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It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS

Intersectionality has attracted substantial scholarly attention in the 1990s. Rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct one another. I explore how the traditional family ideal functions as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality in the United States. Each of its six dimensions demonstrates specific connections between family as a gendered system of social organization, racial ideas and practices, and constructions of U.S. national identity.

When former vice president Dan Quayle used the term *family values* near the end of a speech at a political fundraiser in 1992, he apparently touched a national nerve. Following Quayle's speech, close to three hundred articles using the term *family values* in their titles appeared in the popular press. Despite the range of political perspectives expressed on "family values," one thing remained clear—"family values," however defined, seemed central to national well-being. The term *family values* constituted a touchstone, a phrase that apparently tapped much deeper feelings about the significance of ideas of family, if not actual families themselves, in the United States.

Situated in the center of "family values" debates is an imagined traditional family ideal. Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children. Such families have a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife, and children. Those who idealize the traditional family as a private haven from a public world see family as held together by primary emotional bonds of love and caring. Assuming a relatively fixed sexual division of labor, wherein women's roles are defined as primarily in the home and men's in the public world of work, the traditional family ideal also assumes the separation of work and

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family. Defined as a natural or biological arrangement based on heterosexual attraction, this monolithic family type articulates with governmental structures. It is organized not around a biological core, but a state-sanctioned, heterosexual marriage that confers legitimacy not only on the family structure itself but on children born into it (Andersen 1991).[1]

The power of this traditional family ideal lies in its dual function as an ideological construction and as a fundamental principle of social organization. As ideology, rhetoric associated with the traditional family ideal provides an interpretive framework that accommodates a range of meanings. Just as reworking the rhetoric of family for their own political agendas is a common strategy for conservative movements of all types, the alleged unity and solidarity attributed to family is often invoked to symbolize the aspirations of oppressed groups. For example, the conservative right and Black nationalists alike both rely on family language to advance their political agendas.

Moreover, because family constitutes a fundamental principle of social organization, the significance of the traditional family ideal transcends ideology. In the United States, understandings of social institutions and social policies are often constructed through family rhetoric. Families constitute primary sites of belonging to various groups: to the family as an assumed biological entity; to geographically identifiable, racially segregated neighborhoods conceptualized as imagined families; to so-called racial families codified in science and law; and to the U.S. nation-state conceptualized as a national family.

The importance of family also overlaps with the emerging paradigm of intersectionality. Building on a tradition from Black Women's Studies, intersectionality has attracted substantial scholarly attention in the 1990s.[2] As opposed to examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another, or, in the words of Black British sociologist Stuart Hall, how they "articulate" with one another (Slack 1996). Current scholarship deploying intersectional analyses suggests that certain ideas and practices surface repeatedly across multiple systems of oppression and serve as focal points or privileged social locations for these intersecting systems.[3]

The use of the traditional family ideal in the United States may function as one such privileged exemplar of intersectionality.[4] In this paper, I explore how six dimensions of the traditional family ideal construct intersections of gender, race, and nation. Each dimension demonstrates specific connections between family as a gendered system of social organization, race as ideology and practice in the United States, and constructions of U.S. national identity. Collectively, these six dimensions illuminate specific ways that ideological constructions of family, as well as the significance of family in shaping social practices, constitute an especially rich site for intersectional analysis.

While I provide a preliminary framework of how gender, race, and nation intersect in family rhetoric and practices, more comprehensive analyses might reveal how other systems of inequality operate via similar processes. Social class is certainly important across multiple social hierarchies. Ethnicity and religion also constitute categories of belonging that invoke family rhetoric (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Politicizing ethnicity and religion requires manipulating understandings of group loyalty conveyed by family rhetoric. Instead of viewing this process as solely confined to ethnicity or religion, intersectional analyses would join studies of ethnicity and religion more closely to intersections of gender, race, class, and nation. Similarly, because it is so closely linked to issues of gender identity and reproduction, sexuality remains important in constructions of family, and actual families remain deeply implicated in reproducing heterosexism. Age provides yet another suggestive link to the richness of the root metaphor of family. While I allude to class, ethnicity, sexuality and age in the following discussion, I place greater emphasis on how family links social hierarchies of gender, race, and nation. A comprehensive and more nuanced discussion of family as a site of intersectionality would encompass these and other hierarchies.

Manufacturing Naturalized Hierarchy

One dimension of family as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality lies in how it reconciles the contradictory relationship between equality and hierarchy. The traditional family ideal projects a model of equality. A well-functioning family protects and balances the interests of all its members—the strong care for the weak, and everyone contributes to and benefits from family membership in proportion to his or her capacities. In contrast to this idealized version, actual families remain organized around varying patterns of hierarchy. As Ann McClintock observes, "the family image came to figure *hierarchy within unity* [emphasis in original] as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimating exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism" (McClintock 1995, 45). Families are expected to socialize their members into an appropriate set of "family values" that simultaneously reinforce the hierarchy within the assumed unity of interests symbolized by the family and lay the foundation for many social hierarchies. In particular, hierarchies of gender, wealth, age, and sexuality within actual family units correlate with comparable hierarchies in U.S. society. Individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class in their families of origin. At the same time, they learn to view such hierarchies as natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones. Hierarchy in this sense becomes "naturalized" because it is associated with seemingly "natural" processes of the family.

The "family values" that underlie the traditional family ideal work to naturalize U.S. hierarchies of gender, age, and sexuality. For example, the traditional family ideal assumes a male headship that privileges and naturalizes masculinity as a source of authority. Similarly, parental control over dependent children reproduces age and seniority as fundamental principles of social organization. Moreover, gender and age mutually construct one another; mothers comply with fathers, sisters defer to brothers, all with the understanding that boys submit to maternal authority until they become men. Working in tandem with these mutually constructing age and gender hierarchies are comparable ideas concerning sexuality. Predicated on assumptions of heterosexism, the invisibility of gay, lesbian, and bisexual sexualities in the traditional family ideal obscures these sexualities and keeps them hidden. Regardless of how individual families grapple with these hierarchical notions, they remain the received wisdom to be confronted.

In the United States, naturalized hierarchies of gender and age are interwoven with corresponding racial hierarchies, regardless of whether racial hierarchies are justified with reference to biological, genetic differences or to immutable cultural differences (Goldberg 1993). The logic of the traditional family ideal can be used to explain race relations. One way that this occurs is when racial inequality becomes explained using family roles. For example, racial ideologies that portray people of color as intellectually underdeveloped, uncivilized children require parallel ideas that construct Whites as intellectually mature, civilized adults. When applied to race, family rhetoric that deems adults more developed than children, and thus entitled to greater power, uses naturalized ideas about age and authority to legitimate racial hierarchy. Combining age and gender hierarchies adds additional complexity. Whereas White men and White women enjoy shared racial privileges provided by Whiteness, within the racial boundary of Whiteness, women are expected to defer to men. People of color have not been immune from this same logic. Within the frame of race as family, women of subordinated racial groups defer to men of their groups, often to support men's struggles in dealing with racism.

The complexities attached to these relationships of age, gender, and race coalesce in that the so-called natural hierarchy promulgated by the traditional family ideal bears striking resemblance to social hierarchies in U.S. society overall. White men dominate in positions of power, aided by their White female helpmates, both working together to administer to allegedly less-qualified people of color who themselves struggle with the same family rhetoric. With racial ideologies and practices so reliant on family for meaning, family writ large becomes race. Within racial discourse, just as families can be seen naturally occurring, biologically linked entities who share common interests, Whites, Blacks, Native Americans, and other "races" of any given historical period can also be seen this way. The actual racial categories of any given period matter less than the persistent belief in race itself as an enduring

principle of social organization that connotes family ties. Thus, hierarchies of gender, age, and sexuality that exist *within* different racial groups (whose alleged family ties lead to a commonality of interest) mirrors the hierarchy characterizing relationships *among* groups. In this way, racial inequality becomes comprehensible and justified via family rhetoric.

This notion of naturalized hierarchy learned in family units frames issues of U.S. national identity in particular ways. If the nation-state is conceptualized as a national family with the traditional family ideal providing ideas about family, then the standards used to assess the contributions of family members in heterosexual, married-couple households with children become foundational for assessing group contributions to overall national well-being. Naturalized hierarchies of the traditional family ideal influence understandings of constructions of first- and second-class citizenship. For example, using a logic of birth order elevates the importance of time of arrival in the country for citizenship entitlements. Claims that early-migrating, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants are entitled to more benefits than more recent arrivals resemble beliefs that "last hired, first fired" rules fairly discriminate among workers. Similarly, notions of naturalized gender hierarchies promulgated by the traditional family ideal—the differential treatment of girls and boys regarding economic autonomy and free-access to public space—parallel practices such as the sex-typing of occupations in the paid labor market and male domination in government, professional sports, the streets, and other public spaces.

As is the case with all situations of hierarchy, actual or implicit use of force, sanctions and violence may be needed to maintain unequal power relations. However, the very pervasiveness of violence can lead to its invisibility. For example, feminist efforts to have violence against women in the home taken seriously as a bona fide form of violence and not just a private family matter have long met with resistance. In a similar fashion, the extent of the violence against Native American, Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, African-American, and other groups who were incorporated into the United States not through voluntary migration but via conquest and slavery remains routinely overlooked. Even current violence against such groups remains underreported unless captured in a dramatic fashion, such as the videotaped beating of motorist Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers. Despite their severity and recent increase, hate crimes against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals also remain largely invisible. Through these silences, these forms of violence not only are neglected, they become legitimated. Family rhetoric can also work to minimize understandings of violence in groups that self-define in family terms. In the same way that wife battering and childhood physical and sexual abuse become part of the "family secrets" of far too many families, so does the routine nature of violence targeted against women, gays, lesbians, and children within distinctive racial and ethnic groups.

Subordinated groups often face difficult contradictions in responding to such violence (Crenshaw 1991). One response consists of analyzing one or more hierarchies as being socially constructed while continuing to see others as naturalized. In African-American civil society, for example, the question of maintaining racial solidarity comes face-to-face with the question of how naturalized hierarchies construct one another. Maintaining racial solidarity at all costs often requires replicating hierarchies of gender, social class, sexuality, and nation in Black civil society. Consider, for example, typical understandings of the phrase "Black on Black violence." Stressing violence among Black men permits patterns of Black male violence targeted toward Black women—domestic abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace—to remain hidden and condoned. In the face of sexual harassment, especially at the hands of Black men, African-American women are cautioned not to "air dirty laundry" about internal family problems. The parallel with victims of domestic violence who are encouraged to keep "family secrets" is startling. In general, whether it is family as household, family as a foundation for conceptualizing race, or the national family defined through U.S. citizenship, family rhetoric that naturalizes hierarchy inside and outside the home obscures the force needed to maintain these relationships.

Looking for a Home: Place, Space, and Territory

The multiple meanings attached to the concept of "home"—home as family household, home as neighborhood, home as native country—speak to its significance within family as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality. In the United States, the traditional family ideal's ideas about place, space, and territory suggest that families, racial groups, and nation-states require their own unique places or "homes." Because "homes" provide spaces of privacy and security for families, races, and nation-states, they serve as sanctuaries for group members. Surrounded by individuals who seemingly share similar objectives, these homes represent idealized, privatized spaces where members can feel at ease.

This view of home requires certain gendered ideas about private and public space. Because women are so often associated with family, home space becomes seen as a private, feminized space that is distinct from the public, masculinized space that lies outside its borders. Family space is for members only—outsiders can be invited in only by family members or else they are intruders. Within these gendered spheres of private and public space, women and men again assume distinctive roles. Women are expected to remain in their home "place." Avoiding the dangerous space of public streets allows women to care for children, the sick, and the elderly, and other dependent family members. Men are expected to support and defend the private, feminized space that houses their families. Actual U.S. families rarely meet this ideal. For example, despite

feminist analyses that discredit the home as a safe place for women, this myth seems deeply entrenched in U.S. culture (Coontz 1992).

A similar logic concerning place, space, and territory constructs racialized space in the United States.[5] Just as the value attached to actual families reflects their placement in racial and social class hierarchies, the neighborhoods housing these families demonstrate comparable inequalities. Assumptions of race- and class-segregated space mandate that U.S. families and the neighborhoods where they reside be kept separate. Just as crafting a family from individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, religious or class backgrounds is discouraged, mixing different races within one neighborhood is frowned upon. As mini-nation-states, neighborhoods allegedly operate best when racial and/or class homogeneity prevails. Assigning Whites, Blacks, and Latinos their own separate spaces reflects efforts to maintain a geographic, racial purity. As the dominant group, Whites continue to support legal and extra-legal measures that segregate African-Americans, Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other similar groups, thereby perpetuating cultural norms about desirability of racial purity in schools, neighborhoods, and public facilities. For example, tactics such as the continual White flight out of inner cities, deploying restrictive zoning in suburban communities in order to restrict low-income housing, and shifting White children into private institutions in the face of increasingly colored schools effectively maintain racially segregated home spaces for White men, women, and children. This belief in segregated physical spaces also has parallels to ideas about segregated social and symbolic spaces. For example, lucrative professional categories remain largely White and male, in part, because people of color are seen as less capable of entering these spaces. Similarly, keeping school curricula focused on the exploits of Whites represents another example of ideas about segregated spaces mapped on symbolic space. Overall, racial segregation of actual physical space fosters multiple forms of political, economic, and social segregation (Massey and Denton 1993).

Securing a people's "homeland" or national territory has long been important to nationalist aspirations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Calhoun 1993). After its successful anticolonial struggle against England and its formation as a nation-state, the United States pursued a sustained imperialist policy in order to acquire much of the land that defines its current borders. This history of conquest illustrates the significance of property in relations of space, place, and territory. Moreover, just as households and neighborhoods are seen as needing protection from outsiders, maintaining the integrity of national borders has long formed a pillar of U.S. foreign policy. Because the United States has operated as a dominant world power since World War II, shielding its own home "soil" from warfare has been a minor theme. Instead, protecting so-called American interests has been more prominent. Individuals and busi-

nesses who occupy foreign soil represent extensions of U.S. territory, citizens of the national family who must be defended at all costs.

Overall, by relying on the belief that families have assigned places where they truly belong, images of place, space, and territory link gendered notions of family with constructs of race and nation (Jackson and Penrose 1993). In this logic that everything has its place, maintaining borders of all sorts becomes vitally important. Preserving the logic of segregated home spaces requires strict rules that distinguish insiders from outsiders. Unfortunately, far too often, these boundaries continue to be drawn along the color line.

On "Blood Ties": Family, Race, and Nation

Presumptions of "blood ties" that permeate the traditional family ideal reflect another dimension of how family operates as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality. In the United States, concepts of family and kinship draw strength from the flow of blood as a substance that regulates the spread of rights (Williams 1995). While the legal system continues to privilege heterosexual married couples as the preferred family organization, the importance given to bonds between mothers and children, brothers and sisters, grandmothers and grandchildren, illustrates the significance of biology in definitions of family. Representing the genetic links among related individuals, the belief in blood ties naturalizes the bonds among members of kinship networks. Blood, family, and kin are so closely connected that the absence of such ties can be cause for concern. As the search of adoptees for their "real" families or blood relatives suggests, blood ties remain highly significant for definitions of family.

Given the significance attached to biology, women of different racial groups have varying responsibilities in maintaining blood ties. For example, White women play a special role in keeping family bloodlines pure. Historically, creating White families required controlling White women's sexuality, largely through social norms that advocated pre-marital virginity. By marrying White men and engaging in sexual relations only with their husbands, White women ensured the racial purity of White families. Thus, through social taboos that eschewed pre-marital sexuality and interracial marriage for White women, White families could thereby avoid racial degeneration (Young 1995). When reinserted into naturalized hierarchies of gender, race, class, and nation, and institutionally enforced via mechanisms such as segregated space and state-sanctioned violence, efforts to regulate sexuality and marriage reinforced beliefs in the sanctity of "blood ties."

Historically, definitions of race in U.S. society also emphasized the importance of blood ties.[6] Biological families and racial families both rely on similar notions. The connections between the race and blood ties were so self-evident that nineteenth-century Black nationalist thinker Alexander Crummell claimed, "races, like families, are the organisms and ordinances of God; a race

feeling is of divine origin. The extinction of race feeling is just as possible as the extinction of family feeling. Indeed, a race *is* a family" (quoted in Appiah 1992, 17). Definitions of race as family in the United States traditionally rested on biological classifications legitimated by science and legally sanctioned by law. By grouping people through notions of physical similarity, such as skin color, facial features, or hair texture, and supported by law and custom, scientific racism defined Whites and Blacks as distinctive social groups (Gould 1981). Just as members of "real" families linked by blood were expected to resemble one another, so were members of racial groups descended from a common bloodline seen as sharing similar physical, intellectual, and moral attributes. Within this logic, those lacking biological similarities became defined as family outsiders, while racially different groups became strangers to one another.

A similar logic can be applied to understandings of nation. One definition views a nation as a group of people who share a common ethnicity grounded in blood ties. Cultural expressions of their peoplehood—their music, art, language, and customs—constitute their unique national identity. Under this ethnic nationalism model, each nation should have its own nation-state, a political entity where the ethnic group can be self-governing. While this understanding of nation has a long history in European cultures (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Yuval-Davis 1997, 26-29), it is less often applied to questions of U.S. national identity. Instead, the United States is often seen as an important expression of civic nationalism where many different ethnic groups cooperate within the boundaries of one nation-state (Calhoun 1993). In contrast to nation-states where ethnic or tribal membership confers citizenship rights, the democratic principles of the U.S. Constitution promise equality for all American citizens. Regardless of race, national origin, former condition of servitude, and color, all citizens stand equal before the law. Via these principles, the United States aims to craft one nation out of many and to transcend the limitations of ethnic nationalism.

Despite this portrayal, U.S. national identity may be grounded more in ethnic nationalism than is typically realized. Notions of U.S. national identity that take both family and race into account result in a view of the United States as a large national family with racial families hierarchically arranged within it. Representing the epitome of racial purity that is also associated with U.S. national interests, Whites constitute the most valuable citizens. In this racialized nation-state, Native Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans become second-class citizens, whereas people of color from the Caribbean, Asia, Latin America, and Africa encounter more difficulty becoming naturalized citizens than immigrants from European nations. Because all of these groups are not White and thereby lack appropriate blood ties, they are deemed to be less-worthy actual and potential U.S. citizens.

When seen in this framework that links family, race, and nation, public policies of all sorts take on new meaning. An example is the historical similarity between the adoption of children and the process of acquiring citizenship. When children are screened for their suitability for adoption, factors such as their racial, religious, and ethnic background carry a prominent weight. Younger children, who allegedly are less socialized, are typically preferred over older ones. When adoptions are finalized, such children become "naturalized" and legally indistinguishable from children born into the family unit. In a similar fashion, immigration policies screen potential citizens in terms of how well they match the biological make-up of the U.S. national family. Historically, immigration policies have reflected the perceived racial, ethnic, and labor needs of a domestic political economy that routinely discriminated against people of color (Takaki 1993). Those who wish to become adopted citizens must undergo a socialization process whereby they study important elements of U.S. culture. This socialization process aims to transform so-called aliens into bona fide U.S. citizens who are indistinguishable from those born in the United States.

Membership Has Its Privileges: Rights, Obligations and Rules

By suggesting an ideal relationship between the rights and responsibilities of family membership, the traditional family ideal operates as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality in yet another way. In a situation in which notions of belonging to a family remain important to issues of responsibility and accountability, individuals feel that they "owe" something to, and are responsible for, members of their families. For example, people within family units routinely help their family members by babysitting, lending money, helping relatives find employment and housing, or caring for the elderly. Family members linked by blood are entitled to these benefits merely by belonging. Even when family members lack merit, they are entitled to benefits simply because they belong. Beyond this issue of access to entitlements, individuals incur differential responsibilities that depend on their placement in family hierarchies. For example, women are expected to perform much of the domestic labor that keeps the family going, whereas men's duties lie in providing financial support.

In a similar fashion, U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization acquire certain rights and responsibilities that accrue from membership. Citizens are promised entitlements such as equal protection under the law, access to unemployment insurance, old age pensions, free public education, and other social welfare benefits. Citizens are also expected to fulfill certain obligations to one another. U.S. citizens are expected to pay taxes, observe the law, and engage in military service when required. In contrast to the rights and responsibilities provided

insiders, outsiders lack both the entitlements provided group members and the obligations attached to belonging. Similar to non-family members, non-U.S. citizens are neither entitled to citizenship benefits nor responsible for national duties.

In the United States where race is constructed via assumed blood ties, race influences the differential distribution of citizenship rights and responsibilities. Taxation policies illustrate how ideas about family and race reinforce differences in entitlements and obligations. Despite the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools, large numbers of African-American children remain warehoused in poorly funded, deteriorating, racially segregated inner city schools. These children are seen as lacking merit and therefore unworthy of public support. Contrasting their lot with the often lavish school facilities and services provided to children attending overwhelmingly White suburban schools, especially in affluent districts, reveals substantial racial differences. Even though many of these suburban children lack merit, the location of their homes entitles them to superior public services. It is important to remember that these patterns of racial segregation and differential obligations and entitlements experienced by all U.S. children are far from random. Governmental policies helped create these patterns of racially segregated spaces that reproduce social inequalities (Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

In a situation of naturalized hierarchy, conceptualizing U.S. national identity as composed of racial groups that collectively comprise a U.S. national family fosters differential patterns of enforcement of the rights and obligations of citizenship. Members of some racial families receive full benefits of membership while others encounter inferior treatment. Gender hierarchies add additional complexity. African-American women's experiences with entitlement criteria for 1930s Social Security programs, for example, illustrate how institutionalized racism and gender-specific ideology public policies shaped national public policy. Race was a factor in deciding which occupations would be covered by Social Security. Two occupational categories were expressly excluded from coverage: agricultural and domestic workers, the two categories that included most African-American women. Also, by providing differential benefits to men and women through worker's compensation (for which Black women did not qualify) and mothers's aid, from its inception, Social Security encompassed ideas about gender. Eligibility rules rewarded women who remained in marriages and were supported by their husbands but penalized women who became separated or divorced or who remained single and earned their own way. Black women who were not in stable marriages lacked access to spousal and widows benefits that routinely subsidized White women. In this case, the combination of race-targeted polices concerning occupational category and gender-targeted policies concerning applicants' marital status worked to exclude Black women from benefits (Gordon 1994). On paper, Black

women may have been first-class U.S. citizens, but their experiences reveal their second-class treatment.

FAMILY GENEALOGY: INHERITANCE AND THE FAMILY WAGE

Naturalized hierarchies embedded in the traditional family ideal articulate not only with hierarchies of race and nation but also with hierarchies of economic or social class (Collins 1998, chapter 6). The traditional family ideal may be more heavily implicated in social class organization in the United States than previously imagined. Using the individual as the unit of analysis, social class analyses have traditionally examined men's incomes as central to family organization. However, moving from individuals to families as the basic unit of social class analysis, and from income to wealth as a measure of class, illustrate yet another way that family serves as a privileged exemplar for intersectionality. Shifting to wealth as a measure of social class status suggests that families serve as important social units for wealth's intergenerational transmission. As Oliver and Shapiro observe, "private wealth thus captures inequality that is the product of the past, often passed down from generation to generation" (Oliver and Shapiro 1995, 2).

Focusing on wealth not only references contemporary economic inequality but also incorporates the historical origins and reproduction of class differences over time. Despite ideas that social mobility is widespread, U.S. children routinely enjoy or suffer the economic status of their parents. Families constitute important sites for inheritance, not solely of cultural values, but of property. Families use wealth to create opportunities, secure a desired standard of living, and pass their social class status to their children. In this process, the family home becomes more than a private respite from the demands of the public sphere. When "family values" and "property values" become intertwined, homes in racially segregated neighborhoods become important investments. The traditional family ideal shows the family not only occupying a home, but owning it. Ensconced in tax policies that provide lucrative benefits for homeowners, for many Americans, the single-family home as a tangible symbol of wealth remains central to the American dream (Coontz 1992). Wealth matters because, if one adheres to rules of marriage and childbearing, it is directly transferable from generation to generation.

It would be a mistake to view the intergenerational transmission of property as primarily a phenomenon affecting middle-class and affluent families. Certainly property-owning families at the founding of the United States enjoyed an immense advantage that many were able to broker into persistent economic and political power. The wealth of these families stood in stark contrast to the situation of Native Americans who lost land and livelihood in wars of conquest, or to that of African-Americans whose enslavement rendered them the

property that was inherited. Despite the historical concentration of wealth among a small percentage of families, the intergenerational transmission of wealth through family also operates among working-class families. Traditional analyses view working-class families in purely wage-earning terms. Such families are thought to have no property to pass on to their children, and are seen as mere employees of other more wealthy families. However, the notion of working-class men being entitled to a "family wage" emerges at the intersection of expectations of family inheritance and a naturalized gender hierarchy. In this situation, working-class men inherit opportunities to earn a wage and are expected to use that wage to support their families. According to this logic, women's and children's social class status derives from that of men.

When these relationships regulating intergenerational property transmission are racialized, as they are in the United States, another level of complexity emerges. In her analysis of how racism undermined the War on Poverty program, Jill Quadagno describes the resistance that craft unions put forth when pressured to change entrenched patterns of racial discrimination. As Quadagno points out, the right of unions to select their own members was seen as a "property right of the working class. This was a most compelling argument for nepotism—the tradition of passing on the craft from fathers to sons" (Quadagno 1994, 65). Among Philadelphia plumbers, 40 percent of the apprentices were sons of members. Fathers wanted their sons to be trained as plumbers and to continue in the business. Practices such as these virtually ensured that African-Americans and other groups were excluded from lucrative positions. Quadagno quotes one construction worker who explains the concept of property rights and property transmission in White working-class families:

> Some men leave their sons money, some large investments, some business connections and some a profession. I have none of these to bequeath to my sons. I have only one worthwhile thing to give: my trade. . . . For this simple father's wish it is said that I discriminate against Negroes. Don't all of us discriminate? Which of us when it comes to choice will not choose a son over all others? (quoted in Quadagno 1994, 65)

In effect, racial discrimination in education, employment, and housing historically reflected White working-class understandings of these social locations as "private property" to be disposed of as inherited wealth. While such attitudes certainly may reflect personal prejudice, racial discrimination thus may be more closely attached to property rights and concerns about the value of inheritable property than actual attitudes toward African-Americans.

FAMILY PLANNING

The significance of the family as an exemplar of intersectionality can also be seen in one final dimension of family rhetoric. Family planning comprises a constellation of options, ranging from coercion to choice, from permanence to reversibility regarding reproduction of actual populations. In the case of individual families, decision-making lies with family members; they decide whether to have children, how many children to have, and how those children will be spaced. Feminist scholars in particular have identified how male control over women's sexual and reproductive capacities has been central to women's oppression (see, for example, Raymond 1993). However, just as women's bodies produce children who are part of a socially constructed family grounded in notions of biological kinship, women's bodies produce the population for the national "family" or nation-state, conceptualized as having some sort of biological oneness. In this sense, family planning becomes important in regulating population groups identified by race, social class, and national status (Heng and Devan 1992; Kuumba 1993).

Social policies designed to foster the health of the United States conceptualized as a national family follow a family planning logic, as demonstrated via eugenic thinking. Early twentieth century "racial hygiene" or eugenic movements compellingly illustrate the thinking that underlies population policies designed to control the motherhood of different groups of women for reasons of nationality and race (Haller 1984; Proctor 1988). Eugenic philosophies and the population policies they supported emerged in political economies with distinctive needs, and in societies with particular social class relations. Common to eugenic movements throughout the world was the view that biology was central to solving social problems. Societies that embraced eugenic philosophies typically aimed to transform social problems into technical problems amenable to biological solutions effected via social engineering. Eugenic approaches thus combined a "philosophy of biological determinism with a belief that science might provide a technical fix for social problems" (Proctor 1988, 286).

Three elements of eugenic thinking seem remarkably similar to themes in American public policy. Those embracing eugenic thinking saw "race and heredity—the birth rates of the fit and the unfit—as the forces that shape[d] . . . political and social developments" (Haller 1984, 78). First, eugenic thinking racializes segments of a given population by classifying people into mutually exclusive racial groups. Because the United States has operated as a racialized state since its inception, race remains a fundamental principle of U.S. social organization. While racial meanings change in response to political and economic conditions, the fundamental belief in race as a guiding principle of U.S. society remains remarkably hardy. Associating diverse racial groups with perceived national interests, a second element of

eugenic thinking, also has a long history in the United States. The third feature of eugenic thinking, the direct control of different racial groups through various measures also is present in U.S. politics. So-called positive eugenic—efforts to increase reproduction among the better groups who allegedly carried the outstanding qualities of their group in their genes—and negative eugenic—efforts to prevent the propagation by less desirable groups—also have affected U.S. public policy.

While now seen as an embarrassment, past ideas concerning eugenic gained considerable influence in the United States. As Haller points out, Francis Galton, the founder of the eugenic movement in England, believed that "Anglo-Saxons far outranked the Negroes of Africa, who in turn outranked the Australian aborigines, who outranked nobody. Because he believed that large innate differences between races existed, Galton felt that a program to raise the inherent abilities of mankind involved the replacement of inferior races by the superior" (Haller 1984, 11). Galton's ideas proved popular in the racially segregated United States. U.S. eugenic laws preceded by twenty years the sterilization laws of other countries, and were seen as pioneering ventures by eugenicists abroad. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1927 *Buck vs. Bell* decision held that sterilization fell within the police power of the state. Reflecting the majority opinion, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote,

> It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the state for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped by incompetence. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. . . . Three generations of imbeciles is enough. (Haller 1984, 139)

Given this intellectual context, differential population policies developed for different segments of the U.S. population emerge in direct relation to any group's perceived value within the nation-state.[7] In periods of profound social change, such as the massive European migration that preceded the *Buck vs. Bell* decision, eugenic philosophies can reemerge. With the civil rights, women's, anti-war, and other social movements of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the growing nonwhite immigrant population of the 1970s and 1980s, the United States experienced profound change. Omi and Winant (1994) interpret the expanding conservative social projects that emerged during this period as a direct response to the perceived gains of Blacks and women. One core feature characterizing the rhetoric of social projects of the Right was a return to the family values of the traditional U.S. family. By associating the ideal family with U.S. national interests, these movements linked those inter-

ests to their own political agendas concerning race and gender. Returning to "family values" not only invoked racial and gendered meanings, it set the stage for reviving a logic of eugenic that could be applied to adolescent pregnancy, women's poverty, street crime, and other social issues.

In this context, contemporary American social policies from the 1960s through the "family values" debate of the 1990s become more comprehensible. When attached to state policy in a racialized nation-state, questions of controlling the sexuality and fertility of women from diverse race, social class, and citizenship groups become highly politicized. For example, White women, especially those of the middle class, are encouraged to reproduce. In contrast, women of color, especially those lacking economic resources or not in state sanctioned marriages, are routinely discouraged from having children (Raymond 1993). Population policies such as providing lavish services to combat infertility for White, middle class women, while offering a limited range of Norplant, Depo Provera, and sterilization to poor African-American women constitute contemporary reflections of the logic of eugenic thinking (Davis 1981; Nsiah-Jefferson 1989).

In the logic of the family as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality, viewing race- and gender-based policies as regulating different forms of social relations is fallacious. Current assumptions see African-Americans as having race, White women as having gender, Black women as experiencing both race and gender, and White men experiencing neither. These assumptions dissipate when confronted with actual population policies designed to regulate the childbearing patterns of different racial and ethnic groups generally, and the mothering experiences of different groups of women in particular.

Reclaiming Family

Family occupies such a prominent place in the language of public discourse in the United States that rejecting it outright might be counterproductive for groups aiming to challenge hierarchies. Because the family functions as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality in structuring hierarchy, it potentially can serve a similar function in challenging that hierarchy. Just as the traditional family ideal provides a rich site for understanding intersectional inequalities, reclaiming notions of family that reject hierarchical thinking may provide an intriguing and important site of resistance.

Many groups aim to dismantle social hierarchy, yet use unexamined ideas about family in crafting their political programs. Consider how Black nationalist-influenced projects within African-American civil society invoke family rhetoric. Sociologist Paul Gilroy (1993) notes that the "trope of kinship" permeates Black understandings of culture and community to the point that African-Americans largely accept the notion of race as family and work within it. In Black-influenced projects, families are seen as building blocks of the

nation. The Afrocentric yearning for a homeland for the Black racial family and the construction of a mythical Africa to serve this purpose speaks to the use of this construct. Family language also shapes everyday interactions: African-American strangers often refer to one another as "brother" and "sister"; some Black men refer to each other as "bloods." In hip-hop culture, "homies" are Black males from one's neighborhood, or home community. Within this political framework, Whites remain the strangers, the outsiders who are castigated in Black political thought. Ironically, though the popular press often associates the traditional family ideal with conservative political projects, this rhetoric finds a home in what many African-Americans consider to be the most radical of Black political theories (Appiah 1992; Gilroy 1993).

Feminist politics can contain similar contradictions regarding family. U.S. feminists have made important contributions in analyzing how the traditional family ideal harms women. However, feminism's longing for a sisterhood among women has proved difficult to sustain in the context of U.S. race and class politics. Assumptions of an idealized sisterhood floundered because women of color, among others, questioned their place in the feminist family. Even more significant is the U.S. media's routine characterization of feminism as anti-family. Although much of the backlash against feminism claims that U.S. feminists are anti-family, many women who are not part of this backlash probably remain suspicious of any political movement that questions such an important social institution by appearing to dismiss it. This is unfortunate, because family rhetoric often forms a powerful language to organize people for a variety of ends.

Given the power of family as ideological construction and principle of social organization, Black nationalist, feminist, and other political movements in the United States dedicated to challenging social inequality might consider recasting intersectional understandings of family in ways that do not reproduce inequality. Instead of engaging in endless criticism, reclaiming the language of family for democratic ends and transforming the very conception of family itself might provide a more useful approach.

Notes

I would like to thank the editors of this volume and four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I also thank the students at the University of Cincinnati in my graduate seminar "Gender and Intersectionality" for their insightful ideas.

1. By dislodging beliefs in the naturalness or normality of any one family form, feminist scholarship analyzes the significance of specific notions of family to gender oppression (Thorne 1992). As Stephanie Coontz (1992) reports, this traditional family ideal never existed, even during the 1950s, a decade that is often assumed to be the era of its realization. Feminist anthropologists also challenge the traditional family ideal by

demonstrating that the heterosexual, married couple form in the United States is neither "natural," universal, nor cross-culturally normative (Collier et al. 1992). Recent family scholarship suggests that large numbers of U.S. families never experienced the traditional family ideal, and those who may have once achieved this form are now abandoning it (Coontz 1992; Stacey 1992).

2. In the early 1980s, several African-American women scholar-activists called for a new approach to analyzing Black women's lives. They claimed that African-American women's experiences were shaped not just by race but also by gender, social class, and sexuality. In this tradition, works such as *Women, Race, and Class* by Angela Davis (1981), "A Black Feminist Statement" drafted by the Combahee River Collective (1982), and Audre Lorde's (1984) classic volume *Sister Outsider* stand as groundbreaking works that explore interconnections among systems of oppression. Subsequent work aimed to name this interconnected relationship with terms such as *matrix of domination* (Collins 1990), and *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1991). Because Black lesbians were at the forefront in raising the issue of intersectionality, sexuality was one of the emphases in early work by African-American women. However, pervasive homophobia in African-American communities, as evidenced by the reaction to the works of Alice Walker, Ntosake Shange, Michele Wallace and other early modern Black feminists, diverted attention from intersectional analyses that emphasized sexuality. The absence of a developed tradition of queer theory in the academy also worked against more comprehensive intersectional analyses. For early intersectional analyses that included sexuality, see the essays in Barbara Smith's (1983) edited volume *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*.

3. A wide range of topics, such as the significance of primatology in framing gendered, raced views of nature in modern science (Haraway 1989); the social construction of Whiteness among White women in the United States (Frankenberg 1993); race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial conquest (McClintock 1995); and the interplay of race, class, and gender in welfare state policies in the United States (Brewer 1994; Quadagno 1994) have all received an intersectional treatment. Moreover, the initial emphasis on race, social class, and gender has expanded to include intersections involving sexuality, ethnicity, and nationalism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Parker et al. 1992; Daniels 1997).

4. Theoretical and empirical work on women of color's location in work and family not only challenges the traditional family ideal, but paves the way for the more general question of family as a privileged site of intersectionality. For work in this tradition, see Dill 1988, Zinn 1989, and Glenn 1992.

5. In this section, I emphasize land as literal space. However, symbolic space, or the terrain of ideas, is organized via similar principles. Foucault's (1979) idea of disciplinary power in which people are classified and located on a knowledge grid, parallels my discussion of the mapping of symbolic space.

6. By tracing the changing meaning of race in the sixteenth-century *Oxford English Dictionary*, David Goldberg identifies the foundational meanings that subsequently link race with family. Goldberg notes, "in general, 'race' has been used to signify a 'breed or stock of animals' (1580), a 'genus, species or kind of animal' (1605), or a 'variety of plant' (1605). It refers at this time also to 'the great divisions of mankind' (1580) and especially to 'a limited group of persons descended from a common ancestor' (1581), while only slightly later to a 'tribe, nation or people considered of common stock' " (1600) (Goldberg 1993, 63). Note the connections between animals, nature, family, tribe, and nation.

7. For extended discussions of this concept, see the essays in Bridenthal et al. (1984) *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*. This volume contains one of the best discussions I have encountered of the links between gender, social class, race, and nation, when policies were actually implemented in one nation-state.

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