Modern American households are coming to resemble those of centuries past, when it was the norm for multiple generations to live under the same roof. Census data show that the number of U.S. households with three or more generations increased by 38 percent between 1990 and 2000. There were about 4 million multigenerational households in 2000, and that number appears to be on the rise. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of parents living in the homes of their adult children increased by a whopping 67 percent. In other cases, grown children with families of their own are moving back into a parent’s house. Experts say harsh economic realities like high housing costs and low incomes are probably a driving force behind the trend. "It is so much less expensive to have one kitchen, one living room, one dwelling to heat," says Frances Goldscheider, professor emeritus of sociology at Brown. "If you can manage to be polite to each other ... you can get all the benefits of the reduced costs." Other forces at work include immigration—certain cultures favor extended-family living—and increased longevity, since multigenerational households can care for aging parents. According to futurist Andrew Zolli, people born after 1975 could end up taking care of their mothers longer than their mothers took care of them, since women in that generation are likely to live more than 18 years into retirement, when they are most likely to need help of some kind from their children. Philip Cohen, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of the upcoming book Family: Diversity, Inequality and Social Change, predicts that the economic downturn will contribute further to the rise in multigenerational living. "Especially with foreclosures and people losing their homes, where do people turn?" he asks. "They're most likely to go to their families first."

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