

Gregory Niemesh, Jacqueline Craig (Miami) & Katherine Eriksson (UC Davis)
'Marriage and the intergenerational mobility of women: Evidence from marriage certificates, 1850-1910'

The literature finds a high degree of economic mobility for men in the 19th century in comparison to today. However, due to data limitations, changes in female economic mobility over time are not well understood. We overcome those data limitations by using a set of marriage certificates from Massachusetts over the period of 1850-1910 to link men and women to their childhood and adult census records to obtain a measure of occupational standing across two generations. We construct a set of father-daughter and father-son pairs using two linkages across three datasets. We begin with a set of over 1 million recorded marriages between 1850 and 1910. Using given names, surname, and ages, couples from the marriage certificates are first matched to a post-marriage census to observe the husband's occupation. Of the marriages that are successfully linked in the first step, the husband and wife are individually matched to a pre-marriage childhood census in which the father's occupation can be observed for each spouse.

We find that intergenerational mobility for women is higher than for men in the 1850-1880 cohort. However, between 1880-1910, men's mobility increases to converge with that of women. Using our preferred specification, a rank-rank regression, with an occupational wealth score based off of total wealth in the 1870 census, we find a father-son rank-rank parameter of 0.248 for 1850-1880 and 0.181 for 1880-1910. For women, the estimates are 0.192 and 0.173 for those same cohorts. Persistence was greater for men in both cohorts, but that difference had disappeared by 1910. We also find evidence of assortative mating based on the correlation in occupational income score and real estate wealth between the husband's and wife's fathers. In our sample, the likelihood that women would marry out of the economic class of their fathers decreased over time. Consequently, mobility of women in the 1880-1910 cohort would have been higher than observed if they faced the lower level of assortative mating of women in the earlier 1850-1880 cohort.