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FP-13-13 Marriage: More Than a Century of Change

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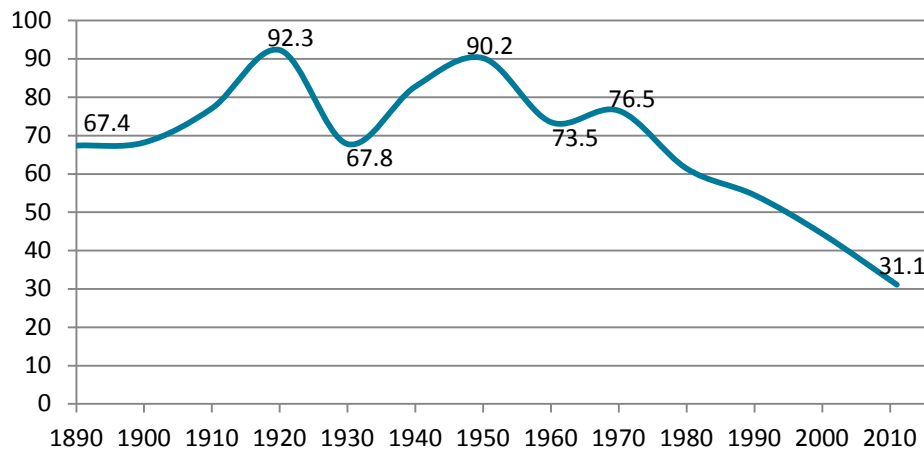


Marriage: More Than a Century of Change

Julissa Cruz

This profile examines demographic changes in women's marriage patterns over the past century using data from the National Vital Statistics, Decennial Census, and American Community Survey. Although the marriage rate and the proportion of women who are married have risen and fallen from the 1890s to the 1960s, they have declined precipitously since 1970 with both now at record lows. Furthermore, women's median age at first marriage is the highest it has been in over a century at 26.6 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Figure 1. Marriage Rate of Women, 1890-2011



Note: Data for Alaska and Hawaii do not begin until 1959 and 1960, respectively.

Sources: The 1890-1960 data come from National Vital Statistics "100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics United States, 1867-1967" Report. The 1970, 1980, and 1990 data come from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health Statistics. The 2000 data come from the National Center for Health Statistics, CDC and the U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2000. The 2011 data come from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011.

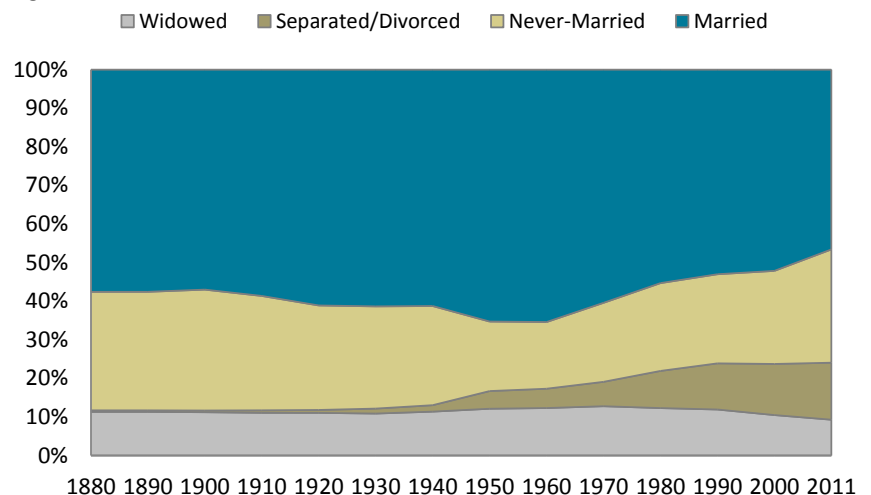
Change in Marriage Rate in the U.S., 1890-2011

- The U.S. marriage rate (the number of women's marriages per 1,000 unmarried women 15 years and older) is the lowest it has been in over a century at 31.1—that is, roughly 31 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women.
- The marriage rate was highest in 1920 at 92.3.
- Since 1970, the marriage rate has declined by almost 60%.

Change in Marital Status, 1880-2011

- The proportion of women married was highest in 1950 at approximately 65%. Today, less than half (47%) of women 15 and over are married—the lowest percentage since the turn of the century.
- The proportion of women who are never-married has followed a curvilinear pattern over time with the lowest point in 1960 at 17%. The highest peaks occurred in 1880 and in 2011 when 31% and 29%, respectively, of women were never-married.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of women who are separated or divorced. Less than 1% of women were separated or divorced in 1920. Today, 15% of women hold this status.
- The proportion of women who are widowed has remained relatively stable over time at approximately 11%.

Figure 2. Marital Status of Women, 1880-2011



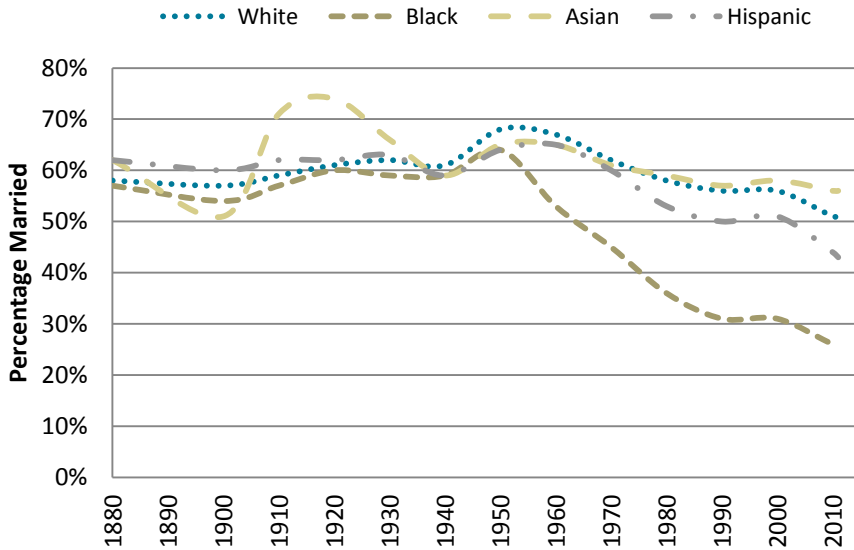
Note: No data available for 1890. Proportions for 1890 were assumed to have remained constant. Data for separated was not available until 1950.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1880-2010 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011 (IPUMS)

Family Profiles examine topics related to NCFMR's core research themes. Data are presented at both the national and state levels using new data sources. Written for both researchers and broad communities, these profiles summarize the latest statistics on U.S. families.

Variation in Percentage Married According to Race & Ethnicity, 1880-2011

Figure 3. Percentage of Women Married Among Race and Ethnic Groups, 1880-2011



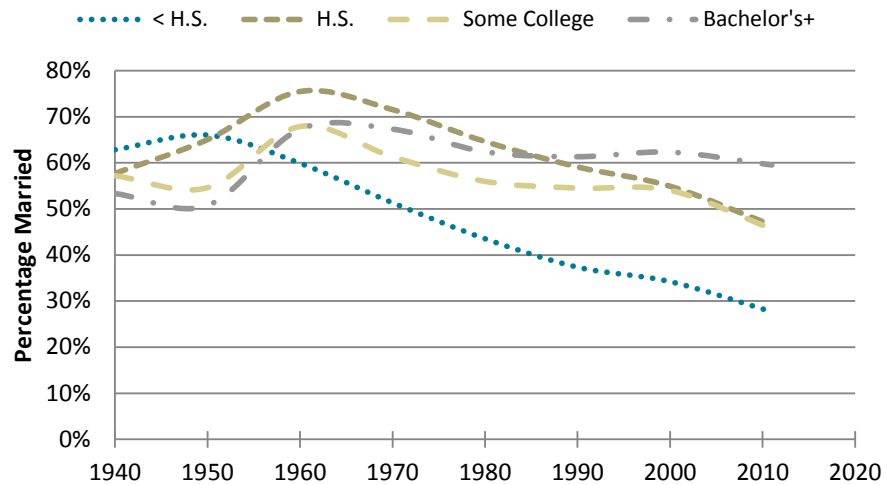
Note: No data available for 1890.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1880-2000 (IPUMS). U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011 (IPUMS).

Variation in Percentage Married According to Educational Attainment, 1940-2011

- In 1940, there was only a 17% difference between the highest and lowest proportion of women married according to educational attainment. By 2011, the percentage difference increased to nearly 73%.
- All groups reached their peak in the proportion of women married in 1960 with the exception of women with less than a high school diploma, who peaked a decade earlier (1950). Since then, the decline in the proportion married was modest for women with at least a Bachelor's degree. Today, women with at least a Bachelor's degree have the highest proportion of currently married women (60%).
- Among all women, except the college educated, fewer than half are currently married. Today, the group with the lowest proportion of married women is women with less than a high school diploma (28%).

Figure 4. Percentage of Women Married Among Educational Attainment Groups, 1940-2011



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1940-2000 (IPUMS); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011 (IPUMS)

Sources:

- Plateris, A. A. 100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics, United States, 1867-1967. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital and Health Statistics. Series 21: Data from the national vital statistics system. Data on natality, marriage, and divorce, no. 24.
- Ruggles, S., Alexander, J. T., Genadek, K., Goeken, R., Schroeder, M. B., & Sobek, M. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). Table MS-2. Estimated median age at first marriage, by sex: 1890 to the present. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/files/ms2.csv>.

- Racial/ethnic patterns in the proportion of women married have diverged since the 1950s. Approximately 64% to 69% of women of all racial/ethnic groups were married in the 1950s. Today, the proportion of women married ranges from 26% to 56% by racial/ethnic group.
- The proportion of women married has declined among all racial/ethnic groups since the 1950s. This decline has been most dramatic for Hispanic and Black women, who experienced 33% and 60% declines in the proportion of women married, respectively.
- Today, the racial/ethnic group with the lowest proportion married is Black women (26%), and the group with the highest is Asian women (56%).
- Approximately 43% of Hispanic women and 51% of White women are currently married.

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