This book is about child support payments in the United States during the 1980s, a decade in which changes in the government's child support enforcement system were great and child support emerged on the national agenda for the first time. Nationwide surveys of the child-support-eligible population—first conducted by the Census Bureau in 1979 and repeated at roughly two-year intervals—made possible this detailed analysis of the determinants of, trends in, and consequences of child support payments over this period. Although 1986 was the latest survey we had access to, our detailed analyses and findings have implications for the remainder of the 1980s and into the 1990s. We find that there was at best a small change in child support payments during the 1980s and that for too many mothers and children inadequate child support payments amounted to no more than "small change."

Although this book is the product of scholarly technical research based in the discipline of economics, it is intended for a much wider audience. It is not a comprehensive summary of all that is known to date about child support; rather, it focuses primarily on those questions that can be addressed using census surveys. It is also not a compilation of our previously published work, but it does benefit from the proven methodology established in our earlier papers. Finally, it is neither a how-to book apprising mothers (or fathers) of how to get more child support, nor is it a policy manual advocating any one particular approach to child support reform. Yet it does reach definite conclusions about some of the directions in which we believe public policy ought to be moving. As such, we hope it will prove useful to policymakers.

This book represents the culmination of nearly nine years of collaborative research that began when we were assistant professors at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We are grateful to Julian Simon, who first suggested the topic of child support to Beller,
who in turn received initial funding under a Hatch grant from the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station.

In 1983, Andrea Beller approached John Graham with the modest proposal of using newly released census data to analyze the impact of child support payments on the economic well-being of single mothers and their children. That work was presented at a conference of the National Bureau of Economic Research and served as the basis for a research proposal ultimately funded for six years by the Center for Population Research, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (Grant no. ROI HD19350). Additional support was provided by the Research Board of the University of Illinois. In 1986, Graham approached Beller with the equally modest proposal of writing a book on child support. Despite numerous obstacles to continued collaboration (Graham moved to Rutgers University and Beller endured a difficult pregnancy), our joint efforts survived thanks to a healthy division of labor, extended telephone conversations, and the good work of Federal Express.

The order of our names on the title page is a simple matter of alphabetical tradition. Although all of the chapters represent a genuine collaboration, Beller could be acknowledged as the custodial parent of chapters 2, 6, and 8, and Graham of chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7. (Chapter 1 truly deserves joint custody.)

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of numerous individuals whose efforts have contributed to this book. First, we thank Ruth A. Sanders, formerly of the Census Bureau, for answering numerous questions about the data, and H. Elizabeth Peters for sharing with us her computer program for extracting the data. Second, we thank the many graduate students at the University of Illinois who helped in our research over the years: Sanghee Sohn Cha, Hyuncha Choe, Seung Sin Chung, Kee-ok Kim Han, Pedro M. Hernandez, Soon-Hee Joung, Yang-Suk Kim, D. Elizabeth Kiss, Lorraine Maddox, John Rearden, Edwin Sexton, and Se-jeong Yang. John Boyd and Jill Hashbarger provided invaluable computer assistance. Betty L. Mathis and Barbara S. Smith did a careful job typing the tables for two chapters.

Several individuals contributed to specific sections of the book. We thank graduate students Karen Fox Folk and Kyung-ja Kim for their assistance with portions of the section “Adequacy of Award
Amounts” in chapter 2. Robert Scott suggested the idea about bargaining over award amounts that we use in chapter 4 to explain why new awards rose only half as fast as prices. The section “Issues in Setting State Guidelines” in chapter 6 draws on a report prepared for the state of Illinois (Andrea H. Beller, Barbara J. Phipps, and Sheila Fitzgerald Krein, *An Analysis of Child Support Guidelines Models and Costs of Raising Children*, Illinois Department of Public Aid, 1991.) The discussion in the section “Guideline Models” is taken from part of a report primarily researched and written by Barbara Phipps, and “Measurement of Income,” by Phipps and Sheila Krein, who rightfully should be regarded coauthors of these respective sections. The data on actual guidelines in effect in the states were based upon original research by Phipps and data collected by the National Center for the State Courts, 1990. Finally, we found the marvelous Charles Dickens quotation that opens chapter 7 in Arthur A. Adrian, *Dickens and the Parent-Child Relationship* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984, 96).

Our colleagues also contributed substantially to our work. We thank Marianne A. Ferber, who carefully read the entire manuscript and offered suggestions on almost every page. Barbara R. Bergmann, Karen Fox Folk, Saul D. Hoffman, Robert Hughes, Jr., Paula Roberts, and Lois B. Shaw offered helpful suggestions on early versions of one or more chapters. In addition, we are indebted to Paula Roberts for offering the point in chapter 8 (under recommendation 5.c. “Further Research”) that the Office of Child Support Enforcement made it clear that under mandatory guidelines lowering awards for children born outside marriage violates federal law. We gained useful insights into various aspects of child support from conversations with Barbara R. Bergmann, Irwin Garfinkel, Maurice M. MacDonald, H. Elizabeth Peters, Philip K. Robins, and Robert J. Willis. The book is better for those suggestions we followed and would have been better still had we followed more of them.

We thank our editor at Yale John Covell for his initial interest in our work and his help along the way. Finally, we are especially grateful to our manuscript editor Lorraine Alexson for her very careful editorial work and thoughtful suggestions throughout the manuscript.

John Graham gratefully acknowledges the intellectual support of his former colleagues in the economics department at the University of Illinois, as well as his current colleagues at Rutgers University. Rutgers University provided him an invaluable sabbatical leave during
which the book was first outlined. Finally, he is also grateful for the continuing, loving support of Paul Louis Ochman.

Andrea Beller owes an intellectual debt to Gary S. Becker, James J. Heckman, and Irwin Garfinkel, and to all of the other researchers at the Institute for Research on Poverty during 1975–77, whose influence shaped the questions she posed and approaches she took to answering them. She is also grateful to Sharon Y. Nickols for her support over the crucial years of this study. The University of Illinois provided an invaluable sabbatical that was used to launch the book. Finally, Beller owes a great debt to her husband, Kenneth B. Stolarsky, without whose constant support and willingness to undertake extra responsibilities on the home front this book might never have come to fruition.
This page intentionally left blank