Center for Research on Women

Our Mothers' Grief:
Racial Ethnic Women
and the Maintenance of Families

Bonnie Thornton Dill
University of Maryland
May, 1986

Research Paper #4

OUR MOTHERS' GRIEF: RACIAL ETHNIC WOMEN AND THE MAINTENANCE OF FAMILIES

By

Bonnie Thornton Dill
Women's Studies Program
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

Published by the
Center for Research on Women
Memphis State University
Memphis, TN 38152
(901) 678-2770

The research in this paper was supported in part by a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Inter-University Research Group Exploring the Intersection of Gender and Race. The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions of her co-investigators: Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Elizabeth Higginbotham and Ruth Zambrana.

Copyright 1986 by Bonnie Thornton Dill

Not for reproduction or quotation without permission of the author.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..............................................1  
REPRODUCTIVE LABOR FOR WHITE WOMEN IN EARLY AMERICAN ..........6  
REPRODUCTIVE LABOR AMONG RACIAL-ETHNICS IN EARLY AMERICA ....14  
AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVES ..................................15  
CHINESE SOJOURNERS .........................................27  
CHICANOS ......................................................32  
CONCLUSION: OUR MOTHERS’ GRIEF .............................44  
BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................49
Introduction

The nature and organization of women's reproductive labor in the family has been central to the explanation of women's oppression developed among feminist theorists. The term "reproductive labor" is used to refer to all of the work of women in the home. This includes, but is not limited to: the buying and preparation of food and clothing, provision of emotional support and nurturance for all family members, bearing children, and planning, organizing and carrying out a wide variety of tasks associated with their socialization. All of these activities are necessary for the growth of patriarchal capitalism because they maintain, sustain, stabilize and reproduce (both biologically and socially) the labor force.

The theoretical distinction between productive and reproductive labor is crucial to feminist discussions of the development of separate spheres of male and female labor during the 19th century which led to the increased confinement of White

1. Feminist theory actually has many different strains which are not well represented by such a global construct. For the purposes of this discussion, the term "feminist theory" refers to that group of theorists whom Sokoloff (1980) identifies as "Later Marxist Feminists" or feminist theorists of patriarchal capitalism (Chapter 5).
wives to reproductive labor in the home. Yet, if we consider this concept, with the lives of racial-ethnic women in mind, then we must acknowledge that in order for their families to reproduce their labor force, racial-ethnic wives often had to leave the home and enter some form of market work. Thus, the reproductive labor of racial-ethnic wives occurs both inside and outside the domestic sphere and the distinctions between productive and reproductive labor are not as clearly or sharply drawn.

Of primary importance to any discussion of the families and specific roles of racial-ethnic women in families during the 18th and 19th centuries is the fact that as a group, racial-ethnic people were participants in a colonial labor system designed to extract maximum profit from individual laborers. Families were a source of concern and interest to the extent that their presence could enhance or interfere with the growth of profits. As second class citizens, aliens, and participants in a colonial labor force, racial-ethnics were subject to economic, political and social domination. The implications of these factors for women's reproductive labor for the family is, first and foremost, that racial-ethnic women performed their reproductive labor for families that were subjected to a variety of forms of cultural assault.

Cultural assaults, according to Caulfield (1974) are benign and systematic attacks on the institutions and forms of social
rganization that are fundamental to the maintenance and flourishing of a group's culture. The family is generally acknowledged as a critical institution in the maintenance and perpetuation of culture. In many societies, and particularly in 18th century China, Mexico and Western Africa, the family was an important source of legal and political power. In all societies it is the major instrument for organizing male-female relationships and relationships among different generations. In addition, as the primary mechanism for socialization, it teaches children their place in society and is critical in the reproduction of social relations. In 18th and 19th century America, the role of the family was even more expansive than it is today, since many of the functions which are now performed by a variety of 'new' social institutions were then performed within the family. Because of its vast potential for affecting all areas of a group's social life, the family-- in a colonial situation-- becomes an important institution for colonizer control.

The need for the colonizer to control or manage the growth and development of the family institution among the colonized suggests an alternative conceptualization of family: one where it is seen not merely as a conservative institution, retaining and transmitting traditional values, but as an active force in which culture is created. This conceptualization of family is
suggested by Caulfield (1974) in her argument that families can be sources of resistance to colonization. As a central unit in the reproduction of social relations, the families of the colonized could threaten the maintenance of the colonial system of authority if children are socialized to question or criticize it. According to Caulfield (1974):

We must look not only at the ways in which the colonizer acts to break down family solidarity but also the ways in which the colonized--women, men and children--act to maintain, consolidate and build anew the basic units in which children can grow and be enculturated in the values and relationships that are independent of and in opposition to the imperial culture (Caulfield, 1974:73).

The maintenance of families and of sets of values which support, promote and encourage family life among Afro-Americans, Chicanos and Chinese Americans during the 18th and 19th centuries is testimony to the ability of these men, women, and children to resist oppression. Faced with a political economy that denied their rights to have families and to utilize the family institution as a basis for participation in the social order, they created alternative structures which allowed them to have a...
degree of cultural autonomy.

In sharp contrast with the experiences of White women during this period, racial-ethnic women perform their reproductive labor for families that are denied legal, social and economic standing in the society. As a result, their roles as wives, mothers and daughters are doubly jeopardized. They must struggle to maintain family units in the face of policies, laws and programs that were designed either to deny or minimize their mere existence. Since families and family-like groupings were one of the few, and often only, institutional resource available to racial-ethnics during this period, they were important potential springboards for political action, cultural resistance, community organization and individual mobility. Racial-ethnic women struggled individually and collectively, with other women and with men, to keep these units alive and viable. Their active participation in this struggle resulted in their having a degree of freedom and autonomy not granted to White women. At the same time, however, they faced varying degrees of exploitation, exclusion and denial both within their family units and within the wider society. Their low status as women in a patriarchal society was compounded by the negative social status assigned to their racial-ethnic group.

This paper examines the nature and social organization of racial-ethnic women's reproductive labor in the family. It
begins with a brief description of reproductive labor for White families in early America and uses that as a point of contrast for examining reproductive labor among Afro-American, Chinese and Mexican American women during the 19th century. It is particularly focused upon the ways in which women's work in maintaining the family becomes a source of cultural resistance. It documents the ways women worked to resist a social, legal and economic system that either denied the existence of families or seriously curtailed their growth and development.

Reproductive Labor for White Women in Early America

In 18th and 19th century America, the lives of White women in the United States were circumscribed within a legal and social system based upon patriarchal authority. This authority took two forms: public and private. As Catherine Stimpson (1980) describes it: "patriarchy refers both to families that fathers dominate and large structures like the state that men regulate." For White women, their social, legal and economic position in the society was defined in terms of their relationship to families headed by men (private patriarchy). There were virtually no work opportunities outside families for married White women during this period. The society was structured to confine White wives to reproductive labor within the domestic sphere. At the same time, the formation, preservation and protection of families
among White settlers was seen as crucial to the growth and development of American society. Building, maintaining and supporting families was a concern of the State and of those organizations that prefigured the State. Thus, while white women had few legal rights as women, they were acknowledged and supported in their family roles of wives and mothers because they were vital instruments for building American society (public patriarchy).

The groundwork for public patriarchal support of women's family roles was laid during the colonial period. As early as 1619, the London Company began planning for the importation of single women into the colonies to marry colonists, form families and provide the basis for a permanent settlement. The objective was:

> to make the men more settled and lesse moveable who by defect thereof (as is credibly reported) stay there but to gette some thing and then return for England.' Such instability, would 'breed a dissolucon, and so an overthrow of the Plantation' (Spruill, 1972:8).

In accordance with this recognition of the importance of families, The London Company provided the economic basis necessary for the development of the family as a viable and
essential institution within the nascent social structure of the colonies. Shares of land were allotted for both husbands and wives in recognition of the fact that "in a new plantation it is not known whether man or women be the most necessary" (cited in Spruill, 1972:9).

This pattern of providing an economic base designed to attract, promote and maintain families was followed in the other colonial settlements. Lord Baltimore of Maryland offered to each adventurer a hundred acres for himself, a hundred for his wife, fifty for each child, a hundred for each man servant, and sixty for a woman servant. Women heads of families were treated just as men (Spruill, 1972:11).

In Georgia, which appealed to poorer classes for settlers than did Virginia or Maryland, "among the advantages they offered men to emigrate was the gainful employment of their wives and children" (Spruill, 1972:16).

In colonial America, white women were seen as vital contributors to the stabilization and growth of society. They were therefore accorded some legal and economic recognition through a patriarchal family structure.

While colonial life remained hard, women in America probably had better health, more favorable living
conditions, higher status, and greater opportunity to improve their lot than did those who remained in Europe. American women married earlier, were less restricted by dowries, and often had legal protection for themselves and their children in antenuptial contracts (Kennedy, 1979:7).

Throughout the colonial period, women's reproductive labor in the family was an integral part of the daily operation of small scale family farms or artisan's shops. According to Kessler-Harris (1981:22), while a gender based division of labor was common, it was not rigid. The participation of women in work that was essential to family survival reinforced the importance of their contributions to both the protection of the family and the growth of the society.

Between the end of the Eighteenth and the mid-Nineteenth century, what was labeled the "modern American family" developed. The growth of industrialization and an urban middle class, along with the accumulation of agrarian wealth among Southern planters, had two results which are patricianly pertinent to this discussion. First, class differentiation increased and sharpened and with it, distinctions in the content and nature of women's family lives. Second, the organization of industrial labor resulted in the separation of home and family and the assignment
to women of a separate sphere of activity focused upon childcare and home maintenance. While men's activities became increasingly focused upon the industrial competitive sphere of work: women's activities were increasingly confined to the care of children, the nurturing of husband, and the physical maintenance of the home. Moreover, it was not unusual to refer to women as the 'angels of the house,' for they were responsible for the ethical and spiritual character as well as the comfort and tranquility of the home. In that role they were the acknowledged superiors of men (Degler, 1980:26).

This separate sphere of domesticity and piety, labeled by some as the cult of true womanhood (Welter, 1966) became both an ideal for all White women as well as a source for important distinctions between them. As Matthei (1982) points out, tied to this notion of wife as homemaker is a definition of masculinity in which the husband's successful role performance was measured by his ability to keep his wife in the homemaker role. The entry of White women into the labor force came to be seen as reflective of the husband's inability to fulfill his responsibilities.

For wealthy and middle class women, the growth of the domestic sphere offered a potential for creative development as
homemakers and mothers. Given ample financial support from their husband's earnings, some of these women were able to concentrate their energies on the development and elaboration of the more intangible elements of this separate sphere. They were also able to hire other women to perform the daily tasks such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, and ironing. Kessler-Harris (1981) cautions however, that the separation of productive labor from the home, did not seriously diminish the amount of physical drudgery associated with housework, even for middle class women.

It did relegate the continuing hard work to second place, transforming the public image of the household by the 1820s and 1830s from a place where productive labor was performed to one whose main goals were the preservation of virtue and morality. . . Many of the 'well-run' homes of the pre-Civil War period seem to have been the dwellings of overworked women. Short of household help, without modern conveniences, and frequently pregnant, these women complained bitterly of their harsh existence (1981:39).

In effect, household labor was transformed from economic productivity done by members of the family group to home maintenance, childcare and moral uplift done by an isolated woman who perhaps supervised some servants.
Working class White women experienced this same transformation but their families' acceptance of the domestic code meant that their labor in the home intensified. Given the meager earnings of working class men during this period, working class families had to develop alternative strategies to both survive and keep the wives at home. The result was that working class women's reproductive labor increased to fill the gap between family need and family income. Matthei (1982) identifies several major ways in which working class women accomplished this: by limiting family consumption; by increasing their own production of household goods through canning, sewing, etc.; and through other sources of income including taking in boarders and taking in work that could be done in the home. A final and very important source of other income was wages earned by the participation of sons and daughters in the labor force. In fact, it has been argued that "the domestic homemaking of married women was supported by the labors of their daughters" (Matthei, 1982:130).

The question arises: Why did White working class families sacrifice other aspects of this 19th century notion of family, such as privacy and the protection of children, to keep wives as homemakers within the home? Zaretzky (1978) provides a possible answer.

The Victorian emphasis on the sanctity of the
family, and on the autonomy of women within the family marked an advance for women of all classes over the interdependent but male dominated subsistence farm of the 18th century. . . . most of women's adult life was taken up with childrearing. As a result, a special respect for her place within the home, and particularly for her childrearing activities was appreciated by working class women (p. 211).

Another way in which White women's family roles were socially acknowledged and protected was through the existence of a separate sphere for women. The code of domesticity, attainable by affluent women became an ideal toward which non-affluent women aspired. Notwithstanding the personal constraints placed on women's development, the notion of separate spheres promoted the growth and stability of family life among the White middle class and became the basis for working class men's efforts to achieve wages which would permit their wives to remain at home. Also, women gained a distinct sphere of authority and expertise which yielded them special recognition.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American society accorded considerable importance to the development and sustenance of White families. As primary laborers in the
reproduction and maintenance of family life, White women were acknowledged and accorded the privileges and protections deemed socially appropriate to their family roles. This argument does not deny the fact that the patriarchal family denied these women many rights and privileges and seriously constrained their growth and development. Because women gained social recognition mostly through their membership in families, their rights were few and privileges subject to the will of the male head of the household. Nevertheless, the recognition of women's reproductive labor as an essential building block of the family, combined with a view of the family as the cornerstone of the nation, distinguishes the White, dominant culture experiences from that of racial-ethnics.

Thus, in its founding, American society initiated legal, economic and social practices designed to promote the growth of family life among White colonists. The reception colonial families found in the United States contrasts sharply with the lack of attention given to the families of racial-ethnics. Although the presence of racial-ethnics was equally as important for the growth of the nation, their political, economic, legal and social status was quite different.

Reproductive Labor Among Racial-Ethnics in Early America

Unlike White women, racial-ethnic women experienced the
oppressions of a patriarchal society (public patriarchy) but were
denied the protections and buffering of a patriarchal family
(private patriarchy). Their families sustained cultural
assaults as a direct result of the organization of the labor
systems in which their group participated. Racial-ethnics were
brought to this country to meet the need for a cheap and
exploitable labor force. Little attention was give to their
family and community life except as it related to their economic
productivity. Labor, and not the existence or maintenance of
families was the critical aspect of their role in building the
nation. Thus, they were denied the social structural supports
necessary to make their families a vital element in the social
order. Family membership was not a key means of access to
participation in the wider society. The lack of social, legal
and economic support for racial-ethnic families intensified and
extended women's reproductive labor, created tensions and strains
in family relationships, and set the stage for a variety of
creative and adaptive forms of resistance.

African-American Slaves

Among students of slavery, there has been considerable
debate over the relative "harshness" of American slavery and the
degree to which slaves were permitted or encouraged to form
families. It is generally acknowledged that many slaveowners
found it economically advantageous to encourage family formation as a way of reproducing and perpetuating the slave labor force. This became increasingly true after 1807 when the importation of African slaves was explicitly prohibited. However, the existence of these families and many aspects of their functioning were directly controlled by the master. In other words, slaves married and formed families but these groupings existed only until "death or buckra (master) part you" (cited in Degler, 1980:114). One study has estimated that about 32% of all recorded slave marriages were disrupted by sale; about 45% by death of a spouse, about 10% by choice and the remaining 13% were not disrupted at all (Blassingame, 1972:90-92). African slaves thus quickly learned that they had a limited degree of control over the formation and maintenance of their marriages and could not be assured of keeping their children with them. The threat of disruption was perhaps the most direct and pervasive cultural assault on families which slaves encountered. Yet, there were a number of other aspects of the slave system which reinforced the "subject" nature of slave family life.

In contrast to some African traditions and the Euro-American patterns of the period, slave men were not the main provider or authority figure in the family. The mother-child tie was most basic and of greatest interest to the slave owner because it was critical in the reproduction of the labor force.
In addition to the lack of authority and economic roles granted to the husband-father in the slave family, use of the rape of women slaves as a weapon of terror and control further undermined the integrity of the slave family.

It would be a mistake to regard the institutionalized pattern of rape during slavery as an expression of White men's sexual urges, otherwise stifled by the specter of White womanhood's chastity. . .Rape was a weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women's will to resist, and in the process, to demoralize their men (Davis, 1981:23-24).

The slave family, therefore, was at the heart of a peculiar tension in the master-slave relationship. On the one hand, slaveowners sought to encourage familial ties among slaves because, as Matthei (1982) states: "these provided the basis of the development of the slave into a self-conscious socialized human being" (p. 81). They also hoped and believed that this socialization process would help children learn to accept their place in society as slaves. Yet, the master's need to control and intervene in the familial life of the slaves is indicative of the other side of this tension. Family ties had the potential
for becoming a competing and more potent source of allegiance than the slavemaster himself. Also, kin were as likely to socialize children in forms of resistance as in acts of compliance.

It was within this context of surveillance, assault, and ambivalence that slave women's reproductive labor took place. She and her menfolk had the difficult task of preserving the human and family ties that would ultimately give them a reason for living. They had to socialize their children to believe in the possibility of a life in which they were not enslaved. The slave women's labor on behalf of the family was, as Davis (1971) has pointed out, the only labor the slave engaged in that could not be directly appropriated by the slave owner for his own profit. Yet, its indirect appropriation, as labor crucial to the reproduction of the slaveowner's labor force, was the source of strong ambivalence for many slave women. So, while some mothers killed their babies to keep them from being slaves, many sought within the family sphere a degree of autonomy and creativity denied them in other realms of the society. The maintenance of a distinct African-American culture is testimony to the ways in which slaves maintained a degree of cultural autonomy and resisted the creation of a slave family that only served the needs of the master.

Herbert Gutman (1976) in his landmark study, The Black
Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 provides evidence of the ways in which slaves expressed a unique Afro-American culture through their family practices. He provides data on naming patterns and kinship ties among slaves that flies in the face of the dominant ideology of the period. That ideology argued that slaves were immoral and had little concern for or appreciation of family life.

For example, in a system which denied the father authority over his family, slave boys were frequently named after their fathers. Girls were not named after their mothers to the same degree. However, children were generally named after blood relatives as a way of maintaining family ties. Gutman has also suggested that after emancipation a number of slaves took the names of former owners in order to reestablish family ties that had been disrupted earlier. On plantation after plantation, Gutman found considerable evidence of the building and maintenance of extensive kinship ties among slaves. Even in instances where slave families had been disrupted, slaves in new communities reconstituted the kinds of family and kin ties that came to characterize Black family life throughout the South. These patterns included, but were not limited to, a belief in the importance of marriage as a longterm commitment, rules of exogamy which excluded marriage between first cousins, and acceptance of women who had children outside of marriage. Kinship networks
were an important source of resistance to the capitalist organization of labor which treated the individual slave, and not the family as the unit of labor (Caulfield, 1974).

Another interesting indicator of the slaves' maintenance of some degree of cultural autonomy has been pointed out by Wright (1981) in her discussion of slave housing. Up until the early 1800s, slaves were often permitted to build their housing according to their own designs and taste. During that period, housing built in an African style was quite common in the slave quarters. By 1830, however, slaveowners had begun to control the design and arrangement of slave housing and had introduced a degree of conformity and regularity to it that left little room for the slave's personalization of the home. Nevertheless, slaves did use some of their own techniques in construction and often hid it from their masters.

Even the floors, which usually consisted only of tamped earth, were evidence of a hidden African tradition: slaves cooked clay over a fire, mixing in ox blood or cow dung, and then poured it in place to make hard dirt floors almost like asphalt. . .In slave houses, in contrast to other crafts, these signs of skill and tradition would then be covered over (Wright, 1981:48).
Housing is important in discussions of family because its design reflects social and cultural attitudes toward family life. The housing which slaveowners provided for their slaves reflected a view of Black family life consistent with the stereotypes of the period. While the existence of slave families was acknowledged, it was certainly not nurtured. Thus, cabins were crowded, often containing more than one family and there were no provisions for privacy. Slaves had to create their own.

Slave couples hung up old clothes or quilts to establish boundaries; others built more substantial partitions from scrap wood. Parents sought to establish sexual privacy from their children. A few ex-slaves described modified trundle beds designed to hide parental love-making... Even in one room cabins, sexual segregation was carefully organized (Wright, 1981:50).

Perhaps most critical in developing an understanding of slave women's reproductive labor is the gender based division of labor in the domestic sphere. We have already demonstrated that the organization of slave labor enforced equality on men and women in the work arena. The ways in which equality in the labor force was translated into the family sphere is somewhat more speculative. Davis (1981), for example, suggests that
egalitarianism between males and females was a direct result of slavery when she says:

Within the confines of their family and community life, therefore, Black people managed to accomplish a magnificent feat. They transformed that negative equality which emanated from the equal oppression they suffered as slaves into a positive quality: the egalitarianism characterizing their social relations (p. 18).

However, it is likely that this transformation was far less direct than this quotation implies. We know, for example, that slave women experienced what we have recently come to call a "double day" before most other women in this society. Slave narratives (Jones, 1980; Blassingame, 1977) reveal that women had primary responsibility for their family's domestic chores. They cooked (although on some plantations meals were prepared for all of the slaves), sewed, cared for their children, and cleaned house, all after completing a full day of labor for the master. Blassingame (1972) and others have pointed out that slave men engaged in hunting, trapping, perhaps some gardening, and furniture making as ways of contributing to the maintenance of their families. Clearly, a gender-based division of labor did exist within the family and it appears that women bore the larger
share of the burden for housekeeping and child-care.

In contrast to White families of the period, however, the division of labor in the domestic sphere was not reinforced in the relationship of slave women to work nor in the social institutions of the day. The gender-based division of labor among the slaves existed within a social system which treated men and women as equal, independent units of labor. Thus, Matthei (1982) is probably correct in concluding:

Whereas...the White homemaker interacted with the public sphere through her husband, and had her work life determined by him, the enslaved Afro-American homemaker was directly subordinated to and determined by her owner...This perpetuated the relatively independent position she had known vis-a-vis her husband in her previous horticultural society. The equal enslavement of husband and wife gave the slave marriage a curious kind of equality, an equality of oppression (p. 94).

Black men were denied the male resources of a patriarchal society and therefore were unable to turn gender distinctions into female subordination, even if that had been their desire. Black women, on the other hand, were denied support and protection for their roles as mothers and wives and thus had to
modify and structure those roles around the demands of their labor. Thus, reproductive labor for slave women was intensified in several ways: by the demands of slave labor which forced her into the double day of work; by the desire and need to maintain family ties in the face of a system that gave them only limited recognition; by the stresses of building a family with men who were denied the standard social privileges of manhood; and by the struggle to raise children who could survive in a hostile environment.

This intensification of reproductive labor made networks of kin and quasi-kin important instruments in carrying out the reproductive tasks of the slave community. Given an African cultural heritage where kinship ties formed the basis of social relations, it is not at all surprising that African-American slaves developed an extensive system of kinship ties and obligations (Gutman, 1976; Sudarkasa, 1981). Research on Black families in slavery provides considerable documentation of participation of extended kin in child rearing, childbirth and other domestic, social, and economic activities (Gutman, 1976; Blassingame, 1972; Genovese, 1974).

After slavery, these ties continued to be an important factor linking individual household units in a variety of domestic activities. While kinship ties were also important among native born Whites and European immigrants, Gutman (1976)
has suggested that these ties:

were comparatively more important to Afro-Americans than to lower-class native White and immigrant Americans, the result of their distinctive low economic status, a condition that denied them the advantages of an extensive associational life beyond the kin group and the advantages and disadvantages resulting from mobility opportunities (p. 213).

His argument is reaffirmed by research on Afro-American families after slavery [Shimkin (1978), Aschenbrenner (1975), Davis (1981), Stack (1974)]. Sudarkasa (1981) takes this argument one step further and links this pattern to the African cultural heritage.

historical realities require that the derivation of this aspect of Black family organization be traced to its African antecedents. Such a view does not deny the adaptive significance of consanguineal (kin) networks. In fact, it helps to clarify why these networks had the flexibility they had and why they, rather than conjugal relationships came to be the stabilizing factor in Black families (p. 49).

Within individual households, the gender based division of
labor experienced some important shifts during emancipation. In their first real opportunity to establish family life beyond the controls and constraints imposed by a slavemaster, family life among Black sharecroppers changed radically. Most women, at least those who were wives and daughters of able-bodied men, withdrew from field labor and concentrated on their domestic duties in the home. Husbands took primary responsibility for the fieldwork and for relations with the owners, such as signing contracts on behalf of the family. Black women were severely criticized by Whites for removing themselves from field labor because they were seen to be aspiring to a model of womanhood that was inappropriate to them. However, this reorganization of female labor represented an attempt on the part of Blacks to protect women from some of the abuses of the slave system and to thus secure their family life. It was more likely a response to the particular set of circumstances that the newly freed slaves faced than a reaction to the lives of their former masters. The sharecropping family that lived and worked together actually represented an adaptation, or response, to post-war conditions rather than a clinging to old ways. This development, initiated so boldly by Blacks was particularly significant because it contrasted sharply with trends characteristic of late nineteenth century American
society in general (Jones, 1980:35).

Jones's argument is that at a time when industrial development was introducing a labor system that divided male and female labor, confining women to a cult of domesticity, the freed Black family was establishing a pattern of joint work and complementary of tasks between males and females that was reminiscent of the preindustrial families. Unfortunately, these former slaves had to do this without the institutional supports that White farm families had had and in the midst of a sharecropping system that deprived them of economic independence.

**Chinese Sojourners**

Chinese people were explicitly denied the right to form families in the United States through both law and social practice. Though male laborers began coming to the United States in sizeable numbers in the middle of the 19th century, it was more than a century before an appreciable number of children of Chinese parents were born in America. Tom, a respondent in Nee and Nee's (1973) book, Longtime Californ', says: "one thing about Chinese men in America was you had to be either a merchant or a big gambler, have lot of side money to have a family here. A working man, an ordinary man, just can't!" (p. 80).

Working in the United States was a means to gain support for
one's family with an end of obtaining sufficient capital to return to China and purchase land. The practice of sojourning was reinforced by laws preventing Chinese laborers from becoming citizens, and by restrictions on their entry into this country. Chinese laborers who arrived prior to 1882 could not bring their wives and were prevented, by law, from marrying Whites. Thus, it is likely that the number of Chinese American families might have been negligible had it not been for the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906 which destroyed all municipal records, and for the ingenuity and persistence of the Chinese people. Since relatives of citizens were permitted entry, American born Chinese (real and claimed) would visit China, report the birth of a son, and thus create an entry slot. "Years later the slot could be used by a relative or purchased. The purchasers were called "paper sons."

The high concentration of males in the Chinese community prior to 1920 resulted in a split household family.

In the split household family, production is separated from other functions and is carried out by a member living far from the rest of the household. The rest, --consumption, reproduction and socialization--are carried out by the wife and other relatives from the home village. . .The split household form makes possible maximum exploitation
of the worker... The labor of prime-age male workers can be bought relatively cheaply, since the cost of reproduction and family maintenance is borne partially by unpaid subsistence work of women and old people in the home village" (Glenn, 1981:14-15).

The women who were in the United States during this period consisted of a small number who were wives and daughters of merchants and a larger percentage who were prostitutes. Hirata (1979) has suggested that Chinese prostitution was an important element in helping to maintain the split household family. In conjunction with laws prohibiting intermarriage, Chinese prostitution helped men avoid long term relationships with women in the United States and insured that the bulk of their meager earnings would continue to support the family at home. As prostitutes in the United States, Chinese women were exploited in support of a labor system that exploited their men.

We do not know a great deal about the lives of wives who remained at home in China. We do know, however, that Nineteenth Century Chinese women were members of a patriarchal family system in which a daughter had little value. Girls were considered only temporary members of their father's family since, when they married, they became members of their husband's families.
Because of their low status, girls were sold by some poor parents to serve as prostitutes, concubines or servants. This saved the family the expense of raising her and was a source of income. For most girls however, marriages were arranged and families sought useful family connections through this process.

With the development of a sojourning pattern in the United States, some Chinese women in those regions of China where this pattern was more prevalent might be sold and become prostitutes in the United States. Most, however were married off to men whom they saw only once or twice in the twenty or thirty year period that he was sojourning in the United States. As his wife, she insured that a portion of the meager wages he earned would be returned to his family in China. This arrangement required considerable sacrifice and adjustment on the part of wives who remained in China and upon those who joined their husbands after a long separation.

Maxine Hong Kingston (1979) tells the story of the unhappy meeting of her aunt, Moon Orchid, with her husband from whom she had been separated from thirty years.

For thirty years she had been receiving money from him from America. But she had never told him that she wanted to come to the United States. She waited for him to suggest it, but he never did (Kingston, 1977:144).
His response to seeing her when she arrived unexpectedly was to say:

'Look at her. She'd never fit into an American household. I have important American guests who come inside my house to eat.' He turned to Moon Orchid, 'You can't talk to them. You can barely talk to me.'

Moon Orchid was so ashamed, she held her hands over her face. She wished she could also hide her dappled hands. Her husband looked like one of the ghosts passing the car windows, and she must look like a ghost from China. They had indeed entered the land of ghosts, and they had become ghosts (Kingston, 1977: 178).

Despite these handicaps, Chinese people collaborated to establish the opportunity to form families and settle in the United States. In some cases it took as long as three generations for a child to be born on United States soil.

In one typical history, related by a 21 year old college student, great-grandfather arrived in the States in the 1890s as a "paper son" and worked for about 20 years as a laborer. He then sent for the grandfather, who worked alongside great-grandfather
in a small business for several years. Great-grandfather subsequently returned to China, leaving grandfather to run the business and send remittance. In the 1940s, grandfather sent for father; up to this point, none of the wives had left China. Finally, in the late 1950s father returned to China and brought his wife back with him. Thus, after nearly 70 years, the first child was born in the United States (Glenn, 1981:14).

Chicanos

The cultural assaults directed toward Chicano families were the result of the United States colonization of an indigenous Mexican population and the beginnings of industrial development in the region. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, granted American citizenship to Mexicans living in what is now called the Southwest. However, the American takeover resulted in the gradual displacement of Mexicans from the land and their incorporation into a colonial labor force (Barrera, 1979). In addition, Mexicans who immigrated into the United States after 1848 were also absorbed into this labor force.

Whether native to Northern Mexico (which became the U.S. Southwest after 1848) or immigrants from Southern Mexico, Chicanos were a largely peasant population whose lives were
defined by a feudal economy and a daily struggle on the land for economic survival. Patriarchal families were important instruments of community life and nuclear family units were linked together through an elaborate system of kinship and godparenting. Traditional life was characterized by hard work and a fairly distinct pattern of sex-role segregation.

Most Mexican women were valued for their household qualities, men by their ability to work and to provide for a family. Children were taught to get up early, to contribute to the family's labor to prepare themselves for adult life--childhood was short, adolescence still shorter, and adulthood too often a gradual wearing down under the weight of harsh labor. Such a life demanded discipline, authority, deference--values that cemented the working of a family surrounded and shaped by the requirements of Mexico's distinctive historical pattern of agricultural development, especially its pervasive debt peonage (Saragoza, 1983:8).

As the primary caretakers of hearth and home in a rural environment, las Chicanas labor made a vital and important contribution to family survival. A description of women's reproductive labor in the early 20th century can be used to gain
insight into the work of 19th century rural women.

For country women, work was seldom a salaried job. More often it was the work of growing and preparing food, of making adobes and plastering houses with mud, or making their children's clothes for school and teaching them the hymns and prayers of the church, or delivering babies and treating sicknesses with herbs and patience. In almost every town there were one or two women who, in addition to working in their own homes, served other families in the community as curanderas (healers), parteras (midwives), and schoolteachers (Elasser, 1980:10).

Although some scholars have argued that family rituals and community life showed little change before World War I (Saragoza, 1983), the American conquest of Mexican lands, the introduction of a new system of labor, the loss of Mexican-owned land through the inability to document ownership, plus the transient nature of most of the jobs in which Chicanos were employed, resulted in the gradual erosion of this pastoral way of life. Families were uprooted as the economic basis for family life changed. Some immigrated from Mexico in search of a better standard of living and worked in the mines and railroads. Others who were native to
the Southwest, faced a job market that no longer required their skills and moved into mining, railroad and agricultural labor in search of a means of earning a living. According to Camarillo (1979), the influx of Anglo (2) capital into the pastoral economy of Santa Barbara rendered obsolete the skills of many Chicano males who had worked as ranch hands and farmers prior to the urbanization of that economy. While some women and children accompanied their husbands to the railroad and mine camps, they often did so despite prohibitions against it. Initially, many of these camps discouraged or prohibited family settlement.

The American period (post-1848) was characterized by considerable transiency for the Chicano population. Its impact on families is seen in the growth of female-headed households which was reflected in the data as early as 1860. Griswold del Castillo (1979) found a sharp increase in female-headed households in Los Angeles, from a low of 13% in 1844 to 31% in 1880. Camarillo (1979) documents a similar increase in Santa Barbara from 15% in 1844 to 30% by 1880 (1979:120). These increases appear to be due, not so much to divorce, which was infrequent in this Catholic population, but to widowhood and temporary abandonment by men in search of work. Given the

2. This term is used to refer to White Americans of European ancestry.
hazardous nature of work in the mines and in railroad camps, the death of a husband, father, or son who was laboring in these sites was not uncommon. Griswold del Castillo reports a higher death rate among men than women in Los Angeles. The rise in female-headed households, therefore, reflects the instabilities and insecurities introduced into women's lives as a result of the changing social organization of work.

One outcome, the increasing participation of women and children in the labor force was primarily a response to economic factors which required the modification of traditional values. According to Louisa Vigil, who was born in 1890:

The women didn't work at that time. The man was supposed to marry that girl and take care of her...Your grandpa never did let me work for nobody. He always had work, and we never did have really bad times (Elasser, 1980:14).

Senora Vigil's comments are reinforced in Garcia's (1980) study of El Paso. Of the 393 households he examined in the 1900 census, he found that 17.1% of women were employed. The majority of this group were daughters, mothers with no husbands, and single women. In the cases of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, where there were even greater work opportunities for women than in El Paso, wives who were heads of household worked in seasonal
and part-time jobs and lived off the earnings of children and relatives in an effort to maintain traditional female roles.

Slowly, entire families were encouraged to go to some railroad work camps, and were eventually incorporated into the agricultural labor market. This was a response both to the extremely low wages paid to Chicano laborers and to the preferences of employers who saw family labor as a way of stabilizing the workforce. For Chicanos, engaging all family members in agricultural work was a means of increasing their earnings to a level close to subsistence for the entire group and of keeping the family unit together. Camarillo (1979) provides a picture of the interplay of work, family and migration in the Santa Barbara area in the following quotation:

The time of year when women and children were employed in the fruit cannery and participated in the almond and olive harvests coincided with the seasons when the men were most likely to be engaged in seasonal migratory work. There were seasons, however, especially in the early summer when the entire family migrated from the city to pick fruit. This type of family seasonal harvest was evident in Santa Barbara by the 1890s. As walnuts replaced almonds and as the fruit industry expanded, Chicano family labor became essential (p. 93).
This arrangement, while bringing families together, did not decrease the hardships which Chicanas had to confront in raising their families. We may infer something about the rigors of that life from Jesse Lopez de la Cruz' description of the workday of migrant farm laborers in the 1940s. Work conditions in the 1890s were as difficult, if not worse.

We always went where the women and men were going to work, because if it were just the men working it wasn't worth going out there because we wouldn't earn enough to support a family. ... We would start around 6:30 a.m. and work for four or five hours, then walk home and eat and rest until about three-thirty in the afternoon when it cooled off. We would go back and work until we couldn't see. Then I'd clean up the kitchen. I was doing the housework and working out in the fields and taking care of two children (Cantarow, 1981:119-120).

In the towns, women's reproductive labor was intensified by the congested and unsanitary conditions of the "barrios" in which they lived. Garcia (1980) described the following conditions in El Paso:

Mexican women had to haul water for washing and cooking from the river or public water pipes. To
feed their families, they had to spend time marketing, often in Cuidad Juarez across the border, as well as long, hot hours cooking meals and coping with the burden of desert sand both inside and outside their homes. Besides the problem of raising children, unsanitary living conditions forced Mexican mothers to deal with disease and illness in their families. Diphtheria, tuberculosis, typhus and influenza were never too far away. Some diseases could be directly traced to inferior city services. As a result, Mexican mothers had to devote much energy to caring for sick children, many of whom died (pp. 320-21).

While the extended family has remained an important element of Chicano life, it was eroded in the American period in several ways. Griswold del Castillo (1979), for example, points out that in 1845 "about 71% of Angelenos lived in extended families" and that by 1880, less than half did. This decrease in extended families appears to be a response to the changed economic conditions and to the instabilities generated by the new political and social structure. Additionally, the imposition of American law and custom ignored and ultimately undermined some aspects of the extended family. The extended family in
traditional Mexican life consisted of an important set of familial, religious and community obligations. Women, while valued primarily for their domesticity, had certain legal and property rights that acknowledged the importance of their work, their families of origin and their children. In California, for example:

Equal ownership of property between husband and wife had been one of the mainstays of the Spanish and Mexican family systems. Community-property laws were written into the civil codes with the intention of strengthening the economic controls of the wife and her relatives. The American government incorporated these Mexican laws into the state constitution, but later court decisions interpreted these statutes so as to undermine the wife's economic rights. In 1861, the legislature passed a law that allowed the deceased wife's property to revert to her husband. Previously it had been inherited by her children and relatives if she died without a will (Griswold del Castillo, 1979:69).

The impact of this and other similar court rulings was to "strengthen the property rights of the husband at the expense of
his wife and children" (p. 69). The effect of American patriarchal family law on traditional Mexican family law and custom is largely unresearched. Yet this one example, from del Castillo's study of Los Angeles, suggests how important this area of scholarship might be in illuminating and explaining some of the changes which Chicano families underwent after 1848.

In the face of the legal, social and economic changes which occurred during the American period, Chicanas were forced to cope with a series of dislocations in traditional life. They were caught between conflicting pressures to maintain traditional women's roles and family customs and the need to participate in the economic support of their family by working outside the home. During this period the preservation of some traditional customs became an important force in resisting complete disarray.

According to Saragoza (1983), transiency, racism resulting in segregation, and proximity to Mexico aided in the maintenance of traditional family practices. Garcia (1980) has suggested that women were the guardians of Mexican cultural traditions within the family. He cites the work of anthropologist, Manuel Gamio who identified the retention of many Mexican customs among Chicanos in settlements around the United States in the early 1900s.

These included folklore, songs and ballads, birthday celebrations, saints' days, baptisms,
weddings, and funerals in the traditional style. Because of poverty, a lack of physicians in the barrios, and adherence to traditional customs, Mexicans continued to use medicinal herbs.

Gamio also identified the maintenance of a number of oral traditions, and of Mexican style cooking.

Of vital importance to the integrity of traditional culture was the perpetuation of the Spanish language. Factors which aided in the maintenance of other aspects of Mexican culture also helped in sustaining the language. However, entry into English-language public schools introduced the children and their families to systematic cultural assaults on their native tongue. Griswold del Castillo reports that in the early 1880s there was considerable pressure against the speaking of Spanish in the public schools. He also found that some Chicano parents responded to this kind of discrimination by helping support independent bilingual schools. These efforts, however, were short-lived.

Another key factor in conserving Chicano culture was the extended family network, particularly the system of compadrazgo or godparenting. Although the full extent of the impact of the American period on the Chicano extended family is not known, it is generally acknowledged that this family system, though lacking many legal and social sanctions, played an important role in the
preservation of the Mexican community (Camarillo, 1979:13). In Mexican society, godparents were an important way of linking family and community through respected friends or authorities. Named at the important rites of passage in a child's life, such as birth, confirmation, first communion, and marriage, *compadrazgo* had a moral obligation to act as guardians, to provide financial assistance in times of need, and to substitute in case of the death of a parent. Camarillo (1979) points out that in traditional society these bonds cut across class and racial lines.

The rites of baptism established kinship networks between rich and poor--between Spanish, mestizo and Indian--and often carried with them political loyalty and economic-occupational ties. The leading Californio patriarchs in the pueblo played important roles in the *compadrazgo* network. They sponsored dozens of children for their workers or poorer relatives. The kindness of the *padrino* and *madrina* was repaid with respect and support from the *pobladores* (pp. 12-13).

The extended family network--which included godparents--expanded the support groups for women who were widowed or temporarily abandoned and for those who were in
seasonal, part-time or full-time work. It suggests, therefore the potential for an exchange of services among poor people whose income did not provide the basis for family subsistence. Griswold del Castillo (1980) argues that family organization influenced literacy rates and socioeconomic mobility among Chicanos in Los Angeles between 1850 and 1880. His data suggest that children in extended families (defined as those with at least one relative living in a nuclear family household) had higher literacy rates than did those in nuclear families. He also argues that those in larger families fared better economically, and experienced less downward mobility. The data here are too limited to generalize to the Chicano experience as a whole but they do reinforce the actual and potential importance of this family form to the continued cultural autonomy of the Chicano community.

**Conclusion: Our Mothers' Grief**

Reproductive labor for racial-ethnic women in the 19th century centered upon the struggle to maintain family units in the face of a variety of cultural assaults. Treated primarily as individual units of labor, rather than as members of family groups, racial-ethnic women labored to maintain, sustain, stabilize and reproduce their families while working in both the public (productive) and private (reproductive) spheres. Thus,
the concept of reproductive labor, when applied to women of
color, must be modified to account for the fact that labor in the
productive sphere was required to achieve even minimal levels of
family subsistence. Long after industrialization had begun to
reshape family roles in middle class White families, driving
White women into a cult of domesticity, women of color were
coping with an extended day. This day included subsistence labor
outside the family and domestic labor within the family. For
slaves, domestics, migrant farm laborers, seasonal factory
workers and prostitutes, the distinctions between labor which
reproduced family life and that which economically sustained it
were minimized. The expanded workday was one of the primary ways
in which reproductive labor increased.

The fact that racial-ethnic families were sustained and
maintained in spite of incredible odds must be acknowledged as an
heroic feat. Yet, they and their families paid a high price in
the process. High rates of infant mortality, a shortened life
span, the early onset of crippling and debilitating disease
provide some insight into the sources of our foremother's grief.

The poor quality of their housing and the neglect of their
communities further increased reproductive labor. Not only did
they have to work hard outside the home for a mere subsistence,
they had to work very hard inside the home to achieve even
minimal standards of privacy and cleanliness. They were
continually faced with disease and illnesses that were a direct result of the absence of basic sanitation. There was an emotional strain associated with bearing and raising children to participate in the colonial labor system. The fact that some African women killed their children to prevent them from becoming slaves is well documented. But what of the Chinese prostitutes who found themselves pregnant or having given birth to a girl-child; or the Chicana farm laborer who saw herself bringing more children into the world to begin back-breaking work at a very young age and contribute meager earnings to the family's inadequate coffers?

We have uncovered little information about the use of birth control, the prevalence of infanticide or the motivations which may have generated these or other behaviors. We can surmise, however, that no matter how much children were accepted, loved or valued among any of these groups of people, their futures in a colonial labor system were a source of grief for their mothers. For those children who were born, the task of keeping them alive, of helping them to understand and participate in a system that exploited them, and the challenge of maintaining a measure--no matter how small--of cultural integrity, intensified reproductive labor.

Being a woman of color in 19th century American society meant having extra work both inside and outside the home. It
also meant having a contradictory relationship to the norms and values about women that were being generated in the dominant White culture. As pointed out earlier, the notion of separate spheres of male and female labor had contradictory outcomes for 19th century Whites. It was the basis for the confinement of women to the household and for much of the protective legislation that subsequently developed. At the same time, it sustained White families by providing social acknowledgement and support to women in the performance of their family roles. For women of color, however, the notion of separate spheres served to reinforce their subordinate status and became, in effect another assault. Women of color were forced into work in a productive labor sphere that was organized only for women who were so unfortunate or immoral that they could not confine their work to the domestic sphere. In the productive sphere racial-ethnic women faced exploitative jobs and depressed wages. In the reproductive sphere, however, they were denied the opportunity to embrace the dominant ideological definition of "good" wife or mother. In essence, they were faced with a double bind situation, one which required their participation in the labor force to sustain family life but damned them as women, wives, and mothers because they did not confine their labor to the home. Thus, the conflict between ideology and reality in the lives of women of color during 19th century sets the stage for
stereotypes, issues of self-esteem and conflicts around gender role prescriptions which surface more fully in the 20th century. Furthermore, the tensions and conflicts which characterized their lives during this period provided the impulse for community activism to jointly address the inequities which they, their children, and their families faced.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aimquist, Elizabeth M.

Apodaca, Maria Linda
1979  The Chicano Woman: An Historical Materialist Perspective. in Women in Latin America. Latin American Perspectives, Riverside, California.

Aschenbrenner, Joyce

Barrera, Mario

Billingsley, Andrew

Blassingame, John

Blauner, Robert

Buss, Fran Leeper
Camarillo, Albert

Cantarow, Ellen

Carson, Josephine

Caulfield, Mina Davis

Davis, Angela

Degler, Carl

Elasser, Nan Kyle MacKenzie and Yvonne Tixier Y. Vigil

Garcia, Mario T.

Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend

Genovese, Eugene D.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano


Glenn, Evelyn Nakano and Roslyn L. Feldberg


Goldman, Marion S.


Griswold del Castillo, Richard


Gutman, Herbert


Hartmann, Heidi and Amy Bridges


Higginbotham, Elizabeth

Hirata, Lucie Cheng


Houston, James D. and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston


Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith


Hurst, Marsha and Ruth E. Zambrana


Jones, Jacqueline


Kennedy, Susan Estabrook

1979  "If All We did Was to Weep at Home: A History of White Working-Class Women in America." Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Kessler-Harris, Alice

Kingston, Maxine Hong

Lindsay, Beverly, ed.

McCunn, Ruthanne Lum

Matthei, Julie

Mirande, Alfredo

Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa

Myers, Lena

Nee, Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee

Quan, Robert Seto
1982    Lotus Among the Magnolias: The Mississippi Chinese. Jackson, Mississippi: University of
Mississippi Press.

Sanchez, Rosaura and Rosa Martinez Cruz, eds.

1977 Essays on La Mujer. Los Angeles, California: Chinese Studies Center, University of California.

Saragoza, Alex M.


Servin, Manuel


Shimkin, Demetri, E.M. Shimkin and D.A. Frate, eds.


Simons, Margaret A.


Sokoloff, Natalie


Spruill, Julia Cherry


Stack, Carol S.


Staples, Robert and Alfredo Mirande

Sterling, Dorothy


Stimpson, Catharine R.


Sudarkasa, Niara


Sweeney, Judith

1977 Chicano History: A Review of the Literature in Essays on La Mujer, edited by Rosavia Sanchez and Rosa Martinez, Los Angeles, California: Chicano Studies Center, University of California at Los Angeles.

Thomas, Almaguer


Welter, Barbara


Wright, Gwendolyn


Yanagisako, Sylvia J.

Zaretsky, Eli