

Declining Significance of Race?:
The Case of Japanese American Marriage Patterns

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*Abstract prepared for consideration for presentation at the 2007 annual meeting of the Population Association of America. This research is supported by grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R01 HD0409120-02S1).

Abstract

Japanese Americans are a useful group with which to test the thesis that the significance of race is declining. They are often noted as having earnings similar to non-Hispanic whites, yet have also experienced exclusionary events in the U.S and exhibit a tendency toward racial/ethnic homogamy. I analyze the trends in Japanese Americans' intermarriage level with non-Hispanic whites and their marriage timing relative to that of non-Hispanic whites using several data sets: the Japanese-American Research Project, the General Social Survey, the Census, and the Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study. Of particular interest are their level of intermarriage with non-Hispanic whites and their marriage timing relative to whites (with some focus on German Americans and Italian Americans) before and after historical events such as the World War II internment and redress. Results have implications for the link between exclusionary historical events and the level of integration of a racial/ethnic group.

Background and Significance

Over the past few decades, some sociologists have argued that the significance of race has declined for blacks (Wilson 1980) and for other racial/ethnic groups (Sakamoto et al. 2000). Economic evidence in support of this view has been mixed at best (e.g., Cancio, Evans and Maume 1996; Thomas 2000). For example, the race/ethnic group that provides evidence most consistent with this view are the Chinese and Japanese American men. Their economic disadvantage relative to non-Hispanic white men seems to have disappeared as early as the 1980s (Henry 1999; Nee and Sanders 1985; Sakamoto 2000). However, Chin (2005) provides evidence that the impact of interment has had a long-term suppressive impact on Japanese men's wages. Suzuki (2004) argues that the convergence is largely the result of the increased selective migration from Japan to the U.S. rather than the declining significance of race.

Using the economic situation of Japanese American men as evidence of the declining significance of race is limited in two ways. First, as already noted by Payne (1989), even when some evidence is available that the economic significance of race could be declining in this group, the social significance of race could persist. The social integration of a race/ethnic group, as measured the level of intermarriage (and by implication, marriage timing because exclusion reduces the availability of mates), is a useful indicator to track the level of social integration of a racial/ethnic group (e.g, Gullickson 2006; Harris and Ono 2005; Qian 1997). Tinkers (1982) notes that, even during times when most Americans think that there should be equality in opportunities, they remain skeptical and even hostile about interracial marriages. Fu's (2001) cross-

sectional study of endogamy patterns indicates that there is still a major homogamous tendency among Japanese Americans as of 1990. Although cross-sectional studies exist (Ferguson 1995; 2000; Hwang, Saenz and Aguirre 1994; Tinker 1973), no previous study has investigated the *trend* in Japanese American intermarriage and marriage timing. Second, Japanese American women are entirely excluded from the previous analysis. In order to adequately support the view that the significance of race is declining, both men and women need to be included in the analysis.

Therefore, I study the trends in intermarriage and marriage timing among Japanese American and non-Hispanic white men and women. I ask: has the homogamous tendency of the Japanese Americans and non-Hispanic whites declined? Also, have the differences in marriage timing between non-Hispanic whites and Japanese Americans closed over historical time? Have group-defining historical events for Japanese Americans, such as the Alien Land Law, and the World War II internment and redress, affected their marriage formation patterns? Japanese Americans are an ideal group to capture the influence of exclusionary events--African Americans have a longer causal chain of harm that are more complex (Howard-Hassman 2004). If results indicate that Japanese American intermarriage and marriage patterns have consistently converged to that of non-Hispanic whites, even during years of exclusionary events, then they would suggest that the influences of these events are weak. Alternatively, the influence of these events may have persisted and have reduced the level of intermarriage and delay first marriage timing of individuals in that group since then by: a) preventing between-race mixing; and b) reducing resources available to the individuals, including the availability of mates. Such results would suggest that race/ethnicity continues to be socially

significant in the U.S., even in a subpopulation in which the economic significance of race seems to have disappeared among men.

Data and Analytic Strategy

Data. The primary sources of data are the Japanese-American Research Project, A Three Generation Study (JARP), the General Social Survey (GSS), 1972-2000, and the Census PUMS files from 1910 to 2000. Data in the JARP were collected from a national representative sample of first, second, and third generation Japanese Americans at UCLA in the 1960s by Gene Levine. The total sample size is approximately 4,000 cases. The GSS contains a large sample collected annually and cross-sectionally since 1972, with extensive sets of socioeconomic status measures. The Census PUMS data are drawn from the IPUMS project, and covers the last century. Supplementary information will be obtained from and the Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS). It is a census of the internees, and was collected by Dorothy Thomas in the early 1940s. The data will be converted to person-year data sets to conduct a multinomial logit model. Pair data will be used to conduct log-linear analyses.

Variables. The dependent variable used in the multinomial logit model is: whether or not a respondent first married in year interval t , and whether that marriage was with a spouse within or outside the racial/ethnic group. The dependent variable used in the log-linear model is homogamous versus heterogamous pairing of a couple. Control variables include: generation, nativity, respondent's educational level, birth cohort, state of residence, father's education, and period. When analyzing couples, additional controls

will be introduced, such as the spouse's generation, nativity, educational level, and birth cohort.

Analytical Strategy. I plan to present a series of descriptive findings. These will show mean period shifts in the average age at marriage and the homogamy-intermarriage odds ratios of Japanese Americans, German Americans, Italian Americans and other non-Hispanic whites in the 20th century. German Americans and Italian Americans are separated from other non-Hispanic whites because they were also relocated to some extent during World War II (Fox 2000). The multivariate analyses employ multinomial logit and log-linear models. The primary goal of the multivariate analysis is to build on, and better understand, the descriptive results by attempting to account for any differentials on dimensions other than race, such as racial and educational composition.

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