

**Family Values:
Between Neoliberalism and
the New Social Conservatism**

Melinda Cooper

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CHAPTER ONE

Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism

The family in the Western world has been radically altered,
some claim almost destroyed, by events of the last three decades.

—Gary Becker, *Treatise on the Family*

The history of the family is one of perpetual crisis. Yet, this crisis presents itself in distinct, even contradictory fashion to different political constituencies. For social conservatives of the left and right—the inheritors of 1970s neoconservatism—the contours of family crisis appear to have changed very little over the past several decades. The American family still seems to be suffering from a general epidemic of “fatherlessness.”¹ Young, impoverished women, particularly African Americans and Latinas, are still having children out of wedlock and still expecting the welfare state to take care of them. In the 1990s, social theorists complicated this story somewhat when they announced that the long-standing, quasi-mythical crisis of the African American family, infamously diagnosed by the neoconservative Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965, had now spread to the white middle class, encouraging generations of younger women to forsake the stability of marriage in favor of career-minded narcissism.² Even more recently, they have discovered that marriage itself has become a marker of class in American society—a privilege that appears to be reserved for the college-educated middle class—and inversely, perhaps, a practice that

should be encouraged as a shortcut to social mobility.³ With all its variations and refinements, this discourse has shifted only slightly since it was first fashioned in the 1970s. And although it has inspired four decades of punitive welfare reform, its proponents continue to blame the Great Society welfare state for what they see as the ongoing decline of the American family.

Neoliberals have always entertained a more complex relationship to the discourse of family crisis. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the enormous political activism of American neoliberals in the 1970s was inspired by the fact of changing family structures. Certainly Gary Becker, the Chicago school economist singled out as exemplary by Michel Foucault, understood the breakdown of the Fordist family wage to be the critical event of his time, and one whose reverberations could be discerned in everything from shifting race relations to the recomposition of the labor market and the changing imperatives of social welfare.⁴ In effect, while it lasted, the Fordist family wage not only functioned as a mechanism for the normalization of gender and sexual relationships, but it also stood at the heart of the midcentury organization of labor, race, and class, defining African American men by their exclusion from the male breadwinner wage and African American women by their relegation to agricultural and domestic labor in the service of white households. The neoliberal response to the crisis of the Fordist family can be described, in the first instance, as adaptive and accommodationist. Eschewing the overt moralism of social conservatives, neoliberals are interested in subsuming the newly liberated labor of former housewives within an expanded market for domestic services and are intent on devising new mechanisms for pricing the risks of (for example) racial discrimination or unsafe sex. There is no form of social liberation, it would seem, that the neoliberal economist cannot incorporate within a new market for contractual services or high-risk credit.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that neoliberalism is any less

invested in the value of the family than are social conservatives. “Since the family is the foundation of all civil society,” notes Gary Becker, we have good reason to be concerned about the “enormous changes in the stability and composition of families in recent decades.”⁵ Neoliberals are particularly concerned about the enormous social costs that derive from the breakdown of the stable Fordist family: the costs that have been incurred, for example, by women who opt for no-fault divorce, women who have children out of wedlock or those who engage in unprotected sex without private insurance; and the fact that these costs accrue to the government and taxpayer rather than the private family.⁶ Although they are much more prepared than are social conservatives to accommodate changes in the nature and form of relationships within the family, neoliberal economists and legal theorists wish to reestablish the private family as the primary source of economic security and a comprehensive alternative to the welfare state. If American welfare reform has been singularly focused on the question of marriage promotion and responsible family formation in the past few decades, it is thanks to the ongoing collaboration between neoliberals and social conservatives on this point in particular.

In contrast to both neoliberals and social conservatives, and in spite of the prominence of family in contemporary social policy, a certain kind of left-wing critic has come to see neoliberal capitalism as itself destructive of family life. The idea that the flexible labor relations introduced by neoliberal reform have somehow disabled the long-term obligations of love and parenthood is pervasive among left-wing social theorists interested in the effects of late modernism on the structures of intimate life. Each in their own way, and with varying degrees of nostalgia, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, and Eva Illouz all point to the increasingly fleeting character of love in an era dominated by the short-term contract and employment at will.⁷

By far the most elaborate and sustained argument in this direction,

however, is provided by the German political economist Wolfgang Streeck, whose recent work reflects at length on what he sees as the causal relationship between the flexible employment contract and the “flexible family.”⁸ Streeck is concerned here with the dismantling of the standard postwar employment relationship and its correlate, the so-called Fordist family consisting of a male worker, a stay-at-home wife and mother, and two or more children. As he notes, the economic security of the postwar era was premised on a tightly enforced sexual division of labor that relegated women to lower-paid, precarious forms of employment and indexed the wage of the Fordist worker to the costs of maintaining a wife and children at home. How and why did this particular architecture of economic security crumble so rapidly in the 1970s, Streeck asks, and why did its decline provoke so little opposition from those who benefited so much from it?

Searching for an answer to this question, he notes that “the social and family structure that the standard employment relationship had once underwritten has itself dissolved in a process of truly revolutionary change. In fact, it appears that the Fordist family was replaced by a flexible family in much the same way as Fordist employment was replaced by flexible employment, during the same period and also all across the Western world.”⁹ The destabilization of the long-term marital contract, Streeck wants to argue, occurred a short but significant time before the dismantling of the Fordist employment relationship and can be seen as having provoked the decline of the latter.¹⁰ The revolution in family law and intimate relationships that occurred in the 1960s—from the introduction of no-fault divorce to the growing acceptance of cohabitation—destroyed the very *raison d’être* of the Fordist family wage and thereby led to its gradual phasing out over the following years. If women were no longer tied to men in long-term relationships of economic dependence, and if men were no longer obliged to look after a wife and children for life, then who would be left to defend that great Fordist institution of economic security, the family wage?

At this point, Streeck's antifeminism becomes overt. It was feminism, after all, that first challenged the legal and institutional forms of the Fordist family by encouraging women to seek an independent wage on a par with men and transforming marriage from a long-term, noncontractual obligation into a contract that could be dissolved at will. In so doing, feminists (whom he imagines as middle class) robbed women (whom he imagines as working class) of the economic security that came from marriage to a Fordist worker.¹¹ By undermining the idea that men should be paid wages high enough to care for a wife and children, feminism helped managers to generalize the norm of precarious employment and workplace flexibility, eventually compromising the security of all workers.

Without descending into the overt antifeminism of Wolfgang Streeck, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism* offers a conceptual critique of the countercultural left that leads ineluctably to the same conclusions. Their revisionist history of late Fordist social movements points to an incipient fracture between the productive left, focused on building and maintaining the economic security afforded by the postwar consensus, and what they refer to as the artistic left, more interested in critiquing the predictable securities and norms of Fordist life.¹² If the former can be more or less equated with the trade union movement and old socialist left, the latter consisted of the distinctly new components of the left—from feminism and gay liberation to the student movement and counterculture. Having thus distinguished between a good labor politics (focused on economic security and the permanence of social relations) and a bad sexual politics (focused on liberation from the same set of social relations), Boltanski and Chiapello identify the decline of the family as the most visible sign of neoliberalism's social insecurity. "During these years of social regression," they write, the family "became a much more fluid and fragile institution, compounding job insecurity and the general sense of insecurity. . . . The search for maximum flexibility in

firms chimed with a depreciation of the family as a factor of temporal and geographical inflexibility, so that...similar ideological schemas are mobilized to justify adaptability in work relations and mobility in emotional life.”¹³ Like Streeck, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the artistic left prepared the groundwork for the neoliberal assault on economic and social security by destroying its intimate foundations in the postwar family. By implication, their analysis posits the restoration of the Fordist family (or some revision thereof) as a necessary component of a renewed left agenda.

It is somewhat more surprising to find such reflections in the work of Nancy Fraser, who has done so much to uncover the role of the family wage in shaping the sexual divisions of labor constitutive of American Fordism. Yet, Fraser’s longstanding commitment to the conceptual distinction between cultural recognition and economic redistribution places her in a similar bind to Boltanski and Chiapello when it comes to the sexual politics of capital.¹⁴ In her most recent work, Fraser accuses second-wave feminism of having colluded with neoliberalism in its efforts to destroy the family wage. “Was it mere coincidence that second-wave feminism and neoliberalism prospered in tandem? Or was there some perverse, subterranean, elective affinity between them?”¹⁵ Fraser goes on to answer in the affirmative: “Our critique of the family wage,” she writes, “now supplies a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and moral point.”¹⁶ What she offers as an alternative is a renewed politics of economic security that would allow women (and, in the long run, men) to sustain the families that have been torn apart by the enforced flexibility of the neoliberal labor market. Without advocating the simple return to Fordism that Streeck seems to have in mind, Fraser seeks to imagine an improved family wage that would in the first instance recognize and valorize women’s reproductive labor and perhaps ultimately disrupt the gendered division of labor itself.¹⁷ But having identified the specific evil of neoliberalism as the destruction of

the Fordist family wage, her analysis leads inescapably to the conclusion that resistance demands the restoration of family, albeit in a more progressive, egalitarian form.

Each of these theorists is clearly indebted to the work of Karl Polanyi,¹⁸ whose thesis of the “double movement” is pervasive and well nigh uncontested in contemporary left-wing formulations of anti-capitalist critique.¹⁹ In his signature work of historical sociology, *The Great Transformation* (1944), Polanyi distinguishes laissez-faire capitalism from all previous economies of exchange by virtue of the fact that it strives to include what was once inalienable within the ambit of exchange value.²⁰ Reaching its purest form in nineteenth-century England, Polanyi sees modern capitalism as inhabited by a relentless calculative drive that submits even foundational social values such as labor, land, and money to the metrics of commodity exchange. Under the conditions of modern capitalism, human labor itself loses any intrinsic value and sees its price fixed by the highest bidder; money is subject to the nominal measure of interest and exchange rates; and the price of land is determined by the fluctuations of speculative value. Thus, essential social properties that should by rights function as foundations and anchors to any stable system of exchange are set to circulate in the open market as “fictitious commodities.” Having posited Aristotle’s household economy of measured exchange as ethical reference point, Polanyi can only envisage these innovations as departures from a transcendent norm of economic justice. Polanyi understands modern capitalism as the generalization of Aristotle’s “chrematistics”—an economic regime in which the perverse logic of self-multiplying value has overtaken and subsumed the measured reproduction of foundational social values.²¹ As a twentieth-century social democrat, however, he also wants to argue that the disintegrative forces of the free market will inevitably provoke a “countermovement” bent on protecting the social order (indeed the free market itself) from the excesses of laissez-faire capitalism.

In a somewhat paradoxical manner, Polanyi imagines the countermovement as external to the dynamics of capitalism and yet historically inevitable and indeed necessitated by the free market itself. Reflecting on the history of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, he observes that the laissez-faire utopia of the self-regulating market cannot survive in the long run without the intervention of some external form of social protectionism. When implemented as an economic ideal, the self-regulating market unleashes destructive forces that threaten the very existence of the market system. Pushed to the limit, then, the individualizing excesses of liberal contractualism will generate at some point a social countermovement intent on protecting workers from the stiff winds of the market. But while it must be understood as external to free-market capitalism, the countermovement is ultimately necessary to the continued functioning of the market itself, since its role will be to safeguard those essential “fictitious commodities”—money, land, and labor—that capital is incapable of protecting of its own accord.

What makes Polanyi’s theory of the double movement so appealing to a certain kind of left is its tendency to conflate capitalism itself with the logic of the free market and thus to reduce its ideological expression to economic liberalism, understood as a force of social disintegration. Once one has accepted these premises, however, resistance can only be imagined as conservative. If capitalism as an ideological formation is reducible to the tenets of economic liberalism, and if market freedom tends inexorably to disintegrate, disembed, and homogenize social existence, then any viable countermovement must seek to reanchor value as a way of arresting these trends. This imperative applies not only to the “fictitious commodities” of land, labor, and money—which the social protectionist movement seeks to “decommodify” and restore to a position of fundamental value—but also to social life more widely, which ultimately demands to be stabilized and reembedded within the institution of the family.²² If capitalism is theorized as uniquely

and exclusively destructive of prior social solidarities, then the countermovement can be imagined only as an effort to restore, or at least reinvent, that which was allegedly destroyed by the advent of industrial capitalism. It is not by chance that Polanyi evinces an unmistakable nostalgia for the old territorial order of feudal England, where (he imagines) aristocrats and peasants shared a common attachment to land, family, and community.

Polanyi himself was well aware of the potential affinities between his theory of the countermovement and the social conservatisms of the right. Indeed, he saw the fascist movements of early twentieth-century Europe as one particularly destructive manifestation of the countermovement, and one that could be avoided only by implementing the alternative of a socially protectionist and politically democratic welfare state.²³ For Polanyi, the difference between a social democratic countermovement and the social conservatism of the right was decisive in its historical consequences—and yet it was a difference of methods and degree, not of kind. The Polanyian social democrat shares the conservative’s nostalgia for community, land, and family but seeks to transform these institutions into conduits for state-based forms of social protection. Where the Burkean conservative strives to instill family values by force, the social democrat seeks to encourage them through the redistribution of social wealth. Polanyi, it might be said, replaces the private family values of the old Elizabethan poor-law tradition with the redistributive family values of a certain kind of social progressive left. In this respect, his philosophy of the double movement can be read as the ideological expression of the mid-twentieth-century welfare state, which perfectly combined social democracy and social conservatism in the form of the Fordist family wage.

This book assumes instead that what Polanyi calls the “double movement” would be better understood as fully internal to the dynamic of capital. This is to say that economic liberalism and political conservatism—even when the latter speaks the language of

anticapitalist critique—are equally constitutive expressions of modern capitalism. We need not defer to a Hegelian reading of Marx to recognize that this double movement is central to his depiction of capital’s “differential calculus,” putting him radically at odds with Polanyi on the question of critique.²⁴ Most lucidly in the *Grundrisse*, Marx discerns two countervailing tendencies at work in the logic of capitalist valuation: on the one hand, a propensity to deflect from all external limits to the speculative generation of social wealth, and on the other hand, a drive to reestablish such limits as the internal condition of value’s realization as private wealth.²⁵ In more suggestive, less austere mathematical terms, Marx recognized that the capitalist injunction to self-valorization “drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life,”²⁶ at the same time that it calls for the reaffirmation of such limits as a way of channeling and restricting the actual realization of wealth.

Yet, while Marx recognized that the restoration of fundamental value could be accomplished through any number of institutional and juridical means—from the gold standard to private property in land to vagrancy laws limiting the mobility of workers—his analysis does not extend to the intimate, reproductive dimensions of this process.²⁷ In its efforts to overcome all quantitative barriers to the generation of wealth, Marx observed, capital transgresses all established forms of reproduction—that is, all customary or religious strictures on the organization of gender, all status-like constraints on social mobility, and all national restrictions on the circulation of money.²⁸ But is it not also compelled to reassert the reproductive institutions of race, family, and nation as a way of ensuring the unequal distribution of wealth and income across time? Isn’t it compelled, in the last instance, to reinstate the family as the elementary legal form of private wealth accumulation?

On this point, Marx's thinking must be radicalized.²⁹ The assertion of foundation is never merely "economic" in character since it must ultimately incorporate the "social and cultural" conditions under which value is to be reproduced and reappropriated in private form—kinship, lineage, and inheritance. If the history of modern capital appears on the one hand to regularly undermine and challenge existing orders of gender and sexuality, it also entails the periodic reinvention of the family as an instrument for distributing wealth and income. Thus, according to Reva Siegel, the legal history of the modern family can be understood as a process of "preservation through transformation" rather than one of progressive liberalization, where challenges to established gender and generational hierarchies are repeatedly recaptured within new, more democratic, but no less implacable legal structures.³⁰

What Eric Hobsbawm refers to as the "reinvention of tradition" can usefully be understood as the expression of this double movement, provided that we accord no prior stability to tradition as such and recognize the very historicity of the term as an invention of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.³¹ Translating these insights into a general reflection on the philosophy of history, Peter Osborne argues that the peculiar temporality of modern capitalism is defined by the oscillation of tendencies that are alternatively self-revolutionizing and restorative, speculative and radically nostalgic. For Osborne, both these orientations "may be regarded as temporally integral political forms of capitalist societies, alternative political articulations of the social form of capitalist accumulation itself: that 'constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation,' which Marx and Engels identified as the distinguishing feature of the present epoch nearly one hundred and fifty years ago."³² One consequence of this analysis is its neutralization of Polanyian critique. We cannot hope to counter the logic of capitalist exchange by seeking merely to reembed or stabilize

its volatile signs, as Polanyi counsels, since this project is already a necessary component of capital's double movement. The tension between the adaptive forces of credit expansion and the appropriative drive to social foundation is constitutive of capital itself, although realized in widely different political forms in different historical moments.

Accordingly, this book takes neoliberalism and the new social conservatism as the contemporary expression of capital's double movement. In doing so, I follow Wendy Brown, whose seminal essay "American Nightmare" argues that neoliberalism and neoconservatism must be thought together—in their convergences, collisions, and symbioses—if we are to understand the political rationality of power in the United States today.³³ This thinking together, I would add, is necessary if we are to avoid the trap of mobilizing a left neoliberalism against the regressive forces of social conservatism or a left social conservatism against the disintegrating effects of the free market.

By neoliberalism, I refer in particular to the American schools of new economic liberalism that emerged at the University of Chicago, the University of Virginia, George Mason University, Virginia Polytechnic University, the UCLA Department of Economics, and various other institutional outposts in the early to mid-twentieth century. The historiography of American neoliberalism is vast.³⁴ Here I focus on a distinct phase in the evolution of this new economic liberalism, one that was defined by the social and economic upheavals of the 1960s and '70s and the intellectual response that it provoked among free-market economists of the Chicago and Virginia schools. During this period, American neoliberals refined and in some cases utterly revised their founding concepts in direct response to the changing gender and racial composition of the workforce, the civil rights and welfare rights movements, and the rise of student radicalism. Throughout the 1970s, leading neoliberal intellectuals such as Milton Friedman, Rose Friedman, George Stigler, Richard Epstein, Richard Posner, James M. Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Richard Wagner, and Gary Becker helped

redefine the intellectual and popular consensus on state deficit spending, the role of the central bank, inflation, taxation, consumer protection laws, tuition fees, and welfare. At no other moment before or after have the affiliates of the Chicago and Virginia schools been so directly involved in formulating and implementing government policy. A figure such as Milton Friedman, for instance, was remarkably involved in the policy decisions of the Nixon, Carter, and Reagan administrations: At various moments, he could be found lending his hand to proposals to introduce a basic guaranteed income, informing central bank policy on inflation, and calling for the introduction of tuition fees in the University of California system. If Milton Friedman went on to become more of a public intellectual than a political insider, and if neoliberalism itself later lost the clearly identifiable profile it once enjoyed in the 1970s, it was because it had become so widely accepted among policymakers of all political stripes and so thoroughly disseminated throughout mainstream economics.³⁵

By new social conservatism, I refer to the spectrum of conservative movements that emerged in or after the late 1960s, often in response to the same set of concerns that mobilized neoliberals into action. Under this umbrella term, I include the neoconservative movement as such (which in its earliest incarnation was almost exclusively preoccupied with domestic social issues), the new religious right comprising conservative Catholics and evangelicals, the new paternalism of Lawrence Mead (the principal American architect of welfare-to-work programs), and the communitarian movement in social welfare. Although others have used the term “neoconservative” to refer to this broad coalition of conservative currents, I prefer to use the more generic term “new social conservatism” so as to address the specificity of the actual neoconservatives within this coalition. The “new” in “new social conservatism” serves to distinguish these various currents from the traditionalist or Burkean conservatism of the American paleoconservatives, whose antistatism, anti-Semitism, and

aversion to racial democracy made them ill-suited to any compromise with the New Deal left.³⁶ Many if not most of the new generation of social conservatives, in fact, had traveled some part of the way with the political left and were opposed to the Great Society expansion of the New Deal, not the New Deal experiment itself. The representatives of these movements came from diverse political backgrounds. A small handful of them had been fellow travelers of right-wing figures such as Barry Goldwater or the *National Review*'s William F. Buckley Jr., key figures in the Cold War conservative-libertarian alliance.³⁷ Others had emerged out of the more fundamentalist, traditionally quietist currents within American Protestantism.³⁸ Many more came from the political left. Most of the first generation of neoconservatives were former Trotskyists and Cold War Democrats who remained fiercely committed to the New Deal welfare state and its conservative sexual order.³⁹ Although the more prominent among them—Irving Kristol and his son Bill Kristol most notably—would later join forces with the Republicans, others remained firmly attached to the Democratic Party. The communitarians who succeeded them on the political stage after the 1980s were closely aligned with “Third Way” New Democrats such as Bill Clinton and were always striving to bridge the divide between religious and secular conservatives, the partisan left and right.⁴⁰ For his part, the new paternalist Lawrence Mead never identified with any party in particular and in fact achieved his greatest policy success under President Clinton, who introduced sweeping workfare legislation in 1996.⁴¹ Throughout this period, only white religious conservatives have remained overwhelmingly associated with the political right.

During the 1970s, American neoliberalism and the new social conservatism matured and came together in response to the same set of events and a convergent perception of crisis. It is almost always assumed that the neoliberal–new social conservative alliance was forged in response to Keynesianism itself, as exemplified in the New

Deal welfare state and radicalized under Johnson's Great Society. But this is to misunderstand the specificity of their critique. Emphatically, what prompted their reaction was not the New Deal welfare state itself (although neoliberals certainly had a long tradition of critique on this front) but rather the panoply of liberation movements that emerged out of and in excess of the postwar Keynesian order toward the end of the 1960s. At various moments between the 1960s and 1980s, poverty activists, welfare militants, feminists, AIDS activists, and public-interest lawyers articulated a novel politics of redistribution that delinked risk protection from the sexual division of labor and social insurance from sexual normativity.⁴² These movements were historically unique in that they continued to fight for greater wealth and income redistribution while refusing the normative constraints of the Fordist family wage. While neoliberals and neoconservatives were surprisingly sympathetic to efforts to democratize the New Deal welfare state—most notably when it came to the inclusion of African American men within the family wage system—they balked when the Fordist family itself came into question.

In short, it was only when the liberation movements of the 1960s began to challenge the sexual normativity of the family wage as the linchpin and foundation of welfare capitalism that the neoliberal–new social conservative alliance came into being. What they proposed in response to this “crisis” was not a return to the Fordist family wage (this particular nostalgia would be the hallmark of the left), but rather the strategic reinvention of a much older, poor-law tradition of private family responsibility, using the combined instruments of welfare reform, changes to taxation, and monetary policy. Under their influence, welfare has been transformed from a redistributive program into an immense federal apparatus for policing the private family responsibilities of the poor, while deficit spending has been steadily transferred from the state to the private family. Through policies designed to democratize credit markets and inflate asset values, these reformers

have sought to revive the tradition of private family responsibility in the idiom of household debt, while simultaneously accommodating and neutralizing the most ambitious political desires of the 1960s.

Despite its prominence in the political rhetoric of the Reagan revolution and beyond, most accounts of this era see the politics of family values as peripheral to structural economic battles waged over (for example) monetary policy, state-deficit spending, or the redistribution of wealth through taxation.⁴³ Thus, Ronald Reagan is said to have deployed family values rhetoric to cover for his macroeconomic policies and to seduce the working class into alliances that would ultimately work against them. The neoconservative culture wars are understood in retrospect as a useful distraction from the real business of cutting funding to public education and the arts, while Clinton's communitarianism is similarly understood as a ruse designed to soften the edges of his neoliberal economic policy and a useful instrument for healing the historical breach between New and Old Democrats. Typically emanating from the left, these accounts tend to dismiss the florid defense of family values as so much flotsam and jetsam floating above the real story of monumental wealth redistribution and class warfare.

The idea that economic processes can and should be separated from the merely cultural phenomena of gender, race, and sexuality has a long intellectual pedigree, expressed variously in the Marxist vocabulary of base and superstructure, the vernacular distinction between identity and class politics, and the late Frankfurt school language of recognition versus redistribution (although all are perhaps ultimately indebted to the contract versus status opposition deployed by nineteenth-century anthropologists such as Henry Sumner Maine).⁴⁴ As a methodological and political point of departure, such distinctions have always been suspect. The nineteenth-century anthropological language of status and contract, for example, served to obscure and sentimentalize the existence of women's unpaid labor in the home at precisely the historical moment when the boundaries

between the labor market and the private family were being established. Women were thus relegated to the quasi-sacred space of kinship and the gift relation at a time when they were being actively excluded from the contractual labor market by an alliance of male trade unionists and conservative protectionists.⁴⁵ In general, leftist demands for the decommodification of social life or the protection of kinship relations all too readily lend themselves to the social conservative argument that certain forms of (domestic, feminized) labor should remain unpaid.

The distinction between recognition and redistribution performs a similar kind of revisionist work today, obscuring the actual historical intricacies of economic and sexual politics while actively quarantining the family from critique. We need only look at the historical example of the Fordist family wage to see that redistribution and recognition cannot be understood in isolation: As an instrument of redistribution, the standard Fordist wage actively policed the boundaries between women and men's work and white and black men's labor, and in its social-insurance dimensions, it was inseparable from the imperative of sexual normativity. The Fordist politics of class was itself a form of identity politics inasmuch as it established white, married masculinity as a point of access to full social protection.

Today the politics of distribution is no longer channeled through the instrument of the Fordist family wage and (as Thomas Piketty has shown) is much more heavily influenced by the wealth-transmitting mechanism of private inheritance than it was in the postwar era.⁴⁶ But here again, the distinction between recognition and redistribution proves unhelpful as a way of understanding the actual imbrication of sexual and economic politics. How after all are we to separate the wealth-distributive work of inheritance from the legal and cultural legitimation of family? In what sense can the regulation of sexuality be abstracted from a legal instrument of wealth appropriation that takes the form of family genealogy?

This book proceeds from the assumption that the history of economic formations cannot be prized apart from the operations of gender, race, and sexuality without obscuring the politics of wealth and income distribution itself. By revisiting and questioning established historical accounts of the stagflation crisis of the 1970s, I seek to show that the question of family was as central to the formation of a post-Keynesian capitalist order as it was to welfare state capitalism, and therefore it cannot be ignored without profoundly misrepresenting the political history of the era. Unlike many on the left, the key actors of the neoliberal–new social conservative alliance had no hesitation in recognizing the family as the locus of crisis. These actors were in no doubt that the grand macroeconomic issues of the time, from inflation to budget deficits to ballooning welfare budgets, reflected an ominous shift in the sexual and racial foundations of the Fordist family. Given this assessment, they could see only one possible solution: the wholesale reinvention of the American family itself. This book will be dedicated to the project of exploring how this process of reinvention was conceived and how it eventually overtook the intellectual ambitions of its authors.