

The Other Breadwinners : the Mobilization of Secondary Wage Earners in Early Twentieth-Century Black Families

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Abstract:

This study examines black families' reliance on secondary wage earners in Atlanta, GA during the early twentieth century (1900 and 1936). In periods of economic prosperity and decline, two-parent black families routinely relied on the employment of mothers, children, and extended kin to supplement the family income. These other breadwinners had different positions within the black family economy, and families' reliance on them was affected by diverse, albeit complementary factors. The employment of mothers and children was affected by economic need and the demands associated with the family life cycle. The presence of working relatives in extended family households was affected by the age of relatives, household size, and, to a limited degree, the ages of the host families' children.

Keywords: Black Families | African American families | Employment | Family strategy | Family history

Article:

1 Introduction

In the years immediately following Emancipation, black husbands sought to withdraw their wives and children from the labor force (Gutman, 1976, pp. 167–168; Jones, 1985, pp. 58–60; Litwack, 1998, pp. 125–127; Ransom & Sutch, 1981, p. 44). Ransom and Sutch (1981, p. 44) argue that for blacks, like other Americans of the period, there was a hierarchy of preferred workers by gender and age. Furthermore, the work available for women and youth was long, arduous, and sometimes dangerous, and the pay did not equal that of adult men (Harley, 1990, p. 163; Jones, 1985, pp. 127–134). Although family preferences, the type of work available, and the level of wages may have been incentives for women and children to remain at home or at school, the impoverishment and economic marginality facing most black Americans a generation after Emancipation pushed them into the market place.

Indeed, the withdrawal of women and youth from the labor force after Emancipation was curtailed by the economic conditions facing newly freed blacks — survival often required the labor of husbands, wives, and their offspring. As black families moved into the twentieth century and into urban areas, the paid labor of women, youth, and extended kin was an economic mainstay providing income to supplement the wages of husbands and fathers. In addition to economic hardship, the history of collective work strategies forged in an agricultural economy and slavery (Harris, 1982, pp. 11–16, 22–26; Jones, 1985, pp. 86–98), a gender role ideology and a family organization that buttressed the integration of women's work and family roles (Collins, 1990, pp. 52–56; Harley, 1990, pp. 171–172; Hunter, 1997, pp. 49–52), and malleable household boundaries (Borchert, 1980, pp. 57–86; Harris, 1976, p. 323; Hunter, 1993, pp. 232–233, 238) helped forge the roles of women and youth as supplemental or secondary wage earners.

This article examines black families' reliance on secondary wage earners during the early twentieth century. Due to a confluence of factors, black families often made different types of decisions than their white and native immigrant counterparts about whom to send to work and under what conditions (Bodnar, Simon, & Weber, 1982, pp. 89–102; Goldin, 1977, 1981; Pleck, 1978). Goldin (1981, p. 303), in her study of racial/ethnic differences in families' use of secondary workers, wrote: “Decisions within these [black and white] families appear to have been made in extremely different ways, and it is difficult to attribute this finding to disparities in the income levels of the two groups.” Despite Goldin's (1981) observation, few empirical studies specifically examine household-level processes among black families, or explore variations within this population. However, historical studies of black families, based primarily on late-nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century populations, do point to the varied ways economic need and family demands may affect family decision-making about fertility (Tolnay, 1986) (McDaniel & Morgan, 1996; Shifflet, 1975), and employment (Goldin, 1977, 1981; Pleck, 1978).

2 The black family economy, family strategies, and the mobilization of secondary wage earners

With Emancipation, both much and little had changed for southern blacks — it was, as Ransom and Sutch (1981) suggest, “one kind of freedom.” Black families were free to make more unfettered decisions about how to negotiate work and family roles and responsibilities. However, discriminatory practices limited the economic and occupational opportunities available to black Americans, and a deeply entrenched racial social caste system that included racial violence and de facto and de jure segregation kept southern blacks in their economic and social place. Polly Shine (Mellon, 1988, p. 406), a former slave, described the first decades after Emancipation: “The Reconstruction period has been hell on the Negro race, but we suffered it through, somehow. If we had another time like that to go through, believes I would hang myself so es (sic) I would not suffer again.” Indeed, black Americans would survive freedom in much the same way as they had weathered slavery by relying on family and community-based supports, a rich cultural and spiritual life, no fear of hard work, and the belief that change would come. In

their migration to southern and northern towns and cities, black Americans searched for better opportunities, a better life, and the promise of racial equality and social justice. Though constrained by limited opportunity and racial caste, black families made decisions about who to send to work and when, who to take into their households and families, and for how long.

The allocation of work and family roles among poor and working-class families in early industrial economies reflected family strategies developed within the context of a collective family economy (see, for example, Hareven, 1982; Tilly, 1979). The concept of family strategies suggests that the patterns in work, family, and household are interdependent and are the result of proactive decision making, as well as a product of social and economic constraints (and options) shaped by gender, race and ethnicity, culture, family characteristics (e.g., family life cycle), region, and historical period. Though implementation of family strategies can be thought of as a collective project, what families do also reflects tensions between the needs of individual family members and the family as a collective, and the coexistence of mutual and competing needs within families (Hareven, 1987; Rapp, Ross, & Bridenthal, 1979). Viewing the work and wages of women, youth, and extended kin as a source of supplemental income suggests a specific social organization of the family economy where work roles are allocated by age, gender, and kinship position. Further, in two-parent families, it suggests a hierarchy of wage-earning that positions the male head as primary breadwinner and the employment of other family members as a reserve labor force (Goldin, 1981). Hence, the economic roles of family members are shaped by structurally based options and constraints, and culturally informed choices.

Family economic and developmental models provide a framework within which to organize priorities linked to the family's economic and social survival. Together these models focus on economic needs and the demands associated with the developmental needs of family members as catalysts for family decision-making. The family economy model directs attention to the ways in which families generate and allocate resources for their survival and maintenance, as well as to the ebb and flow of economic demands linked to family formation, growth, and dissolution (see Elder, 1978, pp. 42–54; Hareven, 1982; Tilly, 1979). The family developmental model, a complementary framework, highlights shifting social tasks linked to reproduction, child care, socialization, and the launching of adult offspring, processes that unfold within the context of the life cycle of the family and household (e.g., formation, growth, maintenance, dissolution; see discussion in Aldous, 1994; Elder, 1978). Therefore, we can best understand families' mobilization of secondary wage earners not only as a function of economic need, but also as the result of the negotiation of family-based developmental tasks (e.g., child rearing). Also important is the confluence of alternative economic strategies families can or are willing to put into place.

3 Employment of wives and mothers

Black families' reliance on working wives and mothers is well documented (Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1985). Black women were products of a cultural ethos and a long history of work that facilitated the extension of their family roles to include that of wife, mother, and worker. During

the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in contrast to their white counterparts, black mothers' employment appeared to be both a preferred source of supplemental income in their families and the linchpin for other economic strategies (Harley, 1990; Hunter, 1993; Klaczynska, 1976; Pleck, 1978). When and how long wives worked was primarily determined by the husbands' labor force characteristics (e.g., wages, unemployment), and parenting responsibilities were potential barriers to mothers' employment. In addition, the reliance on alternative income-generating strategies (e.g., boarding/lodging, children's work) and family structure (extended or nuclear) were factors related to the employment of married mothers (Bose, 1984; Goldin, 1981, pp. 300–302; Hunter, 1984, pp. 78–80; Hunter, 1993).

A number of descriptive accounts of black families during the early twentieth century have noted the involvement of youth in employment, domestic chores, and child-care tasks (Borchert, 1980, pp. 144–146; DuBois, 1996, pp. 101–105, 111; Johnson, 1941, pp. 189–190). Hence, it is important to consider the ways in which children may have made it less necessary for mothers to work by entering the labor market or by providing domestic and child-rearing support to their mothers. It has been noted that, unlike families today, older children were more likely than younger children to affect mothers' employment, because they could substitute their paid labor for that of their mothers (Bose, 1984; Fraundorf, 1979, pp. 403–407). This pattern is not as clear in black families, and, further, the relationship between mothers' and children's employment is likely more complex than a substitution effect. For example, Bose (1984, pp. 481–483), in a national study of women's work at the turn-of-the-century, found that older adolescent daughters substituted for their mothers' employment only when young children were in the household. Otherwise, there was a positive relationship between mothers' and daughters' employment. Goldin (1981, p. 302), in her study of black families in late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia, found that mothers who worked outside the home were more likely to have working daughters; however, sons were less likely to work under these circumstances. These findings suggest that comprehensive measures of children's characteristics (e.g., gender and age composition of children at home) are needed to provide insights into the circumstances under which children were likely to deter, enable, or substitute for their mothers' employment. This is particularly important in the study of black families, where economic vulnerability was a push for mothers to enter the work force even if child-rearing demands were high.

Taking in boarders and lodgers was one way for women to generate income while remaining at home (Bodnar et al., 1982, pp. 103–106, 148; Borchert, 1980, pp. 57–59, 80–81; Modell and Hareven, 1973; Zunz, 1982, p. 257). Although black families frequently took in boarders, black women's employment did not decrease significantly by their presence nor by the income generated from rent (Bose, 1984; Hunter, 1984, pp. 79–80). Bose (1984, pp. 482–484) suggests that families who took in boarders were often faced with the most severe economic hardship; hence, wives in these families were more likely to work than wives in non-boarding families. Indeed, black women's employment was unaffected by boarding, unless families relied on additional income strategies (e.g., children's work) and/or had extended kin present

(Hunter, 1984, p. 7; Hunter, 1993, pp. 241–242). In addition, the relationship between boarding and women's employment in black families was complicated by the potential dual functions of boarding. For example, Borchert (1980, pp. 80–81), in a study of early twentieth-century black ally families in Washington, DC, found that boarders remained in homes even if they became ill or could not work. Under these circumstances, he suggests that boarding practices moved from being an avenue to generate or pool resources to a form of community aid.

Extended family living arrangements is also a mechanism to share economic resources (Angel & Tienda, 1982; Martin & Martin, 1978, pp. 32–38; Stack, 1974, pp. 32–44) and provide social and parenting support (Hunter, 1997; McDaniel & Morgan, 1996; Pearson, Hunter, Ensminger, & Kellam, 1990). Bose (1984, pp. 481–484) found that when extended kin were present, mothers were more likely to work, but only if no young children were present. Hunter's (1993, pp. 241–243) study of the cooccurrence of economic strategies also suggests that the relationship between mothers' employment and family structure varied depending on the health of the local economy. These findings suggest that either the presence or employment of extended kin could affect the employment of female heads. In addition, like the offspring of household heads, extended kin place demands on family resources, but they may also generate additional income and provide domestic and child-care support. The potential roles of extended kin in black families are well documented in historical (see, for example, Borchert, 1980; Gutman, 1976) and period studies (see, for example, DuBois, 1908; Frazier, 1939); however, few empirical studies have examined the effect of extended family households or the employment of relatives on family decisions about mothers' employment.

4 Children's employment

Black youth and young adult children made contributions to the family economy in both rural and urban areas (Bodnar et al., 1982; Goldin, 1981; Tolnay, 1986; Walters & Briggs, 1993). Youth and young adult children living at home were more likely to be mobilized when families' resources were lower and there were greater economic demands on resources (Goldin, 1981; Horan & Hargis, 1991; Walters & Briggs, 1993). In a study of late-nineteenth-century families, Horan and Hargis (1991, p. 592) found that both mothers' and fathers' earnings negatively affected the employment of children. Although black children's employment was affected by family resources (Walters & Briggs, 1993), Goldin (1981, p. 302) found that they were more likely to be affected by their mothers' employment and by household composition than by their fathers' earnings and employment status.

Families' reliance on children's work is also affected by who is available to work (age, gender, number) and families' preferences for secondary wage earners (Bose, 1984; Elman, 1993; Goldin, 1981; Horan & Hargis, 1991). If we look at children's employment as a family-level strategy, the age and gender composition of children living at home will influence whether families will mobilize children for work and who (e.g., sons, daughters, older or younger children) is likely to be sent to work. For example, in late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia,

daughters with female siblings were more likely to work, perhaps reflecting job-networking among sisters (Goldin, 1981, p. 300). In addition, the presence of young children increased the likelihood of employment of both sons and daughters. The relationship between mothers' and children's employment may also be influenced by the gender of potential child workers (Goldin, 1981, Perlmann, 1988). For example, Goldin (1981, p. 302) found that mothers' outside employment increased the employment of daughters, but decreased the employment of sons. Among black families residing in Providence during the late nineteenth century, Perlmann (1988, pp. 173–174) found that both daughters and sons were more likely to work if their mothers did. Among families sampled in 1915, sons whose mothers worked were less likely to work than sons whose mothers did not; however, a positive relationship between mothers' and daughters' employment, though diminished in magnitude, remained.

The occupational opportunities available to children varied by age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Older children (15 and older) were more likely to secure employment; however, gender differences in employment varied depending on community context and race/ethnicity (Bodnar et al., 1982; Modell & Hareven, 1973; Walters & Briggs, 1993). Opportunities for school enrollment and state limitations on child labor were institutional forces that differentially suppressed the employment of youth (aged 10–14 years) relative to their older siblings (15 and older) (Elman, 1993; Horan & Hargis, 1991). Horan and Hargis (1991, p. 591), examining the impact of the family economy, characteristics of the local economy, and regional context (e.g., southern, state education laws) on family decisions about children's work and school enrollment, found that having more older and fewer female children increased families' reliance on children's employment. Elman (1993, p. 74) also found that native-white male teens were more likely to be employed, although their employment patterns were affected by residence (i.e., urban vs. rural). Walters and Briggs (1993, pp. 173–174) found few gender differences in the determinants of children's employment in black families, and the preference for sons' employment was less evident than it was in white families. They found that when gender affected the likelihood of southern black children's employment, it was tied to the type of occupational opportunities available where children resided. For example, in heavily agricultural counties, girls were more likely than boys to work both inside and outside of agriculture. This difference was due primarily to black daughters' greater access to employment in domestic service. These findings illustrate both how culturally based preferences and race- and gender-stratified occupational opportunities affected the ways black and white parents were likely to rely on the employment of their sons and daughters.

Black youth, like their parents, faced racial discrimination in employment and were more likely to be restricted from taking jobs that often employed white and ethnic immigrant youth (DuBois, 1996, pp. 97–111; Lieberman, 1980, pp. 292–325). Youth in southern cities may have fared better because of the number of domestic and personal service jobs designated as “Negro” jobs and the almost complete absence of competing poor ethnic immigrant populations. However, it is less clear whether female or male children were more advantaged by this

situation. Female children may have had better access to employment than male youth because of the demand for domestic labor and black women's involvement in this employment sector. However, male youth had greater access to industrial labor, as well as male-oriented domestic and personal service occupations. As a result, adolescent and young adult sons may have had a wider range of occupational opportunities than daughters who were largely restricted to domestic service.

In addition to siblings and parents, extended kin and boarders affected children's role in the family economy. Elman (1993, p. 79) found that the presence of elderly extended kin increased the likelihood of white teenagers' school enrollment but did not have an effect on employment. In contrast, Bose (1984, p. 484) found that the presence of extended kin, without respect to age, decreased the employment of adolescent daughters. Although findings from these studies differ, they do indicate the potential effect of extended kin on family decisions about schooling and child employment, which during the early twentieth century were often interrelated decisions (Horan & Hargis, 1991; Tolnay, 1986; Walters & Briggs, 1993). As was noted, boarders were a common feature of black households in urban areas. However, neither the presence of boarders nor the income generated from this source significantly predicts children's employment (Bose, 1984; Horan & Hargis, 1991). Bose (1984) argues that this was likely a function of the severity of the economic need of families that took in boarders. The diverse effects of household composition on children's employment may, in part, reflect the varied conditions under which families took in boarders and relatives.

5 Extended families and working relatives

Studies of contemporary black family life have focused on the economic conditions under which households are extended (Anderson & Allen, 1984; Angel & Tienda, 1982) and the intergenerational flow of economic resources, instrumental support, and social support (Beck & Beck, 1989; Dressler, Hoepfner, & Pitts, 1985; Hofferth, 1985; Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 1993). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, extended families were common during periods of economic crisis (Agresti, 1982) and in impoverished urban areas (Borchert, 1980, pp. 66–69; Zunz, 1982, pp. 248–250). As families opened their doors to kin and friends, additional persons were integrated into the household family economy. Although the expansion or contraction of the household has economic implications for families (e.g., demands on and contributions to resources), there have been few historical, empirical investigations of the role of extended kin in the black family economy. As was discussed, extended kin have been found to influence the mobilization of secondary wage earners (Bose, 1984; Elman, 1993). However, we know little about the labor force participation of extended kin or the extent to which their employment was a function of the economic characteristics of the household heads, the demographic characteristics of the core family (i.e., nuclear family of the household heads), or the characteristics of extended kin themselves (e.g., age, gender). Bose's (1984) investigation of the employment of female relatives suggests that all these factors are important. She found

that race, age, gender, marital status of household members, and the economic status of household heads affected the employment of relatives.

6 Study aims and research questions

W. E. B. DuBois (1996, p. 97), in his classic study of the black population in turn-of-the-century Philadelphia, wrote: “For a group of freedmen the question of economic survival is the most pressing of all questions ...” During the postbellum period and well into the twentieth century, urban black families addressed this question by depending on secondary wage earners to buttress the household family economy. The examination of families' reliance on multiple types of secondary wage earners provides a unique view of the complexities of family decision-making about the economic role of its members. The aim of this article is twofold: (1) to examine how families' decisions about employment were affected by economic and developmentally based imperatives and (2) to examine variations in family decisions about the economic role of family members. Specifically, this study addresses two central questions. First, how do families' economic and demographic characteristics affect their reliance on secondary wage earners, and, second, do factors affecting families' mobilization of secondary wage earners vary by type of family member relied on?

In addition, this study looks at these questions during periods of economic expansion (1900) and decline (1936). The decisions that families make about employment and the choices they have are necessarily shaped by the economic contexts in which they live (Hareven, 1982; Moen, Kain, & Elder, 1983). During the early twentieth century, black Americans had more constrained economic opportunities and lower wages, and their families were less likely to have wealth (Bayor, 1996, pp. 93–106; Sterner, 1943, pp. 29–46, 59–77). Racial discrimination constrained economic opportunities in the best of times, and during periods of economic decline, black Americans suffered job and income losses sooner and for longer periods of time than white Americans (Smith, 1988, pp. 20–22, 56–58; Trotter & Lewis, 1996, pp. 169–247). Because black families were often dependent on multiple wage earners for economic survival even during periods of economic prosperity, when the Great Depression hit, it was not a question of enlisting new economic strategies (e.g., mothers' employment) as was true for more affluent white families (see for example Bennett & Elder, 1979), but instead, of maintaining old strategies in the face of increased external constraints. As E. T. Lewis (Kuhn, Joyce, & West, 1990, p. 201), a black southerner that came of age during the Great Depression, observed: “The Negro had always been in a depression.”

6.1 The setting: Atlanta, GA

During the early twentieth century, the urban south, particularly cities like Atlanta, embodied the promise of social and economic equality and the horrors of racial inequality (Dittmer, 1977; Smith, 1988; Woodward, 1955). At the turn of the century, Reverend Carter (1971, p. 12), referring to race relations and economic opportunity for blacks in Atlanta, wrote: “I am inclined

to use the words of Apostle Paul: 'For here we have no continued (sic) city, but seek one to come.' Southern cities, in part due to the deep devastation of the Civil War and the largely agricultural economy of the south, moved slowly into the industrial age compared to northern cities (Goldfield, 1982). But a generation after the Civil War, southern cities were moving briskly toward an industrial age, which many economic reformers and city planners heralded as the coming of the New South (Goldfield, 1982, pp. 114–115). For black Americans who came from rural areas and towns to southern cities in search of better wages and opportunities, north of the Mason–Dixon Line was not the only promised land (Marks, 1989, pp. 34–35).

Atlanta was an important industrial base and transportation center in the Deep South. Atlanta experienced rapid growth during the early twentieth century; the population increased from nearly 90,000 in 1900 to over 300,000 in 1940. Black Americans constituted about one-third of Atlanta's population, increasing nearly threefold from over 35,000 in 1900 to over 104,000 by 1940. As the black population in southern cities grew, it met escalating racial oppression, violence, and the institutionalization of Jim Crow laws (Newby, 1965; Woodward, 1955). Within this context, a diverse black community was growing and, to some degree, thriving. The black community included a small professional elite and middle class, although the largest percentage of the population was working poor (Bayor, 1996, pp. 6–12). Unskilled and low-paying work was the mainstay of the majority of black households. Domestic and personal services were major areas of employment for black Americans, particularly for women who seldom worked in other fields (Hunter, 1997, p. 241; Jones, 1985; Katzman, 1978). Men were employed in varied industries; however, the majority was laborers and unskilled workers.

The economic promise of the New South suffered a severe setback during the Great Depression (Smith, 1988, pp. 11–26). Black families and communities were hard hit. In Atlanta, although about one-third of the population, blacks constituted 50% of the total unemployed (Smith, 1988, p. 20). Further, the number of unemployed blacks increased 95% between 1931 and 1932 compared to 25% for whites (Smith, 1988, p. 20). As economic conditions worsened, there was even an erosion in the jobs that were considered “Negro jobs,” as jobless whites moved into positions that were once beneath them (Smith, 1988, pp. 20–21). Dan Stephen (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 202) remembered the difficulty in finding work in service jobs that historically were exclusively held by blacks: “... I couldn't get a job around the hotels. The whites were bellhopping and what not.”

Racial tensions over the right of black workers to the limited work available helped to spawn the American Order of Fascisti, a white supremacist group known as the “Black Shirts” (Bayor, 1996, pp. 98–99; Kuhn et al., 1990, pp. 202–205). Arthur Raper (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 202), a staff member at the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, recalled that the Black Shirts were involved in a campaign to remove blacks from jobs, which included the intimidation of white employers. The position of the Black Shirts was: “The white man's hungry. You [white business owners and employers] have an obligation to him over and beyond what you have to the black man.” (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 202)The Black Shirts soon disintegrated, but the racial

ideology from which they had grown also infected the administration of New Deal programs in Atlanta. Throughout the south, New Deal programs were mired in Jim Crowism, resulting in separate and unequal benefits for blacks and whites (Bayor, 1996, pp. 100–106; Smith, 1988, pp. 231–245; Trotter & Lewis, 1996, pp. 169–175). In addition, Trotter and Lewis (1996, p. 172) note that “by exempting common laborers, agricultural workers, and domestic service employees from minimum wage and participatory provisions, the NRA [National Recovery Act] and the new social security programs eliminated nearly 60% of African American workers and their families from benefits.” Blacks would have to rely primarily on well-worn family and community strategies to survive yet another incarnation of economic crisis.

Before and after the Great Depression, black families were more likely to rely on multiple wage earners than white families; however, families struggled even when they had employed members (Hunter, 1984, pp. 40–46, 84; Sterner, 1943, pp. 71, 85–86). In the mid-1930s, two-parent black families with two or more wage earners had a median income that was 49% of white families' with one wage earner (Sterner, 1943, pp. 71, 85–86). In these families, the job loss of wives, children, and extended kin was potentially devastating. Other family types relying on one wage earner fared worse; two-parent black families with one wage earner and single parent families had median incomes that were, respectively, 38% and 27% of two-parent white families' with one wage earner (Sterner, 1943, pp. 79–80). Even with multiple wage earners, the median income in two-parent black families fell below subsistence levels established by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (Sterner, 1943, p. 79).

7 Data and methods

7.1 The households

Households for this study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) the race of the household head was identified as black, colored, or Negro, (2) the household was located within the city limits of Atlanta, (3) the household was headed by a couple who identified themselves as married, and (4) at least one offspring (by blood, marriage, or adoption) was present or the head couple were guardians of relative(s) under 18 years of age. The households were drawn from the household schedules of the 12th United States Census (1900) for Fulton County and the Consumer Purchase Study 1935–1936, conducted by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), covering Atlanta city limits. This study is based on data from 446 households that included 2417 persons in 1900 and 408 households that included 2109 persons in 1936.

7.1.1 Household size, family structure, and household composition

The average household size was about five in 1900 (Mean=5.25, S.D.=4.29) and 1936 (Mean=5.16, S.D.=2.0); there was greater variability in household size in 1900. Most households included three to five members; about one-third had six or more members. One-third (33.6%) of the households in 1900 and 37.8% in 1936 included nonnuclear family members. About 1 in 10 households included boarders and lodgers in 1900 (9.9%) and in 1936 (12.7%). Twenty-eight

percent of the households included extended relatives in both years. In 1900 and 1936, extended family households most often included three or more generations. For example, in the 1900 households, 20% of extended kin were the parents/parents-in-law of the head couple, 27.8% were grandchildren, and 38% were either the siblings or nieces and nephews of the head couple. An almost identical pattern of extension was seen in 1936. The median age of extended kin was 18 in 1900 (range of 0–98 years) and 17 in 1936 (range of 0–87 years). In both samples, extended kin were most frequently female; about half of all extended family households only included female relatives.

7.1.2 Parents' age and family life cycle

In the 1900 sample, the mean age of male heads was 41.4 (S.D.=12.7) and the mean age of female heads was 35.9 (S.D.=11.4). In the 1936 sample, the mean age of male heads was 40.5 (S.D.=11.4) and the mean age for female heads was 35.2 (S.D.=9.7). As a result of the selection criteria, most families were in the childbearing and child-rearing stage (over 90%), but there was a great deal of diversity in the ages of children (i.e., offspring and/or wards) living at home. The majority of households included children whose ages spanned 6 or more years. The mean age for children in 1900 was 10.5 (S.D.=7.6) and in 1936 10.9 (S.D.=7.2). The distribution of households across family developmental period (as defined by ages of offspring/wards present) in 1900 and 1936 did not vary significantly.

8 The model

During the early twentieth century, male heads (husbands and fathers) were the primary source of family support in two-parent households. This article explores the mobilization of secondary wage earners to supplement the family income. The model examined is based on family economic and developmental models, which focus on variations both in families' economic needs and social tasks that are linked to family and household composition. In addition, the perspective on family strategies focuses attention on families' attempts to negotiate competing demands (e.g., child care and need for extra income) that involve making culturally informed choices (e.g., acceptability of mother's work) within the context of structurally defined constraints (e.g., racial and gender stratification in the occupational sector, economic prosperity vs. decline).

The basic model examined includes the following variables: (1) labor force characteristics of the male household heads, (2) age, gender, and number of the children of the household heads, (3) family structure, and (4) families' reliance on supplemental income-generating strategies (e.g., secondary wage earners, boarding/lodging, public assistance). Logistic regression analysis is used to examine the impact of aforementioned factors on families' reliance on secondary wage earners. Logistic regression is based on a loglinear model that allows one to examine the impact of categorical and continuous variables on the likelihood of being in one of two categories of a dichotomous dependent variable (Fienberg, 1985). The logistic regression coefficients indicate

the change in the log odds of one outcome vs. another outcome and are associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable. In addition, the impact of independent variables is a function of the values of other independent variables in the equation.

8.1 Independent and dependent variables

8.1.1 Secondary wage earners

Secondary wage earners include (1) mothers (female heads), (2) children, and (3) extended kin. If the female head was employed at any point during the survey year, mothers' employment was coded as 1; otherwise, mothers' employment was coded as 0. If at least one offspring (biological, step, or adopted) of the head couple was working at some point during the survey year, children's employment was coded as 1; if no working offspring were present, children's employment was coded as 0. Note, "children's employment" is a term used to describe the employment of offspring regardless of their age. If extended family households had at least one nonnuclear relative employed at some point during the survey year, extended kin employment was coded as 1; if no working extended kin were present, extended kin employment was coded as 0.

8.1.2 Husband's/father's labor force characteristics

The male head's labor force characteristics include the following variables: (1) number of weeks male head was unemployed (1900), (2) male head's occupational level (1900), and (3) wage income during the survey year (1936). Male head's occupational level was coded as a continuous variable from laborer (1) to professional (8).

8.1.3 Number, age, and gender composition of offspring

The number of children in the household, and age and gender composition of offspring of the head couple are used to measure child-rearing demands and developmentally based family tasks (i.e., family life cycle). Age composition of children is measured by a series of dichotomous variables (6 and under, 7–9, 10–14, and 15 years and over) where 1 indicates the presence of children in the specified age group, and 0 indicates their absence. Gender composition of households is the percent of children who were male. The number of children is a continuous variable.

8.1.4 Extended family structure

Households that included extended kin received a code of 1; otherwise, family structure was coded 0.

8.1.5 Supplemental income strategies and income

Measures of supplemental income strategies and income include the following: (1) boarding and lodging, (2) employment of secondary wage earners, (3) non-wage income (1936), and (4) public assistance (1936). If boarders and/or lodgers were present, they were coded as 1, if not, as 0.

Non-wage income included dollar earnings from miscellaneous sources including rent, informal insurance policies, gifts, and veterans' pensions. The receipt of public assistance (e.g., in-kind, cash) was coded as 1, and nonreceipt of public assistance, was coded as 0.

9 Findings

9.1 Employment of male heads and secondary wage earners

At the turn-of-the-century, the overwhelming majority (99%) of male heads were employed at some point during the year, with 25% experiencing intermittent employment (i.e., periods of both employment and unemployment). Although most husbands were employed, two-thirds of the families also relied on secondary wage earners. Forty-four percent of mothers (female heads) were employed, and most (83.2%) worked throughout the year. In families with children of employable age (10 years and older), over one-half (52.2%) relied on offspring as secondary wage earners. When children worked, three-quarters were employed throughout the survey year. Forty-four percent of extended family households also included a working relative, the majority (78.1%) of whom worked throughout the survey year. The internal labor force on which families relied varied noticeably between the robust turn-of-the-century economy and the depressed economy of the mid-1930s.

During the Depression decade, most male heads (95.8%) were employed at some point during the survey year; however, about 5% of men did not work at all, and 25% worked intermittently. Secondary wage earners remained important, with over one-half (54.2%) of the families relying on them, but the economic prospects of these family members were dimmer. The employment rate of mothers (female heads) was 39%, with 45.3% working intermittently during the survey year. Among families with children of employable age, 38% had working children. Fifty percent of working children were employed intermittently. About one-third of extended family households included working relatives and two-thirds worked throughout the year.

Although over one-half of the families sampled in 1936 relied on at least two wage earners, the median household income at US\$655 was well below the WPA standards for subsistence (Stern, 1943). The suggested emergency WPA budget for a family of two was US\$911. In Atlanta, the median income of a black family of four who did not receive relief was US\$760 (Stern, 1943, p. 88). Despite low family incomes, 77.7% of households sampled did not receive public assistance. Of the families who did receive relief, 38.5% received work relief, 16.5% received cash or in-kind relief, and 45% received a combination of benefits. The nation's economic crisis did not weaken the color line that defined the American South; New Deal policies could not uproot Jim Crow (Smith, 1988, pp. 232–234; Trotter & Lewis, 1996, pp. 169–175). Nell Blackshear (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 200), a black social worker, recalls: “There were no just hungry people. Even on relief you had to remember that you were black and they were white.”

10 Multivariate analyses

10.1 The mobilization of secondary wage earners: 1900

10.1.1 Employment of mothers

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, most black women in Atlanta worked as domestics (Hunter, 1997, p. 242). Jones (1985, p. 125) argues that southern black women were “trapped in the urban matrix of material deprivation and racial discrimination, black wives and mothers had to take whatever job they could find.” The work they could most often find, situated at the intersections of racial caste and gender inequality, was in domestic and personal service. Indeed, in 1900, 92% of employed black women who resided in Atlanta worked in domestic service. As Dorothy Bolden, who almost, 70 years later, organized the National Domestic Workers Union in Atlanta, noted, “you did not have no other avenue to go down.” (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 111) If money was needed, black women took what work was available and mothers found a way to manage their children and their homes.

Child-rearing demands, as measured by the presence of young children and the number of children, did not significantly affect mothers' employment in the families examined. However, when mothers only had younger children (under 15) and families relied on working offspring, women were more likely to be employed. Husbands' labor force characteristics were not related to the likelihood of their wives' employment (Table 1). Aside from children's work, alternative income strategies families may have engaged in (e.g., boarding and lodging, employed relatives) did not influence mothers' employment. Mothers' employment also did not vary in nuclear and extended family households. The absence of an impact of these indicators of the household family economy may reflect the low wages of husbands and the limited income generated from supplemental income sources. It may also speak to the ways in which black women organized their work and family life. Hunter (1996, p. 171) argues that women sought to “balance wage earning activities with other needs and obligations.” They did so by selecting certain types of domestic work (e.g., laundry work, day's work), having a fluid relationship to the job market, and switching jobs frequently. In 1900, over one-half of black working women were employed as laundresses. Although labor-intensive, laundry work provided flexibility, autonomy, the opportunity to work with other women, and allowed mothers to tend to child-care responsibilities. Hunter (1997, p. 57), in her work on black southern women's labor, suggests, “laundry work was the optimal choice for a black woman who wanted to create a life of her own.”

Table 1 Logistic regression: the employment of mothers, 1900N=432, $\chi^2=430.09$, df=419, P=.344.10.1.2 Children's employment

	Logit	S.E.
Husband's labor force characteristics		
Weeks husband unemployed	0.042	0.027
Skill level of husband's occupation	0.000	0.005
Children below employable age		
Children 6 and under	-0.058	0.153
Children 7-9	0.002	0.131
Children above employable age		
Children 10-14	0.027	0.135
Children 15 and over	-0.471**	0.183
Number of offspring	-0.038	0.050
Percent male offspring	0.000	0.001
Other economic strategies		
Children employed	0.623***	0.169
Boarders and lodgers	0.074	0.169
Extended kin employed	0.072	0.196
Extended family structure	-0.087	0.147
Intercept	4.76	0.206

*** $P \leq .01$, ** $P \leq .001$.

The following analysis is based on households with children of employable age (i.e., 10 years and older only). Fathers' labor force characteristics did not affect the likelihood that families would rely on their children's employment (Table 2). Households with employed mothers and larger numbers of children at home were more likely to have working children if older children (15 and over) and no younger siblings were present (under 14). However, gender composition of the children living at home did not affect the likelihood that families would rely on working children. The reliance on alternative income strategies and family structure did not significantly affect the families' reliance on children as secondary wage earners either.

Table 2 Logistic regression: the employment of children, a 1900N=393, $\chi^2=260.43$, $df=263$, $P=.53$.

	Logit	S.E.
Parent's labor force characteristics		
Weeks father unemployed	-0.013	0.042
Skill level of father's occupation	-0.003	0.008
Mother employed	0.600***	0.168
Children below employable age		
Children 6 and under	-0.443*	0.225
Children 7-9	-0.553*	0.211
Children of employable age		
Children 10-14	-0.669**	0.232
Children 15 and over	0.775***	0.233
Number of offspring in home	0.284***	0.074
Percent male offspring	0.003	0.002
Other economic strategies		
Boarders and lodgers	0.081	0.247
Employed extended kin	0.049	0.301
Extended family structure	0.027	0.207
Intercept	4.06	0.372

a Households with children 10 years and older.*** $P \leq .001$.* $P \leq .05$.** $P \leq .01$.

As was found by Goldin (1981, p. 300), children's employment was not related to their fathers' labor force characteristics but was linked more directly to their mothers' employment. Further,

whether families relied on children as secondary wage earners was affected by the characteristics of the children in the household. These findings suggest that we should consider two issues: who is available to work and where is this labor allocated. First, as a matter of availability and opportunity, having more children increases the likelihood that families will have one or more children who will successfully secure employment if it is sought. Second, the relationship between older children's employment and the presence of young siblings suggests that older children may have facilitated their mothers' employment by providing home-based support. That is, among these families, there appeared to be a substitution effect between mothers and children only in the provision of child care, not employment. When child-rearing demands were high, older children were more likely to stay home if their mothers worked. Dorothy Bolden (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 116) explains the role of older children in providing care for young siblings when mothers worked. She recalls how she managed care of a sick child while she worked: "If one [of your children] got sick, you had to keep the oldest child home. You couldn't afford to stay home, so they stayed home and kept the children." If mothers worked, and there were no young children needing care, families were also likely to rely on the wages of older children.

The relationship between children's and mothers' employment suggests that neither child-rearing demands nor the youth of potential child workers deterred families from seeking employment for these potential workers, if their wages were needed. Ella Martin, a former domestic (Kuhn et al., 1990, pp. 111–113), explains: "I became involved [in domestic work] when I was a young girl in Atlanta, nine years old. My father was a chauffeur and my mother was cook. And when she wasn't in her cooking job she did laundry at home ... You'd iron ... and you did everything ... — a whole family washing of a white person's family." Bose (1984, pp. 481–482) suggests that young adolescent girls were not preferred workers; however, if employed, female kin were likely to be in the labor force as well. Bose sees this pattern as an indicator of the extent of families' economic need. This pattern may also reflect occupational networking between mothers, daughters, and female kin (Goldin, 1981, p. 302). In Atlanta, black girls were most often hired as general housemaids and child nurses (Hunter, 1997, p. 51). When we look at the employment of young children (e.g., 10–14) in this sample, especially girls, many were involved in some form of domestic work (e.g., nursing, laundering), which may have consisted of aiding parents or working in the same households with their mothers.

10.1.3 Extended kin employment

In extended family households where older children (15 and over) of the host family were not present and the extended kin present were in their prime employment years (15 to 49), households were more likely to include employed relatives (Table 3). Having more male relatives did not increase the likelihood of the presence of working extended kin. Indices of the family economy and child-rearing demands of the host family, for the most part, did not directly affect the employment of extended kin. These findings may reflect the diverse circumstances under which relatives came to live with extended kin and the dual functions of extended living arrangements — that is, either to help or be helped (Hunter, 1993, pp. 232–234). In addition, the

model used to explain employment among nuclear family members may not be appropriate for looking at extended kin. It is likely that more details about extended kin members (e.g., marital and parental status) and their relationship (e.g., kinship tie, generational position) to the head couple may be needed. The impact of older children on extended kin employment may be a marker for the circumstances under which households may be extended; for example, older children are more likely to have children themselves, so the source of extension is more likely to be dependent relatives.

Table 3 Logistic regression: the employment of extended kin, 1900N=100, $\chi^2=97.21$, $df=87$, $P=.212$.

	Logit	S.E.
Head couple's labor force characteristics		
Weeks male head unemployed	-0.109	0.068
Skill level of male head's occupation	-0.012	0.011
Female head employed	0.279	0.259
Ages of head couple's offspring		
Children 6 and under	-0.536	0.353
Children 7-9	-0.320	0.331
Children 10-14	-0.429	0.331
Children 15 and over	-1.05*	0.501
Household Size	0.129	0.097
Characteristics of extended kin		
Percent male relatives	-0.000	-0.003
Percent ages 15-49 years old	0.010***	0.002
Other economic strategies		
Boarders and lodgers	0.252	0.327
Children employed	0.154	0.448
Intercept	5.23	0.705
* $P \leq .05$.		
*** $P \leq .001$.		

In sum, at the turn-of-the-century, mothers' and children's employment were intertwined through work, the need for income, and the negotiation of domestic and child-care responsibilities. It appears that children had dual roles as workers and domestic support. Interestingly, the predictors of children's employment reveal more about how domestic and child-rearing demands were reconciled than the investigation of the employment of mothers. The employment of extended kin was also linked to the presence of older children and the ages of relatives, with younger children and the elderly being less likely to be employed. Fathers' labor force characteristics did not directly affect the employment of secondary wage earners. This may be a function of the general measures used and/or limited variation in black husbands' labor force characteristics.

10.2 The mobilization of secondary wage earners: 1936

10.2.1 Employment of mothers

E. T. Lewis' (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 201) sardonic observation that black folk were already in a depression before the national economic crisis speaks to the bleak economic conditions endured

by most southern blacks. Still, the Great Depression turned the prospects of many black Atlantans from bad to worse (Bayor, 1996, pp. 96–106; Smith, 1988, pp. 20–21). However, women's employment would remain a critical strategy for black families as they weathered the economic crisis. In 1930, 57% of black women in Atlanta were employed, more than three times the rate of white women (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 111). Despite the economic crisis, black women worked as domestic and personal servants, mostly in private homes. The irony of the racial caste system in the south was that black women faced virtually no competition from white women in private domestic service, and because wages were so low, it was not uncommon for white families with modest incomes to hire help (Hunter, 1997, pp. 109–110; Jones, 1985, pp. 127–132; Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 113).

Private domestic service placed enormous demands on women's time. Alice Adams (Kuhn et al., 1990, p. 113), who worked in Atlanta as a domestic from age 14, describes her day: “I would leave home early in the morning, [be] on the job at seven, leave this job at seven, then get home around eight. You'd leave home in the dark, get back at dark. You never knew what home looked like ...” Women had to find a way to work and care for their families; for many black families, there were no viable alternatives. Among the households examined during the Depression era, husbands' earnings and the ages of children in the home affected mothers' employment. In households where husbands earned less money and there were children between 10 and 14 years old, but none older, mothers were more likely to be employed (Table 4). However, mothers' employment was not affected by the presence of younger children or their gender. The families' reliance on children's employment, alternative income-generating strategies, or public aid also did not significantly affect the likelihood of mothers' employment. Finally, mothers' employment did not vary in nuclear and extended families.

Table 4 Logistic regression: the employment of mothers, 1936N=393, $\chi^2=396.61$, $df=379$, $P=.257$.

	Logit	S.E.
Husband's income	-0.001***	0.001
Non-wage income	-0.001	0.002
Public assistance	0.025	0.087
Age of offspring at home		
Children 6 and under	-0.187	0.163
Children 7-9	0.138	0.151
Children 10-14	0.522***	0.148
Children 15 and over	-0.354*	0.163
Number of offspring	-0.140**	0.051
Percent male offspring	-0.046	0.159
Other economic strategies		
Children employed	-0.046	0.159
Boarders and lodgers	0.037	0.176
Extended kin employed	-0.018	0.233
Extended family structure	-0.028	0.160
Intercept	5.24	0.194
*** $P \leq .001$.		
* $P \leq .05$.		
** $P \leq .01$.		

Fewer families relied on children as secondary wage earners than at the turn-of-the-century; however, older children remained a critical factor in mothers' employment. If money was needed and there were no older children present (15 and older), mothers were more likely to work if there were children who were old enough (10–14 years old) to provide some child-care assistance and/or care for themselves. Unlike the 1900 households sampled, this pattern suggests a direct substitution in the labor force participation of mothers and older children (15 and older). However, mothers' employment does not significantly affect families' reliance on working children. Perhaps, this is the result of the declining ability of mothers to secure employment for themselves and their offspring during the Great Depression. These patterns may also reflect a shift in the role of children in the family economy. That is, the opening up of elementary and secondary schooling opportunities across racial lines and the institution of child labor laws both affected parental perceptions of the appropriateness of children's work, as well as opportunities for employment (Anderson, 1988, pp. 179–181; Elman, 1993; Horan & Hargis, 1991). Indeed, by 1940, southern black children were attending school at the same rate as their white counterparts (Anderson, 1988, pp. 180–181).

10.2.2 Children's employment

Nuclear family households with more children, all 15 and older, were more likely to have employed children (Table 5). There was also a trend toward households with more male children increasing the likelihood of children's employment. Mothers' employment, fathers' labor force characteristics, and other measures of economic resources did not significantly affect families' reliance on employed children. The lack of influence of both mothers' and fathers' labor force characteristics is somewhat surprising. Perhaps within the context of a declining economy, factors that may push children into the work force may not result in employment if no jobs are available. In addition to the declining economy, fundamental transformations in the role of children in the household family economy may have changed the relationship between family need and the use of children as workers.

Table 5 Logistic regression: the employment of children, 1936N=270, $\chi^2=268.34$, $df=256$, $P=.286$.

	Logit	S.E.
Parents' labor force characteristics		
Father's income	-0.000	0.000
Mother employed	-0.028	0.162
Non-wage income	-0.000	0.000
Public Assistance	0.099	0.118
Children below employable age		
Children 6 and under	-0.613**	0.234
Children 7-9	-0.455 †	0.241
Children of employable age		
Children 10-14	-0.523*	0.223
Children 15 and over	1.03**	0.404
Number of Offspring in Home	0.207****	0.065
Percent Male Offspring	0.003 †	0.002
Other economic strategies		
Boarders and lodgers	-0.441	0.279
Employed extended kin	-0.457	0.303
Extended family structure	-0.471**	0.201
Intercept	3.32	0.447
** P≤.01.		
† P≤.10.		
* P≤.05.		
**** P≤.001.		

Nuclear families with many older children, mostly male, may have been able to secure children's employment when jobs were few. The fact that extended family households were less likely to have working children may tell us something about whose families were likely to take in during the Great Depression. Although the type and distribution of relatives living in extended families did not vary across the 2 survey years, there may have been more subtle differences in family extension that would tie the employment of offspring and family structure. For example, married adult offspring with or without children may have been less able to set up independent households because of unemployment, and thus, either remained at home or returned, thereby creating an extended family household. Alternatively, families with mostly young and nonworking children may have been more likely to take in relatives as a source of child-care help or of income. Although the employment of relatives did not significantly affect the likelihood of children's employment, the direction of the relationship between them was negative.

10.2.3 Extended kin employment

Larger extended family households, with no young offspring present (aged 7–9) and more extended kin (15–49), were more likely to have employed relatives (Table 6). As was true in 1900, household members in their prime employment years (15–49) were more advantaged in the market place than the very old or very young. In addition, larger households increase demands on economic resources and also provide more potential kin workers. It is unclear why only young children (7–9) would decrease the likelihood of relative employment; however, this variable may tap the potential child-care function of relatives. That is, if families took in nonworking relatives, one way to contribute to the family economy was through domestic chores. These findings and the relationship between family structure and offspring (noted above) suggest that, under the press of severe economic hardship, it was likely that taking in kin varied as a family and economic strategy.

Table 6 Logistic regression: the employment of extended kin, 1936N=95, $\chi^2=77.24$, $df=81$, $P=.598$.

	Logit	S.E.
Head couple's labor force characteristics		
Male's head income	-0.000	0.000
Female head employed	0.232	0.318
Non-wage income	-0.002	0.002
Public Assistance	-0.348	0.265
Ages of head couple's offspring		
Children 6 and under	-0.541	0.366
Children 7-9	-0.803*	0.381
Children 10-14	-0.206	0.366
Children 15 and over	-0.264	0.350
Household size	0.320*	0.099
Characteristics of extended kin		
Percent male relatives	-0.004	0.003
Percent ages 15-49 years old	0.012***	0.003
Other economic strategies		
Boarders and lodgers	0.080	0.534
Children employed	-0.443	0.412
Intercept	3.49	0.665
* $P \leq .05$.		
*** $P \leq .001$.		

In sum, during this period of economic uncertainty and crisis, the relationship between parental labor force characteristics and children's employment was tenuous. Mothers' and children's characteristics influenced each other's employment, albeit in different ways than was seen with the 1900 sample. But, importantly, factors affecting families' reliance on both mothers' and children's employment continued to illustrate how families managed domestic demands to send mothers or older children to work. When income was considered, fathers' wages affected the likelihood of mothers' employment, but not children's employment. In a context where jobs were scarce, however, having many children who were desirable workers (older and male) increased the likelihood that families would have working offspring. Extended kin were only minimally affected by the characteristics of the host families, but larger household size and the prime age of relatives were related to increased opportunity for employment.

11 Conclusions

During the early twentieth century, black Atlantans raised families and labored under the weight of Jim Crow and unrelenting racial discrimination. What black families lacked in opportunity and wealth they had to make up in the exploitation of human resources. To make ends meet, black families routinely relied on secondary wage earners to supplement the wages of the male head. When faced with limited resources, the decisions families made about the employment of mothers, children, and extended kin illustrate not only how they responded to economic need, but also how they negotiated family demands and obligations.

On average, the husbands and fathers studied were at the peak of their earning capacity (Bodnar et al., 1982, p. 107). Almost all of the male heads were employed at some point during the year, yet about one out of four experienced intermittent unemployment. In the 1900 sample, the

indices of male heads' labor force characteristics did not affect the mobilization of secondary wage earners. Although similar non-wage measures have been successfully used elsewhere (e.g., Bose, 1984; Goldin, 1981; Horan & Hargis, 1991), these indicators may have been too broad or the variance too constrained to capture black men's economic contributions and/or their economic troubles. It is also noteworthy that alternative income strategies, from boarding to public assistance, did not significantly affect the mobilization of secondary wage earners. This may be indicative of the intensity of families' need for extra income and/or the meagerness of the monies generated from non-wage avenues. When wage data were available for husbands (1936), it only affected the employment of their wives. To more closely access the direct effects of fathers' employment, it may be useful to consider other indicators of husbands' economic contribution (e.g., wages as proportion of subsistence-level income).

Perhaps families' reliance on secondary wage earners reflected not only the depressed wages or the unemployment of the male head, but also the tenuousness of his employment. At the outset of this article, it was argued that to look at women and children as secondary wage earners recognizes not only the realities of family life early in this century, but also reflects the social organization of families and employment opportunities as determined by age and gender. The elusiveness of a family wage and secure employment for black husbands, however, muddy these conceptual waters. The employment of black women during the early twentieth century is unremarkable by today's standards, but it flew in the face of white and middle-class conventions and experiences of the day. Across age groups, the employment rate of the women sampled varied little. This suggests that, at some point, women were likely to combine work and motherhood, and husbands would share the role of breadwinner. Although male heads retained their economic superiority in most black households, their wives were an important linchpin in the family economy. For this time period, there was an extraordinary partnership between black husbands and wives as they shared the role of breadwinner.

As Goldin (1981) found, families' reliance on the employment of children was most influenced by their mothers' employment and the age composition of the children in the household. The relationship between mothers' and children's employment is illustrative of the ways in which families balanced the need for work with family demands. For example, at the turn-of-the-century, mothers' and children's employment was positively related, while other characteristics of her children had no impact on a woman's employment. But if mothers worked, families relied on children as secondary wage earners only if older children and no younger siblings were present. A direct relationship between mothers' and children's employment was not found in 1936, but when income was needed, older children enabled mothers with young children to seek employment. These findings suggest that a mother's employment was not simply determined by child-rearing demands, but also by her children's potential roles as workers and caretakers.

Several studies have found that children's gender affected the relationship between mothers' and children's employment (Bose, 1984; Goldin, 1981), whether children were likely to go to work or to school (Elman, 1993; Horan & Hargis, 1991; Walters & Briggs, 1993), and the impact of

younger siblings on the employment of older teenagers in the household (Bose, 1984; Elman, 1993; Goldin, 1981). In the families studied, gender affected children's employment rates to some degree. Sons, 15–19 years old, were more likely to be employed than daughters, but no gender differences existed when children were less than 15 years old. However, this study did not predict individual children's employment rate, but rather, whether families would use the employment of any offspring as an economic strategy. From the vantage point of the household, the age and number of children were more important than their gender. For the most part, gender composition of children had no impact on families' reliance on any type of secondary wage earners. The exception was during the Great Depression, when families with older male children were more likely to have employed offspring.

Bodnar et al. (1982, pp. 91–93) suggest that because of black parents' awareness of the economic struggles their children would likely face as adults, they were less willing to rely on children's wages than were native and immigrant white parents. Without a legacy of economic stability to pass on, parents socialized their children toward independence and encouraged adult offspring to set up independent households if they could afford to do so. Indeed, black children did leave home earlier than their white counterparts (Bodnar et al., 1982, pp. 9–94; Goldin, 1981, pp. 303–304); however, a substantial number of families relied on the employment of children who lived at home. Hence, one of the major shifts in the household family economy during the early twentieth century was the transformation of the economic role of children. The combination of changes in the economic sector (e.g., child labor laws, availability of jobs for youth), social structure (e.g., increasing educational opportunity for blacks), and parental preferences likely account for the decline in children's employment as the twentieth century wore on. Importantly, the changes in mothers' and children's employment across the time points surveyed suggest that the shifts in children's employment placed more emphasis on the economic role of their mothers and changed how black families negotiated family-based developmental demands with the need to maximize wage earning.

This study also examined the impact of family structure on mothers' and children's employment and predictors of the employment of nonnuclear kin in extended family households. Although the importance of the black extended family is well documented, family structure only had an impact on children's employment during the Great Depression. The key issue in the employment of relatives was age, with the very young and the old less likely to work. Other characteristics of the family (i.e., size, children's age) were important as well, but the model tested may have overlooked many nuances of extended families suggested by the relationships found. Extended family living arrangements occur under diverse circumstances. Some relatives are passing through, and others plan a more prolonged stay, some are in need of help and others offer it. Perhaps the diversity in extended family households makes the impact of extended kin on the family economy and the economic strategies families use more difficult to assess. In addition, because of a sense of commitment and obligation, families may make decisions about kin that make no economic sense. Given these family complexities, one approach to better assess the

impact or role of extended kin is to include variables that will more clearly describe them (e.g., parental status, marital status) and their relationship to the host family.

In conclusion, this study both illustrates black families' reliance on secondary wage earners and provides some insights into how these families tried to address the pressing problem of economic survival to which W. E. B. DuBois (1996) referred. As suggested by family economic and developmental models, these families sought to meet economic needs and respond to family demands when they sent mothers, children, and extended kin to work. What is also evident is that these other breadwinners had different, yet complementary roles in the black family economy of the urban south.

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