

Research Proposal on American Interracial Marriage in the Contemporary Era
(1960-2014)

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

During the 1960s, interracial marriage rose to the forefront of the American consciousness. In an era in which record numbers of students attended college, and for the first time these schools became integrated, cultural and intellectual factors prompted the reevaluation of the role of race in marriage. This paper seeks to answer the question: Why did interracial marriages in the U.S. increase markedly after the 1960s? I hypothesize that films depicting mixed race couples, ideas of equality gleaned from the Civil Rights Movement, and the Supreme Court decision regarding *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) resulted in an increase in the number of people “marrying out.”

Although anti-miscegenation laws seem inconceivable to progressive Americans today, one must be reminded of the vicious debates and contingent decisions that occurred. These debates and decisions informed a process that transformed interracial marriage from a crime into a human right. This project will shed light on regional differences of opinion regarding anti-miscegenation laws to add a degree of nuance to the cultural and intellectual environment surrounding the topic. Only by comprehending the interests and perspectives of southern lawyers and New England professors alike can one recognize the larger historical context of marriage and its purpose. Furthermore, I would like to use a *longue durée* approach to evaluating interracial marriage from the 1960s through the present in order to note the enduring effect of ground

breaking cinema, Civil Rights ideology, and *Loving V. Virginia*. As such, modern American historians, sociologists, and economists will hopefully find this project helpful.

Primary Sources

With respect to the primary sources used to address this research question, I intend to use digitized forms of newspaper articles. Prominent newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* (both accessible through Norlin Library) offer insights on race and marriage through film reviews, general news coverage, and legal commentaries. Newspapers embody an ideal primary source since they feature opinions from both experts and ordinary citizens. What is more, focusing on the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* should present a diversity of views that surfaced from both the political left and right. A wide range of political and social convictions more accurately represents the vastness of the American societal norms.

Another primary source base with which I intend to engage is the Pew Research Center. This organization has an enormous collection of statistics regarding interracial marriage and other demographics. Because the Pew Research Center states that it “does not take policy positions,” I believe it would offer reliable information about a once highly controversial topic. The Pew Research Center’s statistical data allows one to chart trends in people’s opinions about interracial marriage, which supports my claim that its frequency increased after the 1960s. In a similar vein, *The Economist* and U.S. Census present statistics about interracial marriage that complement those gleaned from the Pew Research Center. Using multiple sources to investigate a topic like interracial marriage decreases the likelihood of arriving at a biased conclusion.

Beyond these statistical sources, I also intend to examine non-quantitative databases. For example, the website FindLaw.com contains archived Supreme Court decisions from 1893 to the

present. This resource gives one the ability to scrutinize details of majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions of the Court. In the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, one can see why the Court unanimously decided that Virginia's anti-miscegenation law was unconstitutional. Like FindLaw.com, the U.S. Government Printing Office's Federal Digital System contains digitized copies of documents pertaining to *Loving v. Virginia*. This resource has papers that range from Congressional hearing minutes to United States Statutes at Large. Although the Federal Digital System holds many documents, its papers concerning *Loving v. Virginia* emerge only in the last 20 years. Viewing Congressional debate papers at the time the case came to the Supreme Court would have given this work added depth. The limitation of these documents to the recent past limits interpretation, since one cannot compare government opinions on *Loving v. Virginia* from 1997 and 1967, for example.

Historiography

In addition to primary source materials, secondary sources will remain an integral part of this project. I intend to argue against the interpretation of Samuel Huntington that appears most notably in his books *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) and *Who are We?* (2004). Huntington contends that there exist irreconcilable differences between certain cultures that will lead to an inevitable conflict between civilizations. He also argues that multiculturalism remains a weakness of the United States and that people have and should "become Americans by adopting America's Anglo-Protestant cultural and political values."¹ I will contest Huntington's theory by analyzing how acceptance of multiculturalism in the form of interracial marriage strengthened

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who are We?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 61

American principles like social justice and equality before the law. Likewise, I will show how interracial marriage led to a more sophisticated understanding of American identity.

The intersection of American identity with the themes of culture and power remains at the center of the academic works concerning interracial marriage. University of Oregon History Professor Peggy Pascoe argues that the paradigm of culture has changed. She writes that this shift “leads away from a paradigm of culture as a unified system of values and beliefs toward a paradigm of culture as a series of conflicts over meaning played out along such dividing lines as race, class, and gender.”² She states that the old paradigm of culture emphasizes communal discourse and collective consciousness, while the new paradigm accentuates conflict within a culture over the control of symbols and meanings.³ Pascoe concludes that “for a history of interracial marriage, neither of these paradigms is completely sufficient.”⁴ Hence, I will attempt to reconcile this theoretical disjuncture.

In a less theoretical sense, scholars have made impressive forays into the demographics of interracial relationships. The academic literature on the subject establishes that Black/White marriages (in spite of stereotypes) have been the least frequent of all types of interracial marriage. Rather, the most common form of American interracial marriage has been between Japanese and Whites.⁵ Sociologists discovered these and other findings concerning interracial marriage. Economists like Roland G. Fryer Jr. note that the “marriage market model” best explains American interracial marriage over the 20th century. He believes that individuals make choices based on cost-benefit analysis when choosing a potential spouse. He demonstrates that between

² Peggy Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12.1 (1991): 5-18, 12.

³ Ibid., 13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Zhenchao Qian, Sampson Lee Blair, and Stacey D. Ruf, “Asian American Interracial and Interethnic Marriages: Differences by Education and Nativity,” *The International Migration Review* 35.2 (2001): 557-586.

1880 and 1960 race “was the most important attribute in a marriage market for all racial groups” due to laws prohibiting miscegenation and social pressures dissuading it. He indicates that after the 1960s, anti-miscegenation laws and racism receded, allowing individuals to choose mates based on other attributes like education.⁶ Comparatively, however, fewer historians have published on the topic. By employing cultural and intellectual historical lenses, I seek to remedy this gap in the historical literature.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

www. FindLaw.com.

This website remains crucial for finding digital copies of U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

New York Times, 1960-2014.

Pew Research Center Report on Social and Demographic Trends

The Economist.

This publication provides background information about interracial marriage during the contemporary era in a succinct format.

U.S. Census.

Federal Digital System, U.S. Government Printing Office.

This digital collection contains an enormous number of government publications from all three branches of government dating back to 1849.

Wall Street Journal, 1960-2014.

⁶ Ronald G. Fryer Jr., “Guess Who’s Been Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage over the 20th Century,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21.2 (2007), 71-90.

Secondary Sources:

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Brief Timeline

February: Gather additional research materials (notably primary sources) and refine central argument

Early March: Write first draft of research paper

Late March: Discuss and reevaluate paper with help of Phoebe, Thea, and classmates

Early April: Revise paper. Incorporate any additional sources, if necessary

Late April: Write final draft of paper