THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY

by

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RE THESIS TITLE, COULD BE MULTIPLE LINES, ALL CAPS, DOUBLE SPACED, CENTERED

by

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The family is an integral part of the human experience. It is where we gather our traditions, learn of our culture, and garner emotional and physical support as we grow. In American history, family has represented a segment of the successful American Dream: a home, a job, and a healthy, prosperous family. The American family is also where not only the American experience begins, but also where American history begins.

As time has moved on, our definition of family has changed. From at once being a small group of individuals who were able to survive the journey to the New World and begin a new life, to a large group who were employed to carry on the primarily agrarian business, to frontier families whose equality among genders and children has been heretofore unrivaled in our country’s short history.

Modern American history saw the Victorian age and the movements toward piety and temperance, gathering the family closely. In the 1950’s, this behavior was mirrored although it was a historical anomaly, even in comparison to the Victorian age. Current families seem to model more closely the colonial families, being made up of fewer individuals, and those individuals having more than one role to play in the day to day life.

In today’s society, we see families made up of non-blood relatives, multiple marriages, alternative lifestyles, etc. However, in the history of the American family there has seldom been a family “type” that has occurred before. While social consciousness may expand, the concrete base to the American family has yet to change, thus providing American history with an ultimate and historically consistent origin.
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Evolution of the American Family

Introduction

Like nearly all societies around the world, Americans put a large amount of faith and love into their families, and generally families are a moral, ethical and emotional touchstone for many of us as individuals and as social groups. As Thomas Jefferson said, “The happiest moments of my life have been the few which I have passed at home in the bosom of my family.”¹ But what makes up the American family? Who is involved in its intricacies and idiosyncrasies? What causes these intricacies and idiosyncrasies? Has the American family changed significantly over the course of time, from the colonial era to present day?

Over the course of the history of the United States, the definition of family has changed. The popular conception has evolved from the idea of the extended, agrarian family of several generations living under one roof, to the idealized 1950’s model suburban family of two parents and two children, to the modern family whose definition is currently being fought in the federal and state legislatures and courts. Currently, it is believed by many that the romanticized family of our past is in danger of disappearing. It is common to blame the erosion of the family on several different factors, including the rise in single parent households, drug abuse, and gays and lesbians. Some historians, however, question the existence of the idealized family and have found that today’s families share some similarities with their historical counterparts.

¹
It is this question - the existence of an idealized American family - that is the subject of this historiography. As such, it will focus on five different chronological periods of American history and the family: colonial families, 19th century families, early 20th century families, families of the 1950’s, and present day families. Typically, it will explore the inner-workings of family life and the make-up of the American family and the changes which it undertakes.

Before examining the history of the American family, it is important to understand what a family is and the components of which it consists. According to historian Carl Degler, a family consists of five elements: a marriage ritual between a man and woman; duties and rights of parenthood of the marriage partners; a common place in which the husband and wife and children live; economic obligations between man and wife; and a means of sexual satisfaction for the married partners. Maxine Baca Zinn, however, describes the “mythical monolithic family” as consisting of three elements: a nuclear unit; a mother and a father; and a sexual division of labor. She continues that this model is “a product of a false universalization.” To bolster the point, Zinn quotes social scientist Louise Kapp Howe:

…the first thing to remember about the American family is that it doesn’t exist. Families exist. All kinds of families in all kinds of economic and marital situations, as all of us can see… The American family? Just which American family did you have in mind? Black or white, large or small, wealthy or poor, or somewhere in between? Did you mean a father-headed, mother-headed or childless family? First or second time around? Happy or miserable? Your family or mine?

This historiography will examine whether or not historians find that Degler’s format generally holds true throughout history. It examines the question of whether or
not a strict definition an American family is a fair criterion by which to judge this institution over time.
Colonial Families

The contemporary concept of colonial families generally seems to come from a romanticized notion wrought from elementary and even secondary school teachings of Thanksgiving: pilgrims in black dress and buckled shoes staunchly searching for liberty and religious freedom. While this is not wholly inaccurate, it is surely only a stereotype of particular individuals; it speaks nothing of the make-up of the colonial family and how it functioned within the newly created society.

Stephanie Coontz finds that there were at least three types of families that co-existed in Colonial America, including communal Native American families; white European families that existed in a more nuclear format but depended on neighbors and servants; and black families that struggled to maintain some kinship ties in the face of slavery. Regardless of the eventual make-up and dynamics of the family, most all began with the ritual of marriage.

Marriage in American colonial times is a fairly difficult concept to pin down, mainly due to the lack of accurate records. As Po Bronson relates, “Most colonial couples married themselves during the 17th century, without any sort of religious or civic recognition…cohabitation and community acceptance were the evidence of a legitimate marriage…” Such sparse record keeping continued through the Civil War. Megan J. McClintock writes that “Informal nuptial practices, lax documentation of marital rites and slavery blurred the lines between legal marriage and illegitimate liaisons.”

Nonetheless, some information about marriage traditions within the colonies exists, especially in the colonies settled mostly by men in contrast to those settled by
more family units. Virginia is a good example. According to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, many of the settlers of the Chesapeake area of Virginia and of Maryland were male indentured servants and, due to harsh conditions, had a fifty percent chance of dying within their first year. Males also outnumbered females seven to one. This fact, and the fact of their servitude, often delayed marriage; once married, odds were that there would be a death of one partner prior to their seventh anniversary. Indeed, “Virginia was a society in which life was short, diseases ran rampant, and parentless children and multiple marriages were the norm.”

Another settlement founded mostly by men was Andover, Massachusetts in the early 1640’s. Historian Philip J. Greven Jr.’s study of Andover uncovers “…evidence…[that] indicates that the families of Andover’s first settlers were large…families of twenty-nine men who settled in Andover between 1645 and 1660 reveals that a total of 247 children are known to have been born to these particular families.” This indicates, if nothing else, that family units were established and beginning to thrive, although legitimacy of marriage in modern legal terms is uncertain.

The Puritans of colonial America based many of their beliefs regarding family, including marriage, in contractual terms. Puritanical principles were based on a covenant; in other words, every adult party in any relationship, be it social or business, had to agree to be in that relationship and live up to his or her responsibilities. In specific terms of marriage, John Demos confirms the Puritanical belief system, stating that marriage “was not a sacrament, but rather another type of contract between two individual persons…” Thus, if the agreement was unacceptable to one party or the
other, it was subject to termination. “Even marriage itself was regarded as a covenant. Connecticut granted nearly a thousand divorces between 1670 and 1799.”

Once married, the Puritanical household took on a businesslike if not a paternalistic feel. Gail Collins asserts that the Puritans were orderly and devout, and that “they believed that the husband was the God of the household,” and that the woman of the house “did not have the right to question his judgment.” However, she does go on to illustrate how newly arrived Puritan women, tired and perhaps hardened by their trip across the Atlantic and the hardships of the land in which they settled, may have become a little less submissive and a little more aggressive, perhaps challenging the covenant under which they were married.

Studies of the Puritans provide great insight into their daily lives. The Puritans paved the way of change in raising children. Colonial children were generally thought of as property and (as the households were usually the center of the family economy) free labor. In the Chesapeake region specifically, due to the harshness of life, Gary Nash asserts that families were often made up a menagerie of half-siblings, “headed by parents to whom some of the children were not biologically related.” Demos discusses the practice of “putting out” children (placing children in the households of others) as a means of allowing the child to learn a trade, to take a job (such as a servant,) to receive some sort of education, or because their natural parents were deceased. Putting out children was the Puritans’ attempt to maintain order when financial or familial obligations called for it.
Perhaps it was the Puritans’ resistance to a disordered lifestyle that would eventually lead to the rise of the more traditional, more openly affectionate family. Edmund Morgan theorized that the Puritans, determined to convert their children in order for them to achieve salvation, “committed the very sin that they so often admonished themselves to avoid: they had allowed their children to usurp a higher place than God in their affections...”\(^{17}\) However, historian John Demos seems to contrast this finding, asserting that the Puritans attempted to abbreviate any “willfulness through severe discipline.”\(^{18}\) Most likely, parts of both these Puritanical child-rearing viewpoints are correct.

There seems to be some agreement among historians that the traditions of patriarchy and primogeniture were well established. Coontz states that there was a “strict patriarchal authority” during colonial times.\(^{19}\) Regarding Andover, Massachusetts, Greven establishes that “because of the continuing dependence of the second generation upon their first-generation fathers…the family was patriarchal...”\(^{20}\)

Regardless of the patriarchal nature of colonial families, women did have some control. According to Robert E. Wright, women in colonial America, especially wives of businessmen, were holders of “considerable discretion; [generally when the husbands were absent] and some [husbands] went so far as to allow their wives to run separate businesses.”\(^{21}\) Wright goes on to claim that single or widowed women “were economic free agents as free from legal constraints as any colonial man… [and] had to know how to keep accounts, make cash transactions and arrange credit terms.”\(^{22}\) The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation supports this premise, citing the probability that many wives
outlived their husbands and took their opportunities as property owners and heads of households.\textsuperscript{23}

Generally, the definition of family in colonial times seems to encompass many different types. Po Bronson states that a family’s function was “broad and diffuse, and its boundaries elastic,” capable of housing many different individuals and being the economic, religious and educational center of the family.\textsuperscript{24} However, a contrasting view of this comes from Everett Dixon Dyer’s \textit{The American Family}. He notes of colonial and frontier times in America:

The settlers generally came in nuclear families and as single persons rather than extended family groups. Thus, the nuclear family became the principle social unit early in the colonial period. Dependency on the nuclear family increased with the mobility that characterized the settling of the North American continent.\textsuperscript{25}

While these viewpoints contrast, they seem to each fit easily into today’s broad and changing family model, creating the basis for the changes that come to the American family as time moved forward. Strict patriarchy established in the Puritan model will decrease, and interestingly, more emotional child-rearing practices, also established by the Puritans, will increase.
The 19th century saw not only a westward migration but a creation of an urban middle class as well. Both these developments pushed the evolution of the family dynamic in terms of familial obligations, gender roles, and the roles of parents and children.

The male-dominated westward movement in North America was left many frontier towns full of male pioneers seeking their fortune and severely lacking in female companionship. Early settlers to North America had experienced something similar; this need began to change the rites of courtship and marriage. Dyers shows that the change in the practice of choosing a mate began with the frontier-people of colonial North America, due partially to the new opportunities that the settlers encountered, and that “romantic love became linked to mate selection in the colonies, especially on the frontiers of settlement, where there was a chronic shortage of women.”

Nineteenth century settlers continued with this new trend. Historian Steven Mintz supports this view by stating the following about marriage and courtship rituals in the 19th century: “A new pattern of marriage arose, based primarily on companionship and affection…”

However, the need for women on the frontier and the desire to have a romantic rather than a necessarily practical marriage did not automatically change the status of women in society or in the family. Collins asserts that the decision to move west was usually the decision of the husband, giving the wife no say in the matter. If the woman was so inclined to make the trip as well (either to maintain the family unit or from wanderlust,) Collins found:
…[wives] were generally fighting to be included on a trip the man was planning to make solo. “I would not be left behind,” wrote Luzena Wilson. “I thought where he could go I could go”… Wilson wound up gaining and losing several small fortunes in the West, where her skills as a cook turned out to be much more valuable than her husband’s talent as a gold miner.28

Nash seems to initially refute Collins’ claim of male dominance in the move west, presenting a more egalitarian model and stating that “Men often found themselves assisting wives in unfamiliar domestic chores while women helped men with their heavy outdoor work.”29 However, a logical viewpoint of the needs of pioneers and homesteaders brings to light the fact that, to keep a family going, everybody would need to pitch in wherever needed. The text continues on to eventually support Collins stating that, during the Gold Rush, only “five percent of early Gold Rush emigrants to California were women and children…”30 Nash finds that was evident in the fact that prostitutes “may have constituted as much as 20 percent of California’s female population in 1850.”31

While most parents agreed that prostitution was not the ideal career choice for their daughters, the existence of prostitution is evidence of the evolving family in the 19th century and the changing roles of women and daughters, whether they braved the wild frontier or stayed in urban centers and took on social reform. By the same token, the expanding frontier and availability of new job opportunities also changed the relationship between men and sons. Mintz states that “New England fathers found themselves less able to influence their sons’ choice of occupation, when or whom their children would marry and…fewer daughters were marrying in birth order.”32 Mintz goes on to point out
the gender inequalities that developed within the family: “…new domestic roles appeared, which assigned the wife to care full-time for her children and to maintain a home.” Coontz supports this gender gap in the middle class: “The new middle-class family was based on a strict segregation of spheres between the sexes, intense mother-child bonding, and on the idea that children must be protected from knowledge of poverty, death, and sex.”

The mother-child bonding that was established in the early part of the century was clearly and plainly evident during the Civil War, a time that Alcott and Fahs states was “deeply maternist culture, which placed mothers at the emotional center of the household and placed great value on the virtues of home.” However, the virtues, entitlements, and obligations of home came under scrutiny with the question of Civil War pensions. Coontz writes:

Antebellum courts reject the tradition that a parent’s duty to support his or her offspring was merely a natural obligation without legal enforcement mechanisms. That increased parental liability for minor children (and for unmarried daughter even beyond the age of majority) and gave creditors the right to sue parents for goods supplied to a child. At the same time, judges limited the “familylike” rights and responsibilities of people outside the nuclear family, abrogating reciprocal duties that had once existed beyond the self-reliant family.

Coontz’ research finds that states eventually began to govern about deciding the legality of marriage, reestablishing waiting periods for marriage, raising ages of consent and legally removing the option of interracial marriage. Megan J. McClintock delves more deeply into this issue and states that the government, in an effort to divine what
exactly marriage and filial obligations are, essentially created a welfare system policy based on emotional and family ties:

…the ideal of filial devotion encouraged the federal government to become a provider of poor relief for the elderly in the late nineteenth century. Ideals of familial relations shaped policy directed at Civil War widows as well, but with very different results. Rather than simply benefiting from the expansion of federal assistance, widows were subjected to increasing government supervision of their private lives.38

Civil War widows were placed under much more scrutiny than just families, having not only their marriage to the deceased studied, but also their personal life after the death of their husband placed very nearly into public view. Collins agrees:

“Concerned that pension requirements provided women with both an opportunity to defraud the government, and, since remarriage terminated a widow’s pension, an incentive to conduct their sexual relations outside legal marriage, the Bureau of Pensions added moral supervision to its role of financial provider.”39 If accurate records were not available to determine whether the marriage had been legal and the widow was not living with or conducting a sexual and/or marriage-like relationship with another man, community and other family members would be called upon to verify her situation.

Gary Nash portrays women during the war as a hard-working group of people, maintaining homes as best they could, volunteering in the war effort, picking up the slack on the home front by taking jobs and becoming nurses in the war effort when there was a shortage of male nurses.40 Once the war was over, women either returned to the home or cared for their injured loved ones. For some, their work had not ended, “nor had the discrimination.”41
If white women in the post-Civil War era had their difficulties, those difficulties were compounded for the former slaves, newly freed blacks, and Northern blacks. States Collins: “The emotional burden on middle-class black women in the nineteenth century was stupendous.”

For the newly freed, re-establishment of the family was usually first on their minds. Gary Nash attests that many “left the plantation in search of a spouse, parent, or child sold away years before.”

He continues that the freed men and women sought to establish legal marriage among blacks and to “[establish] the legitimacy of their children.”

Degler agrees with Nash, citing a study done by Herbert Gutman that showed that, from 1867 to 1890, 61.3 percent of the marriages in seven North Carolina counties alone were between blacks.

Legitimizing their marriages occurred, McClintock notes, even though prior to emancipation, slaves were able to create unions: “Though slave codes prohibited marriage, slaves were not denied the right to form unions, albeit unprotected by law.”

While Collins and Nash do not discuss the plight of former slave Civil War widows, however Nash briefly touches on the attempt to establish a traditional family in a discriminatory world: “[Legal] marriage brought special burdens for black women who assumed the double role of housekeep and breadwinner. Their determination to create a traditional family life and care for their children resulted in the withdrawal of women from plantation field labor.”

Annette Gordon-Reed expands the ideals of slave families even further: “…some argue that the church remains the preeminent institution within the black community. The same could be said of family life. That the law provided
nothing in the way of protection for slave families did not prevent the notion of family from growing and remaining within the slave community.”

Nash states that naming became an assertion of a new independence:

“Freedpeople also demonstrated their new status by choosing surnames. Names connoting independence, such as Washington, were common.” Gordon-Reed, on the other hand, takes the viewpoint that names created a bond with lost or distant family and a way to reestablish and maintain family ties: “Family connections were maintained and strengthened through naming practices. Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and cousins, who may have been separated by great distances, were kept a part of the fold by giving children their names.”

In spite of attempts by freedmen and women to reunite their families, and by the North and South to reconstruct the Union, by the end of the nineteenth century, the United States witnessed a sharp rise in divorce rates. Steven Mintz, and John and Rebecca Moores attribute the rise in broken homes to the fact that marriage rituals had gone from the pragmatic to the romantic and the harsh realities thereof: “If marriages were to rest on mutual affection, then divorce had to serve as a safety valve from loveless and abusive marriages.” Coontz takes a slightly different tack, examining the common and short-lived rise and fall of the Victorian-age romantic friendship phenomenon - generally, two female friends who took on more romantic and emotional roles in one another's lives, seemingly as lovers. Such relationships, she asserts, may have contributed to the rise in divorce rates: “Acceptance that the couple relationship should be the sole source of emotional and erotic intimacy made an unsatisfactory relationship
increasingly unbearable.”52 Finally, Degler takes a pragmatic approach: “It might be thought that the increase in the number of divorces at the end of the 19th and the opening of the 20th century was more a function of changes in [divorce] laws, rather than being a true measure of social responses to marriage.”53 In other words, it became easier to either petition for or grant divorces in some states at the turn of the century.

The changes in social landscape of the 19th century - westward movement, war and reconstruction, and evolving gender and familial roles - carved out a tenuous role for the American family as it moved into the next century in the face of industrialization and reform.
Early 20th Century Families

One of the most striking changes in the early 20th century was the rise of cities, both literally and figuratively. More than ever before, cities became the crux of business and culture. Child labor also became an issue, as did the tremendous rise in immigration. These and the rise in divorce brought about more concerns and issues for the American family.

Cities became paradoxes, at once exciting with money and possibility, and a virtual wasteland to the urban immigrant working class. Steven Mintz finds that “By 1920 immigrants and their children formed between half and three-quarters of the population of Boston, Cleveland, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and St. Louis.” Although it might seem that the immigrant families had more of a need to stay together, this was often not the case, nor was it the case that entire families immigrated together. Mintz reports that, “Like Irish daughters before them, large numbers of single young Jewish women migrated on their own.” Young people coming to this country had to work, as did the poor and urban working-class. Mintz asserts that the work “offered [the children] the money they needed to enjoy the pleasures of their new land.” However, David Nasaw takes a slightly grimmer viewpoint: “Children who worked full-time did so because their parents - or parent - had no way of making ends meet without their weekly wages.” However, Nasaw does differentiate between full-time child workers and part-time, allowing that, often, part-time workers more often helped the family rather than supported it. Mintz takes a more pragmatic view of child labor regarding familial obligations, stating that “families living in urban working-class neighborhoods, in mill
and mining towns and in the rural Northeast, South, Midwest, and Far West continued to rely heavily on children’s labor and earnings.”

The Progressive Era reform movement rose, in part, as a reaction against the child laborer. Laboring children, according to Nasaw, “aroused the sympathy of the reform community…and motivated the crusade against child labor.” Mintz goes a step further by that the child labor reform movement treated a symptom of poverty, often mistaking the realities of poverty as familial neglect. However, Tamara K. Hareven offers a different view of families of the industrial era, stating that, instead of allowing the harsh realities of poverty to destroy them, at least some families in the Amoskeag Mills in Manchester, New Hampshire took on proactive roles:

…the role of the family as an active agent in relation to the industrial corporation. The family type most ‘fit’ to interact with the factory system was not an ‘isolated’ nuclear family but rather one embedded in extended kinship ties…kin were instrumental in serving the industrial employer and, at the same time, in advancing the interest of their own members and providing them with protection.

Despite the isolated view of some New Hampshire families, urban and working-class families had to deal with the goals of the reform movement and the introduction of governmental policy into their daily lives. Coontz asserts, however that this reality may have succeeded in bringing the family together as a more cohesive unit:

As families related more directly to the state, the market, and the mass media, they also developed a new cult of privacy, along with the heightened expectations about the family’s role in fostering individual fulfillment. New family values stressed the early independence of children and the romantic coupling of husband and wife…
Such family values are discussed by Kellogg and Mintz, as well as Degler. Kellogg and Mintz discuss the “new conception of the ‘companionate family’ in which husbands and wives would be ‘friends and lovers’ and parents and children would be ‘pals.’”\(^64\) Degler brings up the concept of the companionate family as a direct by-product for the family to exist within the new confines of the industrial world and that it “may well have made early industrialization endurable for many individuals.”\(^65\)

However, the idea of the companionate family did not simply serve as a means of refuge for the over-worked, under-paid family. It also served to redefine the relationship between husband and wife, including mutual attraction and sexual satisfaction as non-negotiable factor in a marriage. Therefore, Kellogg and Mintz assert, some social reform was necessary, including providing access to birth control information, divorce by mutual consent, and training in marriage and parenthood.\(^66\)

Another cause for the rise of the companionate family may have been one borne of necessity. In the 1920’s there was a societal shift regarding women and their attitudes towards sex. Writes Collins: “The new national pastimes [for single people] were necking and petting.”\(^67\) Women began to take the attitude that they should enjoy sex, not only use it for procreation or to satisfy their husbands. Nash also discusses the shift in thought about sexuality regarding the single woman: “Without question, women acquired more sexual freedom in the 1920’s.”\(^68\) He reinforces this viewpoint with a quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald: “None of the Victorian mothers had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to being kissed.”\(^69\) However, Kellogg and Mintz discuss the changing sexual attitudes within the confines of marriage. They cite
Dr. Katherine B. Davis’ study of sexual attitudes that found that many married people viewed sex as “an expression of love” as opposed to being used strictly for procreation. ⁷⁰

Although she bases her viewpoint within a discussion of the new concept of the emotionally fulfilling companionate family, Coontz neatly sums up the two sides of the sexual coin - sexual freedom as an expression of young people, especially women, versus sexual gratification for the sake of the companionate marriage: “From this family we get the idea that women are sexual, that youth is attractive, and that marriage should be the center of our emotional fulfillment.” ⁷¹

The Great Depression stunted these social reforms and social growth. None of the academics discussed herein dismissed the suffering the Great Depression caused individuals and families. However, they also seem to agree that, despite the hardships, many families may have come through it stronger and more intact than they might have. In two of his studies, Mintz echoes his own thoughts on family solidarity in discussing the “salutary effect on the family” that the Depression may have had on some families. ⁷² Stephanie Coontz mentions evidence of “solidarity and cooperation during the Great Depression” within a larger discussion of violence and anger in modern times. ⁷³ And Collins writes that, in retrospect, “some people got nostalgic about the way hard times produced family solidarity.” ⁷⁴

Whatever family solidarity that was or was not achieved during the Great Depression came abruptly to a halt at the onset of World War II. Men went to war, women went to work, and, consequently, more worry over the status of the American family developed. Concern about jobs and the effect the war and working women had on
the family emerged. As Mintz notes, on the home front, mothers and other observers fretted “that the war made it more difficult to discipline children” while the fathers were away. Despite these concerns, Coontz finds, upon the return of their men, many women did not want to leave the workplace. “In the long run, the Second World War seems to have increased women’s taste for work…”

Kellogg and Mintz concur, and find that this new taste for financial independence “sometimes collided with husbands’ ideas of women’s’ proper roles.” Nash, however, takes a somewhat more traditional view, reporting that “…most women, and even more men, agreed at the war’s end that women did not deserve an ‘equal chance with the men’ for jobs.” While Collins does not necessarily disagree with Nash’s explanation, she delves further into the psyche of the women of the time: “Despite the universal desire to return to “normal,” things had changed. The old pattern, in which women worked until they married and then never again, was broken. And the women who when back to their homes, never to enter the job market again, were different, too.

In spite of the desire for a return to a “normal” family life, historians find that a distinct anomaly in the history of the American family occurred in the 1950’s. The desire of women to work outwardly decreased at the same time that the concept of the companionate family, developed earlier in the century, returned with a short-lived vengeance.
More so than during any other time in American history in the 1950’s, the visual image emerged of the American family and what it was supposed to be. As Coontz emphasizes, “Our most powerful visions of traditional families derive for the images that are still delivered to our homes in countless reruns of 1950’s television sitcoms.” Historians and other academics agree about the myth of the fifties family and how it continues to be used as a measuring tool against families of today. Diane Crispell declares the fifties to be mythologized as “the golden years for families, a boom time for babies, the decade of the suburbs, and the era of the mass market.” Kellogg and Mintz agree, stating that the fifties are often “a reference point against which recent changes in family life can be measured.”

Certain elements of the ideal family life of the 1950’s may have actually existed. According to Kellogg and Mintz, “rates of divorce, single-parent families and illegitimacy were half what they are today; birthrates were twice as high; and many more young adults married at young ages.” Crispell’s demographics concur: “In 1950, 79 percent of households were married couples… 52 percent of families included at least one child under the age of 18… [in] 1956, brides had a median age of 20.1 and grooms 22.5… The total number of births in the 1950’s was larger than had ever been seen in the US…” However, Stephanie Coontz offers some explanation for such statistics:

The 1950’s family… was hardly “traditional.” Indeed, it is best seen as a historical aberration. For the first time in 100 years, divorce rates dropped, fertility soared, the gap between men’s and women’s job and education prospects widened… and the age of marriage fell- to the point that teenage birth rates were almost double what they are today…
Admirers of these very nontraditional 1950’s family forms and values point out that household arrangements and gender roles were less diverse in the 1950’s than today, and marriages more stable. But this was partly because diversity was ruthlessly suppressed and partly because economic and political support systems for socially-sanctioned families were far more generous than they are today.86

Arlene Skolnik agrees with Coontz’ assertion that the fifties were an aberration to which we ought not to aspire and that, historically, the fifties did not follow the norm: “the only trend to persist through the Ozzie and Harriet era was the steady but unnoticed march of women into the labor force.”87

Nonetheless, some of the characteristics of the fifties families were not myths. What was expected of an individual was translated into the behavior and beliefs of the time period. Writes Nash: “The family was all-important… Fewer than 10 percent of all Americans felt that an unmarried person could be happy.”88 Kellogg and Mintz use that statistic, and go on to quote an advice book from that time which extolled the virtues of marriage and declared that “The family is the center of your living. If it isn’t, you’ve gone far astray.”89 They also highlight the stereotypical beliefs that society had for people who failed to marry: homosexuality, immaturity and irresponsibility.90

Coontz also discusses the fact that people in the fifties believed everyone should marry. She brings up the divergent nature of marriage during that time, finding that, until this decade, having a single breadwinner and a full-time spouse or parent in the home was unusual. Nevertheless, her conclusion is that these trends were simply a product of the drive over 150 years “that love should be the most fundamental reason for marriage,” i.e.,
the evolving companionate marriage, which allowed for not only love but a more open sexuality.  

This new family lifestyle and the suburbanization of American society changed the roles of parents in the household accordingly. Degler relates that gender roles became delineated, leaving the fact that “even working women spent more time in housekeeping and family work than their husbands.” Kellogg and Mintz discuss the gender roles within the family, concluding that mothers often felt a “lack of recognition” for the work they did for their husbands and children, and fathers felt that “their family function had been largely reduced to that of full-time wage earner…” Collins takes a different tack on the role of fathers within the family, discussing that, while mother took care of the children and household during the day, father was generally the “recreation director,” taking over the task of child entertainer and disciplinarian when he returned home from a hard day’s work.

It is unremarkable, then, that the primary focus on marriage and family life in the fifties was that of having children and rearing them properly. Crispell finds that the fifties were a time for children while Kellogg and Mintz report that “an essential element in the family ideal of the 1950’s was a carefree, child-centered outlook - with relaxed methods of child discipline, separate rooms for each child, and educational toys and music lessons.”

Steven Mintz attributes this phenomenon to the fact that the parents had had to grow up during the Depression and World War II, and didn’t want their own children to be deprived of a happy childhood. But, as a universal truth, not all families and
childhoods were happy. Coontz again establishes a reality check for this time period regarding childhood:

…not every kid was as wholesome as Beaver Cleaver… In 1955 alone, congress discussed zoo bills aimed at curbing juvenile delinquency. Three years later, Life reported that urban teachers were being terrorized by their students… many children grew up in families ravaged by alcohol and barbiturate abuse…

Rates of unwed childbearing tripled between 1940 and 1958, but most Americans didn’t notice because unwed mothers generally left town, gave their babies up for adoption and returned home as if nothing had happened. Troubled youths were encouraged to drop out of high school. Mentally handicapped children were warehoused in institutions…

The unsavoriness of the truth notwithstanding, raising a middle-class child to meet middle-class society’s expectations was no picnic either. Mintz reports that children were to be raised to be not only healthy and happy, but psychologically adjusted and functional within a democratic society. Additionally, but they were supposed to be raised as to be men and women, or, rather, wives and husbands. “…childrearing experts urged parents to respond promptly to signs of ‘sissiness’ in boys and masculine behavior in girls.” Neil Tift agrees, stating succinctly that “In the 1950’s, clearly distinct masculinity and femininity were the desired goal…”

Despite this trend of attentive child-rearing, a distance developed between children and parents. None of the historians and writers examined here deny this fact. A quote from the movie Rebel without a Cause seems to sum up the problem between parent and child: “Go ahead. Hit the desk. You'll feel better ... It's easier sometimes than talking to your folks.” Steven Mintz, however, puts a finer point on the expectation of the fifties youth culture and the pressures they were under:
The teen culture of the 1950’s conjures up a host of nostalgic images… But this teen world was a product of specific demographic, economic and institutional developments: nearly universal high school attendance, suburbanization, early entrance into adulthood, and a degree of affluence that allowed teens to become an autonomous market segment.

Gail Collins writes that the average teenager made over $10 a week from allowance and jobs, giving teenagers (specifically girls in this case) power as a consumer. This affluence afforded teenagers not only some luxuries - like comic books and records - but it also afforded them a responsibility that had heretofore been given only to adults - their parents. A rebellion was imminent. Nash reports that the popularity of misfit Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the writings of Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg, and the music of Elvis Presley contributed to the rebellion. Mintz also targets the capitalism of Hollywood and pop culture, mentioning the influence of comic books, television, the drive-in, and especially motion pictures that “pictured adult culture as blind to the problems of youth and portrayed teenager as searching for genuine family love, warmth and security.” Ken Dryden also brings up the concept of the “jalopy [which was] something a teenager could work towards… [and] Parents didn’t want to be in them.”

As Kellogg and Mintz find, the youth rebellion became a problem for the family: “Many adults, convinced that the youth culture posed a serious threat to traditional values, sought to break down the barriers it had erected between parents and children.” Youth rebellion continued into the sixties. Mintz discusses the stratification of the generations as the problem for the upheaval in American society at that time, allowing that the younger generation of the time all was shaped, to one degree or another by the
struggle for civil rights, the counterculture, the rebirth of feminism, and the Vietnam
War. Coontz agrees without creating a generational bond and seemingly placing more
blame on the stereotypes of the fifties, stating that “In the 1960’s, the civil rights, antiwar,
and the women’s liberation movements exposed the racial, economic and sexual
injustices that had been papered over by the Ozzie and Harriet images on television.”
Conversely, Collins seems to place some of the credit for positive social change for
women back on the television and entertainment: “Only a few years after Mary Tyler
Moore’s sartorial breakthrough [wearing pants on television.] middle-class audiences
were flocking to see Hair…”

The aberrant fifties, seemingly a forced period of perceived normalcy and the
upheaval of the sixties set the stage for the changes in the American family that we see
and feel today.
Present Day Families

While families of today face problems unique to our time, most of the issues that we face were not unknown to families of the past. As Coontz emphasizes, “Almost every marital and sexual arrangement we have seen in recent years, however startling it may appear, has been tried somewhere before.”

According to Dr. Mark Hutter, the most significant changes in family in the last 20 years is the aging population and the fact that young people are putting off marriage and having children due to “economic and social factors…contemporary society…[and the]demands [on] a highly mobile group of workers…” Steven Nock supports Hutter’s finding of the postponement of marriage, and adds these issues as the reasons for the decline in marriage: living together without getting married, high divorce rates and unmarried mothers, decline of the “traditional” family, and “delayed and declined fertility and increasing longevity result in fewer children, smaller families and longer lives…”

Andrew Cherlin cites the changes in American family life as delayed marriage, living singly prior to marriage, cohabitating - which includes gays and lesbians - falling birth rates for non-married women, and a rising divorce rate. Maxine Baca Zinn weighs in on the subject as well, naming “the changes most responsible for the multiplication of American family types are “(1) the large scale influx of married women with young children into the labor force, (2) the decline in the number of children women bear, and (3) the great increases in the lifetime levels of divorce and marriage.”

In general, those who study the historical and contemporary American family agree on three reasons for the decline of American marriage: divorce, working mothers
and (perhaps due to the topicality of the subject) gay and lesbian marriage. These will be the three areas around which this section will focus. As Neera Kuckreja Sohoni states, divorce rates have doubled between the late 1960’s and the late 1980’s from nine to over 20 for 1,000 married women aged 15 and above.\textsuperscript{116} Divorce in America is a commonplace, nearly everyday occurrence. However, the products of divorce vary as much as the studies that have examined this cultural phenomenon. Arlene Skolnik asserts that many studies on divorce are hard to compare because “they use different measures, different ages of children, and different time spans since divorce.”\textsuperscript{117} In the same article she states that no trend other than divorce “is more threatening to the well-being of our children and to our long-term national security.”\textsuperscript{118} Later, she seems to contradict herself by discussing that, while children of divorce go through periods of distress, “The great majority of children of divorce are not impaired in their development.”\textsuperscript{119}

Dr. David Popenoe connects the reality of absent fathers and divorce: “In theory, divorce need not mean disconnection. In reality, it often does.”\textsuperscript{120} Divorce not only removes a father from the family unit, but also often eliminates his economic resources.\textsuperscript{121} Popenoe also surmises that the father brings those things - and, conversely, removes them when he is absent - that cannot be quantified:

… [The father’s] importance as a role model has become a familiar idea. Teenage boys without fathers are notoriously prone to trouble. The pathway to adulthood for daughters is somewhat easier, but they still must learn from their fathers, as they cannot from their mothers, how to relate to men. They learn from their fathers about heterosexual trust, intimacy and difference. They learn to appreciate their own femininity from the one male who is most special in their lives (assuming they love and trust their fathers.) Most important, through loving and being loved by their fathers, they learn that they are love-worthy.\textsuperscript{122}
Steven Nock simply attributes the rise in single-parent households to divorce. Zinn concurs with Nock’s assessment but adds that this event has lead to a rise in poverty for women and their children. Stephanie Coontz agrees with Zinn: “Divorce and unwed motherhood are said to be the major causes of poverty and inequality in contemporary America.”

As shown by Nock, Coontz, and Zinn, a direct by-product of divorce is the creation of single-parent households. This is, of course, not the only reason that single-parent households are created, nor is it the only reason that mothers returned to the workforce. According to Andrew Cherlin, women have returned to the workforce due to the increased demand in the service sector where women have long maintained their presence. As well, Joseph B. Verrengia discusses family life and declares that women working outside of the home is the “biggest change in family dynamics” in years. Finally, Arvonne S. Fraser claims that women returning to the paid labor force are a “major factor” that has affected the multitude of changes in American family life in the last generation.

While most observers agree that women in the workforce are a major factor in the change in American families, the question remains - how has this affected the family? The response tends to be either for working mothers or against them. Ellen Galinsky presented a statement to parents and recorded their responses:

“A mother who works outside the home can have just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.” Overall, 76 percent of employed parents agreed “strongly” or “somewhat.”
Of the remaining 24 percent, fathers are much more likely to disagree than mothers, particularly in single-earner households. Among dual-earner couples, there are no differences between fathers and mothers on the statement. As for employed mothers who are single parents, it isn’t surprising that 90 percent support the statement.129

Galinsky clarifies the debate later in her article: “If a mother works, it’s either good or bad for her children.”130

The main factors that determine “goodness” or “badness” seem to be the amount of time the child is able to spend with the parent and the activities the family participates in together. Yet, still, there are two schools of thought. According to Verrengia’s article, economic pressure on families causes them to “live virtually apart at least five days a week, reuniting for a few hours at night… When they are together, today’s families tend to say in motion…Researchers contend this chase appears to erode families from within…”131 The opposite side to this coin comes from Annette Lareau, who reports her findings as showing that over-scheduling of children gives them “skills that will be valuable to them in higher education and in the labor market. They learn how to communicate with professionals and other adults in positions of authority. They develop a confident style of interaction.”132 However, the advantage within the familial relationship is ambiguous. Coontz asserts that, despite the current day busy lifestyle, “…mothers today in the United States - including those who work part- or full-time - spend almost twice as much time with each child as mothers did in the 1920’s.”133

While the quality of the time spent together and the benefit of the activities in which the children participated are questionable, at least two authors attribute that some negative impact on the family may occur when the child is involved with improper
childcare or on an improper childcare routine. Ajay Chaudry offers answers as to why a child would be placed in improper childcare to begin with:

…low income working mothers are actually forced to put children second…after the welfare reform of 1996, low-income working mothers are expected to work, and their work rates have risen rapidly…
…The children were in nonmaternal care for an average of 10 hours a day. Yet, they did not get the high quality, stable care that children need for intellectual development and emotional security…

The most interesting and contrasting viewpoints around the subject of single parent and alternative families comes E.J. Dionne Jr. and Amy Benfer’s. Dionne states that:

…the left also needs to see the slow return of the two-parent family for what it is: good news. It doesn’t make you a reactionary to acknowledge what social science has long found: All things being equal, kids are far better off with two parents than one. Anyone raising kids knows the job is hard enough when both parents are around.

Benfer, however, takes the opposite tack:

But at the same time, early studies of certain nontraditional families - especially those of single father and gay parents- score as well or better than intact families in child outcome. In part, this seems to be because of the “exceptional parent” syndrome: it is so difficult to become a gay parent or, to a lesser extent, a single father that the ones who do so are usually committed to becoming a parent.

“Social science hasn’t proven anything,” says Barbara Nordhous, assistant clinical professor of social work at the Yale Child Development Center. “It can’t prove anything about family structures, because the one thing we know is that conflict in families is detrimental to children. “But we don’t have any information about family structure,” she adds. “We have information about deprivation, poverty, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, drug addiction of parents - those kinds of things aren’t good for kids. But it’s not about the structure of the family. That’s a prejudice, a bias. And it’s more and more of a fairy tale. No one even remembers what the nuclear family was. People think it was a cartoon from the ‘50’s.”
The most recently discussed and perceived threat to the American family is same sex marriage, a subject that is currently being argued in the American legislatures and the courts. Gay life partners in the United States did not have the availability of legal marriage until 2004 when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court declared the prohibition of gay marriage to be a violation of the state's constitution. Yet, until that time cohabitation had virtually been the only choice for homosexual life partners. However, cohabitation has not been an unusual choice for many people, gay or straight. As Coontz states, “Cohabitation rates have increased tenfold among heterosexual partners during the past 25 years, and cohabitating couples, whether heterosexual or gay or lesbian, are increasingly having children out of wedlock, as are many single women who live alone.” Cherlin agrees, and cites that in the year 2000, 600,000 households were maintained by same-sex partners.

Arguments for and against gay marriage are polarized. Gay marriage supporters cite bigotry and denial of civil rights in their arguments. Anti-gay marriage activists cite a myriad of reasons about why gay marriage should not be legalized. For example, Dr. James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, lists 11 reasons against same sex marriage: the traditional family will be destroyed, children will suffer, public schools will embrace homosexuality, adoption laws will be obsolete, foster care programs will be impacted, the health care system could collapse, Social Security will be stressed, religious freedom will be jeopardized, other nations would follow our lead, and the final two reasons deal with biblical consequences.
Gay marriage proponents speak out from no less emotional point of view; however, that slant was recognized by the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Upon rejecting the civil union alternative to marriage in that state, the Court argued that “civil union but not marriage would create a ‘stigma of exclusion’ because it would deny to same-sex couples ‘a status that is specially recognized in society and has significant social and other advantages.’” As Naomi Cahn states, these other advantages include judicial recognition and protection of their rights. Coontz responds similarly but from a historical perspective, stating that the gay and lesbian movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s, formerly rejecting the norm of marriage, has recently placed focus on winning that recognition.

Worry over children within the framework of gay marriage is an inevitable issue. A lesbian couple who had adopted a child testified before the Changing Family forum and admitted that “our social and legal systems are geared to heterosexual couples” while later being asked by an interviewer how their child was to “learn her place in society.” Furthermore, as found by Charlotte J. Patterson, “Unlike heterosexual parents and their children... lesbian and gay parents and their children are often subject to prejudice because of sexual orientation that turns judges, legislators, professionals, and the public against them, frequently resulting in negative outcomes such as loss of physical custody, restrictions on visitation, and prohibitions against adoption.”

The statistics, conversely, are not supported by the general attitudes of society. Gay families exist in large numbers in this country. Coontz states that “there are more than two million gay mothers and fathers in America... up to 10,000 lesbians have borne
children through sperm donation or other such procedures, and many gay and lesbian couples have won the right to adopt children.\textsuperscript{147}

As mentioned above, James Dobson also worries about the welfare of children in gay families. Dobson’s primary worry is that gays aren’t monogamous “often having as many as three hundred or more partners in a lifetime, some studies say it is typically more than one thousand."\textsuperscript{148} The studies are not cited. Regardless of the idea of promiscuity and the perceived threat of virtual social and religious collapse, The American Psychological Association concluded in its July 2004 “Resolution on Sexual Orientation, Parents, and Children:”

There is no scientific basis for concluding that lesbian mothers or gay fathers are unfit parents on the basis of their sexual orientation… On the contrary, results of research suggest that lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children…Overall, results of research suggest that the development, adjustment, and well-being of children with lesbian and gay parents do not differ markedly from that of children with heterosexual parents.\textsuperscript{149}

It is clear that our modern definition of what makes up a family is changing. Itinerant marriage practices, single parent households, and same sex households are not uncommon, yet require and demand social acceptance. Patriarchy is virtually invisible, and the Ozzie and Harriet-style family, while staunchly burned into our national memory, is clearly becoming what it was all along: an illusion.
Conclusion

This study began with Carl Degler’s definition of family which consists of five elements: a marriage ritual between a man and woman; duties and rights of parenthood; a common living place for the marriage partners; economic obligations between man and wife; and a means of sexual satisfaction for the married partners. Two questions remain: Has this definition held up over time? Was this definition ever wholly accurate?

During the colonial era, historians largely report that marriage as an institution was not necessarily institutionalized. Marriages were more of a tradition, and, indeed, a necessity as an end to an economic need. The Puritans espoused marriage as a covenant, or a business contract, between two individuals and their eventual offspring as a means to achieving a successful life. However, this covenant, by its nature, also affected the freedoms of the marriage partners, allowing for the end of the contract if one of the partners was indeed unfulfilled.

Despite the rather methodical approach to marriage as a basis for family, Puritans were the standard-bearers for the change in child-rearing. They shifted the desire to have children to simply extend the family to include extra laborers, to valuing children as individuals and raising them with affection rather than for utilitarian use.

During the colonial era, child-rearing wasn’t the only practice that changed. Although patriarchy was well established, women generally were allowed some free-will and some economic freedom. Sometimes this did not come until after the death of their husbands, but it was normally not an issue.
In spite of placing significance of the individuality of children and the freedom of women, the nuclear family became the primary social unit of the culture during the colonial era. The nuclear family was the religious, economic, educational, and emotional center for people who created the foundation upon which modern Americans base their ideal of family.

The colonials, then, paved the way for 19th century Americans to further adjust the ever-evolving definition of family. Marriage practices began to involve the notion of love and companionship rather than the simply functional coupling that would lead to potential economic prosperity for the family as it propagated. This lead to even greater emotional and economic freedoms for women, especially in the untamed frontier which, to some degree, was free of most cultural and societal norms placed on women in more urban areas.

As the frontier became a breeding ground for new familial roles, more populated areas in America became more defined: governmental involvement into the personal lives of many married Americans forced a definition of family and marriage. Civil war families and widows began to feel the effects of the government on the family economy, especially if the family or wife did not live up to the governmental definition of family or a marriage. Freedmen and women in postbellum America struggled more than their white counterparts, not only trying to reunify their families after years of slavery, but also having to establish their places as laborers, consumers, individuals, and family units in a still discriminatory world.
In opposition to the post-Civil War pressures placed on simply maintaining a family, the way a family was viewed also began to change as the century continued. Marriage partners were the soul source of intimacy and sexual satisfaction to one another, while at the same time divorce laws became more lax in many states.

Because of these pressures placed on 19th century American families, the divorce rates rose well into the early 20th century. Subsequently, divorce rates continued to rise, and the American family again saw specific changes in its make-up. Families were attracted to cities due to the availability of jobs and the opportunity to increase the family’s economic success. Such success was often tied to their children’s ability to find and hold a job. Some reformers, however, did not approve of the child labor and established the child labor reform movement during the Progressive era. Progressives also advocated maintaining an intact family and attempted to establish the companionate family in which the husband and wife became lovers and friends and the parents and children became buddies, all the while maintaining an acceptable societal norm. The societal norm, however, was rapidly transforming, especially in terms of women and their own views on sexuality. Their freedoms began to expand as did their base of knowledge regarding free will, sex, and relationships. Evidence of this can clearly be seen during the 1920’s flapper era, when drinking, smoking, and petting became popular pastimes.

The Great Depression and eventually the Second World War quickly squashed these new ideals of freedom and expression, leading many families to use these political, social, and economic circumstances to justify keeping the family together or destroying its existence. Once the country recovered from the Depression, it became embroiled in a
world war. Women, by means of necessity, took to the labor force as men took to the battlefield. Even though most women returned to the home once their men returned to the states, this taste of financial freedom and personal responsibility became the kernel that continued to grow as women, even today, continue to inhabit the workforce.

During the 1950’s, scholars note the emergence of the stereotypical normal family. Marriage as a rite of maturity and responsibility and happiness - both culturally and societally - became the desired norm. Suburbanization and the fervent movement to raise functional and happy children added to the trend. There were low divorce rates, few single parent families, high birthrates, and young marriages.

Some historians believe that the 1950’s were a historical anomaly and that the American family - one breadwinner (the father) and one stay-at-home parent (the mother) – was never the norm. The growing youth culture that stemmed from the rights and responsibilities thrust upon them and the subsequent youth rebellion, the fanatical hiding of problem children from the community, and the quiet rate at which post-war women returned to the work force were the early inclinations that the “Ozzie and Harriet” paradigm was not going to last. Unrest was inevitable, as one side of the cultural coin lobbied for nearly militant normalcy and the other fought for and allowed changes that they believed would lead to growth, equity, and acceptance.

The criticisms of the idealized portrait of the family that was falsely created in the 1950’s and the civil unrest and equal rights movements began to form the fluid and ever-changing family ideal that we see in present day American families. Recent studies have shown that there have been major changes to the institution of marriage, including the
delay of marriage, living singly, cohabitation without marriage, the rise in divorce rates, and the ever-present conundrum of working women, especially working mothers and the affect of this phenomenon on child-rearing\textsuperscript{151}. Today’s American children seem almost to be of two camps: either they are over-scheduled to be over-stimulated, or they are placed in a flawed day care system in order to accommodate the schedules of their working parents, and, more often, of their working mother. The rise in divorce rate contributes to this, certainly creating single parent families and families with absent father figures. These facts have created much concern.

The legalization of same sex marriage is another current day issue that is creating much concern. While there are a significant number of gays and lesbians running households – many of which include children – in America today, concern still runs high regarding the well-being of those children. To the same degree, conservatives seem to be concerned as well about the overall societal collapse that they fear might occur if same sex marriage were to be legalized. The gay community as well has its own concerns regarding having to function as a family within a heterosexually based system.

In light of these recent controversies, it may be that, Degler’s definition of family needs to be altered in terms of gender. The political climate of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century finds that the marriage ritual between “a man and a woman” is being reexamined within the current debate over gay marriage indicates. The idea that two people of either gender must be present to create a family is also questionable given the existence of so many single parent households today. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, single parent households made up nine percent of the 111 million households in 2003\textsuperscript{152}. 

In light of these facts, has the notion of parents and children sharing the same living space held up? Puritanical “putting out” of children, turn of the century single immigrants, children leaving the home during the Great Depression to alleviate pressure on their families, and the rise of modern foster care systems seems to say no. In the colonial era and even today it is not an uncommon practice that a family not live full-time in the same living quarters, due to occupational requirements or other factors outside of the nuclear family in colonial times. Divorce plays a role in this phenomenon today.

The next piece of Degler’s definition is also under question: If there are two marriage partners, the economic obligations to one another are still an integral part of marriage, as illustrated by the converse example of divorce. However, there are many families created by cohabitation that also share in financial responsibility in the raising of a family and support of one another. Degler’s definition of family does not allow for chosen families.

Finally, the definition of marriage as a means of sexual satisfaction for the marriage partners may also need to be revised. The Victorian occurrence of romantic friendship discussed by Coontz shows that individuals have long searched for, if not compatible sex partners, at least compatible emotional confidants. During the 1920’s (and certainly the 1960’s and 1970’s) sexual experimentation and freedom often outweighed the need to wait for marriage to have sex. However, the rise in the divorce rates may indicate that having a compatible sex partner is still a large requirement in a marriage today, and not necessarily a flexible one. The rise in cohabitation over the
years, the lowering of the birthrate, and the delay of marriage also may be evidence of this.

The American family has never been easily defined. Historical and current day families existed and continue to exist in many different forms. As the historians reviewed herein indicate, the American family is ever-evolving. Thus, riding the consistently ebbing and flowing familial trends into the 21st century is not only a must, but an inevitability.
Families Make History Lesson Plan

Introduction

The choice for this thesis topic - The Evolution of the American Family - came from the author’s belief that ordinary people who come from ordinary families make history. From this came another belief that forms the basis for this lesson plan – families make history. History books have a tendency to portray both families and individuals as though they were superhuman. While the people who make up American families may have had extraordinary motivations, or extraordinary motivating forces, many came from ordinary homes, with lives similar to those of many of our students, seventh through twelfth graders in alternative education, generally with at or below grade level abilities.

Examples that come to mind are Thomas Jefferson, who lost his father at age 14; Abraham Lincoln, who came from a boyhood of poverty and work; Harry Truman, who worked as a farmer; Susan B. Anthony, who became a teacher; Harriet Tubman, who endured the inhumanity of slavery; and Bill Clinton, who lived some of his life with an abusive stepfather. Each of these people came from different family experiences – experiences with which many American students can relate.

Yet, there was something about these individuals that caused them to rise above the hardships and chaos and make history, to help shape our country and, perhaps, even change the way Americans view ourselves and the world. Perhaps there was nothing special in their genetic make-up that caused them to have their drive and inspiration;
perhaps we all have the potential to make history - to make a difference - in our own ways. We can use these individuals and icons as examples, and the more we can relate to their experiences as our own, the clearer the similarities become.

As teachers, then we can use the history of such people to make some important points. This topic illustrates that throughout history, all families have experienced diversity and individuality and have had exceptional people within their ranks. Pride of place, pride of family, pride of those whom we choose as our families, and pride of our ancestors are concepts that have fallen, if not by the wayside, into the background.

Second, this topic emphasizes that although we may not all be legendary leaders, ordinary people do take part in history. Soldiers in war, and their families at home, are a part of history, even though we may never know their names. It is important to realize that history is not an abstract thought, but that history happens every day, to every one of us, in little and big ways.

This ten day unit – Families Make History – is designed around the theme that Americans have always come from diverse and varied backgrounds. The unit particularly emphasizes the ways that families have changed and remained the same over time. It is designed to meet several of the CSS standards for 8th, 11. and 12th grades (see Appendix A.)

In day one of the unit, students will discover how war affects individuals and families alike. In the initial activity, students will see the reality of war and how it affects families, as well as become better acquainted with the use of primary source documents.
During day two, students will participate in a family mapping activity. This activity will illustrate that some of their current family dynamics stem from their family’s immigration experiences. This activity will also serve as a mini-lesson in geography as they must map the locations from which their family members have originated.

Days three through five will involve lecture and discussion of the American family. The lecture will examine the research and content of the historiography, which focuses on the evolution of the American family. Lecture and discussion will center on the theme that Americans have always come from diverse and varied backgrounds, and that it is this fact that makes America not only what it is, but what it has been, and that these varieties of people are the impetus for such an evolution.

Day six is the beginning of a lesson that will extend into for three-days. The Presidential Family Investigation will begin as students, in pairs, choose an American president to investigate. The focus will be on that particular president’s upbringing and from where he originated. Students will begin their research on this day, using a graphic organizer in which to collect their information. They will be required to use many sources, including the Internet, library books, encyclopedias, and primary documents. This lesson will also serve as a mini-lesson on source citations, including not only their secondary resources but also citing a primary source document, both of which they must include in their final product.

Day seven of the Presidential Family Investigation will be a continuation of the students’ research and the beginning of their final product: a Presidential Family Investigation Poster. They will be given a grading rubric of the poster and guidelines.
Day eight concludes the three day project in which the students’ posters will be displayed and graded by their peers using the rubric. A class discussion will follow, allowing students to share their findings with the teacher and one another.

On day nine, students will be introduced to Rocco Corresca and Sadie Frowne, two turn of the 20th century immigrants who came to America as youngsters and began their new lives in their new countries. Students will explore how Corresca and Frowne viewed the United States, their own families, and how child labor was a major institution in the early 20th century. They will also be given a chance to reflect on how their own lives are similar and different from Corresca’s and Frowne’s.

Day ten consists of two activities: an assessment of what students have learned in the unit in the form of a short essay, and the creation of their own family crest. The crest should consist not necessarily of historically accurate and common crest images and words, but of the students’ own images and words that represent what their family means to them.
Prior Content and Knowledge

- Students should know the difference between primary documents and secondary documents.
- Students should have a rudimentary knowledge on the citation of sources.
- Students should have a basic knowledge of child labor and child labor reformation during the first half of the twentieth century.
- Students should have a basic knowledge of the American Revolution.
- Students should have a basic knowledge of World War II.
Discussion of Content Hook

To begin Families Make History, students will be introduced to Staff Sergeant Elmer Tusko and several unnamed people participating in World War II. This hook is designed to illustrate two things to the students: how to use primary documents and that everyday people take part in and are affected by history. I chose World War II for its abundance of photographs that are to be used in the hook activity; and because World War II is a part of history that is usually recognizable on some level to all students, but is far enough in the past to be “historical.”

For this activity, I used a variety of photographs available from a variety of sources: the Internet, textbooks and magazines. The subjects ranged in activities from the home front, front lines, soldiers at rest, at work and at play. The photographs are candid and realistic rather than posed and demonstrate that history is shaped by every day people participating in activities that may be out of the ordinary in their daily lives. Students will examine the photographs and answer questions about them. They will be encouraged to ask their own questions as well.

Students then will be introduced to Sgt. Tusko in the form of a letter that he wrote home to his family. This primary source document was chosen from the primary source material from Primary Sources Exploring History Teacher Created Materials World War II. A discussion of the letter is found in Day One activities and is designed to allow students to speculate on Tusko’s family life. The date and place the letter came from should be noted; as well, Tusko’s tone should be discussed.
The second primary source document will follow Tusko’s letter: the telegram sent to his family informing them of his death\textsuperscript{157}. Discussion for reaction will be allowed, and response in the form of a letter to Tusko’s parents as though they were Elmer’s commanding officer will close this hook activity.
Lesson Content

Day 1: In this hook activity, students will be told that they will be viewing five photographs of ordinary people doing extraordinary things during World War II. Afterwards, class discussion will focus on the following questions:

1. What is happening in the picture?
2. What do you think the people in the pictures were thinking?
3. Where do you think the individuals in the picture might be from?
4. How old do you think the individuals are?
5. Is this photograph a primary source document? (The answer should be yes for all.)

At this point, a mini lesson of primary source documents can be initiated, although students should know the difference. A simple explanation is that primary sources are actual records that have survived the past, like pictures and letters; a secondary source is something that is an account of the past written by someone who did not experience the event.

Time will be allowed for all students to view and discuss the photographs and answer the five questions. Once all the photographs are examined by each student and the questions answered, a class discussion will begin. What is the consensus regarding each picture and the answer to each question? Why did the student think that way? It is important to guide the discussion to the fact that the soldiers and people at home were ordinary people who felt fear and happiness, sorrow and joy.
Next, send around the handwritten letter from Elmer. Also, an overhead image was made from the letter that is projected for all the class to see. Read the letter to the class and discuss. What kind of person is Elmer? What are his spirits? What is the letter dated? What is the tone of the letter? What is the date? Where was he when he wrote the letter? What message does Elmer want his family to understand about his wartime experience?

Next, send around the telegram, also projecting its image for the class to see. Where was Elmer when he was killed? What was the date of the telegram? How long had he been in France? How do you think his mother felt about receiving such a telegram? What was the tone of the telegram? How might have Elmer’s death affected his family? His family’s finances?

In conclusion to this hook activity, explain to the students that the dead soldier’s commanding officer (C.O.) would usually write a personal letter to the family. Discuss what a C.O. might say in such a letter, and how he might feel having to write it. The culminating activity of this hook is to have the students write such a letter in their history journal. Teacher will respond personally to each journal entry.

It is important that this hook communicate that Elmer was an ordinary young man caught up in extraordinary circumstances. As he and his family participated in the historical event of World War II, the events that he experienced changed his family forever. Thus, he and his family not only were a part of history, but made history as well.

Day 2: Family Mapping Activity. Each student will be given a blank map of the United States, colored pencils, pens or crayons, and a Family Mapping Activity
Questionnaire (see Appendix B.) For resources they may use maps around the classroom and maps in their textbooks. The questionnaire instructs the students that the family is not only an emotional, everyday group of people with whom you interact, but also a geographical concept as well. Mapping the places from which their family comes will create a visual representation of the breadth of their family lives and may answer some questions about their own family histories. Once the family maps are complete, they can be displayed side by side on a wall or bulletin board to illustrate that, while we are all here on this day in this classroom, our family histories are varied and vast and meaningful to each individual.

Conclusion for this activity will be a history journal entry: Do you think differently about your family now than you did when you began this activity? What changed? What didn’t change? Did this make you want to investigate your family history further? Why or why not? Teacher will personally respond to each entry.

Day 3: “Growing Up Colonial” – A lecture and discussion of the evolution of the American family. On this first day of discussion, the lecture will focus on colonial families and childhood.

Why is it important that we know about colonial families? It is important because those families are the families from whence we came. Those families were the start of history for our country. They established culture and community, laws and practices that we may still even use today.

Could you imagine being pregnant in a world without hot running water, probably no doctor for miles, the nearest neighbor might be miles away, too, and it’s the middle of
winter? The odds that the mother would die in childbirth were one in eight. For the child, if the child lived, he or she a one in three chance of dying before he or she turned 21.\textsuperscript{158}

What was it like to be a kid during the colonial era? In the beginning, kids were considered to be property, and they were treated as such. They were free labor for their families. The Puritans were very concerned about their children and how they were to be raised. The main concern of a Puritanical parent was that their child became a civilized and god-fearing human being. Because of that, the children were taught about the awareness of sin from a very early age, and sometimes very harshly.\textsuperscript{159} On some level, though, they were considered to be young, unfinished versions of adults. They even wore smaller versions of adult clothes.\textsuperscript{160}

The relationships between parents and their children were very exact. Children were expected to obey their parents, and the early colonial laws defended this idea. The biblical idea of “honor thy father and mother” was taken very seriously, and a child could only defend himself against extreme punishment.\textsuperscript{161} And even though the saying was “honor thy father and mother,” it was really the father that had to be obeyed at all costs. This was because the society was patriarchal; in other words, the father was in charge. He was the religious leader of the family and the teacher as well as the breadwinner and overseer of how the family ran.\textsuperscript{162} He was also the person that could give his children land and homes as they came of age; typically, it was a tradition of primogeniture, which means that the oldest son got the most land and property. He was also the person who could decide who and when his children could marry.\textsuperscript{163}
After a matter of time, though, the use of patriarchy lost some of its effect. People became healthier as time went on so they lived longer, and the population rose, and more choices for children became available. Children could go to school, become an apprentice (something we’re going to look at more closely in a few minutes,) and some would even leave the area to explore the frontier.\(^{164}\)

The American Revolution shifted patriarchal control. Lots of young Americans thought that the rule of the British over the young America was similar to the way their father’s treated them. As a society, they wanted to be able to make their own decisions; individuals wanted to make their own decisions, too, and move away from the control of their own fathers.\(^{165}\) This idea did three things: it gave sons more autonomy (personal freedom of choice), it gave mother’s more control over raising their children; and it brought up the need for daughters to have more formal education like that of the sons.\(^ {166}\) In other words, if individuals were going to make their own choices, both parents needed to weigh in on their growth and development (especially if the father didn’t hold as much power as he used to,) and, the more education any child had, the better off they were going to be later in life.

Boys, however, still got to have more opportunities than girls, sometimes whether they wanted them or not. In the colonial era, there was a process called “putting out,” which meant that a child (often boys, but sometimes girls) would be placed in someone else’s household to take a job or learn a trade. Often, these people were called apprentices.\(^ {167}\) It wasn’t necessarily a bad deal for the youngster; they would often learn a trade and to read and write, something that their parents might not have been able to do
for them. But, on the other hand, they were bound to their new masters and their sole duty was to learn what the master was going to teach them.

In this next section of the lesson, students will examine a day in the life of an apprentice in colonial Williamsburg, Virginia

The second half of the lesson will be an online activity provided by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: A Day in the Life, online activity, “An Apprentice’s Life.” (See Appendix C.) The online activity includes questions and answers as follows: Why can’t an apprentice attend the theater? How long does an apprenticeship last? What does an individual get from his apprenticeship? Do apprentices have to go to school? What if the apprentice does not like the master or the trade? Discussion questions will be completed as a class, except for their personal response. Successful answering of these questions serves as the assessment for this day.

Day 4: “Children of the City” – A lecture and discussion of the evolution of the family in urban America. At the turn of the century, things were changing. Cities became more popular and more populated. The reason for this shift from country to city was the availability of jobs and immigration into America. As farms and other areas of business became more mechanized, jobs for untrained workers became harder to find. At the same time, low-paying menial jobs in factories became more available, causing people to seek these jobs out in the big city. Businesses within the cities began to grow, and so did the city itself. Construction workers created skyscrapers, and transit systems like trolleys began to bring people into the city to work, and would stay into the evenings to do their shopping at department stores and be entertained.
On the other side of the coin, though, there were the working poor who lived in the city, many in tenements, which were generally low rent apartment buildings barely kept up for humans to live in, and usually there were a lot of humans living in them. Many of these people were immigrants that came from Italy, Poland, Germany and many other countries.¹⁷¹ “By 1920 immigrants and their children formed between half and three-quarters of the population of Boston, Cleveland, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and St. Louis.”¹⁷² These people often were not able to partake of the abundance of goods that other parts of the city boasted.¹⁷³ And all these people took up a lot of space, and there wasn’t much space for children to play in. When the children did play, they were often unsupervised because their parents were hard at work.¹⁷⁴ They would play on the stoops of their buildings and in the streets, and learn from each other how to survive.

Even though parents had to work very hard to try to make ends meet, they often weren’t able to accomplish it. Sometimes laborers lost their jobs due to weather, and sometimes workers were laid off when the business wasn’t doing well.¹⁷⁵ People had a hard time relying on a steady paycheck. When fathers didn’t work, often mothers and children worked out of their homes, doing cooking, cleaning and piecework for money.¹⁷⁶ And often children had to go to work. “Children who worked full-time did so because their parents - or parent - had no way of making ends meet without their weekly wages.”¹⁷⁷

What did these children do for money? Children became helpers, errand boys, messengers, maids and unskilled laborers.¹⁷⁸ Children took these jobs because they were
too low paying for adults to have. More industrious kids shined shoes, and they were called bootblacks. Many children sold newspapers, and they were called newsies.

Newspapers were a big business. Many adults who commuted to and from work had many hours to kill while they were riding, and reading a newspaper was a cheap form of entertainment. There were “hundreds of thousands of customers anxious to get their papers on their way home from work, [so] no newspaper ever had enough newsies.” Industrious and clever kids could make pretty good money if they were willing to work hard enough.

Usually, newsies were boys, although there were some girls that sold newspapers. People thought it was too dangerous for girls to be out on the streets like the boys were. But girls had other responsibilities. Just like their mothers, who often worked inside the home not only running the household but taking in outside work, daughters were expected to stay home and help and they became called little mothers. Girls helped their mothers “with the shopping, cooking and cleaning” and looking after their younger siblings. Families could hire extra help to do those chores, so they fell to the girls. Older girls might eventually work in factories and sweat shops, and, like their brothers, bring their wages home to the family.

All this work that children did didn’t sit well with some people. These people were called reformers, and reformers were a big part of this era, called the progressive era. Progressives were unhappy with the way things were and tried to introduce moral and legislative change. Many reformers thought that children were not able to take on “adult roles and responsibilities.” Reformers feared for the well-being of the children,
and worried about their exposure to the unsavoriness that life in the city had to offer. Because of these fears, the government established the Children’s Bureau, and the bureau called for the “expansion of juvenile courts, federal support for infant and children’s health, and aid to poor families with dependent children.”183 Other organizations that developed to eliminate child labor were the National Consumer League, and the National Child Labor Committee.184

In spite of their good intentions, the child labor reform movement was based on “the moral indignation of middle-class reformers.”185 In other words, people who didn’t live the lives of these families didn’t like what they saw, and may not have even understood it, and tried to change it. They were only partially successful, partially because, sometimes the hard work and hard hours an immigrant child might have been subjected to, it was probably better work than he would have been able to find in his home country. Also, businesses fought hard in the courts to keep their cheap labor. The first successful labor reform law didn’t happen until 1938, with the Fair Labor Standards Act: “The FLSA child labor provisions are designed to protect the educational opportunities of youth and prohibit their employment in jobs and under conditions detrimental to their health or safety.”186 By 1938, however, many jobs that child laborers had held had either been taken over by adults, business or automation.

When the lecture is over, discuss the questions in Appendix D and review the journal assignment.

Day 5: “We Aren’t Ozzie and Harriet” – A lecture and discussion of the evolution of the American family in the 1950’s. This third and final day of discussion
will take an overall look at the evolution of American families against the context of televised 1950’s ideal of the family.

Over the course of the history of the United States, the definition of what a family is has changed. The popular conception has morphed from the idea of family as the extended, agricultural family of several generations living under one roof, to the glamorized model of suburban family as two parents and two children that was idealized by television in the 1950’s, to today’s thoughts on family as those whom one claims, whether they are related or not. While many people worry about the erosion of the modern day family, historians and academics have found that today’s families are not at all that different to those that have come before.

Generally, when one thinks about the American family, the image created by the media pops to mind: *Leave it to Beaver* or *Daddy Knows Best*, parents educated and immaculately dressed, children equally as well dressed and charming. Rarely their problems flowed more deeply than not getting picked for the school play or having to schedule a game of golf around getting a permanent. Of course, we as Americans know that this is not only an outdated version of the American family, it is also very nearly pure fiction in our day and age; what remains is what Hollywood created for us to believe and remember. We know that all families have problems and issues, and that not all families have the mother and father and the white picket fence. In spite of our awareness, this portrait of the American family still seems to be what most of us may either secretly desire or even outwardly pursue, despite the realization that it is simply a farce.
We can prove the inaccuracy of this family structure as normal by using the very same tool (television) during the very same time frame (1950’s and 960’s.) *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show* are two prime examples. The former has two individuals marrying comparatively late in life, living an unusual lifestyle, waiting quite some time to have a child, and only one child at that. *Andy Griffith* portrays a widower raising a single child, bringing in a matronly aunt to help him with that duty. While Andy’s plight may pluck at our heartstrings, it may also be a more accurate view of the American family at least as far as common hardships are concerned.

In fact, there were hardships in the 1950’s; they were simply covered up to meet society’s version of what was acceptable:

…not every kid was as wholesome as Beaver Cleaver… In 1955 alone, congress discussed zoo bills aimed at curbing juvenile delinquency. Three years later, *Life* reported that urban teachers were being terrorized by their students… many children grew up in families ravaged by alcohol and barbiturate abuse…

Rates of unwed childbearing tripled between 1940 and 1958, but most Americans didn’t notice because unwed mothers generally left town, gave their babies up for adoption and returned home as if nothing had happened. Troubled youths were encouraged to drop out of high school. Mentally handicapped children were warehoused in institutions…

However, there is an interesting correlation between the family structure set about in the 1950’s and the history of the American family. The American family and how it is made up is generally based on the same family types that came from Europe, which reaches back to Ancient Greece, Rome, and Hebrew societies which include the predominance of the nuclear family. In Everett Dixon Dyer’s *The American Family*, he talks about colonial and frontier times in America:
The settlers generally came in nuclear families and as single persons rather than extended family groups. Thus, the nuclear family became the principle social unit early in the colonial period. Dependency on the nuclear family increased with the mobility that characterized the settling of the North American continent. In other words, frontier families didn’t load up grandma and all the members of the extended family to head west; they kept their parties small and many didn’t expect to see any of their other family members again.

Gender roles in the colonial family structure played closely to the gender roles we’ve witnessed on television. Within the colonial family, the father was generally the breadwinner and the mother was the emotional caretaker. Out of pure necessity, the gender roles began to expand on the frontier; men began to help in areas that they weren’t used to in their homes (such as caring for the children,) and vice versa (such as women driving a wagon.)

Gender roles have continued to expand. Is this due to need, or is this due to social evolution? Perhaps a little of both. Stephanie Coontz says in *The Way We Never Were* that “self-reliance and independence worked for men because women took care of dependence and obligation.” In other words, both parties lived up to their fair share of the marriage contract.

By and large, most people in Western society get married when they come of age. Initially, the institution of marriage was employed to create heirs. It was also looked upon as at least a business arrangement, if not an economic contract, between the bride and groom and sometimes their extended families. In colonial North America, however, the way one would choose a mate began to change, due partially to the new opportunities
that the settlers encountered, and that “romantic love became linked to mate selection in the colonies, especially on the frontiers of settlement, where there was a chronic shortage of women.” Shortage of appropriate mate material or not, the settlers paved the way for the majority of modern day American citizens to exercise romance and affection.

The expansion of gender roles and more freedom of choice that was allowed individuals in their personal lives brought other issues as well. Well before the first formal meeting for women’s suffrage in Seneca Falls in 1848, women were beginning to exercise some financial decisions and freedoms, a topic that we didn’t see much of in the aggrandized *Ozzie and Harriet* model of marriage. According to Robert E. Wright, women in colonial America, especially wives of businessmen, were holders of “considerable discretion; [generally when the husbands were absent] and some [husbands] went so far as to allow their wives to run separate businesses.” Wright goes on to assert that single or widowed women “were economic free agents as free from legal constraints as any colonial man… [and] had to know how to keep accounts, make cash transactions and arrange credit terms.” Even Harriet didn’t have a job.

Another more unsavory aspect of American marriage and family that rarely got television airtime was abuse. Clearly, physical, verbal and emotional abuse in family history as a whole has always existed. When we begin to explore the modern day mythology of the American family, we tend to think of that All-American family; although Ward was often accused of yelling at Wally and the Beaver, the audience rarely heard him raise his voice, no matter how frustrated he was. Of course, he never hit June in a drunken rage, nor did she ever to anything to spur such a reaction.
Just as early families felt they were different from families of the 1950’s, modern
day families are considerably different, too. Other changes in society are also evident.

Coontz writes:

The separation of sex, marriage and childrearing is most dramatically
demonstrated in the new social definitions of family that have emerged over the
past two decades. Many states and cities have adopted “domestic partner” laws,
allowing unmarried heterosexual or homosexual couples certain privileges that
used to be accorded only to traditional married couples…

Most Americans move in and out of a variety of family types over the
course of their lives- families headed by a divorced parent, couples raising
children out of wedlock, two-earner families, same-sex couples, families with no
spouse in the labor force, blended families and empty-nest families. 194

Membership in the American family has expanded; one does not necessarily have to be a
blood relation or marriage partner to join.

Divorce has certainly played a big role in the way families have changed over the
years. Divorce is common, and the divorce rate is on the rise. This creates single-parent
households, two separate households, absent parents and sometimes poverty. This is
certainly not a phenomenon we saw a lot of in Ozzie and Harriet. In fact, divorce rates in
the 1950’s were low. 195 On television, female divorcees were portrayed as wild women,
and people thought if you did not marry, that you were somehow a failure. 196 Today,
however, it is a common practice to put marriage off, even until after having children.

While it is clear that the “traditional” family still exists in some form in our
society, it is also clear that the expansion of the definition of family has changed to
include many things, such as adoptive families, divorced families, and families made up
of members not related by blood. The traditional family that we saw on television in the
1950’s was certainly based on traditions that early Americans brought with them to the
New World. However, the fact remains that the American family is ever-changing and not the static image we receive from Hollywood. The concept of what a family is seems to be a liquid concept that expands and retracts within our social definitions.

When the lecture is over, go over the discussion questions in Appendix E.

Day 6: Presidential Family Investigation – a three day research assignment. A tally sheet will be placed on the overhead projector. The heading reads: How many of the United States presidents do you think…? The subsections read as follows: were rich all their lives, went to college, had single parents, were only children, were lawyers, had children, had no children, were married, were married more than once, were divorced, lived in abusive households as children, worked in areas other than politics before becoming president, were in the military before becoming president, had pets, had drug or alcohol abuse issues (themselves or within their family,) kept slaves, grew up with no electricity, grew up with no indoor plumbing, had parents who still alive when they took office, were good athletes or musicians. Class discussion of these topics follows allowing the students to speculate the answers. Save the answers.

Instruct the students that, in pairs, they will investigate one president of their choosing. They will investigate their president’s childhood and young adulthood, searching to discover their backgrounds that may have led them to become the American leader of their time. The students will be given guidelines to follow and instructions and a rubric for their creation of the final product: a poster that displays their research (see Appendix F.)
Continuing on in the instruction portion, discuss the aspects of the poster that
must be included. Students will be informed that they must include one primary source
document. It can be a letter, a photograph, or a document their president penned.
Students will also be informed that a map must be included; it can be a map of where
they grew up, or where they went to school, where they served in the military, etc. Their
biographical research must also be included in narrative form. It must be one page long.
Citations must follow (but remind them that this is a very short research project two or
three good sources will suffice.) Also, make sure that the students know that the Internet
cannot be their only source; they must use at least one book as well for research. Finally,
discuss the extra credit opportunities that may be included.

Either place students in pre-assigned pairs, or give them time to pair themselves.
Then let each pair select a president. Make sure there is no duplication. Once selections
are made, have students begin research. Prior to the end of the period, have students turn
in a written sheet that has their name, their partner’s name, the president they’ve chosen
and any sources they’ve already researched.

Day 7: Presidential Family Investigation continues. As the second day of this
project begins, students are reminded to follow their guidelines. Research should
continue, reminding the students that the posters are due at the end of the following class
period. For assessment purposes, the teacher will work around the room, checking
progress, giving advice. By the end of the period, some students should have begun the
creation of their posters. They will have been provided with poster board, glue, scissors,
and markers.
Day 8: Presidential Family Investigation presentations. On the final day of this activity, research should be complete and time for poster creation should be allowed. Teacher should be aware of those students who need extra help to meet the deadline. Remind students that neatness counts. As students begin to finish their posters, hang them and have other pairs begin the grading using the rubrics. At least three other pairs of students must grade the poster to create an average. Once all the posters have been hung and displayed and graded, have the students return to their seats and pull out the “How many of the United States presidents do you think…?” overhead with answers from Day 3. Ask the students the same questions from the subsections, identifying the president when one pair can answer the question from the subsection in the affirmative.

Day 9: Meet Rocco and Sadie. Students will be introduced to two young immigrants that came to the United States at the turn of the 20th century: Rocco Corresca and Sadie Frowne. The documents that are to be used are found at Steven Mintz’ website Digital History at http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/social_history/1bootblack.cfm and http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/social_history/5sweatshop_girl.cfm.

The session begins with a discussion of why people immigrate and have immigrated to the United States. Guide discussion, keeping in mind the ideas of “better life” and “jobs.” Ask why they think that children may have immigrated, and what jobs they could have found once here. Be sure that the terms bootblack (an individual who polishes shoes for a living, generally young children at the turn of the 20th century) and sweatshop (a factory in which people work long hours for low pay) are defined.
Rocco and Sadie’s stories are passed out and read in choral style, answering questions along the way. Questions on the board are as follows and should be answered in their history journals:

Rocco:

1. What is the perception of Americans at the turn of 20th century Italy?
2. Why did Bartolo take the boys in?
3. What was the difference between Rocco’s living situation in Italy and in the United States?
4. Why do you think it was important to Rocco to learn to read and write in English?
5. Do you think Rocco became an American citizen? Why or why not?

Sadie:

1. Why was the Statue of Liberty called “Goddess?”
2. Sadie seemed to think she lived and ate well. Looking at her shopping list, do you think she ate well? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think it was important to Sadie that she learn to read and write in English?
4. Sadie didn’t think that her job was so bad. Was it a bad job to have? Why or why not? Could you have worked in those conditions?
5. Do you think that Sadie became an American citizen? Why or why not?

For assessment purposes, the teacher will respond personally to each journal.
Day 10: Family crest activity and final assessment. The first half of the period, students will be asked to create a pencil drawing of their own, individualized family crest. Define a family crest as a coat of arms that show depictions of the family’s standing, personality and accomplishments. Instruct the students that their family crest should come from their heart and from what they’ve learned about family in the past six days. Give examples of the shapes of family crests to get them started. To prompt them, asked what their families mean to them, what are they most proud of about their families, about the accomplishments of their family members? Also, guide them to think about what they get from their families (love, support) and how they feel about them.

Once complete, they can be displayed below the maps from their family mapping activity.

The second half of the period will be an assessment in the form of a short essay (one page at least) question: How do you think families have shaped the history of the United States? Do families help to guide individuals to reach their goals? Is their a connection between family and the success of an individual in achieving their goals? Give examples from the documents we’ve read, the Presidential Family Investigation Poster, and what you may have discovered about your own family. (For students with lower abilities, a prompt may be used on a one-on-one basis.)

Assessment may be achieved in one of two ways: either a class discussion of their essays or individual response by the teacher.
Appendix A

California standards covered in Unit Plan:

**Eighth grade:**

8.1 Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

8.4.4 Discuss daily life, including traditions in art, music and literature, of early national America

8.6.7 Identify common themes in American art as well as transcendentalism and individualism

8.7 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the South from 1800 to the mid-1800’s and the challenges they faced

8.12.5 Examine the location and effects of urbanization, renewed immigration, and industrialization

**Tenth grade:**

10.3.3 Describe the growth of population, rural to urban migration, and growth of cities associated with the Industrial Revolution

10.8 Students analyze the causes and consequences of World War II

10.8.6 Discuss the human costs of the war, with particular attention to the civilian and military losses in Russia, Germany, Britain, the US, China and Japan

**Eleventh grade:**

11.2 Students analyze the relationship among the rise of industrialization, large-scale rural to urban migration, and massive immigration from Southern to Eastern Europe.

11.7 Students analyze America’s participation in World War II

11.8.8 Discuss forms of popular culture, with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion

11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights

11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society

**Twelfth grade:**

12.2.2 Explain how economic rights are secured and their importance to the individual to and to society

12.2.4 Understand the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and serving in the military or alternative service

12.2.5 Describe the reciprocity between right and obligations; that is, why enjoyment of one’s rights entail respect for the rights of others

12.3 Students evaluate, take and defend position on what the fundamental values and principles of civil society are (i.e., the autonomous sphere of voluntary personal, social and economic relations that are not part of government,) their interdependence, and the meaning and importance of those values and principles for a free society
12.8.3 Explain how public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry and to shape public opinion
Family Mapping Questionnaire

1 Map in orange. Where do you live?
2 Map in orange. Where do your parents or guardians live?
3 Map in green. Where do/did your grandparents live?
4 Map in purple. Where do/did your aunts and uncles live?
5 Map in blue. Where did/does your extended family live (these may include
distant relatives you may never have even met.)
6 Map in pink. There may be people in your life that you consider to be part of
your family that aren’t actually related to you. Where do/did these people
live?
7 Map in yellow. Where did/do your great grandparents live?
8 Map in red. Where did your great-great grandparents live?
9 If there are questions that you cannot answer because you do not know the
answer, have you heard of places that members of your family have come
from? Map those places.
10 Did any of your relatives come to this country from other countries? If so,
who came to the United States and why?
11 Did any of your relatives come to this country or even this county looking for
work? If so, who came and why?
12 Have any of your relatives done something that you are most proud of? If so,
who did it, what did they do and why are you proud of them?
13 When did your family come to Humboldt County? Why did they come here?
14 Do you intend to stay in Humboldt County your whole life? Why or why not?
Appendix C


Growing Up Colonial

1. Why might it be difficult for a woman to have a child in colonial America?

2. How much freedom did colonial children have?

3. Who was in charge of colonial children and families? Why?

4. What is the word for a society run by fathers?

5. What is the word for the practice of the eldest son getting the most land and property from his father?

6. What was “putting out” of children? Why do you think children were put out?

7. From “An Apprentice’s Life”: Why can’t an apprentice attend the theater?

8. From “An Apprentice’s Life”: How long does an apprenticeship last?

9. From “An Apprentice’s Life”: What does an individual get from his apprenticeship?

10. From “An Apprentice’s Life”: Do apprentices have to go to school?

11. From “An Apprentice’s Life”: What if the apprentice does not like the master or the trade?

12. Journal question (to be answered on your own): How did the American Revolution change the way American families were run? Why do you think that the American Revolution changed the way that colonial families were run?
Appendix D

Discussion questions: Children of the City

1. What were some of the reasons that cities were becoming more populated at the turn of the 20th century?

2. What were the low-rent, low-maintained apartment buildings in cities called?

3. Why couldn’t some adult laborers depend on a steady paycheck?

4. What did the fact that many adults could not depend on a steady paycheck do to their children?

5. List at least three jobs that children often participated in.

6. Why didn’t as many girls work as newsies and in other jobs as boys?

7. What were the people called that tried to eliminate child labor, and what were they concerned about?

8. Name the three organizations that were developed to try to eliminate child labor.

9. In what year was the first successful law that limited child labor passed, and what was it called?

10. Journal question (to be answered on your own): Be sure to answer each part of the question. Imagine you live in New York City in 1920. You and your family live in a tenement. Your father doesn’t have a steady job, and your mother not only cares for your three younger siblings and the house, but your family takes in a boarder (someone who pays for a room in your home, a common practice to bring in extra income for the family.) You have to sleep on the floor in the living room with two of your siblings while the baby sleeps with your parents in the only other room in the small apartment. What would you do to try to help your family? Would you get a job? What kind of job would you get: a bootblack, a newsie or something else? How would you manage your time with school? Would you give all your wages to your family, or would you keep some for yourself? What if your parents said you have to be home by 10 o’clock at night, but you know that you can make a lot of extra money between 10 and 11 o’clock when the theaters get out? How would you handle this situation?
Appendix E

Discussion questions: We Aren’t Ozzie and Harriet

1. Describe a typical American family from the 1950’s that you’ve seen on television.

2. Why were I Love Lucy and Andy Griffith unusual television shows for the time? Would their family types be considered unusual today?

3. What changed regarding gender roles on the frontier?

4. What was the reason that families had children in the past? What do you think the reason is now?

5. Why do you think that people started to get married for love rather than to create a partnership?

6. What are some of the family types mentioned by Stephanie Coontz that we see in America today?

7. Journal question (to be answered on your own): Why do you think Hollywood was so successful in perpetuating the mythological families shown in television shows like Ozzie and Harriet and Daddy Knows Best?
Appendix F

Presidential Family Investigation Guidelines and Poster Instructions

You and your partner have most of three days to create a research project on the president of your choice. You will be researching the childhood and young adulthood of this president and creating a short biography that you will create in narrative (story) form. For your sources, you can use the Internet, history texts, library books and encyclopedias. You may not use the Internet for the entire research part; you must use at least one book. Since this is such a short time for a research project, limit your choices to two or three really good sources. Each of your sources must be cited.

You will also be searching for a primary source document to include in your project. This can be a picture or a photograph or a document written by your president.

Finally, a map must be included in your research project. This can be a small map showing where the president grew up, where he went to school, some other significant place in his life. Please note where the place is that you are mapping in your caption. (A map of where the White House or Washington DC is does not count.)

If your project does not include a primary source, a map, your biographical narrative and your citations, it will not be graded.

There are extras that you can include in your project that will add to the point value of your project. These extras can include a picture (other than your primary source document) or a quotation, or something else of your choosing. The more at adds to your project, the higher the point value.
Split up the work between you and your partner to make the best use of your time.

Poster instructions

Include:

1. Your biographical narrative
2. Your primary source document
3. Your map
4. Your citations
5. Can include extras that add to your project (placing a skateboarding logo on your poster does not add to your project.)

You can use the poster board, scissors, glue and markers I give you.

Remember, neatness counts and will be graded. Three other pairs of students will be grading your final poster and you will receive the averaged grade.

Good luck! See me if you have any questions!
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36 total points possible. However, at least 1 point MUST be present in sections 1-4 for the project to be graded.

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10-18 C
19-27 B
28-36 A
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