

Roland G. Fryer Jr. "Guess Who's Been Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage over the 20th Century"

Main Point: Fryer explores the trends of interracial marriage between whites, blacks, and Asians with the use of U.S. Census Data for 1880-2000. The statistical trends show that white males and Asian females are the most prominent interracial marriages, followed by white females and black males. Yet, interracial marriages between black and Asian are rare for both genders. Fryer used education level, military service, and social exchange theories to attempt to explain the increase in interracial marriages after 1960.

Central Issues and Concepts:

Fryer defines interracial marriage as "a marriage between two individuals who report a different race when the census is taken" (Page 380). Fryer created categories based on race and then he divided each race group into gender pairings.

Fryer first observed racial intermarriages compared to all marriages. According to Fryer, within the first 100 years of his research the percentage of white male and black female marriages never rose over 0.1, but between 1980 and 2000 this percentage of marriages rose to 0.2 percent. In 1970, the rate of white female and black male marriages was 0.10 percent, which rose to 0.45 percent in 2000. The percentages for both genders of whites marrying Asians did not begin to rise until 1960 and continued a steady increase. The rise of black interracial marriages did not begin until after 1970, at which point black males increasingly married white women. The most recent studies show that the percentage of black male marriages to white females is almost 6 percent. As for black females, 2.9 percent are married to white males. Both genders of blacks are equally not likely to marry Asians. Asian males have steadily married whites; beginning with roughly 1 percent in 1880 to a high of almost 3 percent in the 1930s to drop after 1940. As for Asian females, there was a dramatic increase in marriage to whites until 1980 and then a decrease, but by 2000, studies show that Asian females are about twice as likely to marry a white male.

Fryer compared the statistical results of interracial marriages with educational level to determine if there was a correlation. Fryer created four different education categories for individuals, high school dropout, some college, college degree, and more than college degree. According to Fryer, the first twenty years of the analysis, 1940 to 1960, show that there is a general pattern with all the races of lesser-educated individuals having interracial marriages. Starting in the 1960s, whites with higher education began an increase in interracial marriages, while Asians, the rise began in 1980. Blacks follow the same pattern for the most part; the only difference is the education level. Since fewer blacks receive college or high degrees than whites and Asians, Fryer makes the adjustment to include some college in the definition of high education level.

Fryer observes the relationship between military service and interracial marriages by comparing veterans with non-veterans. Fryer concludes that blacks and whites follow the same pattern, with

veterans being more likely to have interracial marriages than nonveterans. Asians do not follow this pattern, and statistically nonveterans have more increased rates of interracial marriages.

Fryer concludes that social exchange theories may explain the behaviors towards interracial marriages. Social exchange theories say that there is a value for individuals. If whites were the most valued then an interracial marriage benefits blacks and Asians by raising their value. Yet, it in turns lower the value of the whites, so there must be an exchange of values like the spouse is smarter or more attractive.

Key Quotes:

“Interracial marriages are now more concentrated among those with high level of education” (382)

“White male-Asian female marriages are the most common interracial marriage, comprising 20 percent of all Asian females marriages and 35 percent for domestic-born Asian women. White female-black male is the second most common pairing, constituting 6 percent of black male marriages” (383)

“Intermarriage rates differ substantially by education, geographic consideration, and veteran status” (383)

“Thus, the social exchange model refers to a trade between objective characteristics and social status” (384)

Two Questions:

1. Fryer discusses the historical context of miscegenation laws and how they affect the behavioral patterns of interracial marriages, yet he neglects to consider the historical context and cultural context that influence interracial marriages. What historical and cultural factors could have influenced the increase and decline of interracial marriages among different races, and why did they have this affect? Why does Fryer not discuss and analyze these topics?
2. Fryer notes that interracial marriages between blacks and Asian are “virtually nonexistent” and claims that this maybe due to “small shares of the population”. What other factors may influence the lack of interracial marriages among blacks and Asians?