

THE MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY HISTORY: THE *BLACK* FAMILY CASE STUDY**Donald E Allen, Oklahoma State University****Zella Black Patterson, Langston University****PERSONAL DOCUMENT SOURCES**

W I Thomas argues for the value of the personal document as a data source for the study of social forces and social development. The personal letter, autobiography, and other written materials were exploited, though less than systematically, in the Polish Peasant study (Thomas, Znaniecki 1918-20). Of similar potential value is the study of the family history in the study of adaptive and developmental processes in society. A span of five generations covers more than a century, and a detailed history would permit inferences on mobility, dispersions, diffusion, mortality, and adaptation. The interaction of the family with economic and social institutions also is available in a suitably documented family history.

The multigenerational family history affords a useful data base for evaluating adaptive processes in the larger society. A major social upheaval creates a transition zone and permits measuring variable involvement of successive generations of family members within the family, and in educational, economic, religious, and other social institutions. The *Black* family history illustrates the adaptive process in the educational and vocational areas from 1850 to 1968.

Setting boundaries on the family history poses a logical problem. As a continuing regenerative process, the multigenerational family history has no prime point of origin. The set of parents arbitrarily selected for the beginning of the history are likely to be accorded special status for having "established" a line in which they were in fact generally equivalent to the precedent and sequential regenerative links. A second problem lies in the lateral linkage of the family which is obfuscated in unilineal societies by the convention of reckoning only terms of male or of female direct lines of succession. When a multigenerational family is assembled on the patrilineal pattern, the kinship nexuses of the conjoining wives tend to be disregarded, and to be defined only in terms of wives' patrilineal origins.

Theoretically, in western society, the wives

surrender their original social identity in assuming the surname and social status of the husband. The unilineal convention is convenient for analyzing the family history because it greatly simplifies an inherently complex articulation of social, economic, temporal, and spatial relations arising from the complex of kinship ties. At the same time, further investigation is necessary to evaluate the extent and direction of variance in all of these factors which may be attributed to varying degrees of similarity on the homogamy-heterogamy axis.

Documentation of the family history also presents problems due to the loss of information through the death or incapacity of elderly members. But many families have sufficient documentary sources available in the form of newspaper items, graduation programs, marriage announcements, annotated family photos, school, church, and other public records, to permit a fairly adequate reconstruction of the social record of the family. Letter replies to direct inquiries usually permit corroborative evidence on some information, often add some new information, and may generate new questions.

THE *BLACK* FAMILY

The point can be illustrated with a well-documented black family history with the surname, *Black*. The history exemplifies the main theme of Booker Washington's well-known autobiography, *Up from Slavery* (1900), but in this instance reflects the social evolution of an entire family over a series of five generations. The phenomenon, which is rather common among more professionally oriented negro families, is of theoretical interest because it depends on the generation of new family systems on the macro-cultural basis, among a people who previously had been denied familial rights and obligations both by law and by custom. Under these circumstances we would expect the emergence of weakly-bound mother-dependent families with very low motivation coupled with a poor reward structure for men. This is often cited in the

typical negro family pattern by such authorities as Frazier (1937; 1939; 1957) and Burgess (1963) and Billingsley (1968).

In times of social upheaval, change can be extraordinarily rapid, permitting assessments of the adaptive capacity of the family system (Nye 1966 81). The *Black* family and other families like it constitute "strategic anomalous" data for the theorist who is concerned with the genesis of stable families. The *Black* family also exemplifies what results in Habenstein's "acculturated middle-majority Negro family" (1967 324) although it leaves unexplained the adaptive process required to reach this status. The *Blacks* formed a well-integrated, and highly adaptive family in a social environment which provided very little support for such family development, from individuals who had neither a tradition nor relevant experience with such adaptive processes.

The family was established by a black man and a black woman, both born in slavery. The father, William Black, was born on a plantation which was near Arlington, Washington County, Virginia in 1852 in a slave family consisting of father, mother, and six children, all owned by the same man. The owner migrated to a farm site near Austin, Texas, with his wife, two sons, and 21 slaves in 1859. The 21 slaves consisted of three intact nuclear families, a matri-set of a mother and her three minor children, and a grandmother. The first generation mother was born on a plantation in the vicinity of Austin in 1853.

In the confusion following General Granger's Proclamation which made Emancipation of slaves effective in Texas (Granger 1865) the young girl, then aged 12 became separated from her mother. After an eager search, her mother found her, saying that she had "come for her chick." In 1870, when the girl was 16 she entered connubial union with William Black and the reared the second generation consisting of 10 children, of whom, one died in childhood. The father supported his family by working on a farm in Texas, but went to Logan County, Oklahoma in 1889 to stake out a farm for one of his sons. The farm was homesteaded by the son, and continues in the possession of the direct-line descendents line who are owner operators and up-to-date farmers (1897, Land Office, Guthrie,

Oklahoma).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In the third generation, 35 children were born, of which 30 reached maturity. In the fourth generation, 40 children were born with 36 surviving, and in the fifth generation 40 children have been born thus far. This report will concentrate on the second, third and fourth generations, to illustrate the educational and vocational orientation of the 59 direct-line descendents who have completed their education. Of the 9 persons surviving to maturity in the second generation, two secured college degrees, five had some college, and two had grammar school education. Table 1 shows the distribution of completed education by generation level, broken in two parts according to sex.

Of 30 persons surviving to maturity in the third generation, 17 received college degrees and entered various professions. Five had some college, one completed nurses' training, and eight were high school graduates. The fourth generation includes 40 persons of whom 17 are currently in school. Of the 19 who have completed their education college degrees have been earned by 13 while three have some college and three terminated their formal education as high school graduates.

Comparing the 29 men and the 30 women of the second, third and fourth generations who have completed their education shows the mean number of years of schooling completed is 0.7 years lower for men (14.1 years) than for women (14.8 years). The difference is absolute, since we are dealing with a population, and not a sample. However if the sexes are compared sequentially by generation, it is clear that the women's educational mean has remained relatively stable from the second through the fourth generation. The men, on the other hand, have mean intergenerational increases of more than two years of education for both the third and the fourth generations. From the emerging pattern the males are steadily overtaking the females in the attained level of academic and professional training.

The combined record for generations two through four for the 58 persons reaching adulthood reflects a mean level of 15.0 years of schooling, or three years of college with

TABLE 1: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY GENERATION AND BY SEX

Gener- ation	N Died in childhood	Still in school	Completed Education, Years*								n	Mean
			0	8	12	14	16	18	20			
Women:												
1	1		1								1	0.0
2	4					3	1				4	14.5
3	16					3	3	5	5		16	15.5
4	19	1	8			1	2	6	1		10	15.4
Total	40	1	8	1		4	8	12	6		31	
Men:												
1	1			1							1	0.0
2	6	1			2		2	1			5	12.0
3	20	5				5	3	7			15	14.3
4	21	3	9			1	2	2	1	3	9	16.7
Total	48	9	9	1	2	6	7	10	1	3	30	

*Tallies for 12, 16, 18, 20 years hold diploma, baccalaureate, masters or doctoral degree.

a clear upward trend, mainly due to advances by the men. The families have been marked by a high level of marital stability and by relatively late marriages. For the men and women who have completed their careers, the majority are noteworthy for giving two or more decades of continuous service in a single post, such as pastor of a large church, teacher in a college or public school, county agent in agriculture, and chef. Twenty-one persons reached professional academic status at the baccalaureate level or higher. The professionals of the third generation included one farmer, four ministers, and nine teachers. The fourth generation include three chemists, one dental surgeon, one dentist, one business consultant and two professional artists. Several not attaining the baccalaureate level have taught, or have completed nurses' training, or have undertaken small businesses with moderate success.

When the vocational orientation of members of the second and third generations are compared with those of the fourth generation who have completed school, another major change becomes apparent. Except for the registered nurse and the county agricultural agent, all 15 professional persons in the second and third generations were in the ministry or in teaching, in positions which were confined to intra-ethnic professional service. In the fourth

generation no one entered the ministry; 12 individuals have qualified for specialized and technical fields, such as chemistry, dentistry, business, music, and art. There is evidence in this that the family history is of a transition away from professional and service fields which are confined to the negro community and toward the more universal technical fields in the larger society. Then men in all generations were well motivated and fully able to fill the instrumental functions which are commonly regarded as the male responsibility. They were able to establish stable monogamous family relations, and to meet the objective standards of expertise and behavior required for leading positions in the basic institutions of the community. They reared their children to maturity and assisted them in reaching a high level of academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

Three major transitions appear in the first, second, and fourth generations of this family history. The first generation achieved a transition from a combination of vulnerable nuclear and matricentric family systems to a strong patriarchal family system. Under the matricentric system the economic interest of the slave owner could defeat any authority or rights the natural parents might assert over their children. Under the newly established patriarchal system, based on the mores of the

primary culture, the husband and father assumed the normal obligations and rights regarding his wife and their children.

The second generation achieved the transition from agrarian work and hand labor to intra-ethnic professional service. The fourth generation achieved the last transition from intra-ethnic professional service to more diversified professional work in the basic culture. These transitions depended on two factors. The first was conversion to the patriarchal family system of the basic culture. The second was successful participation in the higher levels of formal education and professional service.

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