African American Marriage Patterns

DOUGLAS J. BESHAROV AND ANDREW WEST

IN 1968, the Kerner Commission declared that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."[1] Happily, many of the Commission's most distressing predictions have not come true. But with respect to marriage and child rearing, black and white Americans do live in substantially different worlds. Over the past fifty years, for all Americans, marriage rates have declined while divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births have climbed. But the negative changes have been greatest among African Americans.

The Decline of Marriage

NONMARRIAGE

Compared with white women, African American women are 25 percent less likely ever to have been married and about half as likely to be currently married. According to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), in 1998, about 29 percent of African American women aged fifteen

and over were married with a spouse present, compared with about 55 percent of white women and 49 percent of Hispanic women.[2] African American women are estimated to spend only half as long as white women married (22 percent vs. 44 percent of their lives).[3]

In the 1950s, after at least seventy years of rough parity, African American marriage rates began to fall behind white rates. In 1950, the percentages of white and African American women (aged fifteen and over) who were currently married were roughly the same, 67 percent and 64 percent, respectively. By 1998, the percentage of currently married white women had dropped by 13 percent to 58 percent. But the drop among African American women was 44 percent to 36 percent—more than three times larger.[4] The declines for males were parallel, 12 percent for white men, 36 percent for African American men.

Among Hispanics, the decline in marriage rates appears to have been less steep, but only because we have no information on Hispanics prior to 1970. From 1970 to 1998, the percentage of currently married Hispanic women dropped 13 percent, from 64 percent to 56 percent (see Fig. 1).[5]

Even more significant has been the sharp divergence in never-married rates. Between 1950 and 1998, the percentage of never-married white women aged fifteen and over rose from 20 percent to 22 percent, a 10 percent rise. But the percentage of never-married African American women about doubled, from 21 percent to 41 percent.[6] For Hispanics, the data begin only in 1970; since then, the percentage of Hispanic never-married women has risen from 24 percent in 1970 to 29 percent in 1998, about a 21 percent rise.[7]

Later marriage among African Americans accounts for only some of this difference. For example, between 1950 and 1998, the percentage of never-married white women aged forty and over actually fell from 9 percent to 5 percent, a 44 percent drop. But the percentage of never-married African American women aged forty and over rose by 200 percent, from 5 percent to 15 percent.[8] (Thus, even adjusting for age at first marriage, marriage rates decline after about 1970 for whites and 1960 for African Americans).[9]

Among Hispanics, there has been almost no change in the percentage

of never-married women. In 1970, about 7 percent of women forty and over were never married. By 1998, that figure had risen by only one percentage point.

DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

At the same time that African American women are half as likely to marry as whites, they are more than twice as likely to divorce. Although African American divorce rates have long been higher than those of whites,

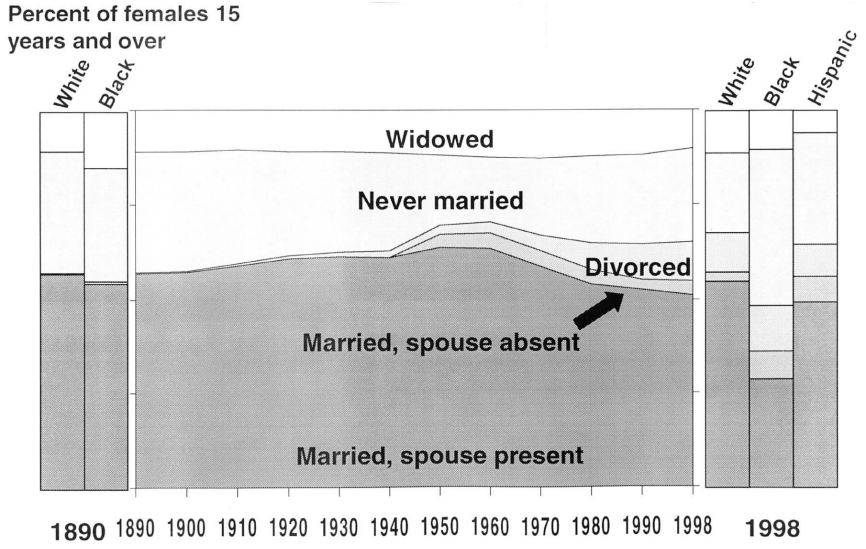

Fig. 1. Marital trends, 1890–1998. Although the 1890 data have not been analyzed, results from 1910 indicate that about 2 percent of black women classified as widows in that year were actually never-married or divorced. See Samuel H. Preston, Suet Lim, and S. Philip Morgan, "African-American Marriage in 1910: Beneath the Surface of Census Data," *Demography* 29 (February 1992): 1–15. Data for 1890–1990 from decennial census data for those years; data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998*, by Terry A. Lugailia (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999), p. 1, table 1.

they are now more so. For example, in 1890 (the first year for which national census data are available) the number of divorced women per thousand married women was 45 percent higher for African Americans than for whites, 9 vs. 6.[10] These are relatively small numbers, but they suggest that even when families were on the whole much stronger than they are today, African American women were still much more likely to face marital disruption.

These early divorce figures may not be completely accurate, however.[11] Not only was divorce highly stigmatized before the 1960s, making it likely that divorces were underreported in early census years, but also, as E. Franklin Frazier pointed out sixty years ago, "divorces" among rural African Americans were most likely informal agreements (between two married people or two people living together) or the de facto result of long-standing separations.[12] Thus, it is likely that formal divorces among African Americans were much lower, and perhaps much lower than among whites.

Regardless of the reliability of earlier census data, however, the racial difference in divorce is now quite large. By 1998, the African American divorce rate was more than twice as high as the white rate (422 per thousand compared with 190 per thousand). The divorce rate for Hispanic women doubled between 1970, the first year for which data are available, and 1998, from 81 to 171 per thousand (compared with a quadrupling of the African American rate and a tripling of the white rate over the same time period).[13]

Separation is about four times more common among African Americans than among whites and about one and a half times more common than among Hispanics. In 1998, according to CPS data, over 20 percent of married black women aged fifteen and over had an absent spouse, compared with 5 percent of married white women and 13 percent of married Hispanic women of the same ages.[14] Some experts question whether the black separation rate is really this high, speculating that black women consider the breakup of a long-term cohabitation (an informal common-law marriage, if you will) to be a "separation."[15]

NONMARITAL BIRTHS

Along with the weakness of marriage, there has been an increase in nonmarital births, especially among teenagers. Once again, African Americans have experienced the greatest increases, although they have also been responsible for most of the recent decline in both teen births and nonmarital teen births. According to Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, an African American child is three times more likely to be born out of wedlock than a white child and, on average, will spend only six years in a two-parent family, compared with fourteen years for a white child and thirteen years for a Hispanic child.[16]

The proportion of births to unwed mothers has risen steadily since 1950, so that now almost one-third of all American children are born out of wedlock (see Fig. 2). From 1950 to 1997, the proportion of births to unmarried white women (non-Hispanic) increased almost twelvefold, from 2 percent to 22 percent. The African American proportion increased fourfold, from 18 percent to a striking 69 percent. (The African American rate could not have risen much more because it was already so high.) The proportion of births to Hispanic unwed mothers has also increased by 5 percent between 1992 and 1997, rising from 39 percent to 41 percent.[17]

A major factor driving these rates has been the decline in the birthrates for married couples—rather than an explosion of births outside of marriage (Fig. 3). As Thernstrom and Thernstrom point out, "In 1987 the birth rate for married black women actually fell *below the birth rate for unmarried black women*, the first time that has ever happened for any ethnic group."[18] Among white women, the overall fertility rate fell from 102.3 births per thousand women aged fifteen to forty-four in 1950 to 63.9 in 1997. (At the same time, the unwed fertility rate rose from 1.8 to 16.5, in part because there were many fewer marriages.) Had the fertility rate of white married women remained at 102.3 (while the rate for white unwed women rose to 16.5), the proportion of births in 1997 to unwed white mothers would be only 16 percent, not 26 percent.

Similarly, the fertility rate of married African American women fell from 137.3 per thousand in 1950 to 70.7 in 1997 (Fig. 4). Had their fertility rate remained the same, the percentage of African American children born out of wedlock in 1997 would have been 36 percent, not 69 percent.[19] Unfortunately, data for Hispanic out-of-wedlock births are not available for years earlier than 1989, making it impossible to make the equivalent calculation for Hispanics.

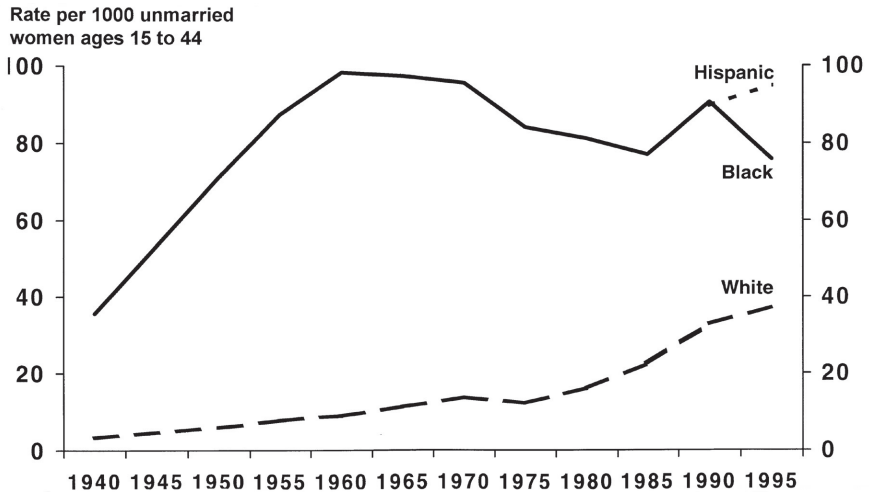

Fig. 2. Nonmarital birthrates, 1940–1995, by race. Data on nonmarital birthrates for white and black women 1950–1990 and for Hispanic women in 1980 from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births to Unmarried Mothers in the United States, 1980–92*, by Stephanie J. Ventura, Vital and Health Statistics, series 12, no. 53 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), p. 27, table 1; data on nonmarital birthrates for white, black, and Hispanic women for 1995 from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., National Vital Statistics Report 47, no. 18 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), p. 43, table 18.

TEENAGE BIRTHS

Having a baby out of wedlock is difficult enough; having a baby as an unwed teenager is even more difficult. One in five African American babies is born to a teenage mother, about twice the white rate and one and a half times the Hispanic rate. In 1996, about 22 percent of all live births to African Americans were to women under age twenty, compared with just over 10 percent for white women and 13 percent for Hispanic women.[20]

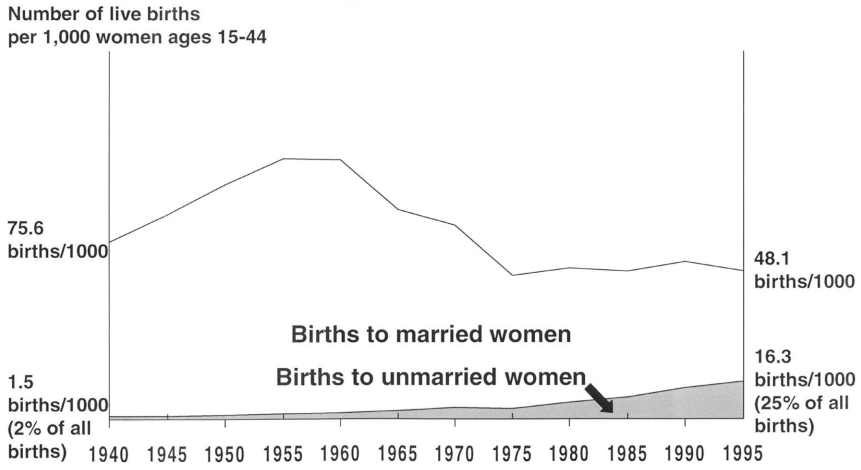

Fig. 3. White fertility rates for married and unmarried women, 1940–1995. From authors' calculations based on data from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., National Vital Statistics Report, vol. 47, no. 18 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), p. 22, table 1; Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births to Unmarried Mothers in the United States 1980–92*, by Stephanie J. Ventura, Vital and Health Statistics, series 12, no. 53 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), p. 35, table 4; data for 1995 taken from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1995*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., Monthly Vital Statistics Report, vol. 45, no. 11, supplement (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1997), p. 40, table 14.

Over the past forty years, the overall teenage birthrate first rose and then declined. Throughout, though, there were sharp racial and ethnic differences. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the birthrate for females aged fifteen to nineteen peaked in 1960, at 79.4 per thousand for whites and 156.1 for African Americans. The rates then declined until 1985 or 1986, when the white rate hit 42.3 and the African American rate 94.1.[21] The rates continued to rise for a few more years and began declining again in 1992 to their 1997 levels of 36 for whites and 91

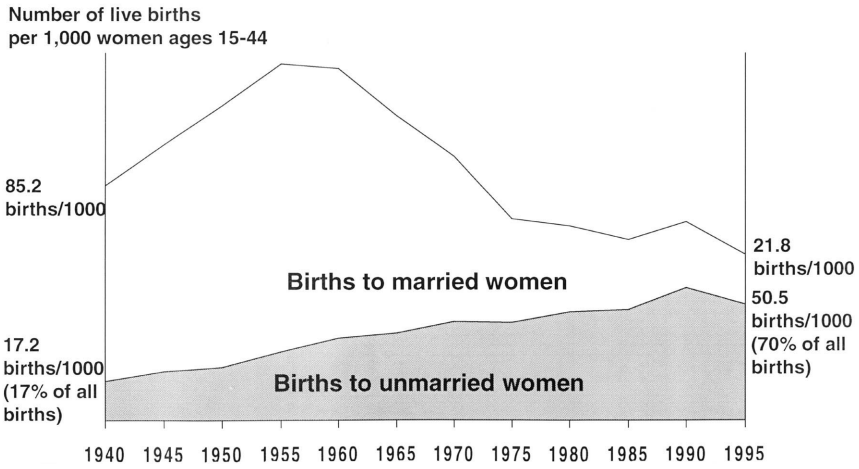

Fig. 4. Black fertility rates for married and unmarried women, 1940–1995. From authors' calculations based on data from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., National Vital Statistics Report, vol. 47, no. 18 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), p. 22, table 1; Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births to Unmarried Mothers in the United States, 1980–92*, by Stephanie J. Ventura, Vital and Health Statistics, series 12, no. 53 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), p. 35, table 4; data for 1995 taken from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1995*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., Monthly Vital Statistics Report, vol. 45, no. 11, supplement (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1997), p. 40, table 14.

for African Americans.[22] Among Hispanics, the teen birthrate rose from 100.8 per thousand in 1989 to a 1994 peak of 107.7 per thousand. The birthrate for Hispanic teens has since declined to 97.4 per thousand in 1997.[23]

For those concerned only about too early parenthood, the recent decline in teenage parenthood is good news. But out-of-wedlock birthrates are still at 1975 levels. More important, the decline is largely driven by the sharp drop in teenage marriage (so that there are fewer married couples trying to have a baby). This is, moreover, all teenage births, marital as well as nonmarital. The trend for nonmarital teenage births, as opposed to marital births, is sharply up. Almost all births to black teens are now out of wedlock. As overall births to teenagers were falling, the proportion of out-of-wedlock teenage births continued to rise because teens just don't marry very much any more, but many are still having babies. For African Americans, between 1950 and 1997, the proportion of births to teenage unwed mothers rose from 36 percent to 96 percent, a 166 percent rise. For whites, the rise was steeper, almost twelvefold (because the base was so much lower), 6 percent in 1950 to 71 percent in 1997. The proportion of Hispanic teenage unwed births rose by 71 percent from 1980 to 1997, from 42 percent of all teenage births to 72 percent of all teenage births.[24]

RECENT DECLINES

Recent trends are much more hopeful. For the past few years, nonmarital births have been declining. The rate for whites peaked in 1994 at 28.5 per thousand single women and has declined slightly since then to 27 per thousand. The African American rate has declined more sharply, following a 1989 peak of 90.7. It is now 73.4. The rate for Hispanics reached its zenith in 1994 at 101.2 and has also declined to 91.4.[25] Since 1991, teen births are down 8 percent for whites and 21 percent for African Americans.

Teenage nonmarital births have declined even more, again most significantly for blacks. Nonmarital birthrates for white teenagers peaked in 1994 at 28.1. Since then the rate has declined to 25.9, an 8 percent decline,

but this is not a large enough drop to tell us what is happening. The rate for black teens, on the other hand, dropped a substantial 20 percent, from a high of 108.5 in 1991 to 86.4 in 1997. The drop for Hispanics has been only slightly larger than for whites. The rate of nonmarital births to Hispanic teenagers has fallen 9 percent, from a high of 82.6 in 1994 to 75.2 in 1997.[26]

Second-order births are also declining, once again most significantly for African Americans. Data from the NCHS indicate that, in 1992, the second-order or higher birthrate for teens was 15.6 per thousand. In 1997, the rate had fallen by 27 percent to 11.4. In 1992, the rates by race had been 8.3 for white teens, 39.5 for African American teens, and 28 for Hispanic teens. In 1997, the rates had fallen to 6.4, 25, and 23.5, respectively.[27]

A Balanced Perspective

At least since the appearance of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's controversial 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, "the plight of the black family" has been the focus of much anxiety and debate. On the one side have been those who think the black family is a "tangle of pathology," to use Moynihan's phrase.[28] On the other side have been those who see the black family as strong and vibrant, emphasizing its "adaptability," to use Belinda Tucker's phrase.[29]

TERMINOLOGY

The disagreement about the state of the black family is partly the result of misunderstanding. The first side tends to use "family breakdown" primarily to mean nonmarriage, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing. The other side tends to use the term "family" more broadly, to include kin networks of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so forth, that often help support single mothers and their children and sometimes take them into their own homes. In an attempt to bridge this disagreement, this paper seeks to make a clear distinction between the breakdown of

marriage, which it calls "marital breakdown," and the role of extended family structures, which, in all communities, is more important when marriages are weaker.

Without doubt, today's unprecedentedly high rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing—across all American society and indeed in most other Western nations—should be a matter of grave concern. Marital breakdown harms many of the adults and children involved and, because of its disproportionate impact on African Americans, is a particular tragedy in that community. Public discourse, however, often goes too far in blaming marital breakdown for all the poverty and social dysfunction that afflict the black community. That is an equally terrible mistake because marital breakdown, poverty, and social dysfunction interact. They are, simultaneously, both causes and effects of each other.

MARITAL BREAKDOWN OR POVERTY?

At first glance, marital breakdown has devastating effects on children, and to African American children in particular because so many are born to unwed teenagers. Children born out of wedlock fall substantially below children from intact families on many important measures.[30]

A 1995 report to Congress from the Department of Health and Human Services summarizes:

> Unmarried mothers are less likely to obtain prenatal care and more likely to have a low birthweight baby. Young children in single-mother families tend to have lower scores on verbal and math achievement tests. In middle childhood, children raised by a single parent tend to receive lower grades, have more behavior problems, and have higher rates of chronic health and psychiatric disorders. Among adolescents and young adults, being raised in a single-mother family is associated with elevated risks of teenage childbearing, high school dropout, incarceration, and with being neither employed nor in school.[31]

According to Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation, data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) show that children born

out of wedlock to never-married mothers spend 51 percent of their childhood in poverty, compared with only 7 percent of children born to two-parent, married families. Such children spend 71 percent of their childhood receiving some form of welfare (AFDC, Medicaid, food stamps, WIC, or SSI), compared with 12 percent for children born to two-parent, married families.[32] The children of teenaged parents, especially if unmarried, have even more serious problems. For example: "Children of young teen mothers are almost three times as likely to be behind bars at some point in their adolescence or early 20s as are the children of mothers who delayed childbearing."[33]

Although the children in female-headed households tend to do less well on various measures, these are only correlations. Because family poverty and various other characteristics are such important determinants of a child's well-being and life prospects, many children would not have fared well even if their parents had been married or had waited until their twenties to have children.[34]

In recent years, a number of researchers have attempted to disentangle the effects of marital breakdown, poverty, and other personal and contextual factors.[35] Doing so substantially reduces the apparent effects of marital breakdown. For example, when Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur analyzed Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data, they found that young people from single-parent families did substantially worse on a variety of measures:

> Compared with teenagers of who grow up with both parents at home, adolescents who have lived apart from one of their parents during some period of childhood are twice as likely to drop out of high school, twice as likely to have a child before age twenty, and one and a half times as likely to be "idle"—out of school and out of work—in their late teens and early twenties.[36]

Controlling for income cuts these differences in half. The negative effects of growing up in a single-parent family were still large—just not as large as some of our public rhetoric would suggest.[37]

Thus, it is important to maintain a balanced perspective on the consequences of "marital breakdown." Although it is an extremely serious problem, it is not the sole determinant of a person's success or happiness. In fact, as other contributors to this volume describe, on many macro indicators of social and economic well-being, African Americans are doing better than ever before. Gaps between whites and African Americans are getting smaller, and in some cases African Americans are making gains relative to whites. Most African Americans—including a majority of those who are unmarried, or divorced, or even born out of wedlock—get up in the morning and go to work or school, like everyone else. Marital breakdown makes things worse, not hopeless.

WORLD-WIDE TRENDS

As we have seen, on every measure of marital stability, African Americans do more poorly than whites and Hispanics. The weakness of African American marriages is, however, more accurately viewed as an exacerbated version of the decline in marriage across the entire postindustrial, Western world. Between 1960 to 1986, most Western societies saw divorce rates rise and total birthrates fall while unwed births rose (see Table 1).

The most broadly accepted explanations for marital breakdown are essentially race-blind: greater acceptance of nonmarital sex and unwed parenthood so that young people feel less need to marry, widespread affluence so that it is easier to leave an unhappy marriage, less emotional and economic gain from marriage so that there is less reason to get married, and welfare's marriage penalties that discourage low-income couples from marrying.

African Americans do seem especially vulnerable to these worldwide trends, however. As Figure 5 indicates, nonmarital birthrates vary from a high of 72 percent for American-born African Americans to a low of 4 percent for Korean Americans. What can it be about African Americans—or their more than three centuries living on this continent—that has made them so vulnerable to the forces that weaken families? A number of factors

seem to be at work: the devastating effects of slavery and Jim Crow laws on black marriages; endemic poverty, which puts added stress on already weak families; even fewer gains from marriage, especially for women; too early sex that puts young girls at greater risk of unwanted pregnancy; and racial concentration that magnifies the impact of these conditions.[38]

This same set of explanations, with a few modifications, helps explain what is happening to Hispanic marriages, which are often included only as an afterthought in discussions about the family. Although separate data on Hispanic marriages span only the last thirty years, we do have enough information to make some preliminary conclusions.

On most indicators, Hispanic marriages lie somewhere between those of whites and African Americans. This suggests that some of the same factors that affect African Americans, such as endemic poverty, too early

Table 1 Worldwide Marital Weakness, 1960–1986/88

	DIVORCE RATE		BIRTHRATE		UNWED BIRTHS (PERCENT)	
Country	*1960*	*1988*	*1960*	*1988*	*1960*	*1986*
United States	9.4	21.2	3.6	2.1	5.3	23.4
Canada	1.7	12.9	3.8	1.9	4.3	16.9
Austria	5.0		2.7	1.6	13.0	21.0
Denmark	6.0	12.8	2.5	1.6	7.8	43.9
Finland	4.1		2.7	1.7	4.1	15.0
France	2.8	8.5	2.7	2.0	6.1	24.0
Germany	3.4	8.3	2.4	1.4	6.3	9.6
Italy		1.1	2.4	1.4	2.4	5.6
Netherlands	2.2	8.7	3.1	1.7	1.3	8.8
Norway	2.8		2.9	2.0	7.0	24.0
Sweden	4.9	10.7	2.2	1.9	11.3	48.4
United Kingdom	2.2	12.9	2.7	2.0	5.4	21.0

SOURCE: Sheila B. Kamerman, "Gender Role and Family Structure Changes in the Advanced Industrialized West: Implications for Social Policy," in Katherine McFate, Roger Lawson, and William Julius Wilson, eds., *Poverty, Inequality, and the Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), pp. 231–56.

sex, and residential concentration, also affect Hispanics. At the same time, the different cultural and historical background of Hispanics appears to ameliorate some of the forces that contribute to further marital weakness among African Americans.

The overriding point is simple: The forces that weaken marriage strike *all* families, albeit in different ways for different groups. The sooner we realize this reality, the sooner progress will be made in strengthening all American families, including African American families. This is not a message in black and white, but perhaps it is a message for blacks and whites (and browns).

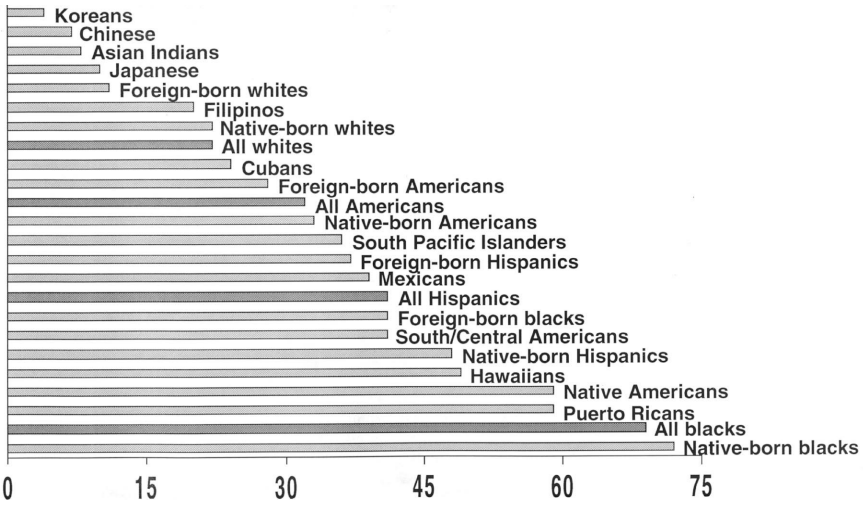

Fig. 5. Nonmarital births by race-ethnicity, 1992–1997. Data for all ethnic groups except Koreans and South Pacific Islanders from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, pp. 38–39, tables 13 and 14; data for Koreans and South Pacific Islanders from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Birth Characteristics for Asian or Pacific Islander Subgroups, 1992*, by Joyce A. Martin, Monthly Vital Statistics Report, vol. 43, no. 10, supplement (Hyattsville, Md.: 1995), p. 5, table 4.

Notes

1. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), p. 1.

2. Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998*, by Terry A. Lugailia (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999), p. 1, table 1.

3. Andrew J. Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 95. A similar estimate for Hispanic women is not available.

4. Data for 1950 from Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population: 1950*, vol. 1, *General Population Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 182, table 104. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

5. Data for 1970 from Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of the Population*, vol. 1, *General Population Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 688, table 216. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

6. Data for 1950 from Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population: 1950*, p. 182, table 104. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

7. Data for 1970 from Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census*, p. 688, table 216. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

8. Data for 1950 from Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population: 1950*, p. 182, table 104. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

9. Marriage rates for Hispanic women have been declining since the 1970s, but lacking data before 1970, we cannot determine when marriage rates among Hispanic women began to decline.

10. The divorce rate presented here represents the number of currently divorced women aged fifteen and older per thousand married, spouse-present women. This rate is different from the standard rate used by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), which is equal to the number of divorces decreed in a given year per thousand married women aged fifteen and over. There are three reasons for using the rate presented here. (1) the NCHS divorce rate is not available by race over time; (2) the NCHS rate does not control for the apparent higher rate of separation among African American women; (3) the rate used here, by focusing on divorced women as opposed to the number of divorces, avoids the problems (although admittedly small) created by divorces among interracial marriages. Data for 1890 from Bureau of the Census, *Census Reports: Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), p. lxxxvii, table 49. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

11. The Census Bureau has recognized the problem in the recording of divorces and has in many cases issued public statements cautioning that the number of divorced persons is underreported. See, e.g., Samuel H. Preston and John McDonald, "The Incidence of Divorce Within Cohorts of American Marriages Contracted Since the Civil War," *Demography* 16 (February 1979): 1–25.

12. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), chaps. 5 and 18, cited in Samuel H. Preston, Suet Lim, and S. Philip Morgan, "African-American Marriage in 1910: Beneath the Surface of Census Data," *Demography* 29 (February 1992): 10.

13. Data for Hispanics in 1970 from Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census*, p. 688, table 216; data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

14. Data for 1998 from Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status*, p. 1, table 1.

15. See Preston, Lim, and Morgan for a discussion of how data recorded by the Census Bureau may be inaccurate.

16. Data on likelihood of nonmarital births from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., National Vital Statistics Report, vol. 47, no. 18 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), p. 42, table 17. Data on the number of years a child can expect to live with two parents correspond to the number of years between birth and age seventeen a child can expect to live in a home with two parents (either married or cohabiting); from Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, "Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the U.S.," working paper, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Center for Demography and Ecology, 1999, p. 36, table 6.

17. Data for 1950 from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Births to Unmarried Mothers in the United States, 1980–92*, by Stephanie J.Ventura, Vital and Health Statistics, series 12, no. 53 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), p. 40, table 5. Data for 1997 from Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, pp. 22, 28, 45, tables 1, 6, and 19.

18. Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 240; emphasis in original.

19. Authors' calculations based on data from Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, p. 22, table 1; and Department of Health and Human Services, *Births to Unmarried Mothers*, p. 35, table 4.

20. Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, p. 39, table 14.

21. Department of Health and Human Services, *Declines in Teenage Birth Rates, 1991–97: National and State Patterns*, by Stephanie J. Ventura, T. J. Mathews, and Sally C. Curtin, National Vital Statistics Report, vol. 47, no. 12 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), p. 9, table 1.

22. Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, p. 34, table 9.

23. Department of Health and Human Services, *Declines in Teenage Birth Rates*, p. 10, table 2.

24. Data for 1950 and 1980 from Kristin A. Moore et al., "Data on Teenage Childbearing in the United States" (prepared by Child Trends, Inc., for the American Enterprise Institute/White House Working Seminar on Integrated Services for Children and Families, Washington, D.C., January 1993), p. 11, table 5. Data for 1997 from Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, p. 42, table 17.

25. Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, p. 43, table 18.

26. See note 24.

27. Data for 1992 from Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1992*, by Stephanie J. Ventura et al., Monthly Vital Statistics Report, vol. 43, no. 5, suppl. (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1994), pp. 34, 41, tables 3 and 7. Data for 1997 from Department of Health and Human Services, *Births: Final Data for 1997*, pp. 24, 32, tables 3 and 8.

28. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Policy Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), p. 75.

29. M. Belinda Tucker, "Family," in *New Directions: African-Americans in a Diversifying Nation*, ed. James S. Jackson (Washington, D.C.: National Policy Association, forthcoming).

30. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

31. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States," executive summary of *Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing* (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), p. xiii.

32. Robert Rector, data presented at Welfare Reform Seminar Series sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., April 1999).

33. Rebecca A. Maynard, "The Study, the Context, and the Findings in Brief," in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, ed. Rebecca A. Maynard (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1997), p. 16.

34. The impact of poverty is complex, however. As Susan Mayer of the University of Chicago points out: "My review of the research suggests three major conclusions. First, though the effect of parental income is nowhere near as large as many political liberals imagine, neither is it zero, as many political conservatives seem to believe.

Second, though the effect of parental income on any one outcome measure appears to be fairly small, higher income has some effect on most outcomes, so its cumulative impact across all outcomes may be substantial. Third, one reason that parental income is not more important to children's outcomes is probably that government policies have done a lot to ensure that poor children get basic necessities most of the time." *What Money Can't Buy: Family Income and Children's Life Chances* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 143.

35. The first major work was Arline T. Geronimus and Sanders Korenman, "The Socioeconomic Consequences of Teen Childbearing Reconsidered," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (November 1992): 1187–1214.

36. There was, for example, a 10 percentage point difference between the high school graduation rates of children from two-parent families and children from single-parent families, 15 percent vs. 25 percent. They also found a 17 percentage point difference in teen birthrates, 14 percent for those from two-parent families compared with 31 percent for young women from single-parent families. There was also a 15 percentage point difference in "idleness" rates for young women. About 26 percent of young women from two-parent families were out of school and out of work, compared with 41 percent of young women from single-parent families. Similarly, 19 percent of young men from two-parent families were idle, compared with 29 percent of young men from single-parent families. McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, pp. 2, 41, 47, 50.

37. Ibid., p. 89, fig. 10.

38. This is not to say that other explanations have not been propounded. But such explanations, such as the existence of extensive kin networks and differing male-female expectations about marriage, do not appear strong enough to account for a substantial share of African American–white differences.