decades have seen dramatic changes in U.S. families, including patterns of
e, childbearing, and the like. This excellent book brings together top scholars to
he central role of social class in such changes and is a must-read among family
, students, and policymakers interested in understanding the under-studied role of
contemporary family change." RACHEL DUNIFON
Cornell University

Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America is arguably the best collection
es on social class differences in romantic partnering and parenting that exists
This book focuses on the fascinating question of why family change over the
f century has been so different at the top, bottom, and middle of the income
tion. The economic opportunities and the life chances of the next generation may
k. Understanding the family changes that this volume illuminates is essential to
ng that risk and designing effective public policy."
SUZANNE BIANCHI
University of California, Los Angeles

arly 1960s, most children grew up in two-parent families with a single
nner. Today, an increasing percentage of children grow up in affluent families
oth parents are college graduates working in high-prestige occupations; at the
, an increasing percentage of children grow up in poverty in single-mother
with a less-educated, unstably employed, never-married mother and siblings
e different fathers. In this volume, the nation's leading family demographers
fully analyze the causes and consequences of the increased complexity and
d inequality of family types over the last fifty years."
SHELDON DANZIGER
University of Michigan

lass and Changing Families in an Unequal America offers an up-to-the-moment
ent of the condition of the family in an era of growing inequality. While Americans
cioeconomic backgrounds have witnessed changes in the nature of family life,
anges play out in very different ways for the wealthy or well off than for the poor.
iting unique aspects of family behavior, it reveals the degree to which families'
experiences are shaped by social class. This book offers a much needed assessment of
porary family life amid the turbulent economic changes in the United States.

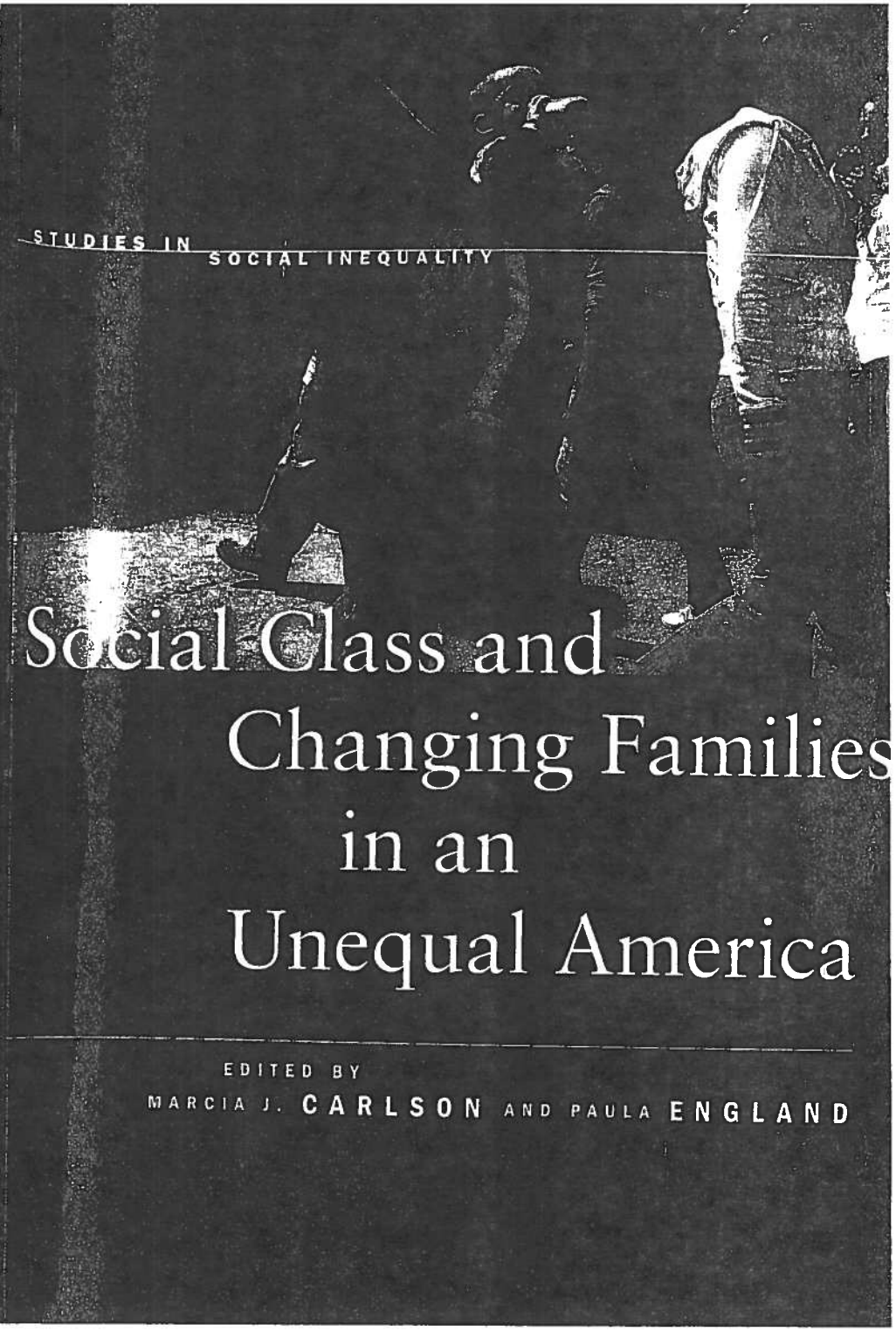
J. CARLSON *is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-*
t. **PAULA ENGLAND** *is Professor of Sociology at New York University.*

ord University Press www.sup.org

ISBN-10: 0-8047-7089-1
ISBN-13: 978-0-8047-7089-7
90000
9 780804 770897

o: Boarded-up businesses, Newark, N.J., 2009. Spencer Platt / Getty Images

CARLSON
ND ENGLAND
Social Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America
Stanford



STUDIES IN SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Social Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America

EDITED BY
MARCIA J. CARLSON AND PAULA ENGLAND

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California

©2011 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of Stanford University Press.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, archival-quality paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Social class and changing families in an unequal America / edited by Marcia J. Carlson and Paula England.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8047-7088-0 (cloth : alk. paper) —
ISBN 978-0-8047-7089-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Families—United States. 2. Social classes—United States. 3. Equality—United States. I. Carlson, Marcia J., editor of compilation. II. England, Paula, 1949- editor of compilation.
HQ536.S665 2011
306.850973—dc22

2010050158

Typeset by Bruce Lundquist in 10/13 Sabon

To Frank F. Furstenberg

Scholar, teacher, and wonderful human being

INTRODUCTION

Social Class and Family Patterns in the United States

Marcia J. Carlson and Paula England

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed dramatic changes that increased the diversity and complexity of U.S. families. The longstanding link between marriage and childbearing weakened. Today, adults are likely to spend time living with more than one partner in marital and/or cohabiting unions, and children often experience several changes in which adults live with them. More and more children spend years living apart from one of their biological parents—typically the father. Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, we also saw a tremendous increase in U.S. economic inequality, whether measured with respect to wage rates, earnings, or family incomes (Gottschalk and Danziger 2005). Inequality rose in the 1980s, slowed somewhat in the 1990s during the economic expansion, then continued to rise as we entered the twenty-first century. Recent cross-national comparisons show that the United States has by far the highest level of family income inequality among all industrialized OECD countries; in 2000, a high-income American (at the ninetieth percentile of the income distribution) had roughly five and one-half times the family income of a low-income American (at the tenth percentile), even after adjusting for taxes, transfers, and family size (Brandolini and Smeeding 2006).

Family patterns have not only changed; they have also become more unequal by education and other measures of social class. Highly educated individuals are now more likely to marry (Goldstein and Kenney 2001); less-educated couples have always been more likely to divorce; but the gap between the two has grown (S. Martin 2006). Being born to unmarried parents is also tied to social class: while there has been very little increase in nonmarital childbearing among highly educated women since 1970, there has been a substantial increase among women in the bottom two-thirds of the distribution (Ellwood and Jencks 2004). Mothers giving birth outside

We sincerely appreciate the thoughtful comments of two anonymous reviewers about this and all chapters in the volume.

of marriage typically have a high school education or less, whereas mothers giving birth within marriage typically have at least some college education. In turn, there are growing gaps in the experiences of children by their parents' socioeconomic status (McLanahan 2004), and such differences in family structure appear to be important factors in increasing American inequality over the past forty years, both within and across generations (M. Martin 2006; McLanahan 2004; McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

This book is focused on changing family life in the context of growing socioeconomic inequality in the United States. Each chapter highlights a unique aspect of family behavior with a particular connection to socioeconomic (sometimes called class) inequality. Some chapters explore contrasts between those with low and high socioeconomic status (often measured by education), while other chapters focus on what's happening within one particular socioeconomic group. It is important to note that while race/ethnicity and class are certainly correlated, we focus here on family patterns that vary by socioeconomic status—a topic that has received less explicit attention in past research. Our view is that in the changing America of the past half-century, social class has become an increasingly important locus of differentiation in the life course with respect to union formation and dissolution, fertility, and parenting behaviors. While race differences likely compound (and interact with) class differences, there appears to be increasing similarity within class (especially educational groups)—regardless of race—in how individuals experience family life in the United States. It is this topic on which the volume is focused. Before briefly summarizing each chapter, we first provide a brief review of key areas of change in families that have occurred over the past half-century, and we highlight patterns that suggest growing differentials by socioeconomic status.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, AND STEPFAMILIES

At the core of changes in family life over the past half-century are shifts in the nature of union formation and marital behavior. Marriage has become less central to the life course both because Americans are marrying later (with a small percentage not marrying at all) and divorcing more often (Cherlin 2009). The freedom to leave unhappy relationships might be counted as a victory for adults, but the same cannot be said for children. Although problems of causal inference plague this literature, the best evidence suggests that, on average, children fare best when they grow up living with both of their biological parents, assuming that the parental relationship is not too conflictual (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2004).

While divorce marks the end of an existing nuclear family unit, as Furstenberg and Cherlin noted (1991), from a child's perspective, marital dissolution also typically marks the beginning of a series of family changes. One parent (typically the father) moves out of the household, resulting in significantly reduced father-child interaction (Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison 1987; Seltzer 1991), and in time, it is likely that one or both parents will remarry or cohabit with a new partner. Stepfamily life is complicated by the lack of clear norms about how the stepparent should relate to the child (Cherlin 1978), and not surprisingly, since stepparents come into a child's life later, they often do not care as deeply about the child, even when they have the best of intentions. Perhaps this is why McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that children whose mothers divorce and remarry do no better than those whose mothers divorce and are stably single, suggesting that the costs and benefits from stepfathers just about cancel each other out, on average. Of course, this literature too, like that on the effects of divorce itself, is beset with questions of whether effects of remarriage on children are causal or due to the selectivity of individuals who will divorce and remarry (Castro-Martin and Bumpass 1989; Furstenberg and Spanier 1984). At the least, changing marital partners has important effects on children's kinship networks (Furstenberg 1990). Indeed, even the elderly seem to have fewer kinship ties if they divorced earlier in the life cycle, because new step-kin do not fully replace the contacts lost (Wachter 1997).

Another change across cohorts is that unmarried cohabitation has arisen as a precursor to—or possible substitute for—legal marriage, such that today over 60 percent of marriages are preceded by cohabitation, and nearly half of all women have cohabited at some point by their late thirties (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Smock 2000). Cohabitation is common both before marriage and after divorce (Bumpass, Raley, and Sweet 1995). Further, many cohabiting households include children born to the couple while they are living together or that are the product of one partner's prior relationship (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008).

NONMARITAL AND TEEN CHILDBEARING

Concurrent with the changes in marriage practices has been a sharp increase in childbearing outside of marriage. In 1940, only 4 percent of all births occurred outside of marriage, while in 2009 (the latest year for which data are available), fully 41 percent of all births occurred outside of marriage (Hamilton, Martin, and Ventura 2010; Ventura and Bachrach 2000). While "traditional" family formation in the United States has typically followed a linear course—first dating, then marriage, then childbearing—the rise in non-

marital childbearing (along with concomitant changes in union formation) has yielded a range of complex and diverse family arrangements, which are strongly differentiated by socioeconomic status (Mincy and Pouncy 1999).

Today, it is common for intercourse and conception to occur outside marriage. The vast majority of unmarried women are sexually active: 77 percent of women age 20 to 29 in 1995 reported engaging in sex during the previous year (Ventura and Bachrach 2000). Also, most pregnancies among unmarried women are unintended, and most unintended pregnancies are not voluntarily terminated: 78 percent of pregnancies among never-married women in 1994 were unintended (Henshaw 1998), and four of every ten pregnancies among unmarried women in 1995 ended in abortion (Ventura and Bachrach 2000). Further, while in the 1950s and 1960s, 52 to 60 percent of first births conceived before marriage were resolved by a "shotgun" marriage before the birth, this was the case for only 23 percent of premaritally conceived first births in the period 1990–94 (Bachu 1999).

These facts about sexual activity and pregnancy resolution portend that the nonmarital birth rate is not likely to attenuate at any time in the near future. Although much of the recent increase in nonmarital childbearing can be attributed to births to cohabiting couples (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Smock 2000), this does not mean that children born into these couples come into a stable union; such unions are highly unstable, much more so in the United States than in other nations (Andersson 2003; Kiernan 1999; Osborne and McLanahan 2007). Indeed, despite positive attitudes toward and expectations about marriage expressed at the time of a nonmarital birth, only a minority of unmarried couples (including cohabitors) will subsequently marry—17 percent by five years after the child's birth (Carlson and McLanahan 2010; Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004). As Sara McLahanan's chapter in this volume shows, among those cohabiting at the nonmarital birth of a child, 48 percent broke up within five years, 26 percent got married, and 26 percent continued to cohabit.

Teen childbearing has been a particular cause for social concern because of the greater economic disadvantage among—and welfare use by—teenage mothers. Nonmarital birth rates for teenagers (age 15 to 19) rose steadily between 1940 and 1994 but declined after that (Ventura and Bachrach 2000), except for a brief upturn over the past several years in births among older unmarried teens (age 18–19) (Ventura 2009). Unmarried birth rates fell among teens of all races after 1994, dropping the most for black teenagers (Ventura and Bachrach 2000). Overall, teen births as a proportion of all unmarried births declined from 50 percent in 1970 to 23 percent in 2007, primarily due to declines in nonmarital birth rates among teens and increases in birth rates for unmarried adult women (Ventura 2009). Still, births to teens are much more likely to occur outside of marriage than births to older

women; 94 percent of births to 15–17-year-olds, and 84 percent of births to 18–19-year-olds, occurred outside of marriage, compared to 62 percent of births to women in their early twenties and 34 percent to women in their late twenties (Hamilton, Martin, and Ventura 2010). Moreover, births to unmarried teens account for about half of all *first* nonmarital births (Moore 1995). Many women who have a teen nonmarital birth go on to have a second nonmarital birth (often by a different partner). Thus teen childbearing remains an important aspect of nonmarital childbearing and family formation among unmarried parents.

Teen childbearing has been linked to a higher risk of negative outcomes for children, including socio-behavioral and cognitive problems in early/middle childhood, as well as delinquency, dropping out of high school, and early childbearing in adolescence and early adulthood (Brown and Eisenberg 1995; Geronimus and Korenman 1992; Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg 1993; Haveman, Wolfe and Peterson 1997; Klepinger, Lundberg, and Plotnick 1995, 1999; Levine, Pollack, and Comfort 2001; Moore, Morrison and Greene 1997; Maynard 1997). Further, there is a greater likelihood of divorce if/when teen mothers marry (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan 1987). At the same time, Furstenberg observed a cohort of teen mothers in Baltimore for several decades and found that estimates of the "consequences" of teen childbearing have been exaggerated because they do not account for preexisting characteristics correlated with both teen motherhood and disadvantageous outcomes—especially low socioeconomic status and opportunities (Furstenberg 2003). These findings are consonant with a growing body of econometric studies that adjust for unobserved differences (e.g., using sibling or community-level fixed effects) and find that estimates of the effects of having a teen birth are diminished—though in many cases not eliminated (Fletcher and Wolfe 2008; Geronimus and Korenman 1992; Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg 1993; Rosenzweig and Wolpin 1995).

MULTI-PARTNERED FERTILITY

At the intersection of the trends in marriage and fertility is the reality that a non-trivial and rising fraction of adults have (or will have) biological children by more than one partner, a pattern sometimes referred to as "multi-partnered fertility" (and abbreviated as MPF) (Furstenberg and King 1999). Several recent studies have found that a sizable fraction of individuals in various specific demographic groups have children by more than one partner, including low-income teenage mothers in Baltimore (Furstenberg and King 1999), a national sample of adult men (Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007a), adolescent and early adult women (Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007b), unwed parents in large U.S. cities (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006; Mincy 2002),

and mothers receiving welfare in the Midwest (Jayakody and Seefeldt 2006; Meyer, Cancian, and Cook 2005).

Multi-partnered fertility is more likely to occur among unmarried and low-SES (socioeconomic status) parents. For example, estimates from a recent birth cohort study of urban parents suggest that for three-fifths of unmarried couples who had a child together in the late 1990s, either the mother or the father (or both) already had a previous child by another partner at the time of their common child's birth; the same was true for less than a quarter of married couples (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006); also, MPF is more common among racial/ethnic minorities and men who have a history of incarceration. In a representative sample of American men, 16 percent of men age 35–44 had children by two or more partners, and successive cohorts appear to be transitioning to multi-partnered fertility at even higher rates, suggesting that the overall prevalence is rising (Guzzo and Furstenberg 2007a).

Multi-partnered fertility has important implications for children's well-being because it affects the organization of family life and kinship networks. When parents are called upon to provide resources to children in more than one household—or to children of different biological relatedness within the same household—the resulting complexities may compromise the quantity or quality of parental investment that children receive. This is because when parents (typically fathers) live apart from their children, they contribute fewer financial resources than when they live with them (Weiss and Willis 1985), and there are higher transaction costs of arranging to spend time with children. Also, evolutionary theory suggests that biological parents will invest more in children than unrelated social parents because the former have an evolutionary interest in ensuring the success of these children (Emlen 1997). Further, as described in the stepfamily literature, the divergent biological ties to children resulting from multi-partnered fertility (with repartnering) obfuscate parental roles and weaken the social capital within the family unit (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991). Given that multi-partnered fertility occurs disproportionately among low-income and minority subgroups, this phenomenon may also contribute to social and economic inequality over time, or exacerbate the negative effects of growing up in economically disadvantaged families (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997).

FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF MEN IN FAMILY LIFE

Although the father's role in family life has historically been defined by financial contributions (i.e., "breadwinning"), fathers today are involved in childrearing in numerous ways. Contemporary fathering may include providing economic support; nurturing and caregiving; engaging in leisure and play activities; providing the child's mother with financial, emotional, or practical support; providing moral guidance and discipline; ensuring the safety of the child; connecting the child to his extended family; and linking the child to community members and resources (Cabrera et al. 2000; Lamb 2004; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Marsiglio and Day 1997; Palkovitz 2002; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). Although the "new" father role has often been discussed with respect to higher-SES fathers, ethnographic studies report that many unwed and low-income fathers describe their roles in terms similar to those used by married and middle-class fathers, even though they face much greater economic constraints (Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan 1992; Jarrett, Roy, and Burton 2002; Waller 2002).

Yet the reality is that low-income fathers are much more likely to live apart from their children and thus to be less involved than their higher-income counterparts. This dichotomy in fathering by SES, which Furstenberg observed and identified as the "good dad-bad dad complex," emerged from the decline in the gendered division of household labor (Furstenberg 1988); as men who live with their children's mother were freed from the expectation that they would be the primary breadwinner, they also became free to participate in family life more fully—and many did. But at the same time, marriage became more optional and detached from childbearing, giving men more freedom to eschew family responsibilities entirely, and women more freedom to shut men out by leaving relationships. Thus, as fatherhood has become a more voluntary role, only the most committed and financially stable men choose to embrace it.

As noted earlier, research suggests that children who live apart from their biological fathers do not fare as well on a range of outcomes as children who grow up with both biological parents (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Children in single-parent families are often deprived of two types of resources from their fathers—economic (money) and relational (time) (Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan 1994). The economic circumstances can be most easily quantified: female-headed families with related children under age 18 have a significantly higher poverty rate (39 percent in 2009) than married-couple families with children (8 percent in 2009) (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2010), and living in extreme poverty has adverse effects on child development and well-being (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Duncan, Kalil, and Ziol-Guest 2008). Yet it is important to recognize that the correlations of family structure with economic well-being are not necessarily (or entirely) causal, though recent evidence suggests that there is some causal effect of marriage on family income (Sawhill and Thomas 2005). Children in single-parent families also receive less parental attention and emotional support from their fathers. Nonresident fathers see their children less often than resident fathers, and lack of interaction decreases the

likelihood that a father and child will develop a close relationship (Seltzer 1991; Shapiro and Lambert 1999).

While the benefits of nonresident fathers' economic contributions have been demonstrated by research (Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Argys et al. 1988; Knox and Bane 1994), the benefits of their relational involvement when living apart from their children are less clear. In fact, studies of the frequency of contact between nonresidential fathers and their children do *not* demonstrate that greater father-child interaction has beneficial effects for children and adolescents (Crockett, Eggebeen, and Hawkins 1993; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison 1987; Hawkins and Eggebeen, 1991; King 1994a, 1994b). This lack of effects of father-child contact exists regardless of the child's race, gender, mother's education, or marital status at birth (King 1994b). Several researchers have suggested that the *quality* of the father-child relationship may be more important than the quantity (Crockett et al. 1993; King, 1994b; Simons et al. 1994; Amato and Rivera 1999; Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer, 1998; Harris and Marmer, 1996). In sum, low-SES children (who are likely to live apart from their fathers) typically get fewer resources—both money and time—from their biological fathers than their high-SES counterparts (who are likely to live with their fathers).

LENGTHENING AND DIVERGENCE IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Along with the major changes in family demography and roles noted above, new and diverging patterns have emerged with respect to the timing and nature of how youth enter adulthood. While those coming of age in the middle of the twentieth century typically left home in their late teens to go to college—or get a job or enter the military (men) or get married (women)—today's youth experience an extended period of becoming an adult that is less guided by a normative sequence of events. As Furstenberg and colleagues have written, "the timing and sequencing of traditional markers of adulthood—leaving home, finishing school, starting work, getting married, and having children—are less predictable and more prolonged, diverse, and disordered" (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, and Settersten 2005, p. 5).

The patterns by which individuals enter adulthood are profoundly shaped by socioeconomic status—the focus of Annette Lareau and Amanda Cox's chapter in this volume. Those raised in high-SES families typically first leave home to enter a four-year college, and upon graduation will likely get a job, get an apartment, and begin to establish a career before "settling down" to get married and have children. Parental transfers along the way help pay tuition and connect youth to a career job, thereby leaving such graduates with limited college debt and connected to a high-paying job.

By contrast, those from low-SES backgrounds may or may not finish high school, and if they do finish and go on to college, they are more likely to incur significant debt and to combine work and college-going, thereby prolonging the amount of time they take to earn a degree (Turner 2006; Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein 2006). Further, those who do not graduate from high school (or those who do not obtain a college degree within six years of high school graduation) are more likely to have children before marriage. Those without a college degree (and sometimes even without a high school diploma) face a dismal labor market with limited job prospects and often have no clear plan for leaving the parental home or assuming the other characteristics of adulthood, such as getting a career job or a place of their own. Indeed, early parenting without a partner makes it even harder to progress up the SES ladder today than twenty years ago. Trying to complete education, pay bills, and find a job and a partner along the way—with a child to raise—is much harder under conditions of a lengthening time to adulthood and poor labor market prospects for the inexperienced and undereducated.

GROWING DIVERSITY IN FAMILY LIFE

Taken together, these changing patterns suggest growing diversity in the experience of family life. They raise concerns about growing social and economic stratification. Of course, the family has long been a mechanism by which advantage—and disadvantage—is transferred across generations. Higher-SES families have for many decades (if not longer) had lower fertility, higher income, and more cognitive and network advantages to pass on to children, and had lower divorce rates. What has changed is the magnitude of the SES differences in income and family structure: SES differences in income are greater today because earnings inequality has risen, along with women's employment and educational homogamy in marriage (Schwartz and Mare 2005). More poor children have always grown up without their fathers owing to higher rates of divorce and death, but today that is compounded by higher levels of, and widening SES differentials, in nonmarital births, combined with the fact that unmarried parents often break up within a few years of the child's birth. These differences by SES in the resources that children receive is of concern in its own right in a society that values equality of opportunity. At the same time, they raise questions about the future of the next generation at the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum, to the extent that childhood disadvantage creates barriers to individual human capital development and long-term economic self-sufficiency. The chapters in this volume highlight different aspects of how class inequality is linked to family patterns, and in some cases, how these patterns are changing in the context of an increasingly unequal America.