THE FAMILY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- The colonial family performed a variety of functions including:
  - Producing and exchanging commodities.
  - Providing the family’s material needs.
  - Teaching the children to read as well as other skills.

- Discuss how external institutions like the police, fire departments, schools, church, day camps, nursing homes have taken over in place of family in performing social functions.

- Consider how these changes have altered the character and quality of interfamily relationships – (e.g., families are together less due to outside activities, fast food, television, etc.)

- In terms of husband-wife relationships in the colonial period, women were subordinate to men.

- Grounds for divorce in 17th century American colonies included:
  - Impotence
  - Adultery
  - Bigamy

- Puritans believed that children were born with original sin.

- During colonial times, children had to bow to their parents when they saw them.

- The formal education colonial girls received were meager. Some men believed that education could rot the female mind.

- During colonial times, women who succeeded in getting an education were often ridiculed.
• African Americans did not come to America voluntarily.
  
  o It was difficult for slaves in colonial times to marry because:
    • Northern slaves lived with their masters
    • And were not allowed to associate with other slaves.
    • There were few slaves on most plantations, which limited the choice of marriage partners.
    • Plantations were far apart which made it difficult to find marriage partners.

  o One example of the historical misrepresentation of African American families is the portrayal of African American men as inadequate fathers and husbands.

  o Male African American slaves:
    • Taught young boys how to trap wild turkeys and rabbits.
    • Were highly respected as preachers.
    • Served as surrogate fathers to many children, including those not their own.

  o Many African American slave families were broken up by sale of family members to different white slave owners.

  o In the south most slave women worked in the fields, though domestic work was as hard as fieldwork.

  o A “mammy” is an African American woman who during slavery took care of the plantation owner’s children.

  o After emancipation migrants to the north made extensive efforts to maintain family ties.
• In most cases American Indian women married after they reached puberty, and American Indian men married after they found a suitable spouse.
  o Before they were forced onto reservations, where they adopted many customs and practices of the larger society, many American Indian women and men had egalitarian relationships.
  o Throughout most American Indian groups children were treated with kindness and indulgence.
  o Many American Indian tribes became extinct as a result of:
    ▪ Marriage with outside groups
    ▪ Massacres
    ▪ Disease
  o The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed the security of Mexican property after the U.S. annexation of Mexican territory.
  o During the 1800’s Mexican women and children worked as almond pickers, and Mexican men worked as railway workers and ranch hands.
  o Family relationships that take precedence over individual well-being, such as among Mexican American families, are called familism.
  o Among Mexican American family’s socialization of children was based on religious teachings.
• **Industrial Revolution** (1820-1930)
  - Change from self-sufficient to wage earning.
  - Change from rural to urban.

- Dramatic changes in the family structure due primarily to industrialization.

- During industrial revolution (use of machines instead of animals to produce goods & services), people were moving from the farms to urban areas. Lots of job opportunities – you could go work for someone else and make a wage.

- Men went to work in factories or offices, families moved from self-sufficient rural households to small urban homes.

- While working class women had to work out of necessity, middle-class women were expected to quit their jobs when they got married.

- Women and men operate in separate spheres:
  - Division of labor: men outside the home; women inside the home.
  - Love becomes an important ingredient in marriage. Not just survival; relationships are important.
    - “True womanhood” emerges – nurturer, caregiver, domesticity, submissiveness
  - Smaller families – women had more time, so they treated children with a new wonderment. Childhood innocence replaced their status of “small adults.”

- In the middle class, husbands and wives developed separate spheres of activity.

- The concept of “true womanhood” refined the role of wife as workmate to one as nurturer and caregiver.

- In order to achieve “true womanhood” women were encouraged to throw parties and learn to adorn (beautify) their homes and themselves.

- A “true woman” was expected to:
  - be submissive
  - adorn their homes and themselves
  - be full-time domestics

- Working-class women had to make a living, so they were not considered capable of being “true women.”
• Before the industrial revolution, children were not really considered to be much of a privilege.
  o Childhood was not appreciated; in fact they were valued more for economic value to the household.
  o Treated as little adults, valued for their cheap labor (worked on farms, or worked in parents’ business).
    • Considered “economically useful.”
    • The more you have, the more work that gets done.

  o View of children changed.
    • Child labor became seen as harmful.

• Children were seen as “economically worthless, but emotionally priceless.”
  o In the past, when children were seen as cheap labor people had a lot more children.
  o The more you had, the more work would get done.
  o We have smaller families today.
    • Why is that?

  o People have less children nowadays because:
    • Children are less productive (less productive labor out of children). You can’t put them to work.
    • Not as much incentive to have a lot of children.
    • Old age security.
      • Now, in more industrious societies, there is more government help for old age.
      • You don’t have to depend on your children for care and support.
    • They are expensive.
      • Increase in cost for raising children.
      • It costs a lot more than it did in the past to raise children.
        o Did you know that a family with a child born in 1997 will spend more than $200,000 for food, shelter, and other necessities over the next 17 years?
    • More effort than it required earlier.
      • We can’t simply tell kids to go outside and play; it can be dangerous.
      • More organized activities; parents have to drive them around (sports, dance, etc.).
We now want our kids to be kids.

- Play, have a carefree, happy childhood.
- More emotional energy invested in children now than before.
- Now parents want to get to know their children.
- The less you have, the more you can get to know each child.
- Relationship between parent and child is more emotional; they have fun together, they are closer.
- Dads are more involved.
- Mom is not the only nurturer.
• RISE OF THE COMPANIONATE FAMILY (1900-1930)
  o Men and women share household tasks and decision making.
  o Marriages were expected to provide romance and sexual fulfillment.

• THE GREAT DEPRESSION
  o In just 3 years (1929-1932), the average family income dropped 40%.
  o Families pooled their resources...lived together.
  o Roles had to change to accommodate the new economy.
  o Men equated their masculinity to their role as breadwinner, so many felt they had failed as men.
  o Many suicides, emotional problems.
  o When poverty walks in the door...loves goes out the window.

  o How families fared during the great depression depended on their:
    • Residence, whether urban or rural
    • Race and sex
    • Social class

  o During the depression many rural people moved to cities in hopes of finding jobs.
    • Young women were most likely to find jobs there because there was a demand for low-paying domestic help.

  o The depression had the most devastating effect on working-class and poor families.
    • During the great depression white middle-class women maintained their family’s standard of living by working in white-collar clerical jobs.

  o The great depression played havoc with gender roles because men lost their jobs, their breadwinner status, and thus their standing within the family.
• During the depression:
  ○ When poverty walks in the door…love goes out the window.

• During the depression (1930’s) divorce rates went down.
  ○ People were so fearful, that meaninglessness of life/unhappy marriages was not important.
  ○ Fulfillment, affection, love were not a priority.
    • Plus, they could not afford to divorce.

• Divorce rates rose dramatically in the 1940’s
  ○ Especially at the end of the war in 1945
    • Unhappy marriages were dissolved at this time
      • People began to focus on personal happiness rather than being consumed with financial despair.
• **WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)**
  • Men left jobs to go to war.
  • Women filled the gap.
    o Women received material and non-material benefits by working, and did not want to surrender their jobs when the men came home.
    o There was great social pressure for women to leave these jobs and return home.
      ▪ Many did this out of gratitude for the heroic deeds of the soldiers.
    o During WWII, American women were encouraged to work outside of the home because there was a scarcity of workers because men had been drafted.
  • The symbol created by the government and the media to encourage women to work outside of the home was “Rosie the Riveter.”
  • During WWII women:
    o Worked in shipyards and steel mills.
    o Worked in ammunition factories.
    o Welded, dug ditches, and operated forklifts.
1950’s
• family stability
• traditional gender roles
• low divorce rate/high birth rate
• many were lonely and bored

• The war (WWII) ended the depression – divorce rates dropped sharply in 1950’s, and marriage rates rose dramatically.
  ○ The birth rate shot up, creating the “baby boom.”
  ○ 2. Marriage rates went up, married younger, divorce rates dropped.

• American women married earlier – 1950’s – almost half married before age 20.
  ○ Highest percentage of married people recorded – 96% (f), 94% (m).

Why did the birth rate shoot up?

• A probable explanation for the “baby boom” is that it was a reaction to the end of the depression – WWII created considerable employment (the military boom); one of the wealthiest periods in the history of the U.S. – an “economic miracle.”
  ○ The 1950’s were seen as the age of the suburbs.
  ○ Homes built in the suburbs were affordable to working-class families; they could live like the middle-class.
  ○ Low interest mortgages meant working-class families could afford to move out of apartments in the city to homes in the suburbs.
    ▪ Houses were mass-produced and fabricated because that was all they could afford.

  ▪ During the “golden” fifty’s the media portrayed women as totally engrossed by domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and child care.

  ▪ “Rosie the Riveter” as slowly replaced by domestic heroines.

  ▪ Wives in the 1950’s were expected to dedicate themselves to making their husband’s life happy.

  ▪ Marriage and child care expert, Dr. Benjamin Spock, told women to be submissive and stay at home to raise their kids.

  ▪ During the “golden” fifties, African Americans and other people of color were excluded from the 1950’s prosperity.

  ▪ They faced severe discrimination in employment, education and housing.

  ▪ Almost 50% of married-couple African-American families were impoverished – a figure far higher than today.
When blacks moved north to find jobs in the postwar urban manufacturing boom they met vicious harassment and violence, first to prevent them from moving out of central cities, then to exclude them from public places like parks or beaches.

The 1950’s was a period of racism as well as sexism.
- Women were expected to center their lives around their husbands and family – very patriarchal, no independence.
- They were unable to take out loans or even credit cards in their own names, excluded from juries in many states.
- A lack of options outside of marriage led some women to remain in desperately unhappy marriages.
1960’S AND BEYOND
A time of the civil rights movement – a counter-culture emerged – political rebellion.

The sixties permanently changed both the family system and public culture.

The conservative family trends of the 1950’s reversed themselves.

- Birth rates have dropped, families have fewer children.
- Marriage is delayed until older from 20 (f) 23 (m) in 1960 to 25 and 27 1998.
- Greater diversity of family structure: nuclear, single-parent, step, blended, cohabitating, dual-earner, etc.
- Increased labor participation of women – increases women’s marital power and also the tension around the division of household chores and who will care for the children.
- There are different expectations for fathers…more involvement with the home and children is expected.
- Shift from self-sacrifice to individualism – personal fulfillment is priority.

**QUESTION:** What are some of the trends of the last 50 years today that could impact families in the future?

Economics: producing – consuming – service
Technology: reproductive tech
Demographics: increased life span, lower birth rate
Gender roles: women have more opportunities