Couples tend to mate assortatively, selecting spouses who are like themselves. Spousal homogamy, marriage between a couple with similar demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, race/ethnicity), is commonplace. Heterogamy, or disparity between spouses on these dimensions, is linked to lower relationship quality and marital stability (Booth & Edwards, 1992). This Family Profile Series examines trends in marital age, education, and racial heterogamy using data on marriages from five decades of the Current Population Survey (1964-2014). Spousal racial homogamy describes marriages between spouses with the same racial background (i.e., intraracial marriages). We examine racial homogamy among Black and White couples over the past fifty years. The profile also presents generational shifts in intraracial marriages in the U.S.

Trends in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

- Intraracial coupling remains the dominant marriage pattern among Black and White couples in the U.S. The vast majority of Black and White Americans (95%) marry within their racial groups.
- The share of racially homogamous Black and White couples has been on a slow but steady decline since 1970.
  - In 1964, virtually all Black and White marriages involved spouses from similar racial backgrounds.
  - By 2014, 95% of Black and White marriages were racially homogamous (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trends in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014

References:


Educational Similarities and Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

The decline in racially homogamous Black and White couples since the early 1970s cuts across all levels of education, but it is more pronounced at higher educational levels.

- The share of intraracially married Black and White couples with less than high school degrees diminished by 3% from 100% in 1964 to 97% in 2014.
- College-educated couples experienced a greater decline (5%) in racial homogamy over the same time period (99% in 1964 to 94% in 2014).

Figure 2. Educational Similarities and Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014


Generational Differences in Racial Homogamy Among Black and White Couples

The U.S. is experiencing a decline in spousal racial homogamy across generations, from the oldest to the youngest.

- Among members of the Greatest Generation (Americans born before 1928), all Black and White marriages were racially homogamous.
- In contrast, the Millennial Generation (born between 1983 and 1997) stands out among its predecessors as having the smallest share (94%) of intraracially married couples.

Figure 3. Generational Differences in the Share of Racially Homogamous Black and White Couples in the U.S., 1964-2014

Suggested Citation:

National Center for Family & Marriage Research

Family Profiles: Original reports summarizing and analyzing nationally representative data with the goal to provide the latest analysis of U.S. families. These profiles examine topics related to the NCFMR’s core research themes.

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This project is supported with assistance from Bowling Green State University. From 2007 to 2013, support was also provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the state or federal government.