
The Black Family In 1910

"Racial Differences in Household and Family Structure at the Turn of the Century" by S. Philip Morgan, Antonio McDaniel, Andrew T. Miller, and Samuel H. Preston, in *American Journal of Sociology* (Jan. 1993), 5835 S. Kimbark, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

More than half of all black children today live in female-headed families, while nearly four in five white children live in two-parent families. In recent years, many conservatives and some liberals have concluded, as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D.-N.Y.) presciently put it in his then-controversial 1965 report, *The Negro Family*, that "the weakness of the family structure" was "at the center of the tangle of pathology" in the black community. But some influential specialists have argued otherwise. University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson, in his much-noted 1987 book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, depicted the rise of the mother-only black family as a result of joblessness among black males and other developments since World War II. Historical research, Wilson claimed, "demonstrates that neither slavery, nor economic deprivation, nor the migration to urban areas affected black family structure by the first quarter of the 20th century."

But Morgan and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania report that data recently made available from the 1910 U.S. census show that a clear black-white difference in family structure did exist. Whereas an estimated 22 percent of black mothers living with children did not have husbands present in 1910, only seven percent of white mothers were without husbands. In addition, some 15 percent of black children under age 14 were not living with their mothers, compared with less than seven percent of white children. (Presumably, the mothers were unmarried or widowed, and the children were living with relatives or friends.)

Most African Americans in 1910 lived in the rural South. In the 13 cities with the largest numbers of blacks, the proportion of female-headed families was larger: 35 percent of black mothers lived without husbands, com-

pared with 11 percent of white mothers.

"The cultural, social, and economic history of African Americans is radically different from that of white Americans," the authors conclude. "It should not be surprising that their family structures have persistently reflected some measure of those differences throughout the 20th century."

The Date Rape Debate

"Date Rape's Other Victims" by Katie Roiphe, in *The New York Times Magazine* (June 13, 1993), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

The national campaign against "date rape" has had its share of conservative and centrist critics, who warn that the definition of this new crime often includes many instances of what used to be called seduction. Roiphe makes a similar complaint—but on feminist grounds.

"By viewing rape as encompassing more than the use or threat of physical violence to coerce someone into sex," the Princeton graduate student writes, "rape-crisis feminists reinforce traditional views about the fragility of the female body and will."

Campus feminists who crusade against "date rape" and "sexual harassment," Roiphe says, "produce endless images of women as victims—women offended by a professor's dirty joke, women pressured into sex by peers, women trying to say no but not managing to get it across." In short, it seems, women are delicate creatures—just as the 1950s ideal of woman held them to be, Roiphe says. It was that ideal of the passive and innocent female that her mother (Anne Roiphe, author of the 1971 novel *Up the Sandbox*) and other feminist women of her generation fought against.

"There would never be a rule or a law or even a pamphlet or peer counseling group for men who claimed to have been emotionally raped or verbally pressured into sex," Roiphe points out. "And for the same reasons—assumption of basic competence, free will, and strength of character—there should be no such rules or groups or pamphlets about women."