

1 Introduction

Understanding the Past to Interpret the Present

THE PERIOD around the year 1900 has always interested me, perhaps because it was around this time that my grandparents emigrated from Europe to the United States. But historical information from this era really caught my attention when the 1900 census data first became publicly accessible. As these data were being entered into computer files, my eye was drawn to the case of a husband and wife in California who both worked as raisin pickers. I found this situation odd, since one could not possibly pick raisins—you pick grapes, which are dried to make raisins. But after I understood their job actually was to pick through or sort raisins, I noticed that their household included the wife's twenty-year-old sister as well as the couple's three young children. I realized that having another adult woman in a household was a major way for working-class wives to make some provision for child care so they could hold a job outside the home. Even more common in other households were co-resident relatives who held jobs and supplemented the household's income so that wives could stay home with their children. I was struck by the constancy of women's problems ensuring child care, by the insufficiency of one wage for many households in that period, and by the different solutions they chose to similar problems we still have today.

These observations were the inspiration for my writing this comprehensive, national-level study of women's work and the general place of women in the U.S. political economy during the key transition period around the turn to the twentieth century. Although the study is rooted in data from the year 1900, my primary goal is to examine the forms some of our contemporary issues and concerns took then, revealing both enduring patterns

as well as some of the changes that have taken place subsequently, thus deepening our understanding of women's evolving economic situation over the course of the twentieth century.

The relatively short time span around 1900, between 1890 and the end of World War I, set the stage for much of the twentieth century. It was a crucial historical period in which a wide array of changes occurred that affected many facets of women's (and men's) employment. The major economic transformation in the United States was the transition from an agricultural and industrial employment base to an industrial and white-collar one. As new jobs were created and existing jobs underwent modifications in their technology base or their work organization, the skills workers needed began to change. Less obviously, the shift in occupational structure created changes in the sex composition and sex segregation of jobs.

During this same interval a major social and cultural transformation took place in the United States, driven by the rapid growth in immigration, which peaked in 1909. New groups of workers, especially from Europe, constantly were entering the labor force, and many first- or second-generation immigrant women were visible among the ranks of domestic and factory workers.

Finally, the turn of the century was a time of geographic mobility, with many people moving into cities. About half of the population still lived in towns or rural areas of less than a thousand people, but the urban job market was growing, drawing rural residents to cities large and small. Turn-of-the-century immigrants, who had little access to farm ownership, also arrived in cities and often remained there. The year 1900 is a key time to explore, since it falls in the middle of a period of economic, social, and demographic change that both ushered in and laid the groundwork for the twentieth century.

In addition to marking a pivotal historical moment, the year 1900 is often used as a baseline against which to gauge the economic changes of the next one hundred years, since it is the gateway to the twentieth century. Unfortunately, sociological research on women's work often picks up later, examining the changes that became visible during World War II. Meanwhile

students tend to think that the history of women's work began relatively recently, in the early 1960s, with the civil rights and feminist movements. Such foreshortened views leave us with misconceptions of the past and make it easy to assume that the turn of the century was a time far different from our own, when women's employment was an embattled issue. When we use the phrases "traditional family division of labor" or "traditional women's work" to depict women's tasks during this period, we invoke a past that is only imagined (Coontz 2000). These expressions conjure a model of the full-time housewife that was defined as conventional only in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, U.S. women had important economic roles in both agricultural and early industrial households. Nevertheless, the power of this imagined past has meant that most historical studies have focused on the increase in women's recorded labor force participation rates over the twentieth century, leaving the false impression that women had few economic roles in 1900. Consequently, many of us retain narrow preconceptions about this period, while ignoring many other connections with women's current positions.

ISSUES LINKING THE PRESENT AND THE PAST

By focusing on 1900, I supplement, challenge, and expand the prevailing understanding of current concerns surrounding women's economic roles. This book is intended to provide a historical perspective on contemporary issues that all too often are analyzed only in terms of the present.

When comparing the beginning and end of the twentieth century, we must keep in mind that change is not necessarily linear. Significant alterations in the U.S. political economy during the twentieth century occurred in three distinct periods: from 1890 through World War I, again in the 1940s (including both World War II and postwar years), and once more beginning in the 1970s. Of course, we have come to expect vast differences between the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. Yet there were both continuities and discontinuities in the major factors shaping, and social concerns surrounding, women's work in this century.

I begin my analysis in Chapter 2 by challenging a fundamental assumption: the popular but limited understanding of work as paid employment outside the home. This mistaken notion has been called into question by the contemporary growth of home-based small businesses in the United States and by the growth of microenterprises in the developing world. Thus, home-based work is now sometimes recognized as work. However, we often ignore women's early twentieth century income-generating work taking in boarders or in tenement sweatshops, on the family farm, or in the family business as a forerunner of current home-based work. Even though home-based employment often went unrecorded by the census in 1900, especially when done by women, it is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, some of this hidden work, such as renting out a room, selling home-made goods, or providing child care in the home, still exists in what we now call the "informal economy," whose workers remain for the most part uncounted. Finding such work and counting the workers changes prevalent images of women's employment status in 1900 and tempers perceptions of the improvements in women's employment opportunities over the century. Other unpaid work, including caring for the elderly at home or doing volunteer work outside of the home, also contributes to the political economy. Such work is beyond the scope of this book, since it would be impossible to recognize as work using either 1900 or 2000 census data.

We have preconceptions not only about the nature of work, but also about the factors that determine which jobs people hold. The significance of individual achievement in U.S. culture leads us to think that an individual's success or failure in the labor market is largely due to that person's own skills and characteristics. In fact, an entire school of economic thought, called human capital theory, is organized around this basic tenet. This belief obscures the role of other factors, such as family composition or available local economic opportunities, that have influenced individual employment decisions throughout the twentieth century. In Chapter 3, I develop a model for predicting which women were employed in 1900 that improves upon the human capital approach by incorporating features of a person's household and the local economic geography. In a further innovation, my model illustrates how a woman's individual, household, and regional

experiences are each shaped by her gender, race, and social class. This new model can be applied to twenty-first century women as well. What has changed over the past one hundred years is the relative importance of specific predictors of women's work, not the general model itself. For example, among a woman's individual characteristics, education is more important to increasing the probability of her employment than it once was, while being married is less of a hindrance to paid work. After considering the conditions leading to women's employment in Chapter 3, in the next two chapters I investigate the specific occupations in which women were employed. Before looking briefly at the content of those chapters, however, I want to spend a bit more time delineating the household structure and geographic components of my analytical model.

Household structure is not entirely ignored in discussions of contemporary economic problems. Salient issues right now are the increased rate of single motherhood and of female-headed households, both associated with high rates of women's poverty and the consequent need for women's employment. We correctly see this trend as an income problem for the people involved. However, we incorrectly think of it as a recent phenomenon and compare it with the "traditional family structure" of the past, when divorce was difficult to get and husbands supposedly provided most of the financial support for their families. These are false assumptions. Although divorce was rare in 1900, desertion by men was fairly common, leaving women to survive on their own. Industrial accidents also created a plentiful supply of widows, who frequently had young children to support and no life insurance. In reality, about 10 percent of all women were heads of households in 1900, and still others were single mothers with children living in someone else's household. The plight of these women was as much a social concern early in the twentieth century as it is now, although the cause of their household headship and the social construction of their problems were sometimes different. There is much to be learned that is useful in the present from studying how these women subsisted in 1900 without welfare, as I describe in Chapter 6.

Geography entered our current economic discussions during the 1970s, when there were large waves of regionally concentrated

plant layoffs associated with U.S.-based corporations moving their production operations overseas. The process, now labeled “de-industrialization,” changed the industrial Northeast and Midwest into regions then nicknamed the “rust belt,” while there was considerable job growth in the southern and western sun-belt states. Ironically, it was those same rust-belt states that had driven the economy earlier in the century. In Chapter 7, I show that economic geography and regional differences in employment patterns have been important throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, some of the seeds of later change were already apparent in 1900.

Not only do job opportunities vary according to geographic area but, in 1900 as now, in most locations the labor markets for women and men rarely overlapped. This phenomenon, known as occupational sex segregation, was firmly established by the early twentieth century. Occupational segregation is probably the most broad-ranging contemporary work issue as well. It is widely recognized as a major source of gender inequality in the labor market and is largely responsible for the current male-female wage gap. And because employed women earn less than men and often work fewer years than men, their social security and retirement benefits are lower. This difference is accentuated because women often work in less profitable industries, which may not provide pensions at all (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). Occupational segregation hinders women’s economic mobility, insofar as there is a “sticky floor” in women’s traditional work (Berheide 1992) in addition to the “glass ceiling” most women reach in male-dominated occupations. Furthermore, in sex-atypical jobs, sexual harassment appears to be a major consequence for women, and being treated as tokens is a problem for both men and women.

Occupational segregation according to race was also fairly extensive in 1900. Yet because occupational race segregation declined significantly over the twentieth century, while sex segregation remained relatively high, some think that sex segregation in the workplace was always stronger than racial segregation. In Chapter 4, I show that the interaction between the two was much more complex. Furthermore, the waves of immigration that crested in the early twentieth century added the element of

ethnic segregation. The combined result of these two trends was considerable racial-ethnic specialization in the labor force, even among women whose job options were already limited by gender. In mid-century, immigration rates were low, but they are now approaching peak levels again, suggesting that we should still look for ethnic as well as racial specialization in women's work.

Notwithstanding labor market segregation, one job was most common among practically every racial-ethnic group of women in 1900—domestic work. In fact, many immigrant women today still end up as domestics or in sweatshops or doing factory out-work as their predecessors did, even though the immigrants now come from different countries and the industrial structure they encounter in the United States has changed since the early twentieth century. Perhaps because discussions of immigrant communities have shifted their focus to issues of diversity and concepts like ethnic enclaves, and away from assimilation and terms like ghettos, we do not see some of the occupational similarities. Although the current ethnic enclaves have been described as helping immigrant men obtain jobs, it is little remarked how the more negatively stereotyped ghettos that preceded them helped women as well as men locate employment. In Chapter 5, I consider how women who were segregated into domestic work in 1900 labored in a type of ethnic enclave, and I compare their situation with that of immigrant women today.

This book is organized thematically, and there are important if subtle links among the different topics addressed. Work in the informal economy, the determinants of formal employment, and the occupational segregation of women and men are issues that virtually define women's role in the labor force. They are tied to our fundamental understanding of work, and as such they have been recognized in one way or another as abiding concerns of the twentieth century.

In contrast, the topics of (sometimes undocumented) immigrants' employment in domestic work, the high rates of female household headship or single motherhood, and regional diversity in job opportunities are more likely to be regarded as current social problems than as work issues. However, they are key examples of the relationship between a woman's work opportunities

and her individual, household, and geographic characteristics, and as such they reveal the nature of women's place in the broader political economy. Without doubt, they are important contemporary issues, but at the same time, each had its counterpart at the beginning of the twentieth century.

"WOMEN'S WORK" VERSUS "WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY"

Why do I emphasize women in the political economy, and not simply women's work? Aren't they the same thing? Although studying women in the political economy includes looking at women's work, it entails a lot more. It shows us how such work is shaped by changes in the wider economy and by institutional forces such as government social welfare policies, labor law, and labor activism (Frader 1998). An examination of work may cover some of the "economy" portion, but it entirely excludes the political component.

As a field of study, political economy places employment in a broad socioeconomic and historical context. Its primary concern is usually with the effects of the U.S. economy's transformation from an agricultural base to an industrial one, and then to a service society. Political economists have been most interested in the comparative economic and political fortunes of working-class people. Indeed, their approach is frequently synonymous with social class-oriented analyses of employment, worker organizations, and social policy. Unfortunately, social class studies often concentrate on men and their social mobility. Although political economists have examined women's labor activism and the increase in married women's employment, they often ignore other gendered components of industrial transformations, such as the changing availability of part-time work or shifts in household structure.

To counterbalance this single focus on social class, two other historical and macroeconomic models have emerged to interpret the effects of twentieth-century economic changes in the United States. Immigration-focused studies developed an ethnicity- and class-oriented model. Meanwhile, feminist research on women's waged and unwaged work developed a gendered class model.

My broad vision of political economy places all three features at the center of this analysis, melding contemporary feminist visions with those focused on race and ethnicity and the more usually considered social class structures. This standpoint is inherently multidisciplinary, drawing primarily on sociology, history, economics, and social policy studies. In addition, a racial-ethnic-, class-, and gender-sensitive approach to political economy reveals previously hidden aspects of women's work, such as work's role in creating purported social problems like female-headed households.

Fortunately, the year 1900 is ideal for studying simultaneous transformations in all three of these stratifying components of the U.S. political economy. Shifts in social class position were in full swing as the economy moved from a predominantly agricultural one to an industrial economy. Women's entry into waged work was clearly evident, reshaping their family lives. And ethnicity was increasingly visible as immigration reached its peak in 1909, producing a population that was 15 percent foreign born. Although that figure subsequently declined to a low of 5 percent in 1970, the foreign-born U.S. population rose again to 9.3 percent by 1998. Late nineteenth century racial patterns did not change considerably until the northward migration of blacks after World War I; however, substantial populations of other racial groups were regionally distributed across the country, with Asians predominantly on the West Coast and Latinos in the Southwest.

Combining all the elements of my model, *Women in 1900: Gateway to the Political Economy of the 20th Century* presents a multilevel, national framework from which to understand women's economic conditions. It interweaves two sets of characteristics, somewhat like the vertical and horizontal patterns in the potholders children create. The horizontal threads symbolize the characteristics that situate women as individuals located simultaneously within their households, counties, and regions. The vertical threads represent their simultaneous experience of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The interwoven design suggests my conceptualization of gender, class, and race or ethnicity as both structural properties of the political economy and as

characteristics of individual women and the households they live in. As an example of this construction (which is explained further in Chapter 3), we can consider that while ethnicity is usually regarded as an individual trait, the ethnic mix of a county's residents is a geographic or structural aspect of the same characteristic. Thus, gender, race, and ethnicity are not merely biological categories or individual traits, they are also embedded in social institutions and in the household or geographic context of everyday life.

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE GATEWAY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A NATIONAL VIEW

Most socio-historical studies of women in the U.S. political economy do not use national-level data. I do so in order to situate particular regional or ethnic-group patterns of women's work in a broad context and to inquire how representative these experiences might have been. Most of the important books on early twentieth-century women's work have focused either on a few industrial cities, or on specific ethnic groups (or immigrants more generally), or on a single racial group, most commonly white or African-American women. Some (for example, Cohen 1992; DeVault 1990; Dublin 1994; Ewen 1985; Friedman-Kasaba 1996; Glenn 1990; Lamphere 1987) provide considerable detail on a small geographic area and generate intriguing hypotheses about the intersection of work, gender, class, and ethnicity, especially in the Northeast (for a West Coast exception, see Mason and Laslett 1983). Others (Glenn 1986; Jones 1985; Yung 1995) do the same for race-related employment issues. Numerous authors cover the history of a single female-dominated occupation, such as waitressing (Cobble 1991), sales (Benson 1986), the collar industry (Turbin 1992), or domestic servant work (Katzman 1978). The research presented in this book can be used to evaluate whether the employment patterns these authors have found for specific cities and regions, racial-ethnic groups, or occupations are replicated at a national level. Used this way, national-level data reduce the chance of inadvertently creating stereotypes through extrapolation from case studies.

At the same time, this approach develops a mutually supportive relationship between qualitative local studies and this more quantitative national one. National data reveal the range of women's work experiences and thus provide a context for single case studies. For example, national data show that what was reported as the "typical" job of Italian or Russian women actually depended on whether they resided in rural or urban areas, and that women's "typical" nonfarm occupations were different in northeastern, midwestern, and southern cities.

This is not the first book to examine women's turn-of-the-century work at a national level. For example, Watkins (1994) briefly examines gender and industry in 1910. Yet she primarily focuses on demographic issues such as fertility, mortality, and household structure. There have been other economic histories of women's employment that were nationwide and encompassed several decades of the twentieth century. However, they have tended to focus on the most easily measured concerns, such as the transformation of women's endeavors into waged work (Kessler-Harris 1982) and the increase in employment rates among married women (Goldin 1990), rather than on more contemporary concerns. Furthermore, many have relied on a variety of regional or state reports (Kessler-Harris 1982) or on published national census data (Amott and Matthaei 1991; Matthaei 1982). I reanalyze the original 1900 census data both because of inaccuracies in published figures, which I describe later, and because my analytical framework combines information on individuals, their households, and geographic area that must be constructed out of the census's original format.

Because my approach to women's roles in the political economy is national, information on geographic and economic differences must be incorporated. Simple location measures, such as the region or the size of a town or city a woman lived in, are included in the census data. However, I created additional contextual indicators to clarify how women's employment decisions were structured by the opportunities available in their local economies. This information provides the context or background against which each person lived their life. For example, a woman could escape employment in domestic work—the predominant

women's job of the period—only if there were alternative workplaces, such as manufacturing firms, especially those paying higher wages. Or an immigrant woman might have a better chance of finding work if she lived in a community with other immigrants, especially of the same nationality, who would help each other out, creating what we now call an ethnic enclave. Measures I added, such as the county average for women's wages in manufacturing, the average firm size, or the county's ethnic mix, tap into these issues.

Such contextual data reduce the risk of ignoring regional variation during the search for national trends. At the same time, they help us determine when race or ethnic-group patterns that seemed unique or a cultural feature actually were the result of a connection between the distribution of each group across the country and the economic opportunities available to them in each place.

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE DATA: THE CENSUS OF 1900

What kind of data is available with which to construct a national portrait of women's economic activities at the gateway to the twentieth century? And how have I reconceptualized and transformed these data to answer the complex questions I have posed about the past as a gateway to the present?

The manuscripts for the U.S. census of 1900, which provide much more detail than the published summary tabulations, were closed to non-census personnel for seventy years because of confidentiality issues. When they were opened to the public, in the 1970s, a set of the original data, known as a Public Use Sample, was drawn from this source, coded, computerized, documented, and made available by the University of Washington Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology. This data set is a nationally representative sample that includes one in every 760 individuals, for a total of 100,438 people recorded in the 27,069 households in which they lived. All the information on each individual and household available from the original enumerator sheets was incorporated into this data sample. I began my study using this data set, but I also had to transform it.

First, the data had to be reformatted so that each individual woman's "record" or file included statistics on her household as well. Then, in order to include geographically based contextual measures, I matched each individual in the Public Use Sample with economic data on their county of residence—information I drew from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research's county and state data for the same period. In this way I created a data set that includes measures on individual men and women and their households, and relevant geographic contextual measures.

Unfortunately, the data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau, like other public records, are not as free from ideological influences as one might think. This problem does not reduce the usefulness of the data, but it does mean one should understand how 1900 terminology relates (or does not relate) to that used a century later. The census definition of gainful employment used from 1870 through 1930 tended to undercount women's work in each of those decades, with the possible exception of 1910 (see also Abel and Folbre 1990; Bose 1987; Ciancanelli 1983; Goldin 1990; Sobek 1997). Furthermore, the verification procedures instituted in 1890, when the census introduced machine tabulation procedures, consistently undercounted women's nontraditional employment (Conk 1981). In 1900 the Census Bureau began systematically checking the accuracy of its new coding and data card-punching procedures by reexamining information cards for blacks in the North, foreign-born persons in the South, women in "men's jobs," and men in "women's jobs." When such "unusual" cases were encountered during the verification procedures, there was undoubtedly pressure to change some occupational codes. As Conk (1981, 68) indicates, "The punching clerks were aware that their work would be rejected if they coded men into 'female' occupations and women into 'male' occupations, even if they were true to the schedules. . . . From the clerk's point of view, it would perhaps be better to use a non-controversial occupation code in the first place and avoid having one's work scrutinized." Paradoxically, this accuracy check resulted in less precise data.

In addition, the new census occupational classifications of 1910, which loosely defined jobs according to levels of skill,

created divisions between categories that were social as well as technical. Skilled workers were employed in the crafts, semi-skilled workers used machinery (operatives), and laborers found themselves in the residual category of unskilled. Women and minorities were presumed never to be skilled; and, under Alba Edwards's leadership at the Census Bureau, coders who classified individuals' occupations were advised to take into account cultural information about people. As a result, the status of some occupations was lowered from skilled to semiskilled merely because women and children held those jobs (Conk 1978). Thus, in its methods of assigning individuals to occupational categories and occupational categories to levels of skill, the Census Bureau reinforced prevailing ideologies about the sexual and racial division of labor by determining that certain occupations were "wrong."

Obviously, the social and economic purposes of the Census Bureau were rather entangled at the turn of the century (Conk 1978). Many of these problems were inadvertently alleviated when the U.S. entry into World War II instigated modifications in the 1940 census procedures that affected the verification system. As part of the war effort, the government encouraged women to enter jobs previously nontraditional for them, and it needed information on the success rate of these efforts. In order to speed up tabulations, and because of the new questions and procedures, the Census Bureau hired many new statisticians who were not well schooled in the prior verification methods that checked for white women and persons of color in "wrong" occupations. As a result, detailed census statistics published in the fall of 1941 counted many women and youths in occupations that were "unusual" for them and from which they had been excluded in previous censuses. The figures were already published, and it was too late to go back and check the occupational codes against the original reports. Thus, the sex-typed verification procedures initiated at the beginning of the century were not carried out in 1940. When the final statistics appeared in 1942, newspaper and government reports expressed delight with the success of the war effort, which had drawn so many women into traditional male occupations. However, we should recall that some of these

women had been in those jobs all along but had been counted in another place. Because of these and other problems in census methods in the early part of the century, government-published national data from that period are not as reliable as they might be, which is why my study goes back to the original data on the enumerator forms. In so doing, I had the opportunity to recode women's occupations into the "correct" categories, as well as to reshape definitions of race and ethnicity, of social class, and even of gender.

DEFINING RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity are socially defined constructs that, like definitions of work, are heavily influenced by the ideologies of dominant segments of society. When and how they are measured by the census reflects the concerns and conceptualizations of an era. Because the early twentieth century was marked by high immigration rates, the census of 1900 inquired about a person's place of birth and the birthplace of his or her parents. Such questions are not explicitly about ethnicity, but a person's ethnic origins can be constructed from this information. The 1900 census also recognized five races—white, black ("Negro or of Negro descent"), Chinese, Japanese, and Native American ("Indian"), although relatively few individuals from the last three groups are represented in the Public Use Sample. Between 1850 and 1920 the census separated the categories "mulatto" and "Negro," but in 1900 both were combined into black ("Negro"), which Washington (1996) suggests reflected fears of finding a large percentage of mixed-race people and a preference for labeling all mixtures as black. Indeed, throughout much of the twentieth century, race has been socially defined dichotomously as black and white, and only recently, owing to increasing political pressure from multiracial people, has the census considered using a mixed-race category.

Obviously, race and ethnicity are not separate dimensions. For example, in 1900, many white people were also immigrants, as were virtually all Chinese and Japanese residents. Meanwhile, people from Latin America and the Caribbean were considered by the 1900 census to be immigrants like any others, but today they

are also asked to self-identify as Latino or Hispanic from a list that is composed primarily of racial groups. Some immigrant groups, such as Jews or the Irish, were popularly considered to be racial minorities around 1900, but this is not true now, and at no time did the census record them as racial groups. Nonetheless, there has been considerable historical discussion of "whiteness" and how some immigrant groups "became" white (for example, Brod-kin 1998; Ignatiev 1995). Because of this complex interrelationship between race and ethnicity, I divide men and women into fourteen different "racial ethnic" (or racial-ethnic) categories that combine race and national origin, or ethnicity, in a continuum. The set of groups is defined by a combination of a person's birth-place and immigrant status. I describe each below in order of their generations in the United States.

Native Americans constitute a single category, although only 0.2 percent of all adult women fall within it. The census defines them by race, but the group also has the greatest proportion of people born in the United States of U.S.-born parents. Native Americans constitute the only truly native-born group.

Eleven other groups are each composed of immigrants and second-generation immigrants, that is, people who were born in the United States but had at least one foreign-born parent. I organize the ethnicities represented in these groups by continent of origin rather than size of the group. From Europe there were Irish, British, Scandinavians, Germans, Eastern Europeans, Russians, and Italians (as well as an assorted mixture of "other Europeans," which is the residual category and is excluded from most of the analysis). From the Americas there were French Canadians, English Canadians, and Latin Americans, the latter including men and women from the Caribbean. Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and other nationalities from Asia are combined in an additional category, "Asians," because there were too few in the sample to study each group separately. These immigrant and second-generation immigrant groups formed the eleven largest ethnic categories in terms of representation in U.S. society at that time, and in total, 38 percent of all adult women had their roots in these countries.

Combining first- and second-generation immigrants of the same ethnic background was both practical, because the 1900 census gives place of birth for an individual and her or his parents, and sensible, because national origin characteristics, if any, are not lost to the second generation. Indeed, both immigrants and their U.S.-born children tended to be employed in the same types of jobs. Members of these eleven groups may be of any race but, except for Asian and Latin American women, would now be considered predominantly white. Asians and Latin Americans had experiences as immigrants that were somewhat different from those of African Americans, although both were, and still are, often treated as racial minorities within U.S. society.

The remaining two groups are black and white women who were at least third-generation U.S. residents, that is, born in the United States to native-born parents. For simplicity, I variously refer to these groups as blacks or whites, and sometimes as third-generation residents, even though many families had resided in the United States for many more than three generations at the time of the census. In 1900, about 11 percent of adult women were black, and most blacks were African Americans and at least third-generation U.S. residents. Only a few were first- or second-generation immigrants, usually from the Caribbean. In contrast, "white" is a residual category for those whose race is coded as white and for whom ethnic heritage cannot be determined from the census, which provides only a respondent's and her or his parents' place of birth. They may have identified themselves with some ethnic group, but the census will not reveal that information. Nonetheless, this is the group assumed by many to be the baseline for "American" family behavior. Ironically, such women barely constituted a majority, at 51 percent, of all women age 15 or older.

Although race and ethnicity are usually considered individual attributes, I also created two geographically based measures of racial-ethnic diversity. One is the county's ethnic mix, or the percentage of women who were (white) immigrants or had foreign-born parents, and the second is the percentage of women in a county who were black. Occasionally I also include a third measure of the percentage of nonblack women of color.

DEFINING GENDER

Much has been written about the differences between *sex* and *gender*. The labels male/female (or man/woman) refer to biological sex. Thus, I appropriately might say that *Gateway to the Political Economy of the 20th Century* focuses on women's experiences in the political economy. On the other hand, the terms masculine and feminine refer to gender. Gender, like race, is socially constructed. Indeed, we now commonly talk about "doing gender" in our day-to-day lives (West and Zimmerman 1987). Consequently, we observe that men and women often have different roles in the political economy because of gender constraints. Gender can be created by social expectations, such as the notion that women should be employed only before they marry. Gender can also be shaped by social institutions. For instance, there were few women bartenders in 1900 because most states had laws that prohibited women from tending bar. In this study on the social shaping of women's employment options, I try to focus on the aspects of individual and household life, as well as of geographic location, that could be considered gendered.

As I indicated earlier, adopting a gendered standpoint on the political economy extends the very definition of work. Work is no longer limited to formal participation in the labor force but incorporates unpaid work in the informal economy or other home-based work. Indeed, this approach applies a global perspective to work in the United States, since research on developing countries has shown that work should be conceptualized as occurring on a continuum from unpaid subsistence labor through paid labor in the formal sector (Ward and Pyle 1995).

DEFINING SOCIAL CLASS

Social class can be defined in numerous ways. The most intuitive approach for many people is to divide the U.S. population into between three and six classes, such as the upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, and working classes, and the poor. In general, we use a multiplicity of indicators to know who fits into each of these categories, most commonly considering a person's occupation,

income, and education. Unfortunately, this approach does not always work for historical studies such as mine because the U.S. census never collected some of the relevant information. In 1900 the census enumerators were supposed to inquire about the ability to read and write rather than about years of formal education, and they were not supposed to ask about income at all. Information on occupations is available but was not counted in categories that are comparable to current ones. The occupational structure at the turn of the century was much more heavily agricultural and industrial, with fewer white-collar and service jobs. Thus the categories of white-collar work were not as diversified then as now. In addition, the class position of some occupations has changed. For example, as “office clerk” gradually ceased to refer to an office manager and more often referred to filers and typists, the status of that occupation declined over the century.

Even though some of the information we typically use to discern social class is either missing or different, it is possible to make judgments about a person’s class in 1900 using either of two methods. First, instead of using categories labeled by class, I use seven occupational categories: professional-managerial, clerical and sales, craft occupations, machine operatives and laborers, service workers, agricultural workers, and the unemployed. This approach reflects the white-collar/blue-collar/agricultural social and economic hierarchy in place at the turn of the century and follows the major occupational categories that the census used for several decades. A household head or an individual household member can be recorded in these categories.

The second approach uses a continuous prestige scale that rates occupations from 0 (low) through 100 (high). The scale was developed to measure the social standing of occupations in 1950, when the U.S. occupational distribution was closer to what it was at the beginning of the twentieth century than it is now. Staff at the University of Washington appended this information to each occupation when they created the Census Public Use data set. Of course, using these scores for 1900 is not ideal. However, the two approaches validate each other. In 1900, women achieved the highest prestige scores in professional (69) and managerial jobs (54), while attaining slightly lower scores in white-collar clerical

(51) and sales (47) work. In the elite blue-collar craft or artisan jobs, women averaged 32 prestige points. However, in factory operative jobs their status dropped to 19 points. Agricultural (13) and service work (11) had fairly equivalent, low prestige scores. Unemployment is not usually rated using this system.

The categorical approach provides considerable detail and specificity, but listing seven categories can be awkward. In contrast, the prestige scale is easy to use, requiring the reporting of a single number, but that number doesn't always give us a sense of a person's lifestyle. I use both the occupational categories and the prestige scores, because these advantages and disadvantages offset each other.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

In sum, this book explores women's place in the political economy at the beginning of the twentieth century using two different standpoints. The first is an exploration, at the national level, of variations in women's experiences according to racial-ethnic background, class, and geography. Because this past is often used as the baseline for judging changes during the subsequent one hundred years, it is important that we understand it on its own terms. In addition, 1900 was at the crux of changes in the U.S. economic structure and ethnic composition, making it a key time to observe transformations in women's options. The second standpoint is based in contemporary issues. Here I explore the historical roots of seemingly new concerns, looking backward to see ways in which the past is much more relevant to the present than popular culture would lead us to believe.

I use a thematic organization to raise both specific and general issues regarding women's role in the political economy. The first three chapters examine the nature of women's employment. Chapter 2 tabulates the large volume of women's work in the informal economy that went uncounted by the census in 1900, suggesting that the roles of women in the economy then were larger than we have been lead to believe. Chapter 3 reveals which individual, household, and geographic characteristics predicted women's entry into formal employment. I show that some of the predictive traits

have changed while others have remained the same, and that the influence of race, ethnicity, class, and gender could vary considerably. Chapter 4 explores which jobs women held in the formal economy, looking at the occupational segregation experienced by women of differing racial-ethnic backgrounds.

The next three chapters concentrate on broader political economic concerns frequently cast as social problems. The issues were selected to represent the three analytical levels of the individual, the household, and geographic settings. In addition, the issues connect the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. Chapter 5 focuses on domestic work, the predominant women's job in 1900, and uses it to inquire whether women might have participated in ethnic enclaves, or employment networks based on ethnicity, which now are expected to benefit men. Domestic employment was a woman's work ghetto, but in my analysis I consider the conditions under which employers went out of their way to hire women of a racial-ethnic background similar to their own. In Chapter 6 I turn to the lives of female heads of households and of single mothers (who might not head their own households). Contrary to contemporary perceptions, this group of women has been around for a long time. I show how they supported themselves in the absence of large state or federal welfare programs in 1900, and which groups of women were most vulnerable to becoming heads of a household. Then, in Chapter 7, I direct attention to the geographic or contextual effects on women's employment. I consider how residence in a rural versus an urban area or in a particular region of the country could limit or expand a woman's job options. Ironically, the area we now call the rust belt previously offered women some of the best jobs.

Finally, in the Epilogue (Chapter 8) I make the basic argument that the beginning of the twentieth century tells us a great deal about the end of it. I take a moment to reflect on the new factors influencing women's place in today's political economy as well as the less obvious older factors that still hold sway. I discuss the implications of racial-ethnic differences in shaping the existing diversity within the category of "women" and the role of local differences in shaping national patterns of women's work.