nuclear family, extended family, family time and historical time.
2. Student will be able to discuss the need for large families in an agricultural economy.
3. Student will be able to discuss how the “work at home” concept of preindustrial America helped to maintain the family unit.
4. Student will know how the needs of an urban/ industrial/manufacturing society influenced changes in the family unit.
5. Based on their studies, students will be able to make predictions about the future of the family.
6. Student will know that many variables helped to shape the structure and expectations of the

family.

7. Student will be able to discuss the difference between an economy centered around agriculture and one centered around industrial manufacturing.
8. Student will explain the Industrial Revolution.

EARLY AMERICANS

In our study of the early Americans we will look, briefly, at two groups; (1) the American Indians and (2) the early colonist (though the colonist did not refer to themselves as Americans).

American Indians

Our readings on the American Indians reveals, to us, that they (Indians) lived in what I refer to as a “communal” family. The term “communal” is not to be confused with “communal sex” relationships as some social historians once felt. I use the term to refer to the fact that nuclear families existed but that they cooperated and interacted as one large community (tribe).

As mentioned earlier, Indians (as hunters and gatherers) lived, prior to the creations of the present day state and/or organized government, as groups of families under the protection of the tribe or band. Their survival depended on this mutual cooperation between the families. In essence, they were bands of mostly nuclear families. Kathleen Gough, in “The Origin of the Family”, stated (in paraphrase) that of all the hunting and gathering tribes that she studied, about fifty percent or more of them lived in nuclear families (with polygamous families serving as the compliment). Another thirty-three percent had “stepfamily” households (this is where an older parent lives in with one of the children, usually with the eldest son. Often, this care would be paid for via land or other possessions through inheritance). Lastly, a small percentage of the Indians lived in large extended families. Exceptions to this would be Indians like the Hopi and Navaho that were mostly “extended, matrilineal, matrilocal” families.

In this society of hunters and gatherers the social life would reflect the egalitarian nature of a cooperative society. The work of women was considered to be as important as that of men. Nevertheless, the work was divided, along sexual lines. Men assured the collective responsibilities of hunting, administering the affairs of the tribe, and defending it from enemies. Women, on the other hand, were expected to collectively gather and prepare the food (berries, nuts, etc.), tan the hides for shelter and clothing, and rear the children. In this society, nuclear families made decisions that were peculiar to their family. Decisions that affected the tribe, as a whole, was made by tribal leaders.

The above arrangement offered protection to the tribe and insured the survival of the “tribal family.” Nomadic tribes needed this network of nuclear families as they traveled in search of food. The need for larger families would not come about until agricultural developments were sufficient enough to support and require such a change in the structure of the family.

Colonist

There doesn't appear to be many studies on colonial families of the seventeenth century. Much of the data seems to come from inferences based on such information as inheritance records, birthrates, and marriage records, etc.

The early colonist desired to live in small village communities like those they were accustomed to living in England. However, the frontier offered so much free land that families tended to spread out as they staked out their fortunes. These families tended to be nuclear with the children (especially males) marrying late so that their labor could be used as long as possible on the family farms. Even when these sons married they were often offered parcels of land, on the family farm, where they might build their homes. The New England Colonies also saw the system of reciprocity. There it was understood that parents would care for their children until they were old enough, and desired, to marry and/or leave home to start out on their own. In return the children were expected to care for the parent(s) when they were no longer able to care for themselves.

At this time there also existed a modified extended family (this was a combination of the extended family and the nuclear family that came about during the second generation when the sons stayed nearby).

In seventeenth century Maryland the family also took on the form of the nuclear family. Though it would take a long time before a definite and dominant family type could emerge. Maryland was inhabited by European immigrants that were well entrenched in their family habits. Considering the facts that the vast majority of men, in Maryland, died before the age of seventy, and that men greatly outnumbered women and the fact that of those unmarried women coming to the colony most of them came as indentured servants one can see that it would take a long time before families could be established or a nativeborn family type could emerge. Many Maryland immigrants left their families in England.

Because of the conditions existing in the New World (availability of land, a host of immigrant groups, a disproportional number of men and women and plenty of opportunity, etc.) the end of the eighteenth century saw many changes take place in the American family. John Demos (“The American Family In Past Time”) felt that the older children's adaptability to the new world conditions led to a breakdown of parental authority. Younger men felt that they were better equipped to deal with these conditions. This, coupled with free land in the frontier, enabled some young men to threaten “to leave home” when disagreement developed between them and their parent(s) (father). Other changes have often been outlined by historians. They include a break in the interactions between the family and the community at large; it includes changes in the family structure (with boys leaving home earlier to seek their own fortunes); there was an increase in opportunity and status for women (women could now own property and were known to operate taverns and Inns); and finally it included changes in puritanical views about sex.

Preindustrial America

At this time, prior to the late nineteenth century, families lived and functioned in a predominantly agrarian society. Here, the home market was the main support or income source for the family.

In this society sex determined the role each individual would play in the economic domain. Nevertheless, the

roles of men and women were viewed as equal in their relationship to the importance of family support. Men worked at their various crafts (near the farm) or worked on the family farm. When the boys were old enough to work they worked alongside their fathers. The craft shops or family fields were always in close proximity to the house that the men were near if needed.

Women, on the other hand, worked in the house. In addition to maintaining the house, caring for the children and training the girls, she also sewed, made the soap, churned the butter, canned the food, and sometimes engaged in the production of clothing. Those things, to name a few, were important to the health and survival of the family. Thus, men, women and often children all worked for the betterment of the whole family. There was no individual bread-winner (as we conceive of the term today).

The preindustrial society demanded a geographically stable family. The composition of the family, at that time, tended to reflect that need. Relatives were always present, either in the house or nearby, to assist in the task of child rearing and to provide support for the family (if needed). Families were larger at that time. The first U.S. Census of 1790 showed that the median household size was 5.7 members. Some of that size could be attributed to other non-nuclear support members of the household. These supports came in the form of servants, borders, apprentices and other relatives.

As it was in colonial society, the care of the elderly and/or the infirm was mainly the responsibility of the larger family group since public institutions, for such care, was limited.

When the home market of this period began to disappear so eroded the equality of the home work performed by women. At this time we also began to see a decline in household size.

Industrial/Urban America

There are as many counter theories as there are theories about the development of the human family. Few social scientists agree with all of any one theory. The area receiving the most challenges is the period described as the era of industrial and urban development. Here, many people such as Talcott Parsons, theorizes that the extended family with strong kinship ties could not meet the needs of this new period. Industry needed people that could be employed based on ability and not kinship. They needed a socially and geographically mobile family. Parsons felt that (1) individuals with strong ties to the kinship relationships would be less likely to relocate in order to satisfy the purposes of industry; (2) he felt that these relationships would die if a separation occurred; and lastly, that it would be difficult to move and employ large groups of people.

Other researchers countered that these things occurred together by chance and not necessarily as causes and effects. They argue that technology made it possible for people to live apart and still maintain close communication with one another. They argue that a modified extended family existed. The cause/effect theory states that the family is broken up into nuclear families that excludes kinship interference in their everyday lives. They say that contrary to the extended family concept, marriage is based on mutual admiration of the man and woman and not kinship arrangements. Critics argue that isn't true. They say that parents influence who their children meet, interact with and consequently fall in love with. Critics argue that grandparents, in-laws, first cousins, aunts and uncles are still important to the conjugal family and that they exert a great deal of pressure and influence on the conjugal family.

The conjugal family puts less restrictions on the status obligation of its family members than that of the extended family. This frees both sexes to pursue their individual goals (just what industry needed).

Unlike the men of the agrarian period, the men of the industrial period tended to work far away from home tucked away in factories or offices. He was considered to be, to a large extent, the bread winner of the family and could, or should, expect little (if any) help from his wife or children. This is thought to have helped to destroy the equalitarian position of women.

Industrialism is viewed, by many, as the institution that destroyed the extended family system and ushered in the so-called "isolated nuclear family" (families were expected to consist of parents and children only). They were also expected to have assigned tasks (the father worked outside of the home and the mother should work within the household). Industrialism also destroyed the drive towards land ownership, that had existed under the agrarian system. Mobility was essential to the success of the growing industry consequently it was important that a system be engendered that downplayed ties to the land or family (kinship ties were a hindrance to nobility).

Other changes that took place with the introduction of industrialism were: (1) children could now support their own families with their own earnings, as a result they no longer needed the blessings of their elders; (2) since advancement, on the job, depended solely on the individual's ability and not kinship ties obedience was no longer a necessity; (3) In addition, instruction and training, at home, was replaced by instruction and training in the public schools and factories. Industrialism also reduced the need for children to engage in employment thus freeing them to attend school.

African American Family (Prior to the Civil War)

In our readings for this section we find two main views and/or theories abound. These views contradict one another in their interpretation of the extent of the relationships between members of the African American family.

One view espouses the belief that it was the slave master and/or plantation that held the slave's family and moral fortitude together. They felt that if those factors were removed the slave family system would crumble. Therefore, the slave family depended, to a large extent, on the whims of the slave master.

The African slave tended to identify with the idea of the extended kinship family. This conclusion was based on information about the slave's method of naming their children (often after nonnuclear family members). The slave owner, on the other hand, treated the slaves as property, creating and destroying family units whenever it was economically advantageous to do so. It is important, here, that I point out the fact that these scholars did not think that all slave owners felt this way. Some slave masters were not as callous towards the slave's family. Instead, some of them went to great pains to ensure that the slave family stayed together (they did this by selling or buying slave families as a unit).

Herbert G. Gutman, "The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925", argues the opposite. He states that in all of his research he finds that the breakup of the slave's family, by the slave master, was very minimum. He states that the vast majority of slave families embraced the nuclear family pattern (that most slaves sold from the family were older children and unmarried adults). He went on to state that most children lived in two parent families and that these parents tended to remain married for long periods of time.

In conclusion, he stated that the African slave family, in their attempts to adjust to the harshness of slavery, learned from (and embraced) the slave master's nuclear family system. Once this system was adopted the slave family adhered to it rigidly. This system was found to exist under various conditions (in the "Lower South" as well as the "Upper South", on large farms and on plantations, with "good" masters and bad

masters).

African American Family (Post Civil War)

From the ending of the Civil War to the present the African American family has, on the whole, identified with the nuclear family. However, the past thirty or so years have seen many changes take place in the family's structure. We can readily identify four types of family structures coexisting in contemporary society. (1) The basic family consisting only of a married couple; (2) a nuclear family—with both parents and children; (3) the extended family (embracing other relatives, usually a grandparent); and lastly, the “attenuated” family (where one parent, usually the male, is missing from the household).

Within the above family structures we find the same decision making tools in place that are found in white families. Patriarches (where the father/husband makes the major decisions for the family); matriarchs (where the major decisions are made by the mother/wife often in the absence of a male); and thirdly, there is the equalitarian system of joint decision making.

The sex roles of these families vary from community to community or among” the social classes. In some instances we find the traditional division (men are the breadwinners of the family and women are expected to care for the household). In another, we find two working partners that share, as much as possible, the responsibilities of the household; and yet, in another, setting we find the children sharing in the responsibilities.

The Future at the Family in Society

In this section we will encourage students to explore the many possibilities open to them. We have already noticed that many roles once reserved for the family (i.e., caring for the aged and infirm, etc) have been taken over, for the most part, by state agencies. Even the socialization of the young has shifted from the home to the schools, churches, and other community organizations.

Is the family still needed? Will testtube babies eliminate the need for families as producers of children? How does the two working member family fit into a society designed for a one provider household? How does the single parent home fit into this scheme?

These are the questions that students must be encouraged to address.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would hope that after using a combination of materials (this unit, the student and teacher bibliography and the independently assigned teacher assignments) students will gain a better insight and understanding of the interdependence of social forces and institutions as they interact to bring about changes.

I have chosen a topic (the family) that students can readily relate to. In addition, it is an institution that has gone through many changes and/or variations and is still in the process of adjusting itself to meet present day demands. It is a subject with no real clear cut and definitive answer (there is adequate research to support different theories though modern day researchers tend to tilt towards Gutman). As a results, students should feel free to explore one or both sides of the argument.

It is important that students understand the following points: (1) changes are constantly taking place in society; (2) that the family has evolved from an extended kinship family to a nuclear family to what some

refer to as a modified extended family. Existing along side these family structures we find the nuclear family. (3) we want students to ponder the question of which came first (the nuclear family gave us industrialism or did industrialism engender the family structure). Some social historians feel that changes in the home led to changes in the means of production. i.e., to cite one example; inventions to improve production in the home market and local craft shops led to changes. Example, the power generator was invented to aid this industry, however, the generator was much too large to be placed in the home or craft shop so factories were built to house them. The largest of families, of those times, were not large enough to staff the factories so wage earners were hired to staff them. They (social historians) argue that many events such as this led to industrialism. (4) In the end students should try to understand the social conditions that produce single parent homes, two career families, communes, and gay marriages, etc.

As an added bonus students should ponder how the new drug culture might affect family relationships, if at all. Is the isolated nuclear family really isolated? Finally, what are some of the drawbacks of industrialism?

Purpose

This unit is intended for eighth grade students studying American History via the study of the Western Hemisphere. However, the unit can be modified to suit any grade and/or grade level.

The unit should be taught as a seven week unit. Ideally the unit should be broken down as follows: first week: (a) introduction of the unit, (b) establishing a working definition of the concept "family" and (c) studying the communal life of the American Indians. Second week: (a) comparing the extended and conjugal family and (b) studying the concept of the modified extended family. Third week: an examination of the family during preindustrial America. Fourth week: the study of the family during the period of industrialization and urbanization. Fifth week: The preCivil War African American family. Sixth week: The post Civil War African American family. Seventh week: a summary of the above materials where students should be encouraged to speculate on the future of the American family.

APPROACH

1. Readings (text, excerpts)
2. Discussions (of readings)
3. Discussions (of family photos and diaries from text, and personal photos of students if available)
4. Speaker (one)
5. Reports (one oral or written on any aspect of the family)

MOTIVATION

As students study the history of the United States, the coming of the immigrants specifically, have them read and/or research the impact of the immigrant family on their new community and the community's impact on them. This should generate enough interest to lead into the unit.

SAMPLE BREAKDOWN OF ONE WEEKLY TOPIC ON A DAILY BASIS

Week 2 : Student will be able to discuss the difference between the extended and the
1 . nuclear family. Student will be able to explain and/or discuss the tenants of the modified
extended family.

Day 1, obj: student will be able to explain and give examples of the extended family.

Day 2, obj: student will be able to explain and give examples of the nuclear family.

Day 3, obj: student will be able to discuss the modified extended family.

Day 4, obj: student will compare and contrast the extended, nuclear and modified extended
families.

Day 5, obj: student will explain the economic systems that existed with the extended, nuclear and
modified systems.

TWO SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

(Week 2)

Day 1, obj: student will be able to explain and give examples of the extended family.

Statement: the extended family unit was widespread during the agrarian period. It was a system that encouraged ties to the land and stability.

Material: article ("World Revolution and Family Patterns," William Goode, first six paragraphs)

Read, aloud, the selected paragraphs and discuss with teacher and class. Discussion should bring out the following points:

- a. what is meant by the terms extended family and agrarian.
- b. why the work of everyone, on the farm, was considered equal in its importance.
- c. why the children were educated at home.
- d. why families were larger then.

Day 3, obj: student will be able to discuss the modified extended family.

Statement: This is the family of today's industrial world. It is the nuclear family that is able to maintain kinship links via the advancements in technology (communication and travel).

Material: Article ("Geographic Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion," Eugene Litwak, *The Family in Change*). Definition on chalkboard.

Have student read and discuss definition of extended modified family (listed on board). Have students discuss the many ways that people can be mobile (for industry's sake) and yet be in close contact with relatives (encourage students to think of personal examples, i.e. contact—telephone, mail, or trips—with relatives in the South or elsewhere). Discuss these in detail. Secondly, have students read article and discuss.

For homework have student think of as many relatives as they can that they are very close to but live far away.

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