

Concepts can become so widely accepted and seem so obvious that they block the way to further understanding. Descriptions of black American domestic life (Frazier 1939; Drake and Cayton 1945; Abrahams 1964; Moynihan 1965; Rainwater 1966a) are almost always couched in terms of the nuclear family and in terms of the fashionable notion of a matrifocal complex. But in many societies the nuclear family is not always a unit of domestic cooperation, and the "universal functions" of family life can be provided by other social units (Spiro 1954; Gough 1959; Levy and Fallers 1959; Reiss 1965). And matrifocal thinking, while it may bring out the importance of women in family life, fails to account for the great variety of domestic strategies one can find on the scene in urban black America. The following study suggests that if we shed concepts such as matrifocality we can see that black Americans have evolved a repertoire of domestic units that serve as flexible adaptive strategies for coping with the everyday human demands of ghetto life.

In the fall of 1966 I began to investigate black family organization in midwestern cities. I concentrated upon one domestic family unit—the household of Viola and Leo Jackson—and their network of kinsmen, which proved to number over 100 persons.² My immediate aim was to discover when and why each of these people had changed residence, and what kind of domestic unit they joined during the half-century since they had begun moving north from Arkansas.

The data show that during the process of migration and the adjustment of individuals to urban living, clusters of kin align together for various domestic purposes. It soon became clear that matrifocal thinking provided little insight into the organization of

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THE KINDRED OF VIOLA JACKSON: RESIDENCE AND FAMILY ORGANIZATION OF AN URBAN BLACK AMERICAN FAMILY¹

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domestic units of cooperation, for example, those groups of kin and non-kin which carry out domestic functions but do not always reside together (Bender 1967). In certain situations such as the death or desertion of a parent, the loss of a job, or in the process of migration it was found that an individual almost always changed residence. But matrilocality proved to be a poor predictor of the kind of domestic unit the individual might subsequently enter. Among Mrs. Jackson's kin one can find various assortments of adults and children cooperating in domestic units: children living with relatives other than their parents, and also clusters of kin (often involving the father) who do not reside together but who provide some of the domestic functions for a mother-and-child unit in another location. Not only does matrilocality fail here, but also little or nothing in the current writing on black American family life helps deal with questions such as the following that arise when we examine Mrs. Jackson's kin: Which relatives can a person expect will help him? Which relatives will care for parentless or abandoned children? And who will look after the ill and elderly? I will discuss these questions, and the challenge that Mrs. Jackson's kin and their lifeways put to our powers of explanation. First, however, I will deal briefly with the nature of matrilocality.

THE MATRIFOCAL COMPLEX

Matrilocality has become a popular replacement for the discarded nineteenth-century concept of matriarchy. Some would argue that matrilocality is more sophisticated, but I suggest that it is no more useful than matriarchy for characterizing urban Negro households.

When the rules for reckoning kinship are not explicit, then it is difficult to determine the basis upon which households are formed. As so, as M. G. Smith (1962b:7) has pointed out, by necessity the anthropologist must rely on data on household composition. It is in this context that the term "matrilocality" is most widely used. However, it also has been used to refer to at least three units of information: (1) the composition of a household, (2) the type of kinship bond linking its members, and (3) the relationship between males and females in the household. In fact, matrilocality tells us little about the actual composition of the household, and the relational link upon which the household is formed. Schneider (1966) points out that in the past the terms "male local marriage" and "matriliny" were used interchangeably (see Bachofen 1861) and that the matriarchal complex referred to in the household which did not include the husband or father. Both González (1965) and Smith (1962b) use matrilocality to refer to the composition of households. These and similar formulations ignore the developmental history of domestic groups (Good 1958). In addition, they supply no information on the age and circumstances in which individuals join households, the alternative open to them, the relational links they have with other members, or who the members are. *Matrilocality is not a residence rule, and particular, it is not a rule for post-marital residence.* Residence, one of the dynamics of social organization, can be understood only if the basis for the active formation of households is known.

A further complication is that notions such as matrilocality, maternal family (King 1945), and matriarchy inadvertently are associated with unilineal descent. It was Bachofen's contention (1861) that matriarchy (descent through women) and matriarchy

were but two aspects of the same institution (Schneider 1961; Lowie 1947). This claim had to be discarded when observers failed to find any generalized authority of women over men in matriarchal societies. This controversy is well known. What is less widely appreciated is that there is a close parallel between matriarchal and matrilocality thinking, in that both imply descent through women. For example, M. G. Smith (1962b) defines Caribbean matrilocality as ones which are composed of blood-related women plus all their unmarried children. González (1965:1542) defines consanguineal households in terms of the type of kinship bond linking adult men and women in the household such that no two members are bound together in an affinal relationship. She suggests that consanguineal households may also be matrilocality (1965:1548) and that there is evidence that consanguineal households exist among lower class Negro American groups (DuBois 1908; Frazier 1939; C. King 1945). The tentative classification that emerges from studies of black American households as consanguineal or as both consanguineal and matrilocality is confusing. In this confusion the use of the notion of matrilocality roughly coincides with Schneider's (1961:3) definition of matrilineal descent units in which he states that the "individual's initial relationship is to his mother and through her to other kinsmen, both male and female, but continuing only through females." *Matrilocality is not necessarily a correlate of matrilineal descent, nor does it imply a structure for linking families in the same community.*

The term "matrilocality" may have value as an indication of the woman's role within the domestic group, but it tells us little about authority, decision-making, and male-female relationships within the house-

hold, among extended kin, and in the community. Used in this context to refer to a dominant female role, and as a designate of residence classification, reference to the matrilocality household may lead to confusion between residence and role behavior. Analysis of role relationships and interactional patterns which is limited to their classification as matrilocality is at best uninteresting. The role organization of urban Negro households exists in a dynamic system which can be illustrated by the life histories of individuals in households as they adapt to the urban environment. This adaptation comes out dramatically when one examines Viola Jackson's kin and their many ways of forming a domestic unit.

Frequently, discussions of matrilocality and consanguineal households ignore crucial aspects of family organization. Some of the matrilocality thinkers seem to assume that children derive nothing of sociological importance from their father, that households are equivalent to the nuclear family, and that resident husband-fathers are marginal members of their own homes (M. G. Smith 1957b). A look at Viola Jackson's kindred raises doubts about many of these assumptions.

URBAN FAMILY ORGANIZATION

Clusters of Kin

The past fifty years have witnessed a massive migration of rural, southern blacks to urban centers in the United States. The kindred of Viola Jackson are a part of this movement. Ninety-six of them left the South between 1916 and 1967. Some of them first moved from rural Arkansas to live and work harvesting fruit in areas around Grand Rapids and Benton Harbor, Michigan, and

Racine, Wisconsin; eventually they settled in the urban North. Two major patterns emerge from their life histories: (1) relatives tend to cluster in the same areas during similar periods; and (2) the most frequent and consistent alignment and cooperation appears to occur between siblings.

During the process of moving, Viola Jackson's kin maintained communication with relatives in the South. They frequently moved back to the South for short periods, or from Chicago and other midwestern cities to fruit harvesting areas on a seasonal basis. Therefore it is difficult to separate the data in terms of phases such as "migration" and subsequent "urban adaptation." During some seasons bus loads of rural blacks were brought to the North to harvest fruit. Many families worked their way back South only to repeat the process in order to avoid the poverty and unemployment there. This cyclical migration mainly involved the younger families and individuals.

Frequently, migrant workers follow their relatives and large urban neighborhoods reflect the geographical boundaries of the hinterland. Once these facts are established it is important to find out who made the original move, his age at the time of the move, which relatives joined one another to form households, and the context of each move.

Between 1916 and 1967 Mrs. Jackson's kin lived in five states, and groups of 10 to 15 individuals tended to cluster in the same areas during the same time periods. An example of this can be seen in Table 16-1, which shows where Viola's mother and siblings were living during that time period.

The basis for the active formation of households during migration and urban settlement can only be understood if material developing out of life histories is related to the realities of kinship and non-kinship

factors. During this period of migratory wage labor in the young adult's life, the data show that the strongest alignment is of cooperation and mutual aid among siblings of both sexes (after the age of thirteen). Siblings left the South together, or shortly followed one another, for seasonal jobs. They often lived together in the North with their dependents and spouses, or lived near one another, providing mutual aid such as cooking and child care.

Domestic Arrangements

CASE 1

In 1945 C left her husband and daughter in the South with his parents and moved to Racine, Wisconsin, to harvest fruit. At the same time C's brother's wife died leaving him, J, with two young sons. J decided to move north and join C in Racine. He and his two sons took a bus to Racine where he got a job in a catsup factory. The company furnished trailers which C and J placed next to each other. C cooked for J and his two sons and cared for the children. They were cooperating as a single domestic unit. This situation continued for about a year and a half and then they all returned to the South.

CASE 2

By 1946 Viola and Leo had four children and Leo was picking cotton. They were anxious to leave the South in order to find better wages and living conditions. Viola, Leo, and their children joined a bus load of people and moved to join Viola's brother, L, in Benton Harbor, Michigan. In Benton Harbor all the adults and the older children worked harvesting fruit. At the same time Leo's twin brother and Viola's brother, J, and his two sons moved to Benton Harbor. Leo's twin brother moved into Viola's and Leo's household. J and his sons moved into

TABLE 16-1.
Residence and Kin Clusters

AREA AND TIME PERIOD	Ego's MOTHER (MAGNOLIA)	EGO (VIOLA)	B	Z	Z	Z	B
Arkansas 1916-1917	X	X	X				
Arkansas 1928-1944	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blythe, Calif. 1927-1928	X	X	X				
Grand Rapids, Mich. 1944-1946			X	X			
Racine, Wisc. 1947-1948		X		X			X
Benton Harbor, Mich. 1946-1948		X	X	X			X
Decatur, Ark. 1948-1952	X	X		X			X
Chicago, Ill. 1950-1953					X		
Champaign, Ill. 1952-1954	X	X	X				
Gary, Ind. 1954-1955			X				
Champaign, Ill. 1955-1967	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chicago Heights, Ill. 1959-1967					X		
Chicago, Ill. 1965-1967			X				

the household of J's brother, L, and L's wife.

CASE 3

In 1948 C decided to move north again. This time she took her daughter with her. She moved to Benton Harbor where Viola and her family, their two brothers, L and J, and Leo's twin brother were all living. C and J and their children began cooperating as a single domestic unit as they had in Racine. The pattern described above of cooperation and mutual aid among siblings becomes even more apparent as these individuals move to urban areas. Sibling alignment in

the urban context will be discussed in the next section.

SIBLING ALIGNMENT AND KIN CO-OPERATION IN URBAN AREAS

Understanding residence and family organization for people whose economic situation is constantly changing, and who therefore frequently change households, is not easy. Aside from the common observations of household composition based upon where people sleep, there are many other important patterns to be observed, such as

which situations lead to a change in residence, which adults share households, and with which adult relatives are children frequently living.

One pattern, a continuation of a pattern formed during the early stages of migratory labor, is the cooperative alignment of siblings. By the time the majority of Viola Jackson's relatives had established permanent residence and jobs in the North there were numerous examples of siblings forming co-residential and/or domestic units of cooperation. These sibling-based units, apparently motivated by situations such as death, sickness, desertion, abandonment, and unemployment, most often focused around the need for child-care arrangements. Here are two examples:

1. SISTER/BROTHER

In 1956 Viola and Leo were living in Champaign, Illinois. Viola's brother, J, took the train from the South to visit them. After the visit he decided to move to Champaign with his two sons and look for work. J rented a house near Viola's and got a construction job. When he brought his sons to Champaign Viola cooked for them and cared for them during the day.

2. SISTER/SISTER

In 1959 Viola's sister, E, was suffering from a nervous breakdown. E's husband took their four youngest children to his mother in Arkansas. E's sister, C, was living in Chicago and she cared for E's oldest daughter. After E's husband deserted her, E's twin sister, M, moved into E's house. The household was composed of E, her oldest daughter who had been in Chicago, M, and M's two youngest daughters.

These alignments may be largely attributed to adaptation to urban socio-economic conditions. One such urban pat-

tern is a minimum of emphasis on the inheritance of property. For obvious social and economic reasons, poor and highly mobile urban apartment dwellers do not develop strong ties to a homestead or a particular piece of land, even though they may express strong regional and even neighborhood loyalty or identification. This contrasts with the rural South and with Young's and Willmott's (1957) observations that apartments in Bethnal Green were kept in the family. The high frequency of moving from one apartment to another in economically depressed urban areas is related to the degree of overcrowding, the shortage of apartments, urban renewal, and the changing employment situation. Another situation causing these alignments to form is the arrival of a new migrant to the urban area wherein he lives with siblings. With time, if he successfully establishes himself in a job in the urban area he may move out of his sibling's household.

CRISIS SITUATIONS AND THE RESIDENCE OF CHILDREN

It has already been pointed out that migration, unemployment, sickness, and desertion by necessity often lead to a change in residence. Most often these changes are closely related to the need for child-care arrangements. The choices and expectations involved in placing children in a relative's home largely focus around which adult female relatives are available. In selecting the specific relative, the following criteria are considered: the geographical locations of these adult female relatives; their source of financial support, their age, their marital status, the composition of their household, and the ability of the people making the decision to get along with these females. At

the same time, due to the flexibility and mobility of urban individuals, decisions frequently center around the relational link the child has with female members of a particular household. This means that the distance and location of a household, for example, are not a great deterrent, and that in fact the economic, distance, and other decisions are made after the kin criteria are met. Children in the extended kin network of

RELATIONAL LINK

Mother

Viola's brother married his first wife when he was sixteen. When she left him, she kept her daughter.

Mother's mother

Viola's sister, M, never was able to care for her children. In between husbands, her mother kept her two oldest children, and after M's death, her mother kept all three of the children. Her brother offered to keep the oldest girl.

Mother's mother

Viola's daughter (age 20) was living at home and gave birth to a son. The daughter and her son remained in the Jackson household. The daughter expressed the desire to set up a separate household.

Mother's sister

M moved to Chicago into her sister's household. The household consisted of the two sisters and four of their children.

Father's mother

Viola's sister, E, had four daughters and one son. When E was suffering from a nervous breakdown her husband took three daughters and his son to live with his mother in Arkansas. After his wife's death he also took the oldest daughter to his mother's household in Arkansas.

Father's mother

When Viola's younger sister, C, left her husband in order to harvest fruit in Wisconsin she left her two daughters with his mother in Arkansas.

Father's sister

When Viola's brother's wife died, he decided to raise his two sons himself. He kept the two boys and never remarried. His residence has consistently been close to one or another of his sisters who have fed and cared for his two sons.

DOMESTIC UNIT

Here are some examples.

These examples do indeed indicate the important role of the black female. But the difference between matrifocal thinking and thinking about household composition in terms of where children live is that the latter can bring to light the dynamics of house-

hold formation, and the criteria, rules, and decisions that the process entails.

The summaries of the social context in which children changed households indicate that adult female relatives are frequently called upon for service. The align-

ment and cooperation between siblings, such as mother's sister and father's sister, has already been noted. This has been underestimated by workers who select the grandmother household (especially mother's mother) as the only significant domestic unit. It must be noted that the crucial role which paternal as well as maternal grandmothers assume in socialization is a frequent,

but definitely not a unique, alternative. Since social scientists have stressed the existence of female-centered, woman-headed matrifocal black families, it is of particular interest to look at the formation of grandmother households in Viola's kin. Here is a summary of the households in which Viola's mother, Magnolia, has lived.

MAGNOLIA
CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC UNIT OR HOUSEHOLD

- 60 In 1958 Magnolia's second husband died and she was left alone with her daughter's (M) two oldest children. Viola sent her two oldest sons to care for Magnolia and the two children.
- 62 In 1960 Magnolia moved to Champaign and joined the household of her twin daughters, E and M, bringing M's children with her.
- 65 After E's death, Magnolia and her daughter moved to Danville, Illinois, with M's two children, who Magnolia raised in the South, and M's two youngest children.
- 67 After M's death, Magnolia joined her daughter Viola's household for a short time.
- 67 Soon afterward, Viola and her husband rented a nearby house for Magnolia and the four grandchildren. Magnolia is on welfare, cares for the four children, and constantly receives help from the Jacksons and from her children living in Chicago.

When a grandmother household is characterized as matrifocal we get little insight into the dynamics of its formation. At best, it suggests a mother hen who gathers her chicks about her. After age sixty, Magnolia's residence was determined by her children, who decided to bring her to the urban North to care for her. Her move North was prompted by her children's concern for her health and well-being.

We find that Magnolia has frequently shared households with her children and grandchildren. In fact, she has consistently moved to join her daughter's households to be cared for, or to care for her grand-children. Instead of simply gathering her flock, each move and new household in which Magnolia lived

This four-generational kin cluster is not a residential unit, but a domestic unit of cooperation. The main source of financial support work, welfare payments to both Magnolia and Viola's daughter (for her son), and the part-time jobs of some of the remaining children. These individuals used Viola's house as home base where they shared the evening meal, cared for all the small children, and exchanged special skills and services. Frequently, Viola's brother (whose wife had died) ate with the group and participated in the exchange of money, food, care for the sick, and household duties. The exchange of clothes, appliances, and services in crisis situations extended beyond this kin cluster to relatives in Chicago and St. Louis. This group is an example of an urban kinship based domestic unit which formed to handle the basic family functions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The examples from the preceding sections support the suggestion that domestic func-

tions are carried out for urban blacks by clusters of kin who may or may not reside together. Individuals who are members of households and domestic units of cooperation align to provide the basic functions often attributed to nuclear family units. The flexibility of the blacks' adaptation to the daily social and economic problems of urban living is evidenced in these kinship-based units which form to handle the daily demands of urban life. In particular, new or expanded households and/or domestic units are created to care for children. The basis of these cooperative units is co-generational sibling alignment, the domestic cooperation of close adult females, and the exchange of goods and services between the male and female relatives of these females. To conclude, it is suggested that these households and domestic units provide the assurance that all the children will be cared for.

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2. Names throughout the paper are pseudonyms.

Seventeen

WHAT GHETTO MALES ARE LIKE: ANOTHER LOOK¹

Ulf Hannerz

Ever since the beginnings of the study of black people in the Americas investigators have commented on the ways in which black men and women—in particular some men and women—differ in their behavior from their white counterparts.² Most of these comments have focused on the nature of the black family, and especially on female dominance. Herskovits saw the close bond between mother and children, and the peripheral status of the father, as an African vestige, typical of polygynous marriage where every woman with her offspring formed a separate unit. Yet he was aware that this pattern was changed and adapted to New World slavery (Herskovits 1941:181). Frazier is generally regarded as the pioneer among those who have ascribed to American slavery itself the strongest influence in undermining the stability of marital unions (Frazier 1932, 1934, 1939, 1949). But Frazier also saw a strengthening of the marriage institution among rural freedmen in southern states, and another weakening following migration and urbanization. He makes relatively clear that economic insecurity was one characteristic of city life, but this point is frequently dimmed by his imagery of other urban evils: anonymity, disorganization, lack of social supports and controls. Undoubtedly, he was influenced by his contemporaries in the Chicago school of sociology, who saw the city primarily in such terms. Under those conditions, the lower class black family allegedly reverted, with matrifocality, to a primitive evolutionary stage (Frazier 1934:198). Obviously, Frazier found practically only weaknesses in the matrifocal family arrangement. His studies contain an abundance of comments on the evils of “broken” families but are quite deficient in social and cultural analysis of a more intensive sort.³

The emphasis on the socio-economic