Unclaimed Flowers and Blossoms Protected by Thorns: Never-Married Women in the United States, 1880-1930

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For my mother
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The Spinster

Since many a poet sings the praise
That's due to wife and mother –
My muse prefers her voice to raise
In honor of another.

After the noontide heat and glare,
How calm the twilight shady!
Thus peaceful is the atmosphere
About a maiden lady.

The wife may heed the husband's woes,
She either shares or doubles –
The maiden lady interest shows
In everybody's troubles.

The mother, rightly, makes the care
Of home her life's chief centre –
The "old maid" has some love to spare
Wherever love can enter.

It may be in denouncing wrong
She's overenergetic,
But down among the struggling throng
She's widely sympathetic.

No fear of germs her foot deters
From densely peopled regions –
The children of the poor are hers –
She numbers them by legions.

Her kind seems growing rare of late,
Less often we accost her –
Her value who shall estimate?
We can not till we've lost her!

-- George B. Morewood,
New York Times, April 26, 1911

Introduction

> To the Editor of the *New York Times*:
>
> Apropos of the old maid discussion, I want to ask you what is the matter with the girl – or men – who is 31 years old and has never had a lover…? She dances like a dream, 'keeps house' as if she loved it, makes most of her good-looking clothes, and earns $200 a month by writing stories and articles for magazines, besides.
>
> That's me![1]

From October until well into December 1909, a debate over why educated women did not marry dominated the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. The debate began with a simple reference to an article "Why Do Not Educated Women Marry?" by "Unwilling Celibate" which appeared in the October 28, 1909 issue of *The Independent*.[2] In the article, college educated "Unwilling Celibate" searched for reasons why she was nearly thirty and still single. After surveying her many assets, she concluded that the fault lay with men.[3] Although "Unwilling Celibate's" plight generated a letter or two in the *Times*, the debate exploded two weeks later as a result of the letter by "Unclaimed Flower" quoted above. "Unclaimed Flower's" letter launched a deluge of responses, more than twenty-five of which were printed before the debate was apparently terminated by the editor about December 19th. Suggestions as to the causes of "Unclaimed Flower's" difficulties were wide ranging and covered many points of view on this obviously controversial issue. Some thought "Unclaimed Flower" might scare men off with her education and abilities. "Perhaps," one individual wrote, "'An Unclaimed Flower' has frightened her men friends into the tall weeds of the matrimonial garden with

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[1] "She is Called Brilliant and Charming, but Men Will Not Court Her," *New York Times*, November 14, 1909, p. 12.

[2] A concurrent debate in *The Independent* continued until terminated by the editors in the December 9, 1909 issue.

[3] Unwilling Celibate, "Why Do Not Educated Women Marry?" *Independent* (New York), October 28, 1909, p. 966-9; "A Woman Wants to Know," *New York Times*, October 29, 1909, p. 8.

her points of superiority."[4] Others suggested she was too "fastidious" and straight-laced. "A woman is not attractive unless she attracts, and to attract a girl must know how to show her appreciation of men."[5] "Flower Unclaimed Through Choice" suggested that "Unclaimed Flower" be less concerned about marriage and "revel in her freedom."[6] "Unclaimed Flower" also gained at least one proposal (from a farmer in Orange County, New York) and a suggestion that Americans should follow customs of "the Orient" and allow parents to arrange marriages.[7]

The debate triggered by "Unclaimed Flower" in the *New York Times* reflected the importance of marriage in the United States in the early 20th Century. Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were aware of the growing number of increasingly visible, educated white women in their midst who remained single their entire lives. The issue of why such women did not marry was considered by the editor of *The Independent* as one of the most important of his time – one which "the future of civilized races depends upon...."[8] "If the spiritually gifted become priests and nuns and the intellectually gifted become celibate professors..." he continued, "there is no conceivable way by which the loss to humanity can be repaired in future generations."[9] Between 1880 and 1930, newspapers all over the United States carried a variety of articles related to why men and women did not marry, who was to blame for the situation, how it might be resolved, and what might happen if men and women did not marry. With the increasing fears of "race suicide" among the white, "old stock" Americans, these questions were primarily

[4] "Old Boy" Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, November 17, 1909, p. 8.
[5] "M.H." Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, November 19, 1909, p. 10.
[6] "Flower Unclaimed Through Choice" Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, November 24, 1909, p. 10.
[7] "Good Provider" Letter to the Editor, *New York Times* December 19, 1909, p. 12; "An Oriental" Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, December 6, 1909, p. 8.
[8] "Comrades and Sweethearts," *The Independent* (New York), October 28, 1909, p. 989.
[9] "Comrades and Sweethearts," p. 990.

directed toward white, U.S.-born men and women. However, marriage was a priority of some level in all communities in the United States and some degree of pressure to marry was placed upon women of all racial and ethnic groups.[10] The rate at which women in the United States remained single increased overall during the period, but varied significantly from one ethnic or racial group to another. It is questions related to why women in the United States, of all races and backgrounds, did not marry that this dissertation will explore.

Marriage and Singleness in America

In this dissertation, I argue that the increase in the number of never-married women in the United States between 1880 and 1920 was the result of the new employment opportunities that appeared in the decades following the Civil War. In fact, it was during these years that the percent of forty-five to fifty-four year old women who claimed in the U.S. census to be never married climbed to the highest point in United States history, at least through the 2000 census. This period was also a time of great change as industrialization, urbanization, and new technology altered the lives of all Americans.

I argue that in the decades following the Civil War large numbers of women in the United States entered the paid work force when new employment opportunities appeared as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and new technology. As these women grew able to contribute to their own support, perhaps even become self

[10] Marriage was a priority among, for example, African-Americans and I found evidence of this in African-American newspapers. However, because marriage rates were far higher among African-American women than white, U.S.-born women that pressure was far more subtle than what I observed in the white, middle class press.

supporting, they gained an authority to make decisions that shaped their own lives. With paid work and this new authority, women gained the ability to consider life outside of marriage. Thus, the rate at which women in the United States remained single their entire lives grew from 6.83 to 9.44 percent nationally between 1880 and 1930.[11]

However, lifelong singleness was not attractive or even plausible for all women in the United States. I also argue that a woman's inclination to marry, or not, was shaped by four significant factors: race and ethnicity, class, and location. Race and ethnicity were perhaps the most important factors in determining a woman's marital fate. The racial and/or ethnic group with which a woman identified defined, to a large extent, the pool of men from which she might select a husband and how much pressure was placed upon her to wed. Race and ethnicity, in many cases, also determined what jobs were open to her, how attractive they might be as an alternative to marriage, and what she gained or lost if she chose to marry. For example, most white women in the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, particularly white, U.S.-born women, were expected or compelled to give up any paid employment they might hold upon marriage. Their new profession was to care for their husband and any children that might come along.[12] Class was also significant. White middle class women proved better able to take advantage of the new work opportunities than women from other classes because the middle class women were most likely to obtain the education necessary for many of the new jobs. Jobs and education were also more likely to be found in urban areas than in more remote regions which made singleness more imaginable for city women. A

[11] Calculated by using census samples from IPUMS, 1880-1930; see Chapter 1 for further details..
[12] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 71, 98

woman's location also shaped the number of potential partners available. Thus, while new employment opportunities led to an increase in the rate of singleness in the United States, race, ethnicity, class, and location came together to shape which women were able to take advantage of the new opportunities.

There has been little research on never-married women in the United States during this period. Previous scholars focus on the generations of women who came of age in America before the Civil War. One of the most significant books about never-married American women is Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller's *Liberty a Better Husband: Single Women in America, The Generations of 1780-1840*. "[B]ased on the lives and writings of more than one hundred northeastern spinsters" of the antebellum period, Chambers-Schiller explores their reasons for lifelong singleness and routes toward personal autonomy.[13] Beginning about 1780, women of the upper- and middle-classes started to show a new independence by rejecting marriage for a variety of reasons including religion, personal independence, or lack of acceptable men. Although each of the spinsters Chambers-Schiller describes desired the freedom to pursue her interests and vocations, independence often proved to be one of "personal identity" rather than a physical or economic separation from her family. Instead, "most spinsters … lived at home with parents or siblings and moved between the domestic, vocational, and occupational realms according to the dint of family and economic pressure."[14] Women were almost never able to leave financial dependency behind entirely and, according to Chambers-Schiller, were unable to for many decades to come. Although Chambers-

[13] Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America, The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.
[14] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 4.

Schiller challenges other historians to examine the lives of subsequent generations of women, there has been no study of American never-married women in the decades following the Civil War.

More recent works continue to explore the lives of never-married women in the United States during earlier periods. For example, in *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South*, Christine Jacobson Carter examines the lives of never-married women in antebellum Savannah and Charleston and finds that like the northern women studied by Chamber-Schiller, white, affluent Southern women also "had opportunities to choose or to accept single blessedness; find meaning in their lives as daughters, aunts, and sisters; enjoy intimate female friendships; organize for benevolent causes; and travel extensively."[15] Karen Wulf's *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* examines how single women "fit into their communities [religious, economic, legal, or charitable] and culture" of colonial Philadelphia. Wulf "also examines the ways that those communities and culture developed because of the presence and contributions of these women." [16] While these scholars expand the understanding of the lives of never-married women in different times and regions of the United States, the post-Civil War decades in America continue to be overlooked.

Martha Vicinus explores the changing world of single English women in the years following Chambers-Schiller's study in her book *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920.* Here Vicinus examines the lives of the small population of middle-class, single, English women who "could afford to live, however

[15] Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 6
[16] Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 9.

poorly, on their own earnings outside heterosexual domesticity or church governance."[17] Once labeled anomalies, these women created a movement seeking political change, education, jobs, and ultimately a new way of structuring their lives.[18] While a valuable contribution to the literature on unmarried women, Vicinus limits her analysis to those who were in a very small number of jobs, such as a boarding school teacher, nurse, or suffrage worker, and able to establish personal and financial autonomy. However, these women were not representative of the population of never-married women either in England or the United States, and American never-married women were beyond the scope of her study.

Limited by the sources available, none of these scholars are able to thoroughly explore how race, ethnicity, or class affected singleness in the United States. Carter and Chambers-Schiller, for example, build their arguments through the analysis of the papers of white, antebellum never-married women who were prominent or lucky enough to have their writings preserved. These historians have little other choice given the eras they are examining. The U.S. census did not begin to record marital status until 1880. The lack of surviving materials from African-American women, immigrant women, or working class women prevents their inclusion in Carter's or Chamber-Schiller's analysis. Wulf's focus specifically on Philadelphia, however, provides her with a wider range of sources including "tax records, Constable's Returns (a kind of census), court dockets, and the minutes and accounts of poor relief officials" in addition to various personal papers.[19] Although this allows Wulf to include a more diverse group of women, her work focuses

[17] Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, Ltd., 1985), 6.
[18] Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 6.
[19] Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 20

on the 18th century, over one hundred years removed from the period examined here. Wulf points to Chamber-Schiller's work for those seeking an understanding of the future of never-married women. However, she does indicate that a "combination of factors, including sex ratios, individual choice, cultural priorities, and economic opportunities could produce transitions in the rates of marriage and remarriage in a specific setting" all of which are indicated as factors contributing to singleness in this dissertation.[20]

Additionally, these earlier American studies also focus on small specific regions. Wulf focuses on Philadelphia, Chambers-Schiller on the Northeast, and Carter on the antebellum South. Although their conclusions are excellent for the region in question, the scholars can only make educated guesses on how they applied to the nation at large. In fact, although Chambers-Schiller makes some insightful conjectures about singleness in regions other than the Northeast, she is quick to point out that "it may be foolhardy to speculate on the degree to which the experience of [women in the other regions] resembled that of the women in this study."[21] How singleness was affected by race, ethnicity, class, and location is important for understanding the changing world of never-married women in the United States and not fully addressed in the existing literature, particularly in the decades following the Civil War.

While Wulf, Chambers-Schiller, Carter, and Vicinus focus on real spinsters, Naomi Braun Rosenthal's *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities* examines the changing perceptions of never-married women as they were portrayed in magazine fiction and the movies. Rosenthal wrestles with the question of why the spinster, a symbol of female independence in the early 20th Century, evolved into a nightmare

[20] Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 16.
[21] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 5.

alternative for women in the years following World War II, and then almost completely disappeared by the end of the 20th Century. The unmarried woman of the late 19th Century, according to Rosenthal, was probably the greatest beneficiary of the newly expanded roles for women. By the years immediately before the First World War, female professionals in popular literature were well established, able to provide for themselves, and live outside of family control. However, at the same time, while successful, spinsters also began to be seen as unfulfilled because they were perceived as having neither sexual intercourse nor children. Through the 1920s, new views on sexuality and an increasingly sharp divide between homosexuality and heterosexuality made spinsters seem more and more abnormal. Further, it became possible for women to have both a career and a marriage. Over the following decades, concludes Rosenthal, spinsters slowly disappeared from popular media, becoming more and more an artifact of the past.

Rosenthal's arguments about the perceptions of lifelong singleness in the popular media between 1880 and 1930 are, by my estimation, accurate. There was increasing praise for single women in the popular media of the late 19th century, which evolved into a celebration of marriage and motherhood for educated women by the 1920s. However, Rosenthal's over reliance on three stories from the *Ladies Home Journal* to makes her arguments about lifelong single women mutes the dissenting voices. Not all authors praised self-sufficient college educated women in the 1890s or discredited them by the 1910s and 1920s. College educated woman and the rates at which they married remained controversial subjects through the 1920s, with both supporters and critics throughout the period. By using more articles to make her arguments, Rosenthal would have enhanced her credibility and provided a more nuanced picture of the views of the period.

Further, Rosenthal is not convincing the many times she attempts to draw conclusions about real life from the stories she analyses. She claims, for example that "By the turn of the century, … women who remained unmarried were not only able to support themselves, but also able to establish separate households and develop a social and intellectual life outside of family control."[22] While this may have been the case for magazine heroines, it was not necessarily true in real life. Fiction authors sometimes had a personal agenda or cause and wrote about what they believed should be true, even if it was not. They were not recording history, but writing entertaining fiction. The autonomy held by Rebekah Spofford, the main character in the 1890s story Rosenthal uses to make her point, was neither typical nor likely desirable to most never-married women in the United States at the time.[23]

Bachelors were also controversial figures in turn of the 20th century America and the literature on unmarried men also contributes to my dissertation.[24] Particularly valuable is Howard P. Chudacoff's *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture.* Focusing on the lives of single men during the same period as this dissertation, 1880-1930, Chudacoff argues that "the modern bachelor subculture took shape and bachelors began to influence the direction of consumer culture" at this time.[25] Of particular interest to my dissertation was the chapter "Why so Many Bachelors" where Chudacoff searches for the causes of the increase in singleness among men in the United

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[22] Naomi Braun Rosenthal, *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 33.
[23] Rosenthal, *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities*, 19-30.
[24] See for example, E, Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books: 1993); John Gilbert McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[25] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 19.

States between 1880 and 1930.[26] He explores three theories as to the cause of this increase: that there were more men than women in many urban areas and men could not find partners; that men could not afford to marry; and that the availability of new urban amenities separate from marriage discouraged men from choosing a wife. After examining all three, Chudacoff argues for the third. The new leisure time pursuits of the cities; the increasing ability of young men to socialize with women and choose their own marriage partners outside of parental supervision; and the large "fraternity" of unmarried men "diverted a larger-than-might-be-expected cohort of men away from matrimony."[27] As these situations and entertainments became less novel by the 1920s, Chudacoff continues, the percent of men remaining single began to decline.[28]

The arguments in *The Age of the Bachelor* provide valuable insights into the reasons behind singleness not considered in the existing works on never-married women which focus on earlier eras. My research supports Chudacoff's argument that the new urban culture and activities were influential in shaping an individual's decision to marry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Communities of single women, like those of single men, supported their members in lives outside of marriage. Also cities often provided jobs and services that made life outside of marriage more imaginable for both sexes. However, I believe that Chudacoff dismisses the unbalanced sex ratios too quickly in his search for the causes of singleness. While it is true that "countless people seek, select, and accept marriage partners from outside their own community," a man can

[26] Chudacoff defines a bachelor as a man who has never married and is over the age of 15.By this definition almost all men are bachelors at some point in their lives. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor,* 45, 48.
[27] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 73.
[28] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 73.

not marry if there are no single women available.[29] Chudacoff also assumes that almost any individual of the opposite sex would do as a marriage partner and does not take into account class or ethnic issues that might disqualify certain women as wives. Additionally, in many rural areas, single men also outnumbered single women. While they are beyond the scope of his book, Chudacoff's theories do not explain rural men's single state.

By examining singleness and the factors shaping men's and women's decisions to wed, this dissertation also contributes to the literature on marriage in the United States in the late 19th century. To understand marriage, one needs to understand the forces that led some women to remain outside of it, either by design or by fate. Race and ethnicity were extremely important in shaping marital decisions. By the mid-19th Century, American-born young people had more freedom in selecting a spouse than had been available in the past.[30] However, while white Americans took the institution seriously, African-Americans, according to historian Glenda Gilmore in *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, placed an especially high value on marriage because it had been denied during slavery days.[31] Many foreign-born families also placed a high priority on marriage which was often shaped by the customs in their homeland. Historian Randy McBee demonstrates in *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States* that arranged marriages or courtships under close parental supervision, similar to the customs in

[29] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 61.
[30] Zsuzsa Berend, "'The Best or None!' Spinsterhood in Nineteenth Century New England." *Journal of Social History* 33 (2000): 936.
[31] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 18.

Europe, were not uncommon, especially in families newly arrived from Italy or Poland.[32] However, McBee goes on to argue that as subsequent generations became more Americanized, they gained a wider range of social contacts through work or school. As a result, U.S.-born children of foreign-born parents struggled to escape from old-world traditions and determined their own matrimonial fates, often in conflict with their parents who wanted to retain traditional ways.[33]

Women's marital decisions were also shaped by the availability of jobs open to them and this dissertation contributes to the literature on female employment as well.[34] While industrialization, urbanization, and new technology constricted the wage earning opportunities for some men, they expanded the paid work options open to women, giving them new opportunities to contribute financially to their own support. For example, in *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution*, historian Thomas Dublin traces how the new occupations that appeared over the course of the 19th Century, including weaving and hat making done as outwork, factory work, and teaching, changed women's lives. Although some women, like the mill girls of the 1830s and 1840s who lived in factory boarding houses, gained autonomy while living away from their families, later workers remained at home because they could not afford to leave or because their pay was needed to help support the family.[35] Expanded job opportunities

[32] Randy D. McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 31.
[33] McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 232.
[34] Significant histories on women and work include Thomas Dublin's *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution*; Alice Kessler-*Harris' Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*; Joanne J. Meyerowitz's *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1910*; and Wendy Gamber's *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*.
[35] Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 27.

came with the Civil War, as factories required more workers to keep up with wartime demands and women filled in for men in a few jobs deemed suitable for women such as government clerical work and teaching. Many women remained in or entered the paid workforce following the Civil War because they needed some means of survival when their male providers were killed or incapacitated.

As the speed of industrialization and urbanization accelerated following the conflict, many women, such as those historian Joanne Meyerowitz describes in *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*, moved to cities in search of new opportunities. Although factory work continued to be a common employment for urban women, Dublin describes how others, usually white and U.S.-born, moved into jobs created by the new technology and urbanization such as clerical work, telephone operating, or retail sales. Rural employment remained more limited, but teaching was an occupation open to single women who were soon the majority of all common school teachers.[36] The expanded education available to many Americans in the decades following the Civil War opened new employment opportunities to some women. Historian John Rury argues in *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* that "education prepared some women for relatively well-paying or high status careers in white-collar or non-manual employment."[37] Such work brought these women an authority over their own lives unknown to previous generations. Yet, single working women who were ineligible for

[36] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 207. John Rury in *Education and Social Change* argues that during the second half of the 19h century, teaching rapidly became feminized. By "1900, about 8 out of 10 teachers were women.: John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002) 77.
[37] John Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 7.

these jobs and remained with family members gained autonomy as well, as historian Kathy Peiss argues in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Exposed to new ideas in the public sphere, single working class women by the early years of the 20th Century felt that, like men, they should have "greater autonomy in their personal lives" and fought their parents for "access to and use of leisure time."[38] As a result, these women created a unique culture, separate from that of their families, often causing tensions between the young working women and their parents. This collection of "distinctive and pleasurable social practices" argues historian Nan Enstad in *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, brought women together across ethnic divides.[39]

While scholars like Thomas Dublin or Joanne Meyerowitz mention life-long single working women in their research, they typically focus on the majority - women who married and left the paid workforce before reaching the age of 30. Meyerowitz, for example, only speculates about the connection between well-paying jobs and life-long singleness. "[P]erhaps," she suggests, "some of the women with better jobs remained adrift at older ages because, as self-supporting women, they felt less compelled to marry."[40] Little consideration is ever given to women past the usual age of marriage. Instead, these historians, for the most part, study young single women for whom paid work outside the home was a temporary experience. As Dublin points out, "any autonomy these women experienced was typically short-lived as they usually soon

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[38] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 69.
[39] Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 202.
[40] Joanne J. Meyerowitz's *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1910* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 37.

moved back into the dependency of marriage."[41] This focus prevents these scholars from paying significant attention to women who remained single their entire lives.

An additional way women might strike out on their own was by attending college, examined in another literature that has connections to this project.[42] For the earliest generations of college women, according to historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz in *Campus Life*, the mere act of attending an institution of higher education was a courageous one. Attending college was not considered socially acceptable for a white middle or upper class American woman until around 1900.[43] At most coeducational colleges or universities, the pioneering female students were harassed or ignored by the male students. The female students were also typically studious and determined with clear educational goals.

The college experience, argues historian Barbara Solomon in *In the Company of Educated Women*, showed many women that they were intelligent beings who did not require masculine care to survive. College classes led many women to reexamine their values and possibly develop new ones, different from those of their parents. This experience created a difficult conundrum for new college graduates: should they apply their newly acquired skills or return to their parents' homes and to the role of the dutiful daughter preparing for marriage? They were torn between marriage and using their hard-earned education. Some highly educated women were thus faced with an agonizing

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[41] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 27

[42] Significant works on the history of women in higher education include Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's books *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* and *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* and Barbara Miller Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America.*

[43] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 197.

choice. “No one can estimate the number of women,” claimed Bryn Mawr College president M. Carey Thomas, “who remain unmarried in revolt before such a horrible alternative.”[44]

However, these historians overestimate the connection between college educations for women and lifelong singleness. While college women did remain single in larger numbers than the general population of Americans, the limited data sets these historians use inflate the negative effect attendance had on matrimony. College women married in greater numbers than previously thought and, although perhaps the most visible, did not make up a significant portion of the population of never-married women. This dissertation expands the understanding of the connections between college education and marriage among white women in the United States because it places college women within the context of the greater population of never-married women.

In summary, my dissertation contributes to several lines of historical analysis. Not only does it write women of different races and backgrounds into the history of never-married women in a previously overlooked era, it contributes to the history of marriage, women’s education, and women’s labor in the United States. Marriage and family was the path that most 19th Century women were expected to follow. Yet, women were under different pressures to marry – pressures shaped by race, ethnicity, and class. A woman’s race or ethnicity might have placed her in a situation in which marriage was unavoidable or it might have provided alternatives that made marriage less attractive. Some women, particularly educated white women from upper middle class backgrounds, were

[44] M. Carey Thomas, “Marriage and the Woman Scholar,” in *The Educated Woman in America: Selected Writings of Catharine Beecher, Margaret Fuller, and M. Carey Thomas*, ed. Barbara M. Cross (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965), 172.

economically better equipped to survive outside of marriage and might pass up a less than ideal suitor. For others, there was no acceptable partner available. By understanding how these factors shaped women's life choices, this dissertation adds to the understanding of marriage at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States.

This dissertation also expands the understanding of the connection between women in the labor force and marriage by exploring how a woman's paid employment transformed the lives paths and choices available to her. Workforce participation had a significant effect on a woman's decision to marry because if she could support herself, she would not be forced into a marriage in order to ensure survival; she could actually make a real choice. A college education frequently gave white, U.S.-born women the skills necessary to move into better-paying jobs that made such choices possible. By understanding why women in all parts of the country remained single during these years, historians gain a further understanding of the playing field and the obstacles both men and women faced when selecting a mate. By studying the factors – both economic and cultural – that led women to embrace or forego marriage one gains a clearer picture of women's life alternatives in the decades following the Civil War.

Dissertation Sources

To make arguments about the changing world of women who never married I rely on two significant sources: census data and material from the popular press. The census data used in this study was obtained through the various projects created, managed, and maintained by the Minnesota Population Center (MPC) at the University of Minnesota. Most of the census data samples used in this project were obtained through the Integrated

Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), "a national level, coherent demographic data set that includes United States census data from 1850 to 2000."[45] IPUMS is made up of carefully measured samples of the population from each census and includes all the information that the enumerators collected on each individual that has been released to the public. The data is coded in a uniform way so it is comparable across decades. It is available online, free of charge through the IPUMS web site at www.ipums.org.[46] This source provides a unique window into the lives of ordinary people at the time each census was taken. I selected dozens of pieces of information in connection with each individual in each family as well as the family unit as a whole. Information collected by census enumerators, including age, sex, marital status, relation to head of household, place of birth, occupation and race, was used to identify never-married women and learn about their lives. Family interrelationship variables created through the IPUMS project were used to help determine, for example, the composition of the never-married women's households. Census data allowed a far more diverse group of women to be included than otherwise possible.

Because of the time frame considered in this dissertation, the census data samples

Table I.1: IPUMS USA Census Data Samples Used

Chapter	Samples used
Chapter 1	1880-1930
Chapter 2	1940 and 1960
Chapter 3	1880-1930
Chapter 4	1850, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1930

[45] Catherine A. Fitch, "Marriage Timing and Life Course Transitions in the United States, 1880-2000," Manuscript for Presentation at the annual meeting of the Social Science History Association, November13-16, 2004, p. 5.

from 1850, 1870, 1880-1940, and 1960 were employed, as shown in Table I.1. No sample from 1890 census was included because that census manuscript was destroyed by fire some years ago and is not available anywhere. In a few instances, I was able to find appropriate figures from the 1890 census in the *Historical Statistics of the United States*.[47] However, in most cases I calculated rough estimates for 1890 figures by interpolating the data from 1880 and 1900.

The data for Chapter 5 was drawn from another MPC collection: The North Atlantic Population Project (NAPP). NAPP was created by the Minnesota Population Center in collaboration with the University of Ottawa, Université de Montréal, University of Essex, Statistics Iceland, National Archives of Sweden, Stockholms stadsarkiv, Umeå University, University of Bergen, and the University of Tromsø. NAPP is a machine-readable database of the complete censuses of Canada (1881), Great Britain (1881), Iceland (1870, 1880, 1901), Norway (1865, 1900), Sweden (1900), and the United States (1880). In Fall 2008, the MPC released a collection of linked data files where individuals in the IPUMS 1850-1930 U.S. census samples were linked to themselves in the NAPP complete U.S. 1880 census. I used the complete 1880 census as well as the 1880-1920 linked data sample, and the IPUMS 1880 10 percent sample as the sources for Chapter 5. Taken together, these data collections allowed me to identify women who were between 45 and 54 and never-married in 1920, examine their situation in 1880, and identify any factors in their background, different from other girls their age, that might have shaped their marital fate.

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[46] "What is the IPUMS http://usa.ipums.org/usa/intro.shtml, accessed December 12, 2006

[47] *U.S. Department of Commerce, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, part 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975). Available online at http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/ documents/CT1970p1-01.pdf. Accessed July 29, 2009.

Unless otherwise stated, when using the census data, I define a never-married woman as a woman between the ages of 45 and 54 who was listed in one of the U.S. census samples, 1880-1930, as "Never Married / Single". There were two reasons for selecting this specific age range to study. First, by age 45 most women who were going to marry had already done so. Those who married for the first time after 45 were small enough in number that they did not disrupt the statistics generated in this study. By setting the maximum age at 54, there was almost no overlap in the samples of women from census to census. A unique cohort from every census allowed comparisons across decades and generations. This age range was modified for the discussion of college women in Chapter 2 because the highest level of education completed was not recorded until 1940. Thus for that chapter, the 1940 and 1960 censuses were employed and the never married women in question were between the ages of 55 and 74. Although this made the college-educated women studied somewhat younger than the women in other chapters, the population of women who were any older was too small to base any conclusions upon.

I augmented the census data with qualitative sources related to never-married women. Most important were the newspaper collections available through ProQuest, the Library of Congress, and the Gale Databases' Nineteenth Century newspaper collections, all available online to the public or through the University of Minnesota Libraries. These databases allowed keyword searches of newspaper articles from about 1880 until 1930 from all over the United States. (A complete list of newspapers referenced in this project can be found in Appendix C.) I initially began my searches broadly with the terms "old maid," "spinster," "unmarried woman," and "bachelor girl," to gain an understanding of

the nuances of language of the time in connection with women, young, middle aged, and old, who were not married. Surprised by the hundreds of articles that turned up and the level of debate which women without husbands inspired in the popular press, I was increasingly specific in my searches and looked for references to topics like “women not married why” or “college women marriage” to limit the material available to a manageable amount. This material proved rich enough to answer numerous questions about the marital choices that many women made between 1880 and 1930.

Of particular value were the letters to the editors of the various publications, like those quoted earlier. The wide variety of topics deemed worthy of discussion in this public forum – including singleness and marriage – was astounding to me. Under pseudonyms, people felt comfortable enough to air strongly held beliefs in a way that might not have been possible in another venue. The responses or silences greeting individual letters were also telling. Naturally, the editor or editors filtered these letters to fit with the political agenda of the publication, but the letters in any given paper undoubtedly represented the points of view of one spectrum of thought in connection with the “problem” of life long single women in the United States.

What was also striking was how closely the newspaper sources mirrored what I observed as a result of my statistical tests on the census data. The U.S. census shows that there was a clear increase in the percentage of women remaining single their entire lives in the decades following the Civil War. Americans of the time recognized that fact and became increasingly concerned about what they observed around them, particularly as the increase continued and could no longer be explained by Civil War losses. Newspaper sources also highlighted the prejudices of the nation in a way that census data would have

kept invisible. Concerns about low marriage rates, for the most part, appeared in connection with white, U.S.-born women who were allegedly contributing to "race suicide" by their failure to marry. Other women, like the Irish-born who remained single at much higher rates, raised less concern. Taken together, these sources provide new insights into the realities facing never-married women between 1880 and 1930 and how strongly these concerns were tied to race and class.

Chapter Outline

As stated previously, I argue that female employment gave women an authority in their lives that made lifelong singleness imaginable and led to an increase in the percent of women remaining single their entire lives. However singleness was profoundly shaped by race and ethnicity as well as class and location. In Chapter 1, I set the stage for the rest of the project by arguing that the views of and opportunities for never-married women changed profoundly in the decades following the Civil War. As background, I examine how the views of never-married women changed significantly between the 1600s and the Civil War. Initially considered sinful or a disgrace, never-married women by the time of the Civil War were seen in many instances as necessary to smooth functioning families. In the decades following the war, the opportunities for paid employment for never-married women expanded tremendously. The U.S. census data shows that never-married women between the ages of 45 and 54 moved into the paid workforce in great numbers and into jobs that likely paid better wages than those previously available. Although white, U.S.-born women made the most gains, all white women saw increased employment options as a result of industrialization and new technology. With paid

employment, never-married women gained an authority that allowed them to make decisions that shaped their lives and perhaps the lives of others. At the same time, the percent of women who never married began to increase and continued to until the 1920s. Concerned Americans began to look for causes of this great social change.

By the early 20th century, many contemporaries blamed college educated women, at least in part, for the increase in the number of lifelong single women in the United States. Using census data, I argue in Chapter 2 that college education was not the cause of the increased rate of female singleness in the United States. College women were never more than a small percentage of the population of never-married women and had little effect on the overall increases or decreases. They also married at significantly higher rates than contemporaries or even more recent scholars believed. Instead, the increase in singleness in the United States was the result of decisions made by a far more diverse group of women.

With college women discredited as a source, Chapter 3 begins a search for other factors shaping the marital decisions of women living in the United States. Here I argue that race and ethnicity had a profound effect on a woman's marital decisions. The customs and beliefs of an ethnic or racial group shaped a woman's attitudes toward marriage and provided varying degrees of pressure to marry. Foreign-born Jewish immigrants, for example, placed a great deal of pressure on women to marry and they did in very high numbers in spite of the availability of jobs. On the other hand, marriage was less critical among the Irish-born and consequently these women married in lower numbers. The sex ratio in any specific place was also important. For example, far fewer Italian women migrated to the United States than Italian men and thus the women had

many choices for husbands and married at very high rates.

Interestingly enough, in this examination of the marriage rates within different ethnic and/or racial groups, I find that the marriage rates among white, U.S.-born women were relatively unchanged between 1880 and 1930 on the national level. However, when the marriage rates were broken down by region, great variations were discovered. I show in Chapter 4 that the rate at which white, U.S.-born women married was strongly affected by the region in which they lived. Three significant factors came into play here: the number of men available, the status of the men available, and the employment options available for women. In areas like New England or many Southern states immediately following the Civil War, many white U.S.-born women remained unmarried because there were simply not enough men to go around. However, marriage rates were far higher in places like Texas or Arizona where the white, U.S.-born men vastly outnumbered the white U.S.-born women. Additionally, in many cases, a sizable percentage of the men who remained single after the age of 45 were either not employed or were laborers of some sort and thus not desirable husbands in the eyes of many women or their parents, particularly those from the middle class, no matter the region in which they lived. These men were particularly unattractive partners in places where these same women could find decently paying jobs and at least contribute to self support. Thus the regional aspects of singleness were caused by the number of men available, the status of the available men, and the availability of employment for women that might make marriage a less attractive option.

In Chapter 5, I look at the family backgrounds of the white, U.S.-born women who never married and find that class also played into marital decisions. White, U.S.-

born women from prosperous middle class families appear to have been less inclined to marry than women from both higher and lower social groups. Their families' affluence put them in a position where they could live comfortably outside of marriage. Able to obtain better educations than women from poorer families, they could move into better-paying jobs and gain a measure of self support. Further, if they could not provide for themselves, their families could afford to support them comfortably, perhaps making marriage in some cases a less attractive option than singleness.

The late-19th century saw an increase in the number of never-married women in the United States. The expanded and more lucrative employment options that appeared in the decades following the Civil War made life outside of marriage plausible, particularly for some white women who gained personal authority as they entered the paid workforce. This led an increasing population of women in the United States to remain single their entire lives. However, singleness was not an attractive option for all women and several factors shaped which women might follow this life path. A woman's fate to remain single was strongly shaped by her race and ethnicity. Although the available jobs for women, the number of single men and the status of the single men were all very important, race and ethnicity were key. It was through these parameters that women evaluated their various options.

Chapter 1 – "In the Grip of a Great Social Change:" Lifelong Singleness and Women's Work in America[1]

> "The woman is fortunate who wasn't born a generation ago – in fact, the girls are in luck. Girls are now earning good wages, and new trades are opening to them every year."
> -- *New York Times*, April 2, 1883 [2]

On September 26, 1882, Mary Hall became the first woman lawyer in the state of Connecticut. Although she successfully passed the bar examination some time before, "the legal question of her admission [to the bar] was reserved for the [state] Supreme Court."[3] Although many challenged her right to serve, the Connecticut Chief Justice found nothing in that state's laws that prohibited women from becoming attorneys. Eight years later, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* human interest article described Hall as a "bright energetic little lady" with a successful legal practice in Hartford, Connecticut. Her clients were mostly "ladies" who she assisted by "drawing wills, leases, and other legal documents, and investigating property matters."[4] Although she remained Connecticut's only practicing female lawyer, the *Tribune* hinted that there were other women in the state who were studying law and would soon follow Hall's lead.

The world of single women in the United States changed significantly between the time of early settlement and the first decades of the 20th century. In the colonial period, American views of lifelong singleness ranged from sinful to disgraceful. Scholars have documented how these beliefs evolved in the decades following the American Revolution so that by the mid-nineteenth century, many believed that a bad marriage was

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[1] M. Carey Thomas, "Marriage and the Woman Scholar," in *The Educated Woman in America: Selected Writings of Catharine Beecher, Margaret Fuller, and M. Carey Thomas*, Barbara M. Cross, ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965) 171.
[2] "Today's Work for Working Women," *New York Times*, April 2, 1883, p. 5.
[3] "Connecticut's Woman Lawyer," *New York Times*, September 27, 1882, p. 5.
[4] "Connecticut's Sole Lady Lawyer," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1890, p. 9.

far worse than none at all.[5] The choices women faced when contemplating marriage changed further and dramatically in the years following the Civil War. The large number of men killed in the fighting made marriage for many women unlikely. Industrialization and new technology created numerous new jobs, some of which were deemed acceptable for women to fill, and women moved into the paid workforce in significant numbers. Women like Mary Hall also moved into professions that were previously reserved for men. With a successful occupation, Hall and others might build happy, useful lives without husbands. Some women even saw lifelong singleness as an acceptable if not desirable fate. As these changes occurred, there was an increase in the percent of women in the United States who remained single their entire lives. However, given the diverse population of the United States at this time as well as varying conditions across a large country, one must look beyond national statistics to understand the shifting patterns and causes of lifelong singleness among women in the United States between 1880 and 1930.

This first chapter sets the background for the rest of the dissertation and argues that views of and opportunities for never-married women in the United States changed significantly in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. This was accompanied by a rise in the number of women in the United States who remained single their entire lives. Never-

[5] See for example Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South1800-1865*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006; Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. London: Virago Press, 1985; Zsuzsa Berend, "'The Best or None!': Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England." *Journal of Social History* 33 (Summer 2000) 935-957; Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood 1865-1895*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980; Naomi Braun Rosentahl, *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002; Susan Cotts Watkins "Spinsters." *Special Issue: Spinsterhood, Journal of Family History* 9 (Winter 1984): 310-323.

married women were indeed, in the words of M. Carey Thomas, "in the grip of a great social change."[6]

Single Women in America, 1620-1865

During the early years of American settlement, free women living alone, particularly in New England, were perceived as existing in a "sinful state." Although in most places a single man might strike out on his own, unmarried women were frequently compelled to live within a household headed by a "respectable, property-holding, church-affiliated" man.[7] Single women who lived alone, either by choice or by circumstances, were often viewed with suspicion and perhaps even accused of witchcraft because they lived outside the care of a male protector and were not fulfilling society's expectations for their life roles. In spite of these views, in 1700, 5.0 to 7.5 percent of white women in New England remained single their entire lives, likely as a result of an increasingly unbalanced sex ratio.[8] By the 1760s, while singleness was no longer seen as sinful, it was not considered a viable option for most white women by either American society or the women themselves. The "Appellation of an old Made… I don't belive [sic.] one of our Sex wou'd voluntarily Bare," remarked a New York girl in 1762.[9] For many women, marriage was the only way to ensure survival. Those women who remained single were usually forced to be a dependent, sometimes an unwelcome one, in a relative's home,

[6] Thomas, "Marriage and the Woman Scholar,"171.
[7] John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) 77; Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America, The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 11.
[8] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) 205.
[9] As quoted in Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980) 41.

helping with childcare, nursing, and housework in exchange for a place to live.[10] Never-married women were more of a disgrace than an asset.[11] Even if they could find a way to be autonomous, never-married women typically remained outsiders in a society where almost everyone had a spouse.[12]

In the years following the American Revolution, views on marital status were questioned and began to change significantly in connection with women remaining single their entire lives. Americans even began to question whether marriage and motherhood was the only life path available to women. There were indeed some women for whom marriage had never truly been an option. Women with disabilities like blindness, deafness, an inability to bear children, or mental illness were considered unattractive partners. "It would be a severe handicap to any man to saddle upon him the dead weight of my infirmities," wrote Helen Keller decades later, but probably still reflecting the views of antebellum America. "I know I have nothing to give a man to make up for such an unnatural burden." [13] Although the vast majority of other women still had to marry to survive economically, Americans began to view a small number of unimpaired women who never married in a more positive light.[14] Popular literature began to portray some single women as honorable, useful, and important to smooth-functioning families, particularly women who remained single to care for "aging parents, ill siblings, and

[10] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 41.
[11] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 11.
[12] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 41-42.
[13] As quoted in Catherine Kudlock, "Modernity's Miss-Fits: Blind Girls and Marriage in France and America, 1820-1920," in *Women on their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008) 201.
[14] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 240.

orphaned nieces and nephews."[15] Single women were recognized as serving a significant role in American life.

Singleness was sometimes part of a family strategy to ensure survival of the group. A woman's contributions could come in the form of her pay, her labor at home, or both. In some instances, working women's wages constituted a significant part of their families' support. Sick parents, widows or other destitute relatives sometimes relied on unmarried women's pay to survive. In 1860, for example, Connecticut residents and sisters Mary and Hannah Wellis apparently supported their mother, Parley, as schoolteachers. Catharine Willington of Wilmington, Delaware was a dressmaker probably contributing significantly to the income of her home which she shared with her eighty year-old mother.[16] At the same time, family members saw unmarried women as having no particular work and felt free to demand their labor in an emergency. Because they were considered to be dependents, unmarried women's lives were frequently shaped by other's needs. Widowed fathers or brothers, for example, might need a housekeeper or someone to care for orphaned children. An overburdened, pregnant sister might need help caring for her home. Hannah Little of Cambridge, Massachusetts lived with her brother and probably cared for his children and several boarders. C. Miles of Missouri kept house for her father and some children who were probably her nieces and nephews.[17] Decades later reformer Jane Addams described this phenomenon, which she knew well, as the "family claim" where unmarried women were expected to be "self-forgetting and self-sacrificing," responsive to family members' requests for assistance with children,

[15] Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1880-1865*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 45-6.
[16] IPUMS 1860 census, accessed May 4, 2010
[17] IPUMS 1850 census, accessed May 4, 2010.

available to care for the sick, and otherwise ready to fill in during a crisis.[18] Marriage opportunities were sometimes missed because a woman had to meet such family commitments.[19] Those who left such family claims for other things, like a career or even marriage, sometimes ended up feeling guilty for leaving their relations behind. Only exceedingly strong women, like Addams, were able to escape such claims.

Changing views of a partner also affected a woman's marriage prospects. By the mid-19th Century white, middle-class women may have become more careful in selecting a man to marry, believing that no marriage was better than a bad one.[20] According to historian Lee Chambers-Schiller in *Liberty, a Better Husband*, "Popular culture lauded women who held high standards for prospective husbands and who vowed to remain single unless they found a mate equal to themselves in morality, integrity, courage, and learning."[21] Temperance reformer Frances Willard, for example, believed that it was "so much better to wait for years and years if we may hope to find at last the one who can be all things to the heart."[22] Thus romantic notions could make women like Willard skip marriage because they refused to settle for less than their ideal partner.

Finally, many women remained single for other personal reasons. Some women refused marriage because they feared childbirth. Others desired a relationship with a same-sex partner. Still others were determined to avoid the restrictions a husband would place on their lives. Some women opted for a career instead of marriage. Astronomer and Vassar College professor Maria Mitchell, for example, did not marry so she could be

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[18] Joyce Antler, *The Educated Woman and Professionalization: The Struggle for a New Feminine Identity 1890-1920* (New York, Garland Publishing, Inc. 1987), 158-169.
[19] Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 73.
[20] Zsuzsa Berend, "'The Best or None!': Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England." *Journal of Social History* 33 (Summer 2000): 940.
[21] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 12.
[22] As quoted in Berend, "'The Best or None!'" 938.

"more vigilant in her work."[23] These women rejected social expectations and made their own choices.

Also shaping marital decisions among mid-19th century women in the United States was the Civil War, which made lifelong singleness a reality for many women who never seriously considered it before. Because roughly one in five white men in the United States between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine were killed or wounded in the fighting, many women were unable to find partners.[24] Necessity thus made singleness a legitimate fate for many white women. Although some perceived lifelong singleness as a tragedy, others saw it as an opportunity – something, in pre-war culture, that might have been nearly impossible.[25]

With emancipation, freed African-American women gained more ability to shape their own marital fate. Although legal marriage, denied during slavery times, was now available, a master no longer had any influence in such decisions. While the vast majority eventually married, as will be shown in Chapter 3, African-American women now had the freedom to choose to remain single

Views of never-married women changed significantly between 1620 and 1865. Singleness went from being perceived as sinful to a recognized necessity for some women and their families as evolving beliefs and events changed the world in which they lived. However, the industrialization and new technology of the second half of the 19th century complicated women's choices with significant results.

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[23] As quoted in Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 60.
[24] Herbert S. Klein, *A Population History of the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 108.
[25] Jane Turner Censor, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003) 33.

Workforce Participation

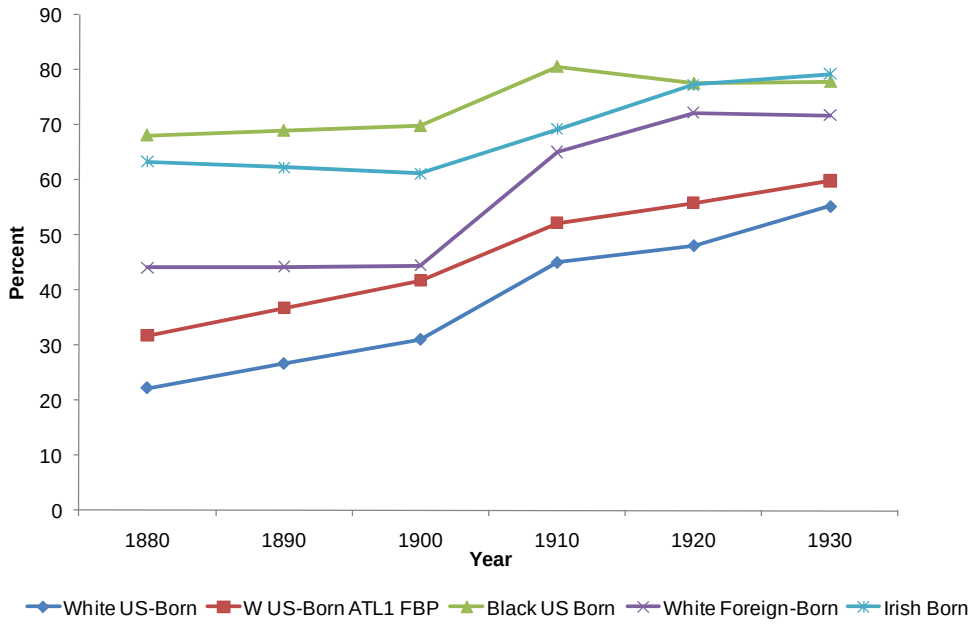
In an August 19, 1888 article, a *Minneapolis Tribune* reporter sang the praises of "Typewriter Girls," declaring in a headline that "Stenography and Letter Writing Are Vocations of Which Women Are Rapidly Taking Possession." The reporter described the duties of a "Typewriter Girl" as "[taking] letters from dictation and [transcribing] them on the typewriter." Hired by business houses and law offices, these women were proving an "undisguised blessing" to their employers and fit into the office setting "as naturally as any of the other clerks." Although women were warned that these skills required a great deal of preparation and practice to gain speed and accuracy, skilled stenographers and typewriter operators could earn as much as $90 a month![26]

Following the Civil War, industrialization, new technology, and urbanization brought significant social change to all Americans. In "the late 1800s and early 1900s, new technology and new forms of industrial organization altered the structure of work."[27] An increasing number of goods and products were mass-produced in factories instead of made at home. New inventions changed how goods were made, frequently using machines tended by unskilled or semi-skilled workers who only learned one step of the manufacturing process. Other inventions like typewriters and telephones further revolutionized how people communicated both on and off the job. While these changes restricted the freedom and economic possibilities for many Americans, like skilled male craftsmen, others gained new opportunities. New jobs became available to working-class

[26] "Typewriter Girls," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 19, 1888, p. 13.
[27] Alice Kessler Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 142.

women as factories sought an additional, formerly underutilized, labor source. The new technology created occupations like typing and telephone operating that drew middle-class or upwardly mobile working-class women into the paid workforce. Advances in educational opportunities opened some professions to women that were previously reserved for men. Some educated women professionalized other jobs. This expansion of the workforce brought mature never-married women unprecedented opportunities for paid employment not possible for previous generations.

Figure 1.1: Percent of Never-Married Women in Paid Workforce, by Ethnic/Racial Group (1880-1930)



Source: IPUMS

As shown in Figure 1.1, thousands of never-married women took advantage of these opportunities.[28] Workforce participation for never-married women of all groups

[28] Figure 1.1 was calculated by first separating population of never-married women into five ethnic/racial groups: white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents; white U.S.-born women with one or more foreign-born parents; U.S.-born African-American women; white foreign-born women; and Irish-born women. Then, the number of gainfully employed never-married women in each group was counted and divided by

increased between 1880 and 1930. Although these gains were neither steady nor at the same rate across racial and ethnic lines, more women of each category were working at the end of this fifty-year period than at the beginning.

In 1880, white, U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents were the women least likely to be in the paid workforce with only 22.3 percent listed in the U.S. census as employed outside the home. (See Figure 1.1) Born between 1825 and 1835, gender expectations and the limited education available when these women were children probably worked against their moving easily into paid employment. The majority of these women who worked outside the home in 1880 filled jobs that were typically performed by women. Of those working, the largest groups were domestic servants like Connecticut housekeeper Delia Woodhouse (23.3 percent), seamstresses like Washington, D.C. dressmaker Rebecca Wise (21 percent), or teachers like Michigan resident Mary J. Hemmingway (12.7 percent). However, workforce participation by white U.S.-born never-married women with U.S.-born parents increased fairly steadily over the next half-century, more than doubling by 1930, with 55.3 percent now claiming employment. These better educated women also largely abandoned domestic and needle work for higher status, frequently better paying professional and clerical work with approximately half of these working women so employed. Most professional women were still teachers like Elizabeth Gallinger of Niagara, New York or Osma Newton from rural North Carolina. However, others were physicians like Mable Seagrave of Seattle, Washington or librarians like Texan Ida Pemington. In spite of their great gains, white, U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents remained the least likely of all women in the

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the total number of never-married women from that ethnic/racial group; the results were graphed. Note the category white foreign-born women does not include women who were born in Ireland.

United States to hold paid employment outside the home.

White, U.S.-born never-married women with at least one foreign-born parent made gains similar to white U.S.-born never-married women with U.S.-born parents as shown in Figure 1.1. While the never-married women with foreign-born parents were always employed at a rate approximately 5-10 percent higher than those with U.S.-born parents, they also showed a significant increase, with their workforce participation growing from 31.8 percent 1880 to 59.9 percent in 1930. Additionally, they also made a decided move from employment in domestic service and needlework into clerical and professional positions. However, while the majority of the white, never-married women with one foreign-born parent were professionals (teachers) by 1930, those with two foreign-born parents remained slightly more likely to be factory operatives.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, conditions were such that many white U.S.-born women were both pushed and pulled into paid employment. The Civil War created a population of women, particularly in the South, who needed to support themselves when their usual male provider was killed in the fighting.[29] A wide variety of jobs, including factory work, clerical work, and social work, opened to "respectable" women, increasing their choices for paid work outside the home. Changing educational requirements in the United States created a need for more teachers and at the same time gave women the skills for a wider variety of jobs. Teaching also became a steadier, more reliable occupation. The country schools of the 19th century with frequently changing teachers and sporadic three-month terms gradually gave way to graded, consolidated schools with nine-month terms and permanent, better paid teachers. At home, changes in

[29] Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work,* 81.

technology, such as electricity and gas stoves, coupled with an increased consumption of factory-made rather than home-manufactured goods, reduced the number of women required to maintain a home, freeing grown, unmarried daughters to take jobs. While some women remained at home out of respect to the "social customs of their class", by the 1880s many unmarried women began to look outside the home for employment.[30]

Workforce participation by white, foreign-born[31] never-married women also increased between 1880 and 1930. The paid employment of Irish-born women grew from 63.4 to 79.3 percent between 1880 and 1930 while that of other white foreign-born women jumped from 44.1 to 71.8 percent over the same decades. Although the culture of their birth-country affected which women worked outside the home and to what extent, these statistics reveal how central employment became in these women's lives. Irish women, for example, frequently came to the United States without their families and needed to work to eat. They also often sent money back to Ireland to assist family members. Most other white foreign-born women came to America as part of a family group and were less likely to be gainfully employed, as shown in Figure 1.1.[32] With other relatives in the U.S., white foreign-born women might not need to support themselves or have other responsibilities that kept them in the home. However, because immigrants as a group usually had fewer resources to rely on than white women born in the United States, significantly more foreign-born women were in the paid workforce than white U.S.-born.

The majority of working, white, foreign-born, never-married women were

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[30] Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work*, 113.
[31] It is impossible to draw any conclusions about the population of non-white foreign-born never-married women because there are fewer than 20 such individuals in any given year of the IPUMS 1880-1930 census samples.
[32] Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland: 1885-1920* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1989) 69.

domestic servants throughout this period. Data from the U.S. census shows that although the values fluctuated from decade to decade, approximately 36 to 48 percent of Irish women and 19 to 26 percent of other European-born never-married women were servants between 1880 and 1930. Until 1930, factory work remained the second most popular occupation for European-born women, both Irish and non-Irish, with between 9 and 17 percent of never-married, white, foreign-born working women so employed. However, like U.S.-born women, employment options for white foreign-born never-married women changed during this period.

Between 1880 and 1930, European-born never-married women gained access to white-collar work in spite of the tremendous odds stacked against them. Initially, many immigrants were shut out of such work. Some did not read, write, or speak English well; others were not sufficiently assimilated to American culture to be considered attractive employees.[33] Office work and teaching required at least some high school and frequently additional, specialized training.[34] Many families could not afford to have their daughters continue their education when a factory job would allow them to contribute to the family income immediately.[35] White-collar as well as department store work also frequently required a more expensive wardrobe than domestic service or factory work and parents sometimes balked at the outlay.[36] However, between 1880 and 1930, changes occurred that contributed to a shift to white-collar work. Laws began to further limit child labor

[33] Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate*, 1870-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 127.
[34] Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, *Young Working Girls: A Summary of Evidence from Two Thousand Social Workers* (Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1913), 27.
[35] John L. Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 108.
[36] Louise Montgomery, *The American Girl in the Stockyards District* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1913), 58-9

and forced parents to keep their children in school longer. After 1900, many high schools began to offer classes in typing, shorthand, and other clerical skills that previously had only been available at business colleges, bringing these skills within reach of poorer Americans. Teachers' colleges and normal schools became more affordable and more common. Thus, more and more foreign-born women were able to get additional schooling and move into these jobs.[37] By 1930, the percent of all employed, white foreign-born never-married women who were listed in the U.S. census as in professional or clerical fields had grown from the 6.3 percent of 1880 to 21 percent.[38] Most of the foreign-born professional women were teachers, but, unlike the U.S.-born never-married professional women, there were also a significant number of nurses and religious workers.

Although Irish-born women became the most likely of all never-married women to be in the paid workforce, prior to 1930 they were surpassed by African-American never-married women, due at least in part to the economic disadvantages endured by black people. As shown in Figure 1.1, 68.1 percent of never-married African-American women worked for wages in 1880; this percent grew very slowly until after 1900, when it increased to 80.8 by 1910, dropping off slightly to approximately 78 percent by 1920, where it remained through 1930. Custom and necessity forced black women into the workforce, unlike white women where custom kept them out. During slavery times, almost all enslaved black women were forced to work for people other than their own families. After emancipation, African-American men hoped they could earn enough

[37] Zunz, *Making America Corporate*, 127; Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 194; John L. Rury, *Education and Women's Work*, 21, 148-9.
[38] 75 percent or more of the foreign-born never-married women appearing in the IPUMS census samples, 1880-1930, had lived in the United States for at least sixteen years.

money to allow their wives and daughters to remain at home. However, the meager wages paid most black men forced other family members, including available women, to take paid work to add to the family income. Many never-married black women probably had to work in order to eat or not burden cash-strapped families.[39]

The majority of working never-married black women were domestic servants with 35 to 51 percent so employed over the course of this 50-year period. Service was one of the few lines of work open to them in the United States and as white women left domestic service for other occupations, more servant positions became available.[40] When employment as a domestic servant proved unsatisfactory or unavailable, many never-married African-American women turned to work as laborers, especially those living in rural areas in the South. Like domestic service, farm labor was a carryover from slavery days. Although the women tried to escape this work, economic pressure and coercion from groups like the Ku Klux Klan forced them to return to the fields. The number of never-married African-American women employed as farm laborers was probably higher than that recorded in the census as some of these women were employed by family members and thus not seen by the census enumerators as in the paid workforce. However, the percent of black women working as laborers declined between 1880 and 1930, from 22 to 13 percent.

Few never-married black women were able to enter other types of employment. The census shows that less than 2 percent practiced any profession during this period. Racial discrimination prevented black women from getting the training necessary for

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[39] Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997) 120-1.
[40] Evans, *Born for Liberty,* 113; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 167.

professional work or, if they got the training, from advancing like white women. Black social workers were needed in Richmond, Virginia, but there were no women sufficiently educated to hire.[41] Discriminatory practices in the nursing field kept trained black nurses from getting jobs.[42] Some black women worked in factories, but that was predominantly to cover labor shortages, such as those during the First World War. Even when employed, black women usually worked under adverse conditions, doing the work nobody else wanted to do for poor pay and little chance of advancement.[43] Up until 1910, only about 3 percent of African-American never-married women worked in factories rising to 6.97 percent in 1920. By 1930, this had shrunk to less than 1 percent, probably as a result of downsizing following World War I and the onset of the Depression.

Between 1880 and 1930, many never-married women of all races entered paid employment. While the numbers differed from group to group, all saw growth between 1880 and 1930, particularly white, U.S.-born women with U.S. born parents. White women all over the United States also moved out of low-status work into pink- and white-collar occupations and professions while African-American women remained locked in domestic service. Employment frequently led women out of the often narrow confines of home, exposed them to new ideas and values, and sometimes led them to break with customs of their parents.[44] The earnings generated by these never-married women gave them, at minimum, a way to contribute to their own support.

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[41] *The Negro in Richmond, Virginia: The Report of the Negro Welfare Survey Committee (*Richmond: The Richmond Council of Social Agencies, 1929), 96.
[42] Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 93.
[43] Carole Marks, *Farewell – We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 131; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 137.
[44] Montgomery, *The American Girl in the Stockyards District*, 60

Work and Authority

> "The pay envelope – at once the supreme symbol and potent instrument of newly gained power – and the whole realm of fresh experience that grows out of entrance into industry unite to create a revolution in the girl's attitude toward herself and toward life. Her personality expands with almost startling rapidity; and her opinion of herself as an independent and all-conquering being is reinforced by evident material accomplishment."[45]

In their 1913 study *Young Working Girls: A Summary of Evidence from Two Thousand Social Workers*, (quoted above) authors Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy claimed that entrance into the paid workforce brought young women a sense of "independence" or autonomy. It changed their attitudes in connection with their homes, families, and the world in general. A working woman grew to accept the standards of her peers instead of her family, demanded freedom from home regulations, and "justifi[ed] herself by the claim 'I am earning my own living and can do as I please.'"[46] At the same time, the members of her household looked upon her differently as well. She was now a more powerful member of the group and respected as a "self-supporting individual."[47]

Wood's and Kennedy's description of the "independence" of working women seems overstated, reflecting perhaps the exuberance of a teenager entering the workforce for the first time rather than reality. However, these young girls seem to have gained some power within their households, although perhaps only as the result of parents placating working daughters by allowing them social autonomy in exchange for the unopened pay envelope, as described by Kathy Peiss in *Cheap Amusements* and the social workers interviewed by Woods and Kennedy.[48] Did older never-married women gain

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[45] Woods and Kennedy, *Young Working Girls*, 34.
[46] Woods and Kennedy, *Young Working Girls*, 37.
[47] Woods and Kennedy, *Young Working Girls*, 37.
[48] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986)

authority in their homes as they entered the paid workforce or was this only a luxury of the young?

Without detailed information about specific forty-five to fifty-four year-old never-married women, it is impossible to determine with certainty if entry into the paid workforce increased the authority they held in their lives or homes. However, census data allows the identification of women who were head of their household, the only wage earner in the household, or employed and living separate from family (HSS).[49] While there is no exact way to measure authority or control, these household and employment statuses do offer some clues. In any of these roles, a never-married woman likely held some authority over her life and perhaps over the lives of others. This estimation probably includes women who had little authority in their lives and home and overlooks others who were quite powerful. However, a woman who was HSS probably held enough power to convince any other members of her household to consider her wishes seriously.

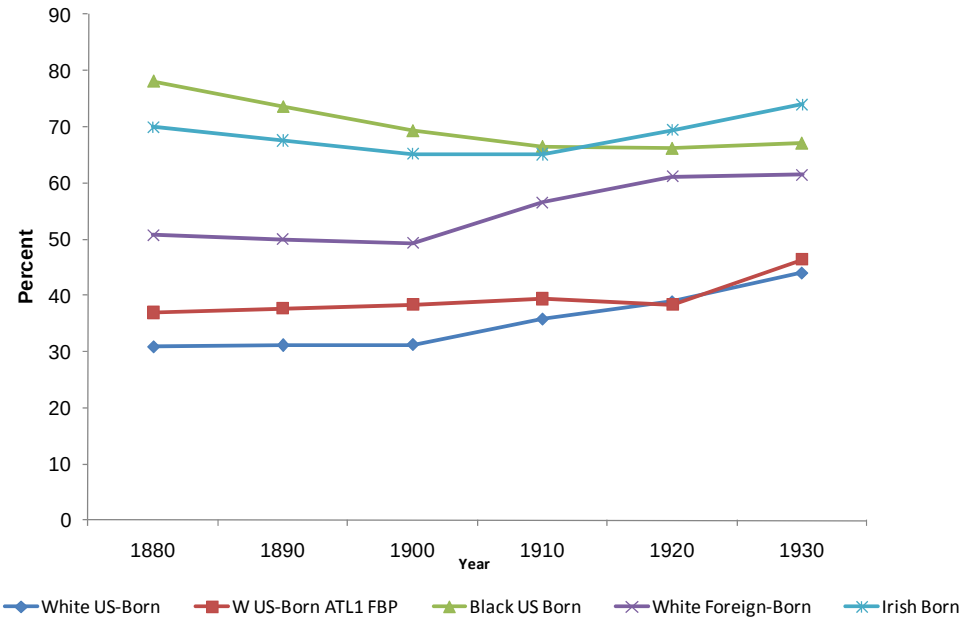
Figure 1.2 illustrates the changing percentages of women who were HSS between 1880 and 1930.[50] As shown, all white women made overall gains. While this growth was not always steady or consistent, each was higher in 1930 than in 1880. On the other hand, far fewer African-American women were HSS at the end of the period than at the

HSS stands for Head, Supporting, or Separate. Women who are described as HSS are listed in one of the IPUMS U.S. census samples, 1880-1930, as head of her household, the only wage earner in her family's household, employed and living separate from family, or some combination thereof. HSS is used to estimate the increasing personal authority or power a woman might have gained over her own life and decisions as she entered the paid workforce.

[49] See textbox for a fuller description of HSS.
[50] To calculate the figures displayed on this graph, first, never-married women who were head of their household, only wage earner in the household, or working and living separate from family (HSS) were

beginning. However, as will be discussed later, African-American never-married women actually gained control over their own lives during these years, but in ways driven more by social than economic changes.

Figure 1.2: Percent of Never-Married Women who were HSS, by Ethnic/Racial Group, 1880-1930



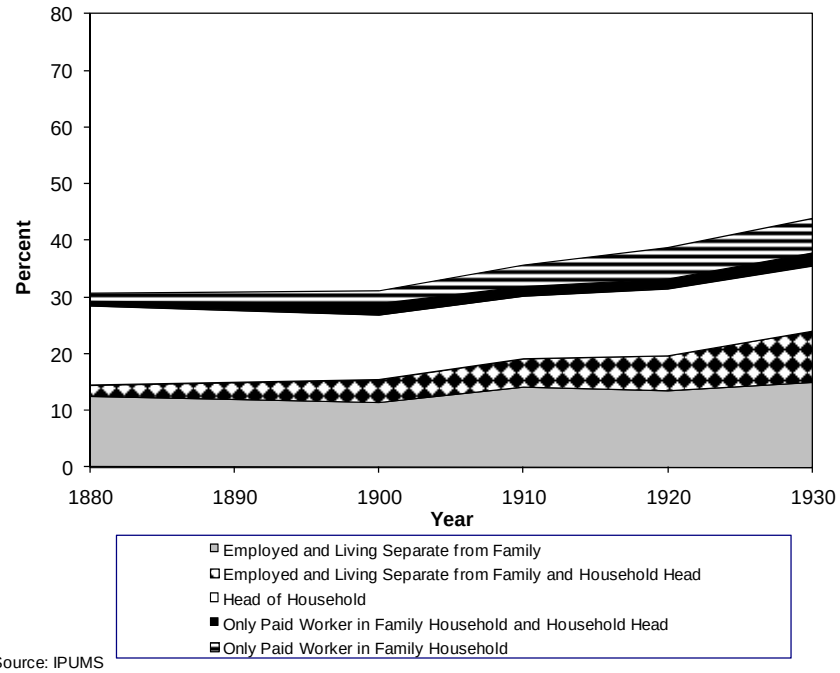
Source: IPUMS

White U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents made the greatest overall gains in the percent that were HSS during this fifty year period, as shown in Figure 1.2. While often the most likely of all never-married women to have a seemingly dependent position in someone else's household, the portion of these women who were HSS grew by over 13 percent from 30.84 to 44.02 percent between 1880 and 1930. This growth was particularly pronounced after 1900, the same time that large numbers of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents moved into the paid workforce.

Because it is instructive to see exactly where these gains came, this estimation of

identified. Then the number of never-married women who were HSS from each racial or ethnic group was divided by the total number of never-married women in that group. The results are plotted in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.3: Percent of White U.S.-Born Never-Married Women with U.S. Born Parents who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

authority was broken into its individual components to discover where the most change occurred. However, in doing so, it was discovered that the household head category overlapped with the other two. Therefore, these HSS overlaps were separated into their own categories, creating five in all: only paid worker in the household; only paid worker in the household and household head; household head; employed and living separate from family; and employed, living separate from family and household head.[51] Figure 1.3 illustrates the percent of white, U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents in each.[52]

[51] Note that the women who are described as only the household head are listed in the census as being neither in the paid workforce nor living with family members.

[52] To calculate the figures displayed on this graph, I first identified the white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents who were only paid worker in the household; only paid worker in the household and household head; household head; employed and living separate from family; and employed, living separate from family and household head. Then the number of women in each category was divided by the total number of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents. The results are plotted in Figure C.2. Note that

The increase in the percent of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents who were HSS was primarily the result of growth in three categories: only wage earner in the household; only wage earner and household head; and working, living separate from family, and household head. Women who were the only wage earner in the family household steadily grew from 1.4 to 6.1 percent between 1880 and 1930, and from 2.3 to 8.4 percent for women who were both head of their own household and only wage earner. (Taken together, this was an increase from 3.7 to 14.5 percent.) Such women included Alabama farmer and household head Abby Robinson who probably supported her aunt Mory (Mary?) Morgan, as well as Connecticut nurse Lanna Merchant who apparently provided for her mother Mary. Also making steady gains was the percent of working white, U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents who were household head and living separate from family, like Illinois teacher Alice Shaffer or Mississippi farmer Eliza Chambers. This grew from 1.9 percent to 9.0 percent between 1880 and 1930. The percent of working, white, U.S.-born, never-married women of U.S.-born parents who lived separate from family also grew between 1880 and 1930. Starting at 12.62 percent in 1880, it fell to 11.54 by 1900, but rebounded to a high of 15.07 by 1930. The percent of women who were solely the household head showed no significant change during this period.

The categories in which most of the growth in the percent of white U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents who were HSS occurred were directly tied to paid workforce participation. The percent of women who were the only wage earner in the household; only wage earner and household head; or working, living separate from

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when these statistics are plotted this way, the top of the plot matches the line seen for white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents in Figure C.1.

family, and household head together grew by 17.9 percent between 1880 and 1930 – a significant increase – offsetting fluctuations in other HSS categories. While some women had always filled such roles, the new jobs available to "respectable" women allowed more white, U.S.-born never-married women to move into these positions and thus gain authority within their household. As an employed household head or the only wage earner in a home, a 45 – 54 year old never-married woman likely made significant decisions that shaped her own life and perhaps the lives of any people who might live with her. Thus workforce participation combined by the changes in household roles indicated by HSS made possible the authority of these white U.S.-born never-married women.

For some, this meant an expansion of the "family claim." During the 19th and early-20th centuries, never-married women were frequently bound by what Jane Addams referred to as the "family claim", something she experienced firsthand. Unmarried women were expected to "have no motive larger than a desire to serve her family" and thus be responsive to family members' requests for assistance with children, available to care for the sick, and otherwise ready to fill in during a crisis.[53] The expanded employment opportunities that opened to unmarried women seem to have added an economic facet to the family claim. Some never-married women were now required to support aged, orphaned, infirmed or other needy relatives financially. The statistics above show an increasing number of U.S.-born never-married women with U.S.-born parents who lived with family members and were the only wage earner in their household. Mississippi dressmaker Letitia King probably contributed to the support of her widowed

[53] Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964) 74.

sister and the sister's children and Missouri teacher Laura Johnson probably supported her mother.[54] This phenomenon was not unnoticed by contemporaries. A 1921 study of the financial resources of retired or soon-to-be-retired teachers revealed that 80 percent of the women interviewed spent at least part of their earnings caring for dependents.[55] The *New York Times* carried an article in 1924 about unmarried women supporting relatives, noting that many an unmarried woman had "moved all the way from her historic dependence on the male of her blood to the extreme of extending support to her kin, male and female."[56] Some family members recognized this increase in status because more and more of these working never-married women were also the named the head of their households in the U.S. census. Iowa tailor Rebeca Deal was head of a household containing her five sisters, none of whom were in the paid workforce. Michigan dressmaker Rebecca Primrose was head of the household she shared with her aged mother. Thus paid employment altered the role of some never-married U.S.-born women from family dependent to economic provider with a subsequent increase in status. Although these women remained tied to family responsibility, they also gained authority as they entered the paid workforce because their position as the only wage earner within the household made them a powerful member of the group.

The changes in the percent of women who were working and living separate from family (but who were not head of the household) reflects the move of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents out of domestic service. The decline from 1880 to 1900

[54] 1900 IPUMS census data sample
[55] Lucile Eaves, PhD, *Old Age Support of Women Teachers: Provisions for Old Age made by Women Teachers in the Public Schools of Massachusetts* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1921), 31.
[56] "New Women, Old Style" *New York Times* Feb. 17, 1924, p. E6.

mirrors the movement of white, U.S.-born women away from domestic service which frequently forced them to live separate from their own families. The percent working and living separate from family increased again after 1900 as white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents began to move into professional or clerical occupations and earned enough to live on their own, here as lodgers, boarders, or roommates. In 1880, 42.1 percent of women working and living separate from family were domestic servants and 7.4 percent were professional or clerical; by 1930 only 19.9 percent were domestic servants and 52.0 percent were professional or clerical. Professional or clerical workers with good salaries had more say in where they would live and thus likely had more control over their own lives than those in domestic service.

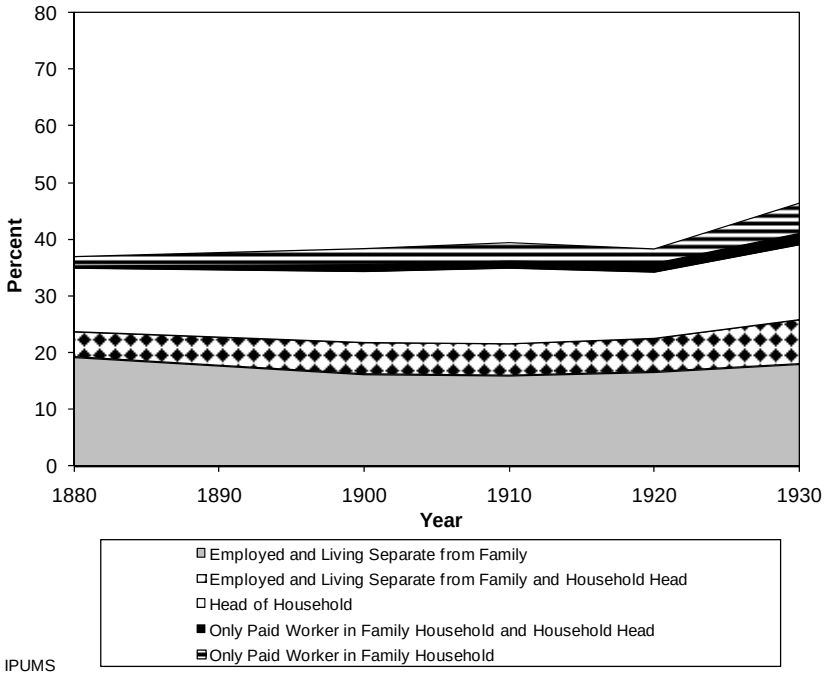
Other never-married women who earlier might have been boarders, used the money earned through the new and better paying jobs to move into their own residences. White U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents were increasingly described in the census as head of their own household, a phenomenon that supports conclusions drawn by historian Joanne Meyerowitz in *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago*. In examining the potential accommodations for single women in the city, Meyerowitz discovers that "women adrift" preferred "contractual tenant relations" over the family boarding house. "[A] woman who lodged in a private family could expect to be watched and sometimes judged by the family she lived with." A person in such a boarding house, according to one Chicago working woman, "may never have any privacy." [57] As they became available in the early 20th century, women showed a decided preference for apartments, if they could afford them. While expensive, a small apartment

[57] Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 75,

gave a working woman more control over her own life than some boarding house arrangements. Of the U.S.-born never-married women listed in the 1880-1930 censuses who were head of their own households, 68-73 percent lived all alone and approximately 90 percent lived alone or with only one or two other people, typically boarders, lodgers, or servants.

The percents of white U.S.-born never-married women with foreign-born parents, both Irish and otherwise, who were HSS, also increased during this period as shown in Figure 1.2, although less than those of women with U.S.-born parents. At 36.99 percent in 1880, the percent grew to 39.45 percent by 1910, dropped slightly to 38.34 percent by 1920, and rebounded to 46.42 percent by 1930, a 9.43 percent gain overall for the 50-year period. Although U.S.-born never-married women with foreign-born parents were initially 6 to 7 percent more likely be in one of these roles than women with U.S.-born

Figure 1.4: Percent of White U.S.-Born Never-Married Women with Foreign-Born Parents who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

parents in 1880, this gap shrank after 1900 and by 1920 was non-existent.

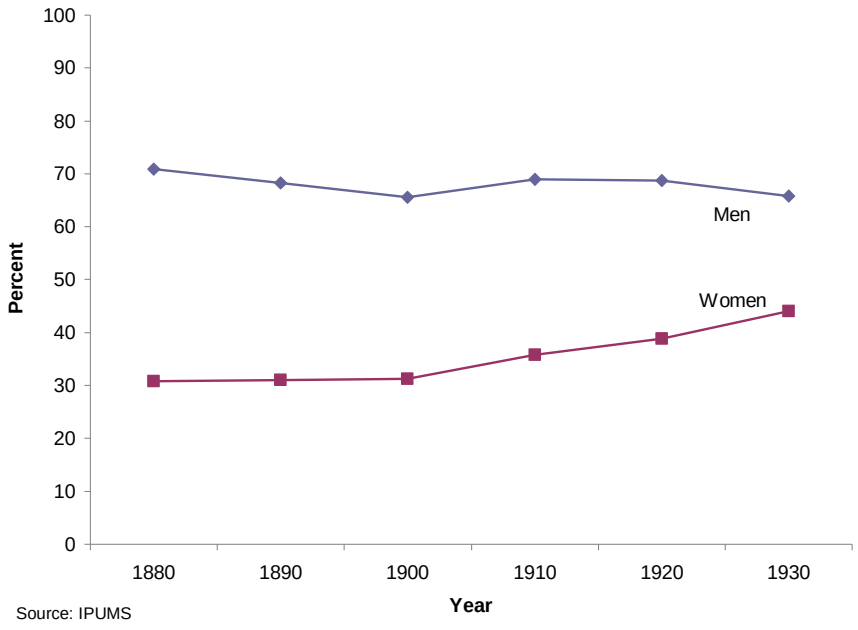
An examination of the categories of HSS, as shown in Figure 1.4, reveals that as with U.S.-born never-married women with U.S.-born parents, the U.S.-born never-married women with foreign-born parents experienced the greatest change in the only paid worker in the household; only paid worker in household and head of household; and employed, living separate from family, and household head categories. The percent of women who were the only paid worker in the household grew from 1.64 to 5.35 percent as the only paid worker in the household and head of household grew from 0.41 to 2.02 percent. (Together this was an increase from 2.05 to 7.37 percent, about half the growth of white, U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents.) Employed women who were living separate from family and head of their own household also grew from 4.38 to 7.76 percent. Women who were head of their own household or employed and living separate from family remained relatively unchanged between 1880 and 1930.

While more and more white U.S.-born never-married women appear to have gained power within their own lives and households between 1880 and 1930, it is important to place these figures in context. Without knowing what was possible, it is hard to know if an increase from 30.8 to 44.0 percent for white U.S.-born never-married women with U.S.-born parents who were HSS and from 37.0 to 46.4 percent for those with foreign-born parents who were HSS were high or low rates. These women probably wanted the same opportunities as their brothers. It is therefore valuable to compare the percent of never-married women who were HSS with the percent of never-married men from similar backgrounds who were HSS. Figure 1.5 thus compares U.S.-born never-married women, ages 45-54, of U.S.-born parents, with their male counterparts and

Figure 1.6 compares U.S.-born never-married women, ages 45-54, of foreign-born parents, with their male counterparts.

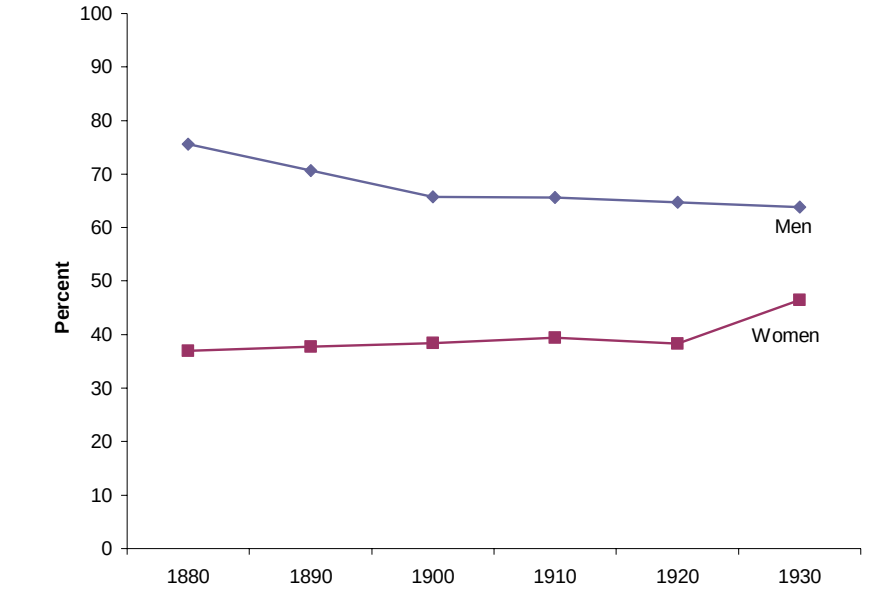
As illustrated in Figure 1.5, white U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents made significant progress in closing the gap between the percent HSS attained by themselves and that enjoyed by their male counterparts. Apart by just over 40 percent in 1880, the gap shrank by almost half to 21.77 in 1930. And, while the percent of white U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents who were HSS increased overall between 1880 and 1930, the percent of their male counterparts who were HSS decreased by 5.1 percent. Thus, as well as gaining authority in their own lives during this period, by this estimation, women also closed the gap between what was possible for men and for themselves.

Figure 1.5: Percent of White US-Born Never-Married Men and Women of US-Born Parents who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

Figure 1.6: Percent of White US-Born Never-Married Men and Women of Foreign-Born Parents who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

Similar to the white U.S. born-never-married women with U.S.-born parents, the percent of white U.S. born-never-married women with foreign-born parents who were HSS also grew closer to that of their male counterparts as illustrated in Figure 1.6. Separated by 38.60 percent in 1880, it was more than halved by 1930 to 17.41 percent with again women's percent HSS increasing as the men's decreased. Thus, white U.S.-born women of foreign-born parents made significant inroads on the potential authority held by their male counterparts, by this estimation.

Although the U.S. census indicates that some white, U.S.-born women gained authority over their own lives by this estimation between 1880 and 1930, the status of other women, of both U.S. and foreign-born parents, is harder to evaluate. Some never-married women lived in a household with a male head, were out of the paid workforce or in some other situation which excluded them from the estimation used above. As a result

it is harder to evaluate how much power they actually held to shape their own lives and how it might have changed during this period.

Louisa May Alcott is a good example of how paid employment could significantly enhance a woman's power to manage her own life, even if she does not fit the estimation used here. In the 1880 census, Alcott was listed as a 49-year old never-married "Authoress" living with her father, sister Anna, two nephews Fred and John, and a servant. Her father, the head of the household, was also in the paid labor force, described as a "Lecturer and Teacher".[58] Thus, Alcott was not living separate from family, the only paid worker in the household, or its head. She was also, according to her diary, bound by the "family claim". She was required to run the house when her sister Anna broke her leg in 1878 and in 1880 became the primary caregiver for her niece Louisa May Nieriker after the baby's mother, Alcott's sister May, died. However, because Alcott's father did not manage money well, even in the best of times, Alcott provided most of the economic support for her family. In 1872, she recorded that she was "paid $4,400 as six months' receipts for the books.... [I] invested $3000, and the rest I put in the bank for family needs. Paid for the furnace and all the bills."[59] In 1879 she mentioned that she "Put a fence around A[nna]'s garden. Bought a phaeton so I might drive ... & father loves to take his guests about."[60] As a mature woman with money of her own, even more than most men earned at that time, she had more power within the household than a never-married daughter without paid work might have otherwise held. Alcott also made significant decisions shaping the lives of various family members. "As

[58] NAPP data, full 1880 census, http://www.nappdata.org/napp/index.shtml
[59] Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, eds. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. (Athens, GA, The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 182.
[60] Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, 215.

Father wants to go west, I decide to hire Cousin L. W.'s house furnished for the winter." She then spent the next month coping with a "hard mixed up family," a wreck of a house, and the numerous repairmen needed to make the place livable for herself and the children.[61] Alcott also recorded several instances at least as early as 1867, when she left her family to stay in Boston to escape home cares and write. In November 1879 she recorded that she "Went to Boston for a month...Take my room at the Bellevue & go about a little. Write on *J[ack] & J[ill]*."[62] She was similarly there in April 1880 and October 1882, but was apparently never willing or able to separate herself from her family permanently. Although Alcott was bound by the family claim, she was by no means dependent. Family needs and responsibilities weighed heavy upon her. Yet, because she had her own financial resources she was able to significantly shape her life and the lives of people around her.

The U.S. census reveals a significant number of U.S.-born, seemingly dependent, never-married women who, like Alcott, were also earning money of their own. Between 1880 and 1930, the percent of these women in the paid workforce approximately tripled, from 11.9 to 33.8 percent for U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents and 13.1 to 40.2 percent for those with foreign-born parents. These women included Jannette Merritt who lived in rural California with her brother, his wife, six of their children, and one of their grandchildren. Although Merritt may have helped care for the children, as a teacher, she also probably contributed to her own support and was not entirely bound by the family claim. Sisters Sarah and Susan Fair were dressmakers and shared a home in rural Alabama. Susan, the elder, was named household head. However, since both women

[61] Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, 228.
[62] Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, 217.

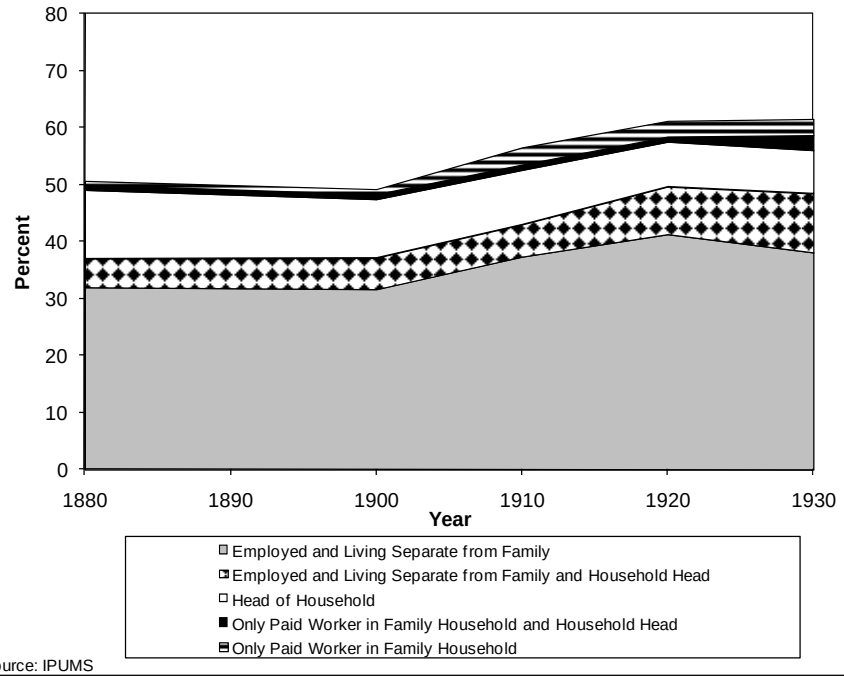
worked, it is unlikely that Sarah was any more dependent on sister Susan than Susan was on her. While these women continued to live with family members, they now contributed to their own support. Paid employment may have given them increased power both at home and in the workplace.

Probably more typical than Alcott was a woman like Eleanor Burns, a "saleswoman of silks in one of the stores in the Lexington Market District" of Baltimore, Maryland. When her father's health and business failed, her "brother was ready and able to carry on the home," but Eleanor and her sister had to provide for themselves. Together the two women made "$25 a week, enough to maintain them and to be of material assistance of the home."[63] While Burns was not living separate from family, she supported herself and contributed funds to the support of her father and the household. Paid work made Burns a self-supporting and probably a more powerful member of the household, thus increasing her personal authority.

Increased workforce participation and a shift in the types of employment they held may also have helped white, foreign-born, never-married women gain authority over their own lives during this period. Like white U.S.-born women, the percent of non-Irish, foreign-born never-married women who were HSS grew between 1880 and 1930 from 50.73 to 61.47 percent, an increase of 10.74 percent, as shown in Figure 1.2. Further, these figures were at least 10 percent higher than those of their U.S.-born counterparts. The gains made by the foreign-born never-married women were particularly pronounced between 1900 and 1920, the same time these women made the greatest gains in workforce participation.

[63] Elizabeth Beardsley Butler, *Saleswomen in Mercantile Stores: Baltimore, 1909* (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1912), 148-9.

Figure 1.7: Percent of White Foreign-Born Never-Married Women who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

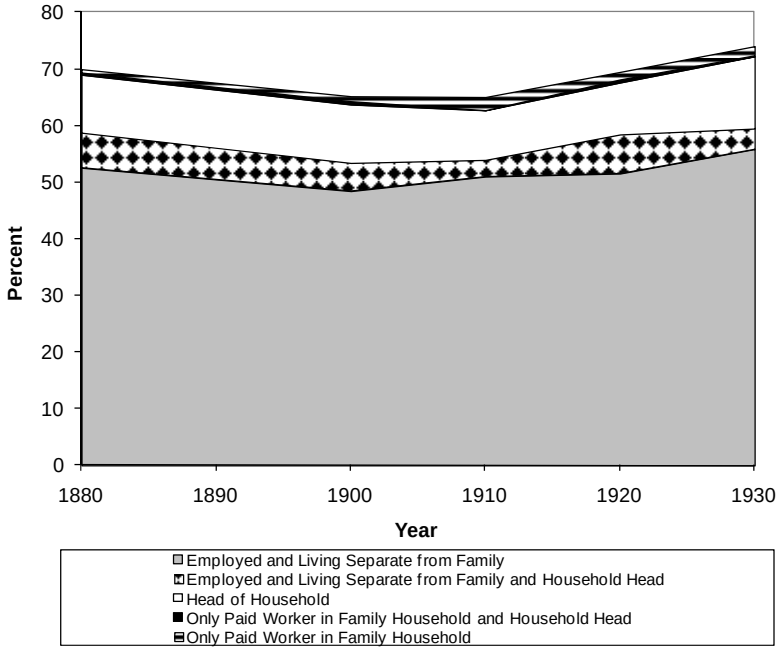
Figure 1.7 illustrates how foreign-born, non-Irish never-married women's authority within their household breaks out into the five relevant HSS categories. The resulting distribution is somewhat different from that of U.S.-born women. First, far more foreign-born, non-Irish never-married women were employed and living separate from family; at about 32 percent through 1900, the percent increased to 41.4 percent by 1920, but dropped to 38.2 percent by 1930. This rate is one-and-a-half to twice that of U.S.-born women. The percent of working foreign-born women who lived separate from family and were head of their own household steadily increased from 1880 to 1930, more than doubling from 5.0 to 10.3 percent. This too was higher than the level reached by U.S.-born women. However, foreign-born never-married women were less likely than U.S.-born women to be the only paid worker in the family household, growing from 0.63 to 2.8 for only worker and 1.04 to 2.6 percent for only worker and head of household.

Finally, the percent of foreign-born women who were solely the household head declined during this period, similar to U.S.-born women, but from 11.95 to 7.93 percent.

Irish-born never-married women were far more likely than all other white or, by 1920, black never-married women to be HSS, as shown in Figure 1.2. Yet at the same time there was less growth in their power over their own lives by the HSS estimation, probably because the percent of Irish-born never-married women who were in these situations was already quite high. In 1880, no less than 69.9 percent of Irish-born never-married women were HSS. This percent actually decreased to 65.1 percent between 1880 and 1910, probably reflecting the movement of some Irish-born women out of domestic service into other work that allowed them to live with family. It began to increase again after 1910, reaching 73.94 percent by 1930, a total increase of 4.03 percent since 1880. By 1930, Irish-born never-married women were the most likely of all never-married women – black or white, U.S. or foreign-born – to have authority over their own lives by this estimation.

As shown in Figure 1.8, it is immediately apparent that more Irish-born never-married women were wage earning and living separate from family than any other group of never-married women. More than half were so situated with 48.4 to 55.9 percent employed and living separate from family and an additional 3.00 to 7.04 percent employed, living separate from family, and head of their own households. Figure 1.8 also shows that these percentages fluctuated from decade to decade, with only a slight gain for the period overall. The percent of Irish-born women who were simply head of their own households increased slightly during this period, something different from the experience of other white women. At roughly 10.3 percent until 1900, it dropped to 8.75 by 1910,

Figure 1.8: Percent of Irish-Born Never-Married Women who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

growing back to 12.77 by 1930, a 2.47 gain for the period. Like other foreign-born women, Irish-born women were far less likely than white U.S.-born women to be the only wage earner in their household, never more than 2.3 percent between 1880 and 1930; they were the only wage earner and household head, less than 1 percent of the time when there were any such women at all.

The higher percents of Irish and other foreign-born never-married women who, by the HSS estimation, held authority over their lives, were the result of the large numbers who were domestic servants. One common condition of domestic service outside the South during this period was that the servant had to live at her employers' home. Except under unusual circumstances where relatives worked for the same employer, this meant the woman had to live away from her family. Some historians have given the impression that domestic servants were so constrained by their employers that they can not be

counted as women who held power to make decisions that shaped their own lives.[64] However, this was not the case. In searching for a job, because of a perceived servant shortage, a perspective servant was sometimes able to negotiate terms of employment, something that most other workers were rarely able to do.[65] When a domestic servant was hired at an employment agency, these negotiations sometimes occurred in front of her peers who urged the perspective servant on in her efforts to obtain the best terms possible.[66] Since employers wanted to maintain a stable, permanent staff, if at all possible, the job search put perspective servants in a comparative "position of strength," allowing them to hunt for the best conditions available. [67] Once employed, employers tried to manage and monopolize their servants' time, but these efforts often proved futile. A servant had some control over her work and could shape its quality in connection with her job satisfaction.[68] Most employers probably could not supervise a servant's every move. German-born servant Wilhelmine Wiebusch described in a letter home all the cooking and laundry she and another woman had to do, but then stated that "We do our best, but we can do things when we want. The *Ladys* (sic.) don't pay much attention to the household..."[69] On their days off, servants attended their own churches and socialized

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[64] See for example David M. Katzman's *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981) or Joanne J. Meyerowitz's, *Women Adrift*.

[65] Andrew Urban, "Irish Domestic Servants, 'Biddy' and Rebellion in the American Home, 1850-1900," Gender and History 21(August 2009), 274.

[66] Based on notes from a 2008 Berkshire Conference presentation made by Vanessa May entitled "We 'stick together through good times and bad:' Domestic Workers, Ethnic Communities, and Working Class Consciousness, 1870-1915," June 13, 2008.

[67] Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 85

[68] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1985), 131.

[69] "Wilhelmine Wiebusch, A Young Immigrant Writes Home 1884-1886" in *Writing Women's Lives: American Women's History through Letters and Diaries*, Eds. Marsha Markman, Jonathan Boe, and Susan Corey. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1999. 179

with friends and family. They also might visit with other servants working for their employers' neighbors during the workday.[70] If not allowed time off, or otherwise dissatisfied, the servant could quit and readily find another service position, something of which the employer was well aware.[71] Finally, employer efforts to shape how servants spent their wages were also typically unsuccessful. What a servant did with her money was her choice, which, since the employer provided food, shelter, and uniform, was not even dictated by physical survival.[72] Although some saved their wages and/or assisted family members, many bought nice clothes, tickets to the theater, and the like.[73] (Wiebusch's letters described a trip to the opera.) Since servants controlled their pay and free time and had some control over their terms of work, they were at least as autonomous as a factory worker living separate from family, perhaps even more so.

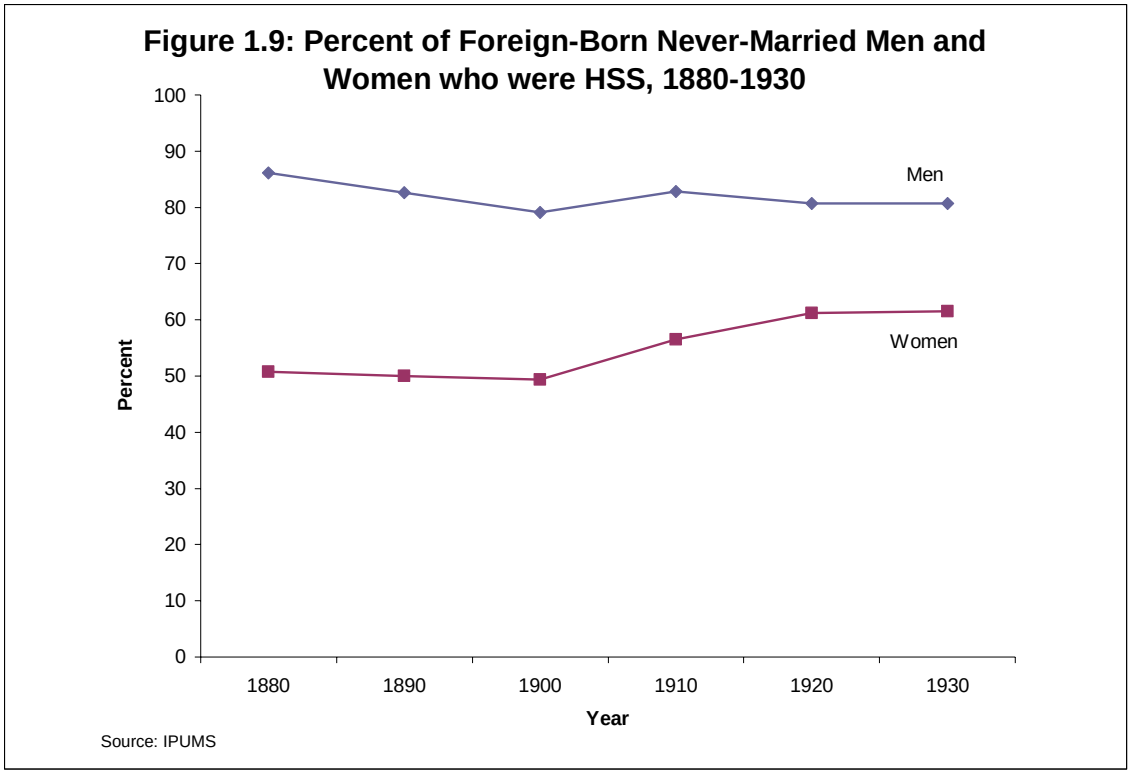
Unlike U.S.-born white women, the percent of all foreign-born women who were the only wage earners in their households did not increase significantly between 1880 and 1930, if at all, and remained less than 3.0 percent for this entire period. However, given the limited resources of many immigrant families, Irish and otherwise, it was unusual for a family to be supported by only one person when there were other working-age members available. Many foreign-born working women who were not domestic servants could not earn enough money to live on their own, never mind support others. Immigrant families frequently practiced an economy where the wages of multiple members were combined to maximize the household income. Although some Irish-born women may have provided

[70] Notes from Vanessa May presentation "We 'stick together through good times and bad:' Domestic Workers, Ethnic Communities, and Working Class Consciousness, 1870-1915."
[71] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 195-7.
[72] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 90.
[73] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York City, 1789-1860*.(Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 157.

the sole support for family members back in Ireland, such support is invisible to the census. The percent of other foreign-born women who lived with family and were the only wage earner in their households was higher than that of the Irish, perhaps reflecting the fact that more of them came to America with and as part of family groups.

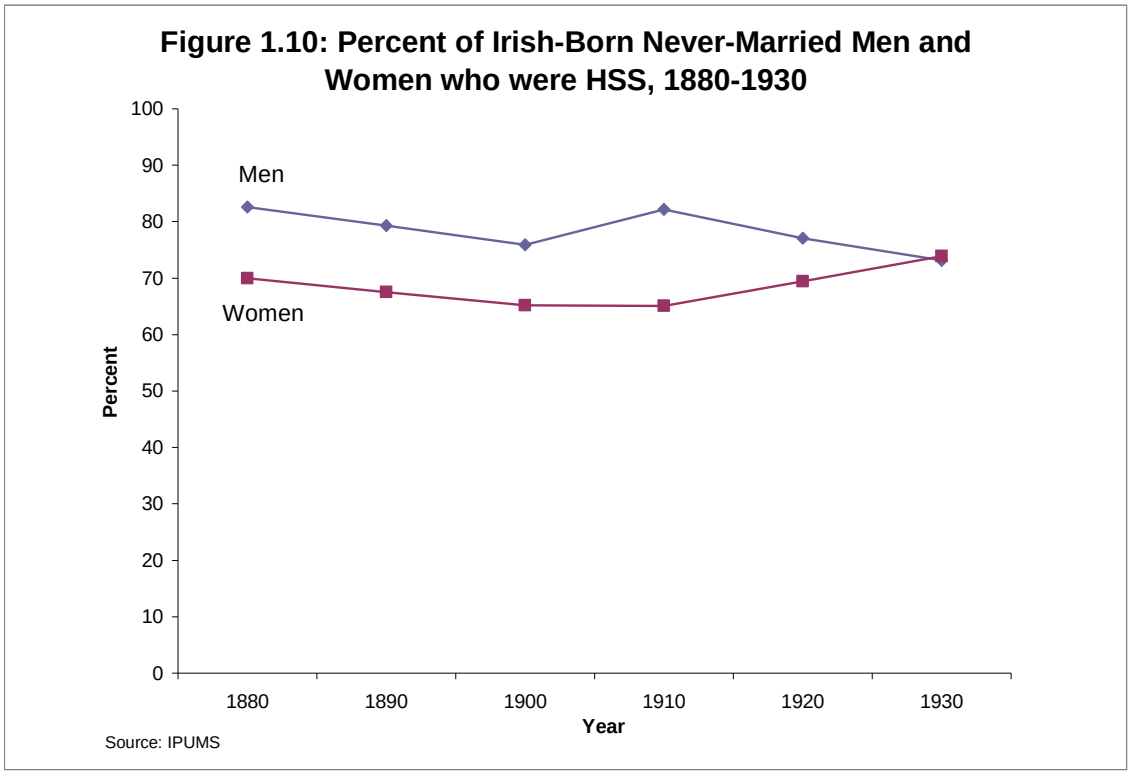
As well as making gains in the percent that were HSS themselves, foreign-born (non-Irish) women also made significant gains on the percent of their male counterparts who were HSS as illustrated in Figure 1.9. Separated by 35.44 percent in 1880, the gap steadily decreased over the next fifty years, closing to 19.27 percent by 1930. It is also worth noting that as the percent of never-married women who were HSS increased, the percent of men, for the most part, decreased over this period. The changes illustrated here are similar to those experienced by the white U.S.-born never-married men and women.

Although their overall gain was small, Irish-born women erased the gap between



the percent that were HSS themselves and the percent of men who were during this period as shown in Figure 1.10. Separated by 12.73 percent in 1880, the difference grew to 17.06 percent by 1910, and was gone by 1930. Irish-born never-married women were the only never-married women to completely erase the gap that existed between themselves and their male counterparts.

While the majority of white U.S.-born never-married women remained dependent between 1880 and 1930, no more than half all foreign-born never-married women were similarly situated. Only 38.53 to 50.69 percent of foreign-born never-married women and



26.06 to 34.79 percent of Irish-born never-married women were not HSS.[74] However, these seemingly dependent foreign-born never-married women, like similar U.S.-born

[74] The percent of dependent Irish-born never-married women is too small to be considered separate from the population of foreign-born women.

women, entered the paid workforce in significant numbers during this period. At 19.4 percent in 1880, the percent working grew steadily, reaching 41.9 percent in 1930. Work participation may have increased the authority of these never-married women, as a pay envelope may have given them more voice in family decisions. One such foreign-born woman was Swedish-born Mollie Vanstrom, an ironer in a Colorado laundry. Vanstrom lived with her brother Charles and his wife, and their two daughters. As well as being a working woman, Mollie was 12 years older than Charles and immigrated to the United States 16 years before him. With all these factors in her favor, it seems likely that Vanstrom had more authority than an otherwise dependent sister and some voice in household decisions that affected her life.

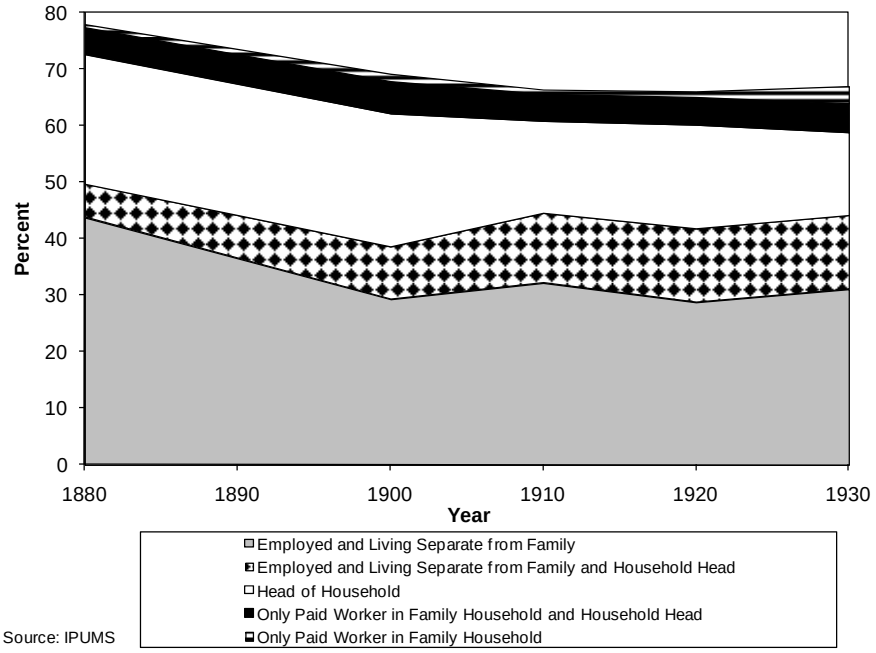
Unlike white never-married women, the percent of black never-married women who were HSS declined during this period, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. At 78.1 percent in 1880, the percent of African-American never-married women who were HSS steadily dropped to 66.2 by 1920, but rebounded slightly to 67.1 percent by 1930, a decrease of 10.96 percent overall for the fifty-year period.

When broken into the five HSS categories, as shown in Figure 1.11, the patterns of African-American women were distinct from those of white women, both foreign and U.S.-born. While the percent of white never-married women who were working and living separate from family increased slightly or remained relatively unchanged between 1880 and 1930, that of never-married African-American women declined during this period by 12.71 percent, from a high of 43.88 in 1880 to a low of 28.85 in 1920, rebounding to 31.17 by 1930. However, like white women, the percent of never-married African-American women who were employed, living separate from family, and head of

their own household increased from 5.81 percent in 1880 to 13.00 percent in 1930. Similar to the Irish-born women, African-American never-married women were rarely the only workers in their family household. However, African- American women were both the only worker in their household and the household head 4 to 6 percent of the time, throughout this period. The percent of African-American women who were only the household head also declined, as was seen with the white U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents and with the foreign-born women. At just over 23 percent through 1900, it steadily declined to 14.72 percent by 1930.

Like many foreign-born never-married women, Irish and otherwise, the high percentage of African-American never-married women who were HSS was a result of the large number who were employed as domestic servants. However, it is also because so many of these women were domestic servants that the percent who were HSS declined.

Figure 1.11: Percent of Never-Married African-American Women who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

Never-married African-American domestic servants were increasingly likely to live out rather than live in. Such arrangements began to appear in the South shortly after the Civil War, but did not become the custom in the North until black migration there after 1910.[75] The census data used in this project illustrates this trend. The percent of black, never-married, servants who lived with their white employer steadily declined between 1880 and 1930 from 56.25 to 26.5 percent.[76] Never-married African-American women seem to have lost authority between 1880 and 1900, because they chose or needed to live with family members instead of their white employer.

However, these seemingly dependent African-American never-married women may have gained some authority over their own lives with this move rather than lost it. The move in itself may actually have been a declaration of independence rather than a surrender to dependency. Following the Civil War, one way African-American women tried to capitalize on their freedom was to live away from their place of work. According to one white Mobile, Alabama resident, black female household workers felt that living at their employers' home was "something against their freedom.... [They] think it is more like being free to have their own homes and to go to them after their work is done."[77] By choosing to live away from her work, a domestic servant exercised her personal power and gained time away from white employer supervision. While only about 10.8 percent of the African-American never-married women living with family were domestic

[75] Tera W. Hunter, "'Work that Body': African American Women, Work, and Leisure in Atlanta and the New South" in *The Black Worker: A Reader*, ed. Eric Arnesen (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 75.
[76] Black never-married women who were domestic servants were far more likely to live with their employers than other African-American women. The percent of African-American widows living with their employers decreased from 39 to 9.4 percent between 1880 and 1930; married African-American women living with employers decreased from 4 to 0.9 percent over this same time.
[77] David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 198-9.

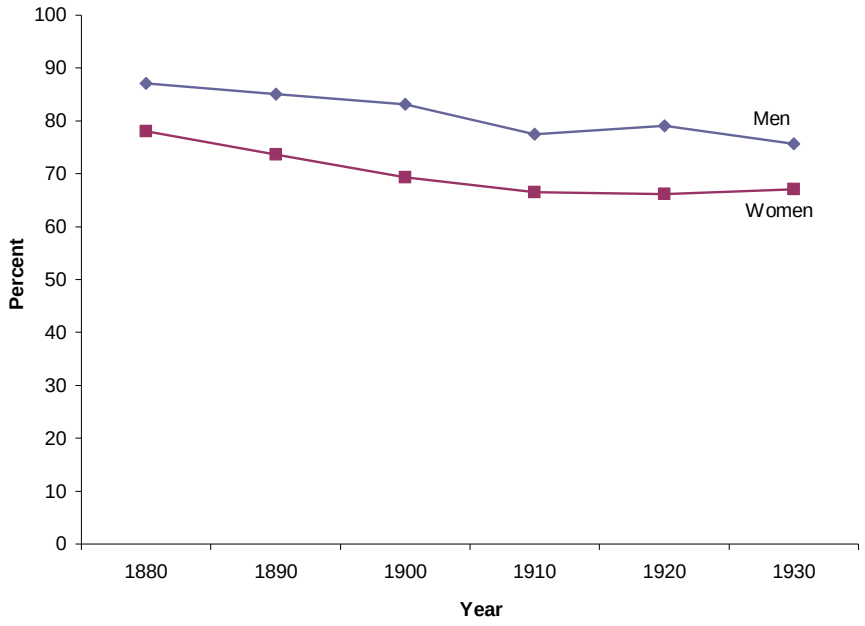
servants in 1880, this rose to over 29 percent by 1910, dropping to about 23 percent the following decades. Mattie Phillips of Alabama and Selma Robinson of Delaware, for example, lived with their fathers; Molly Williams of Kentucky lived with her sister. These women likely found family members more pleasant companions than the white employers they had to cope with during the day. So in spite of the fact that more African-American women lived with family and were seemingly more dependent, they probably gained authority in their own lives because they moved away from the work place, limiting their hours of paid domestic service and white supervision.

The increase in the percent of black domestic servants who were employed, lived separate from family, and head of their own households may also have been the result of this movement out of the employers' home. The same Alabama commentator also noted that "Married or unmarried. They will rent a little house, perhaps a mile off, and pay $10 a month for it, and go there to sleep, when perhaps you would be willing to pay them just as much and give them a comfortable bed or cottage on your own place."[78] The increasing number of African-American women in the U.S. census who were employed, lived separate from family, and head of their own households support this claim. Ann Hunt of Alabama and Alice Wright of Virginia are two of the many, many examples of African-American domestic servants in the 1880 census who lived alone as head of their own households, separate from their employers.

Black women made fewer gains on the percent of their male counterparts who were HSS, as illustrated in Figure 1.12. Like all never-married men in the United States, the percent of African-American men who were HSS declined between 1880 and 1930.

[78]Hunter, "'Work that Body'" 75.

Figure 1.12: Percent of African-American Never-Married Men and Women who were HSS, 1880-1930



Source: IPUMS

However, while white women tended to close the gap between male and female autonomy overall, the difference between household authority in1880 and in 1930 for African-Americans was relatively unchanged. The difference between men and women increased and decreased from decade to decade, starting from 9.02 in 1880, reaching its maximum of 13.87 in 1900 and minimum 8.61 in 1930. At the same time, except for Irish women, Black women's household authority was far closer to that available to black men than white women were to their male counterparts. The precarious financial situation of most African-American families made it necessary for most never-married women to take paid work. Their families simply could not afford for them to do otherwise. So while these women did not gain in comparison with African-American men, they did not, at the same time, significantly lose any ground.

Between 1880 and 1930, all white women, both U.S.- and foreign-born, seem to

have gained some power to shape their own lives through increased workforce participation and a shift into higher status work. More and more were HSS. By 1930, no fewer than 44 percent of white, U.S.-born never-married women and 61.5 percent of foreign-born women were, by the HSS estimation, probably powerful forces in their own lives. At the same time, these women closed the gap between what was possible for themselves and for their male counterparts. Irish-born women erased the gap altogether. Although many white women remained living with their families, more and more of these women moved into the paid workforce. This probably increased the authority in their lives both inside and outside their homes. While advances in personal authority did not keep pace with entry into the paid workforce, that work, as in the case of women like Louisa May Alcott, was instrumental to women's authority.

It is far easier to claim that white women gained power over their own lives during this period than it is for black women. By the HSS estimation used here, black never-married women clearly lost ground. The new opportunities for more challenging, better paid work that paved the way to autonomy for many white women were unavailable to African-American women. However, while they did not change occupations, black never-married women significantly changed the conditions under which they worked. More and more African-American domestic servants were able to live away from their work; this gave them more ability to choose their residence and companions. Instead of moving away from family, African-American women moved toward family. Yet, by moving in with family, African-American women were exercising a definite choice in companions. The choice in itself indicates increased power to make choices in their own lives.

Views of Singleness after the Civil War

In the decades following the Civil War, as women moved into the paid workforce in significant numbers and gained some authority over their lives, most Americans continued to believe that women should marry, but as before, only to the right man. Suffragist and lecturer Mary Livermore, for example, claimed in 1891 that "Marriage is the divinest [sic.] institution of the world, but it should only be the union of two equals."[79] However, at the same time there was an increasing chorus of voices criticizing marriage and praising lifelong singleness.[80] Both the temperance and suffrage movements questioned a woman's position and happiness in marriage and paved the way for such criticism. The Women's Christian Temperance Union's publicity of the family problems caused by alcoholism highlighted white "women's economic and social dependence on their husbands [and] generated an undertow of anxiety and frustration."[81] Suffragists also publicized negative aspects of marriage and fought "not only to improve women's status once they married but also to give middle class women a realistic choice... of whether to marry or not."[82]

A review of the popular press further illustrates this changing trend. Female journalists not only questioned marriage, but increasingly described positive features of single life in comparison with marriage. An October 8, 1892 article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* pointed out that while an unmarried woman might be lonely at times, she was "at

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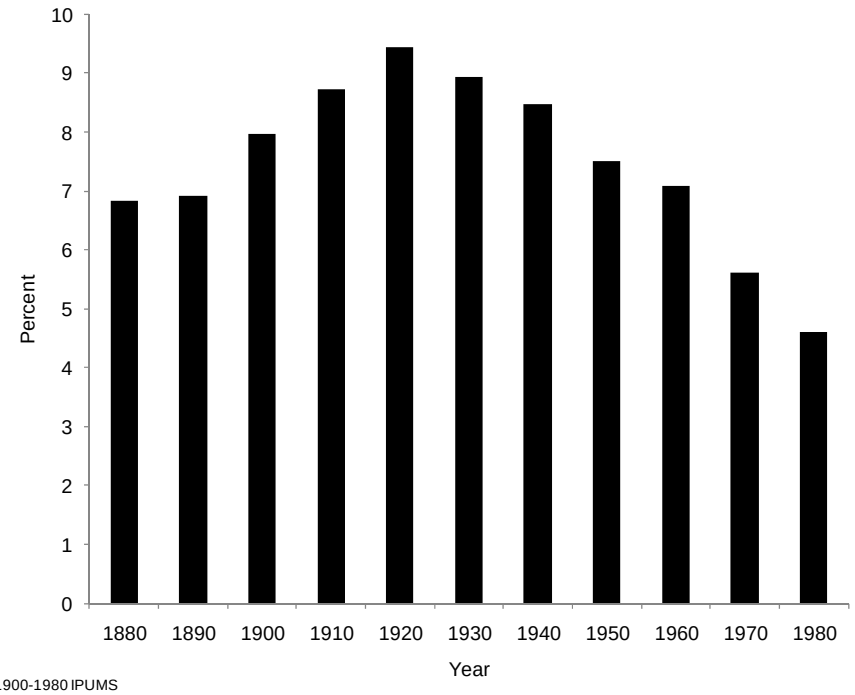
[79] "Women Who Do Not Wed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1891, p. 16.
[80] Ruth Freeman and Patricia Klaus, "Blessed or Not? The New Spinster in England and the United States in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Journal of Family History* 9(December 1984), 396.
[81] Evans, *Born For Liberty*, 128
[82] Marlene Le Gates, *Making Waves: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (Toronto: Copp Clark, Ltd. 1996) 199.

least free from apprehension of disgrace or degradation" caused by a drunken husband, from "cruelty and unfaithfulness," or from having to be the breadwinner for an "invalid husband and hungry little ones."[83] An unnamed *New York Times* columnist claimed in 1903 that she was single because "I'm so happy unmarried that I have decided to never give up single bliss." She went onto blame men for her decision, saying that "the average husband acts as if his wife has done him an injury in marrying at all, constantly chafes for his freedom..., and is wholly unsympathetic and congenial."[84] The Bachelor Girl (Minnie J. Reynolds) in one of her many negative comments on marriage noted that "To the bachelor girl the life of many of her married friends seems only a gilded slavery."[85]

Accompanying this criticism and women's movement into the paid workforce

Figure 1.13: Percent of All Women in the United States, ages 45 - 54, who Never Married, 1880-1980



Source: 1880, 1900-1980 IPUMS
1890 *Historical Statistics of the United States*

[83] "The Attitude of the Spinster," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 8, 1892, 16.
[84] "Matrimony as She Sees It," *New York Times*, June 21, 1903, SM10.
[85] Minnie J. Reynolds, "The Bachelor Girl Reflects," New York Times, August 16, 1903, p. SM14.

was an increase in the number of women remaining single their entire lives, as illustrated in Figure 1.13.[86] Beginning in 1880, the first year census enumerators recorded marital status, the percent of women in the U.S. who never married grew steadily from 6.83 percent to 9.44 percent by 1920 but then declined for the next several decades. On the national level, a larger percentage 45-54 year old women were single in 1920 than any other time in the 19th or 20th centuries.

Americans sensed that more and more women were remaining single and census reports of the time confirmed their suspicions. A backlash soon appeared in the popular press even as others continued to celebrate singleness. Women believed to be avoiding marriage for selfish reasons, like a career, became the subjects of pointed criticism. While some commentators celebrated women like Clara Barton, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard or Jane Addams as doing important "work that no married woman could do," others were less supportive. [87] "Every woman should marry" declared Marie Van Vorst in 1903. "The tendency of the American Girl of today to remain single is one of the signs of the time to be deplored."[88] Author Carolyn Shipman described marriage as a woman's greatest chance for happiness as well as her true calling.[89] As a result, some women, particularly professional women or female college graduates, often one and the same, were seen in some circles as passing up marriage for selfish ends and blamed, at least in part, for the increase in the number of never-married women in the United States.

Amid conflicting voices, the percent of 45 to 54 year old women who were

[86] The statistics illustrated there were calculated by dividing the number of women between the ages of 45 and 54 who claimed to be single by the total number of women between those ages for each census year, 1880-1980.
[87] "Old Maid Defends Her Kind," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 25, 1903, p. 13.
[88] "Doesn't Like Old Maids," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 23, 1903, p.3.
[89] Carolyn Shipman, "The Anomalous Position of the Unmarried Woman" *North American Review* 190(Sept. 1909): 344.

described in the U.S. census as never married continued to increase through 1920. While some Americans celebrated such a fate, others mourned singleness as taking women away from their true calling as wife and mother. For more and more women, life outside of marriage became a reality.

Conclusion

At the end of the Civil War, many Americans believed that women should marry, as long as her chosen partner was a "worthy" man who was likely to bring happiness. However, by the turn of the 20th century, more and more women entered the paid workforce, probably gaining authority over their lives in the process. Singleness was increasingly praised in the popular press, and the number of women who remained single their entire lives was growing.

The remainder of this dissertation will search for explanations for the growth lifelong singleness between 1880 and 1920. Were college educated women to blame for this increase, at least in part, as some contemporaries believed? Was the increase in singleness equal across races and ethnic groups or were some women more likely to remain single than others? Also, the United States was (and is) a geographically large and diverse country. Did location play a role in determining singleness? What connection, if any, was there between the rise in female workforce participation and the rise in lifelong singleness? Were there other factors detectable in census data that shaped women's decisions to marry?

Between 1880 and 1930, the realities facing 45 to 54 year old never-married women changed. Their population was increasing, at least until 1920. More jobs opened

to them as a result of industrialization and new technology giving women more power to shape their own lives. Americans became more willing to consider the possibility that a woman might remain single her entire life. Americans were indeed “in the grip of a great social change.”

Chapter 2 – "Old Maid Factories" Revisited: College Education and Never-Married Women[1]

> "[F]or a girl to be highly educated – and for the dreadful fact to be known – is about the heaviest matrimonial handicap that can be put upon her." – Dorothy Dix, *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Oct. 9, 1904[2]

On June 6, 1897, the *New York Times* carried a short account of the wedding of Miss Elsa Ornstein to Dr. Charles W. Stewart of Newport, RI, which had taken place the evening before. According to the article, Miss Ornstein was the daughter of a "noble Hungarian family" and had lived in the United States with her sister and mother for the past few years. The couple had met the previous summer while the bride was on vacation with her family in Newport. The ceremony and reception were held in New York City, following which the couple left for a tour of Northern New York and the New England states. However, one thing the *New York Times* reporter seemed to find particularly noteworthy was that Miss Ornstein and her sister "have been students at Barnard College. Both have taken high rank."[3]

The *New York Times* reporter was probably not alone in finding the wedding of a former college woman of particular interest. Many Americans were convinced that attending college seriously jeopardized a young woman's chances for marriage. In fact, as mentioned in Chapter 1, some believed that college educations for women were one of the *causes* of the increase in the number of never-married women in the United States during the late-19th century. Between 1895 and 1915, popular and scholarly journals, magazines, and newspaper articles frequently reported on this "sad" state of affairs, listed

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[1] Colleges were labeled "Old Maid Factories in "Simply Old Maid Factories," *Chicago Defender*, January 6, 1912, p. 2.
[2] Dorothy Dix, "College Bred Wives" *Chicago Daily Tribune* Oct. 9, 1904, p. C2.
[3] "A Day's Weddings. Stewart-Ornstein" *New York Times*, June 6, 1897, p. 5.

numerous reasons why college educated women would not or could not marry, and published statistics, often of questionable reliability, to support their claims. More recent historians have agreed that the marriage rate of college women of the late-19th and early-20th centuries was far lower than that of the population of American women in general.[4] Frequently using alumni records, particularly from one or more of the "Seven Sisters" colleges, these scholars argue that only approximately half of the college women in the United States married during this period.

Census data reveals a far more complex story. First, the U.S. Census shows that college-educated women born between 1865 and 1905 married at higher rates than previous scholars have suggested. Approximately 75 percent of the women whose education ended with an undergraduate degree married at some point in their lives. It was only the women who carried their education beyond the undergraduate level whose marriage rate dropped below 60 percent. Second, census data also shows that the majority of never-married women born between 1865 and 1905 were not college graduates as some critics at the time intimated. More than three-quarters of the population of never-married women ended their education with no more than a high school diploma, just like the majority of Americans. College-educated women did indeed marry at rates lower than other American women. However, their connections to the population of never-married women in the United States have been over-stated. College women were not the cause of

[4] See for example, Mary E. Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates 1865-1910" *Population Studies* 38(Nov. 1984); Mary E. Cookingham "Combining Marriage, Motherhood, and Jobs Before World War II: Women College Graduates, Classes of 1905-1935" *Journal of Family History* 9(1984); Roberta Frankfort, *Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Patricia Ann Palmieri *In Adamless Eden: the Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

the rise in singleness in the United States. When searching for reasons for this increase in the number of never-married women prior to 1920, one must look elsewhere.

College Women and Race Suicide

As early as the 1830s, many observers expressed concerns about women attending college. Initially, critics voiced fears that a woman would destroy her health if she attempted an educational program similar to a man's. Edward H. Clarke, for example, made this argument in his widely read 1875 book *Sex and Education* where he claimed that "improper methods of study and a disregard of the reproductive apparatus and its functions, during the educational life of girls ... permanently disabled to a greater or less degree, or fatally injured" many women.[5] By the 1890s such fears were proven unfounded. However, "[w]hen the predicted results of women's collegiate education did not appear, a new and more terrible outcome was discerned, which many had not even anticipated: the decline in the marriage rate of college women...."[6] This discovery exacerbated fears of the "suicide" of the white Anglo-Saxon race in America that appeared during the second half of the nineteenth century.

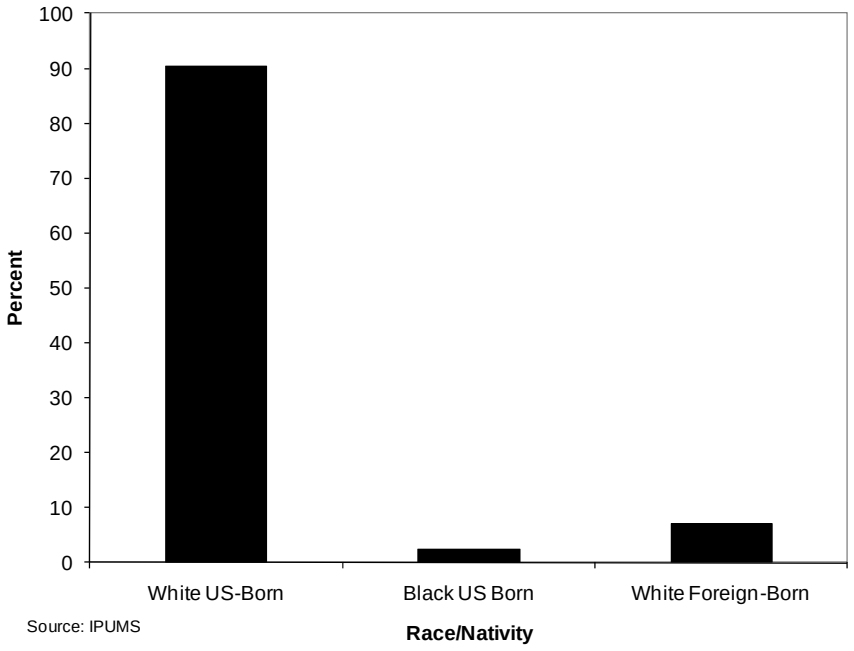
In the decades following the Civil War, the ethnic composition of the United States began a radical shift. Vast numbers of immigrants representing a variety of different countries and cultures arrived in America, settled, and began to raise large families. At the same time, census figures revealed that the marriage and birth rates of the

[5] Edward H. Clarke, MD. *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1875.) http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18504/18504-h/18504-h.htm (accessed January 14, 2009.)
[6] Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 204.

"superior" white, old-stock Americans declined. These changes made some people very uncomfortable and they began to fear that the foreign-born would "supersede the old-stock."[7] Powerful individuals like Theodore Roosevelt concluded that this meant the white, Anglo-Saxon population in America was on the road to "race suicide" and they used their influence to encourage people of the "better sort" to raise large families.[8] Thus, a "woman's willingness and capacity to bear children [became] a duty she owed not only to God and husband, but to her 'race' as well."[9] It was beliefs such as these that led to concerns about the marriage rates of college women.

Female college graduates, from a eugenicist's point of view, were "of prime

Figure 2.1: Race or Nativity of Women in the United States, Born 1865-1905, who Completed Four or More Years of College



[7] Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 71.
[8] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 30.
[9] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Women and Her Role in Nineteenth Century America." *The Journal of American History* 60 (Sep. 1973): 351.

intelligence and racial stock."[10] Although only about 3.6 percent of women in the United States born between 1865 and 1905 completed four or more years of college, the U.S. census data used in this project reveals that the vast majority – approximately 90 percent – were white and U.S.-born. (See Figure 2.1) These women, according to this racist theory, should marry young and bear several children. Instead, as Mr. and Mrs. John Martin claimed in a 1915 *New York Times* article, "a college education brings in its train economic self-support and racial extinction"[11] Not only were college women, like Jane Addams, Mary Dewson, or M. Carey Thomas, behaving in an unconventional manner by seeking an education increasingly on par with man's and pursuing a career, they were also delaying or, here, foregoing marriage to do so. This in the eyes of individuals like the Martins was a serious transgression. Dr. Robert J. Sprague of Amherst Agricultural College, for example, denounced women's colleges as "old maid factories" and blamed them for the failure of women to marry because they gave women the skills to earn a living and value personal independence.[12] "Women are the capital of the race," Sprague stated in 1915. "[T]he civilization that uses its women for stenographers, clerks, and school teachers, instead of mothers, has but one racial fate."[13] Obviously, in his mind, that fate was extinction.

This perceived connection between college women and race suicide resulted in the publication of dozens of articles on the subject in newspapers, magazines, and

[10] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 280.
[11] Mr. and Mrs. John Martin, "The Woman Movement and the Baby Crop," *New York Times* Aug. 29, 1915, p. SM 1.
[12] "Simply Old Maid Factories," *Chicago Defender*, January 6, 1912, p. 2.
[13] Robert J. Sprague, "Education and Race Suicide." *The Journal of Heredity* 6 (1915): 161.

popular or scholarly journals, particularly between 1895 and 1915.[14] Both the attackers and defenders of college-educated women used the new science of statistics to determine if the marriage rate of college women was different from that of the general population. Most responsible statisticians of this period claimed that the marriage rate of college graduates was around 50 percent. However, the published percentages varied widely depending on the sample of women studied and the author's point of view. For example, high school principal Dr. William Felter, who was against higher education for women, claimed the marriage rate of college women was between 21 and 28 percent.[15] Frances M. Abbott, a supporter, studied Vassar College graduates and found 63 percent of them had married.[16] Further, the authors of such studies often criticized previous investigations, for example, calling the samples of women studied atypical, too small, or still marriageable and claimed his or her work was the most reliable. Abbott, for example, declared an earlier study by Millicent Washburn Shinn inaccurate because Abbott found Shinn's sample of members of the American Collegiate Association unrepresentative of college women in general and claimed that teachers were overrepresented in the organization.[17] At the same time, Abbott's sample of Vassar College graduates was perceived by others atypical. Statistics from the most prominent studies were published and republished to both attack and defend college education for women.

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[14] See for example, Millicent Washburn Shinn, "The Marriage Rate of College Women." *The Century* 50(Oct. 1895) 946-9. http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP2287-0050-187 (accessed January 23, 2009); Frances M. Abbott, "College Women and Matrimony – Again" *The Century* 51(Mar. 1896) 796-8. http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP2287-0051-159 (accessed January 23, 2009); "College Training Does Not Keep Women Single" *New York Times*, May 22, 1904, p/ 8; "As to the Right Man" *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, UT) Feb. 12, 1906. "College Girls Wed" *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 19, 1905, p C8; Sprague, "Education and Race Suicide." 158-161.
[15] "Birth Rate Diminishing," *New York Tribune*, February 4, 1906, p. 7.
[16] "As to the Right Man," *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, UT) Feb. 12, 1906; Abbott, "College Women and Matrimony – Again," 797.
[17] Abbott, "College Women and Matrimony – Again", 796.

Overall, these early studies of the marriage rates of college women are not very reliable. Most of the published articles were written specifically to attack or defend college women and the authors chose and presented their statistics in such a way to make their point. Felter's unusually low marriage rates reflect his attack of college women while Abbott's comparatively high marriage rate reflects her defense. Additionally, as critics of the time pointed out, most of the samples of college women were indeed unrepresentative of female college graduates in general and typically focused on a small, limited group of women. Many studies like Abbott's were based on a very small number of schools, often including one or more of the "Seven Sisters" colleges. (Felter does not reveal how his figures were created.) While graduates from the elite Eastern women's college probably were probably among the most visible college women in the United States, they were hardly representative of the population in general. Thousands of women attended other colleges and universities across the U.S. including Cornell, Stanford, Grinnell, Oberlin, and many others. One must include a wide variety of women from a number of schools to develop accurate marriage statistics.

Also important is the fact that many of these studies were premature or incomplete. A large number of the women included in studies, probably like those quoted by Felter, had only been out of college a few years and were still under the age of thirty. Professor William T. Brewster of Columbia University, for example, cautioned in 1908 that the "statistics are at present insignificant; only a very small proportion of women go to college [and] a very large percentage of graduates have only just reached the modern marriageable age of not less than twenty-five...."[18] This view was shared by Professor

[18] Prof. William T. Brewster, "College Education of Women" *New York Times* Sep. 5, 1908, p. 10.

Charles Emerick of Smith College who stated a year later that

> "The great majority of alumnae have been out of college less than fifteen years.... It is manifestly premature to collect satisfactory statistics of marriages and births among college women. This point in itself is sufficient to render any statistical investigation of the effect of college training on marriage and maternity not only inconclusive but nigh well valueless."[19]

Some commentators also theorized, with little evidence to support their claims, that early college women were not representative because many of them were not temperamentally inclined to marriage and probably would have remained single with or without a higher education.[20] While Emerick, a faculty member at a prominent women's college, certainly had reason to try to inflate or obscure low marriage rates of college women, he and Brewster were correct: many of these studies were premature and should only have included women well beyond marriageable age. However, because few such women existed in the early years of the 20th century, accurate statistics were very difficult if not impossible to develop.

More recent scholars are able to exploit a far more complete data set to determine marriage rates and trends of college-educated women in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.[21] However, what they find is that in general, the more reliable early scholars were not far off the mark in their estimates of marriage rates. Alumni records from Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and the University of Michigan reveal that only approximately half of

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[19] Charles Franklin Emerick, "College Women and Race Suicide," *Political Science Quarterly* 24 (June 1909): 283.
[20] "College Women and Race Suicide" *New York Times*, June 16, 1909 p. 6.
[21] See for example Roberta Frankfort, *Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Mary E. Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates 1865-1910" *Population Studies* 38(Nov. 1984); Mary E. Cookingham "Combining Marriage, Motherhood, and Jobs Before World War II: Women College Graduates, Classes of 1905-1935" *Journal of Family History* 9(1984); Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Patricia Ann Palmieri *In Adamless Eden: the Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

the college women who graduated between 1889 and 1909 married.[22] However, the marriage rates of female college students who graduated between 1909 and 1918 went up sharply by 10 to 15 percent, as the cries of college women and race suicide were the most strident.[23] While statistical studies such as these are obviously more complete than those of scholars of the 1890s and 1900s, they still only incorporate a few schools and rely heavily on the elite Eastern "Seven Sisters" colleges for their data samples. Further, the records held by these colleges may be incomplete; some women may not have notified their alma mater of their marriage, particularly if it took place many years after graduation. Again, to truly gain an accurate picture of the marriage rates of college women in the United States, one must only include older women who attended a variety of schools, coeducational and single sex, with a variety of philosophies, from all over the United States.

Marriage Rates of College Graduates

In an attempt to address the weaknesses of previous studies, I have turned to the U.S. census. Census data are a rich and unique source for studying the levels of education completed by women in the United States. Starting in 1940, census enumerators were required to note for each individual "the highest full grade that the person has successfully finished or from which he has graduated." Enumerator instructions cautioned against including any level of schooling that was only partially attended or not completed satisfactorily. Further, the instructions were very clear that when a college or university was referenced, it was not to be a business college or other such training

[22] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women*, 54, 58.
[23] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women, 72-3, 113*.

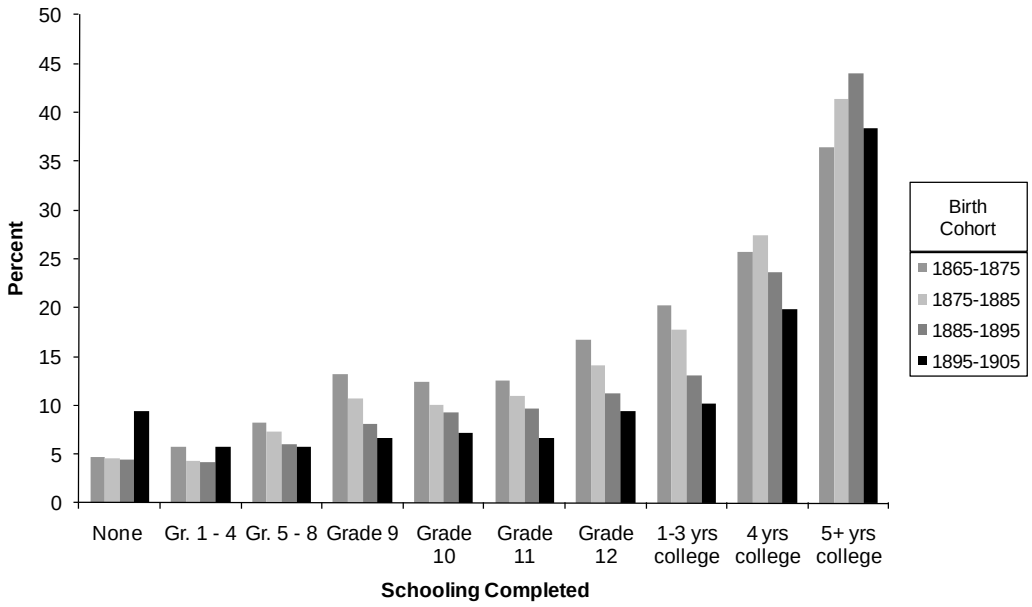
school. According to the instructions, "[t]his question refers only to the education obtained in public, private, or parochial schools, colleges, or universities. Education obtained at vocational schools is not to be considered, unless such school or college was a part of the regular school system." The 1960 census was the first to employ a form of self-enumeration. The Census Bureau mailed each household a form that they were to fill out without the aid of census employees, and Census takers later collected these forms in person. The respondents were cautioned not to include "business or trade schools or adult education classes" when providing information about educational attainment. Thus, assuming the enumerator and/or the respondent followed the instructions correctly, as most probably did, women who attended an academic college or university can be accurately identified as well as how far they went in their program.[24]

Because data related to education attainment was not collected until 1940, the census cannot tell us much about the relationship between marriage and education for the cohorts of women born before 1865. Also, to adequately respond to existing scholarship on college women, some later cohorts must be included. Therefore, the college-educated women whose lives are examined in this chapter were born between 1865 and 1905 and between the ages of 55 and 74 when they appeared in either the 1940 or the 1960 census. The majority of them were probably in college between 1887 and 1927. They were usually white, U.S.-born, and middle class women, but by 1920, increasingly included some white, foreign-born women as well.[25] However, because of the small data sample size, college women will be examined as a group, and not separated by race or ethnic

[24] (For more information see the Census Enumerator instructions for 1940 available online at http://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/inst1940.shtml and for 1960 available online at http://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/items1960.shtml)
[25] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 62-77.

origin. By the 1940 and 1960 censuses, the college women of interest were well beyond marriageable age, from all over the United States and represented a variety of institutions. The rates of singleness of women completing each level of education identified by the census were calculated and plotted in Figure 2.2.[26]

Figure 2.2: Percent of Women who Never Married by Highest Level of Educational Attainment and Birth Cohort



Source: IPUMS

It is immediately apparent that in most cases, the more education a woman had, the more likely she was to remain single.[27] As shown in Chapter 1 in Figure 1.13, the

[26] The group of all women were born between 1865 and 1905 was separated into groups by the highest level of education they completed, by decade of birth. The percent never married was calculated for each group.

[27] The exception to this is that illiterate women born between 1895 and 1905, with a rate of singleness of 9.39 percent, were more likely to remain single their entire lives than any other women of their generation without college. While some of these women came from parts of the United States where it might have been difficult to get an education, these illiterate never married women were significantly more likely to live in a mental institution than other women of their age group. Although less than 1 percent of all other women born between 1895 and 1905 were described in the U.S. census as living in a mental institution, more than 20 percent of the illiterate, never-married women who were born between 1895 and 1905 were. It is therefore likely that a disability was the cause of many of the illiterate women's singleness rather than their lack of education.

percent of women in the United States remaining single was never higher than 9.44 percent. However as women became increasingly educated, their rate of singleness soon passed the national average. Women who completed high school were almost twice as likely as those with only an eighth grade education to remain single their entire lives; women with a college education more than three times as likely. This may have been the result of the dramatic increase in the number of jobs available for educated women at the end of the 19th century. The expansion of teaching positions, better teacher salaries, new professions, and the movement of women in to clerical work benefitted educated women, particularly those with college educations.[28] However, women with high school diplomas benefitted as well. The census shows that the most popular occupation for high school educated women at the time was clerical work, which did not require a college diploma. Having a steady salary might make marriage, or marriage to a less than ideal man, unattractive to a working woman.[29] Although marriage rates among high school graduates were lower than the national average, I found no evidence of any concern over this fact. Ironically, most of the negative press involving high schools and marriage rates was connected to the difficulty school boards had in keeping well trained (a.k.a. college educated) teachers *from* getting married and leaving their jobs.[30]

Figure 2.2 also shows that overall, in the United States, less than 28 percent of women born between 1865 and 1905 who attended four years of college (and presumably earned an undergraduate degree) remained single their entire lives. At 25.68 percent for the cohort born between 1865 and 1875, it rose to 27.48 percent for the cohort born

[28] Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues," 356.
[29] Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues," 355.
[30] See for example, "Quit Teaching to Wed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1899, p. 5.

between 1875 and 1885, graduating approximately between 1897 and 1907. This dropped for subsequent cohorts and was at 19.99 percent for the cohort twenty years younger, born between 1895 and 1905. These statistics are about half the level of non-marriage estimated by early statisticians and previous historians. At the same time, the general trends in singleness match the patterns historian Roberta Frankfort describes in her 1977 book *Collegiate Women*: high until about 1907 and then beginning to decrease.[31]

One reason for the discrepancy in the rates of singleness between this and previous studies is that earlier scholars focused on a small number of schools, particularly Northeastern elite women's colleges like Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and, most often, Bryn Mawr. There were several factors at these schools which encouraged women to postpone or even forego marriage. First were the attitudes of the faculty, particularly at Bryn Mawr, which fostered a sense of independence among the students and made a career more of a priority than marriage. As historian Lynn D. Gordon argues in *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, the "instruction, friendships, and influences of faculty heightened and defined expectations" of life after graduation.[32] Women attending Bryn Mawr between 1884 and 1922 were under the influence of its Dean and then President, M. Carey Thomas. According to Roberta Frankfort, as a result of Thomas' influence at Bryn Mawr "women were committed to a life where domestic values would not encroach on their life styles or careers."[33] During her years at Bryn Mawr, Thomas saw it as her mission to turn "tender innocent freshmen" into "glorious thinking, reasoning women." She tried to "educate fiercely independent, competitive

[31] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women*, 72-3, 113.
[32] Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 125.
[33] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women*, 55.

women who would not succumb to the passivity of being supported by a husband or to the stagnation of housework."[34]

Female students at more modest coeducational schools like Grinnell College in Iowa – not previously included in any statistical studies – received a very different message from their faculty. Although both men and women were admitted to Grinnell from its opening in 1861, female students were not given academic opportunities equal to male students until 1895. Even then, while schools like Bryn Mawr encouraged women to explore careers other than domesticity, Grinnell, according to historian Joan G. Zimmerman, did not broaden the opportunities available to women, but reinforced traditional values.[35] The policies put in place by John Hanson Thomas Main, President of Grinnell College from 1906-1931, "led to a continuation and intensification of Victorian society's practice of according separate roles in separate spheres to men and women."[36] Main, in contrast to Thomas, believed that "in spite of the new avenues of service open to them out in the world, *women will continue to exercise their influence in the home and from the home as a creative center*. [Italics original]"[37] Although Zimmerman does not provide marriage rates for Grinnell's female graduates, she does state that most married. Women gained a college education at Grinnell, but that education only reinforced traditional values and encouraged women to retain the goal of marriage and family. The messages students received while in college had a significant effect on their futures. With the wide variety of college experiences available, only a representative sample of all

[34] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women*, 56-7.
[35] Joan G. Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street: Culture and the Female Community at Grinnell, 1884-1917" in *Woman's Being, Woman's Place: Female Identity and Vocation in American History*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979), 155.
[36] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 159.
[37] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 161.

college graduates will provide an accurate picture of the marriage rates of collegiate women.

The availability and attitudes of the men on campus also had an impact on the marriage rates of female college students. Some scholars focus heavily on schools in the eastern half of the United States. Many of these schools were women's colleges, like Bryn Mawr, where women were unable to meet men during the semester. When coeducational institutions are considered, historians usually select ones like the University of Michigan that were men's schools initially, with women admitted later. During the first decade or two of coeducation, male students typically resented the women's presence and attitudes toward these new female students ranged from frosty to hostile. For example, the *New York Tribune* reported on June 23, 1901 that the graduating class of Wesleyan University "had voted at the last minute to prevent their female classmates from participating in the Class Day events." In what was described as a deliberate insult, the men "waited until the women had invited their friends to the Class Day exercises and until it was too late for them to plan a celebration of their own."[38] According to the same article, a short while before, the men at Cornell University had attempted unsuccessfully, but only by a small margin, to use their superior numbers to vote the women out of the Sophomore class. In an environment such as this, it is little wonder that few women met their future husbands. As isolated from men as at a single-sex university, they were forced to do without male companionship. By examining such schools in the early years of coeducation, it is not surprising that the rates these women remained single were higher than those of the general American population.

[38] "College Co-Education" *New York Tribune,* June 23, 1901.

Rarely studied are schools where women were part of the student body from the beginning. Here attitudes of the male students toward the female students appear to have been very different. While, as at Grinnell College, women might not be seen as equals, they were part of the community so relations were warmer. Grinnell Alumni Margaret McCandless (class of 1911) later remarked when asked if she ever felt resented by the male students that "Co-education was so taken for granted in the Middle West that I never thought so." Another alumnus, Rosamond Rule (class of 1909) recalled that "only in laboratories did I feel that some men felt we were an inferior species – a nuisance."[39] However, since most women did not major in science, such friction was rarely a problem. Further, in 1915 when new Grinnell College rules, initiated as part of President Main's program to separate the sexes on campus, forbade men and women from eating together, the men protested loudly in a series of articles in the college newspaper. "The natural social relations between men and women… has [sic.] been almost completely thwarted by the establishment of artificial barriers."[40] Relations were also cordial at Stanford University in California where women were also admitted from the beginning. In a propaganda piece in the March 23, 1902 *San Francisco Call*, author Sarah Comstock claimed that "Marriages are not all made in heaven. Stamford is a hot rival of heaven in this regard."[41] As evidence, Comstock detailed the romances and subsequent marriages of at least twenty-four student couples including that of the pair who decades later became President and Mrs. Herbert Hoover. Thus, by overlooking such colleges and universities when calculating marital statistics, marriage rates among college women were made

[39] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 166.
[40] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 167.
[41] Sarah Comstock, "Romances of Stanford" *The San Francisco Call*, March 23, 1902.

artificially low. Census data allows a more representative sample of graduates from a variety of universities, reflecting a wide range of attitudes between the sexes.

Another reason why the marriage rates reported by previous scholars are low is the fact that they did not separate women who concluded their education with a bachelor's degree from those who went on for advanced education. As Figure 2.2 shows, the rate that women remained single increased sharply for those who continued their education beyond the undergraduate level. While the percent of women with only four years of college who remained single ranged from 19.88 to 27.48 percent, the rates at which women remained single increased by 10 to 21 percent for those who went further; 36.36 to 44.02 percent of women with advanced college degrees never married. Although still lower than the statistics reported for Bryn Mawr, the fact that 61 percent of Bryn Mawr graduates continued their education beyond a bachelor's degree helps explain why there were so few married graduates.[42] Given the atmosphere at Grinnell, however, few women sought further education. Historian Joan Zimmerman argues that going to Grinnell was "an act of conformity and not an act of independence" and did not deter most women from following the usual female life path of marriage and motherhood.[43] Of the 804 women who graduated from Grinnell between 1884 and 1915, only 58.2 percent reported having an occupation after graduation at all and few of these working women held jobs that indicate they might have continued their education beyond their undergraduate degree.[44] Most Grinnell women who worked outside the home taught for a

[42] Frankfort, *Collegiate Women,* 54-5.
[43] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 158.
[44] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 159.

few years and then married.[45] By focusing on elite schools like Bryn Mawr, marriage statistics on college women are made lower because of the large number of women who earned advanced college degrees. Census data thus allows women with advanced college degrees to be identified and prevents them from artificially inflating the rate of singleness among other college women.

Finally, Figure 2.2 shows that the sharp increase in the rate of singleness among educated women did not occur until a woman actually completed four years college, presumably earning a degree. The percent of women who attended some college and remained single ranged from a high of 20.25 percent for the cohort born between 1865 and 1875 to a low of 10.15 for the cohort born between 1895 and 1905. This is at most only 3.66 percent higher than rates at which high school graduates remained single and shrank to only 0.82 percent higher for the youngest cohort. The difference between the rate of singleness of high school graduates and the rate of singleness of women who attended college for less than four years is similar to or less than the difference between high school graduates and women who did not complete high school.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was not uncommon for a woman to attend college only for a few years and not earn a degree. Margaret Preston of Lexington, Kentucky, for example, was sent to Bryn Mawr by her aunt and only allowed to attend for two years; her cousins Mary Brown Waite and Margaret Wickliffe Brown also attended Bryn Mawr, but similarly did not graduate.[46] May Brooks of Winchester, Massachusetts attended Wellesley College for a couple of years, but left to teach school

[45] Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street," 157.
[46] Joan Marie Johnson, "Job Market or Marriage Market? Life Choices for Southern Women Educated at Northern Colleges, 1875-1915," *History of Education Quarterly* 47(May 2007): 149-50.

near her home. Other women probably dropped out of college to get married. In these census data samples, approximately half of the women who attended college remained for less than four years.

It is possible to suggest a few reasons why the marriage rates of college dropouts were higher. First, by attending college less than four years, a woman probably had less of an investment in a career than one who studied longer; she might be more willing to give it up for marriage. Many of these women did not have had a specific aims or career plans when attending college. Margaret Preston did not want to go at all. Instead, these women, or their families, wanted them to gain "the intangibles of a liberal education: a general bettering of themselves, sharpening of their minds, building of their characters, and developing their person to the fullest potential."[47] Other women, according to a 1909 *New York Times* article, were more interested in "the general college life and its liberal influences" and an experience which by then had become "socially the fashion" rather than a single-minded pursuit of studies.[48] Thus without concrete educational goals or allegiance to a career, marriage to a good man was probably a more attractive option than lifelong singleness.

Attending college less than four years also provided many women with opportunities for marriage earlier than those who remained to earn a degree. Historian Mary Cookingham argues that by postponing marriage for a career, or in this case an education, women sometimes missed opportunities to find a husband all together. The longer a woman waited, the fewer the men available.[49] One Barnard college student

[47] Johnson, "Job Market or Marriage Market?" 151.
[48] "College Women and Race Suicide" *New York Times*, June 16, 1909, p. 6.
[49] Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues," 356.

complained about the difficulty of meeting men, even those at Columbia University. "Unless a Barnard girl happens to become acquainted with a few Columbia men outside of college, she has no opportunity of ever meeting any..." even in the classes that Columbia and Barnard students attended together.[50] At the same time, at least one Columbia student found the Barnard women he met around campus "priggish" and "not cordial to men, but independent and distant."[51] By leaving college, particularly a woman's college, an unmarried woman was probably put in a situation where she was more likely to meet men, perhaps even one who was interested in getting married. As a reporter for the *Washington [D.C.] Times* put it, "the thing which makes hearts go pit-a-pat is propinquity. While the college girl is getting her education the girl who stops … is going to the dance with James, and James is looking for a steady job that will support two."[52] By leaving school early, a woman was able to increase her chances for marriage.

Thus, a woman's prospects for marriage were significantly shaped by the level of education she attained. The longer she remained in school, the less likely she was to marry. However, college-educated women were more likely to marry than previous scholars thought. More than 70 percent of women born between 1865 and 1905 whose education ended after four years of college married at some point during in their lives. It was only when they attained advanced degrees that women's the marriage rates dropped to between 50 and 60 percent. Additionally, the marital behavior of women who attended college for less than four years was more similar to that of high school students than college graduates. Leaving school sooner, they were more likely to take a husband than

[50] Barnard 1914, "The Girl in College" *New York Times*, Sept 20, 1915.
[51] Columbia 1903, "Why College Girls Do Not Please" *New York Times*, Sep 10, 1915.
[52] "The College Girl and the Marriage Question" *The Washington Times*, February 2, 1909.

women who spent more time on an education or a career. 80 to 90 percent of college dropouts married. The level of education completed undoubtedly had some affect on a woman's marital decisions. However, it was not as much a detriment as previous scholars and contemporaries thought.

College Graduates and Never-Married Women

As the percent of women remaining single was overstated by contemporaries, the effect college women had on the population of never-married women in the United States was also misunderstood. According to historian Barbara Miller Solomon, the various surveys conducted in relation to college women and marriage give "some credence to those who associated women's higher education with the increasing proportion of single women in American society."[53] Dr. William L. Felter, Principal of Girls' High School in Brooklyn, NY, claimed in a 1909 convocation address at Adelphi College that "It would be too sweeping an assertion ... to state that women's colleges are institutions for the promotion of celibacy, and yet an examination of the percentage of marriages among college bred women would lend color to the statement.'"[54] Many in the popular media of the late-19th and early-20th centuries associated the two, blaming, at least in part, educated women for causing the perceived increase in singleness. Few commentators were naive enough to place the blame entirely on college women, but higher education for women was often prominently included among the list of reasons. For example, reformer and suffragist Mary Livermore, in a lecture titled "The Women Who Do Not Marry," claimed that one of the reasons that women did not marry was that a woman with a college

[53] Solomon, *In The Company of Educated Women*, 119.
[54] "Birth Rate Diminishing," *New York Tribune*, February 4, 1906.

education was more selective in choosing a husband. Livermore described the college graduate as

> "highly educated, refined, pure, capable of earning for herself a large income and making a place for herself in the world. Can it be wondered ... that, when a man comes offering marriage to such a woman, she should look him all over and say: 'You are asking for me; what have you to give in return?"[55]

Other commentators felt that college women remained single in large numbers because their education made them unattractive to men. Such women focused too much on academic achievements and neglected domestic skills. One anonymous author proclaimed that "Men like women to be feminine and subservient, tender, loving, faithful, and not too well informed."[56] Carolyn Shipman also blamed women's college education as one of the factors causing the rise in singleness in the United States in her article "The Anomalous Position of the Unmarried Women." Shipman described the college education women received as "defective" because it "ignore[ed] wifehood and motherhood" and did "not tacitly have these ends in view."[57] Such a system left women eager to be independent and "unmarried wage earners" instead of wives which, according to Shipman was where their true happiness lay.[58]

Census data can be used to evaluate this stereotype and determine how large an impact never-married college women had on the overall population of never-married women in the United States. As shown in Figure 1.13 in Chapter 1, the percent of never married-women in the U.S. between the ages of 45 and 54 increased from 1880 until 1920 and then began to decrease. If college women were in any way responsible for the

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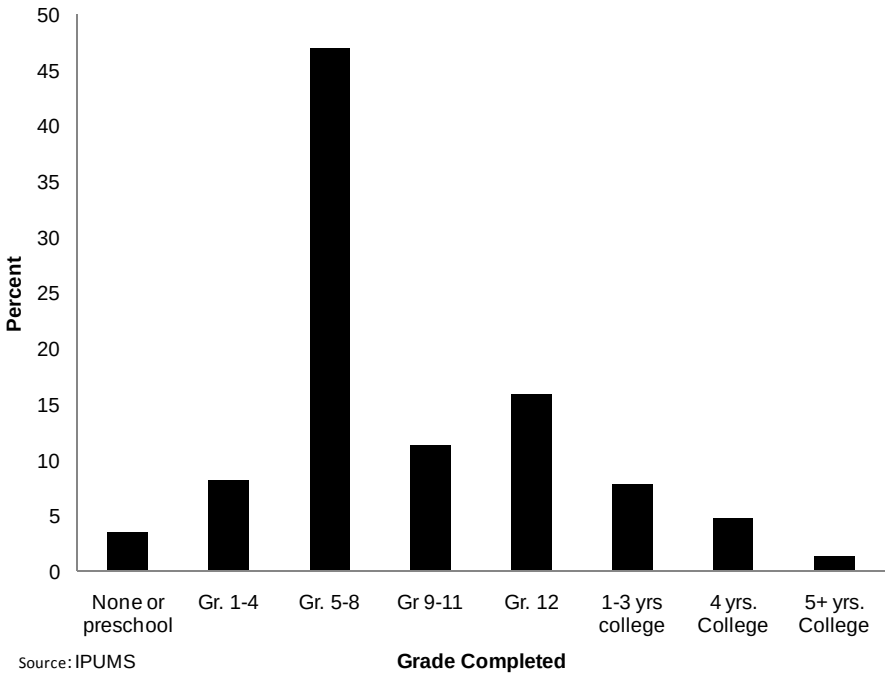
[55] "Women Who Do Not Wed" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1891.
[56] "They Know Too Much" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1895.
[57] Carolyn Shipman, "The Anomalous Position of the Unmarried Woman" *North American Review* 190(Sept. 1909): 345.
[58] Shipman, "The Anomalous Position of the Unmarried Woman," 345-6.

increase, they should make up a sizable portion of never-married women, especially in the highest year – 1920. The women who were 45 – 54 years old in the 1920 census were born between 1865 and 1875. These women can be matched with women of the same ages in the 1940 census for whom educational attainment is known. The percent of never-married women in the 1940 census, born between 1865 and 1875, reaching each level of educational attainment was calculated. The results are displayed in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Educational Attainment of Never Married Women, Born 1865-1875



It is clear from Figure 2.3 that the vast majority of never-married women born between 1865 and 1875 had less than a college education. More than half – 57.78 percent – had an eighth grade education or less and 86.01 percent had a high school education or less. Only 6.15 percent of the population of never-married women completed four or more years of college. Therefore, the women about whom eugenicists were so concerned

and studied so intently, those with four or more years of college, were only a small fraction of the population of never-married women and probably had little effect on the increase or decrease of the population of never-married women in general.

Returning to Figure 2.2, it can be seen that the rates at which women with four or more years of college remained single began to decrease later than those of women with less education. The rates of singleness for women with less than four years of college peaked no later than the generation born between 1865 and 1875. However, the percent of women with four years of college who remained single continued to increase through the cohort born between 1875 and 1885; the percent of women with more than four years of college who remained single continued to increase through the cohort born between 1885 and 1895. Thus, as the percent of lesser educated women who remained single began to decrease, the percent of women completing four or more years of college who remained single continued to increase for one to two additional decades, thus becoming a larger percent of the pool of never-married women. So while college-educated women may have slowed the decline to some extent, they neither caused of the growth of never-married women in the United States nor could prevent the decline. Therefore the critics of the early 20th century clearly misplaced their blame for the increase in the number of never-married women in the United States and should have looked for reasons other than female college education for the causes.

Conclusion

College educated women were indeed more likely to remain single their entire lives than were the general population of women in the United States born between 1865

and 1905. However, eugenicists, critics, and statisticians of the time as well as more recent scholars have overestimated the percent of college women who never married. Less than 30 percent of college women whose education ended with a four-year degree remained single their entire lives – approximately half of previous estimates. It was only the women who attended college for more than four years whose marriage rates fell below 60 percent. Finally, in spite of their high rates of singleness, these highly educated women only made up a small percentage of the population of never-married women in the United States and could hardly have caused the increase in singleness between 1880 and 1920 or prevented the subsequent decline. By the 1920s, newspaper reports of the marriages of women with college degrees were commonplace and the alma mater of the bride was mentioned in passing much the same way as the alma mater of the groom. No longer were women like Elsa Ornstein, whose marriage was detailed at the beginning of this chapter, seen as unusual.

College women were not the cause of the increased number of single women in the United States. Most single women had less than a high school education, like most other Americans. The contemporary and scholarly focus on college women obscured the fact that never-married women in the United States came from almost all races, nationalities, and backgrounds, as well as all corners of the country. Most had less than a high school education just like the American population as a whole. Higher education certainly shaped a woman's marital decisions, but its affects were mostly felt by white, U.S.-born women, probably from affluent families. Additional analysis is necessary to determine what other factors, like race, birth country, or state of residence, might have shaped other women's life choices.

Chapter 3 – "Necessary after a Fashion": Single Women, Marriage, Race, and Ethnicity[1]

> "Marriage to a woman is a very serious matter. In fact it is almost as serious as remaining an old maid." – *New York Times*, December 18, 1910 [2]

On April 30, 1897, the *New York Times* reported that a few hundred "independent," young Irish women had arrived in the city the previous day on the steamships *Majestic* and *Servia*. Their story was picked up ten days later by a Portland, Oregon paper, *The Oregonian*, which cheerfully welcomed the women's arrival in New York "in response to the demand for housegirls [sic.] in that city and throughout the country." However, house service was not the only benefit *The Oregonian* reporter believed these women would bring to the United States. "[I]n the course of time most of them will find husbands of their sort, and will make good and contented wives, strong enough to bear children cheerfully and be able to endow them with the qualities of achieving citizens of the republic."[3]

Although this reporter celebrated the families these women would one day have, many of these Irish-born women probably never married. According to the U.S. census, in 1900, Irish-born men and women remained single at rates higher than any other foreign-born group. Approximately 14.3 percent of the Irish-born women in the United States never married – women like Mary Kyre, a restaurant cook in San Francisco, Sister Eugratis Donohue, a teacher in Washington DC, Annie Donovan, an unspecified laborer in central Connecticut, or Emma Howe, a servant in Chicago.[4] Historian Hasia Diner

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[1] Randy D. McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working Class Immigrants in the United States*. (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 34.
[2] "Musings of the Gentle Cynic." *The New York Times*, 18 December 1910, SM 12.
[3] Untitled article, *Morning Oregonian*, May 10, 1897, p. 4, Col A.
[4] Percent single generated from the 1900 census; examples came from the 1920 U.S. census via IPUMS.

pointed out in her book *Erin's Daughters in America* that, "Irish women brought over from Ireland a tradition... of late marriage or nonmarriage [and] the tradition remained strong in America...."[5] Although Irish women in the United States were less likely than their sisters in Ireland to remain single their entire lives, they "married less frequently than any other immigrant group."[6]

Irish immigrants were not the only group that brought their own marriage customs to America with them. Each of the different ethnic and racial groups in the United States had its own customs and traditions that influenced the frequency of marriage. Although historians identify a number of reasons why women might eschew marriage, their focus on white, middle- or upper-class, U.S.-born women has led them to overlook these important factors – race and ethnicity. Some groups placed a far higher value on marriage than others and put women under varying degrees of pressure to find a spouse. It is argued in this chapter that as much as the reasons listed by other scholars, a woman's race and ethnicity had a significant impact on whether or not she remained single her entire life. In fact, race and ethnicity were the most important factors shaping a woman's decision to marry: they provided fundamental parameters under which she made her life choices.

Binary Logistic Regression

To identify factors that contributed to the rate at which 45 – 54 year old women in the United States remained single between 1880 and 1930, I used the statistical process

[5] Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Women in the Nineteenth Century*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) 51.
[6] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 46.

binary logistic regression analysis. Through this technique, the likelihood of particular outcome or event – in this case singleness – is predicted by examining a set of potential factors that might shape a woman's marital decision. The outcome you are trying to predict, in statistical terms, is known as the dependent variable. Each potential factor that might shape the outcome is known as an independent variable. For this analysis, I selected independent variables from the information recorded by census enumerators about individual women as listed in Table 3.1. For further details and the statistical results from this analysis see Appendix A.

Table 3.1: The Effect of the Independent Variables on the Rate of Marriage

Variable	Effect
Year	Both*
Age	Increase
Illiterate	Both **
Black	Increase
Foreign	Increase

* Rates of singleness increased and decresed over time

** Illiteracy increased the rate of marriage among all people, but decreased it among the white U.S.-born population. See Chapter 2 for further discussion of illiteracy and marriage rates.

As shown in Table 3.1, age, race, and foreign birth each affected the rates at which women married. Logically, age was an important factor. The older a woman was the more likely she was to be married. For example, between 1880 and 1930, most forty-seven year old women were or had been married, but most fifteen year old women were never-married. More significant, however, were race and place of birth, represented by the variables "black" and "foreign". A woman's race shaped her marital fate as did her place of birth. Many foreign-born women were more likely to marry than U.S.-born women. Although the census data used in this project reveals that African-American

women were more likely to marry than white women, there is not enough data to include comparisons with women from other races. A woman's marital fate was thus shaped by the ethnic and/or racial group in the United States to which she belonged. The values, advantages, and limitations created by their race and ethnicity provided the parameters through which specific women made their marital choices.

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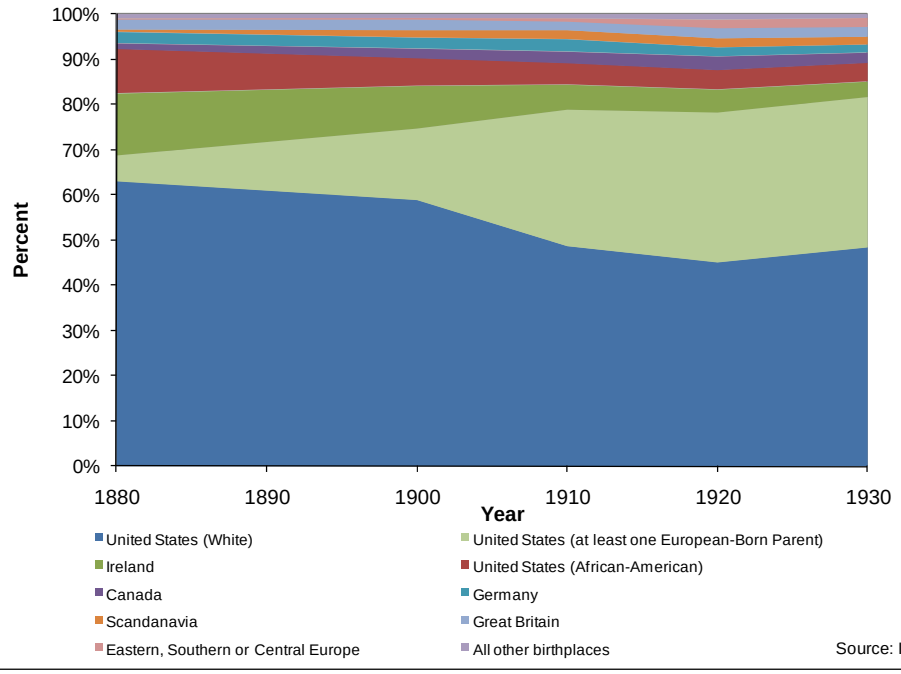
Marital Status, Race, and Ethnicity

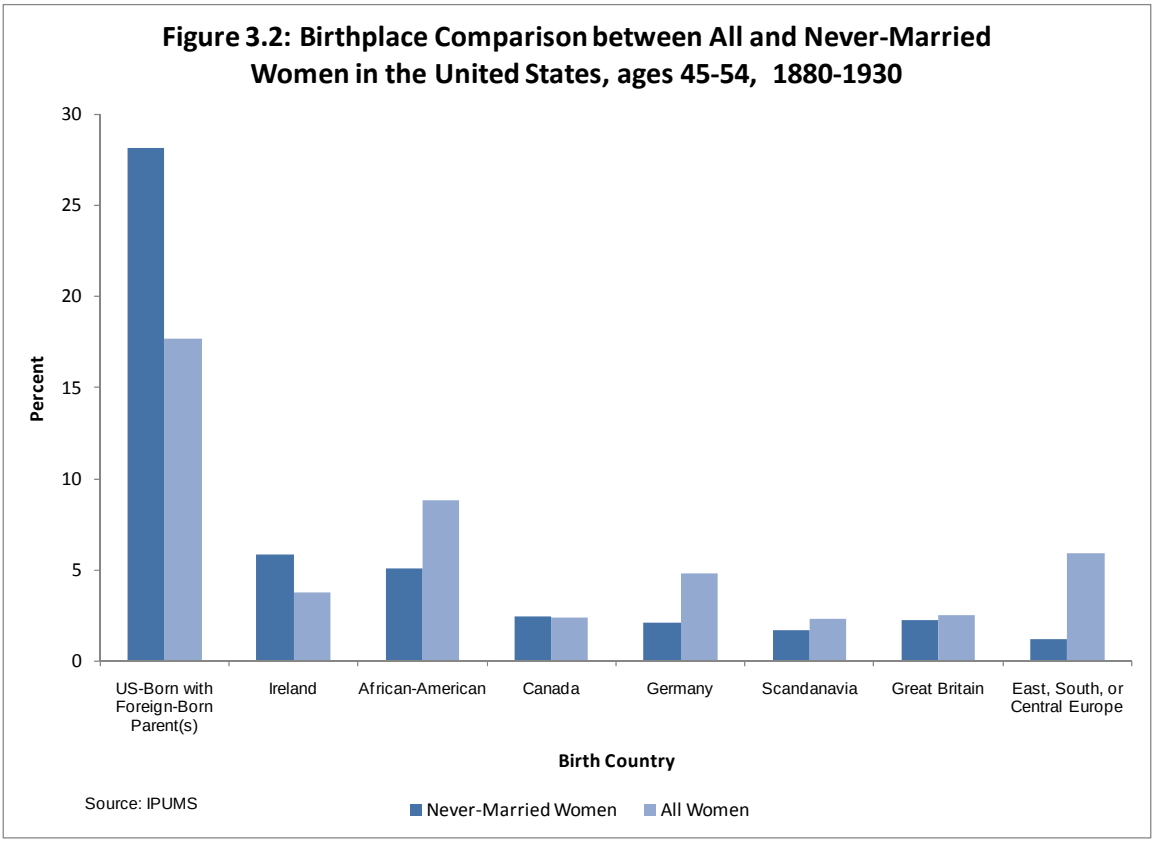
The 1880-1930 U.S. censuses reveal that the population of 45 to 54 year-old never-married women in the United States was a very diverse group as illustrated below in Figure 3.1. Although the largest group of never-married women was white, U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents throughout this period, there were also significant groups of Irish-born women and white U.S.-born women with foreign-born parents. Together,

Figure 3.1: Birthplaces of the Population of Never-Married Women in the United States, ages 45-54, 1880-1930



white U.S.-born women, both of U.S. and foreign-born parents, and Irish-born women accounted for about 82 to 85 percent of all never-married women in the United States between 1880 and 1930. The African-American population of never-married women was always relatively small and decreased significantly between 1880 and 1930 as more and more 45-54 year old black women were recorded in the census as married at some point in their lives. Shown in Figure 3.1, the percent of never-married women who were African-American ranged from just under 11 percent in 1880 to approximately 5 percent in 1930.

The ethnic and racial makeup of the population of never-married women was somewhat different from that of the general population of all 45 – 54 year old women in



the United States during this same period. The percentage of women in each population who were white and U.S.-born with U.S.-born parents was almost exactly the same: 50.14 percent for never-married women and 50.08 percent for all women. However, as illustrated in Figure 3.2, some other groups were significantly over- or under-represented in the population of never-married women. There were, for example, significantly fewer African-American and East, South, and Central European women in the population of never-married women than in the general population, while the population of U.S.-born women with foreign born parents was significantly over-represented. Historians show that women tended to look for husbands in their own ethnic or racial group.[7] It is therefore likely that there were some beliefs, traditions, or realities in the individual ethnic groups that affected the rate of marriage of that population, as also shown by the results of the binary logistic regression analysis.

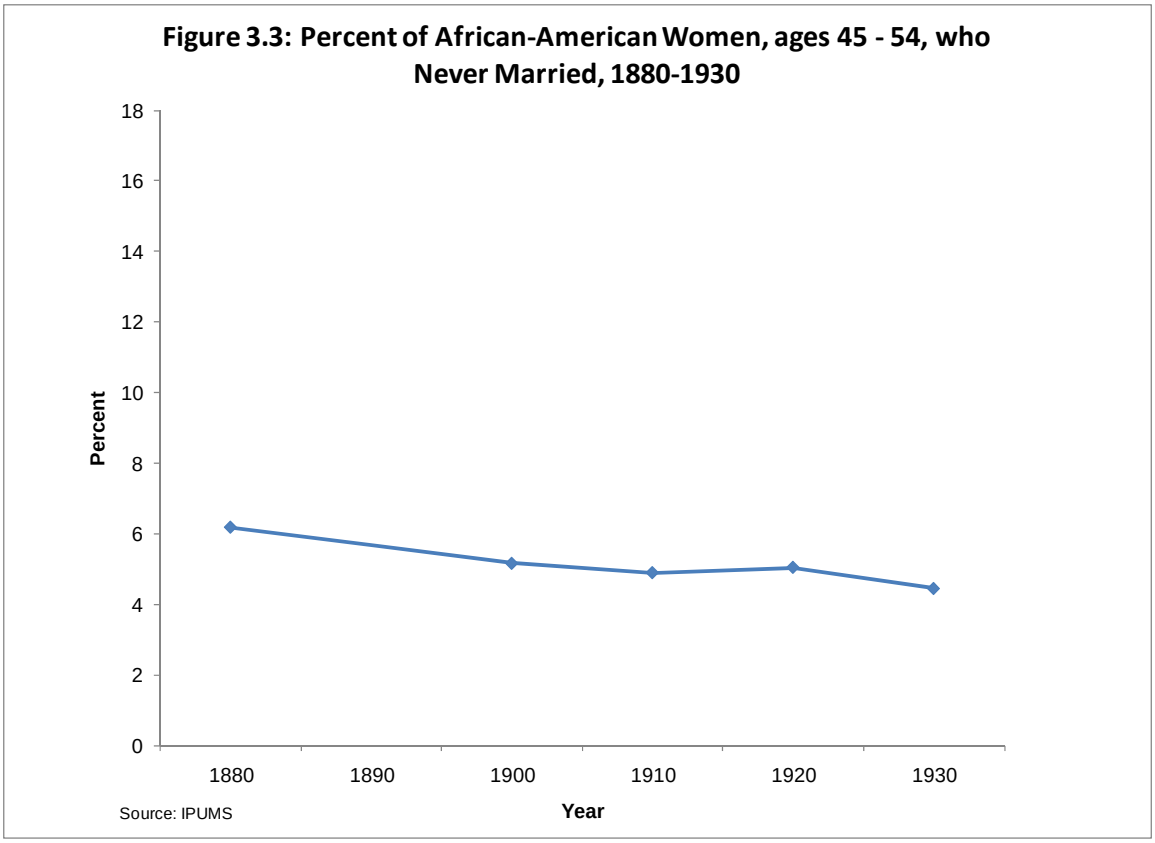
Figure 1.13 in Chapter 1 showed that the percent of all women in the United States between the ages of 45 and 54 who never-married ranged from a low of 6.83 percent in 1880, grew steadily to 9.44 percent by 1920, and then decreased to 8.93 percent by 1930. While this graph is an accurate reflection of what was happening at a national level, it is based on the life choices of women from many different races or ethnicities, each with their own customs and traditions in connection with marriage. To understand how they shaped a woman's marital fate, one must look separately at each ethnic/racial group with a sufficiently large number of individuals in IPUMS census data samples. Women born in Ireland, Scandinavia, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, and

[7] See for example McBee, *Dance Hall Days*; Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); or Peggy Pascoe *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

East, South or Central Europe will be examined as well as U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born, African-American women, and U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents. By looking at each group separately, it might be possible to determine how it shaped a woman's matrimonial fate.

African-American Women

Between 1880 and 1930, African-American women were the least likely of all U.S.-born women to remain single their entire lives. They were also increasingly likely to marry. From a high of 6.17 percent in 1880, the percent of black women who never married dropped to about 4.69 percent in 1910, as shown in Figure 3.3.[8] The percent



[8] Figure 3 was calculated by dividing the number of never-married African-American women by the total number of African-American women. The scale ranging from 0 to 18 percent was selected because it was the same as the scale used in most of the other similar figures in this chapter.

remaining single then stayed between 4.44 and 5.08 percent for the rest of the period under analysis, changing by less than 0.60 percent from decade to decade. Farther and farther below the national average for the United States, the percent remaining single declined overall by 1.73 percent for the period.

It is not surprising that black women were among the least likely to remain single. Many African-Americans, still recovering from slavery, placed a high value on marriage. It was, to some extent, a political act, demonstrating to whites the respectability of black people as well as exercising a right only available with freedom.[9] Before emancipation, slave marriages were often arranged by the master or at least required his blessing to take place. These marriages were not legally binding and could be disrupted by not only by death, but also by forced separation through sale. Further disruption in marriages occurred during the Civil War. Owners, desperate to raise money, sold slaves and thereby destroyed many marriages. Men were also taken away from families when the Confederate army impressed slaves.[10] Following the war, freedmen and women went to great lengths to locate spouses and formalize marriages if at all possible.[11] Marriage was one way African-Americans could celebrate their new status as free persons, a belief they passed on to their children.[12] In an oration given on January 5, 1866 to celebrate one year of freedom, one speaker proclaimed that, "This is a day of gratitude for the freedom of

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[9] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 17-18.
[10] Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 187.
[11] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 38-9; Catherine Clinton, "Reconstructing Freedwomen" in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 307.
[12] Eleanor Alexander, "The Courtship Season: Love, Race, and Elite African American Women at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." *OAH Magazine of History* 18 (July 2004): 17.

matrimony. Formerly there was no security for domestic happiness.... But now we can marry and raise our children, and teach them to fear God."[13] For those coming to maturity after slavery, the importance of marriage remained a strong force among black people.

Additionally, African-Americans did not pressure women to make as many personal sacrifices as white women commonly did upon marriage, which may have made marriage more attractive. According to historian Glenda Gilmore, black marriages may have been more of an equal partnership than white.[14] She cites numerous examples of such partnerships in her book *Gender and Jim Crow* including Charles and Sarah Pettey, George and Anna Julia Cooper, and Maggie Hood and her husband.[15] Black people also seem to have been more accepting of women operating in the public sphere than whites. Unlike white women, middle-class black women did not usually have to choose between a career and marriage. Census data shows that for the few African-American professional women there were, a significant majority were married. (The opposite was true for white women.) Black women, for example, sometimes taught after marriage, something white schools did not typically allow.[16] Mercy Johnson of Pine Bluff Arkansas and Harriet Tuitsch of rural Louisiana were married teachers. Additionally, Elizabeth Sylvas of Norwich, Connecticut and Annie McCoy of Louisville, Kentucky were married physicians.[17]

The precarious financial situation of many black families did not always permit women to leave the paid workforce after marriage. The low wages paid black men made

[13] Clinton, "Reconstructing Freedwomen," 307.
[14] Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 17-8.
[15] Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 17-8, 44-6.
[16] Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43
[17] IPUMS census data, 1880-1930, accessed Sept. 8, 2008

women's contributions to the family incomes very important.[18] The wages of women like Mary Langman, a married laundress from rural Alabama or Lizzie Taylor, a married farm laborer from Louisiana, were probably vital to their family's survival.[19] Their contributions to the family income also may have given them a household authority that married U.S.-born white woman did not hold. Economic survival of any black woman was difficult; it was easier to marry and share the financial burden. Such a condition may have further propelled African-American women into marriage.

Finally, except for 1880, the sex ratios among African-Americans tended to be quite favorable for women seeking husbands. In 1880, 51.82 percent of never-married, rural African-Americans and 56.01 of never-married, urban African-Americans were female. This was likely the result of the disruptions in the black population caused by slavery, Civil War, and Emancipation which decreased the number of men available for marriage. On the other hand, from 1900 to 1930, there were significant majorities of never-married African-American men in both rural and urban communities. In 1920, for example, when the population was the most unbalanced, only 29.27 percent of the rural population and 32.47 percent of the urban population of forty-five to fifty-four years old never-married African-Americans were female. This apparent shortage of single women further enabled African-American women to find husbands.

African-Americans faced marriage pressures somewhat different from those of the white women described by other historians. The history of slavery and different

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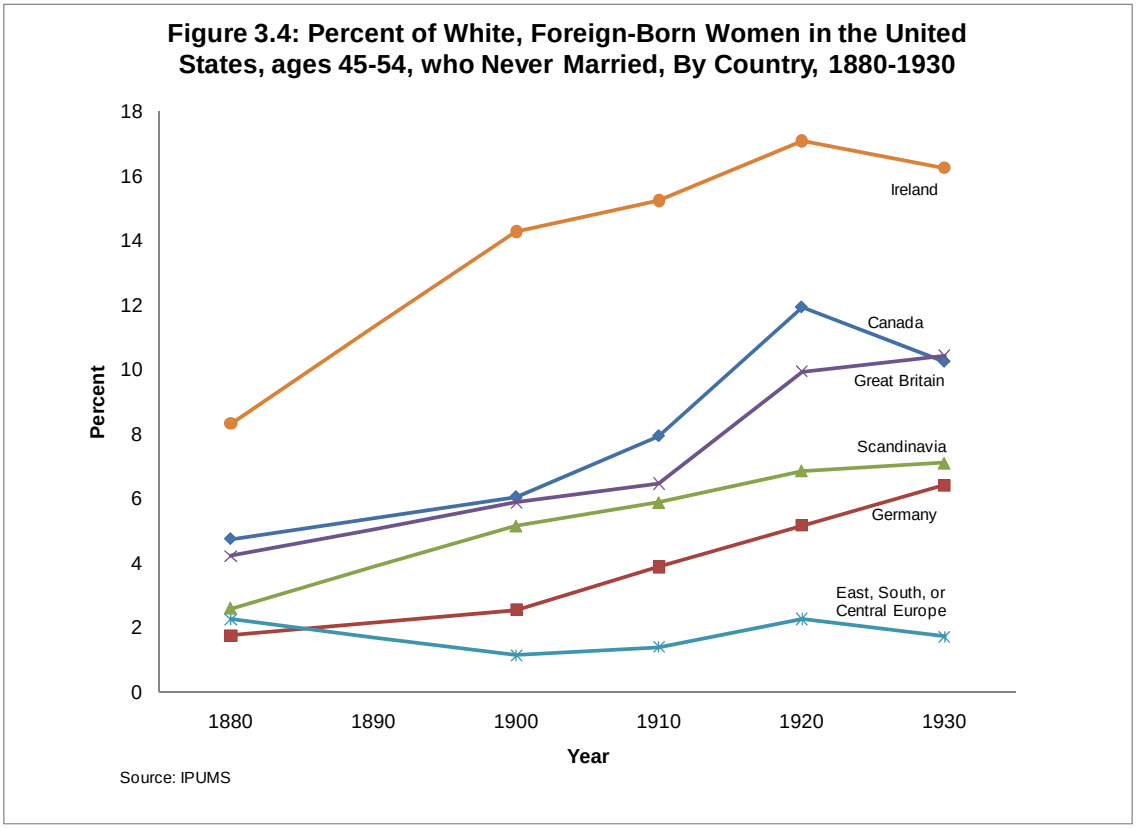
[18] See for example, Carole Marks, *Farewell – We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) 128-9; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, labor of Sorrow: Black Women and the Family. From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 89-91; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: a History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 123.

[19] IPUMS census data, 1880-1930, accessed Sept. 8, 2008.

family expectations both pushed and pulled African-American women toward marriage in unique ways. Thus, for black women, racial and ethnic values, priorities, and realities had a significant effect on their matrimonial fate.

Foreign-Born, Never-Married Women

The rates at which foreign-born women remained single their entire lives varied from group to group, as illustrated in Figure 3.4.[20] Irish-born women were the most likely of all foreign-born women in the United States to remain single their entire lives.



[20] This figure was created by separating the population of women in the United States between the ages of 45 and 54 into groups by country of birth and/or race. Then, the percent never-married was calculated for each group. The results for Irish, Canadian, British, Scandinavian, German, and South, Central, or Eastern European women are displayed here. The statistics for women born in the U.S. will be presented later in this chapter. The IPUMS samples available for women from other countries of birth were too small to

Consistently well over the national average shown in Figure 1.13, the percent of Irish-born women remaining single more than doubled between 1880 and 1920, growing from 8.32 percent to 17.08 percent, then dropping off to 16.23 percent by 1930. Women who were born in Canada, Great Britain, Scandinavia, or Germany were also increasingly likely to remain single until at least 1920, but only those born in Canada and Great Britain were ever over the national average, and then only after 1910. Women from Eastern, Southern, or Central Europe showed no steady or significant change in rates of singleness over this period. At 2.24 percent in 1880, the rate of singleness for Eastern, Southern, or Central European-born women fluctuated between 1.13 and 2.26 percent over the course of this period, decreasing by 0.53 percent overall and changing by less than 1 percent from one decade to the next. This was 4.5 to 7.2 percent below average in the United States at the time.

Men and women from these countries migrated to the United States in different patterns, alone or in groups, and at different rates; most countries sent more men than women, but Ireland more women than men. Immigrant men and women also sometimes settled in different places, depending on where the best employment could be found. Whether single women migrated to the United States with or without their families, they brought with them a set of beliefs reflecting the importance of marriage, particularly in their own imagined futures. These beliefs were typically reinforced by the people they settled with in America. Thus local culture and demography significantly affected whether the women married or not. These factors are reflected in the varying statistics shown in Figure 3.4.

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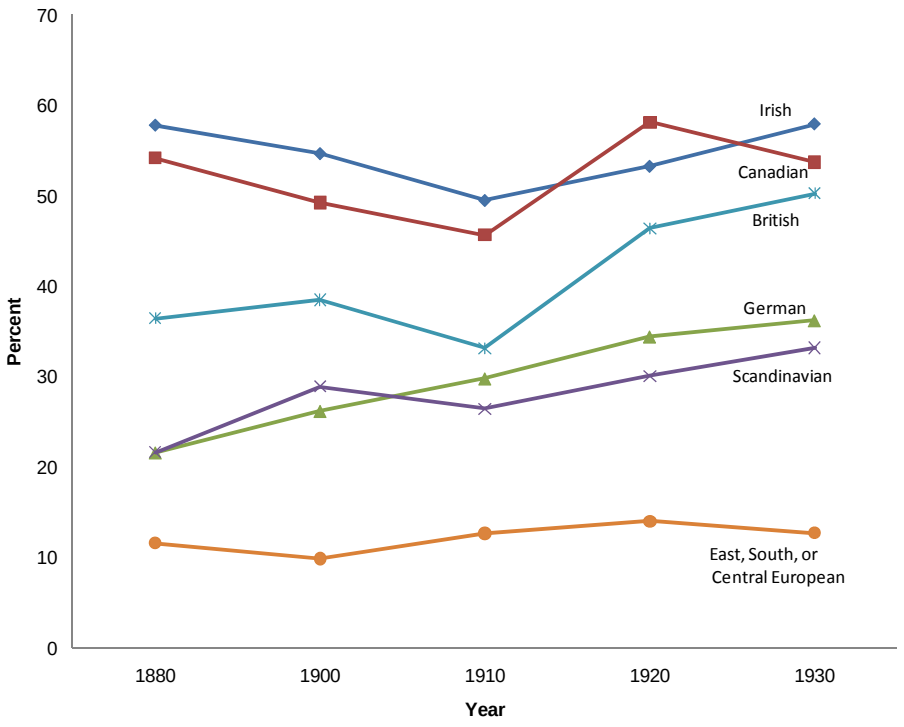
allow analysis.

The sex ratio of women to men was a fundamental factor that contributed to the differing rates of singleness. Immigrants typically married someone from their own ethnic group.[21] Once in the United States, loneliness and unfamiliar surroundings made homesick men (and women) eager to marry someone from a familiar culture. "[Being] among our own people… made you feel better and closer to home," recalled one Polish woman. "Getting married was also necessary after a fashion. It had some semblance of security about it in this new land and life." [22] Census data shows that places in the United States with a significantly larger number of single men than single women generally saw

Figure 3.5 Percent of Foreign-Born Individuals in Urban areas of the U.S., Between the Ages of 45 and 54, that were Female, by Ethnic Group



[21] Janet E. Rasmussen, "'I Met Him at Normanna Hall': Ethnic Cohesion and Marital Patterns among Scandinavian Immigrant Women." *Norwegian-American Studies* 32(1989): 71. Accessed online May 29, 2009 at http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume32/vol32_04.htm .
[22] McBee, *Dance Hall Day,s* 34.

higher marriage rates among women than places where the opposite was true.

Throughout the United States, for each of the national groups examined here, rural areas always had more unmarried men than unmarried women. However, in urban ethnic communities, the sex ratios were more varied, as shown in Figure 3.5.[23] Urban U.S. communities of individuals born in Germany, East, South, or Central Europe, or Scandinavia typically had more single men than women. East, South, or Central European communities in particular had a tremendous surplus of unmarried men; at least 86 percent of the never-married individuals between 45 and 54 in these urban communities were male. Young, single men came to the United States from these countries in greater numbers than women, traveling both alone and in family groups. Women, especially those born in East, South, or Central Europe, usually came as part of a family group and older never-married women were sometimes left behind if the cost to relocate the whole group was prohibitive.[24] With many men and few women, these foreign-born women often had many suitors and felt a great deal of pressure from family to select one.[25] Sicilian-born Roberta Salerno remembered that "I married young. When Italian men came, they grabbed the girls right away…. Everyone wanted to marry me because there were not many Italian girls."[26] German-born August Frank, who lived in

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[23] In the IPUMS census data samples, the variable "urban" indicates whether a household's location was in an urban or rural area. The definition of "urban" varies from year to year, but is generally cities and incorporated places of 2,500 or more inhabitants. All areas not classified as urban are designated rural. (See http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=URBAN, accessed May 6, 2010, for further details on this variable.) To calculate the statistics shown in Figure 3.5, I first identified which foreign-born never-married women from each ethnic group lived in urban areas. Then, I divided that number by the total number of never-married women in the appropriate ethnic group.

[24] Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985) 148.

[25] McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 30.

[26] Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1850-1930*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977) 94. Obtained on line through the web site of the Scholarly Publishing

the United States, wrote his unmarried nieces back in Germany that "if you come here, I will see to it that each of you gets a good husband who lets you have nice dresses." [27] The census reveals that in communities where never-married women made up less than 37 percent of the population of never-married people, singleness rates were below the national average throughout this period and never higher than 7.1 percent.

The sex ratios in the urban Irish, British, and Canadian communities were less favorable to women wanting to marry, as shown as Figure 3.5. While the single men from these ethnic groups in the United States always outnumbered the women in rural communities, in urban areas, where most of these women migrated, there were more single women than men for at least one census between 1880 and 1930. Irish women seeking husbands usually faced the most unfavorable sex ratios with 49.47 to 57.95 percent of the Irish-born population in urban areas female over the course of these decades; only in 1910 was this below 50 percent. With no future at home, young Irish women came to the United States in greater numbers than young men, especially after 1885.[28] The women settled where they could find work, which was frequently as domestic servants in cities or large towns. Canadian-born men and women tended to settle in different places. Male migrants from Canada, for example, often worked on farms or in mines in rural areas, while Canadian-born women successfully found work in urban areas as nurses, clerical workers, factory workers or domestic servants. The percent of never-married women between the ages of 45 and 54 in the urban Canadian-born

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Office of the University of Michigan Library for ACLS Humanities E-Book at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.00485.0001.001. Accessed September 10, 2008.

[27] As quoted in Suzanne Sinke with Stephen Gross "The International Marriage Market and the Sphere of Social Reproduction: a German Case Study" in *Seeking Common Ground: Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United State*s, ed. Donna Gabaccia. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 67.

[28] Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland 1885-1920*. *Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 47.

communities ranged from 45.65 to 58.13 percent female and was below 50 percent only in 1900 and 1910. British-born women faced similar challenges when finding a husband, but it was only after 1920 that they outnumbered the British-born men in urban communities. By comparing Figure 3.4 with Figure 3.5, one can see that as the sex ratios became less favorable to women searching for husbands, the rate of singleness increased.

Sex ratio thus had an effect on rates of singleness. Where there were many more men than women, like among Eastern, Central and Southern Europeans in the United States, rates of singleness were very low. Where there were more women than men, like among the Irish-born, singleness rates were higher. And, it is clear that as the sex ratio became less favorable to women seeking husbands, singleness rates increased. However, sex ratio alone does not completely explain either the different rates of singleness or how they changed between 1880 and 1930. While, for example, the percent of Irish-born women between the ages of 45 and 54 fell and then rose during this period, the percent of Irish-born women remaining single steadily increased between 1880 and 1920, growing by over 8 percent. Also, while husband-seeking German-born women faced a slightly less favorable sex ratio than similar Scandinavian-born women, the German-born women tended to marry at higher rates. Other factors, such as the beliefs and values held in connection with marriage must also have played a significant role in determining the marital fate of a foreign-born woman in the United States.

Religion can not be ignored as an important factor in shaping a woman's marital decisions. Each of the major religions in the United States – Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant – had beliefs and priorities in connection with women and marriage. Each contributed to the forces pushing individual women toward or away from marriage.

In traditional Jewish law a "woman's role in life was defined as caring for her husband, children, and home."[29] With the great number of arranged marriages, foreign-born Jewish girls had few other options for a life path: serving their husbands well was seen as the ultimate goal in a woman's life and "her only hope of salvation."[30] Although some Jewish women in the United States challenged these beliefs, in doing so they "violated a basic tenet of Jewish family structure: that women were merely the servants of men, the extensions of their husbands."[31] On the other hand, for some Catholic women, particularly an Irish Catholic women, life long singleness could be a real option given the Catholic tradition of nuns. According to historian Maureen Fitzgerald in *Habits of Compassion*, even "wives and mothers were on the low rungs of a hierarchy of sexual respectability," among Irish-born Catholics, while nuns were near the top.[32] Additionally, being a nun gave a woman the opportunity to live within a community of women and frequently perform necessary, even rewarding work. Although, for example, Italian-born families, might put significantly more pressure on a girl to marry than the Irish-born, becoming a nun was always in the background among Catholic women as a possibility for lifelong singleness. Protestant women had no model of single life like Catholic nuns, but their salvation typically did not rest on serving men as in the case of orthodox Jewish women. Protestant families in the United States expected daughters to marry and only tended to condone singleness among "dutiful daughters … who cared first for their parents, then for other relatives, and finally for the poor, sick, orphaned, or sinful of their

[29] Norma Fain Pratt, "Transitions in Judaism: The Jewish American Woman through the 1930s" *American Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1978) 685
[30] Alice Kessler-Harris in her Introduction to Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (New York: Persea Books, 1975) vi.
[31] Kessler-Harris, Introduction *Bread Givers,* ix.
[32] Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 31.

communities."[33] Although singleness was imaginable, it was not always practical given attitudes of the 19th and early 20th centuries. No two individuals or groups in the United States – Catholic, Jewish, or Protestant – interpreted or applied their particular religions traditions in exactly the same way. Further, these traditions were combined with secular traditions and became part of the cultural lens through which a woman and her family viewed her future.

Women born in South, Central, and Eastern Europe, for example, were the least likely of all foreign-born women in the United States examined here to remain single their entire lives. Historians have documented how these women, particularly the Jewish women, were brought up to believe that lifelong singleness was not a desirable fate. "Marriage," according to historian Sydney Stahl Weinberg in *The World of Our Mothers*, "was the goal of almost all young women and an 'old maid' was an object of ridicule."[34] A "spinster's life," according to historian Anna R. Ingra in *Wives Without Husbands*, "was difficult and considered pitiful" especially in Russian Jewish immigrant communities.[35] Historian Virginia Yans-McLaughlin argues that "[t]he Italian peasant considered marriage a sacred, lifetime bond; and the law, the Catholic church, and the community all supported this belief."[36] Given the importance of marriage in their daughters' lives, parents sometimes felt obliged to intervene in their matrimonial decisions. Some, particularly Polish and Italian fathers, wished "to preserve the customs

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[33] Lee VirginiaChambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840 (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 25.
[34] Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 205.
[35] Anna R. Ingra, *Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 11.
[36] Yans-McLaughlin, *Family*, 82, 92.

of the old country" and orchestrated matches for their children.[37] Anzia Yezierska immortalized such fathers in her novel *Bread Givers*. The father in the book, Russian immigrant Reb Smolinsky, forced his three oldest daughters to marry men of his choosing rather than the men they loved. He felt it was "shameless and unwomanly [for] a girl [to tell] her father *this* man I want to marry." [Italics original.] [38] It was to his immense pride "that he could marry off two daughters in one day."[39] In life, Polish-born Pauline Golembrewski's marriage was arranged by her brother; Italian-born Letetia Serpe recalled that her mother and future mother-in-law "got together and agreed that I should be married to the woman's son."[40] With such a high value placed on marriage and such pressure to marry, it is little surprise that women from these countries remained single at very low rates.

At the same time, these young women perceived marriage as something that would improve their lives and status. Women living in Eastern, Central, or Southern European ethnic communities in the United States often gained power and respect within their households and their communities upon marriage. While the husband was typically head of the household, wives were able to decide when and how their housework was done and had say as to how the money that came into the house was spent, something most daughters could not do.[41] Although many of these women worked outside of the home before marriage, they frequently held factory jobs or some other unrewarding work. Marriage often allowed women to leave such undesirable jobs since husbands typically

[37] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 226.
[38] Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (New York: Persea Books, 1975), 76.
[39] Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, 88.
[40] McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, 30.
[41] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 104, 161.

did not allow their wives to work outside the home if at all possible.[42] Settlement house workers reported that many women saw marriage as "a step toward freedom, or an opportunity to be rid of disagreeable work in the factory or in the home."[43] Yetta Bursky, for example, recalled that "I married for one reason…to get out of the house and become independent."[44] A perception that marriage was a desirable fate, pressure to marry and significantly more men than women made women from East, South, or Central Europe remain single at lower rates than any other women in the United States.

Irish-born women faced a very different set of expectations. The pressures they faced were more likely to push women away from marriage than those faced by East, South, or Central European-born women. Marriage rates in Ireland had been quite high before the potato famine. However, in the years following, the Irish became "convinced that the devastation and destruction [of the famine] … had been in part caused by irrational, carefree marriage and family practices that failed to treat conjugal life as a fundamentally economic enterprise."[45] Changes quickly followed. New laws prohibited the subdivision of small farms and made it impossible for more than one son to inherit the family holdings. Economic realities made it unlikely that a now necessary dowry could be raised for more than one daughter. Young men and women grew convinced that early marriages were unwise and that lifelong singlehood was a viable option. By the 1870s, more young men and women were remaining single in Ireland than in any other place in

[42] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars,* 230.
[43] Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, eds. *Young Working Girls: A Summary of Evidence from Two Thousand Social Workers*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913) 161.
[44] As quoted in Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars,* 229.
[45] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America,* 7.

Europe.[46] "[T]he low rate of marriage, born of the economic necessities of rural Irish life, remained a common practice among Irish people who had chosen to leave Ireland…."[47] Although the rate at which Irish-born people in the United States remained single was lower than in Ireland, it was higher than almost every other ethnic or racial group within the United States.[48]

Irish-born women also felt pressure to remain single in order to continue helping their families back home. Like Italian or Chinese men, for example, these women sent large sums of money back to family in the "old country" which, among other things, helped support their parents or siblings, brought additional relatives to the United States, or contributed to a dowry for a sister wanting to marry. Mostly employed as domestic servants, the money would dry up after marriage. This led these women to frequently postpone marriage, here permanently, in order to keep helping their families. One 19th century commentator described Irish women in American as "unconscious martyrs to filial duty" making many sacrifices to assist their parents or other family members, including "the vision of a home blessed by the love of husband and the caresses of children."[49] Never-married woman Hannah Finn, for example, a "cook's helper" in a New York City hotel, supported her parents in Limerick for the rest of their lives.[50] Thus ethnic expectations shaped a woman's marital fate. However, in this case, singleness was far more acceptable and in some cases almost expected.

Among the European-born ethnic groups in the United States, women born in

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[46] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 5.
[47] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* 46.
[48] Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* 46.
[49] John Francis Maguire, M.P., *The Irish in America*. (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1868) 314-15. Accessed through University of Michigan Library, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ABL3952.001.001 on September 4, 2008.
[50] Maguire, M.P., *The Irish in America*, 330.

Eastern, Southern, or Central Europe and women born in Ireland represent the extremes in marriage rates. Marriage rates in other communities tended to fall between these two as attitudes brought from the "old" country as well as religion continued to influence marriage choices. For example, marriage in Germany was seen as critical for a young women's future. Both Christian and Jewish families went to great lengths to find their daughters matches in spite of the expensive dowry system in place at the time and a shortage of men because of out-migration.[51] As a result, according to Marion Kaplan, "some women emigrated as a result of proposals, others in pursuit of marriage possibilities."[52] Daughters sometimes migrated when marriage in Germany seemed impossible. For example, in the 1890s, three sisters from a family of nine went to the United States rather than remain single in Germany without a dowry.[53] With such beliefs and goals, it is little wonder that the vast majority of German-born women in the United States married at some point in their lives and rates of singleness among this population remained under the national average in the U.S. between 1880 and 1930. However, the less favorable sex ratios for the German-born women seeking marriage partners in America may have contributed to the fact that they were more likely to remain single than women from Central, Southern, or Eastern Europe.

Marriage for women in Scandinavia was also a high priority. Similar to the situation in Germany, the economic conditions in these countries made many young

[51] Marian Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity, in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 86.
[52] Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class,* 98.
[53] Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class,* 99.

women's futures seem bleak, leading them to migrate.[54] One reason these women came to the United States was to place themselves in situations that were more favorable for finding husbands. A young Swedish woman named Anna, for example, moved to St. Paul, Minnesota because there were few suitable single men near her family's home.[55] Because many came to the United States without their parents and found paid employment, they were less likely to be pressured into a match that did not promise happiness as well as security. The value of marriage in their original country is reflected in the fact that their rates of singleness were well below the national average in the United States, ranging between 2.5 and 7.1 percent between 1880 and 1930, in spite of the fact that many of these women controlled much of their own matrimonial fate.

Women from Great Britain came from a world with a shortage of men as a result of out-migration. The resulting "spinster problem" was widely discussed in British publications of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and women were urged to move to places where their chances of finding a husband were better. The United States was a popular destination.[56] At the same time, as women in England gained more opportunities to contribute to their own support, life-long singleness became a more appealing fate. This trend was mirrored in America. So, while they married at higher rates than women in their country of origin, it is not surprising that British-born women in America remained single at increasing rates that surpassed the national average for the United

[54] Joy Kathleen Lintelman, "'More Freedom, Better Pay': Single Swedish Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1991), 25.
[55] Lintelman, "'More Freedom, Better Pay'", 78.
[56] Rita S. Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 20.

States after 1910.[57]

Hard economic times in Eastern Canada in the late-19th and early 20th centuries sent thousands of single young women and men to the United States to provide additional income to help maintain family farms. The women who remained in Canada found their futures seemingly bleak with few jobs and many of the eligible young men gone. Marriage rates in Eastern Canada thus fell and life long singleness became a reality for more women. At the same time, many who migrated to the United States discovered they enjoyed the "independence and individuality" of paid work.[58] A Boston settlement worker commented that incomes of these Canadian-born women were "equal [to] or better than those of men whom they know, and they refuse to exchange single competence for the double poverty that must result in marriage."[59] With single life in Canada increasingly plausible, pressure to help family members back on the farm, and the rewards of paid employment, 4.7 to 11.9 percent of Canadian women in the United States remained single their entire lives, percentages that were above the U.S. national average after 1910.

Thus for foreign-born women, the ethnicity and their culture of origin had a profound impact on their matrimonial fates. Beliefs about the importance of marriage coupled with the number of men available went a long way to determining whether they married or not. A culture that placed a high priority on marriage and had many single men had few single women; one that was more accepting of lifelong singleness with

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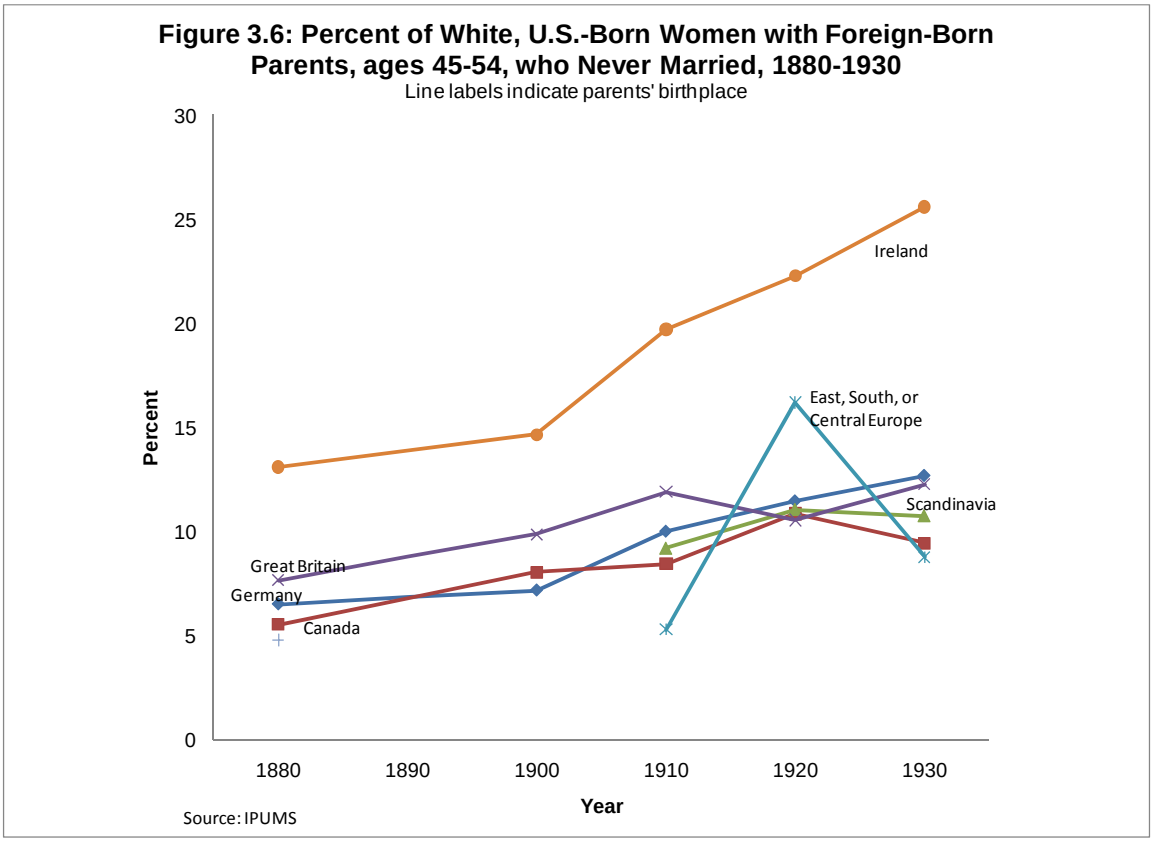
[57] Susan Cotts Watkins "Spinsters." *Special Issue: Spinsterhood, Journal of Family History* 9 (Winter 1984) 314.
[58] Florencemae Waldron, "'I've Never Dreamed it was Necessary to Marry': Women and Work in New England French Canadian Communities, 1870-1930." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25(Winter 2005):36.
[59] Betsy Beattie, Obligation *and Opportunity: Single Maritime Women in Boston, 1870-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 119.

fewer single men saw greater numbers of never-married women. Ethnicity and culture of origin played a significant role in determining a foreign-born woman's marital fate.



Daughters of the Foreign-Born

U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents were almost always more likely to remain single their entire lives than the women born in their parents' birth countries. The percent single for each group grew over the course of the period, although not always steadily or consistently from decade to decade as shown in Figure 3.6.[60] The daughters of

[60] Figure 3.6 was calculated the usual way, by dividing the number of 45 – 54 year old never-married women of a particular national group by the total number of women in that group. Information about U.S.-born women with Scandinavian-born parents and U.S.-born women with Eastern, Southern, or Central European parents has not been included for 1880-1900 because the total number of women in each group was too small to provide any reliable statistics. Note also that the scale on this graph is different from those

Irish immigrants were the most likely of all women in the United States to remain single their entire lives, even higher than the women born in Ireland. At 13.08 percent in 1880, the portion remaining single grew in the next half-century years to over 25.60 percent! U.S.-born women with German, Scandinavian, British, or Eastern, Southern, or Central European parents also remained single at rates somewhat higher than those of their parents; and these rates increased between 1880 and 1930. The percent of U.S.-born women of Canadian-born parents who remained single similarly grew during this period, from 5.53 to 10.85 between 1880 and 1920, dropping to 9.44 in 1930. Unlike other foreign born women, after 1910, U.S.-born women with Canadian-born parents remained single at lower rates than their Canadian-born counterparts. However, after 1910, singleness rates for all white U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents were above the national average and greater than those of U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents, whether black or white. [61]

In searching for reasons behind the higher rate of singleness among U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents, "[s]ome historians have suggested that there was a stronger sense of duty toward kin among immigrant groups than among long-established

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in the other figures in this chapter because the percent of U.S.-born women with Irish-born parents remaining single was so high.

[61] Although statistics on the percent remaining single were included for the U.S.-born daughters of women from Scandinavia and East, South, or Central Europe, the numbers of women upon which these percentages were based were quite small, particularly before 1910. This is not surprising since the women under analysis were, for the most part, born before the large waves of immigrants from these countries began to arrive in the United States. The percents remaining single are included for 1910 to 1930, but prior to 1930, the sample sizes from which they were calculated were between 150 and 400 women. Only after 1930 were sample sizes greater than 750 women. It is likely that these daughters of the foreign-born remained single at higher rates than those born in their parents' counties, it is unclear exactly how great that difference was and how much it changed from decade to decade. I have not been able to explain the sharp increase and subsequent decrease in the percent of U.S.-born never-married women with at least one East, South, or Central European parent. With more data, the line might flatten or I might be able to examine the data more profitably and identify reasons behind this radical changes in only twenty years

Americans."[62] Historian Elizabeth Ewen, for example, describes how many daughters, particularly the older daughters of Eastern European Jews, felt a tremendous obligation to help their families and lists more than one example where daughters "put aside [their] own needs to meet the needs of others."[63] Italian-born immigrants in Buffalo, NY, according to historian Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, believed that "[f]amily needs took priority over the future aspirations of … adult children."[64] Further, U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents likely spoke better English than their parents who may have needed the daughters' help to navigate an English speaking world. The poverty of many immigrant families also made daughters' pay necessary to support aging parents.

The census research of historians Miriam King and Steven Ruggles in connection with the children of the foreign-born also supports the argument that daughters of the foreign-born stayed single to assist their parents. They argue in "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century" that the "data on employment and residence with parents supports the interpretation that second-generation women often delayed marriage because of their duties to their family of origin."[65] However, they go on to caution that this is only one possible explanation for the low rates of marriage among second-generation Americans and that "further investigation may uncover additional economic or cultural barriers to marriage for these women."[66]

This hypothesis is undoubtedly true in some instances. There were U.S.-born

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[62] Miriam King and Steven Ruggles. "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20 (Winter 1990): 362.
[63] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 100-1.
[64] Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 172.
[65] King and Ruggles. "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century", 363.
[66] King and Ruggles. "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century", 363-4.

daughters of foreign-born parents who remained single to help their parents. At the same time, the census data used in this dissertation does not seem to support this theory as a general reason for singleness among these groups. The daughters of Irish-born parents provide a good case in point. Between 1880 and 1930, as the percent of U.S.-born women of Irish-born parents who remained single increased, those living in the same household as their parents actually decreased from 24.63 percent in 1880 to 10.56 percent in 1930. Instead U.S.-born, never-married women of Irish-born parents were more and more likely to live with one or more siblings or entirely separate from family. It was unlikely that these women were living away from their parents because their job demanded it. While the percent of these women in the paid workforce doubled from about 32 to 64 percent between 1880 and 1930, the jobs they held were less and less likely to be domestic service, which usually required them to live away from family. Instead, these women tended to be factory operatives or, increasingly, teachers and clerical workers. Finally, those living with their parents, more often than not, had at least one other sibling in the same household. Never-married Octavia Reed of Iowa, for example, shared a home with her mother and never-married sister Martha. Never-married Sophronia Reddy of Elmira, New York shared a home with her widower father, two never-married sisters, Elizabeth and Sophia, widower brother Avid, and never-married adult niece Hattie Hawley. In homes such as these, there were one or more other people available to assist with the family responsibilities, making any one individual's contributions less vital. Similar situations can be seen for women whose parents were born in Germany, Canada, and Great Britain. (The data sets for women whose parents were born in other countries are too small to form any valid conclusions.) Thus for U.S.-born women with at least one

foreign-born parent, there were most likely other reasons why they remained single at a higher rate than other women in America.

One factor that helps explain the higher rates of singleness among the children of the foreign-born, particularly children of the German-born, is the sex ratio. The highly unbalanced percentages of men and women, common in many communities of foreign-born people in the United States, changed significantly with the first U.S.-born generation and in some cases disappeared. While the U.S.-born sons of the foreign-born populations considered here still outnumbered the daughters in rural areas, in the urban communities, the women were now part of a far more balanced population and sometimes outnumbered the men. While, for example, among the German-born population there were at least 27 percent more never-married men than women in urban communities, the U.S.-born never-married daughters of German-born parents became an increasing proportion of the urban never-married population and by 1930 outnumbered the men. The U.S.-born daughters of British-born parents seeking similar husbands consistently faced less favorable sex ratios than their British-born counterparts, and outnumbered the men in urban areas in three of the five decades considered here. Although the census data available does not provide a large enough sample for the U.S.-born daughters of Scandinavian or East, South, and Central European parents, it is clear that these women also faced more balanced sex ratios than women from their parents' countries. Thus with fewer single men available, sometimes significantly fewer, it is little surprise that the rate of singleness in communities of U.S.-born daughters of British-, German-, Scandinavian- or East, South, and Central European-born parents went up.

The sex ratios among the Canadian-born never-married population in the United

States and the U.S.-born never-married individuals of Canadian-born parents were more similar. Ranging between 40 and 59 percent female, the population with the better sex ratio for husband-seeking women was equally divided between the two groups between 1880 and 1930: almost the same in 1880, more favorable for the Canadian-born women in 1900 and 1920, and more favorable for the U.S.-born daughters of Canadian-born parents in 1910 and 1930. More similar sex ratios help explain why the singleness rates of these two groups were more similar than other such groups in the United States.

However, the differing sex ratios fail to completely explain why the singleness rates of the U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born and their foreign-born counterparts were so different, particularly in connection with the U.S.-born daughters of Irish parents. These U.S.-born daughters faced sex ratios more favorable for women seeking husbands than their Irish-born counterparts. By this logic, the singleness rate should be lower, but it was not. Other factors must have come into play that shaped marital decisions.

Although their foreign-born parents' traditions probably continued to shape U.S.-born daughters' marital decisions to some extent, the daughters were at the same time more assimilated than the parents. According to settlement house worker Louise Montgomery in her 1913 study of U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents in Chicago, "the American-born girl lies between two determining influences, the unseen traditions of the Old World and the visible customs of the New."[67] Unlike many foreign-born women, the U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents were exposed to an American culture most of their lives, perhaps at school, a settlement house, or at work. At each of these places they learned values and morals, different from those of their parents'

[67] Louise Montgomery, *The American Girl in the Stockyard District*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1913) 1.

country (or countries) of origin.[68] These women frequently wanted to "keep up with American standards" and not be perceived as "foreigners".[69] As these daughters of foreign-born parents embraced American ways, they began to move away from their parents' ways.

The daughters of Irish-born parents were likely affected by some new values developed as part of their experiences in the United States, further increasing their propensity to stay single. The middle-class American dilemma forcing a choice between marriage and career, for example, might have added pressure to remain single, as the daughters of Irish immigrants moved away from domestic service and factory work, into various professions. Martha Cox was a never-married physician. Annie Stopley was a never-married actress. It is possible that dedication to a career may have made these U.S.-born women of Irish-born parents forego marriage. As in other ethnic groups, the values of the Irish "old country" combined with American influences may have served to further decrease marriage rates.

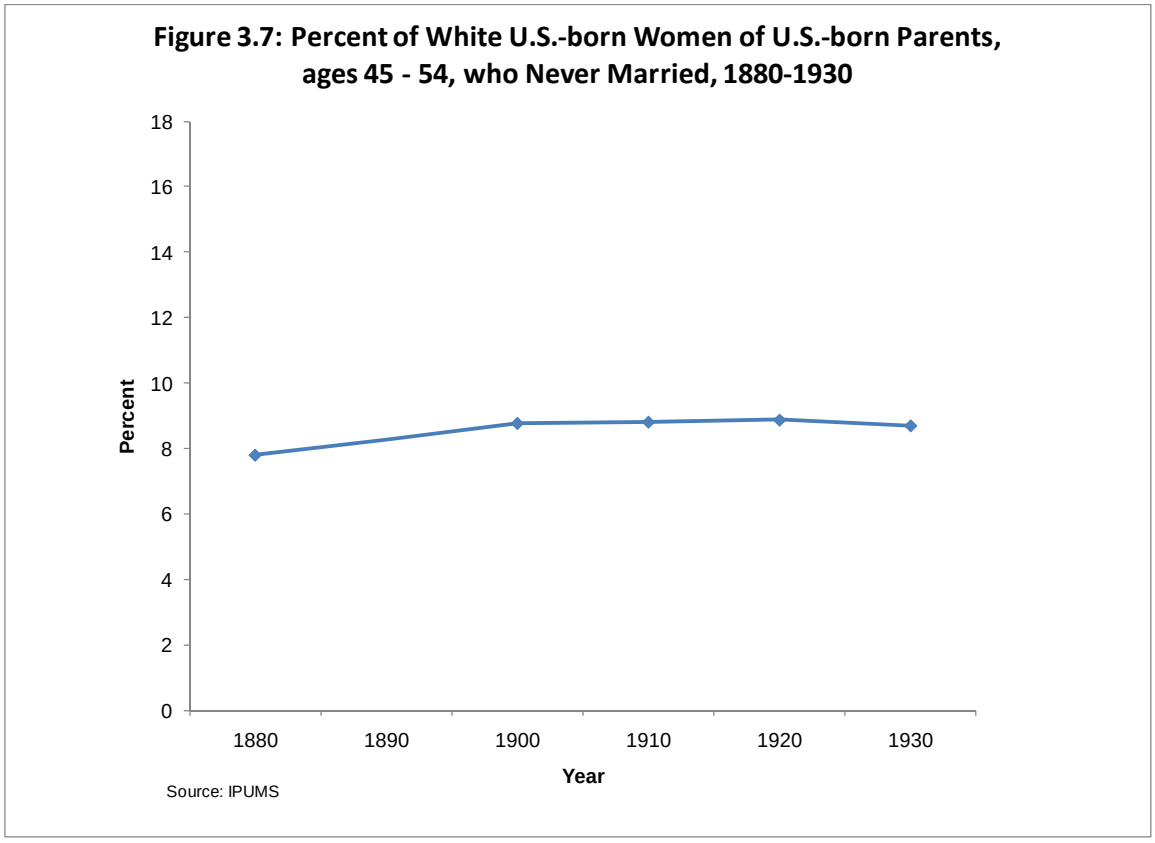
The daughters of the foreign-born were caught between two different forces: their parents' values and traditions and American values and traditions they actually embraced. Identifying with each to some extent, it is not surprising that both played a role in shaping their matrimonial fate. Many of these women when seeking husbands tended to look among the other U.S.-born members of their ethnic group and as a result faced a far less favorable sex ratio than their foreign-born counterparts, making competition for the best matches more difficult. However, this alone does not explain why they so much more likely to remain single. It is therefore necessary to look at factors shaping the marital

[68] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 88.
[69] Montgomery, *The American Girl in the Stockyard District*, 2.

decisions of U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents to fully understand the challenges and opportunities faced by the U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born.

White U.S.-Born Women of U.S.-Born Parents

Unlike many of the foreign-born women or the daughters of foreign born, the percent of white, U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents who did not marry remained relatively unchanged between 1880 and 1930, as shown in Figure 3.7. At 7.79 percent in 1880, it grew steadily to 8.87 percent by 1920, dropping to 8.70 percent by 1930. These changes were less than one-half of one percent from decade to decade with an increase of

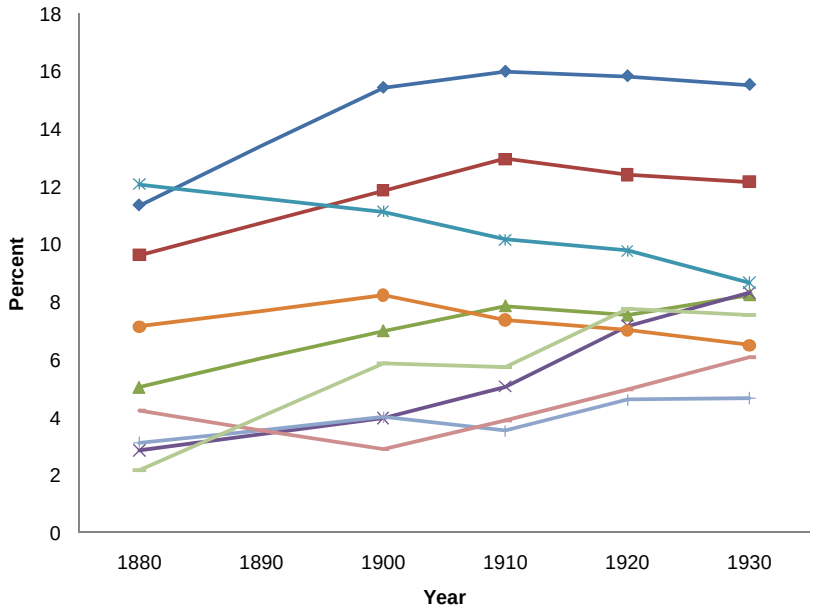


just under one percent over all. The consistency of these percentages is ironic since the white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents were the never-married women upon whom

contemporaries blamed the perceived impending "race suicide" and thus on whom most historians focused.

Separating the population of white, U.S.-born, never-married women of U.S.-born parents into the different census regions reveals a very different story as Figure 3.8

Figure 3.8: Percent of White, U.S.-Born Women of U.S.-Born Parents, Ages 45-54, who Never-Married, 1880-1930, By Region



Source: IPUMS

illustrates.[70] The unchanging percentages on the national level are the result of the

[70] The IPUMS variable "region" was used to identify the region in which the never-married women were located. The following regions are defined in the U.S. censuses of 1880-1930. New England Division: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont; Middle Atlantic Division: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; East North Central Division: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; West North Central Division: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota; South Atlantic Division: Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia; East South Central Division: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee; West South Central Division: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma/Indian Territory, Texas; Mountain Division: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming; Pacific Division: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington. The populations from territories that later became states are included in their appropriate region. Source: "REGION" page, in IPUMS, http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=REGION, accessed September 2, 2008.

regional variations canceling one another out, masking changes happening locally. Prior to 1930, white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents living on the East Coast, particularly in New England, were far more likely to never marry than white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents living in other parts of the United States. At 11.35 percent in 1880, the percent of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents living in the New England Division who remained single past age 54 grew to 15.98 percent by 1910, where it remained relatively unchanged through 1930. The Mountain and West South Central Divisions were among the least likely places to find white, U.S.-born never-married women with less than 6 percent remaining single past age 54. All these regions except for the South Atlantic and East South Central Divisions showed increases in the percent of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents remaining single past age 54 in the decades under analysis.

Regional factors also contributed to the rates of singleness among the white, U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents. Taken individually, it is impossible to create illustrations similar to Figure 3.8 for each ethnic group because there are not enough U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents from each ethnic group in each region to form accurate statistics. Except for the U.S.-born daughters of Scandinavian parents who tended to cluster in the East and West North Central census divisions, the majority of the other U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born, 63.87 to 85.13 percent, lived in the New England, Middle Atlantic, and East North Central divisions. Even in those divisions, there are frequently too few women to calculate accurate statistics. However, by combining all the daughters of the foreign-born into one group and compressing the

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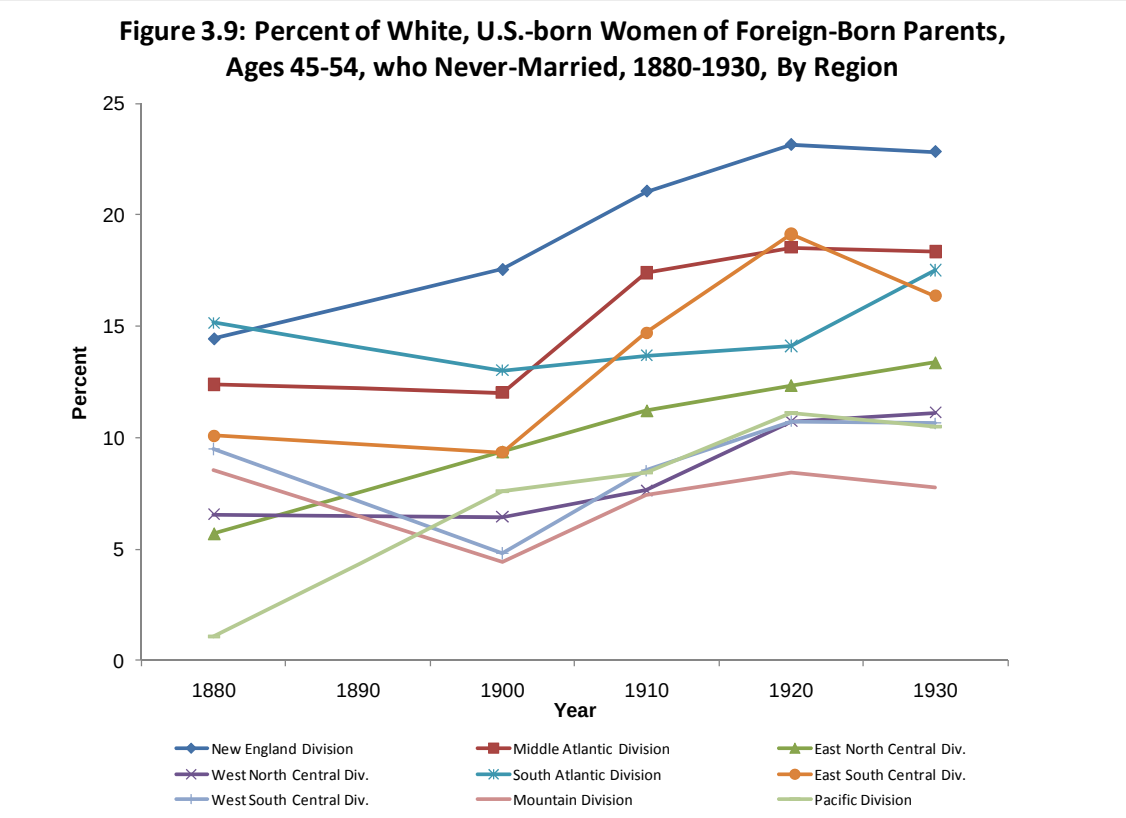
Each value on the graph was found by breaking the country into the different regions and calculating the percent of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents who never married in each.

regions where few settled, it is possible to illustrate the regional variations in their rates of singleness, as shown in Figure 3.9.[71]

Although the values are different, like the U.S.-born daughters of U.S.-born parents, the U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born were more likely to remain single in New England than any other part of the country. At 14.44 percent in 1880, the percent remaining single grew to 23.13 by 1920, and dropped slightly to 22.82 by 1930.



Similarly, the daughters of the foreign-born who lived in the western part of the United States were the least likely to remain single, ranging from 6.23 to 10.6 between 1880 and

[71] Each value in Figure 3.9 was calculated by breaking the country into the modified regions and finding the percent of white U.S.-born women of foreign parents who never married in each. Several regions were combined because there were not enough U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents in these regions to provide accurate statistics. Although New England, Middle Atlantic, and East North Central are the same census divisions as shown in Figure 3.8, "South" consists of the South Atlantic and East South Central census divisions and "West" consists of the West North Central, West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific census divisions.

1930. As with the daughters of the U.S.-born, these two regions reflected the extreme cases, with the other regions falling somewhere in between and in approximately the same order. However, one big difference between the two groups of women is that the rates of singleness for the U.S.-born daughters of the foreign-born increased overall in every region of the country, where the daughters of the U.S.-born saw declines in the South Atlantic and East South Central divisions. The daughters of the foreign-born in these areas, as on the national level, were significantly more likely to stay single their entire lives than the daughters of the U.S.-born.

Between 1880 and 1930, the marriage rates of white U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents as well as U.S.-born daughters of foreign-born parents, varied from region to region. There were thus some factors in these regional communities that shaped the rates of singleness. Reasons behind these differences, including sex ratios and employment opportunities in each region, are explored in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Over the past three or four decades, as historians have examined the lives of never-married women, they have come up with a number of very valid reasons why women remained single. To some extent, these reasons applied to women of all backgrounds all over the United States. However, race and ethnicity also played a significant role in a woman's decision to marry or to remain single, something overlooked by earlier scholars. An unfavorable sex ratio for women seeking husbands meant that there might not be enough co-ethnic men to go around, increasing the likelihood that these women remained single. The attitudes her ethnic or racial group held

in connection with marriage also significantly shaped whether a woman would marry or not. The pressure to marry on Irish-born women the United States was far less than that on African-American women or other foreign-born women. While a woman stayed single for a variety of reasons, she had to live with that choice among the people who surrounded her, a significant factor in making any decision.

Drawing conclusions about singleness among white, U.S.-born women is more difficult. Race and ethnicity do not explain the significant regional variations among this group of women. In the next chapter I will dig deeper into the affect of region on the lives of white, U.S.-born women. What factors related to location so dramatically shaped the marital decisions of these women?

Chapter 4 – "The Great Importance of Locality:" Regional Aspects of Life Long Singleness[1]

> "The Tribune appeals to women of other states to come to the relief of our blooming bachelors. Idaho offers them unparalleled inducements and will receive them with outstretched arms." – *State Tribune* as quoted in *The Owyhee Avalanche* [Ruby City, Idaho] October 7, 1898.[2]

"Iowa Promises to become the Mecca for women" declared the August 26, 1905 *Washington [DC] Bee*. A (then) recent Iowa census led the state census director to declare that there were 46,000 more men than women in the state, a situation "contrary to the prevailing rule in most states and in the world at large." Noting a surplus of women in New England, the *Bee* reporter confidently "anticipated … a general exodus to [Iowa] when the census figures are given publicity." As an added incentive, it noted that there were many "respectable" teaching positions available for capable women to fill while waiting for the right man. In fact, there was "an unparalleled dearth of schoolma'ams in Iowa and 162 schools [were] compelled to close because of inability to obtain instructors."[3] The *Washington Bee* was not alone in its efforts to alleviate a perceived unequal distribution of men and women in the United States. Papers of the time from all across the country urged Eastern women to move west to states with large majorities of unmarried men. South Dakota, Idaho, Wyoming, and Oklahoma as well as Iowa were advertised as fruitful ground for finding husbands. A *Salt Lake Herald* reporter, for example, stated that Wyoming was "a State of Bachelors" and explored ways to resolve this "deplorable" condition. [4]

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[1] Anne O'Hagan, "Her Chance to Marry: A Few Simple Facts and Some Suggestions Which Will Prove of Interest to the Unmarried American Woman," *New York Tribune*, May 19, 1907, p. 4.
[2] As quoted in *The Owyhee Avalanche* [Ruby City Idaho], Friday, October 07, 1898; Issue 8; col. B.
[3] "State Short of Women" *The Washington Bee* (Washington, D.C.), August 26, 1905, p. 7.
[4] "Wyoming a State of Bachelors" *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, Utah), Dec. 6, 1903, Section 2, p. 11.

As shown in the previous chapter, the population of white, U.S.-born, never-married women of U.S.-born parents was not uniformly distributed across the United States between 1880 and 1930.Women in some regions were far more likely to remain single their entire lives than women in others. Jane Nichols, Almira Taylor, Ruth Beach, and Mary and Adelia Bradley, all of Fairfield County, Connecticut, for example, were just a few of the many white, U.S.-born never-married women in the Northeast, while Mary Ellis, a white, U.S.-born never-married woman from Ada County, Idaho, was unusual. Approximately 30 percent of the white U.S.-born never-married women in the United States lived in the census' Middle Atlantic Division with sizable numbers also in the New England, East North Central, and South Atlantic Divisions. Less than 2 percent lived in the Mountain Division.[5]

If newspapers provide an accurate reflection of the time, many Americans recognized the regional aspects of singleness. Most newspapers claimed this "problem" was caused by young men migrating to western states in search of new opportunities, leaving behind unmarried women, especially in the East, who tended to remain in the region in which they were born. Impelled by fears of "race suicide," the disappearance of the white, Anglo-Saxton race in the United States, white, affluent, middle- and upper-class Americans of the time searched for solutions to this "problem" and devised schemes to bring together these white, U.S.-born, unmarried women and men. Although recent historians acknowledge that there were regional aspects to singleness, there has been little

[5] The Middle Atlantic Division includes New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The New England Division consists of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The East North Central Division consists of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The South Atlantic Division is made up of Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Mountain Division includes Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

scholarship in connection with this phenomenon, particularly for the decades between 1880 and 1930. Scholars typically limit their discussion to the fact that there were few men in the east as well as the many jobs there for women, which made singleness an acceptable alternative if the "right" man never came along.

Census data is an excellent source to examine the complicated set of reasons for the geographic variations in the rate of singleness among white, U.S.-born women. Analysis of these data reveals three factors tied to locality that had a profound affect on these women's decisions to marry: the number of "acceptable" men available, the status of these unmarried men, and the employment options available for white U.S.-born women. Parts of the United States with plentiful, reasonably well-paid jobs for women and few desirable men had more 45 to 54 year-old, white, U.S.-born, never-married women. Areas with limited employment options for women and/or many desirable men had fewer. Thus the rate of marriage for white, U.S.-born women in a given region was directly tied to attractiveness of the potential partners and availability of alternative options.

In Chapter 3 I argued that race and ethnicity had a significant impact on a woman's matrimonial fate. And, although this chapter shifts the focus to white, U.S.-born women, it continues to support that claim. A woman's race shaped her options when she contemplated marriage. First, in most cases, it limited the potential partners from which she might choose, automatically designating some men as undesirable. Marriage to such an individual could involve loss of status or racial identity for a woman in the eyes of her peers. Race and ethnicity also shaped the employment opportunities a woman might consider in lieu of marriage. Whiteness and U.S. birth, for example, opened up some

well-paying jobs that were often closed to the non-white or foreign-born women. One can not search for reasons for the regional aspects of singleness among white, U.S.-born women without keeping race firmly in mind.

Where the Men and Women Were

As discussed in Chapter 2, white, "old stock" Americans in the late-19th and early 20th centuries were interested in protecting the Anglo-Saxon race in America from "race suicide." These people blamed many of the social ills of the time on the large wave of "new" immigrants who arrived in the United States in the decades following the Civil War. Statistical studies that demonstrated that these immigrants were having more children than white, U.S.-born families alarmed many individuals and "stimulated predictions of imminent 'race suicide'… [where] large families of foreigners would overwhelm Anglo Saxon stock."[6] Because of these anxieties, there was a great deal of concern about a perceived surplus of white, U.S.-born never-married women of U.S.-born parents and the causes of this "spinster problem."

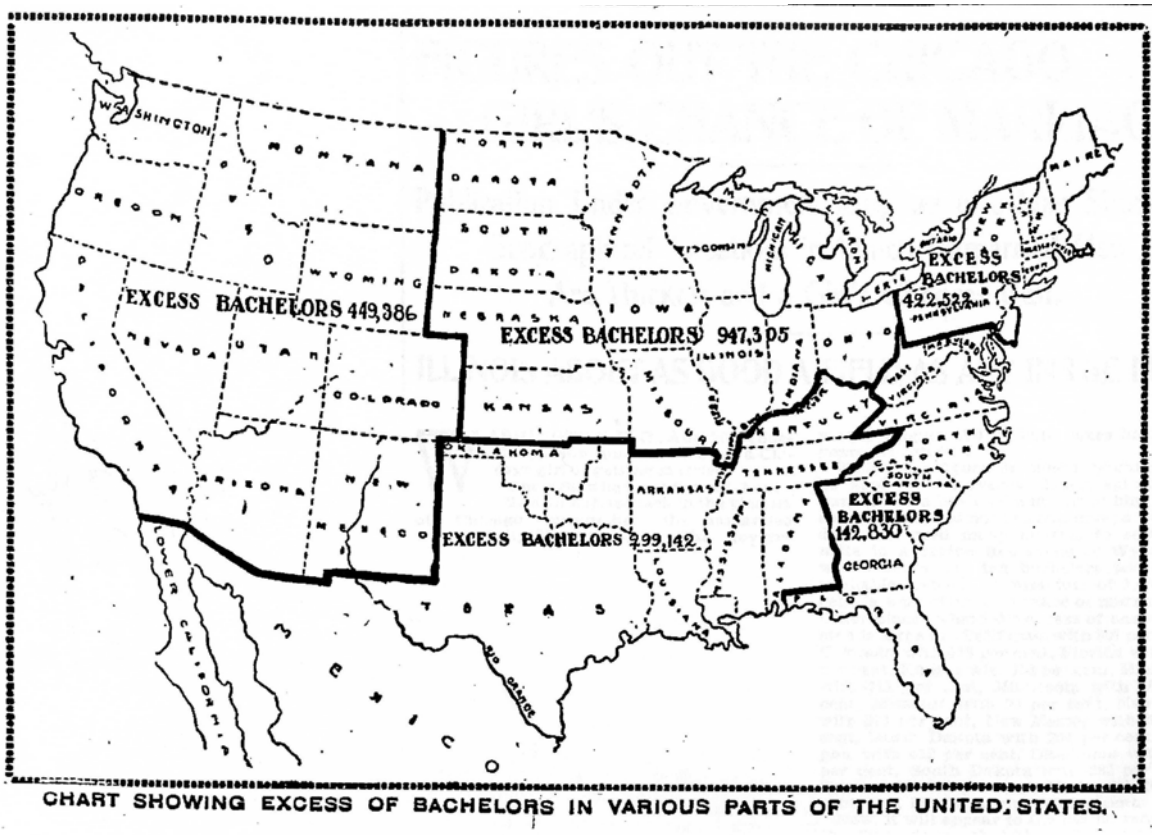
Between 1890 and 1915, Americans received contradictory messages about the relationship between unbalanced sex ratios and life long singleness, particularly in connection with white U.S.-born women. If the U.S. government was to be believed, there was little relationship. Women were not remaining single because of a lack of men. There was a surplus of men in every state. Popular opinion, on the other hand, blamed the perceived increase in the number of white U.S.-born, never-married women, at least in part, on a lack of men, particularly in the east. Women could not marry if there were no

[6] Miriam King and Steven Ruggles, "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century."*Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28(Winter 1990), 348.

potential husbands available. This seemingly contradictory information, discussed in the popular press, highlighted the concerns "old stock" Americans had about singleness and the public debate over its causes.

In 1898, the U.S. Census Bureau published what the popular press dubbed an "Old Maids Chart" graphically illustrating "at a glance in what localities bachelors [were] the thickest, and in what regions spinsters [were] most dense per square mile."[7] (See Figure 4.1[8]) Accompanying this rather unusual document was a list of population figures

Figure 4.1



[7] "Figures Out the Chicago Girl's Chance of Marriage," *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1898, p. 33. Very similar articles describing the "Old Maids Chart" appeared in newspapers all over the United States between August and October 1898 including *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, *New York Times*, *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), *Chicago Tribune*, and *Owyhee Avalanche* (Ruby City, Idaho).

from the 1890 census documenting the number of single men and women over the age of twenty in each state. The popular press greeted this chart with pleased surprise. "[I]t appears … that people have generally been greatly mistaken in their notion that there is an enormous surplus of unmarried women in the country," claimed an article in the *Milwaukee Journal*. "In fact, it is quite the other way, the bachelors outnumbering the maidens."[9] The government figures also showed that each state in the union had a majority of single men, even Massachusetts, which had long been thought to house the largest surplus of women in the country. Instead, there were reportedly 224,368 men over the age of 20 and only 218,070 women.[10] Similar statistics were produced and reported for the 1900 and 1910 censuses and greeted with similar expressions of surprise. In response to reports of the findings of the 1900 census, one reporter wrote, "New England has always been supposed to be overburdened with single women, and yet the census reckoning shows that there is not a State in that group which has not more bachelors than spinsters."[11]

Only a few in the popular media questioned these statistics, in spite of the fact they contradicted widely held beliefs. Professor D. R. McAnally in an article titled "The American Girl's Chances of Marriage," which appeared in the March 1899 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal,* only showed slight hesitation when celebrating the fact that "if the figures of the Census Bureau are reliable there is no need for the New England girl to go

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[8] Chart copied from "Figures Out the Chicago Girl's Chance of Marriage," *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1898, p. 33.
[9] "Chart of Old Maids," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 28, 1898, p. 2.
[10] "A Chart for Old Maids," *New York Times*, September 4, 1898, p. 8.
[11] "More Bachelors than Spinsters," *New York Times*, October 5, 1902, p. 28.

from home for a partner while the unmarried men of her own section are so numerous."[12] However, some were very uncomfortable with these census reports and one reporter claimed that the 1900 report was "misleading," containing "untruths [that] may be divided into three classes: lies, d- lies and statistics."[13]

Skeptics had good reason to be suspicious of the census figures published in the "Old Maids Chart" and Census Bureau reports for 1900 and 1910. Overall, the census reports were correct: there were, between 1880 and 1930, more never-married men than women in the United States over the age of twenty and there were some areas in the United States where the sex ratio was more unbalanced than others. However, the data published by the Census Bureau included all single persons over the age of twenty in the country, of all races, classes, colors, and birthplaces. Not all individuals of the opposite sex were considered suitable marriage partners for any one person. A Chinese-born laborer in California, for example, was not considered an acceptable husband for most white, U.S.-born women. An October 19, 1902 article in the *Washington Times* (Washington, D.C.), for example, obviously designed to deter such matches, claimed that white wives of Chinese men led a "sad life" living in "the heart of the overcrowded and filthy Chinese quarter" with a "daily life of drudgery, seclusion and ostracism from the world" and an "indifferent" husband.[14] It was not that there were not enough men, but not enough white, U.S.-born men for the white U.S.-born women without husbands. Because of the fears of "race suicide," the concerns about the "surplus" of unmarried

[12] Professor D. R. McAnally, "The American Girl's Chances of Marriage," *The Ladies Home Journal,* March 1899
[13] "The Misleading Census" *Imperial Press and Farmer* (Imperial, CA), August 9, 1902, p. 3.
[14] "White Women who have Chosen to Marry Chinamen," *The Washington Times* (Washington, D.C) October 19, 1902, Section 2, 1.

women only arose in connection with white, U.S.-born women of U.S.-born parents and not in connection with most immigrants groups where the surplus of men occurred.

If white, U.S.-born, never-married individuals of U.S.-born parents are considered separately, popular belief was correct. On the national level, the U.S. census shows that the majority of white U.S.-born never-married individuals, ages 45-54, were female in 1880, but male for 1900-1930.[15] Moreover, some places had more white, U.S.-born never-married women than white, U.S.-born never-married men between the ages of 45 and 54, particularly in the Northeast. Massachusetts and Connecticut are two good examples. So while there was indeed a majority of white, U.S.-born never-married men for most of this period at the national level, there were areas with a sizable majority of white, U.S.-born never-married women, particularly as they aged. This phenomenon was recognized by many contemporaries, in spite of the "Old Maids Chart" and other government data.

Many thought the solution to this "spinster problem" was to simply bring these never-married men and women together. While a commentator in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* signing him- or herself as the "Cricket on the Hearth" might regret the large number of unmarried women in the United States, the "Cricket" believed that men and women were "as prone to marriage now as in any period of the world's history." What was needed, however, was "a more through method of bringing … [them] into social contact with each other."[16] Newspapers around the country from the 1880s to the 1920s carried articles proclaiming one western state or another the ideal place for a (presumably

[15] The source for this is a sample of the IPUMS census data. Because of the loss of the 1890 census, it is impossible to calculate what the percentages were for 1890.
[16] "Why Are There Any Unmarried Women," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, April 24, 1880, p. 5.

white, U.S.-born) woman find a husband and listed states in the east to stay away from if she wanted a spouse. The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* claimed that in Omaha, Nebraska the "opportunity to become a wife was better … than in many other parts of the United States."[17] The town of Panhandle, Texas advertised for "100 single women … to come to Panhandle and marry our thrifty young men."[18] *The Salt Lake Herald* and *The Washington [DC] Times* each noted a large surplus of women in Washington DC and urged women to go elsewhere to find a mate.[19] There were even a few publications like *Matrimonial News*, which were designed to facilitate mail-order brides in the United States by, in the words of its business manager, "bring[ing] letters from a special someone to desiring subscribers in hopes that a match would be made and the pair would spend the rest of their life together."[20] If there were plenty of white, U.S.-born men available, a large number of these white U.S.-born never-married women would wed.

While a lack of potential partners is certainly a factor in any woman's matrimonial fate, this contemporary reasoning does not completely explain what was happening in the United States at the time. Just because large numbers of seemingly compatible single men and women lived in close proximity did not necessarily mean that they married. Areas like Manhattan or Chicago, for example, had large numbers of both white, U.S.-born men and women who remained single at rates well above the national average. In Manhattan, as many as 26.09 percent of the white, U.S.-born men and 30.72 percent of the white, U.S.-born women between the ages of 45 and 54 were never

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[17] "A Jill for Every Jack," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* April 8, 1921, p. 18.
[18] "A Chance for Un-Married Women," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1887, p.9.
[19] "Wyoming a State of Bachelors," p. 11; "Girls, Girls Everywhere in Washington, but Not a Man to Wed" *The Washington Times* (Magazine Section) July 12, 1908, p. 1.
[20] Chris Enss, *Hearts West: True Stories of Mail-Order Brides on the Frontier*. (Guilford, CT: Twodot Books, 2005) 23.

married. In Chicago, where there were more single men than women, 14.81 percent of the white, U.S.-born women between the ages of 45 and 54 were never-married. So to understand why some areas had low rates of singleness among women and other areas had high rates, one must look deeper than unbalanced sex ratios among white U.S.-born Americans.

The regional aspect of singleness between 1880 and 1930 is not a subject that has been explored extensively by historians. While scholars have spent a great deal of time considering why American women in the nineteenth century remained single, they have paid limited attention to locational factors beyond the specific region on which they focused. Lee Chambers-Schiller, for example, indicates that the "outmigration of men from more established to less settled areas of the region or to the west shrunk the pool of perspective husbands for women in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island" during the antebellum decades However, she continues, this only "accounts for the phenomenon of proliferating female singlehood partially."[21]

As an additional factor influencing singleness, Chambers-Schiller also points out that "unmarried women followed economic opportunity" meaning that there were large concentrations of single women in areas like the New England mill towns where there was paid work available for them.[22] A woman earning money might delay marriage in order to prolong her participation in the paid workforce and perhaps take more control in the selection of her spouse, if she married at all.[23] However, because Chambers-Schiller studies Northeastern women in antebellum America, other times and regions are beyond

[21] Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 29.
[22] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband,* 30.
[23] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband,* 35-6.

the scope of her study.

There is little scholarship on how the better paying professional employment that opened to women in the decades following the Civil War shaped the regional aspects of singleness. Some nineteenth and early twentieth century journalists commented on concentrations of white U.S.-born never-married working women in various eastern cities and made a direct connection made between their work and singleness. Author and journalist Anne O'Hagan, for example, pointed out in the *New York Tribune* that "It is a significant fact … that just as soon as young women become equal to the task of their own maintenance, or tend to become so, husbands seem to be less diligently sought, less gratefully accepted."[24] To understand the regional aspects of singleness, one must understand how the availability of jobs shaped a woman's decision to marry or remain single. There also might be other significant factors, such as the status of the men available, that were not previously considered, that contributed to a woman's decision to marry.

Binary Logistic Regression

To identify the factors that contributed to the regional variations in the rates of singleness between 1880 and 1930 among white, U.S.-born, 45 to 54 year old women, I return to binary logistic regression analysis as a tool to predict the likelihood of singleness. However, instead of using independent variables related to individual women to predict their singleness as I did in Chapter 3, I use here ones related to where the women lived. These independent variables include the availability of employment for

[24] O'Hagan, "Her Chance to Marry," p. 4.

men, male non-employment, the number of potential partners available, and the availability of "professional" employment for women.[25] (For a more detailed discussion of the use of binary logistic regression analysis with this project, see Appendix A.) A summary of the significant independent variables and their effect on singleness when other factors are controlled for multivariate analysis is listed in Table 4.1.

As shown, as the percent of the population that was female, the number of jobs available for women and male non-employment increased, so did the rates at which women remained single. Logically, as single women became an increasing proportion of

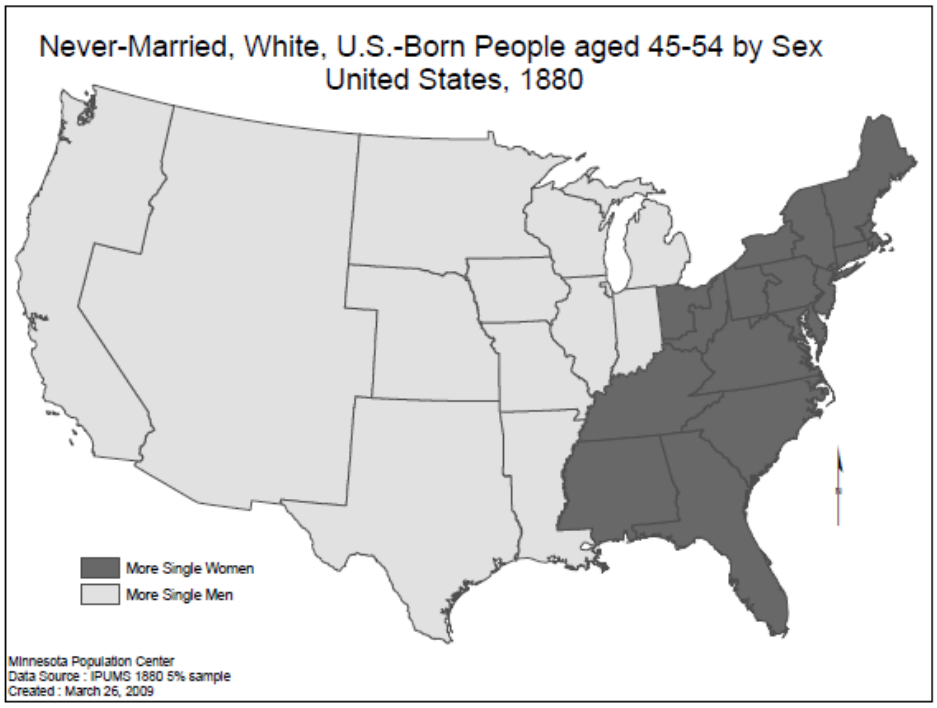
Table 4.1: The Effect of the Locational Independent Variables on the Rate of Marriage

Variable	Effect
Male Employment	
Professional	decrease
Farmer	decrease
Clerical	decrease
Operative	decrease
Service	decrease
Laborer	decrease
Male Non-employment	increase
Female Employment	
Professional	increase
Farmer	both
Clerical	increase
Operative	increase
Servant	increase
Laborer	increase
Percent Female	increase

[25] The jobs included in the manufactured "professional" grouping included those categorized in the census as professionals, managers, or craftsmen. Most of the women who held such jobs were teachers, managers, librarians, nurses, religious or social workers, physicians, postmasters, foremen, or tailors. "Professional" jobs will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

the white U.S.-born population, it became more difficult to find a husband. Jobs for women, especially "professional" jobs that were better paid, made women less inclined to marry. Areas with large numbers of men outside of the paid workforce also saw increased rates of singleness. Conversely, in places with large numbers of good jobs for men, fewer women remained single. In short, woman's marital fate was thus shaped not only by the partners available, but the attractiveness of the alternatives.

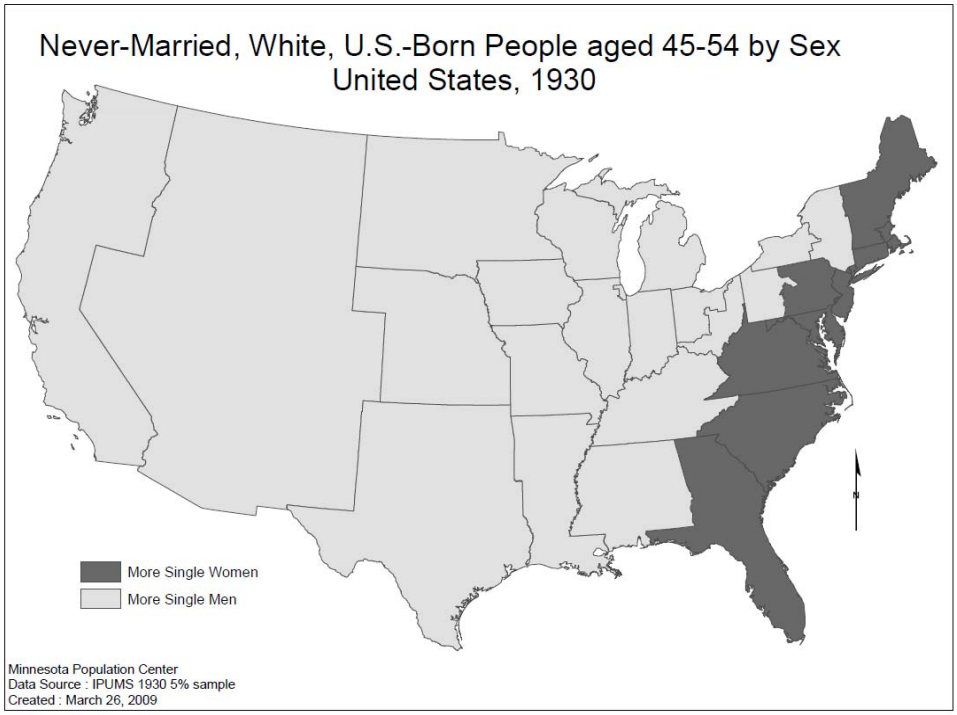
Figure 4.2



Sex Ratios among the White and U.S.-born

One factor identified by binary logistic regression analysis as contributing to the regional variations in singleness among white, U.S.-born women was the sex ratio. As discussed previously, the number of potential partners available was a factor recognized by contemporaries as one that shaped the rate of singleness of all women, in any part of

Figure 4.3



the United States. Created from census data, Figure 4.2 illustrates the regions of the United States with more white, U.S.-born, never-married men or white, U.S.-born, never-married women between the ages of 45 and 54 in 1880 and Figure 4.3 illustrates the same for 1930.[26] As is plainly shown, there were more white, U.S.-born, never-married men than women in the western two-thirds of the country in 1880 while white U.S.-born never-married women were in the majority in the Eastern third of the United States. The area of more women than men actually shrank considerably in the next 50 years, as illustrated in Figure 4.3, and by 1930 included a smaller collection of regions just along the Eastern seaboard. This was possibly the result of two factors. First, by the 20th

[26] These maps were formed by dividing the United States into 32 varying sized regions that contained at least 1000 women between the ages of 45 and 54. A list of the states, counties, or cities forming each of these regions can be found in Appendix B. The percent of the never-married individuals between 45 and 54 that were male or female were calculated and the results for 1880 and 1930 are displayed above.

century, white, U.S.-born single men were increasingly likely to remain in their home state as the number of opportunities for men in the west decreased as the region became more settled. Second, the gender imbalances caused by the Civil War disappeared with the new generations.

The unbalanced sex ratio contributed to the lower rates of singleness among white, U.S.-born women in areas where they were consistently outnumbered by white, U.S.-born men. With the exception of Cook County, Illinois (Chicago) after 1900 and Wisconsin after 1920, white, U.S-born women in areas with more white, U.S.-born men remained single at rates below the national average of 8.1 to 10.7 percent between 1880 and 1930.[27] These rates were the lowest in the areas where the discrepancy between the majority population of men and the smaller population of women was the greatest. Particularly low were Texas and Oklahoma where only 2.9 to 4.5 percent of white U.S.-born women remained single their entire lives and the census "Mountain Division" states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming where 3.2 to 6.7 percent of white U.S.-born women remained single their entire lives, throughout this period. In these regions, there were at least three or four times as many white, U.S.-born men as women, if not even more.

In communities with a large population of single, white, U.S.-born men, white, U.S.-born women received a great deal of encouragement to marry. Men in these predominantly rural areas needed wives to perform their share of the work, provide companionship, and, considering the fears of "race suicide," help propagate the race. However, the great number of men available made it possible for women to indulge in a

[27] Note that these average percentages are based on the life choices of white U.S.-born women with both U.S.-born and foreign-born parents.

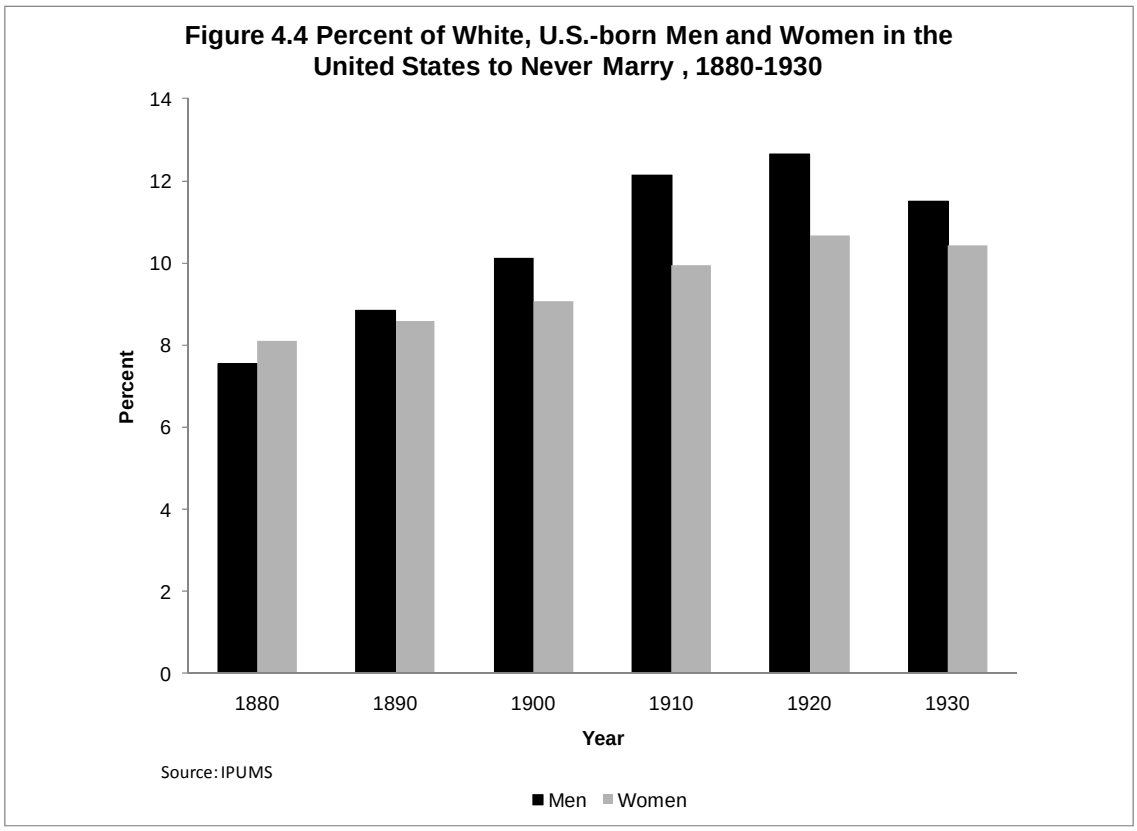
little romance and be selective "rather than accepting a humdrum and unworthy suitor."[28] Although women were not usually considered old enough to marry until their late-teens or early-twenties, when the time came they partnered fairly quickly, often having many eligible bachelors to choose from. Rachel Malik of Oregon, for example, noted in 1852 that "There is a great many young men that loves me about Hear.[sic.]"[29] Wealthy Wyoming businessman Martin Hopkins claimed in 1890 that single women coming to his state found husbands quite easily and he often urged single women in Chicago to move there. "If 1,000 unmarried women should start from Chicago this month I would guarantee that 90 per cent [sic] would not be single a year from now." Hopkins went on to list several women he knew who had followed such a route, including one teacher who came to Wyoming from Omaha, "the prettiest one he ever saw." She later became his wife.[30] Thus, in regions where there were more white, U.S.-born men than women, white U.S.-born women tended to marry at high rates, particularly when they were vastly outnumbered.

A different situation occurred in parts of the country where there were more white, U.S. - born, single women than men. In the Northeastern states, including New England, all of New York State, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Washington DC, women remained single at rates above the national average. These rates were the highest in the regions that included the large metropolitan areas like Manhattan (13.5 to 30.7 percent) or Boston (15.2 to 23.6 percent) or were long settled like Connecticut and Rhode Island (11.4 to 20.6 percent). By 1930, a shift from a female to a

[28] Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang 1998), 84
[29] Jeffrey, *Frontier Women,* 84
[30] "Wives in Great Demand" *Chicago Daily Tribune,* March 8, 1890, p. 8.

male majority in the population of white, U.S.-born never-married people occurred in all of New York State except for New York City and in Western Pennsylvania. Concurrent with that shift came a decline in the percent of women remaining single their entire lives. A similar shift was also seen in both regions of Ohio. While a decrease in the rate of singleness was observed in the southeastern half of Ohio, one was not seen in Northwestern half of the state at the same time. However, white U.S.-born women in Northwestern Ohio always remained single at lower rates than women on the Eastern Seaboard and were at or below the national average for all white U.S.-born women for this entire period.

There were several states in the South that also had more white, U.S.-born, never-married women than men. However, in spite of the female majorities, rates of singleness in the South were usually much lower than those in the North. Although the regions consisting of Tennessee and Kentucky and Alabama and Mississippi initially had more white, U.S.-born, never-married women than men, these regions were always below the national average rate of singleness for women, getting further below as time passed. By 1930, only 7.3 percent of the white, U.S.-born women in Tennessee and Kentucky remained single their entire lives. The regions consisting of Virginia and West Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia and Florida all started above the national average for singleness, but fell below by the 1910s. The most dramatic change in the South was seen in the North and South Carolina region where the rate at which U.S.-born white women remained single dropped by 6.5 percent, from 15.2 to 8.7 percent, and yet, the number of white U.S.-born single women outnumbered white U.S.-born single men throughout this period.



The relationship between rates of singleness and the number of single men available in the eastern regions is complicated. The number of potential partners available obviously had an effect on a white, U.S.-born woman's marital fate. She could not marry if there was no "acceptable" – usually meaning white and probably U.S.-born – potential partners for her to attach herself to. A woman signing herself as "A Bud of Twenty-Six" pointed this out in a November 1909 letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*, "Statistics show that there are eight million more women than men on top of this old earth. May this not account in a measure for… a blossom… remaining unplucked? Doesn't it stand to reason that a few of us are doomed to 'blush unseen?"[31] At the same time, some regions with large numbers of single women also had large numbers of single

[31] "Eight Million Must Be Old Maids," *New York Times*, November 18, 1909, 10.

men. As shown in Figure 4.4, except for 1880, U.S.-born white men in the United States remained single at a higher rate than women. Ranging from a low of 7.6 percent in 1880, the rate at which white U.S.-born men never married grew to a high of 12.6 percent in 1920, dropping back to 11.5 percent in 1930, as shown in Figure 4.4. This should not be surprising because nationally (except in 1880) there were more white U.S.-born men than women. However, in some urban regions like Boston or New York City, where there were always more single white U.S-born women than men, the white U.S.-born men remained single at rates over – sometimes substantially over – their national average. In Boston, for example, the percent of white U.S.-born men remaining single increased steadily between 1880 and 1930 from 9.8 to 17.35 percent. In Manhattan, the percent of white, U.S.-born men remaining single fluctuated, but ranged from 13.0 to 24.9 percent during this same period. The unbalanced sex ratio thus fails to completely explain the high rates of singleness among women in cities such as these. There were large numbers of both white, U.S.-born men and white, U.S.-born women in close proximity and yet no marriage.

The low rates of singleness in the South as compared with the higher ones in the North also indicate that there were factors other than the sex ratio among the white population that contributed to a white U.S.-born woman's decision to marry. The differences in the percent male or female were, by 1930, fairly similar for all the eastern states with more white, U.S.-born never-married women than men. However, in spite of the fact that there were 9 to 10 percent more never-married U.S.-born white women than men in North and South Carolina, the rates at which these women remained single were significantly below those in the Northeast. One reason for this is that racist attitudes in

the South pushed white U.S.-born women toward marriage with white men as a way to both "protect" the white women and reinforce the power of white men in a Jim Crow South.[32] White women in this region who did not marry, according to historian Rebecca S. Montgomery, particularly those with a career were seen as "turn[ing] their backs on the duty of motherhood incumbent on all white women, favoring personal interests over the preservation of national racial integrity." Further, by being independent, they "undermined a central justification for racial discrimination and violence by disproving the need for male protection."[33] However, the difference in attitude alone seems inadequate to account for differences of 10 percent or more between the rates of singleness in North and South. Obviously something else was happening in the North that increased the likelihood of a woman remaining single her entire life.

Professions for Women

Another key factor in determining the rate at which women remained single – one that helps explain these inconsistencies – is the jobs available for white U.S.-born women. While, as shown in Table 4.1, almost all types of employment increased the likelihood a woman would remain single her whole life, singleness increased most significantly when a woman held a "professional" position."[34] Employment gave women the financial wherewithal to imagine, and perhaps build, a life without a husband. With the increasing salaries that "professional" work provided, white U.S.-born women could

[32] Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). 192.
[33] . Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South*, 192.
[34] The jobs included in the manufactured "professional" grouping included those categorized in the census as professionals, managers, or craftsmen. Most of the women who held such jobs were teachers, managers, librarians, nurses, religious or social workers, physicians, postmasters, foremen, or tailors.

be more selective when choosing a husband, no longer having to marry in order to survive with some comfort.

The research of historian Elaine Tyler May in connection with marriage and divorce gives credence to such an argument. May argues that paid work gave women the freedom to escape a bad marriage if they could survive financially without a husband. Following an examination of divorce cases filed between 1910 and 1920 she concludes that, "We have no evidence to suggest that the job was the sole reason for the divorce; but clearly their incomes made it possible for these women to strike out on their own."[35] Financial security gave women the opportunity to leave unhappy marriages and likely the opportunity to avoid entering them as well.

In the course of my research, a number of different types of work were grouped by me under the title "professional" to simplify the coding for the binary logistic regression analysis. This new "professional" category included all occupations classified in the 1880-1930 U.S. censuses as "Professional, Technical", "Managers, Officials, and Proprietors", and "Craftsmen."[36] More than 81 percent of the women in this newly manufactured "professional" category were teachers, managers, librarians, nurses, religious or social workers, physicians, postmasters, foremen, or tailors.[37] This category

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[35] Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 128

[36] For detailed list of all the different occupations these categories include, see the IPUMS "occ1950" variable code web page at http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/codes.do?mnemonic=OCC1950; accessed June 18, 2009,

[37] The IPUMS variable used here to identify occupations is OCC1950, which "the 1950 Census Bureau occupational classification system to the occupational data recorded in other censuses, to enhance comparability across years. For pre-1940 samples created at Minnesota, the alphabetic responses supplied by enumerators were directly coded into the 1950 classification. It is interesting to note that tailors, like the women included here, are classified as "craftsmen" and should not be confused with dressmakers and milliners which are classified as "operatives." Refer to http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/codes.do?mnemonic=OCC1950 and http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=OCC1950 for additional

does not include women who were clerical workers, sales women, factory operatives, laborers, agricultural workers or domestic servants. Between 1880 and 1930, the percent of white, U.S.-born never-married women holding these "professional" jobs more than quadrupled, growing steadily from 5.4 percent to 22.1 percent. The growth of women in these occupations outpaced the movement of women into any other category of work. Three-quarters (or more) of the women who held these positions lived in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, or Midwestern states, which include the cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In many parts of the United States, more white U.S.-born never-married women held "professional" occupations than any other type of work.

In many cases the opportunities to hold such "professional" employment were only available because these women were white and U.S.-born. Many "professional" jobs were closed to women of color or foreign birth. African-American women, even those with a good education, faced discriminatory practices in, for example, the nursing profession which kept trained black nurses from finding well-paying jobs if any work at all.[38] Foreign-born women were sometimes shut out of better paying professions because they did not speak English well or were not assimilated to American culture enough to be attractive employees.[39] Thus, whiteness and nativity were the key, in many cases, to entering the "professional" jobs which gave never-married women the possibility of economic security.

The most common profession practiced by white U.S.-born, never-married

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details. Accessed 14 May 2010.

[38] Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 93.

[39] Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate*, 1870-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 127.

women was teaching, an occupation that changed significantly between 1880 and 1930. In the years immediately after the Civil War, teaching was a poorly paid, erratic occupation where teachers were often hired for short three-month terms with no guarantee of long-term employment. By 1930, in many parts of the United States, teaching provided steady work and a decent, reliable salary. During this period, children under age fourteen were increasingly required by law to attend school for a nine-month school year instead of three month terms, as they also began to attend high school in growing numbers.[40] Teaching thus became a steady job and more teachers were needed to meet these demands. Schools began to hire a staff of teachers that they employed year after year, as long as the teachers remained single.[41] Salaries in most areas increased significantly in the decades following the Civil War to a level where a woman might, with careful planning, support herself.[42] It was not that teachers could live in luxury on their earnings, but as their occupation evolved, it provided them with a steady salary they could count on year after year, particularly in urban schools.[43]

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[40] Mary E. Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates 1865-1910" *Population Studies* 38(Nov. 1984) 356.

[41] Teachers who married were fired if they did not give up their jobs. There were numerous articles in the popular press of the time about whether married teachers should be allowed continuing working after marriage and exposing married teachers who pretended to be single in order to keep their jobs. See for example "The Board of Education Wrestles with the Married Teacher Problem Again," *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 26, 1891, p. 13; "Married Teacher Suspended," *New York Times*, October 2, 1905, p. 4; "To Try Another Married Teacher," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1913, p. 7.

[42] Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues," 357.

[43] For a fuller discussion of the difficulties teachers faced supporting themselves, see Lucile Eaves and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston's book *Old Age Support of Women Teachers: Provisions for Old Age made by Women Teachers in the Public Schools of Massachusetts* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1921). Although a biased plea for pensions for public school teachers, this book raises some interesting points on the difficulties teachers had in living on what seemed a generous salary. This research showed that the average teacher's salary in Massachusetts in 1890 was $526 annually, $586 in 1900, $744 in 1910, $837 in 1915 and $1,326.93 in 1920. (Lucile Eaves and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Boston. Department of Research. *Old Age Support of Women Teachers*, 24-5.) However, these increases were only slightly greater than inflation prior to World War I and fell behind inflation during the war. Small town teachers earned significantly less than urban teachers and elementary school teachers less than high school teachers. Further, given the outside expenses teachers

Change came more slowly in less populated areas. In some rural communities, as in Wyoming for example, teachers continued to be poorly paid and employed sporadically for a minimal three-month school year into the 1920s. "No teacher can live upon the wages earned in a three to four months' term each year," observed a county superintendent in Wyoming. "They must seek employment elsewhere."[44] The more competent teachers were lured to urban schools where they earned better salaries over the longer school years.

By the 20th century, teaching was not the only "respectable," decently paid profession open to white, U.S.-born never-married women. During the second half of the 19th century, opportunities for women greatly expanded in other fields, as they moved into, for example, library work and nursing in significant numbers. "Social work evolved from the volunteerism of 'friendly visitors' [of the 19th century] and settlement house workers to a profession with graduate training schools teaching the 'scientific' case method."[45] Librarians Jessie Tyler of Massachusetts and Emma Hutchinson of New Jersey, nurses Anna McCarthy of New York City and Rose McLaughlin of Pittsburgh, PA, and social workers Alva Blaffer of New Orleans and Julia Vanemberg of New York all apparently supported themselves or contributed to their personal support through these new professions. For women who did not want to teach, these alternative professional options provided other avenues to live in some comfort outside of marriage and maintain their respectability. Most of the new, better-paid professions were found in the more

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were expected to meet, this money did not go as far as it might seem and many were unable to save for old age. For additional data on teachers' salaries see Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters, and Pedagogues."

[44] Charles E. Rankin, "Teaching: Opportunity and Limitation for Wyoming Women." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 21(May 1990) 154.

[45] Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 163.

urban areas of the United States and the women who practiced them, like the better teachers, tended to migrate there.

Also becoming increasingly common in urban areas were clerical jobs for never-married women. According to historian Lisa Fine in *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930*, "[i]n terms of hours, wages, and conditions of work, a clerical position was one of the best occupational opportunities for women at that time."[46] Clerical work was not seasonal, frequently better paid than teaching, and required fewer hours in the workplace than jobs like factory work. Office work was also seen as more attractive to some educated women than the classroom.[47] Although very few (less than 1 percent) white U.S.-born never-married women were clerical workers in 1880, by 1930 more than 10 percent were so employed. Virginia Linehan of Los Angeles, Mary B. Maull of Wilmington, Delaware, and Sarah Riley of Augusta, GA all appear to have been self-supporting through such work.

Women with paid employment that provided a comfortable salary could afford to be more selective when it came to choosing a husband. According to one commentator of the time, "woman is now a worker and a thinker, and marriage … is only one of many possible occupations; and the educated woman may be excused if they regard it as the least desirable of them."[48] Another critic stated that, "love in a cottage – translated in these days into a cheap flat in an unwholesome locality – [does not] appear to her finer or more winsome than the self-respecting independence of the bread-winning positions that

[46] Lisa Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 42.
[47] Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper*, 44-5.
[48] "They Prefer Not to Marry," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mar 17, 1888, p. 16

are now within her reach."[49] "The woman with a trade of her own does not need to marry," pointed out a third. "…she may keep her door open for the best thing of all, [work or marriage], instead of shutting it on a possible half best"[50] With a reasonably well paying job, a woman did not have to marry to survive. Singleness no longer meant being a frequently unwelcome dependent on a family member. A woman who could support herself was able to weigh her options and select the best. And, as employment for women expanded and evolved, more and more women could take advantage of such a situation. Marriage rates were lower in the places where women could find well-paying jobs.

It must be remembered that data from the U.S. census gives no indication of when the women began their careers. By just looking at the situations of white U.S.-born, never-married women between the ages of 45 and 54, it is impossible to tell if they were single because they had a career or built a career after their chance of marriage was significantly diminished. Reasonably well paying work can be as much a result as a cause of singleness. However, the possibility of a well paying job in an urban area may have made the possibility of single life tolerable.

Professional and clerical work for white U.S.-born women help to explain the discrepancy in the rates of singleness between the Northeast and other parts of the United States. In New England, the Middle Atlantic States and the Urban Midwest, there were far more "professional" or clerical jobs available than in the Southern or western states. With fewer alternatives to marriage, white U.S.-born women in the South and West married at higher rates. If marriage meant giving up the status or affluence to which a

[49] "Stops Hasty Marriages" *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Oct. 18, 1895, p. 6
[50] "Women who Work for Wages" *Minneapolis Tribune,* Jun 14, 1906, p. 20

white U.S.-born working woman was accustomed, she might think twice before finding a husband. She did not have to wed to survive.

Taken together, unbalanced sex ratios and good employment for women go a long way to explain the regional aspects of singleness. However, this seems insufficient to explain why there were some regions with an above average percentage of both white, U.S.-born, never-married men and white, U.S.-born, never-married women. Contemporaries believed that if single men and women were brought together this would not happen. While this reasoning is obviously flawed, it does raise a valid point. With all the pressure that U.S.-born white women were under during this period to marry as a result of "race suicide" concerns, why did so many remain single in areas where large percentages of men also remained single? Binary logistic regression analysis reveals a previously overlooked factor – male employment and status – which can help explain this phenomenon.

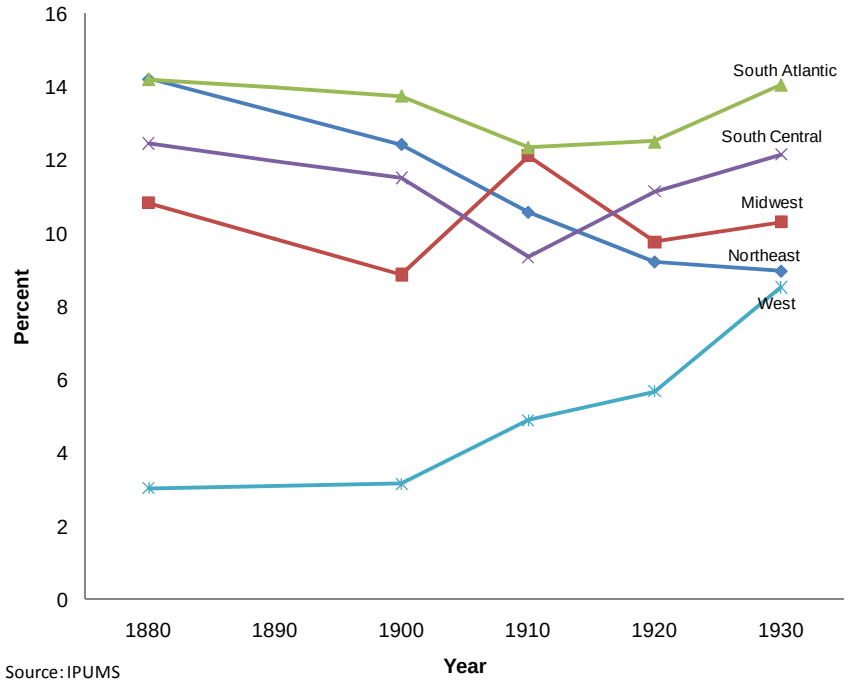
Male Employment and Status

A final factor indicated by binary logistic regression analysis as contributing to the local variations in the rates of singleness was the employment and status of the available white U.S.-born men. My analysis shows that regions with large populations of white U.S.-born employed men, particularly those with well-paying jobs, tended to be areas with higher rates at which white, U.S.-born women married. At the same time, when the white U.S.-born single men were not employed or held low status jobs, they were apparently not perceived as attractive partners and contributed to the higher local rates of singleness. This was further complicated when the white U.S.-born never-married

women in the same region held higher status jobs than the men and would lose status or income by attaching themselves to such a partner.

Figure 4.5 illustrates the regional variations in the non-employment of white U.S.-born never-married men. The highest non-employment was seen in the South Atlantic region where it ranged between 12.4 and 14.2 percent for the years between 1880 and 1930. The lowest was consistently in the West in spite of the fact that it increased from 3.0 to 8.5 percent during this period. This is a far higher rate than that at which white, U.S.-born married men were outside of the paid workforce. Only 2.1 to 3.9 percent of the

Figure 4.5: Percent of White, U.S.-Born Never-Married Men who were not Employed, 1880-1930, by Region

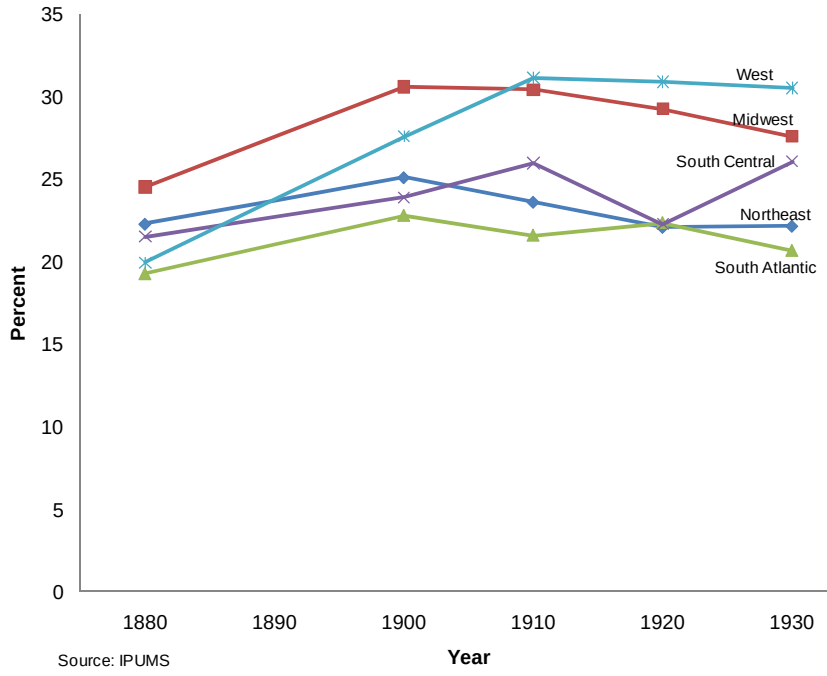


white U.S.-born married men were not employed throughout the different regions of the United States during this period, with far less regional variation. White, U.S.-born married men tended to have more people to support than single men and thus more

incentive to maintain steady employment. At the same time, white U.S.-born men who were not able to work or work steadily may have had a difficult time attracting wives.

In addition to the white U.S.-born never-married men who were out of work, many others were employed as laborers, farm or otherwise. As shown in Figure 4.6, roughly 20 percent or more of the white, U.S.-born never-married men in the United States were some sort of laborer. This was especially prevalent in the West where the percent of white U.S.-born never-married men who were laborers ranged between 20.0 and 31.1 percent between 1880 and 1930 and in the Midwest where the percent ranged

Figure 4.6: Percent of White, U.S.-Born Never-Married Men who were Laborers, 1880-1930, by Region



between 24.5 and 30.6 during the same period. As with non-employment, the percent of white U.S.-born married men who were laborers was far lower than that of their never-married counterparts, typically at least 10 percent less. This, again, reflected the increased need for married men to be well employed as well as the fact that the more desirable men

were more likely find mates.

Taken together, the non-employed and laborers accounted for between 35 and 45 percent of the white, U.S.-born never-married men in the United States between the ages of 45 and 54. At the same time, there were increasing percentages of white, U.S.-born, never-married women who were professionals or clerical workers. By 1930 this included over 37 percent of the white, U.S.-born never-married women in the Northeast, Midwest, and West. In Boston, for example, as many as 30 percent of the men were non-employed or laborers while as many as 48.5 percent of the women were professional, clerical, or sales workers. In Chicago, as many as 26.6 percent of the never married men were non-employed or laborers while more than 40 percent of the never-married women were professional, clerical, or sales workers. These never-married women would not have found such men desirable partners, if they were able to meet them at all.

As stated earlier, many contemporaries believed that the "spinster problem" in the United States could be resolved if single men and women were simply brought together. According to one source, with a knowledge of where large numbers of (presumably white, U.S.-born) never-married men could be found, "it ought not to be hard for the average lonely spinster to hunt down a husband and corner him.…"[51] However, the high numbers of both white, U.S.-born never-married men and white, U.S.-born never-married women in areas like Chicago or Boston indicate that propinquity alone would not completely resolve the "spinster problem". Instead, in regions such as these, a large portion of the available men and women were not compatible because they were of different classes with different values, interests, and standards of comfort.

[51] "Figures out the Chicago Girl's Chance of Marriage," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 28, 1898, p. 33.

A professional woman, for example, was not likely to marry a man who was not employed or a laborer because he would be unable to support her in a fashion to which she was accustomed, and probably would not allow her to continue working after the wedding. One woman, speaking anonymously to a *San Francisco Call* reporter claimed that one of her suitors

> "made $12 a week; I made $25. I really cared for him. I wanted to marry him and go on working. That would have made $37 for both of us, and we should have been able to live after a fashion, even in New York. But he wouldn't hear of it, and I couldn't see myself doing housework, which I detested, for a chance at $12, when I could get more than twice that at stenography, which I liked. So here I am, and I think I've gained more than I've missed."[52]

Dr. Emma L. Benham claimed that, "I wouldn't marry a man who was less successful financially than I am – unless I were foolish enough to fall in love…."[53] Pharmacist Jean Gordon concurred: "Congeniality is the only thing that really counts [in a marriage]… and I couldn't be congenial with a man who hadn't attained sufficient financial success to render my own work unnecessary."[54] Although these women spoke in terms of a husband's earning potential, this was a statement of class as well. These women did not want to lose the status that their earnings allowed them to achieve. They did not want to lose the class standing and comforts that they were born to or they had worked to climb into just for the sake of marriage. A successful marriage, in their eyes, involved like-minded people with similar definitions of success and comfort and the never-married laboring or unemployed men and the professional women did not share these views. This reduced the number of eligible men available to these white U.S.-born women, further

[52] "Why Ten Girls are Unmarried" *The San Francisco Call*, July 24, 1910, 23.
[53] "They Think They Would Have Been Happier if They Had Been Married," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1903, 53.
[54] "They Think They Would Have Been Happier if They Had Been Married," 53.

decreasing their chances for marriage.

At the same time, these non-employed or laboring men probably would not have found these women attractive marriage partners. Men, according to the popular media of the time, were not interested in such women. "Men like women to be feminine and subservient, tender, loving, faithful, and not too well informed."[55] Journalist William E. Curtis wrote that "[A]s a rule, a husband does not want a wife who is wiser or more highly educated than himself.…"[56] Further, according to a Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times* from an individual signing himself as "Bachelor," men believed that educated women were "extravagant" and would "spend money beyond their husbands' means to supply."[57] Thus, the "professional" women as well as those in other middle class jobs probably scared the laborers off. An expensive, overly educated woman would probably have been as unattractive a partner to him as he was to her. In the words of journalist Dorothy Dix, "The happy family is not one in which the wife sits up and reads Marcus Aurelius in the original while the husband reads the baseball score in the evening newspaper."[58]

Contrary to what contemporaries thought, bringing these white, U.S.-born never-married men and women together would not have ended in marriage. Neither the men nor the women would have found the other to be an attractive partner because they were neither like-minded nor likely of the same class. Neither a woman nor probably her parents would encourage a match that meant a loss in status or financial security. Even in areas with large numbers of white U.S.-born never-married men, like Chicago, white

[55] "They Know Too Much" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 14, 1895, p. 4
[56] "College Women make Good Wives" *Minneapolis Tribune,* Sep. 12, 1907 p. 8
[57] "Men Reluctant to Marry" *New York Times* Feb. 16, 1904 p. 8
[58] Dorothy Dix, "The New Ideal of a Wife," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, May 17, 1909, p. 8.

U.S.-born never-married women remained single if the potential partners were unacceptable.

Conclusion

It is impossible to know exactly why any one white U.S.-born woman remained single her entire life. There were almost as many factors and conditions shaping matrimonial fates as there were women. However, there were, as shown here, three factors connected to region that had a significant affect on the chances that any individual white U.S.-born woman would find a spouse. These regionally varying factors were: the number of white U.S.-born men in the area, the employment status of these men, and the employment options available to white, U.S.-born women. With too few men, white U.S.-born women might remain single for lack of an opportunity to marry; with more white U.S.-born men than women, these women had many choices. However, a woman was not likely to marry a man who was unemployed or had a job that would not support her at the level she was accustomed. Further, if she had a well-paying job, she did not have to marry unless the right man came along. And, some parts of the United States had more good men or well-paying jobs than others.

Popular opinion of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was correct in that white, U.S.-born, never-married women were not distributed evenly across the United States. However, just bringing them together with white U.S.-born single men would not resolve the "spinster problem." Besides the number of men available, the status of the men and the jobs available for women in a particular locality profoundly shaped whether marriage would take place. With opportunities for employment that paid

a decent wage, white, U.S.-born women would think twice before marrying.

Chapter 5 – Singleness among the "Fairly Well-to-Do"[1]

> "Happy, indeed, is the house that shelters an old maid. She is the keystone of the household arch." -- *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND) April 25, 1890[2]

Miriam and Jennie Caldwell were born in Missouri in roughly 1867 and 1870 respectively, the daughters of Isaac and Sarah Caldwell. The family moved to Wyoming when the girls were small where Isaac practiced law and the girls attended school. About 1876, some time after their arrival in Wyoming, another child, James, was added to the family. When the family was encountered again in the 1920 census, Miriam and Jennie were both never-married and still living with their mother, but now in Denver, Colorado in a house on Bellain Street. Isaac was dead and James no longer lived with his sisters and mother – possibly married and living with his own family. Although neither Miriam nor her mother had any recorded means of employment, Jennie was a music teacher, probably contributing to the family's support.[3]

Nina Pike was born about 1868 in New York State. By 1880, her father was dead and Nina along with her mother Helena, older brother George, and younger sisters Carrie and Dora lived with her maternal grandfather, John D. Newell. Newell, a widower, had a farm near Gouverneur, New York, a medium sized town near Lake Ontario. Twelve-year-old Nina's occupation was not listed as "At School" in the 1880 census, like Dora's and Carrie's, but instead as "At Home." This was probably a temporary situation because in 1920, Nina was a teacher, sharing a house on Rock Island St, probably still in

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[1] Charles Franklin Emerick, "College Women and Race Suicide," *Political Science Quarterly* 272.
[2] "Women and Home," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND) April 25, 1890, p. 4.
[3] 1880-1920 linked data sample, available through http://usa.ipums.org/usa/linked_data_samples.shtml Downloaded December, 2008.

Gouverneur, with her sister and fellow teacher Carrie.[4]

Until recently, it was very difficult to follow large numbers of individual never-married women like Nina Pike or the Caldwell sisters from one census to the next. Such a task was impossible when using the IPUMS census data samples of the sort used elsewhere in this dissertation because the random sampling used to create them tended to preclude the possibility that the same woman would appear in two different census samples. The IPUMS data allow conclusions to be drawn about regions, racial groups, or even the entire population of never-married women. For individuals, however, these data samples only present a snapshot of one moment in their lives.

With the advent of the linked data samples available through the Minnesota Population Center as of 2008, historians can now easily access two points in people's lives for men, couples, or women. With such data, never-married women can be identified and then looked at decades earlier in search of some features in their young lives that shaped their fate to remain single. When comparing the girls who eventually never married with the general population of girls of the same age, it quickly becomes clear that never-married women could come from any class, ethnic/racial background, or region, and these two groups of women were not completely different. It also appears that neither birth position nor the parental need was a widespread cause of life long singleness among white, U.S.-born women. Instead, the white U.S.-born girls who never married were more likely to come from prosperous, urban, two-parent families that were able to place them in a position that they could afford to remain single. Poorer women tended to marry; women from seemingly more affluent families remained single in somewhat

[4] 1880-1920 linked data sample

larger numbers because they had financial assets and skills that made marriage less urgent. Women who could manage financially outside of marriage were likely to be more selective when choosing a mate than those who had to marry to survive.

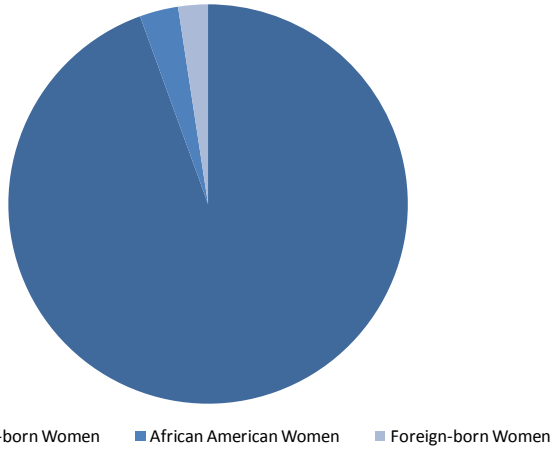
IPUMS Linked Representative Samples

In 1999, the Minnesota Population Center (MPC) and the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints reached an agreement in connection with the complete 1880 U.S. census which Mormon volunteers had painstakingly transcribed onto computers. The MPC would "verify and correct the census transcriptions in exchange for the right to disseminate the resulting database for scholarly and educational purposes."[5] As an additional project, MPC personnel began an effort to match individuals from the 1850-1930 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) samples with themselves in the complete 1880 census, using very conservative approach designed to maximize the reliability of the matches. In Fall 2008, the MPC proudly unveiled their first release of this linked census data which consisted of three collections for each paired census years: men who were in the U.S. for both census years, married couples who were in the U.S. and married to one another for both census years, and women who were in the U.S. and whose marital status was the same for both census years.[6] These new data sets provide historians and other researcherstwo data points for each matched individual as well as information on his or her complete household for both census years.

[5] Steven Ruggles, "Linking Historical Censuses: a New Approach." *History and Computing* 14 (2006): 213.
[6] For a complete discussion on the construction of this data see "New data from Minnesota! IPUMS Linked Representative Samples, 1850-1930" on line at http://usa.ipums.org/usa/linked_data_samples.shtml. Accessed November 5, 2008.

The file linking women from the 1880 and 1920 censuses was selected as the best one to use for the analysis of the backgrounds of women who never married. Because the two censuses were taken 40 years apart, I identified the never-married women between 45 and 54 years old in the 1920 census data and then found a snapshot of their lives in the 1880 census data when they were roughly between five and fifteen.[7] I then examined the family, living situation, education, and other factors of these women's lives in 1880 and look for patterns that might have shaped their matrimonial fates. No other linked file allowed such a comparison because they encompass shorter periods of time. After removing all women from the file who were not never-married in both 1880 and 1920 *and* not between 45 and 54 in 1920, I had a sample of 415 never-married women: 392 white U.S.-born women, 13 African-American, and 10 foreign-born as shown in Figure 5.1. Because the samples of African-American and white foreign-born women are so small, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the 392 white, U.S.-born never-married women in the 1880-1920 linked data file.

Figure 5.1: Racial/Ethnic Composition of Never-Married Women in the Linked Data



Source: IPUMS

[7] The date on which a census is taken varies from decade to decade; ages are not always recorded consistently from census to census.

These data allow an investigation into the lives of white, U.S.-born, never-married women in a way that was not possible for previous scholars. Both Christine Jacobson Carter in *Southern Single Blessedness* and Lee Chambers-Schiller in *Liberty a Better Husband* very successfully use personal papers of white never-married women to make claims about significant aspects of antebellum women's lives and family backgrounds. However, Carter and Chambers-Schiller have few other options. Census data did not include marital status until 1880; according to Carter, "[d]ue to limitations in antebellum census records, historians do not [even] know exactly how many white southern women remained single…."[8] Thus, Chambers-Schiller's and Carter's research efforts, because of the sources available for the antebellum decades, are limited to women who were wealthy, prominent, or lucky enough to have their papers saved. Historians of subsequent generations are more fortunate. While census data does not explain why any specific woman remained single, it does allow an examination of general characteristics in the early lives of women, from all classes and regions in the United States, which might have shaped her marital fate. Such data allow scholars to broaden their understanding of the life choices of white, U.S.-born women.

To identify characteristics of these women or their families that might have increased their chances to remain single past the age of 45, the sample of 392 white, U.S.-born never-married women and their families was compared to the general population of white, U.S.-born women of the same ages and their families in the 1880 census.[9]

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[8] Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 9.

[9] Due to the timing of my dissertation and the Minnesota Population Center's data release schedule for the linked data, I was required to use a preliminary version of the 1880-1920 linked data sample rather than a more polished versions which have subsequently been or soon will be released. For my purposes, this

Comparisons were made in connection with birth position, family composition, father's occupation and education. Both similarities and differences were found between the white U.S.-born never-married women and the general population of white U.S.-born women of the same age. Although it does not appear that birth order or death of a parent had a significant effect on the marital decisions of the population of white, U.S.-born women in the United States as a whole, educational attainment, the household heads', occupation, and the household financial situation were probably significant factors in shaping life long singleness.

Life Long Singleness and the "Family Claim"

On April 24, 1904, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Minneapolis Tribune* both printed an article titled "The Family Martyr" by syndicated columnist Dorothy Dix. In "The Family Martyr" Dix mourns how one family member, in her examples a daughter, was sometimes "selected" to sacrifice her hopes, dreams, and health to benefit the other members – in Dix's biblical terms, to be the "Martha" for a houseful of "Marys". In one example, she describes how the "success of all the balance of the family was built on the wreck of Miss Martha's hopes and happiness. [Martha] was the eldest and the burden and the care and the responsibility of the others slipped on her shoulders."[10] Martha was sent to work in an office at a young age and her wages were spent so her siblings could receive the educations and accouterments necessary to fulfill their ambitions. After her

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earliest version of the linked data was not entirely compatible with the cleaned 1880 samples produced by the MPC because it lacked several of the fields that were created by the MPC for their 1880 sample. As later versions of the linked data samples are released with these additional fields, scholars will be able to take advantage of the cleaner 1880 sample data and not have to contend with many of the data inaccuracies that I encountered in the complete 1880 data.

[10] Dorothy Dix, "The Family Martyr," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 24, 1904, p. A7.

younger siblings were grown and gone, Martha rejected a suitor because she felt it was her duty to remain at home to care for her elderly mother. Yet, Dix pointed out, "Martha's family have [sic.] never appreciated her. They never will."[11]

Dix's melodrama of the "Family Martyr" connects singleness with the "family claim," where family responsibilities sometimes forced one or more daughters to remain single their entire lives. It also ties singleness to birth position. Because Martha was the oldest child, she was the "martyr" and not one of her siblings. Further, the need to care for her mother forced Martha to reject love and marriage for the family responsibilities. However, analysis of the linked census data reveals that neither birth position nor care of a bereaved parent was a major cause of life long singleness in the United States during this period.

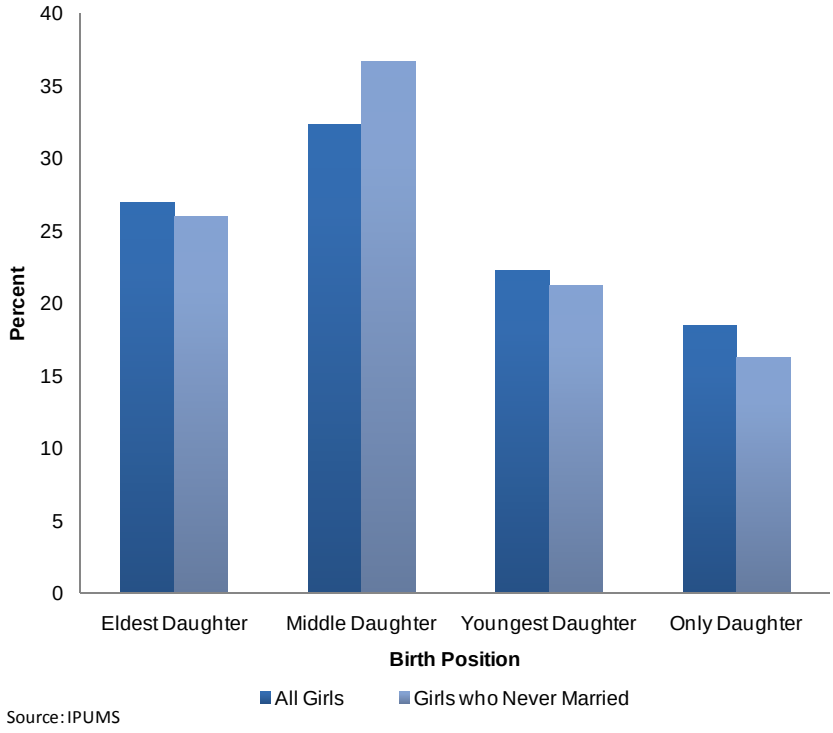
It was a common belief that birth order affected singleness. According to this reasoning, the eldest daughter or the last unmarried daughter, in many cases the youngest, was sometimes designated as the "family caregiver on the death of mother, sister, or sister-in-law."[12] Boston resident Frances Gray was an instance of a real life woman and eldest daughter who "spent most of her life educating and supporting her thirteen younger brothers and sisters when their mother died and their father deserted them."[13] Therefore, if this theory is correct, it would seem likely that eldest or youngest daughters would be overrepresented in the population of women who never married.

The 1880-1920 linked data set used here reveals a different story. Figure 5.2 shows that white U.S.-born girls who never married were no more or less likely than any

[11] Dix, "The Family Martyr," p. A7.
[12] Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband. Single Women in America: the Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 2.
[13] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband*, 216, note 7.

other girls to be the oldest or youngest daughter in the family.[14] The percents of white U.S.-born girls who were oldest or youngest daughters were each about one percent less than the percents that all white U.S.-born girls were oldest or youngest daughters – not a substantial difference. The percent of white U.S.-born girls who never married and were the only daughter was also close to that of all white U.S.-born girls, differing by only 2.28 percent. However, the white, U.S.-born girls who never married may have been slightly more likely to be middle daughters than the general population of white U.S.-born girls their age. 36.64 percent of the white U.S.-born girls who never married were middle daughters, 4.33 percent more than the general population of white U.S.-born girls

Figure 5.2: Percent of White, U.S.-Born Girls, ages 5 - 15, in each Birth Position in 1880



[14] Figure 5.2 was calculated by identifying the birth position – eldest, middle, youngest, or only – of each daughter among both the girls who never married and all girls. The number in each birth position was

their age.[15]

While there were certainly instances in specific families, such as the Gray family, where the eldest daughter held responsibilities that forced her to forego marriage, this was not an overarching trend. The statistics in Figure 5.2 show that neither eldest nor youngest daughters were over represented in the population of girls who never married at a rate significantly higher or lower than in the general population of girls their age. Birth position was not a significant cause of singleness.

It is possible, however, to suggest factors other than birth position that were far more likely to create family situations that contributed to life long singleness among daughters. A daughter who had the necessary skills, greatest earning potential, fewest other commitments, or the closest emotional ties to a family member in need might respond to a family emergency no matter where she fell within the family birth order. Louisa May Alcott, for example, a middle daughter, felt bound by loyalty to her overburdened mother and labored to fulfill the dream of having "a lovely, quiet home for [mother], with no debts or troubles to burden her," a reoccurring theme in her diaries.[16] Alcott's writing talents made it possible for her to reach this goal, irrespective of her birth position. Decades later, nurse Jessie Wilson cared for her brother when he suffered from

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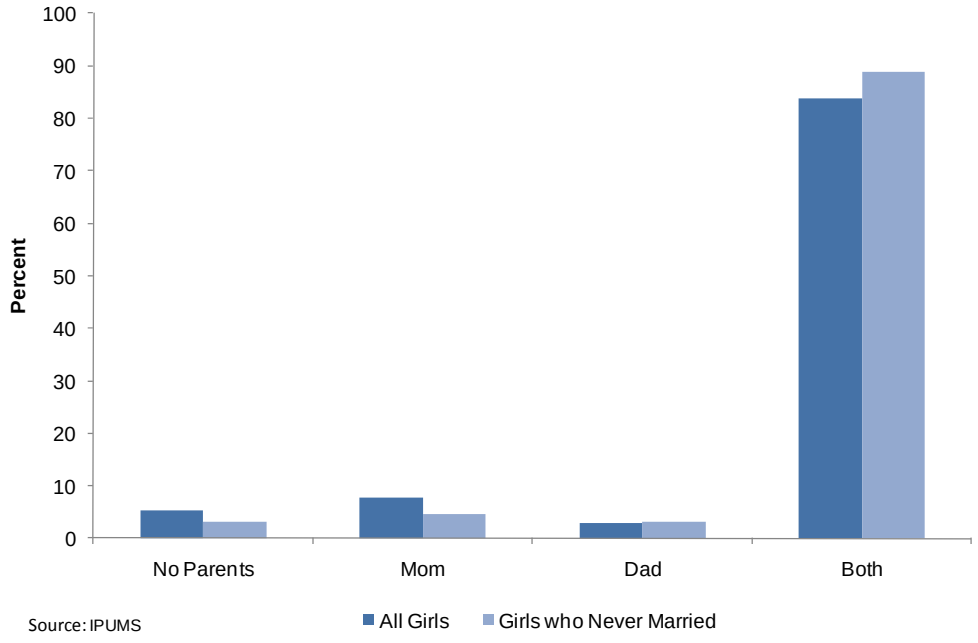
divided by the total number of daughters in each data set. The resulting percentages were graphed.

[15] It also must be pointed out that census data is an imperfect source for determining birth order. Although a girl might be the eldest or youngest daughter in a household at the time a census was taken, that might not be her true birth position. Here, an elder sister might have left home before the 1880 census was taken or a younger sister might have been born in the years following the 1880 census and gone by the 1920 census. This could further increase the likelihood that a white, U.S.-born, never-married women would be a middle daughter and not the eldest or youngest.

[16] Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, eds. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1997),, 63.

shell-shock as a result of service in World War I.[17] Single and over age thirty at the time, it is likely that Wilson received the responsibility because she was available and had the necessary medical experience to cope with her brother's difficulties, not because of the birth position she held within the family. Factors such as these were more significant than birth position in creating situations that led women to accept family responsibilities.

Figure 5.3: Percent of White, U.S.-born Girls Living with Parents



Like birth order, it would also seem likely that if the needs of a bereaved parent were a significant cause of singleness among white, U.S.-born women, such households would be overrepresented among the population of never-married girls. More white U.S.-born girls who never married would come from homes without a mother or father than the general population of girls their age. Instead, the U.S. census data reveals that the

[17] Dolores Avelleyra Murphy, ed. *In Red Hats, Beads, and Bags: 1908 Graduates Sharing their Lives through Letters* (Morrison, CO: Cassiopeia Press, 1990), 251

opposite was true. As shown in Figure 5.3, white, U.S.-born girls who never married were less likely than the general population of white U.S.-born girls their own age to come from households with one or both of their parents missing.[18] The vast majority (greater than 90 percent) of all white, U.S.-born girls between ages five and fifteen in 1880, both those who married and those who did not, lived with at least one of their own parents. However, 88.96 percent of the white U.S.-born girls who never married lived with both of their parents, 5.08 percent more than the general population of white, U.S.-born girls their own age. Ten-year-old Sarah Wise lived with her parents John and Frances Wise; six-year old Augusta Hooks lived with her parents O.F. and Ella Hooks; fourteen-year old Addie Kerr lived with her parents G.T. and E.R. Kerr. This difference seems to have varied by age from less than 2 percent when the girls were around age five to approximately 9 percent by the time the girls were fifteen. The girls who never married were somewhat more likely to come from households with both parents.

Care for one or more parents had an impact on some individual women's marriage prospects, but it was not a significant overall cause of singleness. Instead, family responsibility was more likely a result of singleness rather than a cause. Never-married women were frequently given this responsibility because they were perceived as available since they had no husband or children to care for and were compelled or willing to take it on. In many instances, when called to care for parents, they were already past the age at which most women married. For example, this appears to have been the case for an unnamed Wellesley graduate when family responsibility interrupted her teaching

[18] Figure 5.3 was calculated by first identifying which girls, both those who married and those who did not, lived with both parents, mom only, dad only, or without parents. Then the number in each category was counted and divided by the appropriate number of girls. The results are graphed.

career around 1909. She described in a 1910 letter to classmates that she left teaching a year or so before and was now "at home, keeping house" for her family. She acquired this responsibility when her sister Isabella, the previous caregiver, married. Given the situation, she did "not expect to teach again."[19] A woman might be single because needy family members required her care or be caring for needy family members because as a single woman she was expected to do so. For this Wellesley graduate, the latter was the case. Over thirty when she gave up teaching, she probably had reasons other than family responsibility for being single. However, in spite of her teaching career, because she was single, she assumed charge of the family when Isabella married.

Mildred McIntosh was also past the usual age of marriage when she found herself supporting her mother. McIntosh returned home to her family ranch in Colorado following her college graduation. Forbidden by her family from "joining a social service unit for foreign work" she turned to another interest – sheep and cattle raising.[20] After her father's death, she carried on with the ranch and her mother. Singleness was not a result of caring for her mother; McIntosh's father did that for more than fifteen years after she returned from college. Instead, because she was single, never permanently left home and experienced at running the family ranch, she was available to care for her mother and took it over.

It is also worth noting that children did not have to remain single to care for bereaved parents. The census reveals that many families made other arrangements that allowed the children to wed and the parents still receive care and companionship. For

[19] Joyce Antler *Educated Women: Higher Education, Culture, and Professionalism, 1950-1950.* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 177-8.
[20] Murphy, ed. *In Red Hats, Beads, and Bags*, 115.

example, Julia Barksdale of Alabama lived with her son and daughter-in-law George and Demishia Barksdale; California resident Virginia Trapp lived with her daughter and son-in-law Daisy and Nicholas Choice; Widower Joseph Bockins of Colorado shared a home with his young children as well as his grown son and daughter-in-law, Francis and Mary Bockins; Connecticut resident Major Dikeman was a head of a household made up of his son and daughter-in-law, George and Elizabeth Dikeman, and their three children. Widower John D. Newell, who we encountered at the beginning of the chapter, shared his home with his widowed daughter Helena and her family. Death of a mother or father does not appear to have had a profound overall effect on the marriage prospects of white U.S.-born women who were between 5 and 15 years old in the 1880 census. Care of parents was probably more a result of singleness rather than a cause. And, if a never-married daughter was unavailable to shoulder this responsibility, other arrangements could be made.

The fact that a white, U.S.-born woman was the eldest or youngest daughter in a family did not increase or decrease the chance that she would remain single her entire life. While birth position was important in some specific instances, it was not an important factor overall. At the same time, the responsibility of caring for bereaved parents was more a result of singleness than a cause. Although some women probably did remain single to care for their parents, other arrangements were frequently made. Other factors were thus more important in shaping the marital fates of white, U.S.-born women.

Unequal Opportunities

As stated in an earlier chapter of this dissertation, concerns about "race suicide" prompted numerous studies on the frequency of marriage among female college graduates in the United States in the early 20th century. Then, in a study published by the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in 1904, researchers also began to examine the marriage rates of the non-college female relatives of women college graduates and claimed that their marriage rates were also below the national average.[21] These findings were supported by similar research by Smith College Professor Charles Emerick in 1909. He stated that his statistics showed that the families of the class from which college women came, that which he described as "fairly well-to-do," had "ideals unfavorable to early marriages and large families" that were uncommon among other classes.[22] A study of Wellesley graduates published in the *New York Times* concurred: "women of the upper and of the lower classes are more apt to marry than the women of the middle class…. [T]he great middle class is canny. It has just enough money to know the value of having it, and it does not rush into matrimony."[23]

Data from the U.S. census supports the claim that white, U.S.-born upper-middle class women were more likely to remain single their entire lives than women from other classes. Many of the white U.S.-born women who never married came from families that appear to have been more prosperous than the general population. This affluence and the advantages of class placed these women in a position where they could remain outside of marriage and still maintain a comfortable lifestyle.

Several factors made this possible. First, the heads of the households of the white

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[21] Minnie J. Reynolds, "The Bachelor Girl Reflects" *New York Times*, June 5, 1904, p. SM4.
[22] Emerick, "College Women and Race Suicide," 272.
[23] "Why Don't College Women Marry? Only One-Third of Wellesley Graduates Wed," *New York Times*, January 22, 1911.

U.S.-born girls who never married, usually their fathers, were more likely to hold higher status and likely better paying jobs than the heads of the households of the general

Table 5.1: Percent of Household Heads of White U.S.-Born Girls ages 5 - 15 in each Occupational Category in 1880

Occupation	Girls who Never Married	All Girls
Farmer	48.19	55.81
Craftsmen	14.06	11.89
Manager	13.65	6.70
Operatives	8.84	7.16
Laborer	6.02	10.50
Professional	4.42	3.75
Clerical/Sales	3.61	3.07
Service Workers	1.20	1.11

Source: IPUMS

population of white, U.S.-born girls between five and fifteen in 1880. As shown in Table 5.1, the majority of all fathers were farmers.[24] However, the girls who never married were 7.62 percent less likely to live on a farm than other girls their age. More than twice as many of the girls who never married had fathers whose jobs were classified in the census as "managers, officials, and proprietors." For example, Catherine Nims' father Ruel was a banker, Pauline Sesso's father Henry was a customs house broker, Blanche Hendrick's Grandfather was a boot and shoe merchant, and none of these women ever married. However, 4.48 percent more white, U.S.-born girls in the general population, including Olive Sanford, Nellie Higgins, and Rosie and Alice Noel, had fathers whose work was classified in the U.S. census as a laborer than the similar population of girls who never married.

[24] It is impossible to determine from the 1880 census if any individual farmer owned his farm or was a tenant or sharecropper. It is also impossible to determine if a farm was mortgaged or owned outright.

Through this initial evidence, it appears that the households from which many of the girls who never married came were indeed solidly middle class and more prosperous than those of the general population. However, a census job title or classification alone is an unreliable way to measure the social or financial standing of an individual or a family. The job titles can be misleading so other evidence is necessary to identify a household's true class.[25] Here, however, the individual families of the white, U.S.-born never-married women can be examined for clues to the status of that specific group. Source: IPUMS

Examining only the non-farming households, one of the largest groups of white,

Table 5.2: Percent of Non-Farming Household Heads of White U.S. Born Girls ages 5 - 15 in each Occupational Category in 1880

Occupation	Girls who Never Married	All Girls
Craftsmen	27.13	26.92
Manager	26.36	15.17
Operatives	17.05	16.19
Laborer	11.63	23.76
Professional	8.53	8.50
Clerical/Sales	6.98	6.96
Service Workers	2.33	2.51

Source: IPUMS

U.S.-born girls who never married, 26.4 percent, lived in homes where the household heads, usually their fathers, had jobs classified in the census as "managers, officials, or proprietors" as shown in Table 5.2. Such households appearing in the 1880 portion of the 1880-1920 linked census sample almost always relied solely on the household head's salary for support. The only other employed family members in these households were

[25] For further details see Matthew Sobek, "Class Analysis and the U.S. Census Public Use Samples." *Historical Methods* 24(Fall 1991): 171-182. Accessed through *America History and Life*, EBSCO, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN, August 1, 2007.

grown sons and, occasionally, daughters who still lived at home. If the grown daughters were in the paid workforce they were either teachers or clerical workers. The younger children were usually listed as in school and never reported as in the paid workforce. Teenage sons and daughters were often in school and at least two of the girls who never married had brothers who were in college. Thirteen year old Wilhelmina Wistrand, for example, lived Moline, Illinois with her father Jonas who was a grocer, mother Louisa, four sisters, and brother Herman who was in college.

Households such as that of the Wistrand family appear to have been middle class, or trying to keep the appearance of such. Working class men were often unable to support their families alone. The pooled incomes of several household members were often needed to ensure the survival of the group. Children frequently left school as soon as they were old enough to find paid employment that would allow them to contribute to the family income.[26] On the other hand, one symbol of middle class success for men like Jonas Wistrand was the ability to support their families alone.[27] With economic security, a family could afford to keep the younger children in school and perhaps even send sons (and increasingly daughters) to high school and college. Grown children might hold jobs, but usually white-collar work and never domestic service. Although the census label "managers, officials, or proprietors" is vague, households supported alone by a man with such a job, including children in school past working age, indicate the likelihood of middle class status.

Further evidence of the middle class status of these manager, official, or

[26] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 121.
[27] Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 54.

proprietor headed households was the presence one or more servants in approximately half of the homes. The Wistrand family, for example, employed in 1880 a twenty-one year old domestic servant named Hilda Lindstrom. "Throughout the United States, …middle-class life-style required servants, whether for the comforts servants provided or as an indication of the family's status to the community."[28] Servants were seen as necessary to ease the burdens of the female members of the family, allow the wife some leisure, and as a symbol demonstrating a man's success in providing for his family. Working class families almost never employed servants, but instead sent their daughters to be servants in more prosperous households.[29] The fact that a household could even find the money to pay a servant indicated they had reached a level of comfort that allowed them at least present the face of middle class membership toward the world.

Similar evidence indicates that households headed by a "professional" were also middle class. Another 8.5 percent of the non-farming households of the girls who never married were headed by individuals whose jobs were classified in the census as "professional." Like the "managers, officials, or proprietors" these households were also typically supported by the head alone, the grown daughters were rarely in the paid workforce, and the sons frequently continued their educations through their teenage years. Servants appeared in these households less frequently, but were occasionally present. One such family was that of Gertrude Culp of Constantine, Michigan. In 1880, seven year old "Gertie" lived with her father Samuel, who was a physician, mother Anna, three brothers and two sisters. Gertie's 16-year old brother Melvin was still in school and

[28] David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 149.
[29] Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 149.

her eighteen year old sister Cinthia was a teacher. This sort of class position was not atypical; 34.9 percent of the white U.S.-born girls who never married came from non-farming families who lived in homes headed by professionals or managers, but only 23.7 percent of the girls of the same age from the general white U.S.-born population were as fortunate. Thus the girls who never married were more likely than the general population to come from comfortable middle class households.

In contrast, 23.76 percent of the white, U.S.-born girls from the complete 1880 census lived in non-farm households headed by men listed in the census as laborers. The economic security of these households appears to have been more varied than that of the professionals or the "managers, officials, or proprietors" and less secure overall. 16.76 percent of these families were headed by men who were non-farm laborers. Although these families sometimes lived on the head's pay alone, it was at other times supplemented by additional income sources visible in the census. Some laborers' homes contained one or more boarders. Although the younger children were frequently in school, teenage and grown sons and daughters were often in the paid labor force, typically employed as operatives, laborers, or servants. For example, seven year old May Anderson lived in Oakland, California with her father Mathias, who was a laborer for the railroad, mother Catherine, and younger sisters Rose and Lilly. Louis Stephens, a foreign-born tinsmith, also lived in the household, probably as a boarder. Fourteen year old Mary Newnam lived in Delaware with her father Daniel, a laborer, her mother Martha, four brothers and two sisters. Mary and older brother Albert worked in a cotton mill, another brother, Benjamin, was a farm laborer, nine-year-old Rebecca was in school, and the rest of the children were at home, apparently too young for work or school.

Another 6.99 percent of the general population of white U.S.-born girls between five and fifteen in the 1880 census lived in households headed by a farm laborer. These families, although rural, appear to have lived under conditions similar to non-agricultural laborers. Such households included that of eight-year-old Cathron [sic.] Thompson. Although her relationship to the head of the household is missing, she appears to be the youngest child and only daughter of farm laborer Robert Thompson of rural Alabama. Also in the household were Robert's wife Eliza and their five sons. The oldest two boys, Jeferson [sic.] and John, ages 19 and 17, worked in a turpentine refinery, but the younger three boys and Cathron had no recorded means of employment or school attendance. Also present in the household was fifty-six year old Mary Lancastor who was described as a boarder. While 23.76 percent of the white, U.S.-born girls in the United States in 1880 lived in a non-farming household with a laborer of some sort, only 11.63 percent of the white U.S.-born girls who never married were similarly situated.

The laboring families described here were less prosperous and more likely from a lower class than the professional or manager families. While professional's or manager's families were supported by the household head alone, laborers' families frequently relied on the pooled incomes of multiple family members to make ends meet. The laborers' teenage children were frequently contributing to the household income and held jobs of a lower status than those the children of the professionals or managers might accept. Instead of employing servants to help the women of the house, laborers' daughters were sometimes sent out as servants while the wives, without hired help, cared for the family home and any boarders that lived there too. Unlike the managers' and professionals' households, laborers' households did not have the resources for a middle class lifestyle.

From these data, it appears that white, U.S.-born girls who never married were more likely to come from prosperous middle class families than the general population of white U.S.-born girls their age. The presence of servants, few if any boarders, grown daughters out of the paid work force, and children continuing their education through their teenage years, as well as a higher status job for the household head, indicate that the family was financially secure. Poorer families, from which a greater percent of the general population of girls came, could not afford such luxuries. While young working class women might see marriage as an escape from an unpleasant situation, marriage for daughters of these more prosperous families might mean a loss of status or comfort.[30]

The presence of never-married daughters in more prosperous homes coincides with research on extended families by historian Steven Ruggles. In *Prolonged Connections: The Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth-Century England and America,* Ruggles argues that living in "extended families [was] something of a luxury in the nineteenth century."[31] It was not typically poor families that provided homes for needy relations; there was no economic benefit in such an arrangement for a family already struggling to make ends meet. Instead, it was the more prosperous families that could afford additional dependents – here the unmarried daughters. In spite of the fact that dependents might move in with those who had plenty, "family members who exercised control over economic resources" in this case the fathers, "probably exercised control over the co-residence of kin" influencing who got to stay and who were

[30] Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 72.
[31] Steven Ruggles, *Prolonged Connections: the Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth-Century England and America* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 128.

compelled to leave.[32] Parents who could afford to have their unmarried daughters at home probably welcomed their presence. It is hard to believe that a household head, typically a father, in a financially secure home would agree to a marriage between his daughter and a suitor who was a less than worthy in his eyes or deny her support if an acceptable man never came along.

Also contributing to the affluence of the households of the white, U.S.-born girls who never married was the increased likelihood that the father would be in the household, as shown in Figure 5.3. A household with the male head present was typically more financially secure than one without him. The death or desertion of the male household head severely disrupted the finances of the family, often resulting in a loss of income and perhaps status for the remaining members.[33] These families often struggled to survive economically with the mother going to work and older children leaving school to get jobs. Sometimes the family was forced to split up with members moving in with other relatives or going into charitable institutions.[34] The father's presence helped create an environment that permitted daughters the luxury of remaining at home. It placed them in a position that made comfortable singleness more possible.

At least in part as a result of this affluence, the white U.S.-born girls who never married were significantly more likely to be in school than the general population of girls

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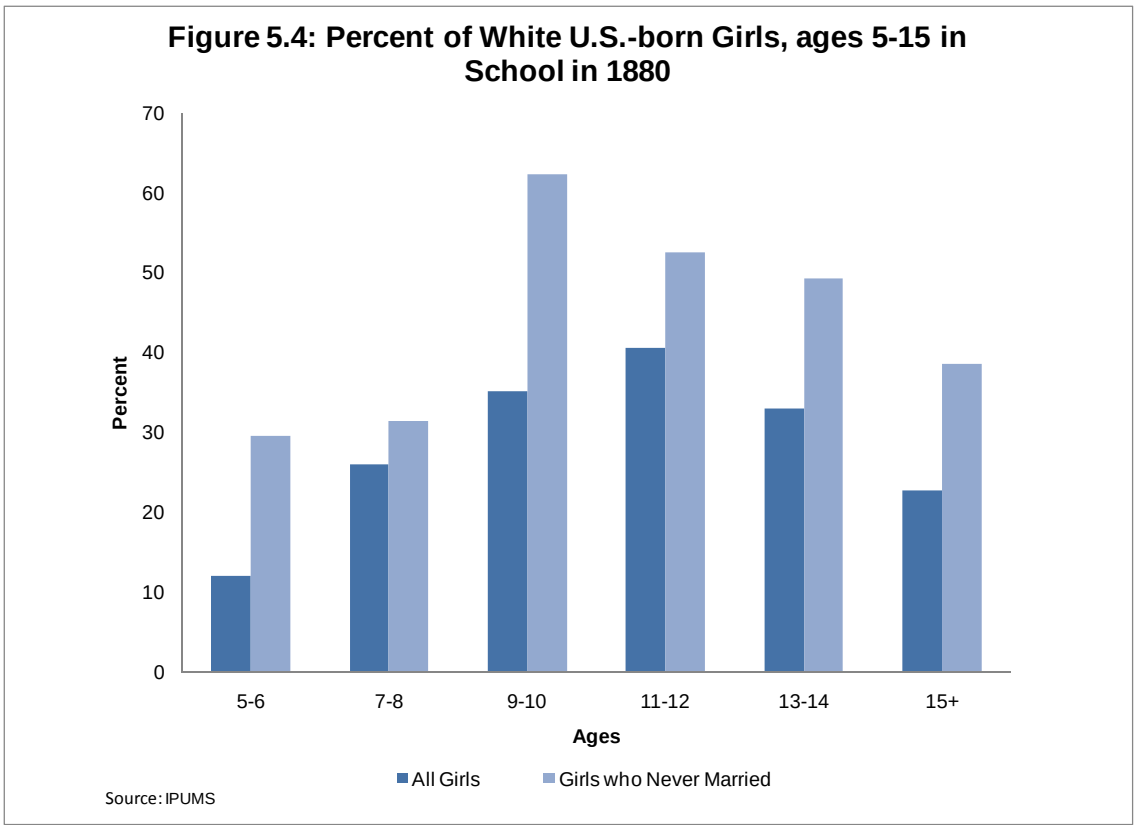
[32] Ruggles, *Prolonged Connections*, 58.
[33] S. J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880-1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 2.
[34] S. J. Kleinberg, "How Did the Debate About Widows' Pensions Shape Relief Programs for Single Mothers, 1900-1940?", in *Women & Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* 9(2) Katherine Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, eds. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005). Accessed on line at http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com.floyd.lib.umn.edu/wam2/wam2.object.details.aspx?dorpid=1000680299

their own age as shown in Figure 5.4.[35] This higher percentage attending school exists at every age between five and fifteen. At its peak at ages 9-10, approximately 62.26 percent of the girls who never married were in school while no more than 40.47 percent of girls from the general population were ever in school, even at their peak attendance at ages 11-12. 38.51 percent of the girls who never married were still in school at age 15, approximately 15.8 percent more than that of the general population.

According to John Rury in his book *Education and Women's Work*, white U.S.-



[35] The IPUMS-USA variable "School" was designed to indicate school attendance for children, but is unavailable for the 1880 complete census. However, when filling in the occupation field for children, enumerators in 1880 were instructed to put "At School" for children if that was how they spent the majority of their time. While not having the "School" variable might result in an undercount of the number of women attending school, a reasonable comparison may be made between the never-married women and the general population using the occupation variable. For further information, see "1880 Census Instructions to Enumerators," IPUMS-USA census documentation. Accessed at http://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/inst1880.shtml#occ on July 20, 2009. Figure 5.4 was calculated by dividing the number in school by the total number of girls in each group, both those who never married and those who did, at each age level.

born families placed a higher value on education than some other ethnic groups.[36] However, to make that education a reality, a family had to be able to afford to keep their daughters in school. Public high schools became increasingly common in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. However, to send a girl to a free public high school, a family had to be able to do without any wages she might earn if she was working.[37] If parents needed additional income or the daughter's labor, she stopped going to school.[38] Therefore, it was typically only the white middle or upper class families that were able to take advantage of the increasingly available high schools because they did not need their daughters' pay. The affluence of the families of the girls who never married was able to provide them with educational advantages unavailable to poorer girls.

The likelihood a girl would be in school also increased if her family lived in an urban community. At least in part a result of their father's occupation, the girls who never married were more likely to live in an urban community than the general population of girls their age. While 39.28 percent of the girls who never married lived in an urban area in 1880, defined roughly in the census as cities and incorporated places with 2,500 or more inhabitants, only 23.94 percent of the general population of girls between the ages of 5 and 15 came from such a place. Although the girls who never married came from all over the United States, they were significantly overrepresented in the Middle Atlantic Division; 32.58 percent as compared with 22.34 percent of the general population of white U.S.-born women their same age in 1880.

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[36] John L. Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60-61

[37] Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 170.

[38] Rury, *Education and Women's Work,* 108

By living in an urban area and/or in the East, the girls who never married were more likely to have access to a school than those who lived in rural areas. Girls in more rural parts of the United States were sometimes unable to go to school because there was no school near by or because bad weather made it impossible for them to get there. In her loosely autobiographical children's novel *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, Laura Ingalls Wilder famously describes how country girls Mary and Laura were unable to attend school some terms because it was not safe for them to walk two miles in unpredictable Minnesota winter weather.[39] Schools in the urban areas were also more likely to be open reliably year after year and for longer terms than rural schools which sometimes had trouble attracting and retaining teachers.[40] Secondary schools were also typically in urban areas; country girls might have to leave home to attend while urban girls frequently did not. With schools more readily available and open more reliably, it is not surprising that urban girls were more likely to be in school than country girls.

Through such an education, many of the white U.S.-born girls who never married gained the skills to enter the new, better paying jobs that would allow them to support themselves. "Because so many of the new jobs available to women required at least some secondary education, women who did not possess the requisite training were largely excluded."[41] It was not the jobs like factory work or domestic service that gave white U.S.-born women both the ability to be self supporting and the incentive to forego marriage, but the new employment like clerical work, expanded teaching, and other

[39] Laura Ingalls Wilder, *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1965), 245-6.
[40] See for example Charles E. Rankin, "Teaching: Opportunity and Limitation for Wyoming Women" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (May 1990) 162-3 or "State Short of Women" *The Washington Bee* (Washington, D.C.), August 26, 1905, p. 7.
[41] Rury, *Education and Women's Work*, 92

professions that opened to them in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Women with the education and living in urban areas where the jobs typically were located were better able to take advantage of this work. Of the white U.S.-born women who never married that were in the paid workforce in 1920, 49 percent were classified in the census as professionals, clerical workers, or managers. They included women like teacher Julia Berg of Alameda, California, social worker Alva Blaffer of New Orleans, Reverend Hannah J. Powell of Maine, clerical worker Salome Rymal of Lincoln, Nebraska, and manager Laura Mabett of Massachusetts. Each of these women was on her own or contributed significantly to her own support. With steady, reasonably well paying employment, young women did not have to marry to survive. They could postpone or even forego marriage if the right man never materialized.

At the same time, daughters of prosperous middle-class families had a socially acceptable role within their parents' household that might also lead them to postpone marriage. In the late 19th and early 20th century many Americans believed that grown daughters should remain in the family fold "making sunshine in the home" until marriage. [42] Living at home to brighten the lives of their parents was seen, in some social circles, as valuable an occupation for an unmarried woman as "professional pursuits." "[S]olicitude for parents received great social sanction."[43] Marion Harland, in a 1911 article in *The Independent*, celebrated the role of the 19th Century "Home Daughter" as "plainly ordained by God." A daughter's "companionship [was] … clearly the lawful recompense of the mother's weary waiting and willing sacrifices of personal interest and

[42] As quoted in Antler *Educated Women*, 171.
[43] Joyce Antler, *Educated Women*, 178 - 9.

desire."[44] Many of the families of the girls who never married could afford to subscribe to this theory and apparently did. They welcomed their daughters' services, even if just company for their mothers.

However, some parents, according to critics, took this too far and prevented their daughters from marrying in order to keep them at home. This situation was prevalent enough for articles to appear in the popular press rebuking parents for their selfishness. "Why do some blind parents," cried one columnist, "expect their daughters to be content forever in the sphere of a maid, young or otherwise?" [45] "It is possible," another columnist noted, "that even mothers are a little too selfish and exacting toward their unmarried daughters."[46] Some mothers declared they could not imagine life with out their daughters at home. "'Oh don't mention the possibility of my daughter ever marrying! How could I ever give her up?' a selfish mother cried one day when some laughing remark had been made on the subject." [47] Philanthropist Mary Elizabeth Garrett, the daughter of B & O Railroad tycoon John Work Garrett, claimed her father would not allow her to marry. According to one theory launched by biographer Kathleen Waters Sander, John relied on Mary's skills as "an assistant, a confidante, and a companion" as well as her "business abilities and sound judgment that he valued and needed" and was unwilling to give that up. (He also later needed her to nurse him through his various illnesses.)[48] With a comfortable home and a socially acceptable role to fill, marriage might be less of a priority for these women than for those who needed to marry to escape

[44] Harland, "The Passing of the Home Daughter." *The Independent* 71(July 1911): 91.
[45] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "The Daughter and the Father" *Minneapolis Tribune,* Oct. 6, 1901, B7.
[46] "Unmarried Women" *Chicago Daily Tribune,* Oct. 6, 1886, 9.
[47] Wilcox, "The Daughter and the Father", B7.
[48] Kathleen Waters Sander, *Mary Elizabeth Garrett: Society and Philanthropy in the Gilded Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 83.

an unpleasant environment.

Taken together, the girls who never married were in a better position to remain single their entire lives than other girls their age. First, they were more likely to come from families that could afford to allow them to remain at home. Dependent unmarried daughters remaining at home were a luxury that not all families could afford. For those who could, there was a role for them in American society – that of the home daughter – that made marriage less urgent. Further, these women were more likely to be better educated than average and lived in an urban area. This allowed them to find a job that perhaps paid enough to permit them to survive single if their parents could not support them. Marriage was still seen as a woman's ultimate career, but financial security allowed women from prosperous middle class families to reject imperfect suitors. Single life became in many cases a pleasant situation to continue when marriage was not a more attractive option.

Conclusion

White U.S.-born women who never married shared many attributes with the general population of women their same age. They came from any background, any social class, and any part of the United States. Like the women who did marry, these women were no more likely to be in any particular birth position than anyone else, but did come from families that were slightly more likely to have both parents alive.

At the same time, the families of the white, U.S.-born women who never married seem to have been more prosperous than the average household. The head's higher status occupation, increased possibility of servants, children in school through their teenage

years, and grown daughters outside the paid workforce all indicate that their family was probably not struggling financially or at least wanted to present the image of middle class status. In such a case, a daughter might not have to marry to ensure survival and could wait for the right man. If he never came along, she still could still maintain a comfortable place to live. With the education her parents could afford, she might have access to a job that would allow her to contribute to the support of the household if not become self-sufficient and reject an unwelcome suitor. Or with a financially comfortable family, she might be welcome at home indefinitely.

Although American society continued to perceive marriage as a woman's highest calling, those with more money could build a comfortable life for themselves outside of marriage if necessary. White, U.S.-born never-married women could come from any social class or region, but family affluence reduced their need to wed.

Conclusion

> "Women may get higher education and the ballot; but the member of the firm that holds the pocketbook will always be the boss." – Minnie J. Reynolds, *New York Times*, June 21, 1903[1]

Between 1880 and 1930, never-married women of all races and backgrounds in the United States entered the paid workforce in significant numbers and many gained a new authority in their lives. At the same time, the number of women who never married began to increase. Although contemporaries believed college educated women were one of the main causes of the growth in singleness among women in the U.S., this was, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, not the case. Instead, I showed that several other factors had a profound effect on a woman's marital decision, specifically her race, ethnicity, class and physical location. However, I have yet to answer one key question raised in this dissertation: what caused the increase in the number of women remaining single between 1880 and 1920?

Although qualified by the factors listed above, race, ethnicity, class, etc., the number of women in the United States who remained single increased as a result of women moving into the paid workforce, particularly into jobs that provided a livable wage or salary. Paid employment gave never-married women an authority in their own lives that was unavailable to the dependent daughters of earlier generations. It gave them a greater measure of control over the selection of marriage partners and timing of marriage, if they chose to marry at all.

It should be immediately noted that many of the women who never married did not make a conscious decision to remain single. Instead, lifelong singleness was

[1] Minnie J. Reynolds, "Some Reflections of a Bachelor Girl," *The New York Times*, June 21, 1903, p. SM13.

frequently the result of a series of smaller events or choices, the sum total of which led to the ultimate result. Labor leader Rose Schneiderman, for example, never married; not as the result of a conscious decision to avoid the institution, but because she was so preoccupied with her work that she never got around to it. She claimed in her autobiography that "[Mother] kept saying that I'd never get married because I was so busy – a prophecy which came true."[2] Other women might reject an undesirable suitor and never have another come along. Paid employment gave women the freedom to reject unwelcome suitors and survive outside of marriage.

This concluding section of my dissertation will first explore the contested terminology used by historians to describe the authority or control over their lives women gained during this period. Then, I will argue that as never-married women gained such authority over their own lives, they were more able to build lives for themselves outside of marriage. Finally, I will briefly explore the question of why the percent of women remaining single their entire lives declined after 1920 and suggest avenues for future research.

Independence, Agency, and Power

"One of the latest examples of the independent woman is Miss D. E. Stevenson," announced the November 24, 1900 issue of the *Deseret Evening News*, a Salt Lake City, Utah paper. Stevenson operated a meat market in Rochester, New York, something that the reporter described as an "attractive novelty". Like a man with a similar store, she bought, cut, and sold her own meat and for three years had operated a successful

[2] Rose Schneiderman with Lucy Goldthwaite, *All For One* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc. 1967), 30.

business. While the reporter claimed that even Stevenson herself admitted that a woman running such a shop was unusual, "she likes the work and by strict attention to the wants of her customers has gained a recognized position."[3]

From time to time, newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reported on women, such as Stevenson, who were described as "independent." While it is unclear exactly what criteria these various reporters used measure independence, the women described, both married and single, seemed to be declared independent because they challenged contemporary notions of what a woman was supposed to be or do. Historians have also adopted the word independent to describe women during this same period, but unlike the reporters, typically establish criteria as part of their research to determine which women were independent and which were not. Although the exact criteria differ from historian to historian, there is significant overlap between these varying definitions. However, "independent" as used by these various historians does not seem to adequately describe the realties faced by never-married women at the end of the nineteenth century.

Some historians, including Hendrick Hartog in *Man and Wife in America* and Amy Dru Stanley in *From Bondage to Contract*, define independence through the law.[4] These historians claim that legally all white women without husbands were independent throughout this period, holding many of the rights that most white men (married or single) took as a matter of course. "[A] single woman's legal status was, for the most

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[3] "This New Woman has a Meat Market," *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, UT), November 24, 1900.

[4] Hendrick Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

part, indistinguishable from the legal status of many men. A single woman could contract, own, depose, write wills, engage in most forms of business, testify, [and] demand the obedience and guardianship of her children."[5]

Scholars who define independence from the legal standpoint clearly demonstrate that unmarried women had far more legal autonomy than married women. Some were able to exercise their legal rights as single women like D. E. Stevenson did through the operation of her meat shop. However, for other women, these rights might not translate into independence in a meaningful sense. Many women were unwilling or unable to act or live separately from family and remained with their family in spite of the fact they were legally able to function on their own. One such woman was May Brooks of East Orange, New Jersey. After her mother's death, Brooks gave up her teaching position and spent the next twenty years keeping house for her father. However, as Brooks reported to college friends, "In March 1925 my father died and I came to Winchester, [Massachusetts] to live with my sister.… In Aug. 1926, she, too, died, and now I am living with my brother-in-law and helping take care of my sister's three children."[6] Family claims kept Brooks from building an independent life, in spite of the fact that the law permitted it.

Other women remained tied to family for economic reasons. Some could not afford to be otherwise. Many working women did not earn the eight to nine dollars a week that various contemporary studies deemed the minimum amount necessary to

[5] Hartog, *Man and Wife in America*, 118.
[6] The letters of May Brooks, *Class of 1897 Wellesley Class Books*, 1907 p. 36, 1910 p. 51, 1927 p. 53.

survive alone.[7] In many industries, like bookbinding, women had to live with family members because the low wages and the "dull season" with little work or layoff made surviving alone nearly impossible.[8] In other instances, families needed the incomes of their daughters to survive. Fabbia Orzo, for example, started working at age thirteen because her family needed the money. A life long single woman, Orzo supported her family most of the rest of her life.[9] In his 1884 study of Boston working girls, Carroll D. Wright discovered dozens of instances where daughters' wages were vital to family survival. In one example, four sisters supported their family because their father did not work regularly.[10] Legal independence was thus also sacrificed in the wake of economic necessity.

Another scholar, Nancy Cott, in "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934," describes independence as the freedom to make choices and shape one's own destiny. "Independence," according to this line of reasoning, means "freedom of judgment - freedom from the imposition of the will of another."[11] Tied to economics, an individual was independent only if she was self-supporting, controlled her own labor, and was not subject to another person's decisions.[12] "There was no middle ground.... Either one was independent and had the capacity to have dependents or one

[7] Eleanor L. Lattimore and Ray S. Trent, *Legal Recognition of Industrial Women* (New York: Industrial Committee, War Work Council of the National Board Young Women's Christian Associations, 1919), 23-4.
[8] Mary Van Kleeck, *Women in the Bookbinding Trade* (New York: Survey Associates, Inc. 1913) 99-100. Accessed on line at http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/hoec/4272063 on 2 November 2008.
[9] Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant women in the Land of Dollars* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 101.
[10] Carroll D. Wright, *The Working Girls of Boston* (New York: Arno & *The New York Times*, 1969), 110.
[11] Nancy Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934." *The American Historical Review* 103 (Dec. 1998): 1451.
[12] Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States," 1453.

was dependent on someone else."[13] A related definition that several other scholars employ, including Joanne Meyerowitz, Lee Chambers-Schiller, Martha Vicinus, and Joyce Antler, identifies a woman as independent if she was self-supporting and lived separate from her family.[14] Having her own money, whether from salary, wages, or another source, a woman did not depend on anyone for her support. Living away from relatives, she decided how to spend that money and made day-to-day choices that gave her a sense of freedom. An income and a separate residence gave a woman significant control over her own life and the ability to keep outside interference at bay.

Independence is indeed the ability to act without the "imposition of the will of another."[15] An independent person is neither subject to another person's authority nor dependent upon him to provide the basic necessities of survival. However, while women's paid work outside of the home fostered a sense of independence, it also brought a new type of dependency. Working women now had to conform to standards and behaviors established by an employer instead of, or as well as, those set by her family. A school teacher, for example, especially in a small town, had to live up to the rules established by the school board and the community. In some Wyoming country schools, teachers could not leave school grounds when school was in session. They could not "walk unescorted, save to school; ... smoke, drink, wear make-up, or provocative clothing, or see men in unsupervised settings."[16] Servants had to accommodate standards established by their employers. Many servants complained that they had to "comply with

[13] Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States," 1452.
[14] See for example Joanne Meyerowitz in *Women Adrift*, Lee Chambers-Schiller in *Liberty a Better Husband*, Martha Vicinus in *Independent Women*, and Joyce Antler in *The Educated Woman and Professionalization*.
[15] Nancy Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934," 1451.
[16] Charles E. Rankin, "Teaching: opportunity and Limitation for Wyoming Women" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (May 1990) 162-3. Accessed through JSTOR May 11, 2008.

whatever rules a mistress may deem necessary."[17] They were on call twenty-four hours a day and frequently denied "free use of their time evenings and Sundays."[18] A factory worker had to be at work at a specific time, labor at a given pace, meet a quota, and not disrupt the status quo, if she wanted to keep her job. The pace Rose Cohen was expected to work made her so tired at the end of the day that she had little energy to do anything but rest for the next days' work.[19] So while a woman might gain control of her life off the job, her employer in many cases shaped her behavior to a great extent, preventing her from being free of outside influences even when outside the workplace.

At the same time, while a woman might control her life off the job to some extent, she still might want to share a home with family members, even if it was possible to live alone.[20] Reformer and Wellesley college professor Vida Scudder, for example, chose to live with her mother. Scudder recalled in her autobiography that the only extended period in her life, before her mother's death, that she and her mother were separated was during her college years, although "there were always vacations together. But I could find it in my heart to regret the wasted months [at college], so fragrant was the time in her dear company."[21] Later Scudder was offered professorships at both Smith (her Alma Mater) and Wellesley. However, she chose Wellesley so she could live in Boston with her mother and "neither uproot... nor desert her."[22] A woman who lived with relatives was not necessarily dependent. Her position within that household as well as the companions

[17] Lucy P. Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1901), 148.
[18] Salmon, *Domestic Service*, 146
[19] Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Girlhood on the Lower East Side* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 112-6.
[20] Joyce Antler, *The Educated Woman and Professionalization: the Struggle for a New Feminine Identity* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1987), 181-2.
[21] Vida Dutton Scudder, *On Journey* (New York: E. P. Dutton & CO., Inc., 1937) 67.
[22] Scudder, *On Journey* 96

with which she lived must be considered before dismissing her as a dependent.

Moreover, such independence was not always welcome. Many never-married women had no parents or other relatives who were willing or able to support them, even though they would have preferred traditional dependency. Some were required to shoulder the financial needs of destitute relatives. While one Massachusetts teacher claimed that she did "not see why the woman teacher should not expect to be of some use to her family just as a man is to his," others found such responsibility overwhelming.[23] Reports of charitable institutions, such as the Thomas Thompson Trust for needy women of Brattleboro, Vermont, detail the sad histories of such women. A 47-year old never-married woman needed financial help when she left a better paying factory job to take in washing so she could care for her aged, invalid father. Another worked herself into a nervous breakdown trying to support an ailing parent and an insane sister.[24] For these women this unexpected responsibility provided nothing but wearing cares.

Thus independence is an extremely complicated concept and not an adequate description of the reality most never-married women in the United States faced in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Although independence was legally available to almost all never-married women, they were frequently unable to practice it. In fact, most Americans, female and male, by this time were dependent on someone else for survival whether it was, for example, an employer, spouse, or parent. Even the employers, spouses, and parents were no longer free from outside influences as laws

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[23] Lucile Eaves, PhD, *Old Age Support of Women Teachers: Provisions for Old Age made by Women Teachers in the Public Schools of Massachusetts* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1921), 31.

[24] Lucile Eaves, et al. *A Legacy to Wage Earning Women: a Survey of Gainfully Employed Women of Brattleboro, Vermont, and of Relief which They Have Received from the Thomas Thompson Trust* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1925) 79.

increasingly regulated their behavior. Furthermore, the term independence, as has been used in the past, does not reflect the fact that a woman might choose seeming dependence, but actually have the freedom to make that choice. She also might have unwelcome independence forced upon her. Although historians have long used the term, independence is inadequate to describe the life situations encountered by never-married women during this period.

So what do you call this reality that single women in the United States faced at the turn of the twentieth century? This question of nomenclature has proven one of the most difficult and controversial issues of this entire dissertation. What one reader hailed as a solution to my dilemma of trying to attach a name to this reality, another perceived as further complicating matters. In spite of its continued, albeit qualified, use, "independence," as I have shown, does not fit here and "agency" has likewise proven problematic. Yet as these women entered the paid workforce, they gained power, a sense of authority, a measure of autonomy, a modicum of control over their own lives that they did not hold before. No longer entirely dependent on another person to provide for them, they gained authority and power to shape their own lives and the lives of people around her. These women became more able to be, in the words of historian M.J. Maynes, "agent[s] of [their] own destiny."[25] I will argue that as women became employed, particularly those in jobs that paid reasonably well, they gained an authority over their lives which allowed them make more decisions that shaped the outcome of their lives. That authority, that ability to make choices, gave them the power to postpone or even forgo marriage in a way that had been impossible before, which led to the increase in the

[25] Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood" *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1(2008): 115.

rate of singleness in the United States.

Circumstances Alter Cases

Early 20th Century feminists believed that "wage earning offered the prospect of individualization, of self-support as distinct from dependence."[26] While feminists may have leapt to this connection too quickly, the "*prospect* of individualization," was real. As shown in Chapter 1, when never-married women moved into the paid workforce, many gained control over significant decisions that shaped their lives and the lives of others. These gains were particularly pronounced among white U.S.-born women with U.S.-born parents, although all never-married women made gains. Employment also probably gave seemingly dependent women more power within their family homes. Not all never-married women wanted to live separate from family, but with paid employment, the possibility was there and increasing numbers took that possibility.[27]

It was this increased personal authority that led to the growth in the population of never married women in the United States. Working women, particularly those who were paid well enough to live separate from family, gained more control over their own lives and likely the selection of a spouse. With money and interests of their own, marriage became less crucial and women could consciously or unconsciously weigh their options more carefully to determine what might be gained or lost by taking a spouse.

For some women, paid employment meant that marriage became a real choice. As discussed in Chapter 1, since at least the mid-19th century, some white, middle-class women seem to have become more careful in selecting a man to marry, believing that no

[26] Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 119.
[27] Antler, *The Educated Woman and Professionalization*, 181-2.

marriage was better than a bad one.[28] They believed it was better to remain single than settle for a less than ideal partner. With the increasing availability of paid employment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more women appear to have shared that belief. For example, the July 11, 1904 *Washington [DC] Times* argued that, "It may be that some women who would have married in order to escape from a position of galling dependence are still unmarried because they can secure independence for themselves."[29] Two years later the *Minneapolis Tribune* claimed that a "woman with a trade of her own does not need to marry. She may wait until love comes along with no anxious thought of 'chances'…. If she misses all together, she is not an economic hanger-on…, but an independent factor in the world's processes."[30] For some employed women, marriage thus became an option. Paid employment gave more women the freedom to be selective when looking for a husband because with the expanded opportunities for better-paying jobs, they no longer had to wed to live in comfort. Because they were more selective, some lost out on marriage, contributing to the increase in the number of never married women in the United States.

For other women, paid employment allowed a rejection of marriage and the personal sacrifices it required. An unnamed woman claimed in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that

> "I thoroughly enjoy my free, unfettered life. To be sure, I go to work in the school-room each day, but… I have no husband to find fault with the coffee or the state of my wardrobe, no children to worry my peaceful hours, no servants to cater to…. If I am engulfed in a whirlpool of extravagance and purchase a lovely gown,… I can endure the reproaches of my own conscience," but do not have to endure the "scowls of an angry

[28] Zsuzsa Berend, "'The Best or None!': Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England." *Journal of Social History* 33 (Summer 2000): 940.
[29] "The Bachelor Maid Question," *The Washington Times*, (Washington, DC) July 11, 1904, p. 4.
[30] "Women Who Work for Wages," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1906, p. 20.

spouse."[31]

Two years later in the same paper, a reporter, after listing all the things a working woman had to give up upon marriage, concluded that, "with broader knowledge of the world and the law, many thoughtful, self-poised women shrink from such effacing of their own individuality and possibilities of youth" for marriage.[32] As women had become more selective in the 19th century, others rejected marriage for a variety of reasons, including loss of freedom, as described here, as well as fears of childbirth or a desire for a life in the company of women. Paid employment again helped make these wishes possible. Paid employment made life outside of marriage imaginable and increasing numbers of women were following their imaginations.

Paid employment also might push marriage into the background, as work-related priorities and goals took center stage. Singleness was not a conscious choice, but a result of their career. Ordained minister Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, for example, always claimed that "I am too busy marrying others" when asked why she was single.[33] Opera singer Mme. Calve similarly claimed that she was too busy to marry.[34] An unnamed "busy [woman] doctor late in her thirties" elaborated further. "To tell the truth, … I don't believe I've ever had time to think very seriously about marriage at all. I suppose I've always rather expected I would be married some day – it seems the natural thing to do – but I rather imagine my last chance fled many years ago."[35] For these women, priorities

[31] "Why She Would Not Marry," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1892, p. 16.
[32] "Why They Do Not Wed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1896, p. 6.
[33] "Women Bachelors," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 2, 1894, p. 18.
[34] "Calve Too Busy to Marry," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 4, 1894, p. 17.
[35] "Why Ten Girls are Unmarried," *The San Francisco Call*, July 24, 1910, p. 23.

of marriage and family were replaced by other dreams and goals. Marriage was, at least initially, less attractive that a career and women devoted their energy to success. However, later, the number of men available had declined leading to greater numbers of single women. Additionally, after a significant amount of time invested in a rewarding career, it was hard consider leaving it. As Dr. Frances Dickinson put it, "I don't think I should dream of giving [my career] up simply because I married….."[36]

A job or career also might put a woman in a position where it was difficult to meet eligible men. Many school teachers, for example, functioned in an environment with few if any unmarried men. In a letter to the New York Times, a woman (?) signing herself as "Another B. M." claimed that the life of a working woman "is a barrier that hinders propinquity" with marriageable men. If a woman's work prevents her from "encourage[ing] social relations during business hours" she is unlikely to have the time or place to meet "new men" during her free time.[37] Work again got in the way of marriage. While many of these women would have welcomed it, their desire or need to work made the pool of potential husbands very small. In spite of their efforts, many of these women probably remained single, further contributing to the increased population of never-married women in the United States.

It must be noted that race, ethnicity, class, and location did not disappear as significant factors in determining a woman's marital fate even as paid employment brought some women authority in their lives. These factors continued to have a profound effect on women's marital decisions at one level or another. As shown earlier, race,

[36] "They Think They Would Have Been Happier if They Had Been Married," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1903, 53.
[37] Another B. M., "The College-Bred Girl," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1914, p. 10.

ethnicity and class shaped, for example, what work a woman might go into and how attractive it might be as an alternative to marriage. Geographic location shaped the number of jobs available and how far a woman might have to move from family and friends to find work. Additionally, a woman might not want to marry if it meant losing the income or status she held while she was single. So while increased employment options for women were the cause of the growth in the number of never-married women in the United States between 1880 and 1920, these other factors shaped which women were able to take advantage of them and which were left out.

The daughters of the Irish-born parents, for example, were particularly able to capitalize on the new opportunities. Assimilated and educated, they were more able than Irish-born women to move out of domestic service and factory work into the better-paying, potentially rewarding professions like teaching. Most daughters of Irish-born parents also lived in urban areas where most jobs were found. Finally they had a heritage that accepted lifelong singleness among women. Consequently, the daughters of Irish-born parents had the highest rates of singleness among women living in the United States. Conversely, African-American women mostly lived in rural areas. They were locked into unappealing jobs, had great pressure on them to marry, and, for those few who had a career, were not usually deterred from continue their profession after marriage. African-American women thus remained single at lower numbers than any other U.S.-born women. So, while the improved employment opportunities for women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the cause of the increase in the rate of singleness in the United States, that rate was still shaped by the factors of race, ethnicity, class, and location.

Avenues for Future Research

This dissertation has examined factors shaping a woman's decision to marry. It has also proposed an explanation for why there was an increase in the number of women never married in the decades between 1880 and 1930. One of the significant questions that it does not address is why the rate at which 45 to 54 year old women in the United States remained single began to decrease after 1920.

Historian Howard Chudacoff in *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*, considers this question in connection with bachelors, which he defines as all never-married men over the age of fifteen. He argues that new leisure time pursuits of the cities; the increasing ability of young men to socialize with women and choose their own marriage partners outside of parental supervision; and the large "fraternity" of unmarried men "diverted a larger-than-might-be-expected cohort of men away from matrimony."[38] However, "after 1920, as society became accustomed to the institutions and situations that previously distracted men from marital commitments," the number of bachelors in the United States declined.[39] While the new familiarity with these urban "institutions and situations" in the 1920s might explain why men under age thirty began to marry at higher rates than men of previous generations, it fails to explain why the percent of women who were never-married after age forty-five declined after 1920. Singleness among women (and possibly men) between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four was the result of a series of decisions, monumental and tiny, that were made twenty or thirty years earlier. To understand the causes of the decline in singleness after 1920, one should not focus on the

[38] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 73.
[39] Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 73.

1920s, but look for clues decades earlier, between 1890 and 1910.

An examination of the popular press from 1890 to 1900 provided some clues that might help explain the decline. One of the pertinent issues that emerged during that period was the fear of "race suicide," the concern among prominent white "old stock" Americans that the white Anglo-Saxon race in America was dying out. They urged their young people to marry early and have many children to prevent such a fate. In connection with this, there appeared in the popular press a variety of reports designed to convince men and women to marry. Not only were there articles by prominent individuals like Theodore Roosevelt or William Howard Taft celebrating family life, there were also "scientific" articles designed scare reluctant couples to the alter. In articles such as "Effect of Marriage on Length of Life" which appeared in the December 15, 1907 *Washington [DC] Times*, statistics from an unnamed source supposedly showed, for example, that the average "spinster" died at age fifty, while a married women was likely to live until age sixty-five.[40] Another article, "Wed and Live Long, Says Dr. Bertillion" which appeared in the January 23, 1910 issue of the *New York Times*, also presented statistics to "prove" that if a person married, their life expectancy would increase. "'Marry if you want to live to a good old age' says Dr. Jacques Bertillion" who, without any reference to his credentials, was declared as possibly "the greatest living authority on the sexes."[41] By giving expert testimony or statistics, these articles were designed to convince men and women it was in their best interest to wed. Although not all the editors took these stories seriously – juxtaposed next to the Dr. Bertillion article was a picture of

[40] "Effect of Marriage on Length of Life," *The Washington Times* [Washington, DC], December 15, 1907, magazine section, p. 4.
[41] "Wed and Live Long, Says Dr. Bertillion," *The New York Times*, January 23, 1910, p. C3.

sixty-nine year old Pope Pius X and a report he was in "vigorous heath" – the reports were clearly seen by others as tools to frighten men and women into marriage.

If scaring them into marriage did not work, there was also an effort in some states and towns to tax men, and sometimes women, into marriage. Between 1890 and 1922, at least eighteen states, including Wyoming, Tennessee, Delaware, Iowa, and New York, considered taxing men who were never-married after a certain age, frequently thirty-five. These laws, known collectively as bachelor taxes, typically came in one of three forms: an increased fee for marriage licenses, a poll tax, or a direct tax for men (and sometimes women) past that certain age. Bachelor taxes existed in colonial times in America and were in the late-19th and early 20th centuries were part of an international movement to encourage marriage.[42] Montana may have been the only state that actually succeeded in enacting such a bachelor tax in 1921, but it was quickly declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court in 1922.

Bachelor taxes were extremely controversial and their consideration in any state resulted in a flurry in the local and national press. The *Minneapolis Tribune* endorsed Wyoming's efforts to pass such a tax in 1890: "the Tribune favors the taxation of bachelors and would gladly welcome such a law in Minnesota."[43] Poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox similarly supported the idea and claimed that "Since it is man's prerogative to decide the question of his own and of some woman's life in this important matter, he who elects to be a bachelor ought to be ready to pay a tax toward the support of single

[42]Katherine V. Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 22.
[43] "Tax the Bachelors," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Feb 7, 1890, p. 4.

women."[44] However, in the twentieth century, the debate became more heated and bachelor taxes began to be seen less favorably. *The Bourbon News* of Paris Kentucky described Indiana's proposed bachelor taxes as "freak" legislation.[45] A letter to the editor of the *New York Evening World* claimed such taxes were a "personal insult to mankind and womankind in this twentieth century of enlightenment in this freest country of the universe."[46] The report of a supposed passing of such a law in Fort Dodge, Iowa in March 1907 resulted in national comment ranging from praise to the letter that described Mayor Bennett, the supposed father of the law, as "the nuttiest freak outside a padded cell."[47]

Were proposed bachelor taxes and "scientific" studies of longevity enough to create to a decline in the rate of singleness in the United States? Of course not; however, they do reflect a growing concern about the increase in singleness in the United States and a challenge to the acceptability of single life. As the population of single men and women in the United States became more visible, I would suggest that there was likely a backlash against never-married men and women that was designed to encourage all men and women to marry. The bachelor taxes as well as the "scientific" reports were part of these efforts. My initial research does not begin to provide an understanding of the complex web of messages young people received about the pros and cons of marriage between 1890 and 1910. I would suggest, however, that changes in attitude about singleness combined with the increased comfort with modern opportunities for women and men, suggested by Chudacoff, led to the decrease in singleness among 45 to 54 year

[44] "Why All Men Should Marry," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 30, 1897, p. 8.
[45] Untitled article, *The Bourbon News*, (Paris KY), February 6, 1903, p, 4.
[46] "The Bachelor Tax," *The Evening World*, (New York, NY).March 10, 1903, p. 13.
[47] Al Nelson, "The Ninnyhammer Chronicles: 100th Anniversary," *The Today Magazine*, March 2007, p. 30.

old women after 1920. However far more research in the popular media as well as census data will be necessary to confirm or disprove this idea.

Final Thoughts

Between 1880 and 1920, the percent of women in the United States who remained single their entire lives increased to its highest point in American History, at least through the 2000 census. This increase was the result of expanding number of women who entered the paid workforce and held jobs that allowed them the possibility of self-support. However, race, ethnicity, class, and geographic location shaped which women were able to take advantage of these new opportunities and which were left out. In fact, race and ethnicity were the most important factors in determining singleness because they provided the lens through which these women measured their futures.

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Appendix A

As introduced in Chapter 4, contemporary journalists and modern historians have argued that the regional variations in the frequency of single women in the in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries resulted from the number of partners available and the number of decently paying jobs open to women in a given area. However, these factors fail to completely explain some patterns of singleness in the United States. Some places, for example, had large populations of *both* single men and women. I used binary logistic regression analysis to identify additional regional characteristics that might help explain such phenomena. Models using data collected by U.S. Census enumerators indicate that the employment status of the unmarried men as well as illiteracy also increased to the rate of singleness among women within the United States.

I present six logistic regression models; three models include all women in the United States ages 45 to 54 and three include only white, U.S.-born women ages 45 to 54. The dependent variable in all cases was a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a woman between the ages of 45 and 54 was listed in the U.S. census as "Never married/single." The models pool individual-level data from the 1860, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses. The 1890 census was not included because it is not available.

Analysis with Individual Variables Only

The initial two logistic regression models focus on independent variables describing individual-level characteristics. Table A.1 describes these variables used in these models. These variables were selected because they are correlated with marriage behavior and (except for ages) unlikely to change between the usual marriage years and

the ages 45 to 54. Variables such as work force participation were not included because employment is often influenced by marital status. Moreover, employment can change throughout a woman's lifetime; it is impossible to determine if a 45-54 year old woman was working when she was twenty or thirty years younger and chose a career over marriage. The year variable was also included because, as I showed in Chapter 2, the rate at which women in the United States remained single changed over time.

Table A.1: Individual Independent Variables

Variable	Description	Mean (All Women)	Standard Deviation (All Women)	Mean (White, U.S.-born Women)	Standard Deviation (White, U.S.-born Women)
Black	African Americans coded 1, others coded 0	0.090	0.2861	----	----
Foreign	Foreign-born coded 1, others coded 0	0.232	0.4224	----	----
Age	Age	49.10	2.850	49.12	2.860
Year	Census year: 1930 reference category	1895.35	16.806	1896.17	16.283
Illiterate	Illiterate coded 1, literate coded 0	0.1063	0.3083	0.0418	0.2002

Model 1 in Table A.2 shows the results of the analysis for all women between the ages of 45 and 54. All the variables were significant in determining the likelihood of

Table A.2: Odds ratios for binary logistic regression of single status on selected characteristics:

	Pooled census data, 1880-1930	
	Model 1	**Model 2**
1880	0.82 ***	0.75 ***
1900	0.91 ***	0.85 ***
1920	1.07 **	1.02
1930 (reference)	1.00	1.00
Age	0.97 ***	0.97 ***
Illiterate	0.90 ***	1.14 ***
Black	0.64 ***	
Foreign	0.62 ***	
Constant	0.56 ***	0.51 ***
N	295336	185666

*** p <.001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

lifelong singleness. Women between the ages of 45 and 54 were more likely to be single in 1920 than any other decade. Age was significant and decreased the change of lifelong singleness because the older a woman got, the more opportunities she likely had to marry. Illiteracy was not a handicap to marriage and in fact, illiterate women appear to have been more likely to marry than literate ones. Being African-American or foreign-born, as shown in Chapter 3 also increased a woman's chances for marriage.

The results are somewhat different when looking at white U.S.-born women separately, as shown in Model 2 in Table A.2. In this analysis, the predicted odds of being single in 1920 were not significantly higher than the odds for 1930. Further, illiteracy for white, U.S.-born women, instead of decreasing the chances of never-marrying, actually increased chances of lifelong singleness.

Between 1880 and 1930, there remained a large, but decreasing, number of 45-54 year old African-American and foreign-born women who could not read or write. Because illiteracy affected a large segment of these populations, it did not decrease the chances of marriage, as revealed in Model 1. However, in most parts of the United States, the vast majority of 45-54 year old, white, U.S.-born, Americans could read and write. A woman (or man) who was illiterate was probably not seen as a desirable marriage partner, particularly by the educated population. By 1930, illiteracy in the more urban regions of the United States possibly indicated a disability that could further discourage suitors.

While these models add to the understanding of singleness in the United States, they do not describe how regional context might affect singleness. A woman's race and ethnicity shaped her marriage decision no matter where she lived by limiting the number of potential partners and shaping her attitudes about married life. Further, these models

only included characteristics about the individual and not the world in which she lived. To get a real picture of the factors that shaped a woman's decision to marry, a model must include variables about the conditions that existed in the region in which she lived when she made the decision to marry or not.

Analysis with Regional and Individual-Level Variables

To address some of the weaknesses in the models based only on individual-level variables, the remaining models include additional independent variables to reflect the regional situation under which the women lived twenty years earlier. The new independent variables are described in Table A.3. These variables each reflect factors that shaped a woman's marital fate when she was consciously or unconsciously deciding whether to marry. Each variable was calculated for each of the 1860, 1880, 1900, and 1910 censuses, for each of the thirty-two regions described in Appendix B. These calculations were done for both all women and for white U.S.-born women only. The results were then merged with the 1880, 1900, 1920, and 1930 census data, respectively, matching region and (year – 20).

One of the weaknesses with these new regional independent variables is that they are not associated with specific women. They are based on the population of a region and not on the individuals themselves. There is no guarantee that the region in which a 45-54 year-old woman lived in 1880, for example, was the same one she lived in twenty years earlier, here in 1860. However, white, U.S.-born never-married women did not migrate in

Table A.3: Regional Independent Variables					
Variable	**Description**	**Mean (All Women)**	**Standard Deviation (All Women)**	**Mean (White, U.S.-born Women)**	**Standard Deviation (White, U.S.-born Women)**
Male Professional	Percent of men who were professionals, managers, or craftsman	25.953	8.2495	27.599	7.7852
Male Farmer	Percent of men were farmers	21.627	15.5750	25.455	16.1856
Male Clerical	Percent of men who were clerical or sales workers	7.569	3.8799	9.401	5.3582
Male Operative	Percent of men who were operatives	13.647	7.3612	11.806	6.1823
Male Service	Percent of men who were service workers	3.525	2.1519	2.467	1.4523
Male Laborer	Percent of men who were laborers (farm or otherwise)	24.155	5.5575	19.515	5.2611
Male Unemployed	Percent of men who were unemployed	3.497	1.5752	3.757	1.6020
Female Professional	Percent of women who were professionals, managers, or craftsman	3.168	1.5460	3.739	1.8880
Female Farmer	Percent of women who were farmers	0.497	0.7210	0.403	0.5293
Female Clerk	Percent of women clerical or sales workers	2.168	2.0228	2.762	2.6903
Female Operative	Percent of women who were operatives	4.250	2.9642	4.236	2.8245
Female Servant	Percent of women who were service workers	7.110	2.6210	3.883	1.5330
Female Laborer	Percent of women who were laborers (farm or otherwise)	2.534	5.5614	1.016	2.0299
Female Unemployed	Percent of women who were unemployed	80.274	8.2332	83.960	7.0260
Female	Percent of population that was female	48.121	3.6547	49.199	2.8334
Male Illiterate	Percent of men illiterate	8.919	8.2055	4.128	4.5365
Female Illiterate	Percent of women illiterate	9.742	10.2415	4.496	5.9814

great numbers. More than two-thirds of these 45–54 year-old women lived in the same state in which they were born and more than 81 percent lived in the same region. These figures were even higher in the Northeast where white U.S.-born women remained single at the highest rates in the country. Thus it seems realistic that examining conditions in a region twenty years before might provide some clues as to why a woman remained single after her forty-fifth birthday.

Before performing logistic regression analysis, I checked the variables in Tables

Table A.4: Odds ratios for binary logistic regression of single status on selected characteristics:

	Pooled census data, 1880-1930			
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
1880	0.919 *	1.033	0.784 ***	0.950
1900	1.071 *	1.066 *	1.028	1.114 **
1920	1.106 ***	1.063 *	1.078 **	1.075 *
1930 (reference)	1.00	1.000	1.000	
Age	0.967 ***	0.967 ***	0.969 ***	0.969 ***
Illiterate	0.972	0.980	1.332 ***	1.348 ***
Black	0.666 ***	0.674 ***		
Foreign	0.520 ***	0.514 ***		
fprof	1.077 ***	1.084 ***	1.069 ***	1.041 ***
foper	1.052 ***	1.025 ***	1.054 ***	1.027 ***
fserv	1.051 ***	1.030 ***	1.026 ***	1.009
ffarmer	0.885 ***	0.957 *	0.907 ***	1.002
flabor	0.999	1.000	1.010	1.028 ***
mprof		0.942 ***		0.941 ***
mfarmer		0.943 ***		0.935 ***
mclerk		0.929 ***		0.937 ***
moper		0.961 ***		0.950 ***
mlabor		0.946 ***		0.941 ***
female	1.039 ***	1.059 ***	1.091 ***	1.098 ***
mnemp	1.061 ***		1.084 ***	
Constant	0.033 ***	3.797 ***	0.003 ***	1.099
N	295336	185666	295336	185666

*** p <.001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

A.1 and A.3 for correlation to be certain that the results would not be distorted. I discovered that a strong correlation existed between the male and female illiteracy variables, male clerk and male service variables, and female professional and female clerk variables, as well as a strong negative correlation between the employment and non-

employment variables. (E.g. male professional, male farmer, male clerk, male operative, male service, and male laborer with male unemployed) Thus, if any of these variables were used in a model, the correlating variable(s) were eliminated.

The results of the logistic regression using both individual-level and regional variables can be seen in Table A.4. Models 3 and 4 are based on analysis including all women, while Models 5 and 6 only include white, U.S.-born women.

Model 3 includes variables reflecting female workforce participation, the percent of the population that was female and male unemployment, in connection with all women in the United States between the ages of 45 and 54. The addition of these new independent variables has some effect on the personal variables. Now, in both 1900 and 1920, women are more likely to remain single than in 1930. Illiteracy is again not a significant predictor of marital status for all women in the United States. These results also show that only some occupational groups increased the chance of never marrying – professional, operatives, and service positions. Female farmers were more likely to marry, perhaps because their business assets made them attractive partners to male farmers. The fact that a woman was a laborer did not have a significant affect on her marital decision. Finally, male unemployment also increased a woman's chances of remaining single. A man who could not support a wife was not typically seen as an attractive partner by a woman or her parents.

The results of the logistic regression with addition of male employment variables, as shown in Model 4, support the general conclusions drawn based on Model 3. Working men were considered good marriage partners and singleness rates decreased as the number of desirable men increased. Female farmers were more likely to marry than many

other working women and for women who were laborers, farm or otherwise, work had no significant effect on their decision. However, while women were still more likely to remain single in 1900 or 1920 than in 1930, 1880 in Model 4 was no longer significantly different from 1930 in predicting singleness.

Thus, for all women in the United States, taken as a group, the significant regional factors shaping marriage decision were the availability of paid work, the number of men available, and the employment available for men.

Models 5 and 6 in Table A.4 reflect the results of logistic regression for U.S.-born white women only. The regional factors increasing the likelihood of singleness remain similar to those of all women: decently paid work for women, the sex ratio, and male unemployment. However, in Model 5, which includes only the variables reflecting female work participation, women are more likely to remain single in 1920 than 1930, although unlike in Models 3 and 4, 1900 was not significantly different from 1930 as a predictor of singleness. Model 6, on the other hand, which includes the male employment variables as well as the female, shows that women in both 1900 and 1920 were more likely to remain single than in 1930 and 1880 was not significant. Model 6 also showed that all paid work increased a woman's chance to remain single, but farming and service were not significant predictors of singleness, while Model 5 reflected what was seen in Models 3 and 4. However, both Models 5 and 6 support the earlier theory that illiteracy decreased a white, U.S.-born woman's chances of marriage.

Discussion

As is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, the regional variations in singleness were shaped by three significant factors, not the two previous scholars identified. As well as the number of potential partners and the number of decent paying jobs available for women, the type of men available also had a significant impact of a woman's marital fate. In the eyes of many single women (and probably their parents) unemployed men were not desirable partners; working men were. Regions with many unemployed men were the home of larger numbers of lifelong single women while regions with high male employment saw fewer.

Also significant from this analysis is the fact that illiteracy was a factor in determining a woman's marital fate, but only among the white and U.S.-born. White U.S.-born men might not want to marry a college educated women, but uneducated women were also unattractive partners. The vast majority of white U.S.-born Americans were able to read and write throughout this period and women who could not were left behind. As literacy approached 100 percent, it is possible that illiteracy, especially in urban areas, indicated some sort of disability that might have further decreased an individual's chances at marriage. It is also significant to note that illiteracy was not a significant factor in the general population of Americans in the United States. In communities where large numbers of women could not read or write, such as many African-American or foreign born communities, particularly in the earlier decades of this study, illiteracy did not decrease her chances for marriage. It was probably only in those areas where the vast majority of the population could read and write that illiteracy was a serious drawback.

Finally, this analysis complicates our understanding of the role that the year played in determining singleness. No consistent pattern emerged among these six models in connection with the rise and decline of singleness among women in America. However, these models indicate that the decline may have begun well before previous scholars thought. The conditions illustrated in the models using the regional variables reflect what occurred twenty years before, when these women were making decisions to marry or not. In Models 4 and 6, the peak year for singleness was 1900, reflecting the situation in 1880; in Models 3 and 5, the peak was in 1920, reflecting the situation in 1900. Because the data is unavailable for 1890, it is impossible using this method to determine what was happening in either 1890 or 1910. Thus, to identify what caused the rates of singleness among 45-54 year old women to decline and when, one must look 20 or more years before to see what conditions were in place that led to the series of decisions that kept these women single. Thus it is argued here that the decline in singleness in the United States began between 1880 and 1910 and not after 1920 (World War I) as many previous scholars have suggested.

Binary logistic regression analysis using the IPUMS census data samples has added to our picture of singleness in America between 1880 and 1930. It added the reasons of illiteracy and male unemployment to the list of reasons why women remained single. It also may have altered our conception of the peak of singleness in the United States, placing it earlier that previously thought.

Appendix B

To construct the maps shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter 4, the continental United States was separated into thirty-two regions. Each region was required to have at least 1000 women between the ages of 45 and 54 in each IPUMS census data sample, 1880-1930. The thirty-two regions are:

1. Connecticut and Rhode Island
2. Suburban Boston including Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk and Suffolk counties
3. Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the rest of Massachusetts
4. New York County, New York (Manhattan)
5. Suburban New York City including Bronx, Kings, Nassau, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties
6. Western New York State including Allegany, Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chautauqua, Chemung, Cortland, Erie, Genesee, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Niagara, Onondaga, Ontario, Orleans, Oswego, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wyoming, Yates, and Wayne Counties
7. Northern New York State including Albany, Broome, Chenango, Clinton, Columbia, Delaware, Dutchess, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Montgomery, Oneida, Orange, Otsego, Putnam, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, St. Lawrence, Sullivan, Ulster, Warren, and Washington counties.
8. New Jersey
9. Delaware, Maryland, and Washington, DC
10. Philadelphia, PA
11. Western Pennsylvania including Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Bedford, Blair, Butler, Cambria, Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, Warren, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties
12. Eastern Pennsylvania including Adams, Berks, Bradford, Bucks, Carbon, Centre, Chester, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh , Luzerne, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montgomery, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Pike, Potter, Schuylkill, Snyder, Sullivan,

Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, Wyoming, and York Counties

13. Southeastern Ohio including Adams, Ashtabula, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Clermont, Columbiana, Coshocton, Fairfield, Gallia, Geauga, Guernsey, Hamilton, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Jackson, Jefferson, Knox, Lawrence, Licking, Mahoning, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Morrow, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Portage, Ross, Scioto, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Vinton, and Washington Counties

14. Northwest Ohio including Allen, Ashland, Auglaize, Butler, Champaign, Clark, Clinton, Crawford, Cuyahoga, Darke, Defiance, Delaware, Erie, Fayette, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hancock, Hardin, Henry, Holmes, Huron, Lake, Logan, Lorain, Lucas, Madison, Marion, Medina, Mercer, Miami, Montgomery, Ottawa, Paulding, Pickaway, Preble, Putnam, Richland, Sandusky, Seneca, Shelby, Union, Van Wert, Warren, Wayne, Williams, Wood, and Wyandot Counties

15. Indiana

16. Cook County, Illinois (Chicago)

17. All other counties of Illinois

18. Michigan

19. Iowa

20. Wisconsin

21. Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota

22. Missouri

23. Kansas and Nebraska

24. Virginia and West Virginia

25. North and South Carolina

26. Alabama and Mississippi

27. Arkansas and Louisiana

28. Florida and Georgia

29. Kentucky and Tennessee

30. Oklahoma and Texas

31. California, Oregon, and Washington

32. Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming

Appendix C

Newspapers were an integral part of this project and I took advantage of three significant collections available on line: The Library of Congress' *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers,* ProQuest's historical newspaper collection, and Gale Databases' 19th century U.S. newspaper collection. The Library of Congress collection is available free on the World Wide Web, while the other two are available through the University of Minnesota Libraries to University of Minnesota students. The titles of the newspapers included in each collection can be found on the collection's website.

Obviously some papers were used more than others. *The New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* are the papers most quoted in this project, but the *New York Tribune, San Francisco Call,* and *Minneapolis Tribune* were also very important. The other papers provided valuable clues to national attitudes about marriage and singleness, but had a less visible impact on this project.

The following newspapers were consulted as part of the research for this dissertation:

The Adair County News (Columbia, KY)
Bismarck Daily Tribune (Bismarck, ND)
Blue-grass Blade (Lexington, KY)
The Bourbon Press (Paris, KY)
The Central Record (Lancaster, KY)
Chicago Daily Tribune
Chicago Defender
The Clay City Times (Clay City, KY)
Daily Evening Bulletin (San Francisco. CA)
Daily Picayune (New Orleans, LA),

Deseret Evening News (Great Salt Lake City, Utah)
The Evening World (New York, NY)
Fort Dodge Messenger (Fort Dodge, Iowa)
Gainesville Daily Sun (Gainesville, FL)
The Hartford Republican (Hartford, KY)
The Hopkinsville Kentuckian (Hopkinsville, KY)
Imperial Press and Farmer (Imperial, CA)
The Milwaukee Sentinel
Minneapolis Tribune
Morning Oregonian (Portland, OR)
Mount Vernon Signal (Mt. Vernon, KY)
The New Enterprise (Madison, FL)
New York Times
New York Tribune
Owyhee Avalanche (Ruby City, Idaho)
The Register and Leader (Des Moines, Iowa)
The Richmond Climax (Richmond, KY)
The St. Lucie County Tribune (Fort Pierce, FL)
Salt Lake Herald
San Francisco Call
The Sun (New York, NY)
The Suburban Citizen (Washington, DC)
The Times Dispatch (Richmond, VA)
The Washington Bee (Washington, DC)
The Washington Herald (Washington, DC)
The Washington Times (Washington, DC)