

LIFESTYLES

Black Couples Remain Together Longer Than Whites Before Divorcing, Study Shows

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479 words

26 November 2007

Jet

30

Volume 112; Issue 21; ISSN: 00215996

English

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Blacks spend more time married before getting a divorce than Whites according to a recent study, "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and Their Driving Forces."

The report, conducted by **Betsey Stevenson** and Justin Wolfers of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, shows that Blacks are slower to enter marriage than Whites. By age 45, nearly 1 in 4 Blacks born between 1950 and 1955 had never married, while the rate for Whites was 1 in 10.

However, of those married, Blacks spent more time in their marriages before divorcing than Whites (9.7 years versus 8.9). The divorce rates for Blacks and Whites are similar.

"It's untrue that African-American families are more unstable than White families," Wolfers, assistant professor at the university, explains to Jet.

The divorce rate in the United States is at its lowest level since 1970 and has been declining for the past 30 years. According to the study, the drop is because of the changing nature of marriages.

"The household has changed dramatically by technology," says Wolfers.

"Becoming a homemaker was a huge, complex affair (100 years ago) so it would make sense in any couple back then for one to specialize in market (workforce) and one in non-market (domestic) skills ...what you want is "unlike" to marry "unlike." A high-powered CEO would be looking for a homemaker.

"In the new world, the CEO enjoys going to the opera and may attract a VP who likes to do the same...it's now about doing things together. It's a movement of marriage from production to being about consumption."

The study also reveals that the marriage rate is currently at its lowest point in recorded history. The divorce rate among those who do get married has dropped, from 22.8 divorces per 1,000 married couples in 1979 to 16.7 divorces in 2005.

Also among the factors that Wolfers and Stevenson attribute the decline in marriage and divorce to is the rise of birth control and contraception, which has limited unwanted pregnancies that formerly produced "shotgun marriages."

-Melody K. Hoffman

Marital Life Stats

Blacks spent more time in marriage before divorcing than Whites, 9.7 years versus 8.9 years

Divorce rate dropped from peak of 22.8 divorces per 1,000 married couples in 1979 to 16.7 divorces in 2005

By age 45, 25 percent of Blacks born between 1950 and 1955 had never married versus 10 percent for Whites

SOURCE: Marriage and Divorce: Changes and Their Driving Forces study

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