



MINNESOTA POPULATION CENTER

**Married women's labor
force participation in the
United States, 1870-1940**

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What is labor force participation?

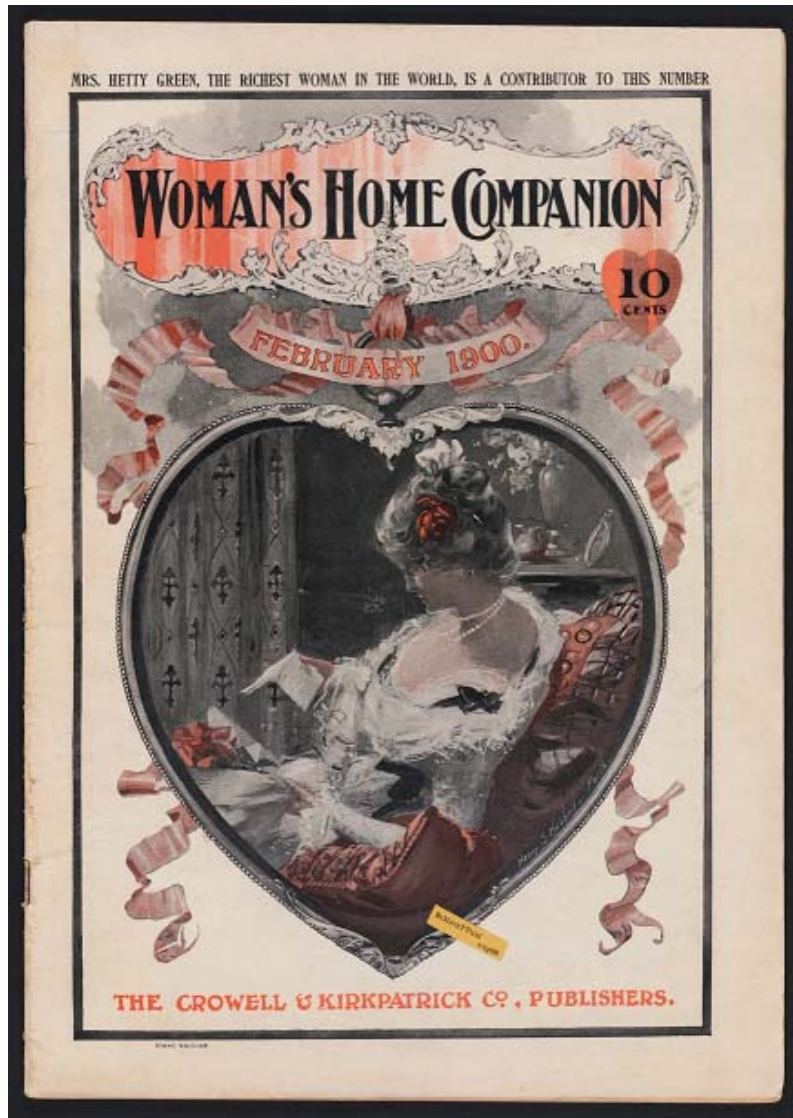
A person is regarded as participating in the labor force if in the past week they were

1. Employers, with others working for them
2. Operating a business by themselves
3. Employed by someone else (at least one hour/week)
4. Unemployed, but actively looking for work

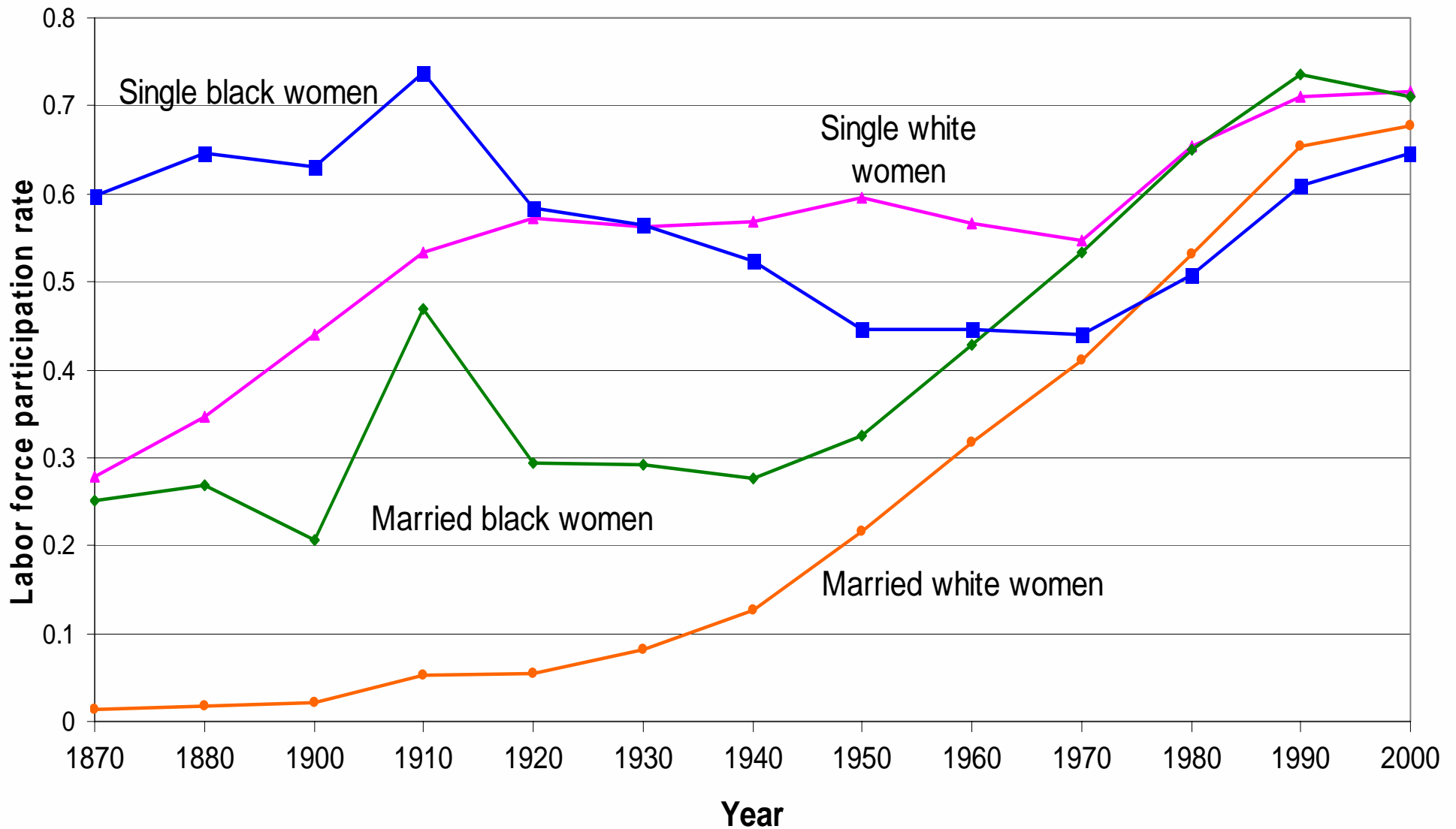
Labor force participation rate

$$LFPR = \frac{\textit{Labor _ force}}{\textit{Population}}$$

From home to work



Women's labor force participation, 1870-2000



Questions I am asking

- What factors propelled the growth of married women's paid work between 1870 and 1940? Specifically, what was the role of
 - Government
 - Families
 - Businessesin this change?
- How did married women fit into the workplace?

Chapters

1. Descriptive analysis of changes in labor force participation, 1870-1940 (Race, fertility and occupational change)
2. Reform of married women's property laws and the effect on married women's labor force participation
3. How did the income of other family members affect wives' decisions to go to work?

Chapters (continued)

4. Immigrant women in the labor force
What was their economic role within their families?
What affected women's earnings?
5. Married women in the workplace
How did employer opinions about married women's work change over time?
What did rank-and-file workers think about married women in their midst?

Data

- Chapters 1-3
 - Representative samples of decennial census data from 1870-1940
 - Cost of living surveys from 1890, 1919 and 1936
- Chapter 4
 - Survey of 2,146 immigrant women in Pennsylvania in the 1920s
- Chapter 5
 - Interviews with factory workers from the 1920s and 1930s
 - Records of firms, especially employee magazines

Results

- Rise in married women's labor force participation was due to white women entering the labor force in the early twentieth century
- Reform of married women's property laws had little effect.
- Changes in white women's work decisions were particularly rapid in the 1920s and 1930s
- High school education
- Availability of 'better' occupations
- Reduced fertility
- More independent decisions by women