

A 100-Year Review of Research on Black Families

Volume I Appendices

Appendix A. Demographic Characteristics of Black People and Families from 1920 – 1960

Data on the demographic characteristics of Black people and families were pulled primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Vital Statistics System. All data come from publicly available tables or documents. While the U.S. Census Bureau publishes data tables at data.census.gov, data are not available in these searchable tables prior to 2000. For data prior to 2000, information was pulled from summary reports or research briefs as part of the Census Bureau Library. Summary reports typically provide detailed data tables and descriptive information, while research briefs offer a broader picture of a particular topic. Whenever possible, we either use data tables published on data.census.gov or summary reports from the Census Bureau Library; however, in some instances, we do reference research briefs published by the Census. Specific data sources, and links to the original documentation, are included in each decade.

Below, we provide a few additional notes on the availability and limitations of these data:

Defining Black families. First, the Census has not always captured information on Black families in the same way. Prior to the 1970s, for example, the Census tended to bifurcate the population into "White" and "Nonwhite." Additionally, before 1980, enumerators/ data collectors were asked to determine race based on their own "observations." While this limits our ability to understand the true experiences of Black Americans over time, there are some cases where the Census published special reports on "Nonwhite" populations—when possible, we looked to these reports for statistics specific to Black families. In many cases, special reports were not available so we used the "Nonwhite" data point. However, readers should note that these data are inclusive of any American who identified as or was deemed to be any race other than White. Please see the write-up for each decade for additional details on shifts in the ways the Census collected information on families' race and ethnicity over time.

Changes in terminology. As noted throughout the report, we rely on the terminology of the original data source in each decade, which shifted over time.

Shifts in the availability of metrics and measures. As noted in tables 1 to 8, data for all metrics were not available in every decade. For example, information on unemployment was not available prior to 1940, as this was not a metric collected by the Census Bureau until the Great Depression. Additionally, the definitions of measures have shifted slightly over time for some metrics. For example, in some decades, marriage rates are calculated for all individuals over age 15, and in other decades for all individuals over age 14. The availability and definition of metrics are clearly detailed in each decade.

Taken together, the limitations of these data make it challenging to track trends over time. Readers should, therefore, use caution when interpreting shifts in metrics.

The following demographic data are reported using Census and CDC data available at the start of each decade. That is, data reported for 1920 include Census data collected from 1919 – 1920. For more information on how Census data were collected, please see **Technical Appendices** and the **Data on Black Families** section in each decade chapter.

Table 1. Marriage Rates for Black Men and Women and for the Total Population from 1920 to 1960

Decade	Black Men	Black Women	Total Pop. of Men	Total Pop. of Women
1920*	60.4%	59.6%	59.2%	60.6%
1930*	59.8%	58.5%	60.0%	61.1%
1940*	60.6%	58.5%	61.2%	61.0%
1950†	64.1%	62.0%	67.6%	65.7%
1960†	62.9%	60.0%	69.5%	66.0%

*Marriage rates for the decade indicated are provided for those ages 15 and older.

†Marriage rates for the decade indicated are provided for those considered “Nonwhite” who were ages 14 and older.

Table 2. National Unemployment Rates for Black People and for the Total Population from 1940 to 1960*

Decade	National Unemployment Rates for Black People	National Unemployment Rates for the Total Population
1940†	11.1%	9.3%
1950	7.8%	4.8%
1960	8.2%	5.0%

*Unemployment rates were collected from 1940 onward.

†Unemployment rates for the decade indicated are provided for those who reported “seeking work.”

Table 3. National Unemployment Rates for Black Men and Women and for the Total Population from 1940 to 1960

Decade	Black Men	Black Women	Total Pop. of Men	Total Pop. of Women
1940†	10.8%	11.3%	9.3%	9.4%
1950	7.8%	7.9%	4.9%	4.6%
1960	8.4%	7.9%	4.9%	5.1%

Table 4. National Employment Rates for Black Men and Women and for the Total Population from 1920-1960

Decade	Black Men	Black Women	Total Pop. of Men	Total Pop. of Women
1920 [*]	81.1%	38.9%	78.2%	21.1%
1930 [*]	80.2%	38.9%	76.2%	22.0%
1940 ^{†§}	65.7%	32.1%	67.4%	22.2%
1950 ^{†§}	69.0%	33.8%	73.3%	27.6%
1960 ^{†§}	63.8%	38.1%	70.8%	32.6%

^{*}Employment rates for the decade indicated are provided for those ages 10 and older.

[†]Employment rates for the decade indicated are provided for those ages 14 and older.

[§]Employment rates for the decade indicated are provided for those considered “Nonwhite.”

Table 5. Income for Black People and for the Total Population from 1940-1960^{*}

Decade	Median Income of Black People	Median Income of the Total Population
1940 [†]	\$511	\$889
1950	\$1,869	\$3,319
1960	\$3,233	\$5,620

^{*}Income was collected from 1940 onward.

[†]Income for the decade indicated are provided for those considered “Nonwhite.”

Table 6. Black Home Ownership Rates and Home Ownership Rates for the Total Population from 1920-1960

Decade	Percentage of Black People Who Owned Their Homes	Percentage of the Total Pop. Who Owned Their Homes
1920	22.3%	44.6%
1930	23.9%	46.8%
1940	22.8%	43.6%
1950	34.4%	55.0%
1960	38.1%	64.4%

Table 7. Fertility Rates for Black Women and for the Total Population from 1920-1960

Decade	Births per 1,000 Black Women Ages 15-44	Births per 1,000 Women Ages 15-44
1920*	137.5	117.9
1930*	105.9	89.2
1940*	102.4	79.9
1950*	137.3	106.2
1960	153.6	118.0

*Fertility rates for the decade indicated are provided for those considered “Nonwhite.”

Table 8. Life Expectancy Tables for Black Men and Women and for the Total Population from 1920-1960

Decade	Black Men	Black Women	Total Pop. Of Men	Total Pop. Of Women
1920*	46.4	45.5	49.8	48.8
1930†	47.6	49.5	53.4	56.1
1940	52.3	55.5	60.8	65.2
1950‡§	59.2	63.2	65.8	71.5
1960§	61.5	66.5	66.8	73.2

*Life expectancy for Black people in the decade indicated are for states with “more than 5.0 percent Negroes.”

†Overall life expectancy for the decade indicated is an average of “White” and “Negro.”

‡According to the CDC life expectancy tables for the decade indicated, “figures for the nonwhite population cover only Negroes. However, in no case did the Negro population comprise less than 95.0 percent of the responding nonwhite population.”

§Life expectancy for the decade indicated is provided for those considered “nonwhite.”

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