Getting Real About Race

Hoodies, Mascots, Model Minorities, and Other Conversations

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Preface

Professors teaching introductory courses in race and ethnicity or “diversity” must not only communicate the long and complicated history, psychology, and sociology of these topics in just one semester but must also repeatedly respond to the myths and misperceptions of race that students bring with them into these courses. Some of these include the idea that race and racial classification systems are based on human biology or genetic variation; that systematic disenfranchisement by race ended with the culmination of the Civil War, the civil rights movement, or the election of the nation’s first Black president; or that evidence for the persistence of racial discrimination is difficult to establish or does not exist. In teaching these topics semester after semester, it can become difficult for professors to summon the patience and empathy needed to engage students in early stages of critical awareness, particularly given how often we hear the same misperceptions. Furthermore, for instructors who may be wary of broaching these questions and discussing them in the classroom, a text that places the latest research at their fingertips can lead to essential learning in an area of sociology often fraught with controversy and silence.

Drawing from our experience of teaching race for nearly 20 years, we believe professors would find it useful to have an engaging text that comprehensively and succinctly addresses the most common misconceptions about race held by students (and by many in the United States, in general). In this book, we have put together a collection of short essays that draw on the latest sociological research on these topics. It is a “one-stop-shopping” reader on the racial topics most often pondered by students and derived from their interests, questions, and concerns. Many scholars write on these topics in various places (e.g., journal articles, books, readers), but what is often lacking is a systematic deconstruction of specific, widely shared myths repeated often by students. Moreover, with other readers, the professor is left to pull out the key pieces of information in each reading, provide the additional supporting information to debunk a particular myth, and create a consistency in a format that is understandable to students. However, the concise and topic-specific, short-essay format we use here aims to facilitate quicker movement from acknowledging misperceptions about race to examining and discussing sociological evidence. Each of our contributors has also provided excellent
follow-up discussion questions for in-class work and suggested out-of-class activities that can help students apply their new knowledge to their everyday lives.

What we saw as necessary, and what drove us to put this collection together, is the work of “translation.” The information contained in these essays is available in many other places, and given our space constraints, we point to those outside sources at the end of each essay. What we saw happen in our own courses was that students often had difficulty connecting the primary text readings to the specific kinds of misinformation and misunderstanding they brought with them. We have tried to build a reader that speaks both languages—the language of the commonly held myths and the language of social science—so that the two are together in one book. Our contributors are those who have written books and articles on these topics or who have been “in the trenches” teaching these topics on a regular basis. As scholars who consistently cover these issues in the classroom and in their scholarship, they are well versed in the latest scholarly literature on controversial racial topics such as these.

The primary target audience for this text is lower level or introductory race and ethnicity or diversity courses, especially those in the core or general education curriculum. Courses of this kind are taught every semester in colleges and universities across the country; approximate class sizes are between 30 and 60 students. Other courses where this text might be useful include education courses, social psychology of race or racism courses, introduction to higher education courses, and ethnic studies courses.

Our hope is that this reader will make the work of translation less difficult for the many excellent instructors all across the country engaging these topics in their classes every semester.

Suggested Additional Resource

Putting together an edited volume is no small task and requires the assistance of many. As we were deciding on which topics would be covered, we sought the advice of treasured colleagues and friends who gave us the benefit of their many years of experience in the classroom. We would like to thank Nikki Khanna, Keisha Edwards Tassie, Michelle Petrie, Ronald J. O. Flores, Afshan Jafar, Michallene McDaniel, Kelly Manley, Victoria Bruce, Michael Ramirez, and E. M. “Woody” Beck for their input and support during the early stages of our project and for the sage advice and wisdom they offered along the way. We would also like to thank Eve Oettinger, David Repetto, Jeff Lasser, Lauren Johnson, Diane McDaniel, Judith Newlin, Nick Pachelli, and the rest of the team at SAGE who worked tirelessly to get this project off the ground and make our vision a reality.

This project is the product of teaching these topics to thousands of students in race and ethnicity courses over many years. In that time, we have witnessed and moderated many challenging discussions—discussions that remind us just how much there is left to know in this area and how important it is that instructors continue to do this difficult work, while having the tools to do so. We thank all of the students we have had over the years, as it is their questions and insights that fueled this anthology.

Finally, we would like to express our great appreciation and gratitude to the contributing authors for lending us their expertise and for writing essays that were better than we could have even hoped for when we first envisioned this project. We are honored and humbled to have you as colleagues and are beyond grateful for all you did to make this volume come to life.

Acknowledgments
PART I

Laying the Foundation
In spite of our hesitance to talk about them, racial myths permeate our social world. They are frequently present in the mass media and public discourse, as well as in our everyday conversations with each other. Perhaps in your dorm rooms, dining halls, workplaces, or on social media, you have heard a variation on the following statements:

- We have a Black president which means racism doesn’t exist anymore.
- We need to look out for “real Americans” first, not immigrants.
- Native American/Indian, Asian/Oriental, Latino/Hispanic. Why does it matter what we call them?
- Asian Americans are doing very well. If other racial groups had their values, they would do well also.
- I know a minority who got worse scores than me and he got into a better college!
- I’m in favor of interracial dating and marriage but the children from these unions suffer.
- I don’t know why people are so upset about team names like the Washington Redskins. It’s really just a way of honoring Native American culture.

These kinds of statements reflect a great deal of the conventional wisdom around race. We define conventional wisdom as the received body of knowledge informally shared by a group or society that is often unstated, internally inconsistent, and resistant to change. This conventional wisdom is full of racial myths and misunderstandings. In this reader, we look at common racial myths that we and many sociology professors and race scholars have heard from their students in race courses. In this essay, we will give you the tools with which to navigate this reader and introduce some key ideas and questions to help you navigate discussions about race both inside and outside of the classroom.

Early in our schooling, we learn a simplified history of America’s founding that ignores the significant levels of racial conflict and inequality that existed. For instance, it is often stated that America was founded on ideals of freedom and equality for all, an image which ignores the many groups who were excluded from that freedom and equality, namely people of color. We also tend to think that racial or ethnic strife happened sometime after that idealized founding. However, as sociologist Joe Feagin (2010) notes in his book, The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing, “Racial oppression was not added later on in the development of [U.S.] society, but was the foundation of the original colonial and U.S. social systems, and it remains as a foundation to the present day” (p. vii). Yet, there is still a tendency in American society to gloss over this history or in other ways minimize the import of race. We see this minimization in the present day, when political pundits and others in the media characterize our society as post-racial, asserting that race no longer determines one’s life chances or determines them to a far lesser extent than it once did.

Indeed, since the election of President Barack Obama, we have been hearing more and more that we have moved beyond race, despite much evidence to the contrary. To be sure, the election of the nation’s first Black president signaled a significant shift in the tenor of race relations in the United States. For this reason, you will see
PART III

Institutions, Policies, and Legacies of Oppression
CHAPTER 12

“Blacks Don’t Value Marriage as Much as Other Groups”

Family Patterns and Persisting Inequality

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Most social scientists agree that there have been tremendous changes in what sociologist Dorothy Smith (1993) coined the SNAF or Standard North American Family. This ideological concept refers to a married heterosexual man and woman who live together with their biological children under one roof. However, contemporary families exhibit a far wider range of forms and flexibility. Even a brief historical glimpse into media representation of families over time reflects these societal changes. In the 1980s, two of the most popular sitcoms were The Cosby Show and Family Ties, which reflected the lives of solidly middle-class Black and White families that fit the SNAF mold. What we formerly viewed as “the family” has transformed into a mosaic of configurations, including stepfamilies,
families raised by gay and lesbian couples, adoptive families, and interracial and interethnic unions, such as those represented in popular TV shows like *Modern Family* and *Grey’s Anatomy*.

By far, the most important demographic change in the social institution of marriage over the past 50 years or so is the dramatic decline in the prevalence of marriage. Roughly 72% of all Americans were married in 1960 but only slightly more than half (53%) of all Americans were married in 2008 (Pew, 2010). This decline was also demonstrated among Whites; seventy-four percent of Whites were married in 1960 but only 56% were married in 2008. Latinos exhibit similar patterns (72% and 50%, respectively). The marriage decline has been far steeper among Blacks than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States. Almost 61% of Blacks were married in 1960 but this figure dropped to 32% by 2008 (Pew, 2010). Blacks also experience higher divorce rates and lower remarriage rates than Whites (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Scholars and the public have understandably been concerned about the universal marriage decline. After all, marriage historically provides myriad benefits to families. Individuals who are married have better physical and mental health, more social integration, have higher household incomes, accumulate more wealth, and raise children with more positive health and social outcomes than those who are unmarried (Waite & Lehrer, 2003). Because the marriage decline has been most amplified among Blacks, greater scrutiny has been directed toward this group in an effort to understand the fundamental question, “Why aren’t more Black people married?” In part, this can be answered by looking at trends in marriage among Blacks over time.

The History of Black Marriage

The history of Black marriage in the United States is a complicated one. The transatlantic slave trade was initiated by European settlers in the early 17th century. During this process, White colonists captured, enslaved, and imported millions of Africans to the United States (among other places in the African Diaspora) in order to extract their free labor to aid in the agricultural and economic development of the new colonies. Because slavery was purely an economic system, African families were often forcefully separated from each other based on the labor and reproductive needs of plantation owners. Slaves were not considered citizens (or even fully human) and therefore were not legally eligible to marry. However, some plantation owners permitted their slaves to engage in symbolic Christian or African marriage ceremonies, often including rituals such as “jumping the broom.” After almost 250 years of bondage, the institution of North American slavery was finally abolished at the end of the Civil War in 1865. Slavery was immediately followed by the development of new economic systems during Reconstruction (1865–1877) and the social marginalization of Blacks that characterized the Jim Crow Era (1877–1965).

In his landmark book, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925*, historian Herbert Gutman analyzed an impressive array of data from sources such as birth records, census data, and marriage records from six large plantations. He concluded that during the period from 1850 to 1930, Black families were either
equally likely or more likely to reside in married-couple households than native-born Whites. Moreover, roughly three quarters of slave unions were legally formalized after manumission (Gutman, 1977). Although recent work has suggested more modest marriage rates during this time, these data also show that at least half of Blacks were married between 1880 and 1940 (Ruggles, 1994). Taken together, these findings prove the unmistakable value that most Blacks placed on forging marital bonds both during and after slavery.

Influential scholars of Black family life have rightfully pointed out the historical strengths of Black families including the incorporation of extended family members, strong biological and fictive kinship bonds, and flexible and egalitarian family roles, among other characteristics (Hill, 2003, 2005; Stack, 1974). Newer research suggests that historically abundant and supportive Black family networks have been partially eroded due to structural factors such as deindustrialization caused by globalization (and the ensuing flight of blue collar jobs to developing countries), the disincentive to marry under mid-1990s welfare reform, and the War on Drugs, all of which primarily targeted people of color (Roschelle, 1997).

Marriage is a fundamental mechanism underlying health and social inequities, a major point that students begin to recognize in my courses. When asked to brainstorm about the factors underlying the contemporary Black marriage decline, one student will inevitably declare that, “Black people don’t value marriage as much as Whites,” a simple statement that echoes the sentiments of many scholars, policymakers, and the media. In other words, the assertion is that Blacks have certain cultural beliefs that devalue the importance of marriage to individuals, families, and the broader society as a whole. One of the first individuals to offer this argument was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a sociologist turned Democratic senator who served the state of New York between 1976 and 2000.

Moynihan’s theoretical framework—later coined the culture of poverty or the tangle of pathology approach—was first laid out in his 1965 research report titled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. In this report, Moynihan argued that high poverty rates among Blacks could be easily traced back to their supposedly backwards cultural values. At the top of this list was Black women’s presumed preference for the matriarchal family, an argument he supported by citing their disproportionately higher rates of nonmarital childbearing and low prevalence of marriage. At the outset of his chapter on “The Negro American Family,” Moynihan professes this philosophy in no uncertain terms: “At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family.” In other words, Blacks devalue and therefore do not conform to the SNAF ideological code of a nuclear family consisting of a married man, woman, and their biological children co-residing in a single household. Because the nuclear family form is less prevalent among Blacks, Moynihan argues that they will be doomed to continue suffering from high rates of social problems such as nonmarital childbearing, crime, incarceration, and presumed welfare dependency. According to him, because these are allegedly cultural values, they are even more troubling because they are destined to be passed down from generation to generation. By Moynihan’s estimation, the intractable values of Black families mean that they will never progress in society and worse, it is their fault. The tangle of pathology approach is cultural determinism at its very worst and yet is still widely believed.
Given the pervasiveness of belief in this idea, how well do empirical data support this culture of poverty argument? Do Blacks really value marriage less than Whites? Belinda Tucker, a social psychologist from the University of California–Los Angeles, used data from Whites, Blacks, and Mexican Americans residing in 21 U.S. cities to definitively answer this long-standing question. After examining 10 different values related to marriage (e.g., importance of marrying one day, importance of being married when having children, etc.), she found no race or ethnic differences among Whites, Blacks, and Mexican Americans on half of the measures. All groups had similar levels of values regarding the expectation of marriage, the importance of marrying someday, and the importance of being married when having children. Where there were differences, Blacks actually valued marriage more than Whites (Tucker, 2000).

The culture of poverty approach supposes that Black women prefer to head single-mother families—in other words, that they devalue the nuclear family. Yet, findings from the Pew Research Center (2010) cast serious doubt on that assumption. Blacks and Whites are equally critical of the trend of single motherhood; seventy-four percent of Blacks and 70% of Whites—yet only 58% of Latinos—reported that women having children without a male partner is “a bad thing for society” (Pew, 2010). When asked whether a child needs a home with both a mother and a father in order to grow up happily, 57% of Whites agreed with that statement. Despite their higher rates of nonmarital childbearing, more Blacks and Latinos agreed with that statement (65% and 72%, respectively). Moreover, among cohabiters, Blacks and Latinos are more likely than Whites to report that they intend to marry but less likely than Whites to ultimately marry their cohabiting partners (Guzzo, 2008).

If surveys indicate Blacks value marriage as much or more than Whites, what types of partners are they seeking? The Pew Research Center (2010) asked respondents to rate the importance of various factors when choosing a mate. When asked how important it is that a “good husband or partner provide a good income,” 67% of Black women believed that it is very important, compared to half of Latinas and only 35% of White women. Roughly 55% of Black women and 54% of Latinas said it was very important for a husband or partner to be well educated, compared to only 28% of White women. When asked whether financial stability should be an important criterion for people to get married, 50% of Black women and 46% of Latina women agreed, versus only 25% of White women (Pew, 2010). A highly acclaimed ethnography from sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas titled, Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage (2005), found that low-income Black and Latina mothers value marriage highly but perceive myriad financial barriers to becoming married. The fact that Black women place more emphasis on the role of socioeconomic status (SES) in deciding to marry yet many Black men experience socioeconomic disadvantage is one piece of the puzzle that can help explain the Black–White marriage gap.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a strong countermovement that seeks to change pervasive cultural assumptions about Black families. The crux of this
movement focuses on structural—rather than cultural—impediments that hinder Blacks from becoming and remaining married. The underpinning of this argument is that the SNAF ideal was (and still is) harder for Blacks to attain given their marginalization in most mainstream social institutions.

Essentially, marriage stands at the intersection of many other social institutions. In other words, marriage and marital rates are greatly affected by the structure of the labor force, the educational system, and the criminal justice system. If, as we have just learned, Blacks value marriage and express a desire and intent to be married just as much as (if not more than) Whites, what explains their increasingly lower rates of marriage? In other words, are structural inequalities a more significant driving force behind the Black marriage decline than presumed cultural beliefs that devalue marriage?

Many scholars attribute the Black marriage decline to an imbalanced gender ratio. When considering the ratio of available (i.e., alive and noninstitutionalized) Black men to Black women, there were roughly 91 Black men for every 100 Black women in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The corresponding gender ratio for Whites is 99 White men for every 100 White women. The gender ratio is actually reversed among Latinos, resulting in a gender ratio of 107 Latino men for every 100 Latina women. An analysis of low-income cities (Harknett & McLanahan, 2004) found that after taking employment into account, there were only 46 employed Black men for every 100 Black women (versus roughly 82:100 ratio of employed White men to employed White women; corresponding figures for Mexicans and those of other Hispanic descent were 83 and 69 per 100, respectively).

Ralph Richard Banks (2011), a Stanford Law professor, recently offered a methodologically rigorous examination of the marriage decline (both overall and by race). In addition to pointing out these glaring disparities, he purported that interracial marriage may be one solution to increase the especially low rates of marriage among Black women. Although intermarriage is becoming a more common phenomenon across all groups, it is important to note that in 2010, more than twice as many Black men (24%) as Black women (9%) married interracially (Pew, 2012; see Khanna, Essay 11 for further discussion on interracial marriage). Therefore, an imbalanced gender ratio (further perpetuated by higher rates of interracial marriage among Black men) is a significant cause of the Black–White marriage gap. There are simply fewer Black men physically available for Black women to marry. This begs the question, where are Black men?

Where Are Black Men? Gender Ratios and “Marriageability”

There are two primary mechanisms to explain the relative dearth of available Black men in the community. First, Black men have the highest rate of incarceration than any other group. Black men had an incarceration rate of 4,347 per 100,000 in 2010, a rate that was six times higher than that of White men (678 per 100,000). The incarceration rate of Hispanic/Latino men was 1,775 per 100,000, half as high as that of Black men (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011; see also Doude, Essay 19). Even when prisoners are released from custody, they face extremely high levels of
discrimination in the labor force, reflecting one of the most enduring stigmas and barriers to upward mobility in the United States. Given the high priority women of color place on the financial viability of potential partners, those with a criminal history will be considered less marriageable by potential partners, further driving down marriage rates in these groups.

Disproportionately high mortality rates and low life expectancy among Black men can also help to explain the imbalanced gender ratio (Xu, 2010). Black men die earlier than any other racial or ethnic and gender group. For example, White men and women can expect to live roughly 79 and 84 years, respectively. But Black women's life expectancy is roughly 78 years and Black men's life expectancy is only 71. Black men have a much higher age-adjusted death rate than White men (890 vs. 1,151 per 100,000, respectively) and a homicide death rate roughly 10 times higher than White men (37.1 vs. 3.7 per 100,000, respectively). Indeed, homicide—an important way in which bodies are prematurely removed from the marriage market—is the 4th leading cause of death for Black men and the 8th leading cause of death for Latino men but does not rank in the top 10 for White men at all (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011; Xu, 2010).

Clearly, there are fewer “warm bodies” whom Black women can marry, but what about the quality of Black men who are physically present in the dating and marriage markets? In his groundbreaking book, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (1987/1990), sociologist William Julius Wilson set forth the argument that Black marriage decline was due to a shortage of “marriageable Black men.” Marriageable men are those who exhibit qualities that are attractive to potential romantic partners in the marriage market. Women of all races and ethnicities prefer to date and marry men who are educated, earn a good income, and have a stable job (although, as described earlier, these characteristics are ironically most important to Black women—see Pew, 2010; Tucker, 2000). In a direct test of this theory, Wilson and Kathryn Neckerman (1986) found an inverse relationship between male employment and marriage rates; as male unemployment increased, marriage rates decreased. A similar study using longitudinal data from 1990 through 2009 found a strong inverse relationship between the rates of families headed by women and the quantity and the quality of men (Craigie, Myers, & Darity, 2012). In focusing on structural factors, William Julius Wilson's work (and subsequent work using this framework) stands in direct contrast to Moynihan's cultural argument.

Are there really fewer marriageable Black men than White men? Let's first consider unemployment rates. In 2010, 9.6% of White men were unemployed, compared to 18.4% of Black men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Sociologists are well aware of the overlap between race or ethnicity and social class, a relationship that would imply that most of the race disparities in SES (in this case, unemployment) are because Blacks have less education than Whites. However, race disparities in unemployment persist even at the highest levels of education. Among the college educated, 4.4% of White men but fully 9.2% of Black men were unemployed in 2010, an even wider gap than the overall trend. This means that even after holding education constant—that is, comparing “apples to apples,” or Black men with the same level of education as White men—Black men are still more likely to be unemployed than White men. When coupled with the aforementioned findings that Blacks place heavy emphasis on the role of finances when deciding whether to
marry, these trends can help explain the Black–White marriage gap. It is quite clear that cultural values are not the problem, structural inequality is.

In examining the “marriageability” of Black men in terms of income, not surprisingly, there is a race divide in median weekly earnings among men. In 2010, White men earned roughly $850 per week, while Black men earned $633 per week (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Can race differences in educational attainment explain why Black men earn so much less? That is, do Black men earn less than White men because they have lower educational attainment? As was the case with unemployment, the race wage gap is still present when comparing highly educated Black men to highly educated White men. The largest race wage gaps among men occur at the highest levels of education; college-educated White men earn $1,354 per week, while college-educated Black men earn only $1,010. Regardless of educational level, Black men earn roughly 25% less than White men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

How does the socioeconomic standing of Black men compare with their likely romantic partners, Black women? For most racial and ethnic groups, women typically have lower SES than men. However, the socioeconomic standing of Black women is either equal to or higher than that of Black men. As an illustrative example, the gender wage gap is smaller among Blacks than Whites. Although White women earn only 80.5% of White men’s annual earnings, Black women earn 93.5% of Black men’s annual earnings, a much smaller gender difference (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Black women generally have higher educational attainment than Black men, a pattern that is not found among Whites. For example, a similar proportion of White men and White women hold at least a bachelor’s degree (30.8% versus 29.9%, respectively), but more Black women than Black men hold at least a bachelor’s degree (21.4% vs. 17.7%, respectively; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Given their similar or higher levels of economic standing relative to Black men, Black women may perceive less economic benefit to marriage, which is another potential explanation for the Black–White marriage gap.

In an innovative study, Harknett and McLanahan (2004) simultaneously tested the cultural and structural arguments for why Black women are less likely than White women to marry after a nonmarital birth. They found that Black women had the strongest pro-marriage attitudes. Moreover, the overall gender ratio and an undersupply of employed men fully explained the Black mothers’ lower likelihood of marriage. This analysis directly tested the culture-structure debate and provides convincing evidence that structure matters most and in fact, that Blacks neither suffer from nor perpetuate culturally deficiency mores that devalue marriage.

**Conclusion**

As the above empirical findings suggest, Blacks place similar or higher value on the institution of marriage, which definitively overturns the cultural argument that Blacks are less likely to get married because they don’t value marriage as much as Whites. There instead appears to be strong evidence in support of two sets of structural factors to explain the Black marriage gap. First, the imbalanced gender
ratio (due to higher incarceration and mortality rates among Black men) results in fewer Black men physically present in the marriage market. Second, the lower “marriageability” of Black men (who experience high rates of unemployment and lower earnings and educational attainment) reduces the economic benefit of marriage for Black women. Future research should put the cultural argument to rest and focus on finding policy solutions to increase the socioeconomic standing of Black men (Darity & Hamilton, 2012).

**Suggested Additional Resources**


**Questions for Further Discussion**

1. Black marriage decline is often depicted as a function of cultural beliefs that devalue marriage. There has also been a similar culture-structure debate in the area of education, with some proposing that Blacks have worse educational outcomes because they value education less than Whites, an argument that has also been disproven (see also Meanwell, Patel, & McClure, Essay 13). Why do you think scholars and the media continue to portray Blacks’ lower social standing to the notion that they have counterproductive cultural values?

2. Is the Black marriage decline/Black–White marriage gap a trend that deserves public policy attention? Based on the findings outlined in this chapter, what might be some effective policy solutions to address this gap?

3. Emerging sociological research (e.g., Marsh, Darity, Cohen, Casper, & Salters, 2008) has identified “The Love Jones Cohort,” a relatively affluent group of Black Americans (primarily women) who are single and living alone (SALA), with neither a spouse nor children in the household. Research indicates that these households increasingly comprise a large proportion of the Black middle class. What are the implications of this cohort for companionship, childbearing, and caregiving across the life course? How might public policy best address this burgeoning segment of the Black population?
4. Other industrialized nations (e.g., Sweden) have begun the legal recognition of cohabiting unions, as opposed to the prior universal focus on implementing public policies that only benefit or protect couples who are legally married. Might this be a more appropriate solution for increasing the stability of Black romantic unions than universal marriage promotion policies? Why or why not?

5. In his 2011 book, *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone*, Harvard law professor Ralph Richard Banks makes a strong case that structural barriers have caused the Black marriage decline. He proposes that Black women (who often face a lack of available or quality potential partners) should consider dating outside of their race. How do you feel about this recommendation? Would that solve the problem? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

6. Recent work finds that marriage rates are also declining among those with lower education. What might be some reasons for that decline? Does it deserve policy attention and if so, why?

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**Reaching Beyond the Color Line**

1. Go to www.census.gov. Research the rates of interracial marriage. Which race or gender group has the highest rates of interracial or interethnic marriage? Which race or gender group has the lowest rates of interracial or interethnic marriage? How well do your findings mesh with Banks’ (2011) recommendation that Black women consider marrying outside of their race?

2. Download data from the Pew Research Center Report on “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families.” Section 2 outlines racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of what makes a good partner. This chapter reviewed the findings regarding the importance of providing a good income. What other factors are important to Black, White, and Latina women? Are there similar findings for Black, White, and Latino men?

3. Pair up with a classmate. Research the marriage rates of Asians and Hispanic/Latinos over time. Compare them to the rates for Blacks. Are the patterns similar or different? What do you think makes these racial and ethnic groups distinct from Blacks?

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**References**


