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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1990 Volume IV: American Family Portraits (Section I)

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## **The Changing Family: How Changes in the Family Reflect Social and Economic Changes in Society**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.04.08  
by Clarence Roberts, Jr.

This unit is intended to help students understand the family unit, or institution, and the social forces that interplay to encourage changes within the institution. Students will study briefly the history of the American family from the time of the Native Americans to the present. They will examine American society when its inhabitants were hunters and gatherers, then farmers, and lastly, wage earners in an industrial/urban society.

Hopefully, they will be able to articulate the connections between those changes in the means of production and the changes in the family unit.

As hunters and gatherers, American Indians formed bands or tribes of extended kinship ties because it facilitated their lifestyle. When the Europeans first arrived they tended to have larger families and live in nuclear units with some kinship ties because that relationship helped them to deal with the demands of an agrarian society. Lastly, the individualistic attitude needed for success in the factory was supported by the nuclear family.

(Recommended for Social Studies, grade 8, and U.S. History, grade 9)

### **Key Words**

*History Family Life Afro-American American*

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