

# **Slouching Towards Utopia?: An Economic History of the Long Twentieth Century**

## **XVIII. Inclusion**

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### **18.1. Inequality and Exclusion as Standard Procedure**

#### **18.1.1. Social Power Requires Being the Right Kind of Male**

It had long been the case that you had social power only if you were male, and even if you were male only if you were special: the right tribe, or the right caste, or the right lineage, or a member of the right social order, had the right kind of—and enough—property, or the right kind of—and enough—education. That was how people expected it was and would always be unless and until humans obtained the fantasy technologies of the Golden Age. That was what Aristotle wrote: that “chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves” only if:

every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the [blacksmithing] statues of Daedalus, or the three-wheeled catering serving-carts of Hephaestus, which, says the poet: "of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods"... the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them...

That was true in 340 BC. That was still true in 1870.

But as of 1870 humanity was already beginning to have the autonomous robotic blacksmithing statues of master-craftsman Daedalus—and more, a thousand-fold—and also food-production food-processing, and food-distribution technology vastly outstripping the self-propelled catering carts of Hephaestus the smith-god. Our shuttles now weave without hands to guide them. And as for the need for a hand to

guide each making of a musical note—well... Thus between 1870 and our day it ceased to be a necessity to own or to have some direct or indirect dominion over slaves and near-slaves in order to be rich in material terms.

Yet inequality and its maintenance remained important, and not just inequality produced by the unequal distribution of property: there was powerful inequality based on what kind of person you were as well. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln—a politician and statesman much more committed to the dignity of labor and to the equality of humanity than most—said while campaigning on the stump:

I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position.... I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment...

But, for Lincoln, the core meaning of his speech came after a “but”. All this was true, but. Africans and African-Americans deserved and had inalienable rights to a much better deal than they were getting:

There is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.... In the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man...

The “promissory note”, as Martin Luther King Jr. was to put it in 1963 in his “I Have A Dream Speech”, signed by the writers of the Declaration and the Constitution was long in default when Lincoln lived. That promissory note is still in arrears today. One-half of American states have election laws carefully crafted to diminish the proportion of African-Americans who surmount the hassles imposed in order to vote.

Nevertheless, over 1870-1916, how, slowly and gradually, and incompletely and imperfectly, being a male of the right tribe, the right caste, the right lineage, or a member of the right social order became less and less essential for social power.

But having the right kind of—and enough—property, and the right kind of—and enough—education remains crucial. And today, still, it greatly matters in what country one is born for what one's opportunities are.

But being the right kind of person—white, male, born in the right country, to parents of the right class—is still very important. “Inclusion” is as much a goal to reality. It is a pathetic sign of this that my knowledge of inclusion—of minority and feminist experience—is sufficiently limited that in this chapter I am going to narrow my focus to the United States alone, for that is what I feel confident reviewing:

## **18.2. First, However: Intellectual Garbage Cleanup**

### **18.2.1. In Our Genes We Are Close Cousins**

As best as we can tell, we are all overwhelmingly descended from the same group of 1000-10000 East African Plains Apes who lived about 75000 years ago. Suppose that there were 10000 of us 75000 years ago who started making the march upcountry that has ended in us. 75000 years is 3000 generations. That means that the typical one of those 10000 occupies  $(10)^{(100)}^8$ —yes, that is a google<sup>8</sup>, a google raised to the 8<sup>th</sup> power—slots in each of our <<http://ancestry.com>> family trees. We are all cousins, and very close cousins at that: There is reputed to be less genetic variation in the entire human race than in your average baboon troop.

Has “important” genetic variations in humans emerged since then? Yes, there are founder effects—genetic drift as characteristics get fixed in small populations that enter new ecological-geographical niches. Yes, if you move far from the equator where the sun is feeble you are unlikely to leave descendants over the long term unless some mutation disrupts their melanin production, and so keeps melanin from blocking the sun's rays turning cholesterol into vitamin D in your skin. Yes, it looks as though lactose tolerance has evolved six times in the past 6000 years. Yes, we are currently under moderately strong selection pressure for resistance to malaria, cholera, and influenza. No, we are no longer under selection pressure for resistance to smallpox, or the bubonic plague. Humans continue to evolve, and to co-evolve with our culture.

### **18.2.2. Are the Rich an Especially Worthy Genetic Elite?**

But what many people really want to talk about is the claim of Philippe Rushton, Arthur Jensen, Charles Murray, and Richard Herrnstein that the mean IQ of sub-Saharan Africans today is 70, the mean IQ for white Americans today is 100, and the bulk of that gap is the result of genetic differences between “races” that retards cognitive development and functioning in sub-Saharan Africans.

IQ tests are constructed to have a fifteen point standard deviation—roughly, two-thirds of observations in a normal distribution fall within one standard deviation of the average. Relative to an average IQ of 100, an IQ of 70 gives:

limited trainability... difficulty with everyday demands like using a phone book, reading bus or train schedules, banking, filling out forms, using appliances like a video recorder, microwave oven, or computer, et cetera, and therefore require assistance from relatives or social workers in the management of their affairs. Can be employed in simple tasks but require supervision.... [Plus] less impulse control, being less able to delay gratification, being less able to comprehend moral principles like the Golden Rule, and being overstrained by the cognitive demands of society...

Consider American test scores in reading. For those born in 1943 the Black-white gap was 1.5 standard deviations—and was twice as large as the gap between those whose parents’ incomes were at the bottom of the top 10% of the income distribution and those whose parents’ incomes were at the top of the bottom 10% of the income distribution. For those born in 2003, the Black-white gap was 0.5 standard deviations—and only  $\frac{2}{5}$  of the size of the 90-10 differential, which had grown by more than half. The natural way to read this is that inherited advantage (whether from parents’ genes or, in all probability, a greater share from parents’ resources and attitudes) became more important in generating differences in reading attainment, and that relative to that yardstick at least 7/10 of the 1943-cohort Black-white differential has proved to be due to discrimination, directly and indirectly. How much of the 3/10 of the 1943-cohort Black-white differential remaining today is still due to lingering discrimination? You would have to be very naive indeed—or to be engaging in very, very motivated reasoning indeed—to believe that only a small amount is so due.

Thomas Sowell pointed out long ago that the immigrant waves of the pre-World War I era were subject to the same claims that they were genetically feeble-minded—and hence unfit to become mainstream members of American society—that the likes of Rushton, Jensen, Herrnstein, and Murray have deployed over the past half

century against African-Americans. Whether from Ireland, Italy, Poland—and especially when Jewish—the rhetoric was the same, and the reporting of large test-score gaps then attributed to genetic differences was the same.

### **18.2.3. Evolutionary Arithmetic**

Suppose we had a population of 10 million. Suppose there is something genetic that gave its possessors a genetic edge that increased the number of their children who would survive to reproductive age by 10%. Then it would take three-thousand years for that gene to spread itself from its first appearance until it were found in one-tenth of the population. And it would then take  $\frac{1}{3}$  of that time, 1000 years, so spread until it were found in nine-tenths of the population.

The last ice age ended, and human populations reshuffled and moved under the pressure of global climate change, only 15000 years ago. Ever since there has been much more than minimal intermarriage among human populations in Eurasia-Africa, plus occasional but regular contacts between and among Eurasia-Africa and Australasia, Oceania, and the Americas.

What are the chances that any of the *races* into which people divide humanity today happen today to correspond to populations in one of which we are at the start and at the other the end of that 2000-year window in which such an important gene moves from being rarely present to rarely absent?

### **18.2.4. Immanuel Kant's Race Science**

And yet... And yet... Immanuel Kant was one of the most famous philosophers in western intellectual history, and still casts a mighty shadow over large pieces of the intellectual discipline of philosophy. Yet Immanuel Kant wrote:

Negroes.... The extreme, humid heat of the warm climate... produced a thick, turned up nose and thick, fatty lips. The skin had to be oily, not only to lessen the too heavy perspiration, but also to ward off the harmful absorption of the foul, humid air. The profusion of iron... precipitated in the net-shaped substance through the evaporation of the phosphoric acid (which explains why all Negroes stink), is the cause of the blackness.... The Negro... is well-suited to his climate, namely, strong, fleshy, and agile. However, because he is so amply supplied by his motherland, he is also lazy, indolent, and dawdling.... The area between 31 and 52 degrees latitude in the old world... is ... where human beings must diverge least from their original form, since the human beings living in this region were

already well-prepared to be transplanted into every other region of the earth. We certainly find in this region white, indeed, brunette inhabitants. We want, therefore, to assume that this form is that of a lineal root genus. The nearest northern deviation to develop from this original form appears to be the noble blond form...

One understands how motivated reasoning leads one to conclude that one's own people are special, and good. But one would expect a great philosopher to stand back and ask how what he thinks is affected by where he happens to be, and also to ask "who are my own people, anyway?"

## **18.3. African-American Rights**

### **18.3.1. Jim Crow Politics**

As of the end of World War II, all indications then were that a combination of official discrimination against African-Americans would continue to enforce relatively low rates of education, relatively low wealth, and rampant poverty among African-Americans into the indefinite future. Gunnar Myrdal entitled his book on race and America *An American Dilemma*. The dilemma was the inconsistency between an "American creed" of equality of opportunity and the actual position of African Americans was. But there seemed to be no reason why the country could not live with this dilemma.

The contradiction had been there in 1776. Yet American dreams of freedom managed to coexist with the institution of slavery for ninety years—and would have coexisted with slavery much longer had not the issue of opposition to slavery become attached to the issue of preserving the national union. Yes President Abraham Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation. But he could abolish slavery in the Civil War only because it was seen as a military necessity: as a means of preserving the nation in a strongly nationalist context. And, after the Civil War, white Americans of all parties became comfortable with eliminating the political rights of and imposing subordinate discriminatory cast distinctions on African-Americans.

The Republican Party retained its ancestral commitment to African-American uplift, as part of its belief in "free labor". But Myrdal's "American creed" managed to coexist with official state-sanctioned discrimination and disenfranchisement for

another full century. In the south African-American disenfranchisement was settled policy, overwhelmingly popular among whites. There were no southern Black congressmen from 1901 to 1973, when Barbara Jordan from Texas and Andrew Young from Georgia took office.

In the north there were, up until the Great Migration, too few African Americans for it to matter. Even after the migration was underway, African-American congressmen were very few. The first northern African-American congressman did not take office until 1929, when Republican Oscar Stanton De Priest was elected to represent the majority-minority district in Southside Chicago. A second congressman joined the Southside's representative when Adam Clayton Powell from Harlem took office in 1945. Then came Charles Diggs from Michigan in 1955, Robert Nix from Pennsylvania in 1958, Augustus Hawkins from California in 1963, and John Conyers from Michigan in 1965. There were thus four African-American congressmen, all Democrats, in the last pre-Voting Rights Act congress.

Eight African-Americans served in congress in 1875-77. That number was not to be exceeded until 1969-71, when 10 Democratic congressmen plus Republican Senator Ed Brooke from Massachusetts were in the legislature. 17 served in 1979-81, 24 in 1989-91, 38 in 1999-2001, 42 in 2009-11, and 56 (including Republican Senator Tim Scott) serve today.

Representation at the congressional district level is very healthy. And yet nearly half of the states have voting restrictions that appear targeted with laser-like precision at reducing the share of African-American votes. A majority of Supreme Court justices pretend to believe that these are partisan restrictions imposed by Republican Party legislators to give them an edge over the Democratic Party in the next election, rather than racist restrictions to keep Black men and women down. But in a context where Republican Party political standard-bearers like Ronald Reagan talk of diplomats from Tanzania as “monkeys from those African countries—damn them, they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes!” And economic-policy standard-bearers like the University of Chicago's George Stigler writes of African-American demonstrations for political and civil rights as “growing in size and insolence”, I do not see the distinction that the Supreme Court majority is willing to draw.

And there are still some who think that the Democratic Party's rejection at its 1964 convention of a Mississippi delegation with no African-American representation was a big mistake.



## **18.3.2. Economic Discrimination in America**

### **18.3.2.1. As of 1940...**

As of 1940, the average African-American worker in the United States had three years fewer of education than the average white worker. A substantial majority of white Americans approved of discrimination—in employment, in housing, in education, and in voting. African-American men were concentrated in unskilled agricultural labor, primarily in the low-productivity and low-income (even for whites) south of the United States; African-American women were concentrated in unskilled agriculture and in domestic service. Both were extremely low-paid occupations: African- American men and women earned an average weekly wage some forty-five percent of their white counterparts. African-American male college graduates earned some \$280 a week (in today's dollars); white high school graduates earned some \$560 a week. In 1940 some 48 percent of white families fell below today's "poverty line" according to official statistics; some 81 percent of African-American families were in poverty.

An absence of political power, being stripped by slavery of the ability to accumulate property, the politics of using racial discrimination as a weapon to keep southern mass electorates from seeking a less inegalitarian distribution of wealth in the U.S. south, and the bad conscience of a white majority that could not forgive African-Americans for by their very existence reminding whites of their ancestors' and predecessors' bad deeds all kept the Black man and woman down.

And discrimination is still a very real reality in America today.

### **18.3.2.2. Progress**

Yet as of today things were very different. Virtually all whites would publicly espouse the principle of equal employment opportunity for African-Americans. Educational attainment by race was almost identical for those finishing school in the late 1980s and 1990s. African-American men's average weekly wages were two-thirds those of whites; African-American women's average weekly wages were more than ninety-five percent those of whites on average.

It is impossible not to credit the change to the extremely wise leadership and the extremely skillful use of moral force by the leadership of the African-American community. Civil rights leaders played an extremely weak hand with immense skill



and patience, and with extraordinary long-run success. They are among the greatest of the heroes of the twentieth century.

The major sources of gains in the 1940 to 1970 generation involved three factors: the end of formal, legal, state-sanctioned discrimination; the migration of African-Americans from the rural south to the urban north; and the associated shift from low-paid low-skill agricultural employment to industrial and service industries. The period was accompanied by large increases in African-American's educational levels, and high rates of employment growth and productivity growth in the rest of the economy.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Right Act made employment discrimination illegal. There is every reason to think that civil right enforcement made a significant difference in speeding the economic advance of African Americans. Employment discrimination lawsuits acted as a spur to boost hiring. Government contractors expanded their African-American workforces much faster than did non-contractors.

### **18.3.2.3. The Rising Significance of Class**

The period from 1940 to 1970 was one of substantial relative advance. The picture from 1970 to today was more mixed. By the end of the 1980s at least one in five of African-American prime-aged men (aged 25-54) reported no earnings in a given calendar year. Real per capita family income for African-Americans today is still only some sixty percent of whites: almost exactly what it had been at the end of the 1960s.

The less favorable relative income performance since 1970 had two causes.

Most important was a general, economy-wide cause: the growth in income inequality as employers' relative demand for less-skilled and educated workers diminished. The second were changes in family structure: the rise in divorce, the rise in births outside of marriage, and the consequent rise in single-parent almost inevitably female-headed households. The poverty rate for two-parent African-American families with children today is 12.5%. The poverty rate for single-parent African-American families with children today is 40%. It is still the case that half of African-American children in the last decades of the twentieth century spent more than half their childhood below the poverty line.

The right-wing explanation for the decline in African-American two-parent families—the explanation provided by ideologists like Charles Murray and George

Gilder—was that more generous welfare payments had triggered the collapse of the African-American family. But it was hard to escape the conclusion that those advancing this traditional explanation simply had not done their arithmetic. Welfare and food stamp payments for a mother with three children rose by one-third between 1960 and 1970, but then declined. By the mid-1990s welfare payments were lower in inflation-adjusted terms than they had been in 1960; real wages were some one-third higher—some fifty percent higher for African-American males. Maintaining a two-parent household was, in material terms, a much more advantageous option relative to split-up and welfare receipt in the 1990s than it had been in the 1950s and 1960s.

A better explanation was that African-American families were caught in the backwash of broader society-wide changes—but were especially vulnerable to them. The 1980s saw the election of America’s first divorced president, Ronald Reagan. By the 1990s the children of one Speaker of the House of Representatives—the Republican Newt Gingrich—had grown up in a single-parent family. And trends in the 1990s suggested that a majority of white children in America would spend at least some time in a single-parent household.

This should not have come as a surprise. Families do not hold together well when economic uncertainty is rife. Indeed, the seminal work out of which thinkers like Murray and Gilder constructed their interpretation was a mid-1960s document written by a then-Johnson administration policymaker: Daniel Patrick Moynihan. But Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* was shaped more by Moynihan’s memories of Irish-American family dynamics under material pressure than an analysis of African-American families either responding to welfare-state incentives or in the grip of non-optimal cultural patterns.

The promissory note remains, in large part, in default.

## **18.4. Feminism in America**

### **18.4.1. Abigail Smith Adams**

In 1764, in Britain’s Massachusetts colony, Abigail Smith was 20. She had had no formal education at all: girls weren’t worth it. In that year she married a man she had known for five years: the up-and-coming 30-year-old lawyer John Adams, future President of the United States.

Children rapidly followed their marriage: Nabby (1765), John Quincy (1767), Suky (1768, died at 2), Charles (1770, died at 10), and Thomas (1772). There was then, probably, a miscarriage or two or three from 1774-6. 1777 saw Elizabeth, stillborn). There may have been another pregnancy or two afterwards—but I suspect not: I suspect they stopped. Abigail Smith Adams spent five years pregnant. She was rich enough that she, perhaps, hired a wet-nurse for her children, but somebody or somebodies nursed her children for perhaps fourteen more years. She or other women were thus eating for two for nearly two decades to raise the next generation of Adamses: that was a substantial biological energy load.

In 1776 Abigail Smith Adams wrote a famous letter to her husband in which she begged him to write laws providing women with legal personality in the new revolutionary country, the United States of America, he was trying to create through the Revolutionary War he was so strongly committed to:

Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable.... Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands.... Such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity?... Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness...

John Adams thought this was a great joke:

I cannot but laugh.... Your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment, but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out. Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine systems.... We have only the name of masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight...

He did not react well.

Read the letter entire, and you learn that Abigail Smith Adams:

1. Ran John Adams's Boston-Braintree household and property operations, while he played on the political stage.
2. Dealt with death and disease of children and neighbors that were omnipresent, with "our Neighbour Trot... striped of two lovely children in one week...",

“Becky Peck they do not expect will live out the day...”, “your Brothers youngest child lies bad with convulsion fitts...”

3. Was desperate for news of what was going on in the wider world, for “I wish you would ever write me a Letter half as long as I write you.... Where your Fleet are gone? What sort of Defence Virginia can make against our common Enemy? Whether it is so situated as to make an able Defence? Are not the Gentry Lords and the common people vassals? Are they not like the uncivilized Natives Brittain represents us to be?...”
4. Warned her husband to be very, very careful of the Massachusetts rebels alliance with the slaveholders of Virginia, for “the passion for Liberty cannot be Eaquelly Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs...”.
5. Begged for at least some fig leaf of legal protection from abuse and brutality for her sisters
6. Expressed desperate concern that more of her children not join the shades in their graves: “our own little flock... My Heart trembles with anxiety for them...”

A very talented, very energetic, very capable woman, confined to a much narrower sphere of life than she could have occupied—and patronized by her husband. That was the life of even a powerful and privileged woman before and even well through the middle of the Long 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **18.4.2. Women in the Outside-the-Household Economy**

### **18.4.2.1 Women’s Employment**

In 1900 in the United States paid male workers outnumbered paid female workers by a margin of perhaps four to one (although census procedures undercounted the number of women whose work products were in fact sold on the market, and economists’ procedures have acted to minimize the economic value of within-the-household production). By the end of the century the paid labor force was nearly half female.

In 1900, the bulk of female workers in the census-counted, formally-paid segment of the labor force were unmarried. Some 43.5 percent of single women greater than fifteen years old were in the officially-counted labor force—41.5 percent of white and 60.5 percent of nonwhite women. By contrast, only 3.2 percent of married white women (and 26 percent of married nonwhite women, for a national average of 5.6 percent) participated in the labor force. In 1920 only 4 percent of married white women around 30 worked: by 1980 nearly 60 percent of married white

women near 30 worked. Labor force participation by married nonwhite women near 30 rose less, but from a higher base and to a greater level: from approximately 33 percent in 1920 to 72 percent by 1980.

From at least one perspective, economy-wide averages of labor force participation among women understated the magnitude of the social and economic changes in progress. Women born around 1920 reached adulthood around 1940 and were sixty in 1980. The labor force participation rate of those who were married rose from roughly 15 percent when they were 20 to approximately 45 percent when they were 50. By contrast their younger sisters born around 1960 already had a 60 percent labor participation rate (among those married) when they were 20—and every sign is that married women’s labor force participation rises with age.

#### **18.4.2.2. Women’s Earnings**

The large increase in female labor force participation in the twentieth century has not been accompanied by any rapid closing in the earnings or wage gap between male and female workers. Although various sources report substantial rises in female relative to male wages across the nineteenth century, and some rise in relative wages up to as late as 1930, since 1930 female wages have remained roughly sixty percent of male wages.

One source of the failure of female relative earnings to rise throughout the middle years of the twentieth century is the rapid expansion in female labor force participation. Rapid expansion in labor force participation means that at any moment a relatively low share of the female labor force has high experience. Because firms pay more for experienced workers—both because experienced workers are more productive and because the promise of regular pay increases along a well-established career track can serve as a powerful way to motivate employees—the relative lack of experience of female workers lowers their relative wage.

A second source was the relatively constant degree of occupational segregation by sex. In years between 1900 and 1960, roughly two-thirds of female labor force would have had to change occupations in order to produce the same distribution across occupations as for the male labor force. Occupational segregation has fallen somewhat since the end of the 1960s, but it is still the case that women are concentrated in a set of occupations that are relatively low-paid.

#### **18.4.2.2. Women and Education: Past, Present, and Future**

A third source is women's failure to possess when they go to the labor market characteristics that employers value, or valued. Women back at the start of the twentieth century had little opportunity for formal education. And they had little opportunity to gain economically-valuable skills through informal education and on-the-job training as well. Women at the start of this century by and large were employed only in tasks that were relatively easily and quickly learned, and in which the benefits of experience on productivity were slim. But conditional on these factors, Claudia Goldin estimates that the gap between what a group of women were paid at the start of this century and what a group of men with similar experience and education would have been paid is relatively small.

By contrast, today—and for most of the past half-century—the gap between what women are paid and what men are paid are typically due less to differences in women's and men's experience, education, and other job-relevant characteristics than to what is apparently wage discrimination: simply paying women less than men. Goldin traces the emergence of such wage discrimination to the development of the large modern firm with its personnel department. Before the development of the large, bureaucratic firm the market provided substantial insulation against discrimination to women. Before there were personnel policies, the labor market was relatively close to a spot market in which one could change jobs at will suffering little penalty: thus should any one firm begin to discriminate—to pay women less for the same work than men—women would have the opportunity to vote with their feet for some other, less- or non-discriminatory employer.

By contrast, as Goldin writes, once firms had established personnel departments with centralized human resource policies:

Wages, hours, benefits, and the other components of the earnings package were no longer just part of the market-clearing mechanism of the labor market. They were the means by which workers were bonded to firms, and were used to sort workers by ability or quit propensity, and to elicit appropriate effort by different types of workers.... Firms found it profitable to have occupational ladders.... [F]irms often used sex as a sign of shorter expected job tenure.... By segregating workers by sex into two jobs ladders (and some dead-end positions) firms may have been better able to use the effort-inducing and ability-revealing mechanisms of the wage structure...

In other words, if you do not expect the typical woman to remain on the job for long enough to value the regular wage increases that come with good efficiency

reports and loyalty to the firm, it is a waste of money to reward the atypical woman who does remain on the job with such increases in pay.

This is not to say that all discrimination against women in wages—past or present—has a rationale in terms of the policies of a profit-maximizing firm. Groups of male workers fearing competition from an expanded supply of workers had an incentive to try to bar women from their occupation. And there is prejudice: on the part of male workers, employers, and customers.

### **18.4.3. The Extraordinary Lag**

From today's perspective, the most surprising thing about the economic transformation of women's role was how very long it took. The birth rate had fallen to its post-World War II average level by the 1920s. A large clerical and retail sector in which physical strength was completely irrelevant had emerged by the early years of this century. And female education had taken hold in the United States even before the twentieth century began. Yet barriers to women's employment proved pervasive and powerful up until the last years of the twentieth century: hours of work that assumed that workers worked full-time posed—and still pose—difficulties; discrimination that was pervasive until the last few decades of the century; sociological pressures that held that certain occupations were inappropriate for women; firm personnel policies that not just restricted but prohibited the employment of married women.

In the long run it was federal government action that eroded away the framework of restrictions and customs that kept women's economic role from expanding. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. Claudia Goldin concludes her book on the gender gap by pointing to “the convergence between men and women in the percentage graduating from college... we can forecast the future by observing the experiences of young cohorts today, and these experiences give us ample ground for optimism.”

### **18.4.4. The Persistence of Patriarchy**

Why male supremacy was so firmly established back in the Agrarian Age is something that is not obvious to me. Yes, it was very important to have surviving descendants. Yes, attaining a reasonable chance of having surviving descendants to take care of one in one's old age meant that the typical woman spent 20 years



eating for two: pregnant and breastfeeding. Yes, eating for two is an enormous energy drain, especially in populations near subsistence. Yes, Agrarian Age populations were near subsistence—my great-grandmother Eleanor Lawton Carter’s maxim was “have a baby, lose a tooth” as the child-to-be leached calcium out of the mother to build her or his own bones. She was an upper-class Bostonian, born in the mid-1870s. Yes, breastfeeding kept women very close to their children, and impelled a concentration of female labor on activities that made that easy: gardening and other forms of within-and-near-the-dwelling labor, especially textiles. Yes, there were benefits to men as a group from oppressing women—especially if women could be convinced that they deserved it: “Unto the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband; and he shall rule over thee’...”

But surely even in the Agrarian Age a shift to a society with less male supremacy would have been a positive-sum change? Women as equal participants in society, rather than just chattels, classified as a little bit above slaves and cattle, can do a lot. We—optimistic—economists have a strong bias toward believing that people in groups will find ways to become, collectively, more productive and then to distribute the fruits of higher productivity in a way that makes such a more productive social order sustainable. But apparently not.

The bio-demographic underpinnings of the cultural pattern of high male supremacy began to erode even before 1870. But it was over 1870-2016 that these underpinnings dissolved utterly. Reductions in infant mortality, the advancing average age of marriage, and the increasing costs of child raising together drove a decrease in fertility. The number of years the typical woman spent eating for two fell from twenty—if she survived her childbed—down to four, as better sanitation, much better nutrition, and more knowledge about disease made many pregnancies less necessary for leaving surviving descendants, and as birth control technology made it easier to plan families. And, after exploding in the Industrial Age, rate of population growth in the industrial core slowed drastically. The population explosion turned out to be a relatively short run thing. Human population growth rapidly headed for zero long-run population growth.

The path of within-the-household technological advance also worked to the benefit of the typical woman over 1870-2016: dishwashers, dryers, vacuum cleaners, improved chemical cleansing products, other electrical and natural gas appliances, and so on, especially clothes-washing machines—all these made the tasks of keeping the household clean, ordered, and functioning much easier. Maintaining a

nineteenth century, high-fertility household was a much more than fulltime job. Maintaining a late twentieth century household could become more like a part-time job. And so much female labor that had been tied to full-time work within the household because of the backward state of household technology became a reserve that could now be used for other purposes. And, as Betty Friedan wrote in the early 1960s, women who sought something like equal status could find it only if they found “identity...in work... for which, usually, our society pays.” As long as women were confined to separate, domestic, occupations which the market did not reward with cash, it was easy for men to denigrate and minimize

I see the centrality of the *economic* and the extraordinary upward leap in prosperity as the principal news that the future will remember from the history of the Long 20th Century, and the coming of feminism as one of—a very important one of—its ramifications. But I am male. If I were female, would I see the demographic transition—the shift of the typical woman’s experience from one of eating for two for twenty years (and of having one chance in seven of dying in childbed) to eating for two for four years—and the rise of feminism as the biggest news?

Quite possibly.

How have minorities and their inclusion done outside of the United States? And what has been the extra-U.S. progress of the feminist revolution? I feel confident discussing many things, but here I find I do not yet know enough to say anything worth your time in reading.