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# Fertility and Racial Stratification

ANTONIO MCDANIEL

LIKE MUCH DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH, fertility research has taken a limited perspective in its study of racial differences. Racial differences in reproductive behavior are produced by differences in social class, social status, behavior, and culture, which are, in turn, a result of different historical experiences. The history and culture of different racial groups provide a necessary perspective. The social conditions in which racially marginalized groups find themselves have influenced their changing expectations and obligations. These changes suggest that a fresh view of fertility patterns is necessary. The racial stratification perspective on racial differences offers such a view.

This article focuses on expanding the way in which racial differences are viewed in fertility research. First, I briefly outline three major perspectives on race: essentialism, assimilationism, and racial stratification. Second, I describe the racial differences in fertility and family formation from the racial stratification perspective. I then return to the three perspectives on race and comment on them, taking into consideration fertility and family formation. Finally, I make several suggestions concerning the future of fertility research in the United States.

## Racial perspectives and fertility research

Racial differences have led to conflict over appropriate values and behavior within societies (Cox, 1948: Chapter 17; Drake, 1987: Chapters 1 and 2). In most cases, there is a segment of society, a racial group, that feels its behavior sets the standard by which the behavior of others should be judged. Scholars, including population scientists, have not been exempt from the influence of this tendency.

The contending perspectives on race can be roughly divided into three schools of thought: essentialism, assimilationism, and racial stratification. Essentialism focuses on the social consequences of racial heterogeneity, whereas assimilationism and racial stratification focus on the social consequences of race relations, with the assimilationists preferring acculturation and miscegenation, and the racial stratificationists seeking the elimination

of ethnocentrism and racial marginalization. In the past most social scientists were assimilationists; however, following the civil rights movement and the black power movement this perspective was challenged (see McKee, 1993; Ture and Hamilton, 1992; Hacker, 1992).

The fertility of human populations has both biological and social aspects.<sup>1</sup> The reproductive physiology of human fertility focuses on ovulation, spermatogenesis, and fertilization and on the regulation of these reproductive processes with contraceptive technology. Research on the social aspects of human fertility has considered birth outcomes as largely the result of social norms, socioeconomic processes, and cultural factors that shape the fertility-control behavior of couples. Most researchers recognize the need to integrate the biological with the social approach for a complete understanding of human fertility. When we consider the issue of race, the connection between the biological and social aspects of fertility takes on new importance. This importance is complicated by the history of the connection between fertility research and essentialist perspectives of race in the name of eugenics.

### Essentialism

The essentialist idea of race is rooted in the development of biology and genetics. The intellectual origin of the modern essentialist concept of race can be traced to scholars' response to a need to explain the physical and cultural diversity of human populations. The rise of European social sciences coincided with the colonial expansion and the end of African enslavement in the Americas. For the African populations in the Americas this period marked the transition to freedom. However, this freedom was stalled by the persistence of racial inequality. European scholars provided the scientific evidence and rationalization necessary for the rhetoric of freedom, justice, and democracy in societies full of racial inequality. It became necessary to rationalize racial inequality in an era that advanced the idea of human equality. The concept of racial difference played an important role in this scientific rationalization and continues to serve the role of rationalizing social differences in contemporary society.

In 1896 the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized racial segregation, so that a legally racialized nation was confirmed. Notions of the race inferiority of non-European-origin populations stemmed from the fear of the genetic annihilation of European-origin populations. Northern European intellectuals feared racial annihilation by way of miscegenation with non-European populations, and racial degradation as a result of the higher fertility of populations from southern and eastern Europe. Essentialism took on a biogenetic character at the turn of the century, and the eugenics movement was the most organized expression of this in-

tellectual development. The twentieth century began with the growing influence of the eugenics movement in Europe and the development of scientific justification of the racial inferiority of peoples from Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

Demography, like genetics,<sup>2</sup> has been heavily influenced by essentialism in the form of eugenics. Eugenicists argued that racial differences are the result of biological differences. The eugenics movement aimed at bettering the human population by controlling reproduction and thereby influencing the population's genetic makeup. The movement had its origins in the nineteenth century, but it was the publication of an article by Ronald Fisher in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* in 1918 that gave it scientific credibility by linking eugenics to Mendelian genetics. Through a combination of statistical and genetic analysis, Fisher developed a method for the eugenics movement to objectify the idea of racial quality and fertility patterns. Race became not simply a socially constructed concept but a genetic "fact" that could be measured mathematically. Conceptually, the use of statistics and genetics allowed the authoritative utterance of "facts" about racial distinctions and the impact of these distinctions on the quality of society. Differences in social behavior could now be related to a somatic (physical) difference, and the observed differences were quantifiable and occurred with a statistical frequency sufficient for prediction.

Eugenics sought to establish the connection between biology and behavioral outcomes, and in this way connected race and fertility. Although eugenics was in decline by the 1930s (see Taylor, 1980; Gould, 1981; and Degler, 1991), the early movement's biological determinist ideas have had an important impact on scientific thought, particularly on fertility research (see Kevles, 1985; Gould, 1981; Soloway, 1990). Modern population researchers are careful to distance themselves from eugenics; however, the overlap of the concerns of eugenics and modern population studies is undeniable. Population studies, like eugenics, is concerned with social and biological aspects of human populations and their reproduction. And population studies, like eugenics, is concerned with racial differences and reproduction.

The intellectual foundation of population studies in the United States was built upon the efforts of and collaboration with eugenicists (see Hodgson, 1991). P. K. Whelpton (1938), the developer of the component method of population projection, clearly exemplifies the crosscutting intellectual interest of early population scientists and eugenicists. In his *Needed Population Research*, published under the auspices of the Population Association of America, Whelpton argued:

What may be the largest attempt to improve the biological makeup of a human population has recently been undertaken in Germany. By means of eu-

genic sterilization, it is planned to lower the incidence of certain undesirable qualities in the next generation. At the same time, an increase in the proportion of children from superior stock is being sought through the offering of larger economic inducements for additional children to families in certain so-called upper classes than to those in lower classes. The steps taken to carry out the various phases of this plan should be watched carefully by populationists in all parts of the world and such tests of its effectiveness made as are possible. (1938: 183)

Whelpton's statement is in open sympathy with eugenics; it is by no means an isolated association by population scientists with the ideas of eugenics (see Hodgson, 1991).

Two examples of central issues in eugenics research that have continued to spark interest among demographers are the relationship between family size and intelligence, and reproductive differentials by intelligence. Francis Galton (1874) was one of the first scholars to study the effects of birth order on cognitive achievement. Such studies have continued under the banner of the confluence theory, which maintains that as sibsize increases, the intellectual environment diminishes because babies add little to the intellectual level of a household (see Zajonc and Markus, 1975; Zajonc et al., 1991). More recent research has suggested important refinements to the confluence theory (Blake, 1989: Chapters 4 and 5; Retherford and Sewell, 1991).

One of the central concerns of the early eugenics movement was the contention that socially important physical, mental, moral, and behavioral characteristics are hereditary.<sup>3</sup> The eugenicists believed that intelligent women have fewer children than "dull" women, and that the lower fertility of intelligent or "privileged" women produced a downward shift in the abilities of the population as a whole. Because intelligence was thought to differ between racial subgroups, different racial groups were thought to make different contributions to the demographic development of the population.

In the early development of both demography and eugenics there was much concern about the differential birth rate of different classes and races (Kevles, 1985; Soloway, 1990). These concerns focused on the impact of the relatively more prolific reproduction among the poor and racially "unfit." Additionally, many scholars were concerned with the possible population pollution that could result from immigration and miscegenation. The context of eugenic discourse has tended to reflect and support social inequalities. In societies where race was salient, such as the United States, the discourse of eugenicists focused on problems of racial differentials in fertility, miscegenation, and immigration of the racially "inferior." In societies where class was more salient than race, such as Britain, eugenicists focused on problems of class differentials in fertility and immigration of

poor uncultured persons from other areas of the world. The American anxiety over race finds its equivalent in the European fear of the lower classes.

The closest modern equivalent to the eugenics arguments is not in demography, but in biology, in the guise of biological determinism (Gould, 1981). However, two social scientists, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994), argue that racial groups differ in their cognitive ability and that these differences are genetic and underlie racial differences in society. Africans generally, and African Americans particularly, are thought to have one of the lowest levels of cognitive ability among human populations, and Europeans and Asians are thought to have the highest levels. In language reminiscent of that used by Galton in the nineteenth century, Herrnstein and Murray caution us about the demographic implications of racial differences in cognitive ability. They note that "Latino and black immigrants are, at least in the short run, putting some downward pressure on the distribution of intelligence" (pp. 360–361). This perspective views race as a biological aspect of human difference.

### Assimilationism

Most modern demography is not concerned with the genetic makeup of the human population. Contemporary research on fertility is largely motivated by the belief that lower fertility will reduce human suffering and inequality. This research implicitly or explicitly takes an assimilationist perspective. Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess are the fathers of assimilationism (Burgess, 1925; Park, 1950; Frazier, 1957; McKee, 1993). Assimilationists seek social solutions through acculturation, amalgamation, and integration. They envision a transformation of several different races or cultures into a single race or culture.

The assimilationists view the proclivity of different racial groups to form group attachments as a natural state of affairs that produces racial conflict, leading to racial domination, followed by racial assimilation (Park, 1950; Frazier, 1957). Typically the vision is Eurocentric:

For four hundred years and more Europe, and particularly Western Europe, has been preeminently the seat and center of greatest intellectual and political activity. During this period European commerce and European culture have penetrated to the most remote corners of the habitable world. As a result of this expansion, most of the world outside Europe has been reduced to a position of political and cultural subordination and dependency. (Park, 1950: 118)

This domination is thought to have reduced the colonized and enslaved populations to a state of social and cultural dependence. From this Euro-

centric perspective the assimilationists see a Darwinian struggle, in which the more "civilized" populations conquered (via extermination or marginalization) the "barbarous" populations. For example, Africans and American Indians are seen as in need of assimilation into European society.

The classical model of assimilation is the "melting pot" model (Taeuber and Taeuber, 1964; Hoetink, 1967), which assumes that immigrants arrive with a relative disadvantage vis-à-vis European Americans, that they are culturally distinct and lack communication and other skills. Thus, immigrants are initially clustered together away from others in society, mainly in central cities. The passage of time brings a withering of differences, along with residential integration, acculturation, and intermarriage. This model assumes that the immigrant group will become like the majority population. When applied to questions of race it is assumed that racial assimilation will follow the same process.

Fertility research explains the persistence of racial differences in one of two ways (for examples see Farley and Allen, 1987: 37–102; Snipp, 1989: 144–148; Bean and Tienda, 1987: 209–232.) The *characteristics* explanation of racial differences in fertility suggests that when the social and economic characteristics of the racial majority and minority are eliminated, differences in fertility will also be eliminated. The *minority group status* explanation suggests that racial differences in fertility are associated with the insecurities of minority group status. Both explanations assume the possibility of assimilation; they fail to explain the persistence of the exclusion of groups such as African Americans.

The ability of a group to be assimilated depends on whether it is considered an ethnic or a racial group. Assimilation is usually race specific. Racial assimilation implies that different ethnic groups assimilate into particular races, and ethnic assimilation occurs among groups considered ethnically different. For example, immigrants from Nigeria and Ghana assimilate into the African American race, and immigrants from Sweden and Ireland assimilate into the European American race. In the racial assimilation of an ethnic group, physical distinctions are overshadowed by the myth of cultural and historical similarities. Ethnic groups such as those from Europe and segments of the Hispanic population show definite signs of assimilability; however, the African-descendent population continues to be blocked from assimilation within the United States. In fact, the lack of assimilation of the African-derived population continues to be a major element of social differentiation within American society.

Racial and ethnic intermarriage is viewed as the key index of assimilation (Spickard, 1989: 3–17), though for African Americans intermarriage and interracial births have tended to reinforce racial differences within societies. In the past, European immigrants experienced considerable social distance from the native-born population (Pagnini and Morgan, 1990).

Intermarriage between European immigrants and the native-born European American population was very rare. In fact, the immigrants tended to marry other immigrants and second-generation ethnics tended to marry other second-generation ethnics. Currently, European-derived ethnic populations have very high rates of intermarriage (Stevens and Owens, 1990), as there has been an increase of out-marriage in successive generations of European immigrants. Regardless of the type of ethnic intermarriage, however, European Americans remain racially homogenous. Their children could be classified as ethnically mixed, but they are racially white (Stevens and Owens, 1990; Lieberson and Waters, 1988: 258–260).

Interracial and interethnic marriage and cohabitation increase the likelihood of interracial and interethnic pregnancies and births. The rates of marriage and cohabitation between European Americans and other racial and ethnic groups differ markedly. More than 30 percent of Asian American women and more than 50 percent of Native American women have either married interracially or cohabited with European Americans; Hispanics also show a tendency for high rates of intermarriage with European Americans (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1990; Lee and Yamanaka, 1990; Gurak and Fitzpatrick, 1982). Although the rates of intermarriage of African Americans and whites increased over the last two decades, African/European American intermarriage rates continue to be relatively low (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1990; Kalmijn, 1993): about 1 percent of African American women and 3 percent of African American men are interracially married or cohabitating.

The problem of African American unassimilability has not been satisfactorily explained by the assimilationist model. American society continues to be viewed as primarily a “Western” nation with roots in Europe. In reality, a large part of the American population does not have “Western” roots. In rethinking how race is viewed in demographic research, the most appropriate starting point is the dynamic nature of racial stratification within the United States.

### Racial stratification

The racial stratification perspective defines race as a socially constructed concept. Race does not refer to the biological differences or similarities within a population; rather, it is an idea created by members of a society. Racial differences evoke physical images related to social differences. Often these social differences are based on the concepts of ethnocentrism and social intolerance. Ethnocentrism is a social attitude that focuses on the virtue of a group’s history and culture and is important for group glorification and solidarity. A racially differentiated society characterized by both ethnocentrism and social intolerance will usually be racially stratified (Cox, 1948; McDaniel, 1995).



The racial stratification perspective, like assimilationism, is concerned with the social context of race relations. Unlike the eugenicists and the assimilationists, who conceptualize social differences as problems, racial stratificationists promote diversity and heterogeneity as strengths. Traditionally, they have sought to understand how we create the boundaries of social difference and to evaluate the social consequences of such boundaries. This perspective seeks to place racial differences within a sociohistorical context that is sensitive to cultural and historical distinctions. Rather than assuming that racial differences universally imply inequality, the racial stratificationists separate racial differences into those that arise from racial inequality and those that arise from cultural heterogeneity. Not all social heterogeneity is reducible to the problem of social integration, because not all social heterogeneity leads to social inequality. Racial stratification exists in a society where racial differences represent an aspect of social stratification. For example, the history of enslavement, Jim Crow, and contemporary residential segregation are aspects of racial stratification in the United States.

Physical and cultural differences between African Americans, European Americans, and other social groups do not cause racial conflict or lead to racial stratification. On the contrary, racial stratification renders certain physical and cultural distinctions issues of competition and conflict (see Cox, 1948; Drake, 1987). Unlike the assimilation tradition, which fails to address the issue of mutual respect, the racial stratification tradition necessitates the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences (see Collins, 1990; West, 1993: Chapter 16). The racial stratification perspective has rarely been employed in fertility research in the United States; however, building upon such a perspective may facilitate a better understanding of racial and cultural differences.

### **Racial stratification and family structure: Economic and sociocultural causes**

In the United States, the population of European descent constitutes the majority; for this reason, researchers have viewed their fertility and family behavior as the standard by which other groups should judge their own fertility and family behavior. This idea has dominated both family and fertility research. In fact, the development of this idea has occurred within a social context in which non-European American behavior has been seen as deviant. Non-European American behavior is believed to be problematic and assimilation is considered to be the solution. However, recent research in family structure has begun to challenge the assumption of assimilation, and fertility research may gain from implications of this challenge.

Because the family is the reproductive unit, there is a logical connection between research on racial differences in family structure and research

on racial differences in fertility (McDaniel, 1994). The family histories of African Americans have been complex, and the normative behavior has been distinct (Collins, 1990; Billingsley, 1992; Morgan et al., 1993; Miller, Morgan, and McDaniel, 1994; McDaniel, 1990, 1994). African American families have a long history of significant numbers of children being raised in single-parent families. The majority of households are headed by women, and, since the 1970s, the odds of an African American child living in a mother-headed household have more than doubled (McDaniel, 1994). Divorce has been much more prevalent in African American families than in European American families, with the former showing a much more fluid marriage pattern than the latter. This fluidity has created step-parents, step-siblings, and half-siblings, as well as a multitude of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and fictive kin.

Paramount to the discussion of racial differences in family structure in the United States is the issue of the relationship between family structure and poverty. The poverty evident in the African American community has been thought to result in part from the lack of "normal" family structures. In a classic example of assimilationist thought, Moynihan (1965) suggests that until African Americans emulate the family behavior of European Americans they place themselves "at a distinct disadvantage." He suggests that the disorganized African American family is a reflection of a "cultural pathology" that prevents assimilation. This perspective distorts the possibility of different responses to poverty and prosperity, and the possibility that there are structural impediments to the acquisition and use of wealth within the society (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995: Chapter 6).

Because the response to economic conditions may reflect a group's cultural patterns and historical conditions (McDaniel, 1994), we should not be surprised that Europeans and African Americans respond differently to various economic situations. That long-standing cultural differences are important is most evident when comparing the experience of African Americans with that of European immigrants. The latter have had far more success at assimilating into European American society than the former, likely due to the shared historical and cultural background that facilitates their assimilation (Stevens and Owens, 1990; Miller, Morgan, and McDaniel, 1994). The economic advancement of African Americans, meanwhile, occurs within the context of social and economic marginalization and exclusion or separation (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995: Chapter 6).

Racial differences in family structure are shaped by the interaction of socioeconomic conditions and cultural predispositions, themselves reflecting long-standing historical differences (see Hill, 1971; Sudarkasa, 1975; Nobles, 1978; Allen, 1978; Collins, 1990; Billingsley, 1992; McDaniel, 1990, 1994; Preston, Lim, and Morgan, 1992; Morgan et al., 1993; Miller, Morgan, and McDaniel, 1994; Ruggles, 1994). Therefore, to the extent that the

historical and cultural developments within racial minority communities are unique, they shed light on why racial differences persist in family structure. To attribute racial differences in family structure purely to economic factors is to ignore the cultural history of the African American community.

### **Racial stratification in fertility and family formation**

The debate about racial differences in fertility has focused on racial differences in family formation and single-parent households (Morgan, this volume). It has been argued that female-headed households result from the breakdown in family norms in the African American community. Research on teenage pregnancy has focused on problems associated with adolescent motherhood and female-headed households, and often centers around a concern about the social deviance of African American and Hispanic teenagers.

#### **The timing of fertility**

Current rates of teenage pregnancy in the United States are high in comparison with other modern industrialized settings (Morgan, this volume). The trends in the timing of first birth and the mean age at fertility vary for different racial groups: African American birth rates remain substantially higher than those of European Americans; both groups have experienced parallel fertility declines over the last century, though fertility trends by age have differed (NCHS, 1993a: Table 1-9; Evans, 1986; Chen and Morgan, 1991).

The timing of fertility is of concern, first, because of presumed effects on health and, second, because of broader social effects (Menken, 1985; Geronimus, 1991, 1994). Considerable attention has been given to the relationship between maternal age and birth outcome (that is, the age of the mother and whether the child lives or dies). Generally, European Americans have lower, and African Americans higher fetal, neonatal, and infant mortality rates than other populations within the United States (NCHS, 1994: Tables 2-1, 3-2, 3-20, and 4-1).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, European Americans have lower, and African Americans higher maternal mortality rates than other populations. However, maternal mortality rises with age for both groups and is associated more with late fertility than with early fertility. Thus, health concerns are also important for late fertility (Makinson, 1985; Geronimus, 1994).

Whether to have children and at what age can be influenced by what women perceive as their opportunities. One cannot deny the persistent poverty of African American children in general and those born to single parents in particular. Indeed, poverty and the lack of opportunities seem to be more important factors in the social dislocation of poor single-parent

families than is the birth of a child. In fact, the increases in African American poverty cannot be attributed to teenage pregnancy, because the rates of teen pregnancy in the African American population been relatively stable over the past 30 years while the rates of poverty have increased. Moreover, teenage childbirth seems hardly to be the disadvantage that it was considered in the past (see Geronimus and Korenman, 1992; Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg, 1993). It would be extreme to suggest that teenage and single-parent childbearing has no effect on socioeconomic status; however, it seems obvious that socioeconomic status has had more of an impact on the poverty status of teen and single-parent mothers before and following the birth of a child.<sup>5</sup> By ignoring this latter aspect, it seems that much of the debate has shifted from the cause of poverty to blaming those who are in poverty.

### Family formation and fertility

The issue of "illegitimate births" exemplifies how value judgments have influenced demographic research on fertility. Several generations of scholars have concluded that the legitimacy of a child is connected to the presence of the father (see Du Bois, 1908; Malinowski, 1962[1930]; Frazier, 1939; Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan (1965: 29) notes that "ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage." Moynihan is clearly suggesting that the African American population is in need of acculturation.

Nonmarital births have outnumbered marital births among African Americans since the early 1980s, and the rates among whites have increased substantially (Smith, 1990; NCHS, 1993a: Table 1-95). As the debate around the deviance of nonmarital fertility in the African American population increased, the racial difference in nonmarital fertility consistently declined. The dramatic increase in nonmarital fertility has removed the responsibility of reproduction from the traditional marital union in the African American population, and the trend of the European American population seems to be in the same direction. In this respect European American fertility behavior seems to be emulating the behavior of African Americans (see Smith, 1990; NCHS, 1993a: Table 1-95).

### Future directions

We need to radically revise how we view race as a determinant of family and fertility in the United States. By bringing the history and culture of

different racial groups back into the discussion we will be able to avoid some of the moralizing about the behavior of African Americans and other racial groups. The social conditions in which groups such as African Americans find themselves have obviously influenced their changing expectations and obligations. These changes suggest that the racial stratification perspective on racial differences offers the best possibilities for understanding racial differences in fertility patterns.

The declining relationship between marriage and fertility, coupled with low rates of fertility and the increase in divorce, cohabitation, and childless couples, suggests that a fresh view of fertility patterns is necessary. The racial differences in these matters are striking, and the trends are persistent in both family and fertility behavior; however, the trends suggest a similar direction for African Americans and European Americans.

The cultural and social history of the African American population, and its deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, are aspects of the African American experience that are understudied in research on fertility and family formation. Historical and cultural differences are important not because they are 100 percent causative but because they represent the different experiences of various groups within the society, as well as different reactions to social change. Each racial group within the United States has a unique historical experience and cultural background. Social distinctions based on racial differences are related to these historical and cultural differences, and they continue to affect how we view racial differences in fertility. Historical and cultural differences may influence how various racial groups obtain particular levels of fertility. This is evident in the paths taken by African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and European Americans to smaller families (see Bean and Tienda, 1987; Evans, 1986).

Future fertility research must consider multiple dimensions of racial and ethnic heterogeneity. For example, the rates of interracial unions indicate the degree of "social space" between various racial and ethnic groups. From these rates we note the closeness of European Americans regardless of ethnic identification. Asians, American Indians, and Hispanics also have high rates of interracial marriage with native-born European Americans, suggesting a process of assimilation. African Americans, on the other hand, are the least assimilated.

There has been little research on the effect on nonmarital fertility rates of the differences in intermarriage rates between African American men and women. We generally believe that the marriage prospects for African American women have deteriorated while those for "marriageable" men have improved (Wilson, 1987; Kalmijn, 1993). However, the intermarriage rates for African American men have increased, particularly for the more educated. In fact, recent research suggests that African American women tend to marry African American men with less education, while educated Afri-

can American men who intermarry tend to marry less-educated European American women (see Kalmijn, 1993). These patterns may have particular implications for the fertility rates of more-educated African American women.

Another direction that fertility research might pursue is the relationship among race, labor markets and earnings, and fertility trends. Easterlin (1980) argued that men adjust their marriage and fertility patterns in response to their feelings of economic security relative to the economic status of their parents. Butz and Ward (1979) emphasized the economic situation of men as well as the economic opportunities of women. The research that has examined these arguments has relied primarily on data for the European American population. However, the context of labor markets and earnings is different for various racial groups within the United States. Explanations of economic opportunities, female labor force participation rates, earnings, wealth portfolios, or educational attainment should be quite different depending upon the racial group under consideration.

Both Easterlin and Butz/Ward fail to explain the simultaneous history of higher labor force participation rates and higher fertility rates of African American women. Both explanations view norms as static and undifferentiated by groups within US society. They argue simply that changes in the economy have altered the opportunity cost of having a child. Easterlin (1980: 161) notes that "Among minority groups the proportion deliberately regulating fertility is usually lower, and the level of their fertility is consequently higher. But the same economic pressures are at work, as in the general population." Also, neither explains why fertility is related to employment and earnings differently for African Americans than for European Americans (see Farley and Allen, 1987: 58–102; Evans, 1986). The answer may rest with the relationship between racial stratification (income and wealth) and fertility; however, understanding cultural differences may also be important.

An additional topic for future research on race and fertility is the effects of African American women's labor force participation on fertility. The post-World War II increase in the labor force participation of European American women is a major topic for research on US fertility. The increases in their participation and income are posited to have a negative impact on fertility. However, this transformation of European American women's labor force participation followed that of African American women. It seems logical that fertility research has a lot to learn from the African American experience with respect to fertility and labor force participation. I would caution against direct comparisons, because African American women's labor force participation has been a critical issue in creating the notion of the "black matriarch" (Collins, 1990: 70–82), and slavery directly affected the labor force participation of formerly enslaved women by altering the economic earning power of both men and women

(Goldin, 1977). Nevertheless, the longer experience of African American women with labor force participation needs closer evaluation in terms of their fertility behavior.

These examples are more instructive than definitive. My aim is to suggest that fertility research will be enhanced by understanding both how race is socially constructed and the social contexts in which different racial groups experience American society.

## Notes

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1 For a systematic examination of these differences and an integration of the two perspectives see Davis and Blake (1956); Sheps and Menken (1973); Bongaarts and Potter (1983).

2 Modern human genetics was influenced by reform eugenic goals, but the increased understanding of the complexity of human heredity reduced the basis of classical eugenics (see Kevles, 1985).

3 This has been true in the past and present; compare Galton ([1869]1892) and Herrnstein and Murray (1994).

4 More data and further analysis are required before we can say anything definitive

about the relationship of racial differences to female health and age at birth. However, there may be racial differences in mothers' ages at childbearing (Geronimus, 1994). For example, in 1983 the rate of neonatal mortality was highest for teenage mothers (early fertility) in the white and Mexican American population, whereas mothers aged 30 to 35 years (late fertility) had the highest rates of neonatal mortality among African Americans and Puerto Ricans.

5 Recent research questions the pervasive belief that teenage childbearing makes a major contribution to the economic disadvantage of women (see Geronimus and Korenman, 1992; Hoffman, Foster, and Furstenberg, 1993). Darity and Myers (1994) question a similar belief regarding the contribution of single-parent families to income differentials.

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