

**April 2006 Response to Steven Ruggles' Comments and Book Review
Concerning *Reading History Sideways: The Fallacy and Enduring Impact of
the Developmental Paradigm on Family Life***

by

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April 2006 Update to My Rebuttal of Ruggles

In March 2006 I posted a response of more than 90 pages to Steven Ruggles' critiques of my book, *Reading History Sideways*. Subsequently, but also in March 2006, Ruggles posted a response to my response. In this April 2006 update I provide a response to Ruggles' March response. This April update of my materials is written with the understanding that readers are already familiar with my March 2006 response. My April response posted on the Web has my March response included as an attachment (<http://developmentalidealism.org/pubs/rhs-ssha05.html>).

I am pleased that in his most recent response, Ruggles expressed regret for falsely accusing me of misrepresenting his writings and for his incorrect statements about his own writings. In his earlier critiques, Ruggles had claimed that he had never said some things which I had attributed to him in *Reading History Sideways*, but he has now agreed that my citations of his work are correct. In his most recent response, Ruggles admitted that he had indeed made these statements in his published work, but that he had "completely forgotten about" them. Apparently, Ruggles made his false accusations of misrepresentation against me at the 2005 Social Science History Association (SSHA) meetings and in his February 2006 critique without taking the time to check the accuracy of his statements against his own publications. Readers desiring more information about this are invited to read pages *i* and 9-24 of my March 2006 response.

I am also pleased that in his most recent response Ruggles expressed regret about the additional distortions of *Reading History Sideways* that he made in his critiques. There are many such mischaracterizations in his critiques, and Ruggles cited, in particular, his false statement that I never quote my sources. I would have been even more pleased with Ruggles' statement of regret if he had not tried to give readers the false impression that I had merely provided "at least 11" quotations rather than the true number of about 100 quotations that I had stated in my March response. It would also have been more pleasing if Ruggles had not forgotten that the "at least 11" quotations he conceded in his response referred only to quotations published before 1804 and that there were scores of quotations from later publications. For more documentation, see pages *ii*, 24-32, and 91 of my March 2006 response.

In his most recent response Ruggles also identified two areas that he believes continue to be disagreements between us. In doing so he repeated the same claims about these issues that he had made earlier and continued his pattern of making incorrect assertions and forgetting about previously presented material. Although I have already extensively addressed these two remaining areas of disagreement, I will discuss them again briefly below, with the same conclusion as in my March 2006 response—that Ruggles' critique has done nothing to challenge the theses of *Reading History Sideways*.

I will begin by discussing Ruggles' second issue—his claim of my inadequate documentation of past scholars "documenting" family change. Here I will invite readers to review the extensive evidence that I had provided earlier and which Ruggles forgot about in his most recent response. Extensive discussions of this earlier scholarship appear

in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Reading History Sideways* and on pages 30-46 of my March 2006 response. In addition, I had earlier posted on my website four working papers that each contain additional substantial and detailed information about the “documentation” of family change by many scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s (see pages 7-8 of my March 2006 response). These materials discuss the work of more than twenty scholars before 1900, and additional scholars from the first half of the 1900s are mentioned (also see pages 30-32 of my March 2006 response). I believe that the evidence of the “documentation” of the supposed great family transition by scholars in the late 1700s and 1800s is very convincing, but readers can make up their own minds from the evidence presented in my writings cited above.

In addition to forgetting to mention much of the available evidence about scholars of the past “documenting” family change, Ruggles made an incorrect claim about the evidence that I had provided concerning “documentation” of one element of the supposed great family transition—the supposed change in living arrangements from large and complex extended households to nuclear or weak stem households. Ruggles asserted incorrectly in his March 2006 response that “Thornton discusses no other theorists [besides Le Play] writing before the twentieth century who posit a change in living arrangements” (page 2). This assertion was made despite the fact that *Reading History Sideways* stated in an extensive discussion that it was likely that Adam Smith had done so as early as the middle 1700s (pages 67-68 of *Reading History Sideways*). Pages 92-94 of my March 2006 response repeated much of the same material about Adam Smith’s role in “documenting” changes in living arrangements. Also, pages 46-47 of my March response mentions both Smith and Le Play on this same topic.

I now turn to Ruggles’ unsubstantiated claim that there was a great family transition in the Northwest European past, which, if true, would contradict the argument of *Reading History Sideways* that there was no such transition. I begin by noting that at the SSHA meetings in November 2005 Ruggles asserted that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s probably used personal observation rather than reading history sideways to document the great family transition (see my March 2006 response, pages ii-iii and 34-35). At the SSHA session, I challenged Ruggles and anyone else to write a manuscript to document that the scholars of that era used the Personal Observation Method rather than reading history sideways. Ruggles responded to that challenge in February 2006 by conceding that those scholars had actually used the reading history sideways method, as I had argued in my book, but then he made a new claim: the historical record was consistent with the conclusion of a great family transition produced by reading history sideways—a claim he repeated in March 2006 (see pages 48-51 of my March response).

Any attempt to provide the detailed and substantial historical documentation of a great family transition in Northwest Europe that contradicts the argument of *Reading History Sideways* faces a great challenge as large as the one faced by anyone claiming that scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s used the Personal Observation Method rather than reading history sideways. This documentation would require substantiation of a great family transition before 1800 as “documented” by Malthus, Millar, Westermarck, Le Play, and other scholars using cross-sectional data to describe the transformation of

family systems from being like those existing in such places as Russia, India, China, and the Middle East to being like those in Northwest Europe around 1800 (see Chapter 3 of *Reading History Sideways* and pages 48-51 of my March 2006 response). If successful, this would simultaneously contribute five accomplishments: first, it would vindicate the work of Le Play, Malthus, Millar, Westermarck, and other scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s; second, it would re-establish the legitimacy of the reading history sideways method by demonstrating the value of cross-sectional data for documenting long-term family change; third, it would demonstrate that such myths as the myth of the large and complex extended household, the myth of young and universal marriage, and the myth of an arranged marriage system in Northwest Europe's past were realities and not myths; fourth, it would document the same supposed great family transition that scholars such as Laslett, Macfarlane, and Hajnal failed to document from the historical record; and fifth, and least important, it would refute one element of my work. Successful accomplishment of these things would be a magnificent contribution for Ruggles or anyone else.

I, of course, believe that this challenge is an incredibly daunting one, as the available evidence overwhelmingly supports my conclusion that there was no great family transition in Northwest Europe before 1800 along the lines described by Le Play, Malthus, Millar, Westermarck, and other scholars. *Reading History Sideways* (Chapter 5) provided an extensive discussion of the lack of evidence for such a great family transition. My March 2006 response (pages 48-52) also discussed this issue and showed that Ruggles' assertion of a great family transition completely failed in its effort to undermine the argument of *Reading History Sideways*. Ruggles also provided no support for his assertion in his new response.

Ruggles insisted in both his February 2006 and March 2006 responses that his data about changes in living arrangements after 1850 were evidence to support one of the many elements of the great family transition—the great change in living arrangements. Although Ruggles' documentation of changes in living arrangements after 1850 is important to family history more generally (and I cite it in my book), it leaves the conclusion of *Reading History Sideways* totally unchallenged because both the nature and the timing of the change documented by Ruggles are irrelevant to the supposed great family transition discussed in my book. As I explain in my book (Chapters 3 and 5), the transformation of living arrangements at issue here for Le Play, Laslett, and myself was that from the large and complex extended households like those of Eastern Europe and Asia to the predominantly nuclear (or weak stem form) households like those in Northwest Europe around 1800, whereas Ruggles documented a change from predominantly nuclear (or weak stem form) households to even more nuclear households (also see pages 48-52 of My March 2006 response).

The change in living arrangements after 1850 documented by Ruggles, important as it is, also has nothing to do with the argument of my book that there was no great family transition before 1800 because the change documented by Ruggles occurred after the time the supposed great family transition had already been “documented” by scholars reading history sideways. As I discussed in *Reading History Sideways*, the supposed great family transition was very probably “documented” as early as 1800 (or even by the

middle 1700s) and certainly by the middle 1800s. Thus, anyone wanting to support the existence of the great family transition, as “documented” by earlier generations of scholars, would have to provide data for the period before 1800—a requirement that is, of course, not met by Ruggles’ data for the period after 1850 (see pages 67-69 of *Reading History Sideways* and pages 48-52 of my March 2006 response).

I noted this timing problem with Ruggles’ argument in footnote 17 of page 51 of my March response which said that “any changes in living arrangements after 1800 are irrelevant to this particular discussion [of the supposed great family transition before 1800] and support the second main thesis of *Reading History Sideways* about substantial changes after 1800”. Ruggles’ March 2006 response to this statement was to change substantially its meaning by misquoting it to say that Thornton maintains that “any changes in living arrangements after 1800 are irrelevant” (page 2). This misquotation made it appear that I took the impossible position that post 1800 changes were simply irrelevant to everything, including theories of family change after 1800. Ruggles then disagreed with the version of my statement that he had created through his misquote and concluded that “nineteenth-century family changes are clearly relevant for evaluating the validity of theories of change in living arrangements” (page 2). While Ruggles’ conclusion disagrees with the version of my statement he created, it does not disagree with my actual statement or any belief of mine. In his response Ruggles also appears to have forgotten that I had discussed in *Reading History Sideways* and in my March 2006 response both the post 1800 changes in living arrangements and the ideational and structural forces (including industrialization) producing them (see Chapter 9 of my book, especially pages 175-177, and pages 51-53 of my March 2006 response).

I close with the hope that Ruggles’ statements in his March 2006 response concerning his regret for his earlier false assertions and distortions, and my comments above, will bring the current encounter between Ruggles and me to a close.

Reference

Ruggles, Steven. 2006a. “A Brief Response to Thornton’s Response to my Response to my Critique of *Reading History Sideways*”, Working Paper, University of Minnesota.

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Overview and Summary

This manuscript is in response to critiques by Steven Ruggles about my book *Reading History Sideways: the Fallacy and Enduring Impact of the Developmental Paradigm on Family Life*. I address in this manuscript the presentation that Ruggles made at the November 2005 Social Science History Association (SSHA) meetings, his February 2006 response to my response about his SSHA presentation, and a forthcoming book review. In this manuscript I document the following four basic conclusions about Ruggles' critique of *Reading History Sideways*: 1) Ruggles falsely accused me of misrepresenting his work, while simultaneously misrepresenting both his work and mine; 2) Ruggles mischaracterized *Reading History Sideways*, its purposes, and arguments; 3) Ruggles made incorrect conclusions about the work of earlier scholars; and 4) Ruggles made incorrect conclusions about actual family changes. In addition, Ruggles' critique has done nothing to challenge the theses and arguments of *Reading History Sideways*. There are so many problematic assertions in Ruggles statements that my refutation of his points has grown into a document of more than ninety pages showing the problems. Because my main response is so long, I have written this overview and summary to highlight some of the problems, with page references to my main paper for back-up documentation. A partial list of the problems in Ruggles' texts is provided below.

Ruggles' False Claim That I Misrepresented His Work, While He Misrepresented Both His Work and Mine

- Ruggles claimed that I misrepresented his work, whereas my citations of his work are accurate and in correct context. (Pages 9-24)
- Ruggles charged me with misrepresenting his work when I used his writings in support of the contrast in living arrangements between Northwest Europe and other parts of the world—claiming that he had “never written about this”—whereas, I provide statements from Ruggles showing that he did write about it. (Pages 11-13)
- Ruggles alleged that I misrepresented his work when I cited his paper for an analysis of education and living arrangements—claiming he “did not analyze education”—whereas, I quote his discussion of an analysis showing that “the higher the level of local education, the fewer elderly resided with kin”. (Pages 13-16)
- Ruggles charged me with imputing to him an interpretation of ideational factors as an explanation of living arrangements—claiming that he was stressing the role of economic incentives—when, in fact, he discussed extensively the likely role of ideational factors and provided the “indisputable” conclusion that there had been “a radical transformation of residential preferences”. (Pages 13-16)
- Ruggles alleged that I misrepresented his position that there were stem families in the Northwest European past, but in doing so he deleted a large portion of my statement that showed that I believed there were no “large and complex extended households” in the Northwest European past rather than that there were no stem households. (Pages 16-23)
- Ruggles claimed that I had misrepresented his position that there were stem families in the past, but in his allegation he changed my statement that in the past Northwest European households were “predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form)” to them being “predominantly nuclear”—making it falsely appear that I did not believe there were stem families in the past. (Pages 16-23)

Ruggles' Mischaracterizations of *Reading History Sideways*

- Ruggles alleged that “Thornton never quotes his sources” and that there “are no quotes whatsoever from primary sources,” whereas I counted approximately 100 quotations in the book. (Pages 24-26)
- Ruggles claimed that my motivation for writing the book was narrowly confined to discussing the myth of the extended family, whereas my clearly stated actual purpose was to explain the influence of developmental thinking on family scholarship and to explain the influence of developmental thinking on actual family structures and relationships. (Page 26)
- Ruggles asserted that I had claimed that the developmental paradigm had emerged full-blown in the 1700s when I had actually traced it back to ancient Greece. (Pages 26-27)
- Ruggles claimed that I had said that the incorrect conclusions of scholars about family change had evolved into the developmental paradigm, when I had said that the developmental paradigm was a factor producing the family myths. (Pages 26-27)
- Ruggles asserted that I claimed that Laslett and Macfarlane demolished the developmental paradigm when I actually said that they had been influenced by it, but had helped overturn the myth of the great family transition. (Pages 26-27)
- Ruggles stated that the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s treated Europe as a single entity, whereas the substantial differences between Northwest Europe and other parts of the continent were essential to the arguments of these scholars. (Pages 28-29)
- Ruggles claimed that I said that the supposed great family transition occurred prior to 1700, whereas I said that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s could not provide dates for historical changes from cross-sectional data, so they could only conclude that the transition occurred sometime before they wrote their books in the late 1700s and 1800s. (Pages 29-30)
- Ruggles asserted that I claimed there was a “dominant and coherent theory”, “a coherent consensus”, about the existence of the supposed great family transition before the middle of the 1800s, when I actually said that it was the first reporting rather than consensus creation that had occurred no later than 1855, but probably as early as 1803. (Pages 30-32)

Ruggles' Incorrect Conclusions about the Work of Earlier Scholars

- Ruggles asserted that “there was no such thing as ‘family scholarship’ before 1850”, whereas I have documented an extensive literature before 1850 about central family issues such as living arrangements, marriage, intergenerational authority, the bearing and rearing of children, the rights and autonomy of women, and the relations between women and men. (Pages 33-34)
- Ruggles stated in his 2005 SSHA talk that reading history sideways with cross-sectional data was not the primary method that scholars of the 1700s and 1800s used to document family change, whereas I have provided extensive evidence that reading history sideways was the predominant method. (Pages 34-46)
- Ruggles claimed in his 2005 SSHA talk that the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s probably documented family change using the Personal Observation Method, but he provided no explanation of the method, no explanation of how personal observation could provide the necessary information to describe great transitions across stages of

history, and no documentation of the use of the Personal Observation Method in actual scholarship. (Pages 34-36)

- Ruggles conceded in his 2006 response that scholars of the 1700s and 1800s documented family change by reading history sideways, but then claimed that they also used the Personal Observation Method, again without any documentation of the latter method or its actual use. (Pages 44-46)

Ruggles Incorrect Conclusions about Actual Family Changes

- After conceding in his 2006 response that scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s read history sideways with cross-sectional data, Ruggles asserted that their conclusions of a great family transition before they wrote were actually supported by the historical record, but he provided no evidence consistent with that claim, and I have not been able to find any supporting evidence. (Pages 48-51)
- Ruggles used his data about American family change after 1850 to argue against the conclusions of *Reading History Sideways*, yet the book used the same data to support its thesis that there had been substantial family changes in many parts of the world, including America, after 1800. (Pages 51-52)
- Ruggles pronounced it “implausible” that ideas of the scholars of the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s had a “significant impact on behavior either in the West or elsewhere in the world” when it is widely believed that such writers as Locke, Malthus, Marx, and Smith have had significant effects. (Pages 52-53)

Introduction

At the 2005 meetings of the Social Science History Association (SSHA) in Portland, Oregon, there was an-author-meets-critics session discussing my book, *Reading History Sideways: The Fallacy and Enduring Impact of the Developmental Paradigm on Family Life* (Thornton 2005a). The session was organized and chaired by Myron Gutmann (University of Michigan), with Katherine Lynch (Carnegie Mellon University), Steven Ruggles (University of Minnesota), Richard Smith (Cambridge University), and Etienne van de Walle (University of Pennsylvania) scheduled to respond to the book.¹ I consider it an honor for the SSHA and such an accomplished and distinguished group of participants to devote an entire session—with the associated preparation time—to my book. I thank SSHA and the session participants for committing this time and energy to *Reading History Sideways*.

During this session, three discussants commented on *Reading History Sideways*. Two of the discussants, Katherine Lynch and Etienne van de Walle, made several interesting observations about the book and its conclusions. I have not made any response to their comments. Rather, this paper is in response to Steven Ruggles and his PowerPoint presentation entitled “Reading History Backwards: A Comment on Thornton’s *Reading History Sideways*”. I first saw Ruggles’ slides when they were distributed at the beginning of his comments in Portland, which made it impossible for me to make an adequate response at the SSHA meetings. I then prepared a manuscript to make that response and clear up misconceptions about the book that were raised in this discussion (Thornton 2006). Since then, Ruggles has written a response to my paper (Ruggles 2006) and a book review to be published in the *Population and Development Review* (Ruggles forthcoming). Ruggles’ material can be found at <http://developmentalidealism.org/pubs/rhs-ruggles.html>. In this paper, I update my

¹ Unfortunately, Smith was unable to attend the session as scheduled.

earlier response (Thornton 2006) to respond in a single manuscript to Ruggles' original comments, his response to my response, and his book review. My original response (Thornton 2006) is also provided on my website (http://developmentalidealism.org/pubs/docs/thornton_RugglesResponseJan2006a.pdf).

At the SSHA Meetings in Portland, Ruggles distributed a hard copy of 16 slides of a PowerPoint presentation, but there was no visual presentation of the PowerPoint slides. I included the distributed slides as an appendix in my original response (Thornton 2006). At the same time that Ruggles released his February 2006 response (Ruggles 2006), he posted on his website an expanded PowerPoint containing 30 slides—14 new slides and modifications of several of the original 16. I have included the full set of Ruggles' 30 PowerPoint slides in the Appendix to this paper.² In addition, the Appendix contains a slide by slide discussion of the comments in Ruggles' PowerPoint.

Summary of Book and its Main Arguments and Conclusions

In order to respond fully to misconceptions or critiques of the book, I will begin by restating the book's main arguments and conclusions. Readers of this response who have already read *Reading History Sideways* itself may want to skip this section and go directly to my detailed responses to Ruggles' critique, and I encourage those interested to refer to the full text of the book. Most of the key points in the book were also covered in my 2001 Presidential Address to the Population Association of America which was subsequently published in the journal *Demography* (Thornton 2001).

Reading History Sideways has two main themes: 1) how scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s used developmental thinking and methods to reach conclusions about family life and

² The slides were scanned directly from a hard copy of Ruggles' slides obtained from his website. Quotes from those slides within the body of this paper were copied directly from the slides.

changes in family life in Europe before 1800—conclusions that in the last half of the 1900s were discovered to be myths; and 2) how developmental thinking and methods and the conclusions of scholars about family change and development became a powerful force for worldwide family change during the 1800s and 1900s.

Origins of Family Myths

In *Reading History Sideways* I argue that prior to the 1960s scholars believed that family life in England and other Northwest European societies in the centuries before 1800 was characterized by great family solidarity, little individualism, overwhelming control of parents over adolescent children, a young age at marriage, universal marriage, marriages arranged by parents, and large households, with children, parents, grandparents, and married aunts and uncles living together. This belief also held that sometime before 1800 there had been a great family transition in Northwest Europe wherein these attributes of family life had been replaced by little family solidarity, great individualism, little control of parents over adolescent children, an older age at marriage, many people never marrying, marriage arranged by the couple through courtship, and small households consisting primarily of parents and children. I argue that beginning in the 1960s, a wave of new family research showed that the characteristics of Northwest European family life of the 1800s that had previously been thought to be of relatively recent origin—the result of the great transformation—had actually existed for many centuries, probably at least back to the 1300s, although data become very sketchy as one moves back in time. These discoveries caused many scholars in recent decades to see the long-believed great transformation of family life as a myth.

Reading History Sideways documents how the myth of the great family transition was created by developmental thinking and methodology. Scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s

believed in a developmental model of history that assumes that all societies are on the same pathway, with each going through the same necessary stages of development, but that the pace of change along this developmental trajectory varies across societies. The result of this differential rate of progress, according to this approach, is the placement of societies at different stages of development in any specific period of history. With this framework, scholars created a methodology for writing history that, instead of following a particular society across time, compares various societies at the same time, a method I characterize as reading history sideways. This reading history sideways approach assumes that the previous conditions of life of a more advanced society can be proxied by the life situations of a contemporary society believed to be at an earlier stage of development. That is, the contemporary society perceived as less developed is used as a proxy for an earlier historical period of the society perceived as more advanced.

One of the important discoveries of the late 1700s and 1800s was that family life in Northwest Europe during this period varied substantially from family life in other parts of the world, such as Russia, The Middle East, China and India. Compared to family life in many other parts of the world—with extensive family solidarity, little individualism, overwhelming control of parents over adolescent children, a young age at marriage, universal marriage, marriages arranged by parents, and large and extended households—family life in Northwest Europe could be characterized as having relatively little family solidarity, great individualism, little control of parents over adolescent children, an older age at marriage, many people never marrying, marriages arranged by the couple through courtship, and small and nuclear (or stem) households. With their belief that Northwestern Europe was at the pinnacle of development and other parts of the world were less developed, scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s

concluded that as Northwest Europe had developed, it had gone through a great family transition that had changed its family system from being like those observed in such places as Russia, the Middle East, China and India to being what was observed in Northwest Europe in the 1700s and 1800s. Given the huge differences in family systems between Northwest Europe and those in many other parts of the world, this reading of history sideways suggested a huge change in Northwest Europe—what I have called a great family transition. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the occurrence of this great family transition before 1800 was discovered to be a myth.

An Engine of Worldwide Family Change

The second main thesis of *Reading History Sideways* is that developmental thinking and methodology and the conclusions of several generations of scholars about family change were used to create a set of propositions that have been a force for family change during the last two centuries. These developmental models and the conclusions drawn from them provided new mechanisms for judging society, family life, and the rights of human beings. They showed the direction for future change and the mechanisms that people could employ to facilitate progress and well-being, and in this way became the engine for many social, economic, and familial changes.

More specifically, the book argues that developmental thinking and methods and the conclusions of several generations of scholars grew into a powerful set of propositions—that I call developmental idealism—that would drive many fundamental changes in family life around the world. Developmental idealism states that a modern society that is industrialized, urbanized, highly educated, and with high levels of knowledge and technology is good and to be sought after. Developmental idealism also indicates a preference for modern families,

defined as having high levels of individualism, high status of women, mature marriage, marriage arranged by the couple, the autonomy of children, small households, and controlled and low fertility. Developmental idealism also suggests that a modern society and modern family are causally connected, with a modern society being a cause and/or effect of a modern family system. Finally, developmental idealism emphasizes that individuals have the right to be free and equal, with social relationships based on consent.

Reading History Sideways argues that developmental idealism has been disseminated widely around the world—through a myriad of mechanisms—and has been an exceptionally powerful force for family change during the 1800s and 1900s both in Western societies and elsewhere. I argue that it has been a particularly important force in many family changes during this period, including declines in childbearing, increases in age at marriage, the increase in the autonomy of young people, growing egalitarianism between women and men, increases in divorce, increases of independent living among both the young and the elderly, increases in sexual activity and cohabitation outside marriage, and the growing emphasis on individual rights as opposed to the norms of the larger community.

Of course, as developmental idealism was disseminated around the world, it met with indigenous social and cultural systems that were also powerful in that they had for centuries provided models for family and social life. It is not surprising that the messages of developmental idealism created substantial tension and conflict with indigenous historical social and cultural systems. In many instances, developmental idealism has been met with sophisticated evaluation, resistance, and adaptation. The end result, however, has been substantial family change during the past two centuries, both in the Western world and

elsewhere, with the result often being a hybridized form that mixes indigenous approaches with those of developmental idealism.

Additional Detailed Working Papers

In *Reading History Sideways* I did not go into great detail about the specific ways in which particular scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s used the reading history sideways method to arrive at their conclusions. Instead, I provided the conceptual framework they used, their data sources, and their conclusions to document the practice, with numerous references to the actual work of these scholars for readers to peruse on their own. I took this approach, with strong encouragement from reviewers and the University of Chicago Press, to produce a readable volume that was not burdened with extensive quotes from earlier generations of scholars.

However, to provide more information for readers interested in this detail, I have written a separate paper in which I provide the descriptions by several scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s of the reading history sideways methodology they used for studying social change using cross-sectional data (Thornton 2005c). I have also written four papers on the ways in which many family scholars used the developmental paradigm, reading history sideways, and cross-sectional data to create or reinforce myths about family change. One of these papers describes how Malthus and subsequent writers used extensive cross-national data and reading history sideways to document and explain the supposed substantial increases in both celibacy and the ages people married (Thornton 2005b). A second paper describes how Westermarck used even more extensive cross-national data and sideways history to reach similar conclusions as Malthus about marital change (Thornton 2005e). A third discusses Le Play's monumental cross-national study and the ways he utilized it to document a supposed

transition from complex extended households to predominantly nuclear households (Thornton 2005d). Finally, the fourth paper (Thornton 2005f) examines how several scholars, including Millar, Durkheim, and Maine, used cross-national data and reading history sideways to document supposed changes in family relationships and processes.³ It is important to note that these five working papers are not exhaustive in that they do not cover all of the relevant authors from the late 1700s and 1800s.

Ruggles' Response

As Ruggles noted in the conclusion to his response, he approached me at the reception following my 2001 Presidential Address to the Population Association of America (PAA) and expressed disagreement with the talk (Ruggles 2006, page 9; also see Slide 12 in the Appendix). We subsequently corresponded by email and talked at other PAA meetings. I was explicit during several of these discussions that I was not disagreeing with Ruggles or his extensive data, as I placed great confidence in his data and expertise and wanted to be consistent with the empirical facts that he and others had produced. I did so because I viewed Ruggles as a leading expert on historical family demography. Ruggles sent me additional reprints and working papers that I used in subsequent revisions of *Reading History Sideways*. I recognized this contribution by Ruggles in the acknowledgement section of the book. As I explain in the comments below, *Reading History Sideways* reflects very careful attention to the data, arguments, and conclusions in Ruggles' work.

My main conclusion about Ruggles' comments about *Reading History Sideways* is consistent with our interaction at the PAA reception. He approached me and a group of other demographers and said that he had a disagreement with the talk. The essence of the disagreement, as expressed by Ruggles at that time, was that he had substantial evidence that

³ All of these papers are posted on the web at <http://developmentalidealism.org/pubs/>

there were important and substantial changes in living arrangements in the United States after 1850, which he said contradicted my claim that there had never been any changes in living arrangements in the Western world—either before or after 1800. The spontaneous reaction of one person in the group was along the following lines: “Arland never said that; you missed the point; the changes in living arrangements after 1850 were actually a significant part of his talk”. As I will explain below, a similar thing has occurred in Ruggles’ reaction to *Reading History Sideways* in that he has missed several of my main points. In addition, he has falsely claimed that I misrepresented his work, he has misrepresented both my writing and his own past writing, he has mischaracterized central elements of *Reading History Sideways*, and he has come to inaccurate conclusions concerning both past scholarship about family history and the nature of family continuity and change itself. I will discuss each of these issues in turn, beginning with Ruggles’ unfounded allegation that I misrepresented his work.

Ruggles’ False Claim that I Misrepresented His Work—and His Misrepresentation of Both His Work and Mine

Because I take scholarly accuracy and integrity seriously, I begin my response with Ruggles’ claim that I misrepresented his work. In making this allegation, Ruggles has tried to cast doubt on the legitimacy and integrity of the entirety of *Reading History Sideways*. In this section of my response, I show that Ruggles’ claim of my misrepresentation of his work is false and without foundation. In addition, when I checked Ruggles’ allegation with the written record, I was surprised and puzzled to discover that in making this claim he had seriously misrepresented *Reading History Sideways*. He both misquoted my manuscript and took material out of context in ways that substantially changed my meaning. Furthermore, and even

more surprisingly, he made claims about his own writings that directly contradict what he had previously published.

Ruggles made his allegation of misrepresentation in both his 2005 SSHA comments and in his 2006 response. Ruggles stated in his response that “in my SSHA presentation, I objected to several of Thornton’s quotations and citations of my work to prove points that were the opposite of what I intended” (Ruggles 2006, page 6). After discussion of his claims, Ruggles concluded this point with the following statement: “Thornton’s consistent misreading of my own work casts serious doubt on his ability to interpret sources. My meaning may sometimes be obscure owing to poor writing, but I doubt it is harder to understand that (sic) that of seventeenth and eighteenth-century moral philosophers. If Thornton cannot understand the argument of an article I wrote in 1994, should we believe him when he cites 18th-century authorities to support his revisionist intellectual history, without even providing quotations and page numbers to document his interpretation?” (Ruggles 2006, page 8) I discuss in the next section the false statement by Ruggles that *Reading History Sideways* contains no quotations or page numbers and will turn here to the allegation of misrepresentation.

I will discuss the three specific cases where Ruggles claimed that I misrepresented his work and show that in each case my quotation of Ruggles’ work is completely accurate and used in the appropriate context. For each of the three cases, I will proceed in four specific steps: 1) quote what I said in *Reading History Sideways*; 2) provide Ruggles’ claim of my misrepresentation; 3) provide the basis from Ruggles’ own texts for what I said; and 4) show the falsity of Ruggles’ claim. This evidence will indicate that my representation of Ruggles’ work is very accurate and that Ruggles’ claims include many inaccuracies—in fact, enough to cast “serious doubt” on Ruggles’ ability to report and interpret sources.

Ruggles Contrasting Northwest Europe and Other Parts of the World.

Let's first consider Ruggles' charge that I miscited him concerning the contrast between Northwest Europe and other parts of the world. In *Reading History Sideways*, I made the observation that the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s reported that nuclear households were the most common type of residential unit in Northwest Europe, with stem households being less common (page 51). I then made the following contrast of Northwest Europe with other places, ending the statement with a substantial list of references documenting this contrast, with two of the references being Ruggles (1987) and Ruggles (1994).

By contrast, the extended household consisting of parents and two or more married children was, according to these scholars, more common in many others parts of the world—such as Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa—than in Northwest Europe.

Recent research confirms the nuclear household/extended household contrast between Northwest Europe and others parts of the world (Thornton 2005, page 51).

In Slide 23 of his PowerPoint Presentation Ruggles objected to my use of his work to support this statement. The slide states:

Other problems with Ruggles citations

Arland cites Ruggles (1987, 1994) to support the statement that

“Recent research confirms the nuclear/extended household contrast between Northwest Europe and other parts of the world.” (p. 51)

But I have never written about this.

I will now quote three passages from Ruggles that indicate that he has indeed written about this contrast between Northwest Europe and other parts of the world. In considering these quotations from Ruggles, please keep in mind that in *Reading History Sideways* (see page 11) I consistently identify Northwest Europe to include migrants from that region to America.

Geographic comparison lends support to the thesis that age at marriage had important consequences for extended-family structure. The European marriage pattern was confined to northwestern Europe; in eastern and southern Europe, marriage occurred much earlier. There is mounting evidence that family structure was substantially more complex in the South and East. See Hajnal (1982), Czap (1978), Mitterauer and Kagan (1982), P. Laslett (1977a: 15-16), Mitterauer and Sieder (1982: 37), Berkner (1972a), Plakans (1973, 1975), McArdle (1974) (Ruggles 1987, page 63).

By itself, then, high mortality is insufficient to preclude a high frequency of stem families; it takes a combination of high mortality with late marriage to produce a major constraint on stem-family structure. Such a combination of demographic characteristics is rare; in fact, preindustrial northwestern Europe may be unique in this respect. In eastern and southern Europe, where a higher frequency of stem families has been found, people married earlier, in some places much earlier.⁴ The...results therefore suggest that geographical differences in the frequency of stem families across preindustrial Europe may have been a function of demographic factors. (Ruggles 1987, page 125).

The stem family is only one of several possible patterns of extended family structure. In other societies, historians and anthropologists have observed high frequencies of joint families, which include married siblings residing together. Such families were common in places such as nineteenth-century central Italy and late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Russia. These were high mortality societies, but that did not prevent a high frequency of extended families; because fertility was also high, the great majority of adults had surviving siblings with whom they could reside.

In the United States, the joint family pattern has barely existed. At least for the period 1850 onward, the percentage of persons whose spouse is present and who reside with their sibling whose spouse is present is barely measurable, never amounting to more than 0.1 percent of the married population. In every year for which data are available, the dominant form of extended family has been multigenerational, containing older

⁴ “Hajnal (1965). In parts of Russia where the frequency of complex households was very high, age at marriage was extremely low—as low as a median of 15 for women and 16 for men; see Mitterauer and Sieder (1982: 37). On marriage age and the differences in family structure between northwestern Europe and southern and eastern Europe, see note 5 in chapter 4.” This footnote is part of Ruggles’ original manuscript.

parents residing with their adult children (Ruggles 1994, page 110).

In short, these passages from Ruggles are very appropriate citations in support of my claim that recent literature confirms the contrast between Northwest Europe (and its offshoots) and other parts of the world. They refute Ruggles' claim that I have misrepresented his work, but instead refute his reporting of his own work. I have no explanation, in the light of the three quotations above, why Ruggles would state that "I have never written about this."

Ruggles on Education, Ideational Factors, and Living Arrangements.

I now turn to Ruggles claim that I gave the opposite interpretation than what he intended in a statement on the relationship between education and living arrangements. I begin by quoting from *Reading History Sideways* the statement where I cite Ruggles reporting a correlation between education and living arrangements and discussing the influence of ideational factors.

The reports by Ruggles (1994, 2001) of aggregate analyses showing that education at the county and state level is strongly associated with the living arrangements of the elderly—particularly that increased levels of education can account for the trend of independent living among the elderly in the late 1900s—lend further support to the idea that ideational shifts have been important influences on trends in living arrangements. Ruggles (1994) himself interpreted the strong correlation between education and living arrangements as representing the influence of ideational factors, suggesting that there have been changes in preferences for living arrangements that are tied to more general changes in attitudes toward single parenthood, cohabitation, divorce, and premarital sex.⁵ This conclusion is consistent with the postulated influence of developmental idealism. (Thornton 2005a, pages 176-177)

⁵“ In a more recent article, Ruggles (2001) again suggested that the preferences of both the young and the old for independent living have grown stronger in the late 1900s. However, in this article, unlike the earlier one, he does not discuss possible links between these changes and more widespread cultural or ideational shifts.” This footnote is part of my original passage.

Ruggles stated that this is an example of my misrepresentation of his arguments. He does so both in Slide 24 of his PowerPoint Presentation and in his 2006 response (Ruggles 2006). I quote from his 2006 response below.

There are several other places in which Thornton misrepresents my arguments. To take one example, Thornton writes “Ruggles (1994) himself interpreted the strong correlation between education and living arrangements as representing the influence of ideational factors” (Thornton 2005a: 176). That paper, however, did not analyze education, and the only mention of education in the paper is my statement that “as life chances were increasingly determined by education instead of inheritance, the incentives for grown children to remain in their parents’ households would have diminished” (Ruggles 1994: 127). The meaning here is very close to the opposite of Thornton’s interpretation; I was stressing the role of *economic* incentives in the residence decisions of the younger generation. (Ruggles 2006, page 7)

I will quote below four paragraphs from Ruggles’ paper that provide the clear basis for my statement in the book that he did an educational analysis and provided an ideational interpretation.

To assess the effects of urbanization and industrialization on the living arrangements of the aged, I carried out multivariate analyses of the effects of local urban development and manufacturing on family structure in 1880 and 1910. This study will appear elsewhere, but the main findings are easily summarized.⁶ Neither urban development nor manufacturing was significantly associated with separate residence of the elderly. In fact, when we control for other characteristics, urban elderly in 1910 were significantly more likely to reside with kin than elderly in rural areas.

There were two local characteristics related to separate residence in old age: percentage of literate in the county and rate of school attendance. The higher the level of local education, the fewer elderly resided with kin. This finding brings to mind John Caldwell’s widely cited theory of fertility decline. Caldwell argues that traditional attitudes about the family have been undermined by individualistic values transmitted through schooling; the same mechanism could prove to be important for

⁶ Ruggles, “Living Arrangements of the Elderly.” This footnote is part of the original passage.

the transformation of family structure.⁷ Education could also have had a more direct effect. The increasing importance of human capital as opposed to occupational or property inheritance may have undermined the economic logic of the stem family. As life chances were increasingly determined by education instead of inheritance, the incentives for grown children to remain in their parents' households would have diminished.

Another hypothesis was offered by Marion Levy. He suggested that as demographic constraints relaxed and people were increasingly able to reside in extended families, "sources of stress and strain" emerged that led them to change their preferred family form. A similar interpretation has been proposed by Frances Kobrin, who argues that as the ratio of elderly to adult children increased, the norm of co-residence was undermined. In other words, the ideal of co-residence could be maintained only as long as a small minority actually lived with their parents; the demographic transition indirectly led to a transition in residential preferences.⁸

Social norms about multigenerational families clearly have changed. Separate residence is now preferred both by the older generation and by their children.⁹ This shift in norms is consistent with the demographic interpretation suggested by Levy and Kobrin. But there is one major problem: the transformation of attitudes about the family has not been confined to the relationship between elderly parents and their adult children. In every sphere of family life, there has been a loosening of bonds of obligation among kin. There has been a revolution in attitudes toward divorce, cohabitation, premarital sex, and single parenthood.¹⁰ It seems unlikely that the shift in attitudes toward co-residence between adults and their parents is unconnected to the broader changes in family values. The demographic thesis is therefore too narrow to explain the larger changes in family attitudes. We are faced, in effect, with explaining the rise of individualism in the twentieth century, a task far beyond the scope of this essay (Ruggles 1994, pages 126-127).

I find four claims in Ruggles' February response impossible to justify in the light of this quotation from his 1994 paper. First, Ruggles' 2006 claim that the 1994 paper did not analyze

⁷ "John C. Caldwell, *Theory of Fertility Decline* (London, 1982)." This footnote is part of the original passage.

⁸ "Levy, 'Aspects of the Analysis of Family Structure'; Kobrin, 'Fall in Household Size'." This footnote is part of Ruggles' original passage.

⁹ "Among many other surveys on this point, see Stephen Crystal, *America's Old Age Crisis* (New York, 1982), 222." This footnote is part of Ruggles' original passage.

¹⁰ "See, for example, Arland Thornton, 'Changing Attitudes toward Family Issues in the United States,' *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51 (1989): 873-93." This footnote is part of Ruggles' original passage.

education is impossible to understand in the light of the paper's statements about multivariate analyses being conducted and literacy and school attendance being positively correlated with separate residences in old age. Second, Ruggles' 2006 claim that the only mention of education in the paper was one sentence about education determining life chances and incentives for grown children to live with their parents cannot be understood when he discusses in two immediately preceding sentences John Caldwell's theory of fertility decline in which traditional attitudes about family matters are undermined by individualistic values transmitted through schooling. Third, Ruggles' 2006 statement that the meaning of his 1994 statement contradicted the influence of ideational factors and stressed only economic factors is impossible to understand when the 1994 statement said that the mechanism of individual values transmitted through schooling could prove to be the same mechanism transforming family structure. Fourth, Ruggles' denial in February 2006 of ideational influences runs counter to his discussion of Frances Kobrin about changing norms of co-residence and his last paragraph discussing a general revolution in "attitudes toward divorce, cohabitation, premarital sex, and single parenthood" that are unlikely to be unconnected to shifts in attitudes toward intergenerational co-residence. And, if Ruggles' point was that the explanation was all economic and not ideational, as he claims in his 2006 response, why would he make the following claim in his 1994 paper, "But my main point is indisputable: the past century has witnessed a radical transformation of residential preferences." (Ruggles 1994, page 127) In summary, my use of Ruggles' 1994 statement is very consistent with the words, sentences, and meaning in his statement, and it is Ruggles' 2006 claims about his 1994 statement that are inconsistent with his 1994 statement.

Ruggles and the Extended Family Myth

Ruggles' final false claim of my misrepresentation of him is more complex but equally problematic. It concerns my use of a quotation from his 1987 book about the myth of extended families in the past. In order to establish the exact nature and context of my quote I provide below the two relevant paragraphs from *Reading History Sideways* (page 84).

The new historical research found that, in Northwest Europe, households had been predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form) for hundreds of years (see M. Anderson 1986/1980; Goode 1970/1963, 1982/1964; Hareven 1977; Laslett 1984/1965; Laslett and Wall 1974/1972; Mitterauer and Seider 1982/1977; Mount 1982; Ruggles 1987; Seccombe 1992; Segalen 1986; Seward 1978; Stone 1982; Wall 1995). Laslett, for example, reported that expectations of large and complex extended households "have been demonstrated to be false...for traditional England...It is not true that most of our ancestors lived in extended families...It is not true that the elderly and the widowed ordinarily had their married children living with them, or that uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces were often to be found as resident relatives" (Laslett 1984/1965, 91; see also Laslett and Wall 1974/1972). In short, Laslett found that there was no evidence that family arrangements seven hundred years ago were markedly different from those of "early modern times." "The further we go back," he wrote, "the more elusive the origins of the interrelated characteristics of the Western family. As of the present state of our knowledge we cannot say when 'the West' diverged from the other parts of Europe" (Laslett 1978/1977, 48).

Steven Ruggles subsequently called the idea of extended households in the past *the extended family myth*, noting: "There are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost" (Ruggles 1987, 4). Examples of other scholars maintaining this view include M. Anderson (1986/1980), Goode (1982/1964), Hareven (1977), Levine (2001), Mitterauer and Seider (1982/1977), Mount (1982), Segalen (1986), Seward (1978), Smith (1979, 1992), and Stone (1982). There was, thus, apparently no evidence for the purported substantial decline in extended households in Northwest Europe during the centuries preceding the 1700s and 1800s. (Thornton 2005a, page 84)

Ruggles' original PowerPoint Slide 13 (modified now as Slide 21) presented the following material.

Thornton on the extended family myth:

“Steven Ruggles called the idea of extended families in the past *the extended family myth*, noting: ‘There are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost.’” (p.84)

So virtually one of the exceedingly rare quotations in the book is one from *me* in support of the statement that “the new historical research found that households had been predominantly nuclear for hundreds of years.”

Ruggles indicated in his response that my quote was accurate but that I took his statement out of context. He stated that the point of his book was that “Laslett and his followers found a superficial resemblance between families in the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries only because” of measurement problems and that they “ignored the confounding effects of demographic constraints on family structure.” He suggested that his book was a critique of “Laslett and his fellow myth-bashers” and argued “that there was a dramatic simplification of living arrangements in England and America beginning in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Thornton, however, quotes me to support that very theory I am attacking, without even mentioning that I sharply disagree with it” (Ruggles 2006, pages 6-7).

In order to give the context of the Ruggles’ material that I originally quoted in *Reading History Sideways*, I provide below a more extended version of his quotation.

The old myth of the extended family is the one we all grew up with. In olden days—before modernization, industrialization, and moral decay—people lived in extended families; now people live in nuclear families. This view of the history of the family was first proposed in the nineteenth century, and by the 1950s it was safely cloaked in the protective language of science.

Doubts about the old myth were first raised in 1963, when Peter Laslett and John Harrison published evidence that residence with extended relatives was rare in Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, during the seventeenth century. Subsequent

research has shown that this village was not exceptional; only about 10 percent of households in English communities between 1650 and 1780 included extended kin. The evidence for colonial America is scantier, because fewer listings of inhabitants are available. Nevertheless, the limited data do suggest that extended living arrangements were at least as unusual in eighteenth-century America as they were in England. There are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost.

Unfortunately, a new myth has replaced the old one. It is now commonly believed that American and English family structure has always been overwhelmingly nuclear. (Ruggles 1987, pages 3-4)

My purpose in using the Ruggles statement— “there are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost”—was simply to illustrate that the idea of extended families in the past had fallen from favor among most scholars. I also made clear, as I note below, that I was primarily comparing the nuclear/stem households of Northwest Europe in the past with the previous belief that households in Northwest Europe had previously been large and complex like those in other parts of the world. My use of Ruggles’ quote in this way is entirely consistent with the context of the section of Ruggles’ book preceding the quote that I used in *Reading History Sideways*, as that section was devoted entirely to the scholarly literature stating as myth the belief that extended families predominated in the past (Ruggles 1987, pages 3-4). Ruggles has also discussed this scholarly consensus in more recent publications (see Ruggles 1994, page 106; Ruggles 2003, page 140).

The extensive quotation (listed above) in Ruggles’ book also stated that “Unfortunately, a new myth has replaced the old one. It is now commonly believed that American and English family structure has always been overwhelmingly nuclear” (Ruggles 1987, page 4). In *Reading History Sideways* I went to great lengths to avoid the “myth of the overwhelmingly

nuclear family”, the myth that Ruggles’ book was arguing against. In fact, avoidance of that myth was why I used the phrase “predominantly nuclear (or weak stem form)”¹¹

In addition, *Reading History Sideways* made several of the exact points about stem families in the Northwest European past that Ruggles claimed in his 2006 response that I had contradicted. Because Ruggles chose not to mention these statements from *Reading History Sideways*, I quote three of them below. They show clearly my rejection of the overwhelmingly nuclear family that Ruggles had labeled a myth.

...in the Northwest European societies of the past, stem households were, in fact, relatively uncommon because high mortality and fertility and late marriage and childbearing combined to limit the number of families that were able to form them (Ruggles 1987, 1994). Nevertheless,...it [was] possible for large numbers of elderly people to live with their unmarried or married children, and many did so (Kertzer 1991; Ruggles 1987, 1994, 1996, 2001; Wall 1995) (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 51-52).

...the existing household system was structured so that significant percentages of the elderly lived with a married child ...(*Reading History Sideways*, page 85).

Substantial numbers of the elderly lived with their children—frequently with unmarried rather than married children—in the 1700s and 1800s (Ruggles 1987, 1994, 1996, 2001; D.S. Smith 1981). (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 175-176).

This brings us to a profoundly ironic point in Ruggles’ allegation. At the same time he accused me of misrepresenting him, he both made a substantial misquote of my position and took my statement out of its crucial context. Furthermore, the misquote changed my position from being one recognizing stem households in the past to a position saying that households in

¹¹In my original response (Thornton 2006) I had included an extensive justification for describing Northwest European households in the past as “predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form).” Ruggles said in his response that he did not object to this characterization of household forms in the past. For this reason, I deleted from this revised version of my response my justification for characterizing Northwest European households for hundreds of years as “predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form)”. Readers desirous of learning more about my rationale for this characterization are invited to read my original response, especially pages 26-29 (Thornton 2006).

the past were predominantly nuclear, a position that Ruggles then chose to attack. Thus, Ruggles created from his misquote of me a position I never took and then attacked the position he created as a misrepresentation of him.

The misquotation by Ruggles occurred in that, as noted above, my original statement said that “The new historical research found that, in Northwest Europe, households had been predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form) for hundreds of years” whereas Ruggles’ slide deleted the parenthetical phrase—“or a weak stem form”. This is an important deletion by Ruggles because it made it appear that I believed that all households in the Northwest European past were nuclear, whereas, in fact, I believe that most households in the past were nuclear but some were stem (and said so multiple times in the book, as noted above). That is, my statement in this passage took into account the presence of some stem families in the Northwest European past—a fact that was erased in the rendition of my statement in Ruggles’ slide. It was this erasure of my recognition of stem families in the past that created a position that I did not endorse that Ruggles then chose to attack.

Interestingly, in the PowerPoint slides that Ruggles posted on his Website in February 2006 after he received my original response, he revised the second paragraph of old Slide 13 (which is now Slide 21) to read as follows: “So virtually one of the exceedingly rare quotations in the book is one from *me* in support of the thesis that households in Northwestern Europe have always been nuclear”. Thus, in his revised paragraph Ruggles changed the text somewhat and took out the quotation marks, but left intact the same incorrect conclusion that I believed that all households in Northwestern Europe were nuclear whereas that was not my statement at all. And, he continued to attack a position of mine that he had created by this misrepresentation.

I now turn to the important context missed by Ruggles' quote. My full statement in *Reading History Sideways* (quoted above) makes clear that the comparison point I was using for characterizing Northwest European families of the 1700s and 1800s as “predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form)” was the large and complex families existing in many other parts of the world at the time. I said that Laslett expected to find that “the elderly and the widowed ordinarily had their married children living with them, or that uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces were often to be found as resident relatives” (see quote above). Furthermore, Laslett clearly had in mind distinctions between ‘the West’ and other parts of Europe and the rest of the world, which did have many large extended families. This fact is indicated further in Laslett’s question: “Can it yet be said when ‘The West’ began to diverge from the rest of Europe and the rest of the world in its familial outlook and behaviour?” (*Reading History Sideways*, page 83). The main conclusion of my statement is that the large and complex extended households found in many other parts of the world—including many parts of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and East and South Asia—have not existed for hundreds of years in Northwest European societies.

Thus, Ruggles’ deletion of the large and complex extended family comparison point substantially altered the meaning of my statement. My point was not that there were no stem households in the Northwest European past—as I explicitly said that there were—but that the large and complex extended households that Laslett and other had expected to find in the Northwest European past were not to be found for hundreds of years. I was not saying that Laslett and others failed to find stem families in the Northwest European past, but that they did not find large and complex extended households like those existing in Eastern Europe and other places.

In his response, as noted above, Ruggles also indicated that *Reading History Sideways* had distorted his position by ignoring his documentation of a “dramatic simplification of living arrangements in America and England beginning in the middle years of the nineteenth century.” This charge is particularly puzzling as I was discussing in this section of the book the lack of a great family transition prior to 1800 or 1850, and Ruggles’ data for the time after the middle years of the nineteenth century is irrelevant to that point. In addition, I explicitly discussed the simplification of living arrangements in the Western world from the middle of the nineteenth century, specifically citing three of Ruggles’ publications in support of that position. I quote one passage from my book below.

Trends toward independent living have also been marked among the elderly in the Western world. Substantial numbers of the elderly lived with their children...in the 1700s and 1800s (Ruggles 1987, 1994, 1996, 2001; D.S. Smith 1981). From the mid-1800s on, however, the fraction doing so declined dramatically, with the result that, by the last few decades of the 1900s, the phenomenon was quite uncommon (Ruggles 1994, 1996, 2001; Thornton and Freedman 1983; D. S. Smith 1981). (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 175-176).

Also, it should be noted that a central thesis of *Reading History Sideways* is that there were large changes in living arrangements in Northwest Europe (and elsewhere) after 1800. Thus, Ruggles’ statement that he had demonstrated such changes in England and America after the middle 1800s is actually support for and not against *Reading History Sideways* (pages 175-176).

Final Points about the Issue of Misrepresentation

I close this section by stating that all of my quotations of Ruggles are accurate and reflect the proper context. The quality of my citations leads to a clear rejection of Ruggles’ claim that “Thornton’s consistent misreading of my own work cast serious doubts on his ability

to interpret sources” (Ruggles 2006, page 8). Instead, the quality of my citations discussed here provides confidence in my interpretative abilities.

At the same time, the claims that Ruggles makes about his own writings are not correct, as things that he stated that he never said are contradicted by multiple extensive quotations from his own writings. In addition, his quotations of me contain important misquotes, he directly deletes crucial context that changes my meaning, and he ignores highly relevant passages of the book. To paraphrase Ruggles, these problems lead to the conclusion that Ruggles’ consistent misrepresentations of my work and his own writings cast serious doubt on his ability to report and interpret sources (including *Reading History Sideways*).

Ruggles’ Mischaracterizations of *Reading History Sideways*

I now turn to a separate set of issues: Ruggles’ mischaracterization of several key elements of *Reading History Sideways*. These range from the matter of quotes and citations, to the purpose of the book, and to several of the key arguments of the book. I begin with the issue of quotes and citations, a matter that was alluded to in a Ruggles’ quote in the previous section.

Distortions About Me Never Citing My Sources

Ruggles seriously criticized *Reading History Sideways* for its alleged complete failure to provide quotations and page numbers. For example, in his book review he says that “Thornton never quotes his sources” (Ruggles forthcoming, page 7). And, in his SSHA slides he reported that “there are no quotes whatsoever from primary sources” (Slide 8), and that I cite 18th century authorities, “without providing a single quotation or page number” (Slide 25). I find it hard to understand why Ruggles would make such statements when I found approximately 100 quotations and 100 page numbers in the book, with several coming from

writers in the 1600s, 1700s, and very early 1800s (also see my response to Slide 25 in the Appendix). I do not know why Ruggles found “no quotes whatsoever”, when I found the number I did. Perhaps, Ruggles and I have different definitions of a “quotation”; or perhaps I read the text more carefully than Ruggles.

Despite my inability to understand Ruggles’ hyperbole and distortion, I can understand why readers might desire more quotations of text material and more page numbers to guide them to source material. The amount of source material that went into *Reading History Sideways* is very large and there is a substantial literature to reference. At the same time, and as I explained earlier, reviewers and the University of Chicago Press strongly encouraged me to produce a readable volume that was not burdened with extensive quotations from earlier generations of scholars. My solution was to provide the conclusions from the material and provide references to the substantial amount of source material, so that readers could follow-up as desired. Consequently, the book has a significant number of references lumped together in support of a particular point. Because so many of my statements were supported by so much source material, this seemed necessary. Recognizing that some people would like more quotations and details, as indicated earlier, I have provided five working papers with substantial additional detail (Thornton 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f).

I also understand how the provision of page numbers to specific pages, sections, and chapters of books would assist readers desirous of locating materials. I did provide such information for the quotations provided in the book. But, I did omit page numbers from many of my text references. However, before being punished too severely for this omission of page numbers from text references, I must say that I have been committing this exact omission for the entire thirty years of my career—without a single complaint being registered until *Reading*

History Sideways. I also add that I have now checked a few random issues of some of my favorite journals such as *Demography* and the *American Sociological Review* and found that almost all of my colleagues writing in these journals also omit page numbers in their citations of references in their texts. Also, I did a little checking of some of Ruggles' own publications and found that he frequently omits specific page numbers in his text references.

Mischaracterizing My Motivations for Writing the Book

Ruggles mischaracterized my motivations for producing *Reading History Sideways* when he declared in his book review that although Thornton “addresses several aspects of family change, the motivation for the book is to explain how the social theorists who preceded Laslett could possibly have gotten things so wrong. What were the origins of the myth of the extended family” (Ruggles forthcoming, page 6). Ruggles' narrow emphasis on the myth of the extended family is not surprising, given that he has focused much of his career on this topic, but to so emphatically project his interests on to my motivations is disappointing.

Reading History Sideways indicates clearly that “the purpose of this book is to tell two interrelated stories: (1) the influence of developmental thinking on scholarship about families and (2) the influence of developmental thinking on actual family structures, relationships, and processes” (Thornton 2005a, page 1). The organization of the book clearly follows these two purposes.

Misunderstanding the Basic Framework and Theory of *Reading History Sideways*

Ruggles' descriptions of *Reading History Sideways* reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of many of the book's central arguments. For example, in his book review (Ruggles forthcoming) Ruggles summarized some of my argument as follows: the incorrect conclusions of family change made by scholars from the 1700s through the early 1900s

“evolved into a powerful dogma Thornton calls the ‘developmental paradigm’. Indeed, Thornton argues, the developmental paradigm is such a compelling myth that it has profoundly influenced familial *behavior* worldwide” (Ruggles forthcoming, page 6). Later in the book review, he said that I claimed that “the developmental paradigm emerged full-blown in the eighteenth century and remained essentially unchanged until it was demolished by Peter Laslett and Alan Macfarlane in the 1960s” (Ruggles forthcoming, page 7).

There are many mischaracterizations in these descriptions by Ruggles. First, contrary to Ruggles’ claims, *Reading History Sideways* never claimed that the ideas of the family scholars about family change evolved into the developmental paradigm; instead it said the opposite—that the developmental paradigm and reading history sideways were used by scholars to produce the conclusion of a great family transformation. Second, contrary to Ruggles, the book never said that the developmental paradigm itself has changed family behavior worldwide; instead it says that the combination of the developmental paradigm, reading history sideways, the conclusions of generations of scholars, and developmental idealism has changed family life. Third, contrary to Ruggles, *Reading History Sideways* never said that the “developmental paradigm emerged full-blown in the eighteenth century”; instead, it said that the developmental paradigm evolved over many centuries from the Greeks through the Enlightenment, with different versions and ideas continuing to evolve for many years after that. Fourth, contrary to Ruggles, the book never said that Laslett and Macfarlane demolished the developmental paradigm. In fact, the book claimed that Laslett and Macfarlane were influenced by the developmental paradigm; the book did not mention Laslett and Macfarlane attacking the developmental paradigm; but the book did discuss Laslett and Macfarlane attacking the supposed great family transformation.

Mischaracterization of the Location of the Supposed Great Family Transition

Ruggles' mischaracterization of my work is also apparent in his very first SSHA substantive slide (Slide 2) in his PowerPoint, where he stated my argument about the myths of the supposed great family transition. I recreate below the text of the entire slide.

The argument

1. In the 1700s to the 1900s, "consensus of scholars", *Reading History Sideways* adopted a set of myths about historical change in the family

They thought that Europe from the 1700s to the 1900s was characterized [by] nuclear families, individualism, and late marriage, and high status for women

They thought that at some time before the 1700s European society had been organized around families, and had lots of extended families, early marriage, and low status for women

This slide summarizes part of Ruggles' understanding of the main arguments of *Reading History Sideways*. However, even this beginning slide demonstrates Ruggles' misunderstanding of the main points of the book. I note in *Reading History Sideways* that the scholars who created the myths about the great family transition distinguished between Northwest Europe and other parts of Europe and used this cross-national difference in constructing their conclusions about family change. Their conclusions about the supposed great family transition were applied to Northwest Europe and not to the whole of Europe as stated in this slide.¹² Without taking into account the geographical variation within Europe, it

¹² As I describe in some detail in Chapter 3 of the book, there were substantial differences between Northwest Europe and other parts of Europe, particularly Eastern Europe. Especially see the section on pages 58-61 concerning "Le Play's Map of European Families" in which he summarizes some of these differences. Unlike Northwest Europe, which was characterized during the 1700s and 1800s by many nuclear families and an older age at marriage, Eastern Europe was characterized by many extended families and a young age at marriage. The section on pages 61-64 of *Reading History Sideways* concerning "Developmental-Trajectory Interpretations" describes how these differences across Europe provided important material for scholars of the period to read history sideways to make conclusions about family change in the Northwest European past.

is very difficult to understand and critique the arguments of the book. Ruggles acknowledged this error in his response (Ruggles 2006, page 3).

Mischaracterization of the Time of the Supposed Great Family Transition

A second inaccuracy in Ruggles' first substantive slide quoted above is its assertion that *Reading History Sideways* claims that the supposed great family transition occurred before 1700. However, *Reading History Sideways* makes no such claim. Instead, it discusses the difficulties of dating the supposed great family transition from cross-sectional data, arguing that the sideways history approach provides no precise dates for the changes it posits. It is only possible to conclude that the scholars writing in the late 1700s and 1800s believed that the supposed great family transition occurred before their times. Unfortunately, without the writers providing precise dates for the supposed great family transition and with them writing in different periods, it is impossible to say when this supposed change was supposed to have occurred. However, as shorthand, as in my summary of the book above, I "date" it before 1800, since most of it had been "documented" by then.¹³ For a full understanding of my beliefs about the supposed timing of the supposed great family transition, I refer the reader to the section in *Reading History Sideways* (pages 67-69) concerning "The Timing of the Perceived Changes in Family Life". For the purpose of this response, I repeat the main paragraphs from that text in a footnote.¹⁴ For more information about this point, see my comments to Ruggles' Slide 2 in the Appendix to this paper.

¹³ As I say in *Reading History Sideways* (page 67, quoted in footnote 14 below), "the documentation of the transition from extended to nuclear households was not definitive until 1855, with the work of Le Play."

¹⁴ "Although the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s believed that there had been substantial changes in family life sometime in the past, it was difficult for them to date these trends in historical time. The problem was that the reading history sideways methodology provided no mechanism for assigning dates to transitions (Bock 1956). This is true because the comparison points came from cultural groups rather than from historical time periods and thus there were no dates to be attached to the changes they believed they had observed from reading history sideways. Dating therefore became a matter of conjecture. The result, of course, was widespread disagreement

Creating and then Attacking a Coherent Consensus before 1850 about the Supposed Great Family Transition

In both his SSHA presentation and his 2006 response, Ruggles created an argument that *Reading History Sideways* had never made—that there was before 1850 a “dominant and coherent theory,” “a coherent consensus,” about the existence of the supposed great family transition. With this argument created and attributed to me, Ruggles then attacked it as fallacious. This is apparent in his SSHA talk where he asserted that “There was no scholarly consensus about a great family transition among scholars writing before the mid-19th century (or more likely, early 20th century)” (Ruggles’ Slide 5). In Ruggles’ 2006 response he wrote that although in his comments at SSHA “I acknowledged these ideas had all been expressed by the end of the nineteenth century, I also expressed doubt that these views should be characterized as a dominant and coherent theory before the twentieth century, and perhaps not even then” (Ruggles 2006, page 4). In several sentences Ruggles expressed doubts about there existing before 1850 “a consensus theory”, “a coherent consensus”, or “a significant scholarly consensus” on this topic.

However, the thesis of a “dominant and coherent theory” of a great family transition before 1850 is an invention by Ruggles, as *Reading History Sideways* makes no such claim. In fact, *Reading History Sideways* did not concern itself about exactly when the ideas of the supposed great family transition reached the status of being “a significant scholarly consensus”

about the timing of specific transitions even if there was a consensus as to the nature of the general trends (see Macfarlane 1979a/1978; Wallerstein 1991).

We can with confidence, however, place one boundary on the timing of these perceived changes in family patterns in that they had to have occurred prior to the time they were first reported. With one possible exception, all the family transitions reviewed in this chapter had been reported at least by 1803 in the work of such scholars as Millar, Smith, Alexander, Robertson, and Malthus, which implies that they had to have occurred prior to that time.

Although there is conclusive evidence that most elements of the great family transition were documented through reading history sideways by 1803, the documentation of the transition from extended to nuclear households was not definitive until 1855, with the work of Le Play” (page 67).

or being “a dominant and coherent theory”. Instead, the book provided considerable discussion of when the elements of the supposed great family transition were first reported and listed numerous subsequent scholars who expressed similar conclusions, but it did not worry about the timing of a “significant” and “coherent” consensus. That is Ruggles’ invention and not the concern of *Reading History Sideways*.

The goal of *Reading History Sideways* to document the first reporting of the elements of the supposed great family transition is clear in the text of the book itself. The book states that “with one possible exception, all of the family transitions reviewed in this chapter had been reported at least by 1803 in the work of such scholars as Millar, Smith, Alexander, Robertson, and Malthus, which implies that they had to have occurred prior to that time. Although there is conclusive evidence that most elements of the great family transition were documented through reading history sideways by 1803, the documentation of the transition from extended to nuclear households was not definitive until 1855, with the work of Le Play. There are, however, at least three reasons to think that the transition from extended to nuclear households was, in fact, documented by 1803” (Thornton 2005a, page 67). The following paragraphs in the book go on to give evidence why I believe the supposed transition in living arrangements had been “documented” by 1803. Thus, in these paragraphs I am trying to document when these ideas and understandings first emerged in the scholarly literature and not when some “significant” and “coherent” consensus had been accepted.

Reading History Sideways does not discuss all of the scholars of the 1700s, 1800s, and 1900s who wrote about elements of the supposed great family transition. It did, however, discuss some of the key ones in Chapter 3, with page 62 (especially footnote 32) providing a substantial list of them. In addition, four of the working papers that I mentioned earlier contain

substantial detail about many, but not all, of these writers and their scholarship from the late 1700s, 1800s, and early 1900s (Thornton 2005b, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f). The scholars listed in the book and the working papers who documented elements of the supposed great family transition by 1803 include Alexander, Condorcet, Home, Ferguson, Malthus, Millar, Robertson, and Smith. The list of scholars documenting elements of the supposed great family transition later in the 1800s include Durkheim, Engels, Le Play, Maine, Morgan, Thwing and Thwing, Sumner, Senior, Alison, Jones, Lubbock, Westermarck, and the anonymous author of an article in *The Nation* (1868) who asked “Why Is Single Life Becoming More General?” And, the list continued to grow in the first half of the 1900s, with the addition of Bosanquet, Burgess and Locke, Calhoun, Davis, Ellwood, Lynd and Lynd, Sumner and Keller, Thomas and Znaniecki, and Weber. I will leave it for others to determine when all of this would be substantial enough to rate as a “significant” and “coherent” consensus “characterized as a dominant and coherent theory”. My conclusion, however, remains, as it was in the book, that most of the elements of the supposed great family transition had been reported by 1803, all by 1855, and during the 1800s and early 1900s the number of scholars describing elements of the supposed great family transition had grown to a considerable size (the above list meeting my criteria of a “considerable size” in this matter).

Ruggles Incorrect Conclusions about the Work of Earlier Scholars

I now move from Ruggles’ mischaracterizations of the arguments of Reading History Sideways to areas where we disagree about the nature of earlier scholarship about family change. The issues in this section of my response concern disagreements about family scholarship, and in the next section I turn to our disagreements about continuity and change in family behavior and relationships. I begin this section with Ruggles’ claim that there was no

family scholarship before 1850 and then address Ruggles' evolving claims about the relative roles of reading history sideways and personal observation in the "documentation" of the supposed great family transition.

Incorrect Assertion about No Family Scholarship Before 1850

Ruggles categorically asserted that "there was no such thing as 'family scholarship' before 1850" (Slide 7; also see his book review). It may be true that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s did not identify themselves as "family scholars" or their work as "family scholarship," but such a point is totally irrelevant to *Reading History Sideways* as these scholars published extensively about family and related matters. As I said in my notes to Slide 7 in the Appendix, *Reading History Sideways* cites a substantial amount of pre-1850 family literature, and the references are not exhaustive (also see Thornton 2005b, 2005f). This literature covers such family matters as household composition and structure, marriage, intergenerational authority, the bearing and rearing of children, the rights and autonomy of women, and the relations between women and men. I do not know what Ruggles would like to call this literature, but there was much of it and it was directed at central issues about families.

In a similar way, Ruggles claimed in Slide 7 such concepts as familism, individualism, and extended and nuclear families come from a later era than 1850 and that Thornton's "attributing them to authors in the 18th century must be reading history backwards, anachronistically imputing ideas to people" (also see Ruggles' forthcoming book review, page 7). I do not claim that the language I used persisted unchanged from the late 1700s through the 2000s. However, I do claim that the extensive literature of the late 1700s through the 1900s discussed matters covered by these concepts. *Reading History Sideways* and my five working papers provide an extensive array of scholarship about family matters from the late 1700s and

1800s, and I would be pleased to have skeptics describe to me where I have inappropriately “read history backwards, anachronistically imputing ideas to people” to reach the conclusions I did in the book.

The Method for Documenting the Supposed Great Family Transition

In Ruggles’ SSHA presentation he disagreed with my thesis that scholars during the late 1700s and 1800s documented family change by reading history sideways using cross-sectional data. He suggested in Slide 5 that “theories of family change appearing after 1850 were probably based mainly on observation rather than reading history sideways.” Similarly in Slide 30, he stated as one of his conclusions that “the minority of scholars who actually talked about changes in family structure were usually describing changes they had observed”.

Ruggles’ Unsubstantiated Claim that the Personal Observation Method was used to Document the Supposed Great Family Transition. For the purpose of this paper, I call the alternative method proposed by Ruggles the Personal Observation Method. The Personal Observation Method is an alternative method for studying family change, and it is apparently different from reading history sideways in that it involves the investigator making his/her own personal observations about actual family change in at least one particular society. However, Ruggles provided no information about the method and how it was used. He also provided no information about how specific scholars such as Malthus, Le Play, and Westermarck used the Personal Observation Method rather than reading history sideways to describe long-term trends in family life. For example, he provided no indication of how the Personal Observation Method gave Malthus the information he needed to document trends from ancient times to modern Europe (Malthus 1986/1803: 254; also see Thornton 2005b). He also provided no indication of how the Personal Observation Method gave Westermarck the data he needed to

trace marriage patterns in the *History of Human Marriage* from what he called “savage and barbarous races of men” to the patterns of what he called “civilized men”, with the conclusion that “modern civilization has proved very unfavorable to the number of marriages” (Westermarck 1894/1891: 135-137 and 145; also see Thornton 2005e).

Although Ruggles conceded in his 2006 response that some scholars in the past read history sideways, he continued to defend his claim that many people made use of the Personal Observation Method rather than reading history sideways to document family change. As evidence of this use of the Personal Observation Method, Ruggles cited three people who had been active in the establishment of the Social Security program in the United States in the 1930s and who had written about family change (see Ruggles’ Slides 16, 17, and 18). He said that such “people did not need to use ‘reading history sideways’ to realize that change was taking place, since they could observe it directly through personal observation” (Ruggles 2006, page 5).

Three factors negate the relevance of these examples for our current discussion. First, the quotes provided by Ruggles provide no documentation of the methods these people used to reach their conclusions (see Slides 16, 17, and 18). Was it using the Personal Observation Method, surveys, administrative records, censuses, reading history sideways, the opinions of others, or some other approach? Although I am open to the possibility that some scholars in the past based their conclusions on the Personal Observation Method, Ruggles has provided no information about specific scholars doing this. Second, the 1930s, when these people wrote, is about three quarters of a century after Le Play first wrote and more than one and a quarter centuries since Millar and Malthus wrote, with the circumstances being very different in the various eras. Third, even if we assume that the three people from the 1930s used the Personal

Observation Method, this has no relevance for what other scholars did from the late 1700s into the middle of the 1900s.

Using Reading History Sideways to Document the Supposed Great Family

Transition. In contrast to the lack of scholars using the Personal Observation Method in the 1700s and 1800s, *Reading History Sideways* provides a substantial amount of evidence showing the use of sideways history in that era. Chapter 2 is devoted exclusively to the reading history sideways method—and the conceptual paradigm and data underlying it. In this chapter, I provide numerous examples of scholars from the era using the method with cross-sectional data. I also provide numerous examples of later scholars documenting the use of the method by scholars during the 1700s and 1800s. I cite Bock (1956) suggesting that reading history sideways with comparative data often became the method of social science (page 41 in *Reading History Sideways*) and Harris (1968), stating that “All theorists of the latter [1800s]... proposed to fill the gaps in the available knowledge of universal history largely by ... the ‘comparative method,’” the comparative method being what I refer to as reading history sideways (page 43 in *Reading History Sideways*). As I document in the book, the gaps in the historical data were huge, and reading history sideways was frequently used to document family change.

As I explained earlier, I did not go into great detail in the book about the specific ways in which scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s used the method of reading history sideways to make conclusions about family change from cross-sectional data and have written five working papers providing additional detail (Thornton 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f.). I will not repeat here the information in these papers about specific scholars, but, to illustrate the use of

sideways history, will highlight the data and approaches of three particularly important scholars: Malthus, Westermarck, and Le Play.

Malthus Reading History Sideways. I begin with Malthus, who provides a difficult case for the belief that scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s documented family change from their personal experience. As I document in detail in *Reading History Sideways* (and in Thornton 2005b), Malthus wrote a brief treatise on population dynamics in 1798 that contained very little data. In subsequent years he devoted extensive time, energy, and travel to collect an enormous amount of information about societies around the world (*Reading History Sideways*: page 29, 63-64). Then, in 1803 Malthus published a manuscript in which he devoted an incredible amount of space to documenting family and population in numerous groups around the world, including: the American Indians, the South Sea islanders, the Chinese, Turkey, Persia, India, Siberia, and Africa. He also devoted considerable attention to the contemporary situation in Norway, Sweden, the Baltic areas of Russia, Central Europe, Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland. It is unlikely that one of the most important scholars of the last 300 years would devote so much time and energy to collecting and reporting this extensive cross-national data if he was going to reach his conclusions about family change using the Personal Observation Method in England or some other specific country.

Malthus devoted Book 1 of his manuscript to “the less civilized parts of the world and in past times” and Book 2 to the “different states of modern Europe” (*Reading History Sideways*, page 64). In his analysis, he explained how societies developed from what he called “less civilized parts of the world” with young and universal marriage to what he called “modern Europe” with its older age at marriage and extensive celibacy.

To be sure, Malthus did try to use historical statistical data to confirm what he had concluded by reading history sideways (page 65 of *Reading History Sideways* and Thornton 2005b). However, this effort to read history from the past to the present represented a very small effort compared to his use of sideways history. In addition, the historical data for England were of very poor quality and he could make conclusions from them only by using as assumptions some of the conclusions that he had obtained from his theory and reading history sideways. These assumptions led him to make conclusions about previous English population history that Wrigley and Schofield (1981) later showed to be different from what had happened in England in the decades before Malthus wrote.

Westermarck Reading History Sideways. Edward Westermarck was a scholar who was very explicit about his reading history sideways methodology. Westermarck, writing his masterpiece on the *History of Human Marriage* late in the 1800s, exceeded Malthus in the amount of international cross-sectional data he used (see pages 29-30 of *Reading History Sideways*). The latest edition of his book included more than one hundred pages of citations documenting marriage patterns around the world. With the sideways history methodology, Westermarck used this extensive cross-national data to write a history of human marriage rather than write a history of marriage from personal observation in either his native Finland or England where he lived for many years (page 63 of *Reading History Sideways*).

There can be little doubt about Westermarck's use of the reading history sideways method, as he made it explicit in the beginning pages of his manuscript. I cite the relevant passages both in Thornton 2005c and Thornton 2005e. As those papers document, Westermarck explicitly used reading history sideways as his method to write a history of human marriage in which he concluded that civilization was bad for marriage. Interestingly,

Westermarck, like Malthus, observed the East-West gradient in European families which he interpreted in historical-developmental ways. Westermarck supplemented his cross-sectional materials with actual historical data, but gave priority to international comparative information (see Thornton 2005e).

Le Play Reading History Sideways. My third example of an important scholar of the 1800s reading history sideways to document family changes is Frederick Le Play who conducted one of the most ambitious international cross-sectional studies ever done (see pages 30-31 and 58-64 of *Reading History Sideways*). Le Play is particularly important because in his SSHA presentation Ruggles identified Le Play as a scholar who documented family change through the Personal Observation Method rather than through the sideways reading of history. I cite below the Ruggles slide making this argument (Slide 13).

Le Play was talking about changes that were occurring as he wrote, in the second half of the 19th century; in 1872 he wrote,

‘the unstable family prevails today among the working class populations subject to the new manufacturing system of Western Europe. Moreover, this type of family is multiplying among the wealthier classes in France...’

Clearly he is not talking about changes that took place 200 years earlier.¹⁵

Le Play’s collection of enormous amounts of cross-national data was facilitated by the fact that he traveled prodigiously—seven times to England, almost as often to Germany, three times to Russia and Italy, and to Spain and West Asia twice—traveling about 200,000 miles

¹⁵ Ruggles is using this sentence of the slide to contradict a straw man—my supposed belief that the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s believed that the supposed great family transition occurred before 1700. As I said in an earlier section of this paper, *Reading History Sideways* never claimed that Le Play or anyone else believed that the supposed transition occurred before 1700. Instead, *Reading History Sideways* claimed that the scholars of the era had to believe that the transition occurred before they wrote—in Le Play’s case in the mid-1800s.

altogether, with much of that distance on foot. He conducted detailed multi-method data collections with families across Europe and elsewhere that lasted from between eight days and a month for each family. He reported conducting such detailed data collections from 300 different families from many different European countries, including Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland. His amazingly accurate family map also contains data from the Middle East and North Africa (replicated on page 60 of *Reading History Sideways*). Thus, we have evidence that Le Play went to remarkable lengths to gather international cross-sectional data.

Le Play used his extensive cross-national data to research the geographical distribution of family types across Europe and beyond. He observed that large patriarchal families were common in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa; that stem families were common in Southern France, Spain, and Italy; and that nuclear, or unstable, families were common in England, Belgium, and Northern France. The Le Play quote about nuclear or unstable families being predominant in the manufacturing areas of Western Europe provided by Ruggles is part of Le Play's discussion of cross-national differences rather than part of a discussion of actual family change observed by personal observation by Le Play in France or elsewhere in Europe.¹⁶

Le Play used his wealth of cross-national data rather than personal observation in his native France or elsewhere to reach his conclusions of a great family transition. Le Play wrote that the pattern of findings in his cross-national data "indicated that far-reaching conclusions could be derived" from the data. "This development," he wrote, "became especially intriguing

¹⁶ For more information about Le Play's description of cross-national differences in family types, see pages 58-61 of *Reading History Sideways*. The first sentence of the Le Play quote is provided on page 60 of *Reading History Sideways*, where I am explaining the cross-national differences in family structure documented by Le Play. On pages 61-64 of *Reading History Sideways*, I explain how Le Play and others interpreted their cross-national data in historical terms by reading history sideways.

after the discovery of the many differences between the metalworkers of France and Germany and the workers observed in factories of Northern and Eastern Europe” (Le Play 1982/1855: 159). He wrote that “in many respects, the present living conditions of laborers in Northern, Eastern, and Central Europe are comparable to those of laborers of regions of [Western] Europe in the not-so-distant past.” He also wrote that “readers need not wait for a talented historian to recreate the spirit of the past for them. In many cases we have only to observe the facts which are still before our eyes” (Le Play 1982/1855: 161). Le Play made his approach to using comparative data for making historical conclusions even more explicit in the following passage:

If we want to recapture the mentality of the past and thereby gain a comprehensive understanding of the present situation of the working classes in the West, the best way to proceed is to study conditions in the countries where the agricultural and industrial techniques, the organization of labor, and the mutual relations of the various social classes remain like those which existed in France in past centuries. A summary of such observations is offered...[by my reports] dealing with Russia, the Scandinavian countries, Turkey, Hungary, and the countries of Central Europe. These studies offer some very useful preliminary findings. They show that although the old institutions were less favorable to the growth of industry and the rapid advancement of gifted individuals than the institutions recently established in the West, they did offer security to all social classes. A lack of security is keenly felt today, especially among lower-class persons and the improvident classes. A methodical comparison of these two social systems—one designed for stability and the other for progress—will provide a wealth of information...(Le Play 1982/1855:161-162).

In using international data to make historical inferences, Le Play explicitly referred to the developmental paradigm and the metaphor comparing human societies to biological organisms (see Chapter 2 of *Reading History Sideways*). He asserted that “In the same way that childhood, adolescence, and manhood succeed one another during the course of an

individual lifetime, Europe's most advanced peoples have passed through three main systems of social organization. These patterns can still be seen today" (Le Play 1982/1855: 240).

As we have already seen, Le Play believed that the trajectory of societal growth and development could be read from east to west in his international data. As he put it, "public opinion unanimously recognizes a gradual amelioration of men and things from the far reaches of Europe to the territory of the richest provinces of Germany, France, and England...Terms of comparison and the approximate rank of each nation can be established without a lengthy investigation; one would surely comply with standard measures of civilization—either certain purely physical facts, such as the extent of means of communication in each country, or elements of intellectual activity, such as the importance of schools or the number of books published each year" (Le Play 1982/1855: 285). With this framework and data it was easy for Le Play to conclude that, with development, family life in France and England had changed from being like what he had documented in Eastern Europe to being like what he had documented for England and Northern France. I provide elsewhere further discussion about how Le Play used his cross-national data to make conclusions about historical change (Thornton 2005d).

Le Play's travels throughout most of Europe demonstrated an important geographical gradient in socioeconomic circumstances. He knew that technological innovation, commerce, and manufacturing were more extensive in Western than in Eastern Europe. He interpreted this geographical gradient in socioeconomic circumstances as a developmental gradient with Western Europe being in the vanguard of development. He also applied this same developmental interpretation to the family differences he observed and concluded that there was a historical trend from the kinds of families that he studied in the East to the families he

knew in the West. It was also easy for Le Play to use the differences he observed in socioeconomic conditions from East to West to explain the differences in family conditions.

Many of the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s knew of economic changes occurring in Western Europe during their lifetimes (such as increases in manufacturing), and they used these economic changes to explain the changes in family structures that they believed they observed from reading history sideways. I make this point in the following quote from *Reading History Sideways*, where I use Le Play as an example of one person using this approach.

I noted earlier that most of the changes in family life that these scholars set out to explain were observed from reading history sideways. However, many of the changes in the factors believed to produce the perceived changes in family life were observed by reading history from the past to the present (for example, Le Play 1982/1855, 1982/1881; also Condorcet 1795; Millar 1979/1771; Smith 1978/1762-3). That is, these scholars knew from the historical record that there had been several dimensions of Western European societies that had changed significantly in previous decades and centuries, including religion, education, modes of production, communication, transportation, and location of residences in rural or urban areas. It was, therefore, easy for them to use these historical changes to explain the trends in family structure and relationships that they observed from reading history sideways. (Page 72)

I argue that Le Play was using actual economic change to explain family change “documented” from reading history sideways in the quote presented by Ruggles in his slide. As I documented in Thornton 2005d, the Le Play quote emphasized by Ruggles is part of a discussion of the three family types in Le Play’s continuum—patriarchal, stem, and unstable—and how they were distributed geographically across Europe, with this geographical distribution providing data for describing historical change. In the first sentence from Le Play

quoted in Ruggles' Slide 13, Le Play was implying that the "new manufacturing system of Western Europe" was related to the nuclear or unstable families in that region.

Ruggles' Unsubstantiated claim that the Personal Observation Method was a Supplementary Approach. Although Ruggles in his SSHA presentation was quite adamant about people in the past relying on the Personal Observation Method rather than reading history sideways to establish conclusions about family change, in his 2006 response he agreed with my position that scholars have used the Reading History Sideways approach to establish historical conclusions. In that response he conceded that "I do not dispute Thornton's argument that many scholars have used cross-cultural comparisons to infer relationships between economic conditions and social behavior. Scholars have also frequently used these comparisons to support theories of historical change in the European past" (Ruggles 2006, page 1). Later in the response, he added "I do not doubt that many scholars used comparisons across regions and cultures to analyze the relationship of economic conditions to family patterns, and in many instances, they used these cross-sectional difference (sic) to support theories of historical change" (Ruggles 2006, page 6).

Ruggles went on to say that "these writers, however, also observed changes going on around them. In the case of Le Play, this was quite self-conscious; he and his researchers visited peasant homes and systematically asked them questions about their youth and about their own family history and 'the principal phases of its existence' (Silver 1982:64)" (Ruggles 2005, page 6). Of course, Ruggles is correct in one sense; the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s were talented people who were undoubtedly observant about the world around them. As I outlined in my discussion of Le Play above, he wrote extensively about the economic

environment and changes around him—reading these changes from the historical record. As I already noted, this was true for others as well (see cites in my quote above on page 43).

More importantly, Ruggles was incorrect about Le Play and his use of the Personal Observation Method to document family change. At the same time that Le Play described the reading history sideways method and how he used it in making his conclusions about family change, I have found no evidence of him using the Personal Observation Method to document actual family change in France or anywhere else. In addition, Ruggles provided no evidence of Le Play documenting change through the Personal Observation Method.

But, how then do we deal with Le Play collecting data from people concerning their youth and family history and its phases? To answer this question, we must backtrack briefly and discuss Le Play's "monographic" method. As I described in my working paper about Le Play (Thornton 2005d), he instructed field workers to spend from eight days to a month with each family participating in the study (Higgs, 1890: 423). During this time the field worker observed the family and the activities of its individual members and conducted detailed semi-structured interviews with members of the household. Included within each family report were sections concerning the physical, economic and demographic environment; family composition; religion; the family's means of existence; the work and other tasks performed by family members; food and meals; housing and household goods; the family's history, including school attendance; family customs; and family budgets, including both receipts and expenditures (Le Play 1982/1879: 184-205; Brooke 1970:148). So the data about a family's history, which included information on school attendance, were just one part of a rather gigantic data collection operation.

The data Le Play collected and presented under the label of family history did not discuss historical trends, but instead focused on the phases of the life courses of individuals. Included here are descriptions of how long children attend school and what the boys and girls do when they leave school. Also discussed are age at marriage and life in the family once it is formed (Le Play 1982/1879, pages 184-205). I have seen no evidence that Le Play used these reports of individual families or comparisons across such families within a geographical area to write about historical family change. With his reading history sideways method and extensive cross-national data, Le Play apparently believed that he had all of the data he needed to describe historical change and did not need or use the individual life course information about individual families for that purpose.

Supplementing with Statistics. Although we have no evidence that scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s used the Personal Observation Method to document family change, as I mentioned earlier in the case of Malthus and Westermarck, some scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s tried to supplement their analyses with whatever statistical information they could about actual family changes in particular societies (see Chapters 2 and 3 of *Reading History Sideways*). However, scholars of the era also frequently complained about the inadequacies of the historical statistical data available to them, saying that if they were to be successful in documenting societal developmental trajectories, they, of necessity, had to rely on cross-sectional data and reading history sideways.

Disagreement about Daniel Scott Smith and Family Change

I now turn to Ruggles' discussion of my disagreement with Daniel Scott Smith's 1993 paper about the origins of the myths about the family (Slides 26-29; also in Ruggles forthcoming). Like Ruggles, I greatly respect Smith as a historical demographer, but, as I

explain on pages 96-97 of *Reading History Sideways*, I disagree about his conclusion that the myth of the extended family in the Northwest European past originated in the first half of the 1900s. I explained earlier in this response that both *Reading History Sideways* and the various working papers have provided names of many people before the 1900s who wrote about the various elements of the supposed great family transition. I have also cited elsewhere (Thornton 2005a, 2005d) the writings of Smith and Le Play concerning the supposed specific decline in extended family living, arguing that this idea had emerged by at least 1855. I have not conducted the exercise of specifically cataloguing other scholars before 1900 discussing a change in living arrangements, but am confident that such a systematic review would produce additional examples. Ruggles' provided no new information or argument to show that Smith's position is preferred over mine, and I retain the position taken in the book.

Also, I was not criticizing Smith in *Reading History Sideways* for not discussing the reading history sideways method. I was only saying that his apparent lack of awareness of the developmental paradigm and reading history sideways prevented him from investigating the possibility that the cross-national data he observed in the writings of earlier writers may have been interpreted dynamically by them as well as geographically.

I also note that Smith's article is not consistent with Ruggles' argument discussed below that there were many extended families in the Northwest European past. As I state in the book, "Smith argued that it was well known to these scholars of the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s [John Locke, Adam Smith, and Alfred Marshall] that, in Northwest Europe, parents and their married children tended to maintain separate residences and lead relatively independent lives" (*Reading History Sideways*, page 96). Consequently, Smith's argument is not sympathetic to Ruggles' position that there were many stem households in the Northwest

European past. However, it is very consistent with the position of *Reading History Sideways* on this point.

Ruggles' Incorrect Conclusions about Actual Family Changes

I now turn from our disagreements about the nature of earlier family scholarship to our disagreements about the nature of actual family change and continuity. I begin with Ruggles' assertion that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s were correct in concluding that there had been a great family transition sometime before these scholars wrote from the middle 1700s through the 1800s.

Ruggles' Incorrect Claim that Reading History Sideways Produced the Right Answers

As noted in an earlier section, in his February 2006 response Ruggles agreed with me that many scholars have read history sideways. He also said that "I further agree with Thornton that this technique can be problematic, and has the potential to yield misleading results" (Ruggles 2006, page 1). But, then Ruggles went on to state that he disagreed with my thesis that this method led scholars to "grossly incorrect conclusions about the history of the family," arguing that "not every statement supported by geographic comparison is wrong. I contend, in fact, that most of the generalizations Thornton cites about historical family change by these scholars have turned out to be true. In particular, the four key elements of Thornton's great family transition...all probably occurred at various points in the past" (Ruggles 2006, page 1). Then, Ruggles provided general cites to recent scholarly literature to support his argument that there were changes in living arrangements, marriage age, the status of women, and individualism. Ruggles finished this section of his response by stating that the conclusions of the scholars writing from the 1700s to the 1900s reading history sideways were largely correct. In addition, he said that "if the historical generalizations made [by] Thornton's writers

were for the most part true, that seriously undermines the premise of the *Reading History Sideways*” (Ruggles 2006, page 3).

To the reader who has not assimilated the specific arguments of *Reading History Sideways*, this challenge might seem like a scary monster for the book, but under a little careful scrutiny it turns out to be a straw man that was created by Ruggles. I invite the reader to the section in the book entitled “The Emergence of the Theme of Family Myths” where I summarize the conclusion that there was no great family transition in Northwest Europe as described by the earlier scholars (pages 95-96). I went on to say explicitly that “This is not, of course, to say that there was no change whatsoever. However, changes of the magnitude postulated by earlier scholars were nowhere to be found in the historical record between the 1300s and the 1700s” (page 95). Later in that section I stated again that “it is important to note that I am not saying that there have been *no* changes at all in family structures and relationships in Northwest Europe. In fact there were some changes before 1800, but nothing remotely resembling the large changes described by earlier generations of scholars through the sideways reading of history” (Thornton 2005a, page 96). I also observed that some changes that had actually occurred in fact were misidentified either in magnitude or direction by earlier scholars. I mentioned in *Reading History Sideways* changes before 1800 in family and kinship terminology, the control of the church and state over marriage, and the place of the family in social organization. So any suggestion by Ruggles that *Reading History Sideways* denies all family change before 1800 is false; the book only denies change of the magnitude and direction implied by the supposed great family transition concluded by earlier generations of scholars.

So what kind of actual historical changes in Northwest Europe before 1800 would discredit the claims of *Reading History Sideways* that the conclusions of the scholars of the late

1700s and 1800s were incorrect? In the book I stated that it is crucial when assessing conclusions about family change to use the appropriate comparison points (pages 121-122). In this case, the appropriate comparison points are the direction and magnitude of geographical differences in the 1700s and 1800s between Northwest Europe and other places such as Russia, the Middle East, India, and China, because it was these geographical differences that the scholars of the past transformed into a picture of historical change (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 121-122). It was differences and changes of this magnitude and direction that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s reported; it was changes of this magnitude and direction that scholars like Hajnal, Laslett, and Macfarlane were looking for and did not find. It would take discoveries of temporal differences of this magnitude and direction in the historical record of pre-1800 Northwest Europe—discoveries that eluded Hajnal, Laslett, and Macfarlane—to restore the historical conclusions of the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s, erase the labels of myth from those conclusions, and “seriously undermine the premise” of *Reading History Sideways*.

Although the scholarly pieces cited by Ruggles (2006, pages 1-3) are interesting and important pieces in their own right, they fall far short of what is required by Ruggles’ attempt to undermine *Reading History Sideways*. They do describe changes and fluctuations, but several of them focus on the era after 1800 (or even after 1850), the period for which *Reading History Sideways* posits significant family trends. The authors of the publications cited by Ruggles do not take on the task of declaring that observed pre-1800 changes in the Northwest European record were so substantial and definitive that they would repudiate the central conclusions of such scholars as Laslett, Hajnal, and Macfarlane. Furthermore, I found nothing in my reading of the material Ruggles cited to challenge the theses of *Reading History*

Sideways, but rather a great amount to support the theses of the book. In the interest of space, I do not discuss these articles and books and what they do and do not show, but only indicate that I found no support in them for Ruggles' thesis that the historical descriptions of the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s about the Northwest European past were correct.¹⁷

Confirming Family Changes Discussed in *Reading History Sideways* for the 1800s and 1900s

Ruggles' Slide 15 provides a graph documenting changes in intergenerational households in the United States between 1850 and 2000. I am pleased that Ruggles presented this graph confirming an essential part of *Reading History Sideways*—a change in living arrangements in Northwest Europe and in the Northwest European diaspora after 1800. *Reading History Sideways* also describes significant post-1800 changes in other family dimensions, such as gender relations; divorce; parental authority; and marriage, sex, cohabitation, and childbearing (see especially Chapters 8 and 9). Such changes after 1800 are consistent with my theory of developmental idealism being a force for family change during the past two centuries. In addition, Ruggles' Slides 16-19 offer a theory to explain those changes. The explanation offered in these slides is basically an economic one relying on the transformation of the economy from agriculture to manufacturing and large-scale commerce. This is a theory that I mention in my theoretical explanations section on pages 69 to 72 of my book and in my discussion on page 176 of changes in living arrangements after 1800.

¹⁷ However, I will clarify some confusion introduced by several of Ruggles' incorrect claims in this section of his response. First, Le Play first published his main findings on the issues at hand in 1855. Second, Le Play was certainly discussing a transition from large extended families as he used such families in Eastern Europe and outside Europe as an indication of the Northwest European past. Third, any changes in living arrangements after 1800 are irrelevant to this particular discussion and support the second main thesis of *Reading History Sideways* about substantial changes after 1800.

Ruggles' comments are simply in agreement with the discussion I provided in *Reading History Sideways* (page 176) and pose no threat to the theses of the book.

Disagreement about the Role of Developmental Idealism in Family Change After 1800

Chapters 8-12 of *Reading History Sideways* present a theory of how developmental idealism had an important influence on family behavior after 1800. These chapters also provide extensive evidence for this proposition. Ruggles summarily dismissed these ideas and evidence in both his response and in his book review without any explanation as to why he was unconvinced (see Slide 30; Ruggles 2006, forthcoming). Ruggles, of course, has no obligation to explain why he was not convinced, but, as I explained in an earlier section, his discussion of the theory indicated that he rejected it without coming to understand it, expressing many incorrect perceptions of the arguments. The theory is clearly much more cohesive and powerful than presented by Ruggles, and I am optimistic that readers who assimilate the theoretical arguments of the book and the evidence presented will find my arguments about family trends at least plausible and probably convincing.

Although I am convinced that these ideas have had great influence, I state at the end of *Reading History Sideways* that because recent scholarship has not focused a systematic research agenda on developmental idealism “we still know very little about the distribution of developmental thought in the general population, the extent to which beliefs in developmental idealism have changed over time, the precise factors influencing the adoption of such beliefs, and the consequences of beliefs in developmental idealism for family processes and relationships” (page 241). I outline in the book an agenda for expanding this knowledge and have launched a research program implementing parts of this agenda. The new data are consistent with the thesis presented in *Reading History Sideways* (see Binstock and Thornton

2006; Thornton et al. 2004, 2005; available as working papers on the web at:
<http://developmentalidealism.org/pubs/>).

Conclusion

I conclude this paper where I began—with an expression of appreciation to the participants in the 2005 SSHA session for the time and energy they committed to *Reading History Sideways* and thank them for the helpful observations they made. I appreciate the opportunity the session gave to discuss the book and debate its conclusions and implications. I especially appreciate the observation that readers would have benefited from more detailed presentation of quotations and specific locations of cited literature. These comments gave me the impetus to provide clarification concerning the book and to provide additional material giving detailed documentation of how specific scholars from the late 1700s and 1800s read history sideways to create beliefs about family change that were later discovered to be myths.

As I said in the preface of the book, quoting Francis Jennings, “This book ranges widely in subject matter and research disciplines, and it offers more than the ordinary number of opportunities for error; that I have inadvertently taken advantage of some of those opportunities may be the one certainty of the whole process” (page x). However, as I have indicated throughout this paper, Ruggles did not identify any of these errors. Instead, he missed several of my main points, mischaracterized others, misrepresented both my work and his previous writing, and came to inaccurate conclusions concerning the history of both family scholarship and family behavior. I look forward to future discussions and critiques of the issues, arguments, and conclusions of the book.

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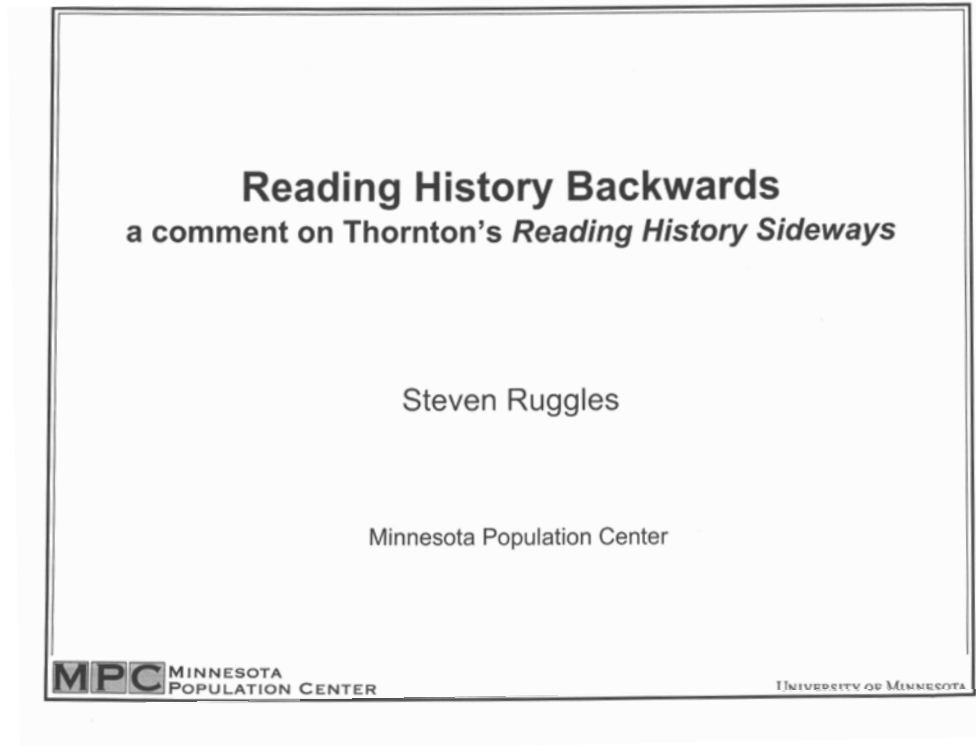
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Appendix

Ruggles' PowerPoint Slides with Brief Thornton Discussion

Slide 1:



Title Page¹⁸

¹⁸ This and other PowerPoint slides were scanned directly from the slides Ruggles posted on his website. This represents an expansion of the number of slides originally presented at the Social Sciences History Association Meetings from 16-30, with some of the original slides amended. The original slides are in the appendix to Thornton 2006.

Slide 2:

The argument

1. In the 1700s to the 1900s, “consensus of scholars”, reading history sideways adopted a set of myths about historical change in the family

They thought that Europe from the 1700s to 1900s was characterized nuclear families, individualism, and late marriage, and high status for women

They thought that at some time before the 1700s European society had been organized around families, and had lots of extended families, early marriage, and low status for women

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For my brief summary of the book, please see Thornton Paper, pages 2-6. Also, see *Reading History Sideways*, pages 3-12 and 230-243.

The first problem with this slide is that the suggestion that the scholars of the 1700s and 1800s described "Europe" as a single entity represents a misunderstanding of my arguments. I made great efforts in *Reading History Sideways* to follow the arguments of earlier scholars by making various important distinctions between Northwest Europe and other parts of the continent, especially Eastern Europe. Such distinctions are critical to a proper understanding of *Reading History Sideways*. (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 47-72; Thornton Paper pages 28-29). In his February 2006 response (page 3) Ruggles acknowledged this mischaracterization.

The second issue with this slide is that I exerted great effort in *Reading History Sideways* to show that scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s could not pinpoint when they thought the supposed great transition in family life occurred, and there is no place in *Reading History Sideways* that justifies Ruggles' claim that I said it occurred before 1700 (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 67-69; Thornton paper, page 29).

Ruggles acknowledged in his February 2006 response that this error in dating must have come from a misreading of *Reading History Sideways*. However, he goes on to suggest in that response that a statement from one of my working papers may reinforce his earlier claim. The

first two sentences of that working paper stated the following: “I argue elsewhere (Thornton 2005a) that many scholars of the 1700s and 1800s believed that family life in the Northwest European past had been very different from what it was during their lifetimes. This suggested a great transition in family life sometime before the 1700s or 1800s” (Thornton 2005f, p. 1).

As I have stated in *Reading History Sideways* and the Thornton paper (pages 29-30), I believe that the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s believed that the supposed great family transition occurred prior to the times that they wrote and not necessarily before 1700.

My statement in the introduction of the working paper, although not precise, is consistent with this position. I thank Ruggles for pointing out the lack of precision in my two introductory sentences in the working paper, and I will make them more precise in my next revision of the paper by stating that “this suggested a great transition in family life sometime before the scholars of the late 1700s and 1800s wrote their manuscripts.”

Slide 3:

The argument

2. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars (especially Peter Laslett and Alan Macfarlane) showed this to be wrong:

The nuclear family, individualism, late marriage, and late marriage existed in Northwest Europe from time immemorial. There was no change, so that the consensus of scholars was a myth.

For my brief summary of the book, please see Thornton Paper, pages 2-6. Also, see *Reading History Sideways*, pages 3-12 and 230-243.

Slide 4:

The argument

3. These mistaken theories of family change and the rise of individualism “have been an overwhelming force for family change” and “became the engine for social, economic, and familial changes.”

Throughout the world people starting living in nuclear families, marrying late, being individualistic, and giving rights to women mainly because they bought into the myth and felt these things were modern.

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For my brief summary of the book, please see Thornton Paper, pages 2-6. Also, see *Reading History Sideways*, pages 3-12 and 230-243. For material showing some of Ruggles’ misunderstandings represented in the points in this slide, please see Thornton paper, pages 26-27.

Slide 5:

All three points are unsupported.

There was no scholarly consensus about a great family transition among scholars writing before the mid-19th century (or more likely, early 20th century)

A great family transition did actually take place, starting after 1850 in the U.S. but perhaps earlier in the industrializing parts of Europe

Therefore, theories of family change appearing after 1850 were probably based mainly on observation rather than reading history sideways.

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In this slide Ruggles has created a straw man to attack. As I pointed out in my main paper (pages 30-32), I never claimed that there was a scholarly consensus before 1850 and did not specify when such a consensus occurred. What I did say was that the elements of the supposed great family transition had been first reported by 1855 and perhaps as early as 1803.

Although *Reading History Sideways* does not try to date the emergence of a consensus on this issue, it does report an extensive literature on the elements in the supposed great family transition by 1900. These include Alexander, Condorcet, Hume, Malthus, Millar, Smith, Durkheim, Engels, Le Play, Maine, Morgan, Thwing and Thwing, Sumner, Westermarck, Senior, Alison, Jones, Lubbock, and Robertson (all writing in the 1700s and 1800s). In addition, to the documentation in *Reading History Sideways* (see especially pages 61-64) and in my response (pages 30-32), see Thornton, 2005b, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f.

Regarding the statement that "A great family transition did actually take place, starting after 1850 in the U.S. but perhaps earlier in the industrialized parts of Europe," I indicate that *Reading History Sideways* presents enormous amounts of evidence documenting family change after 1800. Not only do I argue that there were many changes in family life in Europe and the U.S. after 1800, but the discussion of those changes are central to the later sections of my book and are supportive of my overall thesis. (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 133-179; Thornton Paper, pages 51-52).

The slide concludes that "Therefore, theories of family change appearing after 1850 were probably based mainly on observation rather than *Reading History Sideways*." A similar claim is repeated in Slide 30. In my paper, I referred to this alternative method as the Personal Observation Method (pages 34-36). Ruggles does not explain what the Personal Observation Method is or show how scholars of the 1700s and 1800s used it. I refer readers to the enormous body of writings showing the widespread use of *Reading History Sideways* by scholars of this period. These writings are documented in the book (pages 13-80) and reviewed (with links to further strong evidence) in my paper (pages 36-46). Also see Thornton 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f.

Slide 6:

The claim:

“The family scholarship of the 1700s to through the early 1900s . . . suggested that, in the Northwest European past, societies were overwhelmingly organized around family and kinship relations, that they were familistic rather than individualistic . . . and that they were characterized by a household structure that was extended rather than nuclear.”

(p. 62)

This quote is slightly (but not consequentially) different from what I said in the book. I stand by the claim in the quote.

Slide 7:

Why I was skeptical

There was no such thing as “family scholarship” before 1850.

These kinds of concepts—familistic vs. individualistic, extended family vs. nuclear—come from a later era; I felt attributing them to authors in the 18th century must be reading history backwards, anachronistically imputing ideas to people.

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I am surprised by Ruggles’ claim that there was “no such thing as ‘family scholarship’ before 1850” and that such “kinds of concepts” as “familistic vs. individualistic, extended vs. nuclear” “come from a later era”. I make clear throughout *Reading History Sideways* that by family matters I mean such things as household composition and structure, marriage, intergenerational authority, the bearing and rearing of children, the rights and autonomy of women, and the relations between women and men. I do not know what Ruggles means when he says there was “no such thing as ‘family scholarship’ before 1850.” It may be true that scholars of the 1700s and 1800s did not refer to themselves as “family scholars” or their work as “family scholarship,” but they certainly wrote extensively about matters I would classify as family matters. *Reading History Sideways* cites several scholars before 1850 writing about such family matters. Thornton 2005b and Thornton 2005f cite additional scholars. Also, see Thornton paper, pages 33-34. I would be pleased to know what Ruggles would like to label this extensive scholarship about family and related matters and how such labeling has any relevance to the arguments of *Reading History Sideways*.

The pre-1850 literature cited in *Reading History Sideways* and my working papers provide many opportunities for skeptics to test the hypothesis that I “must be reading history backwards, anachronistically imputing ideas to people”. I would be pleased to learn of any specific instances where someone believes that has occurred. Also, please see comments to Slide 11.

Slide 8:

Thornton's Evidence for the Big Consensus

- There are big generalizations, usually many to a paragraph
- There are no quotes whatsoever from primary sources
- Many generalization have no citations
- When citations do appear, they look like this:

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As I explain below, I am sympathetic with the general point that the book could have included more quotations and page numbers. However, I am surprised and puzzled by the substantial hyperbole and distortion in the statement. For example, the slide states “there are no quotes whatsoever from primary sources”. I find it hard to understand why Ruggles would make such a statement when I found approximately 100 quotations in *Reading History Sideways*. I do not know why Ruggles found “no quotes whatsoever” when I found the number I did. Perhaps, Ruggles and I have a different definition of a “quotation”; or perhaps I read the text more carefully than Ruggles. Also, see pages 24-26 in Thornton text.

I can understand and appreciate the concern, that *Reading History Sideways* provided too many references grouped together, too few quotations of text material, and too few page numbers to guide individuals to source material. The amount of source material that went into *Reading History Sideways* is very large and there is a substantial literature to reference, which I assumed readers would want. At the same time, reviewers and the University of Chicago Press strongly encouraged me to produce a readable volume that was not burdened with extensive quotations from earlier generations of scholars. My solution was to provide the conclusions from the material and provide references to the substantial amount of source material, so that readers could follow-up as desired. Consequently, the book does have a significant number of references lumped together in support of a particular point. Because so many of my statements were supported by so much source material, this seemed necessary. Recognizing that some people want more quotations and details, I have provided five working papers with substantial additional detail (Thornton 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f).

I also understand how the provision of page numbers to specific pages, sections, and chapters of books would assist readers desirous of locating materials. I did provide such information for the quotations and some other specific information provided in the book. But, for the most part I did not provide specific page numbers in text references.

Slide 9:

Typical Thornton Citation

Alexander [1779] 1995; Condorcet [1795] n.d.;
Engels [1884] 1971; Ferguson [1767] 1980; Hegel
[1837] 1878; Hume [1742] 1825; Le Play [1855–
1881] 1982; Maine [1861] 1888; Malthus [1803]
1986; Mill [1859–1869] 1989; Millar [1771] 1979;
Montesquieu [1721] 1973, [1748] 1997; L. Morgan
[1877] 1985; Robertson 1783; Smith [1762–1763]
1978; Westermarck [1891] 1894

The point here seems to be that there are lots of publications cited together without page numbers or quotations. Please see Slide 8 and pages 24-26 of Thornton paper for my discussion.

Slide 10:

This is not sufficient

- Specific points are not tied to specific evidence; after several paragraphs with many huge generalizations that rewrite the history of social thought, we get one big citation that doesn't even have page numbers.
- This is a dramatic revision of intellectual history, but there is no attempt whatsoever to trace the ideas from one author to the next.

For my discussion of these points, see Slide 8.

Slide 11:

Why I don't believe it

- The language Thornton uses when ascribing theories to 18th century writers is highly anachronistic
- It seems implausible that these writers had the exactly same interpretation as mid-twentieth century sociologists
- I think it is much more likely that Arland is reading history backwards, reading between the lines to find modern ideas that these writers did not actually express.

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The lack of specificity in this slide makes it difficult for me to provide a response. There is no specific material to back up the general claim. As I said in my response to Slide 7, I would be interested in knowing how my discussion of writers from the 1700s is highly anachronistic or misleading. Also, I never said that the scholars of the 1700s “had the exactly same interpretation as mid-twentieth century sociologists”. In fact, I have been quite clear that scholars of the 1700s and 1800s disagreed among themselves, and that views evolved over time (see for example pages 13-14 of *Reading History Sideways*; also, see Thornton 2005b, Thornton 2005e, and Thornton 2005f). And, of course, sociologists of the middle 1900s did not all have the “exactly same interpretation”. What I am saying is that the basic ideas of family change that I have labeled as “the supposed great family transition” began to emerge in the late 1700s and were repeated in the 1800s and early 1900s, and persisted until they were discovered as myths in the last half of the 1900s. I believe my interpretation of this is correct and would be pleased to learn of any specific instances where someone believes that I am “reading between the lines to find modern ideas that these writers did not actually express”. In this regard, it might be useful to note that I was not even aware of the widespread practice of the 1700s and 1800s of reading history sideways when I started the research leading to the writing of *Reading History Sideways*, making it quite difficult for me to read this into the past.

Slide 12:

At the reception after Arland's PAA presidential address, I expressed strong skepticism that anyone had talked about a shift in living arrangements before Le Play.

In the book, Arland now concedes that Frederic Le Play was the first to explicitly talk about this, in mid-19th c.

But Le Play cannot be used to support Arland's argument that there was a consensus of scholars who agreed that there had been a massive change in the family sometime before 1700.

I discuss in Thornton paper, pages 8-9, my memory of my discussion with Ruggles after my PAA presidential address in 2001. My memory is clear about several aspects of that discussion, but I recall no discussion there about Le Play and who first documented the supposed change in living arrangements. In any event, my views of who first talked about the supposed change in living arrangements were in place before my presidential talk. The discussion in *Reading History Sideways* of this issue is neither a change nor a concession from any discussion after my talk. In addition, as discussed in my response to Slides 2 and 13, I have never said there was a consensus of “massive changes in the family sometime before 1700”. And, I would never use Le Play to support such a claim. I only said that Le Play believed it happened before 1855 when he reported his research (see pages 29-30 of Thornton paper for further explication on this point). Also, Ruggles' slide totally ignores my statement in *Reading History Sideways* that “it is very likely that Adam Smith believed that there had been a transition from extended to nuclear households in Northwest Europe as early as the late 1750s” (Thornton 2005a, pages 67-68).

Slide 13:

Le Play was talking about changes that were occurring as he wrote, in the second half of the 19th century; in 1872 he wrote,

“the unstable family prevails today among the working class populations subject to the new manufacturing system of Western Europe. Moreover, this type of family is multiplying among the wealthier classes in France . . .”

Clearly he is not talking about changes that took place 200 years earlier.

The first sentence in this Le Play quote was provided by me on page 60 of *Reading History Sideways*. The quote comes from a section of Le Play’s work where he was describing his family classification scheme consisting of patriarchal, stem, and unstable family types and their distribution across the regions of Europe. I use the quote in *Reading History Sideways* in exactly the same way (Thornton paper, pages 39-44).

Ruggles suggested that this quote from Le Play backs up his claim that scholars were really writing from personal observation rather than *Reading History Sideways* (see also Slides 5 and 30). However, Le Play does not indicate in this section of his writings why he believed that unstable families were multiplying in France. He is silent here as to whether his data come from the Personal Observation Method, censuses, surveys, other scholars, or reading history sideways. In this section of Le Play’s writings where this quote appears, he is only contrasting Western Europe with Eastern Europe and other places. As I argue in *Reading History Sideways* and elsewhere, Le Play used that distinction and the reading history sideways approach to turn his geographical insights into a story about family change (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 58-64; Thornton paper, pages 39-44; Thornton 2005d)

The final point concerning this slide is that the statement about Le Play “not talking about changes that took place 200 years earlier” is a straw man. I never claimed that Le Play believed the changes occurred 200 years before Le Play (See Slide 2 and 12). As noted on Slides 2 and 12, we can only know that Le Play believed they had to have occurred before he first wrote in 1855.

Slide 14:

The new family Le Play was describing was one in which all the children left the parental home, leaving the elderly living all by themselves.

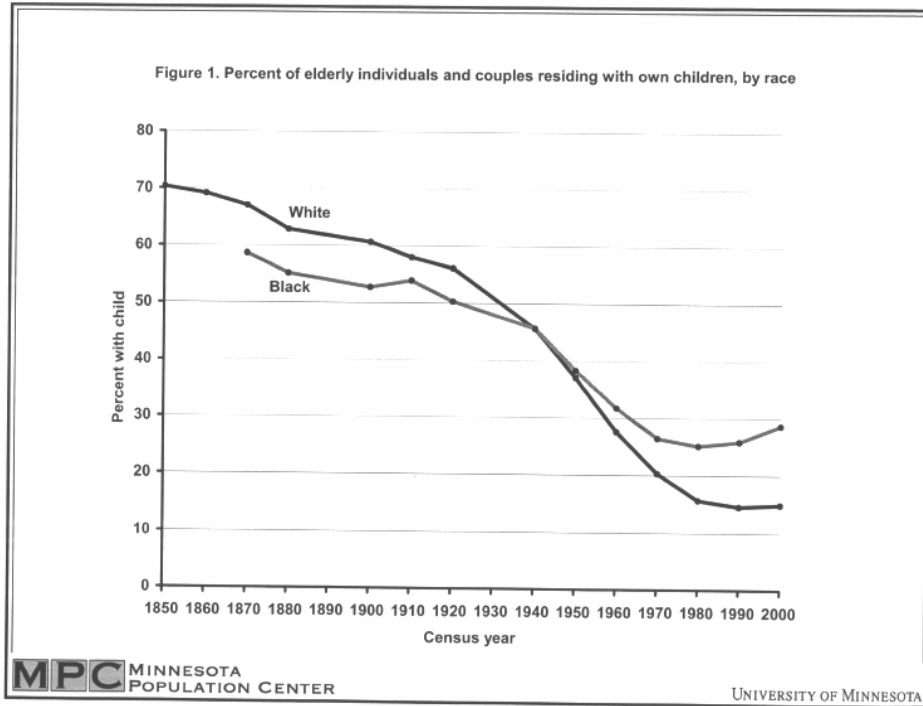
Le Play did not infer this change by comparing Europeans and non-Europeans: he could see the change taking place before his eyes.

In this slide, Ruggles is suggesting that I am claiming that the transition from stem families to unstable families was documented by comparing Europeans and non-Europeans. This is clearly not the case and represents another example of Ruggles' misunderstanding of my position. As I have documented extensively, Le Play categorized families across Europe and beyond as patriarchal, stem, and unstable. As the map on page 60 of *Reading History Sideways* documents, all of the stem and unstable families were located within Europe.

Thus, for the supposed transition from stem to unstable families, Le Play was limited to making comparisons within Europe. It was these within European comparisons that Le Play used to make his observations about the trajectory from stem to unstable. The non-European data only figured in the supposed transition from patriarchal to stem households.

Also, as I document elsewhere, there is no evidence that Le Play used the Personal Observation Method to document the change from stem to unstable. I refer to the extensive documentation that I have provided on Le Play's approaches and conclusions (*Reading History Sideways*, pages 58-64; Thornton paper, pages 39-46; Thornton 2005d).

Slide 15:



This is an interesting graph documenting changes in intergenerational households in the United States from 1850 to 2000. The purpose for presenting it, however, is not clear. One possibility is to show the enormous changes that occurred in living arrangements in the United States after 1850. I have addressed the relevance of that point in my discussion of Slide 5, stating that I not only believe in large family changes after 1800, but that these changes represent substantial support for the theses of *Reading History Sideways*.

Slide 16:

Why it happened

In the old days, the old-age assistance problem was not so great so long as most people lived on farms, had big families, and at least some of the children stayed on the farm. It was customary when the old people got too old to do their share of the work they would stay on the farm and the sons or daughters would keep them there in the home. That pattern changed slowly but continuously from the early part of the century as more and more of the young, rural population left the farms. The three generation household (aged parents, children, and grandchildren), perfectly common 50 years ago, had begun to become very rare indeed. By the time people got old, the children had already left and gone to the city. There was no one to take care of them. Hence, an increase in the problem of the needy age.

-Thomas H. Eliot, Council for the Committee on Wage Security (1935)

This slide provides a quote from Thomas Eliot in 1935 explaining why intergenerational households had declined in the United States from 1885 to 1935. It is not clear how this explanation relates to *Reading History Sideways*. I discuss this and other theories in *Reading History Sideways* (pages 69-72 and 176-177). The theory poses no threat to the theses of *Reading History Sideways*.

Slide 17:

Why it happened

Nelson A. Cruikshank, another early advocate of Social Security, explained that before the 1930s most people thought “all a family needed for a secure old age or to ride out a period of depression was a quarter section of good land and a couple of sons to help farm it, or even a couple of daughters through whom able-bodied sons-in-law might be acquired.”

Similar comments as for Slide 16.

Slide 18:

Why it happened

And Ewan Clague, who joined the Social Security Board in 1936, wrote that earlier in the century, “old people simply lived on the farm until they died ... consequently, the modern old-age problem hadn’t developed.”

Similar comments as for Slide 16.

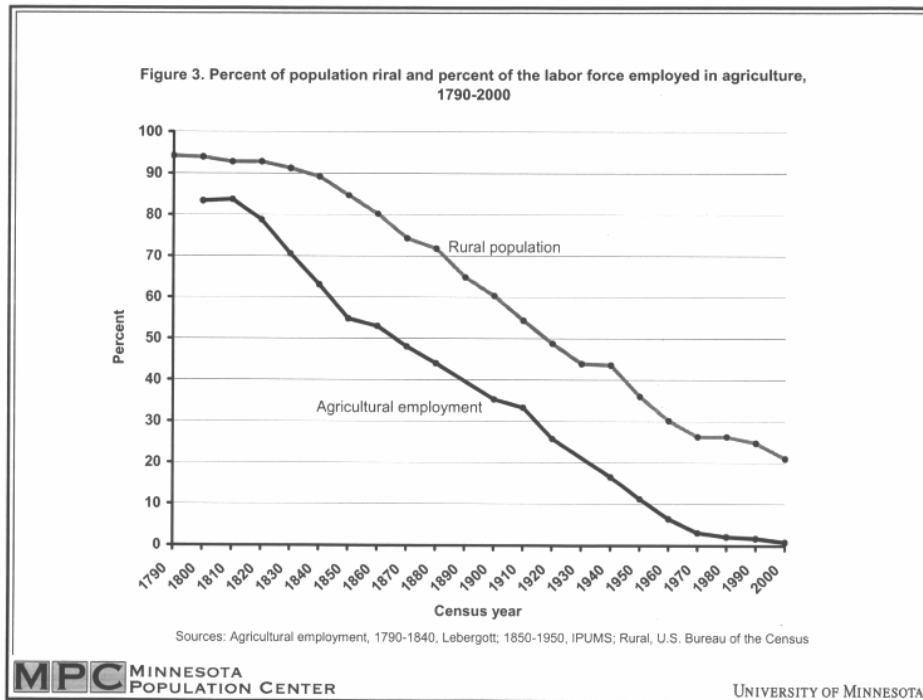
Slide 19:

Effect of the transformation of the economy

- With growth of jobs in large-scale commerce, manufacturing, transportation, incentives for coresidence disappeared
- Young men left the farm for the high wages, independence, and excitement of town life
- Fewer and fewer parents could offer the incentive of eventual inheritance to keep children home
- Without labor demands of the farm, fewer aged had reason to try to keep a child at home

This slide provides a socioeconomic theory for the decline in intergenerational households. It has no effect on the arguments in *Reading History Sideways*. I discuss this and other theories in *Reading History Sideways* (pages 69-72). *Reading History Sideways* offers an ideational theory of family changes after 1800 in the United States and elsewhere (pages 133-179) and recognizes and accepts as part of a complete explanation the theory offered here (see *Reading History Sideways*, page 175-177).

Slide 20:



This slide documents the well known decline in the United States of rural residence and agricultural employment from 1790 to 2000. This supports the theory in Slides 16-19, which I have already addressed. This slide poses no threat to any of the arguments in *Reading History Sideways*.

Slide 21:

But what about the myth of the extended family?

“Steven Ruggles called the idea of extended families in the past *the extended family myth*, noting: ‘There are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost.’”
(p.84)

So virtually one of the exceedingly rare quotations in the book is one from *me* in support of the thesis that households in Northwestern Europe have always been nuclear.

Slides 21 and 22 address the same issue. I will address them together, with my commentary provided as one narrative below the two slides. For a full commentary about the issues raised here, see pages 16-24 of Thornton paper. Below is an outline of the issues. To begin with, I note that current Slide 21 contains several modifications from original slide 13. Ruggles modified the title of this slide from “Thornton on the extended family myth:” to the following title: “But what about the myth of the extended family?” More importantly, he revised the second paragraph of his slide. Whereas the old slide read “so virtually one of the exceedingly rare quotations in the book is one from me in support of the statement that ‘the new historical research found that households had been predominantly nuclear for hundreds of years’” to read as follows: “So virtually one of the exceedingly rare quotations in the book is one from me in support of the thesis that households in Northwestern Europe have always been nuclear”. As I reported in my original response, Ruggles misquoted me in an important way. The quote of mine in his second paragraph of his slide should read: “The new historical research found that, in Northwest Europe, households had been predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form) for hundreds of years.” In addition, the Slide’s quote of me left out important contextual information from my two paragraphs which is important for interpreting my meaning (see page 84 of *Reading History Sideways* and main paper, pages 16-24 for more discussion of this).

Slide 22:

The quote is out of context

The central thesis of my book was that Laslett's findings are an artifact of bad measurement.

I concluded that "there was a marked preference for stem families in eighteenth-century England", and an enormous shift in residential behavior after the late nineteenth century.

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In his revised second paragraph of Slide 21 Ruggles changed the text somewhat and took out the quotation marks. However, the paragraph left the same incorrect impression that I believed that all households in Northwest Europe were nuclear whereas that was not my statement at all. The new slide, like the original one, also did not place the material in its proper context (see Thornton paper, pages 16-24).

In the main paper (pages 16-24) I reported that my quote of Ruggles is precisely accurate and is consistent with the rest of the text surrounding the quote. I provide below the text of the entire paragraph containing the Ruggles quote, the paragraph preceding it, and the first part of the following paragraph.

The old myth of the extended family is the one we all grew up with. In olden days—before modernization, industrialization, and moral decay—people lived in extended families; now people live in nuclear families. This view of the history of the family was first proposed in the nineteenth century, and by the 1950s it was safely cloaked in the protective language of science.

Doubts about the old myth were first raised in 1963, when Peter Laslett and John Harrison published evidence that residence with extended relatives was rare in Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, during the seventeenth century. Subsequent research has shown that this village was not exceptional; only about 10 percent of households in English communities between

1650 and 1780 included extended kin. The evidence for colonial America is scantier, because fewer listings of inhabitants are available. Nevertheless, the limited data do suggest that extended living arrangements were at least as unusual in eighteenth-century America as they were in England. There are now few adherents to the myth that extended families predominated in the world we have lost.

Unfortunately, a new myth has replaced the old one. It is now commonly believed that American and English family structure has always been overwhelmingly nuclear. (Ruggles 1987, pages 3-4)

My purpose in quoting Ruggles in *Reading History Sideways* was to emphasize that there were few people who now believe in the myth. That is what the quote said, and as noted in the main paper text, Ruggles has said similar things in other places. Also, as I note in the main text, I was careful not to endorse the myth that “American and English family structure has always been overwhelmingly nuclear”, the myth that Ruggles’ book was arguing against. In fact, avoidance of that myth was why I used the phrase “predominantly nuclear (or a weak stem form)” to describe Northwest European families in the past. Also, as I report in the main text, I wrote in *Reading History Sideways* about stem families in the Northwest European past (see pages 16-24).

Also, as I have indicated repeatedly, a central thesis of *Reading History Sideways* is that there were changes in living arrangements in Northwest Europe after 1800. Thus, on this point Ruggles is only agreeing with an important thesis of the book (see Thornton paper, pages 51-52).


Slide 23:

Other problems with Ruggles citations

Arland cites Ruggles (1987, 1994) to support the statement that

“Recent research confirms the nuclear/extended household contrast between Northwest Europe and other parts of the world.” (p. 51)

But I have never written about this.

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A full discussion of this alleged problem is provided in the main text, pages 11-13. Ruggles is correct that I did cite his 1987 book and 1994 article contrasting Northwest Europe and other parts of the world. Despite Ruggles claim that “I have never written about this”, I quote below two passages from Ruggles’ 1987 book and one from his 1994 paper that indicate he did. Note that Ruggles’ 1994 comparison of the United States with Italy and Russia is highly relevant as I consistently identified Northwest Europe to include migrants from that region to America, Australia, and other places (see *Reading History Sideways*, page 11). I have no explanation of the obvious discrepancy between the claim in Ruggles’ slide and his statements quoted below.

Geographic comparison lends support to the thesis that age at marriage had important consequences for extended-family structure. The European marriage pattern was confined to northwestern Europe; in eastern and southern Europe, marriage occurred much earlier. There is mounting evidence that family structure was substantially more complex in the South and East. See Hajnal (1982), Czap (1978), Mitterauer and Kagan (1982), P. Laslett (1977a: 15-16), Mitterauer and Sieder (1982: 37), Berkner (1972a), Plakans (1973, 1975), McArdle (1974) (Ruggles 1987, page 63).

By itself, then, high mortality is insufficient to preclude a high frequency of stem families; it takes a combination of high mortality with late marriage to produce a major constraint on

stem-family structure. Such a combination of demographic characteristics is rare; in fact, preindustrial northwestern Europe may be unique in this respect. In eastern and southern Europe, where a higher frequency of stem families has been found, people married earlier, in some places much earlier.¹⁹ The...results therefore suggest that geographical differences in the frequency of stem families across preindustrial Europe may have been a function of demographic factors (Ruggles 1987, page 125).

The stem family is only one of several possible patterns of extended family structure. In other societies, historians and anthropologists have observed high frequencies of joint families, which include married siblings residing together. Such families were common in places such as nineteenth-century central Italy and late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Russia. These were high mortality societies, but that did not prevent a high frequency of extended families; because fertility was also high, the great majority of adults had surviving siblings with whom they could reside.

In the United States, the joint family pattern has barely existed. At least for the period 1850 onward, the percentage of persons whose spouse is present and who reside with their sibling whose spouse is present is barely measurable, never amounting to more than 0.1 percent of the married population. In every year for which data are available, the dominant form of extended family has been multigenerational, containing older parents residing with their adult children (Ruggles 1994, page 110).

¹⁹ Hajnal (1965). In parts of Russia where the frequency of complex households was very high, age at marriage was extremely low—as low as a median of 15 for women and 16 for men; see Mitterauer and Sieder (1982: 37). On marriage age and the differences in family structure between northwestern Europe and southern and eastern Europe, see note 5 in chapter 4.

Slide 24:

Other problems with Ruggles citations

“Ruggles (1994) himself interpreted the strong correlation between education and living arrangements as representing the influence of ideational factors” (p. 176)

Ruggles (1994) reports no analysis of education, and the only mention of education is the statement that “As life chances were increasingly determined by education instead of inheritance, the incentives for grown children to remain in their parents’ households would have diminished” (p. 127).

The meaning here is very close to the opposite of Arland’s interpretation.

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A full discussion of this alleged problem is provided in the main text, pages 13-16. Ruggles’ slide correctly quotes part of my sentence. I quote below the entire paragraph in which my partial sentence was embedded.

The reports by Ruggles (1994, 2001) of aggregate analyses showing that education at the county and state level is strongly associated with the living arrangements of the elderly—particularly that increased levels of education can account for the trend of independent living among the elderly in the late 1900s—lend further support to the idea that ideational shifts have been important influences on trends in living arrangements. Ruggles (1994) himself interpreted the strong correlation between education and living arrangements as representing the influence of ideational factors, suggesting that there have been changes in preferences for living arrangements that are tied to more general changes in attitudes toward single parenthood, cohabitation, divorce, and premarital sex.²⁰ This conclusion is consistent with the postulated influence of developmental idealism. (Thornton 2005, pages 176-177)

²⁰ In a more recent article, Ruggles (2001) again suggested that the preferences of both the young and the old for independent living have grown stronger in the late 1900s. However, in this article, unlike the earlier one, he does not discuss possible links between these changes and more widespread cultural or ideational shifts.

Concerning Ruggles' claim in the above slide that he "reports no analysis of education" in his paper, that "the only mention of education is the statement" given in the slide, and that there was no foundation for an ideational interpretation, I quote below his relevant paragraphs that led to my paragraph cited above. These paragraphs by Ruggles are clearly consistent with my use of them in my book and clearly inconsistent with his claim in the slide.

To assess the effects of urbanization and industrialization on the living arrangements of the aged, I carried out multivariate analyses of the effects of local urban development and manufacturing on family structure in 1880 and 1910. This study will appear elsewhere, but the main findings are easily summarized.²¹ Neither urban development nor manufacturing was significantly associated with separate residence of the elderly. In fact, when we control for other characteristics, urban elderly in 1910 were significantly more likely to reside with kin than elderly in rural areas.

There were two local characteristics related to separate residence in old age: percentage of literate in the county and rate of school attendance. The higher the level of local education, the fewer elderly resided with kin. This finding brings to mind John Caldwell's widely cited theory of fertility decline. Caldwell argues that traditional attitudes about the family have been undermined by individualistic values transmitted through schooling; the same mechanism could prove to be important for the transformation of family structure.²² Education could also have had a more direct effect. The increasing importance of human capital as opposed to occupational or property inheritance may have undermined the economic logic of the stem family. As life chances were increasingly determined by education instead of inheritance, the incentives for grown children to remain in their parents' households would have diminished.

Another hypothesis was offered by Marion Levy. He suggested that as demographic constraints relaxed and people were increasingly able to reside in extended families, "sources of stress and strain" emerged that led them to change their preferred family form. A similar interpretation has been proposed by Frances Kobrin, who argues that as the ratio of elderly to adult children increased, the norm of co-residence was undermined. In other words, the ideal of co-residence could be maintained only as long as a small minority actually lived with their parents; the demographic transition indirectly led to a transition in residential preferences.²³

²¹ Ruggles, "Living Arrangements of the Elderly."

²² John C. Caldwell, *Theory of Fertility Decline* (London, 1982).

²³ Levy, "Aspect of the Analysis of Family Structure"; Kobrin, "Fall in Household Size."

Social norms about multigenerational families clearly have changed. Separate residence is now preferred both by the older generation and by their children.²⁴ This shift in norms is consistent with the demographic interpretation suggested by Levy and Koblin. But there is one major problem: the transformation of attitudes about the family has not been confined to the relationship between elderly parents and their adult children. In every sphere of family life, there has been a loosening of bonds of obligation among kin. There has been a revolution in attitudes toward divorce, cohabitation, premarital sex, and single parenthood.²⁵ It seems unlikely that the shift in attitudes toward co-residence between adults and their parents is unconnected to the broader changes in family values. The demographic thesis is therefore too narrow to explain the larger changes in family attitudes. We are faced, in effect, with explaining the rise of individualism in the twentieth century, a task far beyond the scope of this essay (Ruggles 1994, pages 126-127).

²⁴ Among many other surveys on this point, see Stephen Crystal, *America's Old Age Crisis* (New York, 1982), 222.

²⁵ See, for example, Arland Thornton, "Changing Attitudes toward Family Issues in the United States," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51 (1989): 873-93.

Slide 25:

It is not important that Arland consistently misrepresents my work—that is an insignificant part of his argument.

But it casts serious doubt on his ability to interpret sources.

If he so completely misreads an article I wrote in 1994, why should we believe him when he cites 18th-century authorities to support his revisionist intellectual history, without providing a single quotation or page number.

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On misrepresentation and ability to interpret sources, I invite the reader to review my comments on Slides 21-24 and in my main text and ask who is consistently misrepresenting who and who seems to have difficulty interpreting—even presenting—sources, including his own past statements.

On the claim that I wrote “without providing a single quotation or page number” from the 18th century writers, I invite the reader to review *Reading History Sideways* and see if she/he finds quotes and/or page numbers from such 18th century scholars as Millar, Locke (admittedly 1600s), Ferguson, Hobbes (admittedly 1600s) Jefferson, Alexander, Malthus (admittedly from 1803), Smith, Rousseau, and Astell (see the following pages in *Reading History Sideways*: 20, 33, 37, 55, 57, 64, 68, 162, 163, 165, 166).

As I wrote in my paper (pages 24-26), I understand that the book could have contained additional quotations and understand why some readers might have appreciated them. However, I cannot understand why Ruggles would claim that I cite 18th century authorities “without providing a single quotation or page number” when that is so contrary to easily-checked facts.

Slide 26:

- The most important analysis of the intellectual history of ideas about change in the family is Dan Smith's classic paper on the *Curious History of Theorizing on the Western Family*, in which he made the case that the idea a shift the Western Nuclear from extended to nuclear families was a straw man when it was blasted by Laslett and the other revisionists of the 1960s and 1970s.
- "The myth that industrialization transformed the family from extended to nuclear was largely a creation of those who refuted it" (342)
- By carefully tracing the intellectual antecedents of the idea, Smith persuasively argues that the idea of a shift was never more than a minor theme of a few sociologists, mostly concentrated in the period 1930s to the 1950s.

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I will respond to Slides 26-29 as a set as they all deal with my disagreement with Daniel Scott Smith. Also, see Thornton paper, pages 46-48.

In *Reading History Sideways* (pages 96-97) I reported in a section labeled "A Dissenting Voice" that Daniel Scott Smith had a different position concerning the creation of the myth about large and complex extended families in the Northwest European past. I argued in that section of the book that Smith reached a different conclusion than I did because he was not aware of the *Reading History Sideways* approach and that the scholars of the late 1700s through the early 1900s based their descriptions of Northwest Europe in a yet earlier period on the non-Northwest European present. Ruggles provided no additional evidence to adjudicate my difference of opinion with Smith, and I maintain the correctness of my position. (Also see Thornton paper, pages 46-48)

Concerning evidence of my position, I note in my paper (pages 30-32) that many authors in the late 1700s, 1800s, and early 1900s wrote about various elements of the supposed great family transition. As I discuss more fully below, I have reported Adam Smith in the 1700s and Le Play in the 1800s discussing the supposed change in living arrangements. I have not conducted the exercise of specifically cataloguing all the other scholars before 1930 specifically discussing a change in living arrangements, but am confident that such a systemic review would produce additional examples.

Slide 27:

- Thornton dismisses Smith: “Smith shows no awareness that, using the developmental paradigm and the reading history sideways method, scholars of the 1700s through the early 1900s . . . came to believe that households in Northwest Europe had been transformed from extended ones to nuclear ones . . . Thus, this myth was created in the 1700s and 1800s, not in the 1900s.” (p. 97)

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On Ruggles’ claim that my statement “appears to directly contradict Thornton’s earlier statement that Le Play was the first one to explicitly talk about a change” (Slide 28), I can only say that *Reading History Sideways* never made such a statement. Instead, I reported that while it was definitive that Le Play had discussed a great change in living arrangements in 1855, it was likely that Adam Smith had done so as early as the middle 1700s. I discussed extensively why I believed Smith believed in this transition, but wanting to err on the side of caution, I said this was very likely but not definitive. I quote below part of the relevant passage from *Reading History Sideways* that makes this point. I have no explanation why Ruggles would ignore this passage in claiming that I believed that Le Play was the first to discuss this.

Although there is conclusive evidence that most elements of the great family transition were documented through reading history sideways by 1803, the documentation of the transition from extended to nuclear households was not definitive until 1855, with the work of Le Play. There are, however, at least three reasons to think that the transition from extended to nuclear households was, in fact, documented by 1803.

First, it is very likely that Adam Smith believed that there had been a transition from extended to nuclear households in Northwest Europe as early as the late 1750s (A. Smith 1976/1759, 1978/1762-63; see also D.S. Smith 1993). In a brief

Slide 28:

- No evidence is offered to support this, and it appears to directly contradict Thornton's earlier statement that Le Play was the first one to explicitly talk about a change.

comment in *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (A. Smith 1978/1762-63), for example, he suggested that, in the past, married children lived with their parents while, at the present time, they lived alone. Although Smith was not explicit on his methodology, it appears that this conclusion came from reading history sideways. Similarly, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1976/1759), he discussed the tendency seen in pastoral societies for even distant relatives to live together in the same neighborhood. Smith suggested that this arrangement had existed among the Scottish Highlanders “not many years ago,” “among the Tartars, the Arabs, the Turkomans, and...among all other nations who are nearly in the same state of society in which the Scots Highlanders were about the beginning of the present century” (1976/1759, 223). By contrast, he indicated that, in commercial societies, relatives tend to disperse geographically, become unimportant to each other, and, after a few generations, even forget about their common ancestral heritage. According to Smith, regard for remote ancestors decreased the longer a society had been in a commercial state. (*Reading History Sideways*, pp. 67-68).

Slide 29:

- One can disagree with Dan's argument—as I have in the past—but it deserves to be taken seriously. After I read *Reading History Sideways*, I went back and re-read Dan's article.
- The contrast is dramatic. Dan's analysis is careful intellectual history, with a subtle analysis of the evolution of ideas, and with extensive evidence—mostly quotations—marshaled to back up every point.

See Slides 26 - 28

Slide 30:

Conclusions

- Arland is not persuasive in his revisionist argument about the history of social thought
- The minority of scholars who actually talked about changes in family structure were usually describing changes they had observed
- I find it implausible that these people had a significant impact on behavior either in the West or elsewhere in the world.

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As I stated in my paper, Ruggles' comments on *Reading History Sideways* missed several of my main points, mischaracterized others, and came to inaccurate conclusions concerning the book.

I discussed in Slide 5 the Personal Observation Method that Ruggles posits as the method used by scholars in the past to document family change. Also, see Slide 13 in relationship to Le Play and his method.

Finally, as I argued in the main Thornton paper (pages 52-53), *Reading History Sideways* (pages 133-243) makes a strong case that ideas and arguments about many family and personal issues emphasized by scholars during the 1600s through the 1800s—a period that included the Enlightenment—had significant influence on subsequent family beliefs and behaviors. The ideas and arguments supporting freedom, equality, small families, and independent living promulgated by such authors as Locke, Malthus, Smith, and Marx are widely believed to have been influential. (See pages 133-243 of *Reading History Sideways*). I also discuss in my paper how Ruggles dismissed as implausible the theories in *Reading History Sideways* without understanding them (pages 26-29 and pages 52-53).