

MARRIAGE AND MARITAL STABILITY AMONG BLACKS

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An objective appraisal of the current marital status distribution of Negroes is attempted in this paper. The appraisal is based on comparative data for blacks and whites for the generation since 1940, with emphasis on developments during the 1960's. The accompanying tables are designed to throw light on whether the proportion of mature adult years lived in the married state has been increasing for black people and whether the gap between them and white people in this regard has narrowed or widened in recent years.¹

In this perspective, changes that reflect declines in bachelorhood and spinsterhood among persons of mature adulthood are accepted, along with declines in separation, divorce and widowhood, as indicators of increasing marriage and marital stability. Actually, persons are classified in this study according to their marital status when they were enumerated. Thus, being separated or divorced is regarded as indicative of marital instability. At the same time, living in an intact marriage (married but not separated) is regarded as indicative of at least current marital stability, even though the person may have previously been widowed or divorced. Inasmuch as the category "separated" was not used in censuses of the United States until 1950, comparisons of marriage data for 1940 and more recent years are made in terms of "married" persons rather than persons "with marriage intact."

Black and Negro are treated here as synonyms. Some of the information is for the nonwhite population of the United States, over nine-tenths of which is Negro.

The Widening Gap Between 1940 and 1960

Table 1 shows changes in marital status between 1940 and 1960 for persons 35 to 44 years of age. This group may be characterized as "approaching middle age" and is especially relevant because it covers a stage in life when most of those who will ever marry have done so and when the proportion of persons who are divorced is at or near its height. Percentages of persons who were widowed are not shown in Table 1, but they can be derived by subtraction.

In 1940, at the end of the Great Depression, the proportion single among those aged 35 to 44 was relatively large, and the proportions married or divorced were relatively small, as compared with the situation 20 years later, in 1960. Moreover, in 1940, before the advent of the so-called wonder drugs, the proportion widowed was relatively large. Thus, all of the changes during the two decades as a whole for both white and nonwhite men and women approaching middle age

TABLE 1. SINGLE, MARRIED AND DIVORCED PERSONS 35 TO 44 YEARS OLD, BY COLOR AND SEX, 1960, 1950 AND 1940

<i>Year and Marital Status</i>	<i>Men 35 to 44 Years Old</i>		<i>Women 35 to 44 Years Old</i>		<i>Gap: Nonwhite Minus White</i>	
	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Per cent single						
1960	7.7	11.2	6.0	7.0	3.5	1.0
1950	9.5	9.5	8.4	6.2	0.0	-2.2
1940*	13.6	14.1	11.4	7.7	0.5	-3.7
Change, 1940 to 1960	-5.9	-2.9	-5.4	-0.7	3.0	4.7
Per cent married						
1960	89.3	83.5	87.9	80.4	-5.8	-7.5
1950	87.2	85.4	85.1	79.9	-1.8	-5.2
1940*	82.8	80.4	81.1	74.3	-2.4	-6.8
Change, 1940 to 1960	6.5	3.1	6.8	6.1	-3.4	-0.7
Per cent divorced						
1960	2.5	3.5	3.6	5.7	1.0	2.1
1950	2.5	2.7	3.5	4.4	0.2	0.9
1940*	2.0	1.7	2.9	2.7	-0.3	-0.2
Change, 1940 to 1960	0.5	1.8	0.7	3.0	1.3	2.3
Change in per cent married minus change in per cent divorced	6.0	1.3	6.1	3.1	-4.7	-3.0

* For 1940, data relate to native white and Negro population.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Marital Status*, Table 4; *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Education*, Tables 7 and 8; and *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Educational Attainment by Economic Characteristics and Marital Status*, Tables 37 and 40.

were in the direction of smaller proportions of persons who were bachelors, spinsters, widowers or widows, but larger proportions of persons who were married or divorced. Significantly, however, for each group shown in Table 1, the 20-year increase in the per cent married was substantially greater than the increase in the per cent divorced. On net, therefore, these changes were all in the direction of a growing tendency for both blacks and whites to approach middle age in the married state.

A closer look at the data in Table 1 shows that the decade-by-decade changes were more consistently in the directions just cited for white than nonwhite persons. Thus, the 35-to-44-year-old nonwhites made great strides in the 1940's toward concentration in the married state, but reverted somewhat in the 1950's. The per cent single for nonwhites actually rose while that for white persons continued to fall, and the per cent divorced for the former rose sharply while that for the latter remained virtually unchanged.

On balance, the changes from 1940 to 1960 brought greater evidence of gains in marriage and marital stability to the white than nonwhite 35-to-44-year olds. Consequently, despite the gains made by nonwhites, the gap between the color groups in regard to living in the state of marriage had widened.

The Widening Gap by Educational Level

Table 2 shows that nonwhites approaching middle age in 1960, as compared with corresponding white persons, had lower proportions married and higher proportions divorced among those at all educational levels except the extremes. The largest differences between white and nonwhite persons in respect to proportions married or divorced were found among those in the central part of the educational range. Persons in this part of the range have generally developed the kind of expectations for middle-class living that is identified with "having the comforts of marriage." These persons have also, as a rule, acquired enough resources to afford the cost of a divorce in the event that their marriage turned out to be grossly unsatisfactory.

Among 35-to-44-year-old women, white college graduates with no postgraduate training had the distinction of achieving the lowest per cent divorced, whereas nonwhite women who left college before graduation achieved the highest per cent divorced. Nonwhite women with graduate school training were exceptional in that they had an even higher per cent married than similarly educated white women.

TABLE 2. MARRIED AND DIVORCED PERSONS 35 TO 44 YEARS OLD, BY YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED, COLOR AND SEX, 1960

<i>Marital Status and Years of School Completed</i>	<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>		<i>Gap: Nonwhite Minus White</i>	
	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Per cent married						
Total, 35-44	89.3	83.5	87.9	80.4	-5.8	-7.5
Elementary						
0-4 years	76.9	82.4	76.9	76.6	5.5	-0.3
5-8 years	87.3	84.1	88.0	80.7	-3.2	-7.3
High school						
1-3 years	90.2	83.6	89.4	80.8	-6.6	-8.6
4 years	90.5	83.1	89.1	81.9	-7.4	-7.2
College						
1-3 years	91.0	83.2	87.1	80.9	-7.8	-6.2
4 years	91.3	84.3	85.6	80.3	-7.0	-5.3
5 or more	89.3	85.6	68.1	74.7	-3.7	6.6
Per cent divorced						
Total, 35-44	2.5	3.5	3.6	5.7	1.0	2.1
Elementary						
0-4 years	2.5	2.4	3.2	3.6	-0.1	0.4
5-8 years	2.9	3.1	3.5	4.8	0.2	1.3
High school						
1-3 years	2.8	4.4	4.0	7.0	1.6	3.0
4 years	2.3	4.5	3.3	6.8	2.2	3.5
College						
1-3 years	2.5	4.8	4.2	7.6	2.3	3.4
4 years	1.5	2.8	2.8	6.4	1.3	3.6
5 or more	1.5	2.4	4.6	6.8	0.9	2.2

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Marital Status*, Table 4.

For college-educated men, the deficit of marriage and the excess of divorce among nonwhites as compared with whites generally diminished as the amount of college education increased. White men with graduate training had an extremely low proportion divorced, only 1.5 per cent, but that for nonwhite men was also very low, 2.4 per cent.

Table 3 shows how the per cent married and the per cent divorced changed between 1940 and 1960 for white and nonwhite persons in each educational level. For men, the increase in the per cent married was largest for those with a complete high school education but no college attendance; in addition, the per cent divorced increased the least (or actually decreased) for white men with a high school or college education, but increased most for nonwhite men with high school training and no college. Thus, for men, the changes in marital status

during the 1940's and 1950's were generally more favorable for those with intermediate or upper levels of education, but more so for white than nonwhite men.

Among women, the 1940–1960 increases in per cent married were far larger for those with at least 12 years of school than for those with 11 or fewer years. Moreover, for women in the upper educational division, the increase in per cent divorced tended to be less than that for women in the lower division. By way of interpretive comment, these developments occurred during a period when more and more women were spending part of their time in gainful employment outside the home. Evidently, those with high school or college education were more successful not only in gaining employment but also in becoming married and staying married.

If the increases in per cent married are adjusted downward by the

TABLE 3. CHANGE IN PER CENT MARRIED AND DIVORCED BETWEEN 1940 AND 1960, FOR PERSONS 35 TO 44 YEARS OLD, BY YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED, COLOR AND SEX

<i>Years of School Completed and Sex</i>	<i>Change in Per cent Married, 1940* to 1960</i>		<i>Change in Per cent Divorced, 1940 to 1960</i>		<i>Change in Per cent Married Minus Change in Per cent Divorced</i>	
	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>
Men, 35–44	6.5	3.1	0.5	1.8	6.0	1.3
Elemntaery						
0–4 years	–2.1	0.9	0.8	1.1	–2.9	–0.2
5–8 years	5.2	4.0	0.9	1.3	4.3	2.7
High school						
1–3 years	4.9	3.5	0.6	2.2	4.3	1.3
4 years	6.8	5.0	0.3	2.1	6.5	2.9
College						
1–3 years	5.6	3.7	–0.1	1.5	5.7	2.2
4 or more	5.4	2.0	–0.1	0.2	5.5	1.8
Women, 35–44	6.8	6.1	0.7	3.0	6.1	3.1
Elementary						
0–4 years	–3.5	3.3	1.3	1.6	–4.8	1.7
5–8 years	3.3	5.2	0.9	2.2	2.4	3.0
High school						
1–3 years	6.4	5.8	0.5	3.0	5.9	2.8
4 years	10.6	8.3	–0.1	2.5	10.7	5.8
College						
1–3 years	10.2	12.1	0.8	2.6	9.4	9.5
4 or more	17.6	12.5	0.5	1.8	17.1	10.7

* For 1940, data relate to native white and Negro population.
 Source: See source of Table 1.

amount that the per cent divorced rose during the 1940's and 1950's, as shown in the last two columns of Table 3, the net effect is a clear pattern of substantially greater change in the direction of more marriage and marital stability among those approaching middle age with at least a full high school education than among those who had less education. With few exceptions, the same conclusion was relevant for white and nonwhite men and women, but more so for white persons.

This finding suggests that further upgrading of the educational level of blacks may become one of the potent forces conducive to increasing the development of stable marital unions among blacks, but that up to 1960 (the latest year for which data are available), the marital gap between blacks and whites at most educational levels was still widening.

The Widening Gap Since 1960

To summarize succinctly what has been happening to the marital status distribution by color during recent years, Table 4 was prepared on the basis of data from the Current Population Survey. This table is limited to persons 18 to 64 years old, largely because most marriages and divorces occur within this age span. To strengthen the reliability of the measures of change, information for five years was averaged. Thus, the "1960" data in Table 4 represent averages for 1958 to 1962, which are centered on 1960. Likewise, the "1965" data are averages for 1963 to 1967, centered on 1965. Moreover, the results were standardized for age. This refinement is especially significant for the age groups 18-19 and 20-24, because the composition of these groups changed radically between 1958 and 1967 by the markedly differing numbers of persons born between the mid-1930's and the years of high birth rates after World War II, who were 18 to 24 in 1958 to 1967.

The most relevant information in Table 4, for the present purpose, is in the columns showing "change" in marital status between (around) 1960 and (around) 1965. "Major favorable changes"—changes that tend to demonstrate increasing marriage and marital stability and that are statistically significant (0.4 per cent or more)—and corresponding "major unfavorable changes" are indicated.

Five of the six major changes for whites were favorable and five of the seven major changes for nonwhites were favorable. Among the favorable changes were the fact that, for both white and nonwhite men the proportion of adults who remained single had diminished and the proportion with marriages intact had risen. A major decline was recorded in separation for white men and in widowerhood for nonwhite

TABLE 4. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION BY MARITAL STATUS, FOR PERSONS 18 TO 64 YEARS OLD, BY COLOR AND SEX, STANDARDIZED FOR AGE, 1960 AND 1965

<i>Marital Status and Sex</i>	<i>White</i>			<i>Nonwhite</i>		
	<i>1960*</i>	<i>1965*</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1965</i>	<i>Change</i>
Men, 18-64	100.0	100.0	0	100.0	100.0	0
Single	19.7	18.7	-1.0**†	25.6	24.4	-1.2†
Marriage intact**	75.4	76.8	1.4†	62.1	63.7	1.6†
Marriage disrupted						
Separated	1.5	1.1	-0.4†	6.7	6.4	-0.3
Divorced	2.0	2.3	0.3	2.7	3.3	0.6††
Widowed	1.4	1.1	-0.3	2.9	2.2	-0.7†
Women, 18-64	100.0	100.0	0	100.0	100.0	0
Single	13.3	13.1	-0.2	14.5	14.7	0.2
Marriage intact	75.3	75.9	0.6†	59.3	60.8	1.5†
Marriage disrupted						
Separated	2.0	1.7	-0.3	10.9	10.8	-0.1
Divorced	2.9	3.5	0.6††	4.2	4.9	0.7††
Widowed	6.5	5.8	-0.7†	11.1	8.8	-2.3†

* Average for five years, centered on the stated year.

** Married, except separated.

† Major favorable change.

†† Major unfavorable change.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 87, 96, 105, 114, 122, 135, 144, 159 and 170. This table has been adapted from Table 5 in Glick, P. C., Marital Stability as a Social Indicator, *Social Biology*, 16, 158-166, September, 1969.

men. The only significant major unfavorable change for men was an increase in per cent divorced for nonwhite men. For both white and nonwhite women, the major favorable changes were increases in the proportion with marriage intact and decreases in the proportion widowed, whereas the unfavorable changes were increases in the per cent divorced.

The last half of the period from 1958 to 1967 was a time of increasing numbers of marriages and divorces. The number of marriages went up nearly 350,000 in five years, from 1,577,000 in 1962, to 1,913,000 in 1967; meantime, the number of divorces went up about 100,000, from 413,000 in 1962, to 523,000 in 1967. Unfortunately, corresponding increases in first marriages and remarriages are not available from vital records, and increases in marriages and divorces by color are likewise not available.

For persons in the span of the most marriageable years as a whole, the net effects of all the changes shown in Table 4 were in the direction of less living in the state of bachelorhood, spinsterhood, separation and widowhood and in the direction of more living in intact marriages

despite the increases in divorce. Increasing joint survival of married couples and increasing remarriage (associated with increased divorce) are believed to be among the more important contributors to these developments. To the extent that increasing divorce was associated with decreasing separation, most of the persons involved probably thought they were improving their adjustment by terminating marriages that were no longer viable and moving toward a happier life in remarriage or to a more peaceful life in a permanent state of divorce.

Majority of Favorable Changes Occurs at Young Ages

By disaggregating the global situation and showing changes in marital status by age, significant knowledge about what has been happening is added. Table 5 shows such disaggregated changes for 1960 to 1968. However, this table is not strictly comparable with Table 4 for several reasons. First, Table 5 shows data for Negroes instead of nonwhites, and, second, it has unlike sources for the terminal dates—the 1960 data being from the decennial census and the 1968 data from Current Population Survey statistics for a single year. (The first year for which marital status by age was published for Negroes from the Current Population Survey was 1968.) Besides being for one year, the 1968 data are subdivided into three age groups, with attendant higher sampling variation.

A special definition of a favorable change in marital status for persons under 25 years of age is used in Table 5; it had been introduced earlier in the paper cited in the source of Table 4. Thus, at this age an increase in the per cent single and a decrease in the per cent with marriage intact are regarded as favorable because they are consistent with a change toward more mature age at first marriage.

In Table 5, “major favorable changes” and “major unfavorable changes” are indicated. However, because of the larger sampling variability of the changes shown in Table 5, only those amounting to 1.0 percentage point or more are regarded as “major.”

Table 5 shows substantial and consistently favorable major changes during the 1960's in marital status for young blacks as well as young whites (14 to 24 years of age). By contrast, all but one of the major changes were unfavorable for blacks in the next older group (25 to 44), and as many unfavorable as favorable major changes occurred in the oldest group (45 to 64). For all age groups combined, whites had nine favorable and no unfavorable major changes, and Negroes had six favorable and ten unfavorable major changes in marital status.

TABLE 5. CHANGE BETWEEN 1960 AND 1968 IN MARITAL STATUS, FOR WHITE AND NEGRO POPULATION 14 TO 64 YEARS OLD, BY AGE AND SEX

Marital Status and Sex	Change in Per Cent by Marital Status, 1960 to 1968					
	14-24 Years Old		25-44 Years Old		45-64 Years Old	
	White	Negro	White	Negro	White	Negro
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single	1.4**	3.6**	-0.3	0.8	-1.2**	0.2
Marriage intact*	-1.2**	-3.4**	-0.2	-2.4***	1.2**	-3.3***
Marriage disrupted						
Separated	-0.1	-0.3	0.0	1.3***	0.0	2.2***
Divorced	-0.2	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.3	1.7***
Widowed	0.0	-0.1	-0.1	0.1	-0.2	-0.9
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single	5.1**	6.8**	-1.0*	0.9	-2.2**	-1.0**
Marriage intact	-4.9**	-5.5**	-0.2	-4.6***	2.0**	0.5
Marriage disrupted						
Separated	-0.1	-1.2**	0.5	2.1***	0.2	2.5***
Divorced	0.1	-0.1	0.8	1.7***	0.5	2.0***
Widowed	0.0	0.0	-0.2	-0.2	-0.6	0.1

* Married, except separated.

** Major favorable change.

*** Major unfavorable change.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 187, Table 1; and U.S. Census of Population: 1960, *Marital Status*, Table 4, and *Nonwhite Population by Race*, Table 19.

For those 14 to 24, the recent changes are interpreted as implying even more change by Negroes than whites toward postponement of marriage until mature adulthood. Yet, a larger proportion of Negroes than whites in 1960 were already delaying marriage until after the age of 25 years. Therefore, the added delay in marriage before age 25 for Negroes is not as clearly favorable as it would have been if the two racial groups had started the decade with the same proportions single.

For Negroes 25 to 44 years of age, the decline in the proportion with intact marriage is traceable notably to increases in the levels of separation and divorce, which were already high in 1960. For example, the proportion separated rose from 13 to 15 per cent for Negro women of this age range between 1960 and 1968; that for comparable white women went up from only 1.5 to 2.0 per cent. During the same period the proportion divorced for Negro women of this age rose from five to seven per cent; that for white women rose from only three to four per cent.

For persons 45 to 64 years old—regarded here as persons of middle

age—the indicators pointed to a particularly sharp drop in the proportion of Negro men with marriage intact during the 1960's, despite the fact that they started the decade with a far smaller proportion in this category than did white men (74 versus 85 per cent). During the period from 1960 to 1968, the proportion of middle-aged Negroes with a disrupted marriage (separated or divorced) went up by four percentage points, while that for white persons went up less than one. By 1968, fully 15 per cent of the Negro men and 18 per cent of the Negro women of middle age were reported as separated or divorced, as compared with only four and six per cent of white men and women, respectively.

Figure 1 provides additional evidence of the changing marital situation for persons in their late twenties and early thirties. This graph shows three-year moving averages for two broad marital classes covering the period 1957 to 1968. Especially noteworthy in the graph are the changes around the mid-1960's toward lower proportions of nonwhite women with marriage intact and toward higher proportions of nonwhite men with disrupted marriages. These changes raise the question as to whether the marital situation among blacks has been showing some signs of deterioration in the past few years. The most significant facts about the 1958–1967 trends in Figure 1, however, are the continuing lower level of the per cent with marriage intact and the far higher level of the per cent separated or divorced for nonwhite than for white persons throughout the entire period.

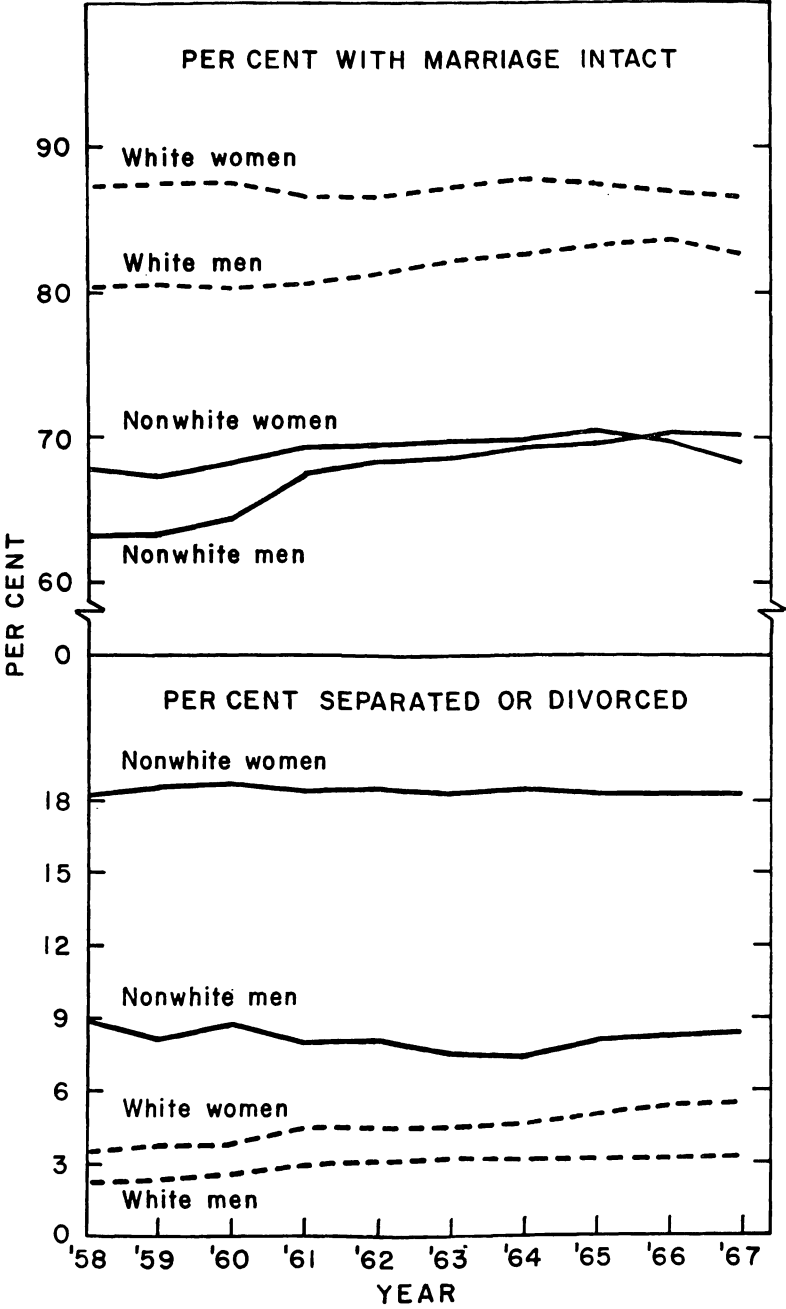
The Marital Situation by Farm-Nonfarm Residence

Table 6 presents color differences with respect to the proportion of persons in broad categories of marital status in 1968, by farm and nonfarm residence. Only broad categories are shown because the sampling variability of the data is particularly large for the farm population. Moreover, because of this consideration, differences between Negroes and whites that are identified as reliable and favorable or as reliable and unfavorable are limited to those amounting to at least 4.0 per cent for persons on farms and 1.0 per cent for persons in nonfarm areas.

All of the differences interpreted as reliable and favorable to Negroes were for persons 14 to 24 years of age and reflected greater postponement of marriage until well into the twenties for nonfarm Negro residents.

Especially noteworthy for persons 25 to 44 years old is the very wide gap (14 percentage points) between Negroes and whites with regard

FIGURE I. THREE-YEAR MOVING AVERAGES WITH MARRIAGE INTACT AND SEPARATED OR DIVORCED, FOR PERSONS 25 TO 34 YEARS OF AGE BY COLOR AND SEX



to the proportion single for men on farms. Thus, for men on farms fully 30 per cent of the Negroes were still single at age 25 to 44, but only 16 per cent of the whites were single. The corresponding difference for women on farms was also quite wide—16 per cent single for Negroes and only five per cent for whites. These findings and similar but less spectacular differences for those aged 25 to 44 in nonfarm areas are consistent with the long-observed tendency for Negroes to delay marriage until a relatively late age.

Of special concern among persons 45 to 64 years old is the extremely wide gap of 23 percentage points between Negroes and whites regarding the proportion with marriage not intact for nonfarm women. Behind the difference of 23 per cent was this striking contrast: 43 per cent of the nonfarm Negro women of middle age had been married, but currently were not in an intact marriage, as compared with only 20 per cent of corresponding white women. Nearly half of the difference was attributable to excess separation among the Negro women (11 versus two per cent) and most of the rest to excess widowhood among the Negroes (24 versus 14 per cent). For middle-aged men, the gap in the proportion with marriage not intact was smaller, but still substantial (15 per cent) and represented the difference between 22 per cent for Negroes and only seven per cent for whites. A larger proportion of the Negro than white men with marriage not intact were separated, whereas a larger proportion of the corresponding group of white men were divorced.

As a summary observation, the indicators of marriage and marital stability for persons living on farms in 1968 were consistently less favorable for blacks than for whites. In nonfarm areas, the indicators were possibly more favorable to young blacks than young whites (although this interpretation of the situation is subject to challenge). But, among those aged 25 to 64, the proportion with marriage not intact was even higher for nonfarm blacks than for blacks living on farms.

Marital Instability by Size of Place and Region

In an earlier study,² an analysis of variance was carried out to test the hypothesis that marital instability among women tends to show more variability by size of place than by geographic region. Although the hypothesis was partially supported by the study, certain refinements were proposed for a later study. These refinements consisted of limiting the white population to native persons of native parentage and limiting the nonwhite population to Negroes, to make each of the

TABLE 6. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEGRO AND WHITE DISTRIBUTION BY MARITAL STATUS, AGE AND SEX, FARM AND NONFARM, 1968

Marital Status and Sex	<i>Per Cent by Marital Status for Negroes Minus Per Cent by Marital Status for Whites</i>					
	14-24 Years Old		25-44 Years Old		45-64 Years Old	
	Farm	Nonfarm	Farm	Nonfarm	Farm	Nonfarm
Men	0	0	0		0	0
Single	-4.4***	4.2**	13.9***	5.3***	4.1***	1.6***
Marriage intact*	-1.8	-5.0**	-22.9***	-14.9***	-5.9***	-16.0***
Marriage not intact	6.1***	0.8	9.1***	9.4***	1.8	14.5***
Women	0	0	0		0	0
Single	0.1	4.7**	11.5***	4.6***	-1.8	-0.9
Marriage intact	-1.7	-6.9**	-15.8***	-24.1***	-14.5***	-22.2***
Marriage not intact	1.7	2.3***	4.4***	19.5***	16.2***	23.0***

* Married, except separated.

** Major favorable change.

*** Major unfavorable change.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 187, Table 1.

TABLE 7. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE RATIOS BY SIZE OF PLACE AND REGION, FOR NATIVE WHITE PERSONS OF NATIVE PARENTAGE AND NEGROES 25 TO 64 YEARS OLD, BY SEX, 1960

Area	<i>Separation Ratio</i>				<i>Divorce Ratio</i>			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	White*	Negro	White	Negro	White	Negro	White	Negro
Total variance	86	108	222	559	420	115	1,254	334
By size of place	54	75	140	387	235	34	1,035	166
By region	32	33	82	172	185	81	219	168
Per cent of								
variance	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
By size of place	62.8	69.4	63.1	69.2	56.0	29.6	82.5	49.7
By region	37.2	30.6	36.9	30.8	44.0	70.4	17.5	50.3

* Native white of native parentage.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Marital Status*, Table 3.

two ethnic groups more homogeneous. In Table 7 these refinements are introduced, and the results are extended to include men as well as women.

The two measures of marital instability used here are a separation ratio and a divorce ratio. The former is actually the percentage of married persons reported as separated, and the latter is the ratio of divorced to married persons. Thus, both ratios have married persons as the base and may be added to obtain a disrupted marriage ratio.

The findings on separation ratios confirm the hypothesis consistently for both blacks and whites, with about twice as much of the variance being accounted for by the size-of-place factor as by the regional factor. Especially large contributions to the variance were made by the relatively high separation ratios in central cities of metropolitan areas in the Northeast (Negro women 22 per cent, Negro men 12 per cent, white women five per cent, and white men three per cent) and by the relatively low separation ratios on farms in the South for Negroes (six per cent for women and five per cent for men) and in the North Central States for whites (0.2 and 0.3 per cent for women and men).

The findings on divorce ratios were quite mixed, with the hypothesis being strongly rejected for Negro men, strongly confirmed for white women and with the variance about equally divided between the two factors for the other groups. For Negroes, heavy contributions to the variance were made by the high divorce ratios in central cities of the North Central States (11 per cent for women and six per cent for men) and by the low divorce ratios in the rural South (less than three per cent). For whites, important sources of variance were the especially low divorce ratios in the urban fringes of cities in the Northeast (where many affluent persons belonging to white ethnic groups with low divorce rates are concentrated); also, especially high divorce ratios were observed in the urban fringe in the West, and especially low ratios on Midwest (North Central) farms.

Children by Marital Status of Parents

Perhaps the greatest public concern about marital instability centers around the number of children who are affected. Table 8 shows the marital status of the parents of children under 18 years of age in 1960 and 1968 by color, including the first available data for Negroes (from the Current Population Survey for 1968). Partly because of higher birth rates among nonwhites, nearly one-fifth of the increase during the 1960's in the number of these children of dependent age occurred

TABLE 8. CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OLD, BY PRESENCE AND MARITAL STATUS OF PARENTS, BY COLOR OR RACE, 1968 AND 1960

<i>Presence and Marital Status of Parents</i>	<i>1968*</i>			<i>1960*</i>		<i>Change 1960 to 1968*</i>	
	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>Negro</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Non- white</i>
All children under 18	59,953	10,650	9,775	55,586	8,724	4,367	1,051
Per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	0
Living with both parents	89.4	60.4	58.3	90.8	66.6	-1.4	-6.2
Living with one parent	8.6	29.6	31.2	7.1	21.7	1.5	7.9
Widowed	2.1	5.8	6.2	2.1	4.6	0.0	1.2
Married, except separated	1.3	2.9	2.6	1.5	2.9	-0.2	0.0
Separated	2.1	13.3	14.3	1.4	9.6	0.7	3.7
Divorced	3.0	4.1	4.3	2.0	2.6	1.0	1.5
Single	0.2	3.5	3.8	0.1	2.1	0.1	1.4
With mother only	7.7	27.6	29.1	6.1	19.8	1.6	7.8
With father only	0.9	2.0	2.1	1.0	2.0	-0.1	0.0
Living with neither parent	2.0	10.0	10.4	2.1	11.7	-0.1	-1.7
With other relatives	1.3	8.4	8.8	1.1	9.3	0.2	-0.9
With nonrelatives	0.7	1.6	1.6	1.0	2.4	-0.3	-0.8

* Numbers in thousands.

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 187, Tables 4 and 9; and *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Detailed Characteristics, U.S. Summary*, Tables 181, 182, and 185.

among the nonwhites, although only one-seventh of the children in 1960 were nonwhite.

Negro children in 1968 were four times as likely as white children not to be living with both parents (42 versus 11 per cent). The proportion of children under 18 living with both parents had declined during the 1960's by 1.4 percentage points for whites and 6.2 for nonwhites. At least a part of the decline for each group was attributable to strictly demographic, as contrasted with social and economic, factors; as the birth rate has fallen since 1957, so has the proportion of children under 18 years of age who were at the very young ages when children are most likely to live with both parents.

Whereas 22 per cent of the Negro children in 1968 were living with a separated, divorced or unwed parent (nearly always the mother), the corresponding proportion for white children was only five per cent. Between 1960 and 1968, the number of children in these circumstances

increased by seven percentage points for nonwhites, compared with only two percentage points for white children. During the same period, however, the proportion of nonwhite children living with neither parent declined from 12 to ten per cent; that for white children remained at the far lower level of two per cent.

On balance, recent changes have brought a wider gap during the 1960's between blacks and whites regarding the proportion of children of dependent age who were living with only one parent. Many, if not most, of these children had parents who were born in, or grew up in, either the Great Depression or World War II. A critical cohort of these parents comprises adults 25 to 34 years old, who were shown (Figure 1) to have some indications of greater marital instability since the mid-1960's.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated that blacks made more headway than whites during the 1940's in advancing the proportion married among those approaching middle age. The direction of change continued for whites during the 1950's, but reversed for blacks, with the net effect of more gain over the 20 years from 1940 to 1960 for whites than blacks.

During the early 1960's, all indicators showed increasing marriage and marital stability for both blacks and whites of mature adult age, but more change in this direction for whites. In this period, the proportion with marriage intact went up at least partly because of increasing joint survival of husbands and wives. Increases in divorce were offset to some extent by declines in separation. A growing tendency to delay first marriage increased the proportion of young single adults; increasing marriage at older ages reduced the ranks of bachelors and spinsters.

Blacks on farms in 1968 had a consistently lesser tendency than whites toward marriage and marital stability at young, intermediate and older adult ages. Young adult blacks in nonfarm areas were delaying marriage more than were their white counterparts, whereas blacks of more mature adult ages in nonfarm areas tended to show far less evidence of marriage intactness than corresponding whites.

For both blacks and whites of native parentage, variations in separation by size of place greatly exceeded those by region of residence. However, the situation was mixed with regard to variations in divorce.

The marital situation seems to have been deteriorating somewhat

since around the mid-1960's among blacks in their late twenties and early thirties. Most of these persons are parents of young children. At the same time, the proportion of young children who were living with separated, divorced or unwed parents went up by one-half among both blacks and whites between 1960 and 1968. One of the factors behind this change is more immediately demographic than social—the decline in the birth rate since 1957; fewer young children now than a decade ago are in the very young ages when most children live with both parents.

Yet, many parents of today's children had married for the first time in the late 1950's when the average age at marriage was the youngest on record. Now this same cohort of parents has a record proportion divorced. During the last decade, however, the average age at marriage has been rising, and the proportion of youth who dropped out of school before completing high school has been falling. Therefore, to the extent that early marriage and dropping out of school weaken the chances for stable marriage, the developments in these respects during the 1960's should be reducing the prospects for continued escalation of divorce in the decade ahead.³

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² Glick, P. C., Marital Instability, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–55.

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Note: The opinions expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Bureau of the Census.

DISCUSSION

Dr. G. Franklin Edwards: The paper by Dr. Glick is based upon the assumption that living in an intact family unit is a desirable condition for the marital partners and for their children. Few persons would argue with this position. Operating upon this assumption, Glick analyzes the marital status statistics of the 1940, 1950 and 1960 decennial censuses and recent data on the subject from the *Current Population Reports*. He concentrates mainly, but not exclusively, on persons 35–44 years of age because they are “at a stage in life when most of those who will ever marry have done so and when the proportion of persons who are divorced is at or near its height.”

The basic, overall finding, in terms of the assumption employed, is that the marital stability of both whites and blacks improved during the period 1940–1968; but, relative to whites, the position of blacks weakened over the entire period. A marked widening of the comparative position of blacks has been noted especially since the mid-1960's. In general, a variety of indicators support the overall finding: greater instability of blacks is found in both farm and nonfarm areas and among all the age groups used in the analysis. In addition, the

proportion of Negro children under 18 living with a single parent or with relatives has increased much more than the comparable proportion for white children of the same age grouping.

The trends observed by Glick are important as social science facts and have important implications for public policy. They do not, however, provide explanations of the observed phenomena. To indicate that the analysis does not enlighten us regarding the underlying causes of the increasing instability of black families, when compared with white families, is not to criticize Glick's paper for what, obviously, it did not purport to do. Moreover, one appreciates the limitations imposed by use of sample data of the type employed for the period since 1960 for making rigorous analyses.

In a larger sense, the paper illustrates the limitations of demographic analysis for an understanding of complex behavioral phenomena such as the dynamics of Negro family life and other aspects of ghetto living. Such analysis, as Glick's paper illustrates, makes a fundamental contribution by providing evidence on the characteristics of and changes in the aggregates studied and, as such, provides valuable clues and suggestions for other types of investigations along the line of some of the other papers prepared for this Conference. It is unfortunate that, since 1940, we have not had systematic studies of the Negro family that combine the findings of demographic analysis with other types of investigations. On the assumption that the family mirrors the basic changes occurring in the larger society, it is important that more comprehensive and systematic studies of black families be undertaken if we are to understand the processes occurring in the black ghettos and, indeed, in the contemporary metropolitan communities of this country.

The paper discussed here raises a number of questions to which all of us would like to have answers but, unfortunately, do not. Why, for example, should the marital status of blacks and whites show a tendency toward convergence during the 1940's and to widen markedly in the period since 1950? Something of the same tendencies have been noted with respect to the convergence of black and white occupational statuses during the 1940's and to greater dissimilarity thereafter. I would suspect that we know more of the underlying reasons for the observed trends in occupations as a result of our studies of labor market requirements, changing technology and racial discrimination than we do about the trends observed in the marital stability of the two groups.

As the analysis is not carried out by socioeconomic levels, any curiosity regarding the strata of the respective populations that make the heaviest contribution to the observed dissimilarity in marital stability cannot be satisfied. Past findings of other students suggest that the family life of the middle and higher socioeconomic groups is characterized by greater stability than that of the lower socioeconomic group. (This conclusion is also supported by the Glick finding that both blacks and whites show "a substantially greater change in the direction of more marriage and marital stability among those approaching middle age with at least a full high school education than among those who had less education.") Given the marked increase in the black middle class and the educational level of blacks since 1940, one would suspect that these factors make a substantial contribution to closing the gap between blacks and whites in marital status and marital stability. Why the marital gap should widen after 1950 can be understood only by a more detailed analysis of the strata within each of the two groups that make the most substantial contributions to changes in the phenomena studied.

It is a logical assumption that convergence on marital status and marital stability indicates that blacks and whites are becoming more alike in life circumstances. Is it equally logical to assume that greater divergence of the indicators suggests that the two groups are becoming more dissimilar in the objective conditions under which they live? Or is it true, as some students suggest, that the differential values and traditions of blacks with respect to family life account for the persistence and widening of the differences observed for the two groups even when the objective conditions become more alike? Or is it simply that the more rapid increases in urbanization and "metropolitanization" of the black population have influenced the differences in a significant way?

Whatever the underlying reason, or combination of reasons, for the dissimilarities between black and white families in marital stability, the black family has become an object of serious public concern. In part, this has resulted from a growing awareness on the part of blacks of the disadvantages under which a higher proportion of black families live and a mobilization of efforts to assert the differences in life circumstances of blacks and whites that create or perpetuate this condition.

Dr. Valien: I would like to underscore what has been said, because

I think it is very important that we at least acknowledge that we are not going beyond formal statistics and to tell why.

But with reference to what the paper says about urbanization, I think the welfare syndrome has been ignored in terms of the result that it has on marital status, and the "man in the house" possibilities. I think this ought to be acknowledged and taken into account.

There is also the matter of common law marriages. I suppose this is something that is very difficult, if not impossible, to get at in a census enumeration. However, some years ago I made a study of what might be called "stable common-law marriages." I took as a definition of a stable common-law marriage, a marriage that was without formal declaration of the state, but one that had existed long enough to produce children. I had about 50 cases and I studied them in some depth. I found that about 40 were still in that state; with children and with the husband and wife present, but not formally married. They enumerated themselves as not married. Yet, they were stable in the sense that they had recognized and acknowledged the joint responsibilities of children, operated a household and so on.

Interestingly enough, the unions that had disintegrated had done so *after formal marriage*. When their marriages had been legitimized the responsibilities and obligations became onerous. The man would not let his wife go out alone, so the family would just disintegrate. I also found that most of the liaisons that were still stable had not been formalized *because of the desire of the woman not to formalize it*. I thought this was very interesting. The woman's desire not to lose the independence that she felt she had in not having a formal relation was mentioned again and again.

Dr. Bernard: First of all, I protest against the unqualified way "urbanization" is used. It is not the same thing over time. Urbanization was one thing a hundred years ago. It was something else 50 years ago and it is different again today. Originally, the most stable families among blacks were those in urban areas. The free Negroes were, long ago, among the most stable.

As for "convergence" of black and white marriage, I did look at this once (see *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, November, 1967). I know that you cannot really hold occupation and education constant between blacks and whites, but I used these variables and found that although high income, occupation and education did, indeed, make for greater stability of marriage in both the black and the white

population, even at high levels of income, occupation and education, there was still a differential. At high levels of socioeconomic status, there was a larger proportion of black than of white men from 45 to 60 years of age who were not living with their first wives.

With reference to Dr. Valien's last point, Dr. Bell also found in his studies in Philadelphia that the women in consensual unions did not want to get married.

When I was looking at the historical data on black out-of-wedlock births I was puzzled by the fact that around 1920, the proportion of such births in the black population was lower than it had ever been and lower than it ever has been since that time. In many cases it was doubtless a consensual type of union, but at least there were two parents present (see *MARRIAGE AND FAMILY AMONG NEGROES*).

Dr. Liebow: Dr. Glick spoke about involuntary separation—death, particularly, accounting for so many of the children living in one-parent families. In addition to death, other forms of involuntary separation play a very important part and do not necessarily reflect on family stability, but are themselves reflections of a variety of political and social forces. One would be the great number of black men in jail, at any given time, and the great number who are on the run from the police, or from personal enemies in their own communities.

Dr. Price: The marital status in which whites and nonwhites have the greatest differential is that of "married with spouse absent." Looking at this information on a cohort basis is one way of getting a slightly clearer picture. If we start with cohorts aged 15–19 and plot the per cent married with spouse absent, among white females this percentage increases slowly to eight or ten per cent. Among nonwhite females, however, the percentages increase more rapidly to 20 or 25 per cent. Even more important, however, is the fact that starting with cohorts 15 to 19 in 1960, each succeeding cohort of nonwhite females has a higher percentage married with spouse absent and the percentage increases more rapidly with increasing age in each succeeding cohort.

This is apparently associated with the rapid urbanization of the black population because female-headed households are basically an urban phenomenon among both whites and nonwhites. It is important that we not stop at this point and say that this is bad. It is simply different. We need to know more of the consequences of this phenomenon and the factors involved in it.

Mr. Campbell: I also would like to emphasize the usefulness of

cohort analysis for data of this kind. I think we should be able to develop measures such as cohort first-marriage rates, divorce rates and so forth, to enable us to see the sequence of these events in different population groups.

I think this would help clarify some of the trends in the data that Dr. Glick presents. I know there are difficulties in doing this, but I think that we could at least make approximate cohort models of what has happened that would be useful for descriptive purposes.

Dr. Himes: I think what I want to say is what has already been said very well by Dr. Edwards, but I want to say it in a little different way. Last year, I worked with some data on white and Negro families in North Carolina. I think the thing that bothers me is that family data, over time, have a built-in flexibility with change, but the ideas we use with the data have a built-in rigidity. There are two things we saw, here, the overtone of meaning in the very notion of marriage without both spouses present. There is a rigidity in this. But the people about whom we are talking may not be at all heavily committed to this as having any real properness for the family. For them this is not necessarily a standard of proper behavior, but for us it is a standard to interpret data.

Then there is the idea of urbanization, which is a variable sort of thing. The very fact of moving from a small town or rural place to a middle-sized or big city may mean a hundred different things to a hundred different people. But it is a single factor for us with a single, inflexible meaning. The names and the ideas that we keep using are in themselves unchanging, while the data are changing very much, and for that reason the meaning keeps leaking out.

Dr. Farley: I would like to ask Dr. Glick about some possible errors in the data that would make for some of these discrepancies between white and black populations. May I first point out that one large difference is in the proportion of married people who do not live with a spouse. Another major racial difference is in the proportion of families headed by a female.

We know that there is a substantial undercount of the black population. The undercount is much greater among blacks than among whites.

What would happen if many of the people who are now missed by the Census or by the Current Population Survey were, indeed, to be enumerated? How much of the observed racial difference can be

attributed to errors in the collection of data? Would the pattern of racial differences be much different if we made assumptions about the magnitude of the undercount or the characteristics of people who are missed?

Dr. Willie: With reference to the trends shown in Dr. Glick's chart from 1958 to 1967, I do not question the data, but my interpretation is that there is not much change in the trend; so before explaining it I would like to know whether Dr. Glick sees an essential trend toward instability. I do not see it from the data. I see those lines, which are pretty straight with a little wave in them, and I am afraid that we have been explaining something that just does not exist. I would be interested in Dr. Glick's interpretation, whether he sees any real change, in terms of the trend.

Second, I would like him to indicate whether he has done any study that carries the analysis quite a distance back, and looks at changes among blacks only rather than changes among blacks in relation to whites. I think one of the problems of interpretation is that the family situation for blacks is always compared to whites. But if the black population is studied over a long period of time, what are the findings about the married state? Is the black family today more stable than in the distant past?

Dr. Thompson: I want to comment on two things briefly. One is that the more middle-class the black population becomes the more convergence we might expect in marriage statistics by color.

I have just finished a two-year study of a thousand black ghetto families including their conception of marriage. The study strongly suggested that we are imposing the middle-class conception of marriage on these people. Marriage to them is mostly a ritual, because "With all my worldly goods I thee endow" means nothing for a man with no worldly goods. So they can live together, and if they can escape the social stigma the ritual really means nothing. But our middle-class marriages carry with them the connotations of various things including inheritance of property.

This interests me, and at some other time I would like to talk about these middle-class assumptions. We assume that a certain type of marriage is the right kind of marriage for blacks, because it is the right kind of marriage for middle-class white America. But I think it might be a catastrophe in some instances.

If we think of the population as an organism whose main function

is to survive, I think we might get a different picture of the black family from that based upon middle-class values. On the whole, black women have done pretty well in terms of the survival of the race. A hundred years ago there were just four million blacks, and now there are 22 million. I think this is pretty good, and I do not think we should look at it from our own middle-class bias.

It always worries me when we start comparing the black family with the white middle-class family. Blacks live under different circumstances; their total outlook is different, and I think that one of the worst things about social science is that we have become moralists. We tend to accept a norm and we judge all families according to this norm. So we focus upon the pathology rather than the cognitives for acceptance.

I asked of the thousand families that I studied this question: "Given the economic and social circumstances under which you live, what is the best form of family you can develop?" And by golly, they have the best form.

For example, we worried at one time about the adoption of children. As you know if you study adoption bureaus, you almost never get a black child adopted in the ghetto. They have an informal adoption and the child grows up with three mothers—his aunt, his grandma and his natural mother. If any one of them dies or leaves he is in the same condition he was in before; he has the same security. So I am afraid of moralizing about the Negro family.

Dr. Teele: In 1865, the Boston Health Department in its annual report compared the number of Negro deaths with the number born, and because the number of deaths was greater, concluded that the Negro population of Boston was dying out.

W. E. B. Dubois, in 1895 or so, I think, commented on the inaccuracy of the 1870 Census, and on how stupid it was to suggest that the black population was dying out.

So somewhere in the last century, apparently, there was great hope (or fear) that the blacks were going to die out, and that they were not going to survive.

Dr. Glick: I appreciate all the comments, but since the time is short, I can react to only a few.

Some data will appear in the Carter-Glick monograph on marriage and divorce about the differences in marital adjustment at different social and economic levels that Dr. Edwards mentioned.

For example, the proportion of couples who double up with someone else is higher for blacks than whites, on the average. As you go up the income scale, however, the difference goes down very markedly to a point where, at the highest income level that we identify, the proportion of Negro couples still living together who maintain their own home is as high as the corresponding level for whites.

Another point concerns the recent increase in the proportion of young Negroes who remain single. I have written more extensively about the subject in a paper that was published in *Social Biology* in September, 1969. There I say that the recent increase in per cent single among young blacks is not necessarily a favorable sign, because they already had a larger per cent single to begin with, meaning to me that a larger proportion of blacks than whites were incapable of maintaining a home and providing the other material things that go with marriage.

There have been comments about the quality of data and possible errors. I agree with what I understood Farley to imply; namely, that if we enumerated all the Negro men who are now being missed, we would show more favorable family life for Negroes, more Negro men and women living together. The man-in-the-house idea has probably kept many responding wives from confessing to the census taker that her husband was there.

The need for cohort data was mentioned by Price and Campbell. One of the things on our agenda at the Census is to retabulate the data from our population surveys for several years to show information by single years of age on many relevant subjects, including marital status. The results will permit one to trace through one birth cohort after another.

The Bureau of the Census received funds a few years ago from the Office of Economic Opportunity to conduct the Survey of Economic Opportunity for 1967. Now, thanks to funds from NIH we have some findings in hand from the survey and more are coming through on probabilities of first marriage, divorce after first marriage, widowhood after first marriage, remarriage after divorce and widowhood, and divorce after remarriage, by social and economic characteristics—the educational level and income of the husband, how many children the women have in their home and the age at which they entered their previous marital state.

Some of the data were presented at the 1969 meeting of the In-

ternational Population Union in London. There will be a report on the subject in the spring. The report will include data on the marital history of those who married for the first time less than ten years ago, ten to 19 years ago, and 20 or more years ago. For those who had been married once, we will show what their marital status was at the time of the survey; for those married twice, how their first (and second) marriage had ended; and for those married three or more times, how their first (and last) marriage ended.