

Trends in Black/ White Intermarriage*

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Abstract

Although black/white intermarriage was a prominent indicator of race relations in the 1960s and early 1970s, the topic seems to have been low on the academic agenda during the 1980s. Many studies are currently being done on black/white differences in income, employment, education, and residence, but there is insufficient recent information on intermarriage. To fill in this gap, I examine annual marriage license data for 33 states from 1968 to 1986 to assess how the role of the black/white color line in marriage choice has changed. The analyses generally show that black/white intermarriage has increased rapidly since the U.S. Supreme Court lifted the legal ban on intermarriage. I further show that this trend is especially pronounced among black males and that the status characteristics of these marriages have remained traditional in the sense that intermarriage still occurs primarily when the white woman marries up in socioeconomic status. In my conclusion, I offer several interpretations of why the link between status and interracial marriage persists, and discuss what this implies for the nature of racial differentiation in contemporary American society.

According to recent empirical studies, various kinds of intermarriage have become more common over the course of this century. This applies to marriages between Protestants and Catholics (Kalmijn 1991), between Jews and Christians (Kosmin et al. 1991), and between members of different European ancestry groups (Lieberman & Waters 1988). While these findings suggest that the traditional group boundaries in American society are now weak, it comes as no surprise that the major exception in this respect is the black/white color line. The exceptionally strong black/white color line in marriage summarizes the three main features of racial differentiation in American society. The color line is linked to high degrees of racial prejudice, it is the natural outcome of strong patterns of residential and school segregation, and it is in part the heritage of a long history of racial inequality in the economic sphere. Nonetheless, racial endogamy is more than simply a reflection of prejudice, segregation, and

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inequality. It also indicates that relationships between blacks and whites are troublesome in the social sphere. Because racial endogamy is a direct indicator of how social interaction in society is structured, it probably comes closest to the Weberian notion of status group closure and, as such, provides important insights into the nature of contemporary race relations (Gordon 1964).

After an upsurge of scholarly interest in racial intermarriage during the late 1960s and 1970s, the number of studies examining black/white intermarriage declined quickly.¹ A vast amount of research is currently being done on the demography of blacks, on racial segregation, and on income and employment differences between blacks and whites, but despite its earlier prominence as an indicator of race relations, intermarriage seems to be low on the present academic agenda. Several studies have examined trends in racial attitudes to assess how blacks and whites accept each other in primary and secondary relationships, but because these measures lack a behavioral component, they leave us with doubts about how things have changed in practice. Some researchers have argued, for example, that shifts in racial attitudes merely reflect a modern commitment to the social norm that people should not be judged on their skin color, without an actual decrease in the social distance that blacks and whites maintain towards each other (Feagin 1991). Intermarriage data permit a significant addition to this line of research, because they are based on a fundamental behavioral choice that involves both races, rather than on individual beliefs and opinions expressed to uninvolved interviewers. In the present study, I reexamine if and how the racial boundary has changed by examining the incidence and nature of black/white intermarriage in annual marriage license data for 33 states from 1968 to 1986.

There are several reasons to expect that black/white intermarriage has increased in this period. First, in 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court declared an antimiscegenation law in Virginia to be unconstitutional, thereby lifting all remaining legal restrictions on racial intermarriage. Second, the racial gap in income, education, and occupation has narrowed considerably since the early 1960s (Farley 1977; Farley & Allen 1989). Third, survey data suggest that there has been a steady decline in white prejudice against blacks (Firebaugh & Davis 1988; Schuman, Steeh & Bobo 1985). Although these changes presumably encouraged intermarriage, we have seen several countertrends during the 1980s, especially in the economic sphere. Black unemployment has risen sharply in comparison to that of whites (Freeman & Holzer 1986), part of the black income gain of the 1960s and 1970s has been lost (Bound & Freeman 1989), and the black/white gap in college enrollment has widened again since the late 1970s (Hauser 1991). How the social boundary between blacks and whites has changed since the 1967 Supreme Court decision thus remains an open question.

In response to the more recent turnaround, several authors have characterized contemporary racial inequality in terms of class. In particular, Wilson (1980, 1987) has argued that we now have a sizable black middle class that is more economically secure than before, as well as a possibly growing black lower class for whom economic gains have been limited. Although the validity of Wilson's assessment remains an object of discussion, his argument does suggest that it is important to examine how the role of class or status has changed in the social domain of American race relations. Previous research has

shown that status selection plays a somewhat peculiar role in racial intermarriage (Heer 1974; Schoen & Wooldredge 1989). Most mixed marriages involve black males rather than black females. White women who marry black men tend to marry up in status more than when they marry white men. Upward mobility of white women in mixed marriages — what is called “status hypergamy” — has traditionally been interpreted as a sign that crossing the racial boundary is conditional on an exchange of racial caste prestige and socioeconomic prestige (Davis 1941; van den Berghe 1960). Assuming this interpretation is valid, the link between racial endogamy and status mobility in marriage provides an alternative indicator of how the significance of race has changed over time. If the social distance between blacks and whites has become smaller, we would expect that the traditional pattern of mixing conditional on status is beginning to disappear. Has a possible increase in the incidence of interracial marriage been matched by a shift toward a pattern of “unconditional boundary crossing”? The basic aims of this study are (1) to document how the annual incidence of black/white marriage has changed since 1967, and (2) to describe how the interaction between race, gender, and status has changed in that period.

Black/White Intermarriage in the Past

Even though racial intermarriage has always been rare, anecdotal evidence shows that during the slavery period, sexual contacts between blacks and whites were not uncommon (e.g., Williamson 1980). Interracial contacts varied from black women and white men temporarily living in concubinage, to rape of female slaves by white slave owners. Early sociologists such as Wirth, Goldhamer, and Reuter tried to measure the extent of racial mixing by examining the size of what was then called the mulatto population. They observed a rapid growth of the number of mulattos relative to the number of blacks since the 1850s and tentatively concluded that miscegenation was on the rise (Reuter 1931; Wirth & Goldhamer 1944).² Although the mixing of blacks and whites in this period may have been common, it was consistent with a system of extreme racial inequality and strong antiblack prejudice (van den Berghe 1967). Because the dominance of the white majority was stable, clearly defined, and heavily protected by institutional arrangements, whites generally had little fear of interacting with blacks in the more intimate social sphere.

When slavery was abolished, the gradual decline in formal inequality of blacks and whites went hand in hand with a growing anxiety about the social boundary between the races. Several observers at the time noted increasing attempts by whites to keep the races separate in the social sphere (e.g., Myrdal 1944). Following Bogardus's conceptions of social distance (1925), Myrdal also noted that within the social sphere, anxiety between the races was stronger when the contact was more intimate. Interracial dating and marriage were condemned with great vigor, and strong social norms emerged against interracial contacts with possible erotic undertones, such as interracial dancing and swimming. The “no social equality” doctrine was formalized in legislation that segregated the races in public facilities (Jim Crow laws) and legislation that

controlled their sexual and marital contacts (antimiscegenation laws). In the first half of this century, antimiscegenation laws were in place both in and outside the South, though sanctions were generally most severe in states with the largest black populations (Wirth & Goldhamer 1944). Attempts to separate the races were reinforced by the emergence of the "one-drop rule," a new system of race classification that socially and legally defined all mixed children as black (Davis 1991).

Consistent with the doctrine of "no social equality," scholars observed very low rates of black/white intermarriage after the abolition of slavery. For example, studies in major cities around the turn of the century all found that less than 1% of all black marriages involved a white person (Drachler 1921; Panunzio 1942; Wright 1912). Empirical research in the 1960s and 1970s suggests that not much has changed since then. Heer's (1974) analysis of the 1970 census showed that the percentage of black marriages that involved whites was less than 1%. Monahan's (1976a) analysis of marriage license data for 35 states showed that the percentage of black marriages that were mixed reached 2.6% in the late 1960s. The major reason why these estimates differ is that Monahan considers marriages that were contracted at a certain point in time, whereas Heer considers the stock of marriages, which reflects both past degrees of intermarriage and differential attrition through mortality and divorce. Nevertheless, both numbers are fairly low and do not reveal any important change since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Social scientists have tried to acquire additional insights into the racial boundary by analyzing the mixed marriages that do occur. Two important empirical regularities can be found in almost every study. First, most mixed marriages are between black men and white women rather than between black women and white men. The percentage of mixed marriages that involve black males ranges from 64% in the 1970 census (Heer 1974) to 78% in vital statistics in the late 1960s (Monahan 1976a). From a historical perspective, these findings are atypical. During slavery, sexual liaisons between white men and black women apparently were common, but intimate relationships between black men and white women were strongly disapproved of. Public sentiment in that period revealed an unambiguous double standard: the white majority strived to protect the "purity" of white motherhood, without seriously restricting white men's sexual behavior. The pattern in more recent times is the opposite: the once strongly prohibited relationships between black men and white women are now the dominant kind of mixing, whereas relationships between white men and black women are exceptional, at least in the form of marriage. A second factor consistently associated with intermarriage is social class or status. Black outmarriage becomes gradually more common when moving up the occupational scale (Wirth & Goldhamer 1944; Burma, Cretser & Seacrest 1970; Monahan 1976b), and outmarriage is more common among higher educated blacks than among lower educated blacks (Bernard 1966; Heer 1974; Schoen & Wooldredge 1989). Among whites, these patterns are more or less reversed (Bernard 1966; Heer 1974).

Most authors have interpreted the link between status and race from a social exchange perspective (Davis 1941; Merton 1941; van den Berghe 1960; Heer 1974). It is believed that white women are more likely to marry a black

spouse when it allows them to marry a man with high socioeconomic prestige. Upwardly mobile black men are believed to have an incentive of marrying a white spouse because society at large is more likely to grant them the prestige that belongs to their status position when they intermarry. Assuming that married men and women benefit from the status characteristics of their spouse, a marriage between a white woman and a black man can be seen as a relationship in which the "racial caste prestige" of the wife is exchanged for the socioeconomic prestige of the husband. Although this interpretation has been challenged on theoretical grounds, observed status patterns in mixed marriages are consistent with the hypothesis. Black men are more likely to marry down in education when they marry a white woman than when they marry a black woman, and white women are more likely to marry up in education when they marry a black man than when they marry a white man (Heer 1974). In addition, Schoen and Wooldredge (1989) have shown that these patterns persist after controlling for aggregate educational differences between race-sex groups. The theory also offers a possible interpretation of why most mixed unions involve black males rather than black females. Although in principle one could reverse the exchange (e.g., black middle-class women could marry lower class white men) under conditions of traditional sex-roles, this type of marriage is believed to be uncommon because of the presumed tendency of men not to marry women who have a higher social status than they do. Because white women are more likely to marry black men if they are to gain socioeconomic prestige, the few interracial marriages that do occur confirm rather than contradict the traditional prestige hierarchy based on race. Race boundaries are crossed sporadically, and when they are, they are conditional on status considerations.

Marriage License Data

Previous analyses of black/white intermarriage are often hampered by the rarity of such unions. Given that about one in every 1,000 marriages is interracial (at least in 1970), one would need a sample of more than 100,000 marriages to find 100 mixed couples. If the aim is to examine year-to-year fluctuations in the incidence and nature of black/white intermarriage, census and survey data are of little use. The present study follows the approach of Monahan (1976a) by analyzing data from marriage certificates, i.e., the form that marriage candidates fill out when they apply for a marriage. Although states independently determine the form and content of their vital statistics, in 1955 most states adopted the so-called standard certificate of marriage. Data from participating states are assembled every year by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and samples are made available to the general public in machine readable form (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1980). Apart from the large samples they provide — the number of marriages in my sample is about 7 million — vital statistics have two other advantages. First, all characteristics are known for brides and grooms and information is provided by both spouses rather than through spouse reports, as is done in most surveys. Second, the data refer to marriages that were contracted in a given year rather than to the stock of marriages that is present at some point in time. This

approach ensures that we focus on characteristics at the time of marriage, and it eliminates problems that may arise from selective attrition of marriages through mortality and divorce.

Vital statistics also have several well-known disadvantages. First, information on the standard certificate of marriage is limited to a few basic demographic characteristics such as age, race, education, previous marital status, state of residence, and state or country of birth. Second, not all states report to the NCHS and not all reporting states include race on their marriage license. My sample is limited to 33 states that reported race in the entire period under consideration.³ These states cover 53% of the entire American population in 1980 and 60% of the black population. About half of all the marriages formed between 1968 and 1986 were contracted in the 33 states in my sample. Although the states are reasonably well dispersed over the U.S., some states with large black concentrations in urban centers, such as California, New York, and Texas are not included. While it is possible that trends in these areas are different, the sample does include several other urban areas with large black populations, such as Chicago and St. Louis in the Midwest, Philadelphia and Newark in the Northeast, and Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans in the South. Hence, the picture here is not exceptionally biased toward a suburban, possibly more affluent black population base. In comparison to previous research, the data I use are an improvement because all past studies, with the exception of Heer's and Monahan's analyses in the 1970s, are based on specific states, cities, or counties. Descriptive statistics of my sample are presented in Table 1.

Trends in the Incidence of Black/ White Intermarriage

The question about race on the marriage license is an open question. The NCHS classifies the responses into three racial groups: black, white, and other. A Hispanic response is coded as white while Asians and American Indians are coded as other (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1987).⁴ In Figure 1, I present the percentage of black women and men who marry whites. For comparative purposes, I also present the percentage of blacks marrying other races. Percentages are presented separately for the South and the remaining part and are weighted to state totals using the inverse of NCHS sampling proportions.⁵ Black/white intermarriage has increased rapidly since the late 1960s, and it has increased in both regions. In absolute terms, the trend for black grooms outside the South is most dramatic. The percentage of black men outside the South who marry a white woman is 3.9% in 1968 and greater than 10% in 1986. For black women outside the South, the levels are lower and the change is smaller, i.e., from 1.2% to 3.7%. In relative terms, the increase for black men in the South is also substantial, from .24% to 4.2%. Black women there, however, lag behind. In 1986, only 1.7% of them married white men.

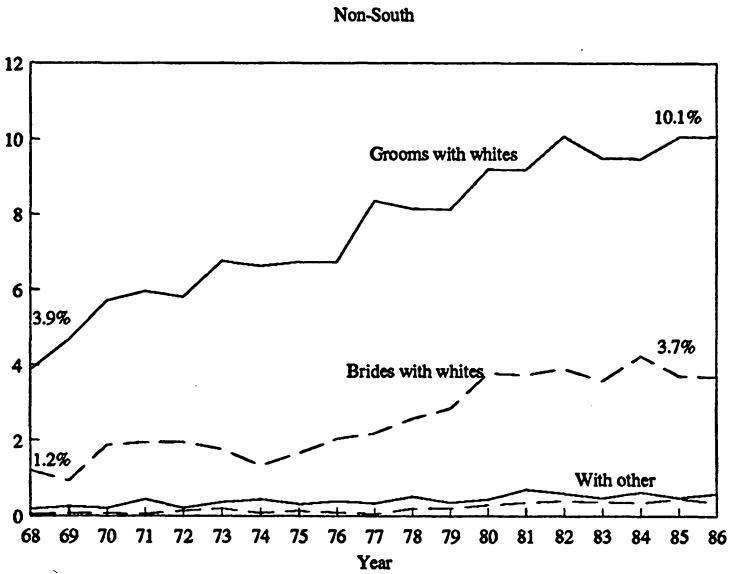
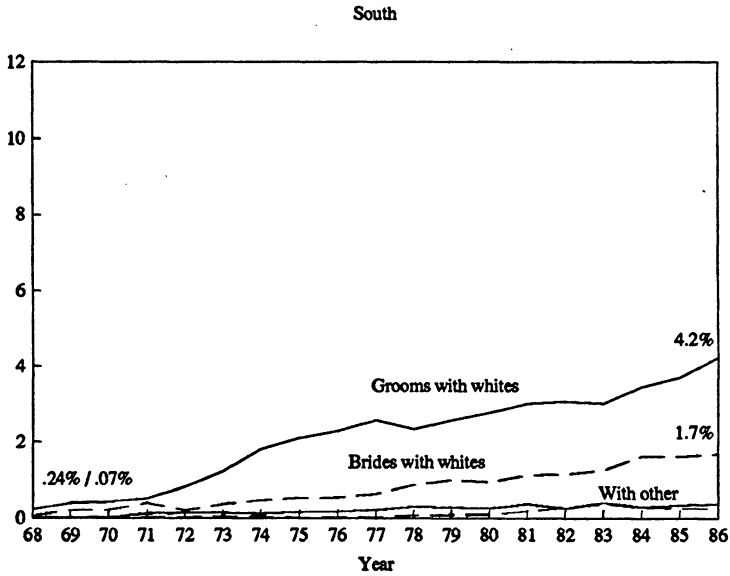
The percentages of whites marrying blacks reveal the same trend but are necessarily much lower. The percentage of white women marrying black men has increased from .050% to .861% in the South and from .245% to .787% outside the South. Trends for white men are similar but begin at a lower level, i.e., from .015% to .335% in the South and from .073% to .270% outside the

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Brides and Grooms: Percentages by Race, Sex, and Decade^a

| | White Grooms | | White Brides | | Black Grooms | | Black Brides | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | 1970s | 1980s | 1970s | 1980s | 1970s | 1980s | 1970s | 1980s |
| <i>Age at first marriage</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Younger than 20 | 21.0 | 12.8 | 43.9 | 29.8 | 15.3 | 6.3 | 35.9 | 18.2 |
| 20 to 24 | 54.2 | 48.4 | 44.2 | 47.0 | 50.4 | 43.0 | 41.6 | 44.1 |
| 25 to 29 | 17.2 | 27.1 | 8.3 | 17.1 | 20.2 | 29.8 | 13.0 | 23.2 |
| 30 to 34 | 4.2 | 8.0 | 2.0 | 4.0 | 6.6 | 11.9 | 4.3 | 8.4 |
| Older than 34 | 3.5 | 3.7 | 1.6 | 2.1 | 7.5 | 9.0 | 5.2 | 6.0 |
| Median | 22.0 | 23.0 | 20.0 | 21.0 | 23.0 | 25.0 | 21.0 | 23.0 |
| <i>Previous marital status</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Single | 68.4 | 62.2 | 69.0 | 62.5 | 74.5 | 70.6 | 77.2 | 73.2 |
| Divorced | 25.9 | 32.4 | 24.5 | 31.5 | 19.4 | 23.8 | 16.8 | 21.4 |
| Widowed | 4.2 | 3.3 | 5.0 | 3.7 | 4.1 | 2.9 | 4.2 | 3.0 |
| Unknown, not single | 1.4 | 2.1 | 1.6 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 2.6 | 1.8 | 2.4 |
| <i>Residence status</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Resident of marriage state | 83.1 | 85.9 | 87.3 | 89.1 | 85.9 | 87.0 | 88.4 | 89.6 |
| Resident of adjacent state | 11.0 | 8.6 | 9.1 | 7.1 | 10.0 | 8.7 | 9.3 | 7.7 |
| Resident of nonadjacent state | 5.9 | 5.6 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 2.4 | 2.7 |
| <i>Nativity status</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Born in marriage state | 57.6 | 55.4 | 62.0 | 58.6 | 61.3 | 58.1 | 67.4 | 64.6 |
| Native born outside marriage state | 38.3 | 38.9 | 34.2 | 36.5 | 35.8 | 34.3 | 30.7 | 30.6 |
| Foreign born | 4.1 | 5.6 | 3.8 | 4.8 | 2.9 | 7.7 | 2.0 | 4.7 |
| <i>Education</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Less than high school (4 years) | 24.9 | 19.4 | 26.6 | 20.5 | 34.4 | 23.0 | 32.6 | 19.7 |
| High school (4 years) | 40.0 | 41.1 | 43.1 | 42.3 | 42.3 | 45.6 | 41.7 | 41.9 |
| College (1 to 3 years) | 20.3 | 20.6 | 19.0 | 21.5 | 16.0 | 20.4 | 17.4 | 25.8 |
| College (4 or more years) | 14.8 | 18.9 | 11.4 | 15.7 | 7.2 | 11.0 | 8.3 | 12.6 |
| Average no. of years | 12.4 | 12.8 | 12.2 | 12.6 | 11.6 | 12.3 | 11.8 | 12.6 |

^a Based on 5% sample of white-white couples, 20% sample of black-black couples, and full sample of mixed couples. Numbers weighted to original unweighted counts and weighted to total state counts.

FIGURE 1: Percentage of Blacks Marrying Outside Racial Group by Sex, Region, and Year in 33 States

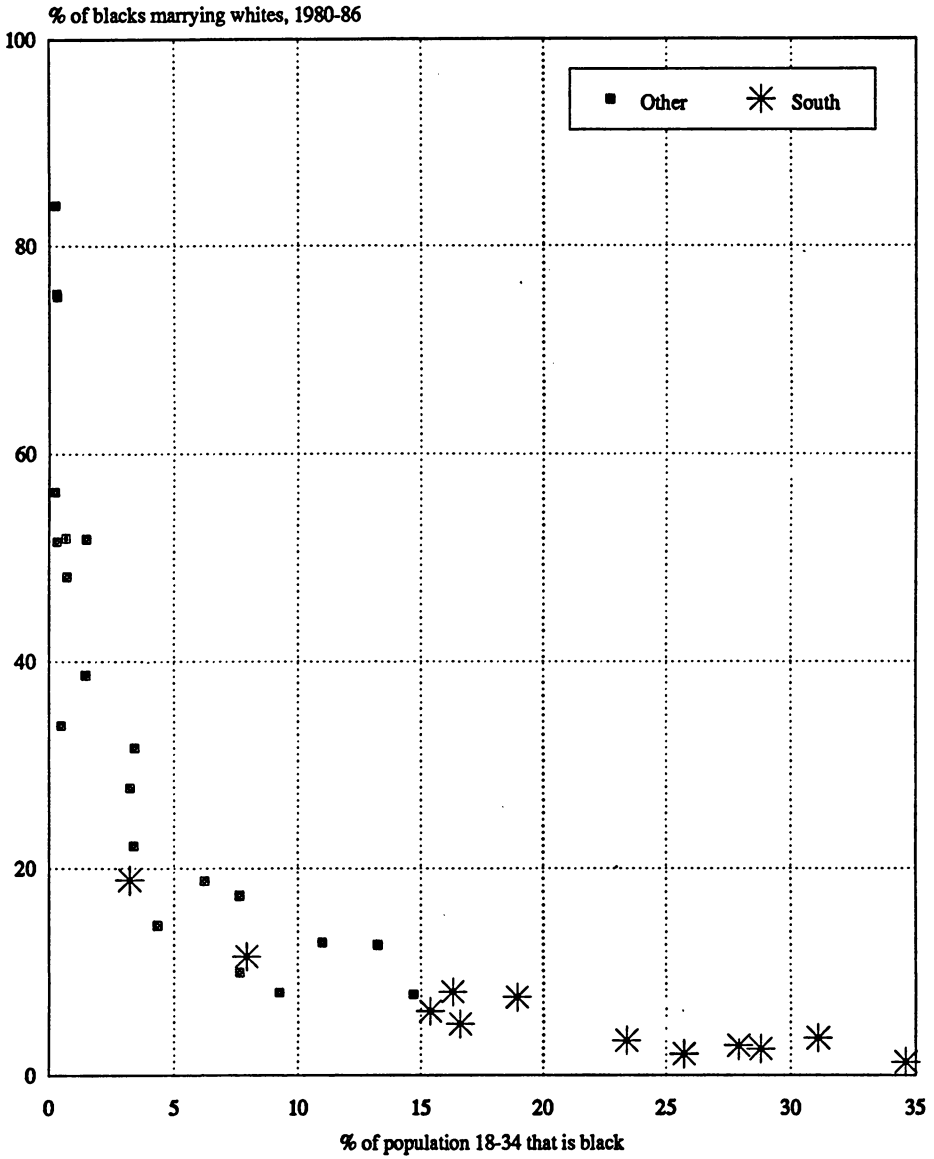


South. These percentages are low in an absolute sense, but note that the maximum level of intermarriage that is possible for whites lies somewhere in between 10% and 15%. Although these figures do not add information to Figure 1 (they are a direct function of black outmarriage and the ratio of blacks to whites), they do accentuate that the trends we observe are not as conspicuous in the white community as they are in the black community. Given that people's social circles tend to be racially homogeneous, it is generally more difficult for whites to notice interracial intermarriage than it is for blacks. In the most extreme case, a white person outside the South needs to know more than 370 grooms or more than 128 brides to discover that someone is marrying across the racial boundary, while a black person there needs to know only about 10 grooms or 27 brides to do so.

That the southern trend is nearly two decades behind that in the rest of the country is partly due to differences in population composition. Although the North does not have the southern legacy of slavery and its miscegenation laws, and even though racial attitudes there are generally more favorable (Firebaugh & Davis 1988), blacks in the north also have fewer opportunities to marry within their group than blacks in the South. In Figure 2, I present the percentage of blacks marrying whites in a given state during the 1980s and the percentage of the marriage age population in a state that is black (using 1980 census data).⁶ Consistent with most previous accounts, the plot shows that there is a strong inverse relationship between relative group size and outmarriage: the smaller the proportion of blacks in a state, the greater the percentage of blacks who marry whites. The relationship is nonlinear, in the sense that outmarriage increases at a faster rate when the percentage of blacks declines. More importantly, the southern states do not seem to be outliers in this relationship, suggesting that the comparatively low southern levels of intermarriage in the 1980s are largely due to compositional factors.

In light of the long-term historical record, which more or less comes down to a steady low of 1% in the first six decades of this century, these trends reveal a remarkable recent change in race relations. Before we accept this conclusion, however, it is important to evaluate three factors that may underlie the trend: (1) increasing delays of marriage, (2) increases in education, and (3) increasing numbers of foreign-born whites, in particular Hispanic Americans. As is well known, the decline of marriage rates has been especially pronounced among blacks (Table 1; Espenshade 1985; Sweet & Bumpass 1987). These trends in part reflect increasing postponement of marriage, but they may also be the result of an increasing percentage of the population that never marries. Since late marriers are more likely to intermarry, it is possible that the trend in interracial marriage is due to the changing age composition of the couples in the sample. In addition, divorced blacks are more likely to intermarry than blacks who never married, suggesting that the increasing number of remarriages may also play a role. In Table 2, I present for each age group the percentage of blacks and whites who intermarry, while excluding those who married for the second time. Although intermarriage is more common among those who marry late, the increasing delays of marriage appear to have had little influence on the trend. When percentages are standardized for age, using the age composition from

FIGURE 2: Relative Group Size and Intermarriage in 33 States in the 1980s



1970 to 1974 as the standard, the trend in intermarriage is only slightly weaker than observed.

Although all age-specific intermarriage percentages have increased, the trends differ in strength by age. Whereas black teenage males were least likely to intermarry all through the 1970s, in the mid 1980s they intermarried more frequently than any other age group. At that time, black teenage males were also the ones who were least likely to marry in the first place. In a more general sense, this raises the question of whether the population we observe has become an increasingly special group. If the characteristics that lead to a postponement of marriage, and perhaps to an increase in nonmarriage as well, are also related to the chances of marrying outside the racial group, one would expect that those who do marry are increasingly likely to intermarry. Such a form of selection would lead to a more integrated picture than exists in the population as a whole. That the age pattern has changed somewhat over time is consistent with an argument about selection. If those who postpone marriage are the ones who are less likely to intermarry, those who still marry young will become more likely to intermarry, while those who marry late will become less likely to intermarry than before. It should be noted that the changing age pattern is primarily due to black teenage males and to the trends of the 1980s, whereas declines in marriage rates have occurred all through the period under consideration, and especially among black males in their early and mid-twenties (Mare & Winship 1991). It remains important, though, to emphasize that the trend we observe applies to blacks and whites who marry, and as such, does not reflect the possibly strengthening racial boundary among those who remain single.

Because higher-educated blacks are more likely to marry whites (e.g., Heer 1974), it is possible that the trend is due to an upward shift in educational composition. Data on education are available in 12 states, a sample that contains about a third of the original marriages.⁷ Consistent with all previous studies, the numbers in Table 3 show that higher-educated blacks are generally more likely to intermarry than lower-educated blacks, although the relationship is not entirely linear. Black college graduates are in fact less likely to intermarry than blacks with some college, though they still intermarry more frequently than black high school graduates. A common interpretation of these differences is that higher-educated blacks are embedded in settings such as colleges and white-collar occupations where the opportunities of meeting people within their race are more limited. In addition, social psychological research has shown that higher-status blacks tend to have a weaker sense of racial group identification than lower-status blacks, even though they have a more favorable evaluation of the characteristics of their group (Demo & Hughes 1990). Among whites, and especially white women, the pattern of educational differences is the mirror image of that among blacks: intermarriage declines with increases in educational attainment. Considering the well-known, though much debated fact that there is a strong positive correlation between education and intergroup tolerance in surveys (Davis 1982; Jackman & Muha 1984), the relatively low rates of intermarriage among college-educated whites are somewhat surprising. It should be recognized, however, that higher-educated whites also have fewer opportunities to mix with blacks than lower-educated whites. The more

TABLE 2: Percentage Marrying Outside Racial Group by Age and Period^a

| | 1970-74 | 1975-78 | 1979-82 | 1983-86 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>Black males</i> | | | | |
| Younger than 20 | 2.12 | 3.24 | 3.27 | 7.12 |
| 20 to 24 | 2.14 | 3.51 | 3.98 | 4.87 |
| 25 to 29 | 2.88 | 4.42 | 4.94 | 4.76 |
| 30 to 34 | 3.24 | 5.21 | 5.34 | 5.78 |
| Older than 34 | 3.31 | 3.74 | 4.21 | 6.32 |
| Total | 2.40 | 3.83 | 4.34 | 5.22 |
| Standardized | 2.40 | 3.72 | 4.10 | 5.43 |
| N | 77,112 | 133,886 | 164,468 | 179,823 |
| <i>Black females</i> | | | | |
| Younger than 20 | .39 | .63 | 1.39 | 2.02 |
| 20 to 24 | .84 | .96 | 1.66 | 1.97 |
| 24 to 29 | 1.28 | 1.44 | 2.13 | 2.14 |
| 30 to 34 | 1.36 | 1.34 | 2.49 | 2.48 |
| Older than 34 | .88 | 1.47 | 1.63 | 2.80 |
| Total | .72 | .97 | 1.75 | 2.12 |
| Standardized | .72 | .91 | 1.63 | 2.07 |
| N | 77,273 | 134,871 | 166,039 | 180,035 |
| <i>White males</i> | | | | |
| Younger than 20 | .05 | .07 | .13 | .23 |
| 20 to 24 | .07 | .11 | .20 | .26 |
| 25 to 29 | .18 | .20 | .28 | .30 |
| 30 to 34 | .29 | .44 | .39 | .41 |
| Older than 34 | .38 | .50 | .59 | .86 |
| Total | .10 | .15 | .23 | .31 |
| Standardized | .10 | .14 | .22 | .28 |
| N | 611,861 | 911,990 | 1,112,126 | 1,146,679 |
| <i>White females</i> | | | | |
| Younger than 20 | .26 | .36 | .35 | .51 |
| 20 to 24 | .33 | .56 | .58 | .65 |
| 25 to 29 | .66 | .79 | .93 | .93 |
| 30 to 34 | 1.04 | 1.26 | 1.16 | 1.55 |
| Older than 34 | .61 | 1.30 | 1.39 | 1.50 |
| Total | .33 | .52 | .58 | .73 |
| Standardized | .33 | .50 | .51 | .63 |
| N | 616,459 | 932,706 | 1,143,662 | 1,148,200 |

^a Based on first married persons in a sample for 33 states. Standardized rates based on period-age-specific rates and 1970-1974 age composition. Percentages weighted by NCHS sampling rates. Reported N's are unweighted. Male and female N's may differ because spouses may be in their second marriage. Persons marrying other races excluded.

important finding in Table 3 is that increases in outmarriage for both blacks and whites have occurred in all four educational groups. When we standardize intermarriage for education, using the educational composition from 1970 to 1974 as the standard, the trends are only slightly weaker than observed. This shows that the trend cannot be explained by a simple upward shift in education.

A third possible explanation lies in the rapidly growing number of people from Hispanic origins. Although blacks have more opportunities for social interaction with non-Hispanic whites than with Hispanic whites, simply because of the relatively small size of the Hispanic population, these contact opportunities have increased in response to the growth of the Hispanic population (Massey & Denton 1987). Has intermarriage between blacks and Hispanic whites taken a growing share of the pool of black/white marriages? Although my sample does not include states where most Hispanics live (California, Texas, New York, New Mexico), it still covers about 20% of the Hispanic population in 1980. Unlike the census form, the marriage certificate does not contain a question on Hispanic origin. However, it does ask about people's country of birth. Since about one in three Hispanics in the 1980s is born abroad (Bean & Tienda 1987), the percentage of blacks marrying foreign-born whites surely underestimates the *number* of black/Hispanic couples at any point in time.⁸ The distinction is still useful, however, for evaluating whether the *trend* is affected by the growing number of Hispanic Americans. A focus on foreign-born whites is also relevant because earlier studies of interracial marriage have shown that in the first half of this century, mixing between blacks and European immigrants was relatively common (Wirth & Goldhamer 1944). This was partly due to the historic shortage of female immigrants, but has also been linked to more favorable racial attitudes among newcomers in American society.

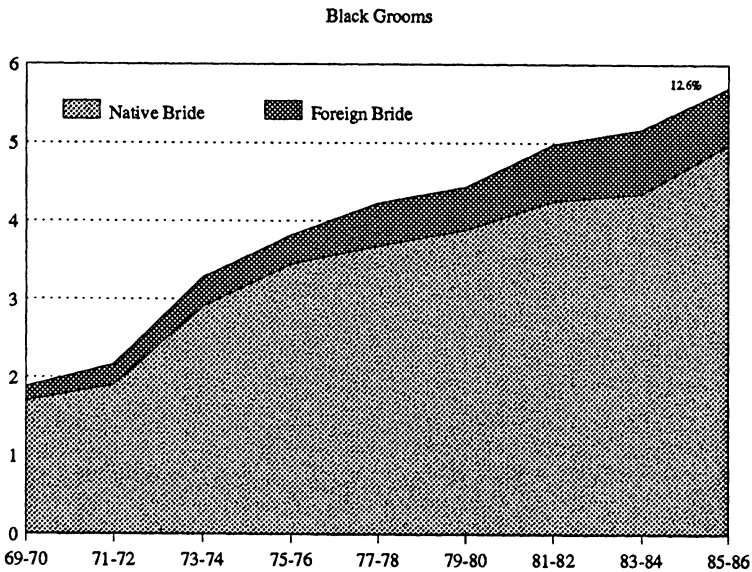
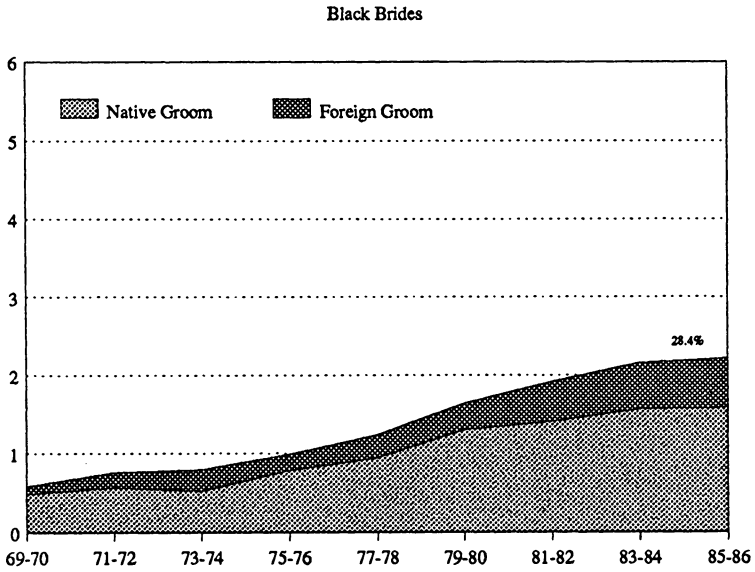
The density chart in Figure 3 presents the percentage of black grooms marrying white brides who are native born and the percentage of black grooms marrying white brides who are foreign born.⁹ The same data are presented for black brides. The figure for males shows that only a small percentage of the intermarried black men married a foreign-born white. Although these findings provide a conservative estimate of the share of black/Hispanic marriages in all mixed marriages, they do not suggest that Hispanics are responsible for the dramatic increase in racial intermarriage. The situation is different for mixed marriages involving black women. Marriages with foreign-born white men constitute a sizable segment of these marriages and the size of this segment has increased. In 1986, 28% of black women who intermarried married a foreign-born white. This figure shows that the type of racial exogamy that is already the least common — that involving black women — is to a large extent a matter of mixing with foreign-born whites. More importantly, when we focus only on mixed couples in which the white man is native born, the trend is not that impressive. In conclusion, it seems that the rapidly increasing Hispanic population in American society may play an important role in the already less significant trend for black women. Microdata from the 1990 census are needed to measure the marriage boundary between blacks and white Hispanic Americans directly.¹⁰

TABLE 3: Percentage Marrying Outside Racial Group by Education and Period^a

| | 1970-74 | 1975-78 | 1979-82 | 1983-86 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>Black males</i> | | | | |
| Less than high school (4 years) | 1.51 | 3.03 | 3.62 | 4.57 |
| High school (4 years) | 1.93 | 3.68 | 3.61 | 4.64 |
| College (1 to 3 years) | 2.79 | 4.95 | 5.38 | 6.67 |
| College (4 or more years) | 2.78 | 4.55 | 4.94 | 5.66 |
| Total | 1.98 | 3.80 | 4.11 | 5.17 |
| Standardized | 1.98 | 3.72 | 3.97 | 4.99 |
| N | 15,952 | 28,927 | 37,128 | 39,194 |
| <i>Black females</i> | | | | |
| Less than high school (4 years) | .48 | .73 | .91 | 1.70 |
| High school (4 years) | .56 | .94 | 1.25 | 1.63 |
| College (1 to 3 years) | 1.17 | 1.06 | 1.50 | 2.23 |
| College (4 or more years) | .50 | 1.38 | 1.26 | 2.10 |
| Total | .63 | .94 | 1.24 | 1.87 |
| Standardized | .63 | .91 | 1.17 | 1.77 |
| N | 15,589 | 27,744 | 35,600 | 37,530 |
| <i>White males</i> | | | | |
| Less than high school (4 years) | .12 | .15 | .18 | .24 |
| High school (4 years) | .07 | .15 | .18 | .31 |
| College (1 to 3 years) | .06 | .08 | .14 | .30 |
| College (4 or more years) | .12 | .11 | .13 | .21 |
| Total | .09 | .13 | .16 | .27 |
| Standardized | .09 | .12 | .16 | .28 |
| N | 155,541 | 268,241 | 349,398 | 327,555 |
| <i>White females</i> | | | | |
| Less than high school (4 years) | .33 | .63 | .58 | .88 |
| High school (4 years) | .29 | .54 | .63 | .91 |
| College (1 to 3 years) | .26 | .52 | .51 | .71 |
| College (4 or more years) | .20 | .31 | .40 | .56 |
| Total | .28 | .52 | .56 | .78 |
| Standardized | .28 | .53 | .56 | .82 |
| N | 155,638 | 269,185 | 350,754 | 329,085 |

^a Based on first marriages in a sample for 12 states. Standardized rates based on period-education-specific rates and 1970-74 educational composition. Percentages weighted by NCHS sampling rates. Reported *N*'s are unweighted. Differences between male and female *N*'s are due to incomplete reporting of education. Persons marrying other races excluded.

FIGURE 3: Density Chart of Blacks Marrying Whites by Nativity of Spouse



In sum, the boundary between blacks and whites has become clearly more permeable over the last two decades. It is important to emphasize, however, that in spite of this trend, the current levels of black/white intermarriage remain low in comparison to other forms of interracial or interethnic marriage, such as Hispanic American marriage (Gurak & Fitzpatrick 1982; Schoen 1986) and even Asian-American marriage (Jiobu 1988). Trends are in the same direction and of similar magnitude when we standardize for age and education, suggesting that black gains in education and marriage delays cannot explain the trend. That trends are more pronounced for black men is somewhat surprising considering the current state of the marriage market for blacks. Several authors have noted that the supply of eligible (i.e., employed) black males has deteriorated over the last decades. While some believe this is the major cause of the decline of marriage among black women (Wilson 1987), it may also have induced black women to search outside their traditional marriage pool. Moreover, if we believe that the marriage market for black women has deteriorated, the marriage market for *eligible* black men must have improved because a large part of their competition has "dropped out of the market." Eligible black men have experienced little demographic pressure to marry whites, but it is precisely their intermarriage rates that have increased so sharply. Black women, on the other hand, find it increasingly difficult to find a suitable black spouse, but their intermarriage rates have not increased substantially.

Trends in the Nature of Black/ White Intermarriage

Previous studies have shown that white women make greater status gains when they marry outside their racial group, suggesting that white tolerance of blacks in the intimate sphere of the family is to some extent conditional upon status considerations (Heer 1974; Schoen & Wooldredge 1989). If the social distance between blacks and whites has become smaller, as suggested by the rapid increase in intermarriage, we would expect that the traditional pattern of mixing conditional on social status has made way for a modern pattern of mixing that is not dependent on status attributes. I examine these issues by analyzing cross-classifications of brides' and grooms' education and race. Education is a reliable predictor of long-term economic well-being and functions as a salient proxy for future socioeconomic status in the process of spouse selection. One way of assessing the tendency for women to marry up in status is to measure hypergamy ratios, i.e., the ratio of the number of women marrying up in terms of education to the number marrying down. While hypergamy ratios provide a meaningful summary of asymmetric selection tendencies, they strongly depend on sex differences in educational attainment. For example, white men are on average better educated than white women, which would lead to a pattern of status hypergamy. Black men, on the other hand, are on average less well educated than black women, which may explain why black women marry down in education more often than up.

A possible way of looking at patterns of status hypergamy independent of such compositional effects is through loglinear models of quasi-symmetry

(Bishop, Fienberg & Holland 1989). Table 4 presents the cross-classification of bride's and groom's education and race. If X_h is the man's education, Y_i is the woman's education, U_j is the man's race, and V_k is the woman's race ($j = k = 1$ when white, and $j = k = 2$ when black), a loglinear model for the $4 * 4 * 2 * 2 = 64$ expected cell counts F_{hijk} can be defined as follows:

$$\log F_{hijk} = \lambda + \lambda_h^X + \lambda_i^Y + \lambda_j^U + \lambda_k^V + \lambda_{hj}^{XU} + \lambda_{ik}^{YV} + \delta_{hi}^w + \delta_{hi}^b + \delta_{hi}^{wb} + \delta_{jk} \quad (1)$$

where

$$\delta_{hi}^w = \delta_{ih}^w \text{ if } h \neq i \text{ and } j = k = 1 \text{ (0 otherwise),}$$

$$\delta_{hi}^b = \delta_{ih}^b \text{ if } h \neq i \text{ and } j = k = 2 \text{ (0 otherwise),}$$

$$\delta_{hi}^{wb} = 1/2 (\delta_{hi}^w + \delta_{hi}^b) \text{ if } j \neq k, \text{ and } \delta_{jk} = \delta_{kj} \text{ if } j \neq k \text{ (0 otherwise).}$$

The model takes into account compositional effects by adjusting for the marginal educational distributions of the four groups. The λ_h^X and λ_i^Y parameters adjust for the marginal distributions of groom's and bride's education, the λ_j^U and λ_k^V parameters adjust for the marginal distribution of groom's and bride's race, and the λ_{hj}^{XU} and λ_{ik}^{YV} parameters adjust for the association between race and education for grooms and brides respectively.¹¹ The model of quasi-symmetry assumes that even though row and column marginals may be different, the association in the table that remains is symmetric. Racial endogamy is modelled by a single parameter that describes the boundary between whites (j) and blacks (k) in terms of an odds ratio, $\exp(\delta_{jk}) = (F_{jj}/F_{jk}) / (F_{kj}/F_{kk})$ which is defined as the ratio of the odds that whites marry whites to the odds that blacks marry whites (or vice versa). The symmetric association between spouses' education is modelled by δ_{hi} parameters that describe the log odds ratio in each 2×2 subtable of educational groups h and i separately, $\exp(\delta_{hi}) = (F_{hh}/F_{hi}) / (F_{ih}/F_{ii})$. In combination, these odds ratios fully describe the symmetric part of the association between grooms' and wives' education. I allow the association parameters to be different for blacks and whites — as shown in model 1 — because we know from previous studies that blacks marry less homogamously with respect to education than whites (Spanier & Glick 1980). The odds ratios in mixed couples, δ_{hi}^{wb} , are assumed to be the geometric mean of the odds ratios in black-black couples and the odds ratios in white-white couples. What the model essentially does is to "match up" the mixed couples based on the marginal distributions of blacks and whites and the average level of homogamy for blacks and whites. In other words, I assume that there is nothing "special" about mixed couples except that they are composed of one white and one black spouse. Deviations from this pattern will then reflect if and to what extent these couples are in fact different.

To measure hypergamy, I compare observed hypergamy ratios with hypergamy ratios expected under model 1. Because expected hypergamy ratios under quasi-symmetry only arise from differences in marginal distributions, and not from asymmetric selection, they are an appropriate point for comparison. A

TABLE 4: Cross-Classification of Bride's and Groom's Education and Race: First Marriages, 1970-86^a

| | White Bride | | | | Black Bride | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------|------|-------------|---------|-------|-----|
| | < 12 | 12 | 13-15 | 16+ | < 12 | 12 | 13-15 | 16+ |
| <i>White groom's education</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Less than 12 years | 11.0 | 6.7 | .9 | .1 | 9.6 | 7.6 | 1.7 | .6 |
| 12 years | 8.7 | 23.9 | 6.3 | 1.6 | 6.0 | 23.3 | 12.2 | 2.3 |
| 13 to 15 years | 1.4 | 7.7 | 9.9 | 3.3 | 1.8 | 6.3 | 8.8 | 2.4 |
| 16 or more years | .2 | 2.4 | 5.3 | 10.6 | .6 | 4.0 | 5.8 | 7.0 |
| Total | | 100.0 | | | | 100.0 | | |
| N | | 1,065,651 | | | | 1,653 | | |
| <i>Black groom's education</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Less than 12 years | 10.2 | 7.3 | 1.5 | .4 | 13.4 | 9.9 | 1.9 | .3 |
| 12 years | 9.0 | 25.7 | 7.0 | 2.9 | 10.5 | 26.8 | 8.2 | 2.3 |
| 13 to 15 years | 3.3 | 9.5 | 9.1 | 3.1 | 1.6 | 5.9 | 7.7 | 2.7 |
| 16 or more years | .3 | 2.2 | 3.5 | 5.2 | .2 | 1.4 | 2.6 | 4.7 |
| Total | | 100.0 | | | | 100.0 | | |
| N | | 5,443 | | | | 145,739 | | |

^a Percentages weighted by NCHS sampling rates. *N*'s are unweighted.

somewhat worrisome aspect of this type of analysis is that it treats the observed marginal distributions in the marriage table as a measure of the composition of the marriage market. While it is difficult to define the marriage market in a satisfactory empirical fashion, it is nonetheless clear that those who did not yet marry contributed to the composition of the market. Within the context of loglinear models, this problem can be overcome to some extent by adjusting the marriage tables to a set of marginal distributions that capture the entire population at risk of marrying in a given period.¹² This approach does not address the problem of different numbers of men and women in the population, nor does it provide a model of the probabilities of marrying. It does improve, however, upon earlier applications of loglinear models by using a more reasonable set of marginals as measures of the composition of the marriage market.

In practice, I fit model 1 on both the observed and the adjusted table. Counts for the adjusted table are obtained by iteratively adjusting the row and column totals of the original multinomial to a table that matches the relative educational distributions for each race-sex group in the population in the appropriate years. This method is known as the Deming-Stephan algorithm and has previously been applied to marriage tables by McFarland (1975). Population data are obtained from the annual March *Current Population Surveys* and are limited to the married and never married population between the ages of 16 and 34. The loglinear models are estimated by maximum likelihood methods

using the Newton-Raphson algorithm. Since the sample size is large — the unweighted N is about 1.2 million — I abstain from presenting measures of fit and test statistics. Data are weighted using the inverse of NCHS sampling proportions so that the findings are representative of the full sample of marriages in the 12 states. The analyses are limited to first marriages, i.e., couples in which both spouses marry for the first time, mainly because educational homogamy tends to differ according to marriage order (Jacobs & Furstenberg 1986). Divorced and separated persons are not included in the population data.

For each of the four types of racial combinations (white-white, black-black, black-white, and white-black), I compare the ratio of the number of women marrying up to the number of women marrying down as observed in the marriage table, to that ratio expected under the model of quasi-symmetry (Table 5). Observed ratios are presented in the first row, expected ratios are presented in the second row, and expected ratios based on tables adjusted for population composition are presented in the third row. Initially, I focus on hypergamy in the entire period under consideration (the first column). In white-white couples, we see that women marry up in education about 35% more often than they marry down, which is evidence of status hypergamy. Expected ratios, however, show that this is more or less what we would expect given the composition of the marriage market. Nonetheless, the hypergamy we observe is somewhat more prevalent than expected, in particular when we compare the observed ratio with the adjusted expected ratio. Hence, the tendency for women to marry up in education can not entirely be explained by their overall educational disadvantage in the marriage market. In black-black couples, we see the reverse pattern. Black women in these couples marry down 13% more often than they marry up, which is evidence of reverse status hypergamy, or what is sometimes called *status hypogamy*. Expected hypergamy ratios, however, show that when selection would have been symmetric, we would also expect to see systematic “downmarrying” for black women. In other words, the observed tendency for black women to marry down in education stems largely from the fact that they are on average better educated than black men. Moreover, the adjusted expected ratio shows that we would expect even more downmarrying for black women than actually occurs. This suggests that once we control for population composition, black women in fact have a tendency to marry *up*, just as white women do.

The pattern in mixed couples is different. In the most common type of mixed marriages, those involving black males, we see that white women marry up 25% more often than they marry down. This ratio is in fact lower than that observed for white women who marry white men. When we look at the expected ratios, however, we do not see systematic “up marrying” for women. On the contrary, the expected ratios suggest that white women marry down more often than up in mixed-couple relationships. This expectation is understandable given that white women have an educational advantage over black men in the marriage market even though white women are not as well educated as white men. The implication is important: though the tendency for white women to marry up when they marry whites is largely due to gender-differences in educational attainment, their tendency to marry up when marrying black

TABLE 5: Observed Hypergamy Ratios and Expected Hypergamy Ratios under Loglinear Model of Quasi-symmetry

| Type of couple | All years | 1970-74 | 1975-78 | 1979-82 | 1983-86 |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>White male and white female</i> | | | | | |
| Observed | 1.348 | 1.662 | 1.437 | 1.190 | 1.056 |
| Expected (observed table) | 1.318 | 1.613 | 1.414 | 1.174 | 1.040 |
| Expected (adjusted table) | 1.263 | 1.191 | 1.428 | 1.418 | 1.007 |
| <i>Black male and black female</i> | | | | | |
| Observed | .872 | 1.064 | .921 | .797 | .691 |
| Expected (observed table) | .892 | 1.073 | .940 | .818 | .709 |
| Expected (adjusted table) | .782 | .832 | .781 | .794 | .714 |
| <i>Black male and white female</i> | | | | | |
| Observed | 1.252 | 1.249 | 1.405 | 1.292 | 1.131 |
| Expected (observed table) | .928 | 1.015 | 1.001 | .908 | .781 |
| Expected (adjusted table) | .716 | .753 | .672 | .763 | .651 |
| <i>White male and black female</i> | | | | | |
| Observed | .910 | 1.455 | .825 | .737 | .861 |
| Expected (observed table) | 1.289 | 1.659 | 1.354 | 1.094 | 1.000 |
| Expected (adjusted table) | 1.344 | 1.295 | 1.565 | 1.436 | 1.098 |

men is not. This supports the hypothesis that white women marry black men in part under the condition of socioeconomic status gains.

For couples in which the man is white and the woman is black, we observe the reverse pattern: here it is the men that marry up more often. This tendency cannot be explained by the marginal distributions because the expected ratios indicate that we would expect the women to marry up in these marriages. The untraditional status dominance of black women in mixed couples further confirms the argument that racial caste prestige and social status function as substitutes in the selection process. When we consider male status dominance in marriage as a traditional form of marriage, it thus appears that the most common type of racial mixing, that between black males and white females, is exceptional with respect to race but conventional with respect to status. Mixed marriages involving black females, however, are exceptional in a double way: they cross the race boundary, and they reverse the traditional male status dominance in marriage. Note that this pattern is only unusual from the perspective of the white men in these couples. For black women, marrying down is also common when they marry within their race.

When we compare the two sets of expected hypergamy ratios, we see that the adjusted expected ratios are generally lower than the unadjusted expected ratios. For example, the adjusted expected ratio for white-white couples shows

that there is less "upmarrying" than expected given the observed (i.e., unadjusted) marginal distributions. Similarly, the adjusted expected ratios for black-black couples and black-white couples reveal more downmarrying than the unadjusted expected ratios do. These differences are probably due to the fact that asymmetries in the row and column marginals of the marriage table partly arise from asymmetric selection tendencies themselves. For example, if women have strong tendencies to marry up, and if not all women marry, the educational attainment of males in the marriage table will be higher than that of females, even if there was no gender difference in educational attainment in the population. In other words, the expected ratios based on the observed marginals of the marriage table seem to predict too much upmarrying because they confound population composition and hypergamous selection tendencies. Nonetheless, comparisons of *observed* ratios with unadjusted expected ratios lead to the same substantive conclusions as comparisons with the adjusted expected ratios.

With regard to trends, we see that for white-white couples, the observed tendency for women to marry up has declined. Expected ratios reveal the same trend, suggesting that the decline in hypergamy is due to a decline in gender differences in educational attainment. For black-black couples, we see an increasing tendency for black women to marry down. Expected ratios show the same trend, but in a somewhat stronger fashion. The convergence of observed and expected ratios reveal that the original tendency for black women to marry up more often than expected has declined. Again, the most common type of interracial marriage deviates from this pattern. In couples in which the man is black there is a persistent tendency for the white woman to marry up more often than expected. This conclusion is strengthened when we focus on the ratios expected on the basis of population composition. The adjusted expected ratios show that in the early 1970s, hypergamy in black-white marriages is 66% greater than expected; in the mid 1980s, this number is 74%. On the basis of these analyses, we can conclude that the mixed marriages that have increased most, those occurring between black males and white females, have remained traditional in the sense that they still primarily occur when the white woman marries up in terms of socioeconomic status.

Alternative Interpretations

The interpretation of status hypergamy in mixed marriages rests on a series of assumptions that can in principle all be challenged. The first point of criticism concerns the assumption that people have an incentive to gain status through marriage. Status gains in marriage can be purely monetary, as in the "new home economic" approach to marriage, but they also include more social characteristics, such as prestige in the community, a comfortable life style, and access to social and cultural capital. The notion of marital mobility has traditionally been applied to women (e.g., Tyree & Treas 1974), but this limitation is not needed for the present argument. In fact, white men who marry black women also tend to be upwardly mobile. Because this goes against the traditional gender pattern in marriage, it provides a strong confirmation of the exchange

hypothesis. Nonetheless, it is clear that other aspects, such as cultural similarity, affection, and perhaps love, also play a role in the selection process. Qualitative studies in this area could provide better insights into the motives to intermarry, but so far, such studies have not provided helpful explanations of why blacks and whites marry each other, nor have they explained the status patterns observed above. Porterfield (1978), for example, finds that most black/white couples in his study married out of love and compatibility, probably just like what we would find for the average couple. Perhaps the most reasonable way to solve these issues is to see the selection process as something that works in stages. Status considerations determine the field of eligibles, and romantic or more personal characteristics govern the final pairing within these fields (Goode 1964).

Another point of criticism is that there are alternative explanations of why white women marry black men and why they marry up in status when they intermarry. For instance, one could argue that white women are generally more tolerant towards blacks than white men are. However, data from the General Social Survey (GSS) show that this is not the case (Davis & Smith 1991). The GSS periodically asks a random sample of the American population if they favor laws against marriages between blacks and whites. My analyses of the 1990 responses to this question indicate that 24% of white women favored these laws, while only 17.4% of white men did so ($N=754$). When we just focus on high school graduates, the difference is of a similar magnitude, 21.5% for women and 16.2% for men. Moreover, support for antimiscegenation laws is especially pronounced among lower-educated white women, which are precisely those who are most likely to intermarry (i.e., 55.6% for women who dropped out of high school, 21.5% for high school graduates, and 10.4% for women with some college). These data show that white women, and in particular those who are not well educated, have to overcome more cultural predispositions when they intermarry than white men. Status considerations may well become an offsetting factor in their decision to marry a black man.

A third point of criticism is that my analyses do not consider the opportunities blacks and whites have to meet in settings such as the school and the work place. The loglinear model only takes into account the overall marginal distributions and thus provides a rather limited description of what is going on in local marriage markets. If we regard colleges as a possible meeting ground for prospective brides and grooms, we would expect to see more interracial contact between black women and white men than between black men and white women. The college population has traditionally been characterized by a shortage of white women and black men (U.S. Department of Education 1989). Hence, white men and black women will have more difficulty in finding a sexual partner and possibly a spouse within their race in college than white women and black men. While the traditional shortage of white women in higher education has disappeared in the 1980s, the shortage of black men has become worse. The work place is another possible meeting ground for prospective spouses. Here, too, we do not see a pattern that favors mixing between black men and white women. When we focus on the single population, white men and black women are more likely to be working than either white women or black men (Farley & Allen 1987). Although these measures are rough indicators

of opportunities for interracial contact, they would not lead us to expect mixing to be most prevalent between black men and white women.

A final point to consider is that education may not have the same meaning for blacks as it has for whites. In this respect, the relationship between education and earnings is of particular importance. Most studies of racial income differences have shown that income returns to education are lower for black men than for white men (e.g., Farley 1977). Assuming status selection is based on people's financial prospects or socioeconomic position alone, these differentials could explain why black men marry down in education when they marry white women. Under these conditions, a male advantage in education in black/white marriages does not necessarily imply a male advantage in terms of income or occupational status. To put it more strongly, mixed marriages that are *hypergamous* with respect to education could in fact be *homogamous* with respect to status. While this argument deserves more serious attention in empirical research, it is not necessarily inconsistent with the interpretation offered here. If the reasoning is valid, the implication is that black males not only have to bring more educational resources to the labor market to acquire a job comparable to that of whites, they also need to bring more resources to the marriage market in order to acquire an "attractive" white spouse.

Conclusion

That intermarriage has increased since the late 1960s is not immediately surprising. First, the period we are looking at begins in 1968, which is one year after the U.S. Supreme Court declared a Virginia miscegenation law to be unconstitutional. The trend is further consistent with what several survey data have shown: a continuous decline in white prejudice against blacks (Firebaugh & Davis 1988; Schuman, Steeh & Bobo 1985). The apparent growth of social tolerance towards blacks may make the marriage seekers themselves less reluctant to intermarry, and it may make it easier for the unprejudiced to marry because of the weakening social norms against such marriages. The trend also agrees with the fact that residential segregation has declined in major cities and metropolitan areas during the 1970s and 1980s (Farley 1991; Massey & Denton 1987). Blacks and whites have had more opportunities to meet each other on a day-to-day basis in their communities, which has probably encouraged intermarriage as well. Finally, the occupational distributions of blacks and whites have become more similar over time (Farley & Allen 1987), suggesting that more blacks are now exposed to settings traditionally dominated by white workers. Although the direction of the trend seems plausible enough, what remains a puzzle is its magnitude. Survey data also make clear that the decline in prejudice is slow, qualitative studies have noted that antiblack prejudice persists, albeit in more subtle forms than traditionally (Feagin 1991), and changes in residential segregation have actually been rather modest. All these changes suggest that race remains a salient factor in American society. Why then has intermarriage increased so strongly?

The puzzle can partly be resolved when we consider how the nature of interracial marriage has changed. My analyses show that it is especially black

males for whom intermarriage has increased. In addition, when black men marry white women, these unions tend to involve high status black males and lower status white females. Moreover, the tendency for white women to be upwardly mobile in mixed marriages has remained fairly stable in the last two decades. It seems that even though the extent of boundary crossing has become more common, the nature of these marriages has remained traditional in the sense that racial caste prestige and socioeconomic prestige still function as substitutes in the selection process. In a more general way, this interpretation fits in with Wilson's notions about the interaction of race and class in American society. Wilson (1980, 1987) essentially argues that economic gains have been limited to middle-class blacks while the group of lower class blacks has increased in size and become more isolated from mainstream society. In Wilson's view, the growing economic divisions within the black community reveal that in so far as there has been a decline in the significance of race, it has been conditional on class. My study suggests that what Wilson shows for economic inequality also applies to the social domain of American race relations. In marriage selection, the salience of race remains closely linked to status considerations. While the color line in marriage seems to be fading, there has been no shift towards a pattern of what can be called unconditional boundary crossing.

An important task for future research is to assess racial boundaries in the population as a whole, regardless of marital status. Given the decline of marriage in the last decades, it is possible that the pool of newlyweds has become an increasingly select group. In the recent past, a range of factors has been proposed to explain these trends. One of these arguments focuses on the deteriorating economic position of young black men, and to a lesser extent, that of young white men. If the people that have been hurt most by the economic downturn of the 1980s are also the people that were least likely to intermarry, the picture we see in Figure 1 may be too optimistic. Although little can be done about this with data on marriage licenses alone, future work could focus on the race of parents on birth certificates. Racially mixed parentage is an alternative indicator of the degree to which blacks and whites interact in the intimate sphere, and as such, provides an additional way of measuring change in racial boundaries. A study of birth certificates would particularly be interesting in light of the increasing percentage of children that are born out of wedlock, a phenomenon that is especially pronounced in the black community (Smith & Cutright 1988).

Notes

1. The following empirical studies can be found in the social science literature (in chronological order): Du Bois 1899; Wright 1912; Drachler 1921; Panunzio 1942; Wirth and Goldhamer 1944; Golden 1953; Risdon 1954; Bernard 1966; Burma, Cretser, and Seacrest 1970; Glick 1970; Washington 1970; Aldridge 1973; Monahan 1970, 1973, 1976a, 1976b; Heer 1966, 1967, 1974; Porterfield 1978; Labov & Jacobs 1986; Schoen & Wooldredge 1989.

2. They were well aware of the limitations of this indicator: (1) it was difficult to determine the race of the parents from the skin color of the children, (2) it was difficult to rule out class biases in the classification practices of census enumerators, and (3) it was unknown to what extent blacks with light skin were passing as whites.

3. States included in my sample are: Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming. Two states that began reporting race to the NCHS in 1970 (Minnesota and South Carolina) are also included. Race reporting is generally sufficiently complete. In several states, missing data on race are greater than 10% for a few years (e.g., Illinois in the first four years, and Wyoming, Indiana, and Idaho in several years between 1968 and 1986).

4. For cases in which only one of the spouses states his or her race, the NCHS assigns the race of the spouse. This leads to a downward bias in recording racial intermarriage. After 1980, the NCHS stopped using this coding rule. Since in the years after 1980, only .2% to .4% of black marriages have missing data on the race of the spouse, the downward bias in years before 1980 will be negligible. Similarly, the trend will be understated in a minimal way.

5. The southern area is defined on the basis of the state of marriage (rather than residence), using census classification in regions. Southern states included in my sample are: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

6. For states with few blacks, such as Montana and Wyoming, the percentages in Figure 2 are based on the population for all age groups.

7. Based on the unweighted number of first marriages between 1970 and 1986. States that have continuous education data from 1970 to 1986 are Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wyoming.

8. The number may also be too low because the percentage of Hispanics who are foreign born varies from group to group, e.g., it is much lower for Mexican Americans than for others (Bean & Tienda 1987). On the other hand, we have to keep in mind that in the 1980s, about 60% of foreign-born whites are not Hispanic (Farley & Allen 1989).

9. My definition of foreign includes those born in Hawaii and outlying U.S. areas (Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and Guam).

10. Another factor that has compounded the racial setting in American society is the position of foreign-born blacks, most of whom come from the West Indies (Farley & Allen 1989). Because the sample does not include New York state, which is where about half of the foreign-born blacks live (Farley & Allen 1989), this is unlikely to affect the trend significantly. My analyses show that the trend is in fact stronger when we just focus on native born blacks (results available on request).

11. The conventional restrictions apply, i.e.,

$$\sum \lambda_h^X = \sum \lambda_i^Y = \sum \lambda_j^U = \sum \lambda_k^V = \lambda_{hj}^{XU} = \sum \lambda_{ik}^{YV} = 0.$$

12. An alternative solution is provided by Schoen's (1988) harmonic mean models.

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