

## The Emerging Black Middle Class: Single and Living Alone

Kris Marsh, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

William A. Darity Jr., *Duke University*

Philip N. Cohen, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Lynne M. Casper, *University of Southern California*

Danielle Salters, *Duke University*

*The literature on the black middle class has focused predominantly on married-couple families with children, reflecting a conception of the black middle class as principally composed of this family type. If that conception is correct, then declining rates of marriage and childrearing would imply a decline in the presence and vitality of the black middle class. Indeed, this is the implication that researchers typically draw from the decline in black marriage rates. However, an alternative view suggests that the decline in marriage and childrearing is producing a shift in the types of households comprising the black middle class. This paper assesses – and affirms – that alternative view. This research shows that, indeed, never-married singles who live alone (Love Jones Cohort) constitute a rapidly growing segment of the black middle class, a development which requires rethinking how the black middle class is conceptualized and studied.*

Over the past three decades in the United States, the age of marriage has risen, divorce rates have remained relatively stable, cohabitation has soared, non-marital childbearing has become more prevalent, marrying and having children have become less common, and more women, especially mothers, are in the labor force (Casper and Bianchi 2002). With the exception of the trend toward not having children, these trends have been dramatically evident among blacks (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995). The retreat from marriage, in particular, has been more pronounced for blacks than for any other racial group (Raley 2000)

*The authors thank John-Charles Duffy, Barbara Entwisle, Bill Wentworth, the anonymous reviewers and conference and seminar participants for their extremely helpful comments. Earlier versions of this paper were presented in New York at the 2007 meetings of the American Sociological Association and the Population Association of America. Direct correspondence to: Kris Marsh, Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University Square, Campus Box 8120, 123 West Franklin St., Chapel Hill, NC 27516-2524. E-mail: marshk@unc.edu.*

These changes in family patterns invite questions about the demographics of the black middle class. Research on the black middle class has focused predominantly on married-couple families with children, reflecting a conception of the black middle class as principally composed of this family type. If that conception is correct, then declining rates of marriage and childrearing would imply a decline in the presence and vitality of the black middle class. Indeed, this is the implication that researchers typically draw from the decline in black marriage rates (Attewell et al. 2005; Besharov 2005; Billingsley 1986; Hill 1971; Landry 1987; McAdoo 1997; Smith and Welch 1986). However, an alternative view suggests that the decline in marriage and childrearing is producing a shift in the types of households comprising the black middle class away from married couples with children and towards singles living alone. This inquiry assesses – and affirms – that alternative view.

Numerous studies reinforce the generalization that married-couple family households with children tend to be middle class and that single and/or divorced households – the U.S. Census Bureau category that includes single-parent households – tend to be poor (Attewell et al. 2004; Billingsley 1968; Blair-Loy and Dehart 2003; Casper and Bianchi 2002; Durant and Loudon 1986; Korenman and Neumark 1992; McAdoo 1997; Smith and Welch 1986; Thomas and Sawhill 2005). However, popular media, such as TV and film, may be emulating reality by depicting a new kind of middle-class black: young, never-married, urban professionals living alone. Films focusing on this new demographic profile include *Love Jones* (1997), about a young black male poet in Chicago who dates a talented female photographer, and *The Brothers* (2001), in which four black male friends begin to question their intimate relationships when one of them announces his impending marriage. To this list could be added the sitcom *Girlfriends* (TV series, 2000- ), about four young black women managing their professional and personal lives. These media depictions invite a reexamination of demographic shifts in the black middle class as a result of changing family patterns. Do these popular representations of a new black middle class reflect an actual demographic change?

Taking a cue from the acronyms that have been offered by the U.S. Census Bureau to describe different family configurations – such as DEWKs (dual earners with kids) or DINKs (dual income, no kids) – this study refers to households comprised of one person who is never-married (hereafter referred to as single) and living alone as SALA (single and living alone). Borrowing the title of one of the popular films mentioned above, we dub these black middle-class SALAs the “*Love Jones* Cohort.”<sup>1</sup> The operational characteristics used to identify the *Love Jones* Cohort are the following: blacks, ages 25 through 44, who live alone, are single (never

married), hold high-wage occupations, have advanced degrees, maintain household incomes above average and own their own homes.<sup>2</sup>

This article has five objectives. The first three tasks are descriptive: First, to provide an overview of black household class status over time; second, to address the importance and growth of SALAs; third, to identify the household composition of the new black middle class and document that SALAs are the emerging black middle class, and; fourth, to test whether members of the Love Jones Cohort remain single and live alone as they age. If the cohort proves to be a temporary phenomenon among younger householders (ages 25-34), then it is simply a transitional category. That is, if these young, black, single professionals who live alone eventually marry and/or have children, then prevailing understandings about black middle-class status and household type will not be challenged significantly. However, if the Love Jones Cohort remains SALA as it ages and retains its middle-class status, then it constitutes a new, potentially permanent social grouping within the larger black middle class. It follows that the black middle class extends substantially beyond married families, and researchers will need to expand discussions of black households and economic status beyond discussions of married and single parent households.

Finally, the analysis determines if SALAs are *more* likely to be middle class than married-couple householders living with a child. If they are, then being single and living alone can be seen as a more advantageous strategy than marriage for establishing one's middle-class status. This conclusion would disrupt even further the standard association of black middle-class status with marital status. In addition, it would reinforce our contention that the black middle class should be studied through a household lens and not a family lens.

### **Black Family Patterns and the Black Middle Class**

Researchers have frequently equated the black middle class with married-couple families. This, in turn, has led to predictions of a decline in the black middle class as a result of the decline in black marriages. The association of married-couple families with middle-class status arises out of the perception that married households enjoy higher incomes, especially in comparison with single-mother households. Writing in 1986, Smith and Welch argued that the dissolution of "husband-wife black families" results in new family units whose incomes "will necessarily be smaller than that of the original intact family." The authors go on to say that "this is particularly true for female-headed families, where the typically higher male income is lost and the ability of many women to compensate by

working is constrained by their childcare responsibilities.” (Smith and Welch 1986:105) Consistent with this logic, Smith and Welch found that the racial income gap for family income narrows substantially in families where both husband and wife were present (Thomas 1989). Two decades later, Besharov (2005) offered a variation of this argument. His argument is based on the premise that, mostly because of dual earners, married-couple families have higher incomes than other types of families. Besharov therefore attributed the stagnation of the black middle class to a decline in dual-income black households. He further argues that, though growing in absolute terms, the black middle class is not growing as a share of the black population.

Like Besharov, McAdoo (1997) maintains that dual incomes are necessary to maintain black middle-class status. McAdoo argues that for urban and suburban middle-income black families with school-age children, socioeconomic mobility “would not have been possible without two incomes and could not be maintained without the continued employment of both parents.” (McAdoo 1997:157) This is increasingly true for the entire U.S. population. Other scholars echo the importance of dual incomes when they suggest that black wives need to participate in the labor force to secure and maintain middle-class status for their families (Billingsley 1986; Hill 1971; Landry 2000).

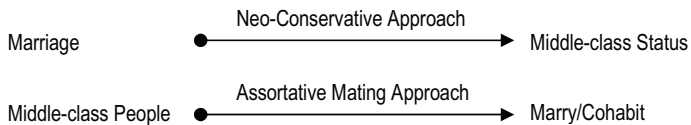
The assumed association between marriage and middle-class status is so strong that scholars affirm it even in the face of data that might be viewed as counterevidence. Consider, for example, the response of Attewell et al. (2004) to the discovery that “the legal marriage rate in the African-American community has been declining over time, even as the black middle class has grown.” Attempting to account for the discrepancy, Attewell et al. surmise that the declining marriage rate “acts as a brake upon household incomes” and that “the more that marriage and cohabitation rates shrink over time, the greater the economic braking effect becomes. Conversely, if marriage or cohabitation rates were to rise, the growth of black families with middle class incomes would accelerate.” (Attewell 2004:15) This is, as we will see, a dubious conclusion.

Equating dual-income married-couple families with the black middle class has a strong commonsense appeal. However, there are two problems with the logic behind this equation. First, to gauge the effect of income on a family’s socioeconomic status, it is necessary to calculate per person income. Besharov’s (2005) observation that married-couple families generally have higher incomes than other family types leaves open the issue of whether those higher family incomes translate into higher-per-person incomes. Smith and Welch (1986) similarly do not take into account factors other than total income that may have ramifications for a family’s economic well-being. For example, the researchers do not

include an accounting of family size (Thomas and Sawhill 2005). As this research will demonstrate, patterns of black affluence differ between married-couple households living with a child and married-couple households living without a child.

A second problem with the equation of married couples who have middle-class status is that the direction of causality is unclear. This has deep political ramifications. Much of the literature suggests that family type produces middle-class status (rather than people already possessing middle-class status choosing to marry or cohabit). This directional linkage is consistent with neo-conservative ideology, which presents marriage as an anti-poverty strategy (Blank 1997).

In fact, however, marriage patterns can simply perpetuate preexisting inequalities: marriage between poor people does not necessarily advance individuals from poverty to middle-class status. An alternative to the neo-conservative view is provided by South (1991). South's study examines socio-demographic differentials in mate selection. He proposes that "people with higher socioeconomic status seek to 'exchange' their resources for a spouse with valued qualities." (Fossett and Kiecolt 1993; Hirschl, Altobelli and Rank 2003; Rose 2004; South 1991:937) South's proposal serves as a caution against assuming that middle-class status follows marriage. In South's assortative mating approach, individuals attain or maintain higher socioeconomic status without having to marry. This is a scenario that corresponds to that which we envision for the Love Jones Cohort.



In a similar vein, but at the opposite side of the economic spectrum, Edin and Kefalas (2005) question the causal direction between marriage and economic status. They find that poor women want to get married but that their potential mates are not good marriage material: they are poor, lack quality jobs and are likely to have been in jail, to have drug and alcohol problems, and may be violent. For these women, the costs of marriage apparently outweigh its benefits.

Perhaps the most significant problem in focusing exclusively on married-couple families as constituting the black middle class is that researchers lose sight of other household types – notably, as this study will show, the growing proportion of blacks who are single and living alone.

The U.S. Census Bureau divides households into two categories: family and non-family (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Fields and Casper 2001). A family household is one in which members are related to the

householder through blood, marriage or adoption. Family households are then subdivided into married-couple families and other families. A *married-couple family household* has both spouses present in the same household. *Other-family households* consist of an unmarried householder, with no spouse present, and at least one family member related through blood, marriage or adoption (e.g., children). Members of *non-family households* are not related through blood or marriage, and children are not present. SALA is one type of non-family household – one-person households in which the householder is single (never married) and living alone. Other examples of non-family households include two or more unrelated and unmarried persons sharing a living unit as roommates or cohabitators living without children (Casper and Cohen 2000).

Researchers who equate married-couple families with the black middle class are not considering the possibility that the rise in the number of non-family households in the black population represents a significant segment of the black middle class. The emergence of the Love Jones Cohort would yield a very different explanation for the data that startled Attewell et al. (2004). One does not need to hypothesize a delayed-action “braking effect” to explain the growth of the black middle class during a time of declining black marriage if, in fact, there is a growing proportion of SALAs with middle-class status. This may be true even if there also is a concentration of poverty among non-married blacks.

The existence of the Love Jones Cohort also would yield a new perspective on the concept of “stabilizing” one’s class position. Durant and Loudon (1986) argue that middle-class blacks (which for them means married-couple families) face a problem of continually having to stabilize their class position. This means that middle-class blacks need to establish a firm residential base (buy a house in a “good” place), develop and maintain strong institutional ties and positions commensurate with middle-class status (family stability, white-collar occupations, political participation and high levels of education), and develop and exemplify behavior patterns and life-styles appropriate to the middle class.

If we are correct about the growth of the Love Jones Cohort, it would appear that this group has a different set of strategies for stabilizing its class position. Contrary to the prevailing assumption in the literature, this cohort stabilizes its position *by not marrying and continuing to live alone*. Indeed, when the complications of per person income are taken into account, SALAs may have certain advantages in maintaining middle-class status over married couples. If true, this will be a somewhat surprising conclusion given that earlier studies have found that childbearing among blacks does not hurt and marriage actually helps respondents’ careers, as measured by earning a higher salary (Blair-Loy and Dehart 2003; Cohen 2002; Korenman and Neumark 1992).

## Defining the Black Middle Class

### *Previous Studies*

Scholars have struggled for decades to decide who among the black population should be considered middle class (Billingsley 1968; Bowser 2007; Fraizer 1957; Heiss 1975; Lacy 2007; Landry 1987; McAdoo 1978, 1988; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Scanzoni and Scanzoni 1976; Wilson 1978). Quantitative definitions of the black middle class generally rely on four variables, used either in combination with one another or independently: education, homeownership (as a measure of wealth), income and occupation (Drake and Horace 1962; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Frazier 1957; Landry 1987; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas and Johnson 2005).

Examining census data with each of these measures offers a rough sense of the size of the black middle class. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that 16 percent of blacks (25 and older) have a bachelor's degree or higher. Forty-six percent live in an owner-occupied housing unit. The black median household income (in 1999 dollars) was \$29,423, and 25 percent of the black employed are in management, professional and related occupations. For comparison purposes, 24 percent of the U.S. population (25 and older) as a whole have a bachelor's degree or higher. Sixty-six percent live in an owner-occupied housing unit. The median household income (in 1999 dollars) was \$41,994, and 34 percent were in management, professional and related occupations (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Researchers widely agree that middle-class blacks have not been insulated from historical and persistent marginalization, discrimination and racism (Bowser 2007). Consequently, the black middle class experience differs from that of the white middle class. Middle-class blacks live in less socioeconomically attractive neighborhoods and in close proximity to the black poor (Adelman 2005; Alba, Logan and Stults 2000; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Substantial wealth disparities relative to whites leave middle-class blacks with fewer assets to bequeath to the next generation (Kochhar 2004). The extended family structure of middle-class blacks, which emphasizes a moral obligation and social responsibility to invest assets in their extended family and the larger black community, prevents assets accumulation for middle-class blacks (Chiteji and Hamilton 2000).

### *The Black Middle Class Index*

Building on the work of several scholars who have defined the black middle class (Landry 1987; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Pattillo-McCoy 1999), we have created a black middle class index (BMCi) as the first step

**Table 1: Selected Scholars' Criteria for Measuring the Black Middle Class**

Scholar(s)*	Year	Definition of the Black Middle Class
Frazier, E.F.	1957	Frazier defines the black bourgeoisie as "those Negroes who derive their incomes principally from the services which they render as white-collar workers." (43)
Billingsley, A.	1968	Billingsley explains "the black middle class is a major achievement sustained by education, two earners, extended families, religion, and service to others." (287)
McAdoo, H.P.	1978	McAdoo describes a certain level of education and financial security (139-140) and motivation and support of the wider community and extended family necessary to attain middle-class status (147). McAdoo suggests that "mobility would not have been possible without two incomes and could not be maintained without the continued employment of both parents." (157)
Wilson, W.J.	1978	Wilson associates the black middle class with "those who are employed in white-collar jobs and in craftsmen and foremen positions." (x)
Collins, S.	1983	Collins states that the movement of increased numbers of blacks into a wider range of professions and higher income brackets has created a "visible" black middle class (369).
Landry, B.	1987	Landry defines the black middle class solely on occupation, including the professionals, managers (non-owners), sales workers, and clerical workers as well as small businessmen and some service occupations such as policemen, firemen, and dental assistants (7).
Oliver, M. Shapiro, T.	1997	Oliver and Shapiro stress the importance of wealth in determining class. For them "the middle class is characterized by a variety of white-collar occupations ranging from sales clerks and teachers to executives, professionals, and the self-employed." They also include income (between \$25,000 and 50,000) and mention the importance of other factors such as education, experience, and skills in determining earnings (35).
Pattillo-McCoy, M.	1999	Pattillo-McCoy says that the middle class is determined by "a combination of socioeconomic factors (mostly income, occupation, and education) and normative judgments (ranging from where people live, to what churches or clubs they belong to, to whether they plant flowers in their gardens" (13)
Bowser, B.	2007	Bowser states that "the single most important ticket into the modern middle class is higher education." (113)



toward identifying the Love Jones Cohort. Table 1 provides a selective list of different ways scholars have defined the black middle class. As the table shows, most scholars use some combination of education, income, occupation and wealth.

Several of the indicators of middle-class status cited in Table 1 are inadequate for various reasons. For example, these researchers look only through a family lens when trying to understand the black middle class. Many also fail to incorporate any wealth indicator into their work. Wealth disparities between the black and white middle classes make the black middle class an economically vulnerable group.

A very important difference between this study and previous studies is the use of households as the unit of analysis (Dickson and Marsh forthcoming). To our knowledge, no existing research has examined SALA households as a prospect for inclusion in the black middle class. Examining the black middle class by household type allows us to take into account changes in family patterns in the larger black community. We are thus able to include SALA households in our analysis, whereas this category is rendered invisible when families are treated as the unit of analysis.

To be classified as middle class or higher, any individual in the household must satisfy criteria for four of the indicators of the BMCi: education, homeownership, per person income and occupational prestige. The BMCi has no upper limits for income, education or occupational prestige. The term “middle class” refers to all relatively affluent households as well as those that are extremely affluent. The BMCi is scored 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4. The maximum score is four and is the score required for classification as middle class.<sup>3</sup> Adding home ownership to the more commonly used criteria for determining middle-class status takes into account the wealth vulnerability of middle-class blacks, which some scholars do not consider.

### *Educational Attainment*

The educational attainment variable measures the highest level of schooling completed within each household. The highest value for this measure is “4+ years of college completed.” If any individual in the household meets this criterion, the household is assigned a point on the BMCi. In 2000, roughly a fifth of black households with householders ages 25-54 and 25-44 (21 and 20 percent, respectively) met the educational requirement for this index.

### *Wealth*

Home ownership is a proxy for wealth. Home ownership is one of the more significant dimensions of wealth for most people (or households) who have positive net worth (Oliver and Shapiro 1997). Householders who

own or are buying a home receive one point on the BMCi. Among black householders in the 25 through 54-year-old range, about half (45 percent) own or are buying their homes, a figure that has been fairly constant since 1980. For householders 25-44 years old, the rate of homeownership was slightly lower, at 39 percent in 2000. The inclusion of home ownership as a variable in the BMCi led to a number of households being excluded from the Love Jones Cohort that might otherwise have the appearance of being middle class.<sup>4</sup>

### *Per person Income*

When scholars examine the black middle class, they often compare families of different sizes without making adjustments for this difference. To ensure that households of different sizes can be compared accurately, a per person income indicator is calculated for each household type. To calculate per person income, this study uses a computation technique suggested in Citro and Michael (1995). De Ruijter, Treas and Cohen (2005:312) describe this computation as follows:

$$\text{Scale value} = (A+PK)^F$$

"where A is the number of adults in the households, K is the number of children (each treated as a proportion P of an adult), and F is the scale economy factor." P equals 0.7:1 or the proportion of a child to an adult. F equals 0.65 or the economies to scale.

$$\text{Scale value} = (A+.70K)^{.65}$$

To illustrate how this computation works, consider that households of three different types – a married-couple householder living with two children, a single householder living with one child, and a single householder living alone – all have a total household income of \$50,000. The scale values for these three households are 2.215, 1.766, and 1, respectively. When each household income (\$50,000) is divided by the scale value, the per-person incomes are \$22,568.81 for the married-couple householder with children, \$35,414.26 for the single householder living with a child, and \$50,000 for the single householder living alone. The latter would be the most affluent of the three.

This study takes the per-person income for each household and compares this income to the median per-person income for all black households. A household whose per person income exceeds the 1980, 1990 and 2000 medians receives a score of one on the BMCi.

### *Occupational Prestige*

OCCSCORE is an occupational score index that measures occupational reward; the index is available across decennial census datasets from 1850 to 2000 and is based on 1950 occupational classifications and incomes (Dietrich forthcoming; Ruggles et al. 2004). The values are presented in 1950 dollars scaled downward by units of 100. For example, if median total income for economists was \$20,000 in 1950, the value equals 20 for economists in all decennial census datasets.<sup>5</sup> As a point of reference, the highest average OCCSCORE for any racial/ethnic group in 1990 was 37.03 (the score for people of Russian ancestry). The average OCCSCORE for all men in 1990 was 29.61; for black men it was 25.77 (Darity, Dietrich and Guilkey 2003).<sup>6</sup>

For the BMCi, OCCSCORE is interpreted as a measure of occupational prestige. Assuming that household members share class status, this study takes the person in each household with the highest OCCSCORE value and compare his or her score to the median for the highest ranking individuals in all black households. This gives us a median score of 24 for 2000 and 23 for 1990 and 1980. A household whose OCCSCORE exceeds these medians receives a score of one on the BMCi.

### **Data**

Using the one percent sample of the 1980, 1990 and 2000 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, we select both person and household variables for non-Hispanic blacks living in non-group quarters. This selection at the person level ensures we are examining households comprised of a black householder (and black spouse). The 1 percent dataset for all three years had slightly more than 808,000 person records. When we aggregate the person records to the household level based on the age of the householder, there are slightly more than 160,000 households with householders in the 25 through 54-year-old range and close to 115,500 households with householders in the 25 through 44-year-old range. The Love Jones Cohort is embedded in the latter category.

The seven household types for this analysis are: single (never-married), living alone ; single (never-married), living with an adult (or adults); single (never-married), living with a child (or children); single (never-married) living with an adult (or adults) and a child (or children); married, living without a child (or children); married, living with a child (or children); and formerly-married.<sup>7</sup> These household types are not exhaustive. Married, spouse-absent households are dropped from the sample.

As explained above, the reason for using households as the unit of analysis is that they reveal the shifting marital trends that are taking place

on a large scale in the black community. The literature pays only a small degree of attention to the rise of SALAs.

We hypothesize that the Love Jones Cohort is a life-cycle specific phenomenon; hence, this study is limited to householders in the 24 through 54-year-old range. This age limit captures the prime working years and the peak years of marriage. And eliminates both elderly blacks who are likely to be retired and younger blacks who have yet to finish their educations and establish themselves economically.

## **Procedures**

To understand changes in middle-class status by household type over time, this project uses three approaches: cross-section analysis, synthetic-cohort analysis and logistic regression. In the cross-sectional analyses, we first produce a descriptive account of black households across the census years 1980, 1990 and 2000. Second, we assess the increasing presence of SALAs among all black household types. Third we identify household composition in conjunction with middle-class status to examine the growth of SALA households in the black middle-class. This allows us to test whether the Love Jones Cohort is accounting for a growing share of the black middle class. Fourth, to examine whether the Love Jones Cohort persists within age cohorts over time, we examine black middle-class householders as their cohorts move through time at 10-year age intervals. Because census data are not longitudinal, this research employs a synthetic-cohort analysis to track householders born about 1950, 1960 and 1970 as they age through the 1980 to 2000 census years. Finally, to determine whether certain household types are associated with an increased likelihood of membership in the black middle class, we use multivariate regression analysis. Households are the unit of analysis. This analysis allows for a test of the final hypothesis: that SALAs are more likely to be middle class than married-couple households. For the regression analysis, the BMCi is recoded as a dichotomous dependent variable equal to one when all four criteria are met. First, we run a model for householders ages 25-54. Second, we run a model for householders ages 25-54 by gender.<sup>8</sup> Finally, we repeat these same models for householders ages 25-44.

## **Findings**

### ***Black Middle Class Index***

Table 2 shows the percentages of black households that scored a point on each of the four indicators and the percentages of black households

**Table 2: Percent of Black Households with Each BMCi Indicator**

<b>Indicators<sup>○</sup></b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Per Person Income*	57.19	56.31	54.08
Occupation Score <sup>†</sup>	52.91	55.69	57.94
Household Education	13.30	17.70	20.81
Homeownership	43.69	42.81	45.39
All Four Indicators <sup>‡</sup>	6.38	8.70	10.00

<b>Indicators<sup>■</sup></b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Per Person Income	55.65	52.93	49.92
Occupation Score	54.98	56.33	59.09
Household Education	14.45	18.45	20.43
Homeownership	38.63	36.85	39.31
All Four Indicators <sup>‡</sup>	6.22	8.02	8.55

○ Black Householders Ages 25-54

■ Black Householders Ages 25-44

\* Median per person income for all black households: \$18,876 (2000); \$12,000 (1990), and \$6,682 (1980).

† Median occupational prestige score of all black households: 24 (2000), 23 (1990), and 23 (1980).

‡ Percent of black households scoring one on all four BMCi indicators

that scored 1 on all four indicators of the BMCi and are therefore considered middle class. Table 2 also contains data for households with householders ages 25-54 and 25-44 in 1980, 1990 and 2000. It is clear that educational attainment is the most selective of the four BMCi indicators. Only one in five black households with householders in the 25 through 54-year-old range has a minimum of one household member with four or more years of college in 2000. In 1980, the figure was 13 percent. Homeownership rates were slightly higher in 2000 than 1980. In 2000 and 1990 less than half (46 and 43, respectively) of black households with householders in the 25 through 54-year-old range were homeowners. Households with householders in the 25 through 44-year-old range have lower rates of inclusion than householders ages 25-54 for the per person income and homeownership indicators and comparable or slightly higher rates for occupational score and education. It is also clear that the black middle class is growing. In 2000, 10 percent of black households with householders in the 25 through 54-year-old range were middle class, up from 6 percent in 1980.<sup>9</sup>

### *SALAs and All Black Households*

Table 3 shows seven household types, each with its respective percentage share of all black households. The percentages are given for 1980, 1990

**Table 3: Percent of Black Households by Type, Age of Householder and Year**

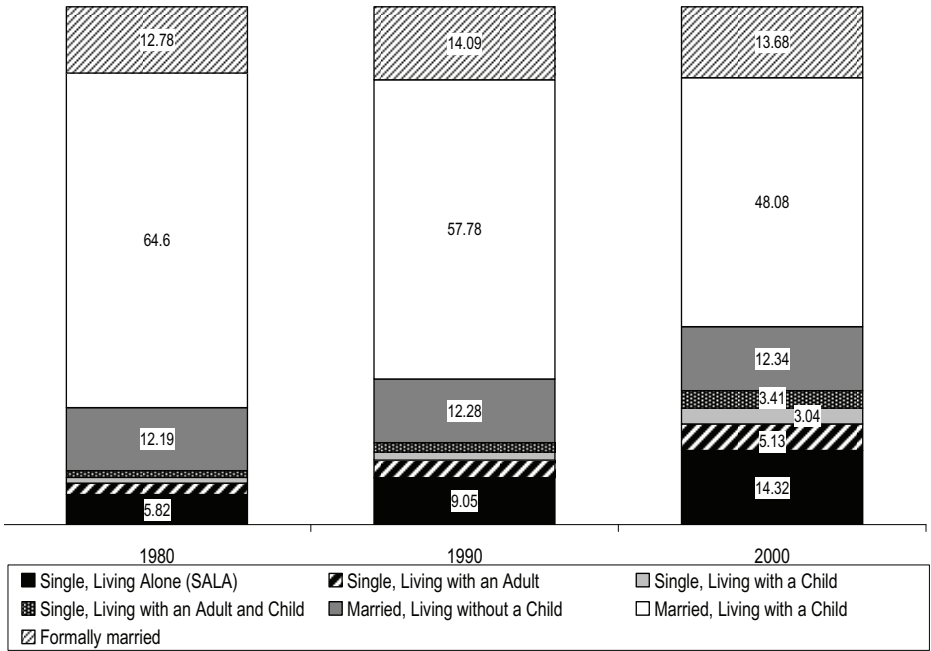
<b>Household Types<sup>○</sup></b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	9	10	14
Single, Living with an Adult	2	3	4
Single, Living with a Child	7	11	13
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	2	4	5
Married, Living without a Child	9	9	9
Married, Living with a Child	35	29	25
Formerly-Married	36	33	30
Total	100	100	100
N	48,427	49,246	64,372

<b>Household Types<sup>■</sup></b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	10	11	15
Single, Living with an Adult	2	4	4
Single, Living with a Child	8	13	17
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	3	5	7
Married, Living without a Child	6	6	6
Married, Living with a Child	37	31	26
Formerly-Married	32	29	25
Total	100	100	100
N	35,618	36,339	43,527

and 2000 and for the two age groupings (25-54, 25-44). From 1980 to 2000, for households with householders ages 25-54, SALAs grew; married-couple households without children remained constant; and married-couple households with children and formerly-married households decreased. Single households living with children increased the most, from 7 percent of total black households in 1980 to 13 percent in 2000. SALA households grew from 9 percent in 1980 to 14 percent in 2000. In Table 3 we see this growth made SALAs the third largest household type (14 percent) in 2000, after married-couple households living with children (25 percent) and formerly-married households (30 percent). Close to one in seven black households are SALA.<sup>10</sup>

From 1980 to 2000, single households with children had the highest percentage point change of all households with householders in the 25 through 54- and 25 through 44-year-old range; most of this growth occurred between 1980 and 1990. When comparing 1990 and 2000, we see that the percentage point change is higher for SALA households for the age group 25-54. Casper and Bianchi (2002) and Sayer, Cohen and Casper (2004) find that most changes in household and family types occurred from 1970 to 1980, slowed from 1980 to 1990, and remained constant since the mid-1990s. Scholars can no longer look past this emerging black household type – SALA.

Figure 1. Percent Distribution of Black Middle-Class Households



Note: Black Householders Ages 25-44

*SALAs and the Black Middle Class*

The composition of the black middle class is shifting. In 2000, 11 percent of black middle class households with the householder in the 25 through 54-year-old range were SALAs, up from 5 percent in 1980; the same pattern is apparent among younger households (25-44).<sup>11</sup> This study clearly detects the presence of a Love Jones Cohort. Given the assumption that the Love Jones Cohort is a phenomenon of younger householders, we graph these changes in household percentages by middle-class status for households with householders ages 25 to 44.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 shows that in 2000, single and living alone householders made up 14 percent of middle-class black households. This means SALAs more than doubled their share of the black middle class, from 6 percent in 1980. Meanwhile, married-couple households with children are decreasing their share and formerly-married are retaining their share. Among households with householders ages 25-44, the proportion of middle-class households that were married-couple living without children remained virtually unchanged from 1980 to 2000.

Figure 1 also shows that married-couple households with children comprise the largest segment of the black middle class although they have been steadily declining since 1980. In 2000, the Love Jones Cohort, slightly edging out the formerly-married households, made up the second largest segment of the black middle class. This figure illustrates that SALA was the fastest growing black middle-class household with householders in the 25 through 44-year-old range between 1980 and 2000. If present trends persist, SALA is on track to become the household type accounting for the largest segment of the black middle class.

### *The Love Jones Cohort and Aging*

As people age, they tend to go through different phases of the life course (Casper and Bianchi 2002). When people reach middle age, they are more likely to be married and have children than when they were in their 20s. After people have reached their prime childrearing years, their children are likely to move out. Also, as young adults age, they tend to earn more and are more likely to buy houses. We now investigate the effects of aging on household composition and middle-class status. It is possible that as the Love Jones Cohort ages its members will marry and have children. If this occurs these individuals will cease being single and living alone. Thus, the strategy of remaining single and childless to achieve and solidify middle class status is called into question. In other words, the Love Jones Cohort may not be eschewing marriage and children, just postponing them.

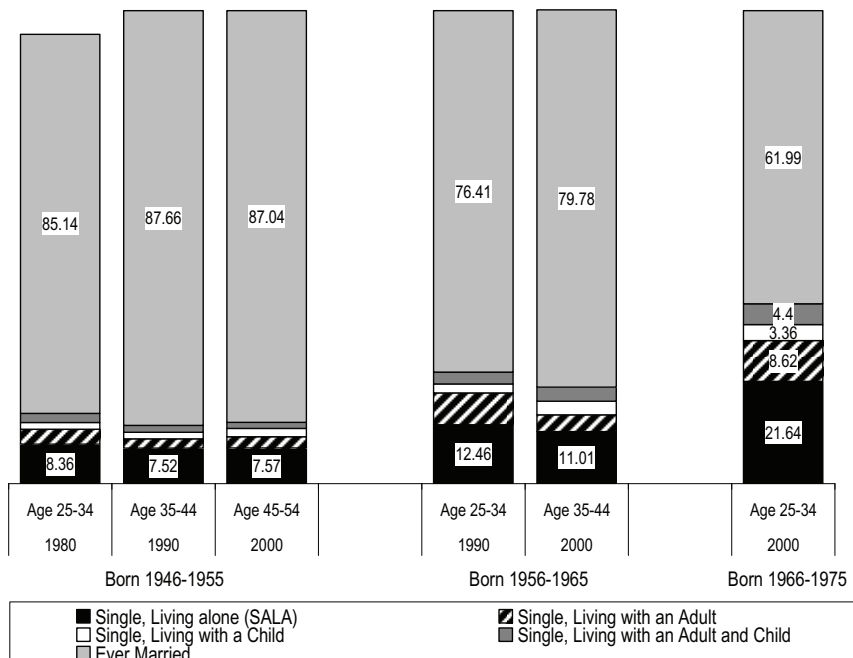
Figure 2 shows two important trends for cohorts born around 1950, 1960 and 1970. First, the increasing share of SALA households among the black middle class is not confined to one cohort. That is, their share of the black middle class increases with each cohort, from around 8 percent to around 12 percent to around 22 percent. Second, there has been only a slight decline in their share of the black middle class as the 1950 and 1960 cohorts have aged. Their representation among the black middle class is not just a phenomenon of early adulthood. In 2000, SALA households with householders ages 25-34 comprised almost a quarter of black middle class households, up from 8 percent in 1980.<sup>13</sup> These findings indicate that the Love Jones Cohort is an emerging phenomenon, and confirm the hypothesis that as the Love Jones Cohort ages it maintains a consistent share of the middle-class status.

### *Odds of Being Middle Class*

In Table 4, model 1, SALA households made continual strides from 1980 to 2000 in increasing their relative odds of acquiring middle-class status.



**Figure 2. Percent Distribution of Black Middle-Class Households, by Birth Cohort**



In 2000, we find that married-couple households without children have greater odds of being middle class than married-couple households with children. We also find that single households with an adult and children have much lesser odds of being in the middle class than married-couple households with children. This pattern is also true in 1990.

In Model 2 we run a regression using the gender of the formerly-married and single household types (except for single, living with an adult and child). In 2000, female SALA households (.539) are about half as likely to qualify as black middle class as are married-couple households with a child; the difference between the odds ratios for these two households is statistically significant. In 2000, single female households living with an adult (.693) have slightly lower odds of being in the black middle class than married-couple households with a child. In 2000, male SALA households (.289) and those single households living with an adult (.323) have much lower odds of being middle class when compared with married-couple households living with a child. The formerly-married female householders (.289) and those male householders (.300) have much lower odds of being middle class compared to married-couple households living with a child. A clear disparity exists between female SALA (.539) and those formerly-

Table 4: Logistic Regression of BMCi on Black Household Types<sup>Ω</sup>

	1980	1990	2000
<b>Model 1<sup>○†</sup></b>			
Single Living Alone (SALA)	.329***	.368***	.409***
Single, Living with an Adult	.506***	.432***	.496***
Single, Living with a Child	.075***	.053***	.088***
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	.231	.166	.226
Married, Living without a Child	1.04	1.10*	1.13**
Formerly-Married	.235***	.270***	.292***
<b>Model 2 – By Gender<sup>○†</sup></b>			
Female, Single, Living Alone (SALA)	.466***	.437***	.539***
Male, Single, Living Alone (SALA)	.231***	.306***	.289***
Female, Single, Living with an Adult	.619*	.599***	.693***
Male, Single, Living with an Adult	.434***	.298***	.323***
Female, Single, Living with a Child	.068***	.043***	.082***
Male, Single, Living with a Child	.203**	.288***	.183***
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	.231	.166	.226
Married, Living without a Child	1.04	1.10*	1.13**
Female, Formerly-Married	.222***	.253***	.289***
Male, Formerly-Married	.275***	.323***	.300***
<b>Model 3<sup>■†</sup></b>			
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	.314***	.390***	.459***
Single, Living with an Adult	.491***	.436***	.571***
Single, Living with a Child	.068***	.052***	.080***
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	.225	.156	.228
Married, Living without a Child	1.15*	1.11	1.20**
Formerly- Married	.202***	.226***	.261***
<b>Model 4 – By Gender<sup>■†</sup></b>			
Female, Single, Living Alone (SALA)	.465***	.480***	.620***
Male, Single Living Alone (SALA)	.210***	.314***	.322***
Female, Single, Living with an Adult	.611*	.619***	.832
Male, Single, Living with an Adult	.419***	.293***	.364***
Female, Single, Living with a Child	.062***	.041***	.076***
Male, Single, Living with a Child	.185**	.340**	.152***
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	.225	1.56	.228
Married, Living without a Child	1.15*	1.11	1.20**
Female, Formerly-Married	.182***	.205***	.247***
Male, Formerly-Married	.265***	.293***	.299***

<sup>Ω</sup> Odd Ratios Reported

<sup>○</sup> Black Householders Ages 25-54

<sup>■</sup> Black Householders Ages 25-44

<sup>†</sup> Reference category for both models is married, living with a child

Note: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

married householders (.289) in relation to them being middle class when married-couple households living with a child are the referent group. This disparity is not evident among these same male householders. Regardless of whether a single householder with children is man (.183) or woman (.082), this household type still reports the lowest odds of being middle class when compared with married-couple households living with a child.

This model does suggest, however, that women living alone or with an adult (but not those formerly-married) have greater odds than their male counterparts of acquiring middle-class status.

Next, we ran a regression with householders ages 25-44, the results of which are shown in models 3 and 4. Model 3 shows the same trends and patterns are present. In Model 4, a slightly more pronounced pattern emerges when we compare householders ages 25-44 by gender. In 2000, married-couple households without a child (1.20) have greater odds of being in the black middle class than married-couple households with a child. The one similarity between the four models is that, out of all households, married-couple households without children consistently have the greatest odds of being middle class.

## Conclusion

The Love Jones Cohort indeed exists. SALAs, one of the defining components of the Love Jones Cohort, are increasing their share of black households, and they are increasing their share of black middle-class households. Furthermore, the proportion of all black households that are SALA *and* middle class holds steady as the cohort ages, indicating this is not a short-lived phenomenon among younger individuals. Although SALAs still represent a relatively small percentage of the black middle class overall, among those ages 25-34 in 2000, SALAs account for roughly a quarter of black middle-class households.

In answer to the specific research questions, the data suggest that the black middle class continues to grow when examining black households with householders in the 25 to 54- and 25 to 44-year-old ranges, and that the Love Jones Cohort could be the leading cause of this growth. This study confirms that in 2000 nearly one in six black middle-class households with householders ages 25-44 was a SALA household, and close to one in four black middle-class households with a householder ages 25-34 were SALAs. A possible implication is that SALAs are on a trajectory to becoming the most prominent household within the black middle class if not the entire black community. Although this is a bold claim, these findings support this notion. Social scientists can no longer afford to overlook this group.

Our analysis positively illustrates that the Love Jones Cohort has maintained its household status of SALA and its socioeconomic status of black middle class for the past 20 years. Married-couple households have decreased their share of the black middle class during this same period. Thus the Love Jones Cohort is not only becoming the newest face of the black middle class, it may possibly become the most pronounced household type for this class group.

When middle-class status is operationalized by the BMCi measures of education, occupational prestige, per person income and wealth, a SALA household status does facilitate access into the black middle class. This is true especially for women ages 25-44. A possible implication of this shift is that if black women are achieving middle-class status without marrying, marriage may not, contrary to what has been previously believed, provide much financial benefit or produce positive returns for professional black women in this age group. However, an increase in the Love Jones Cohort may have negative implications for the intergenerational wealth of the black middle class, the larger black community and upcoming generations. Given that the Love Jones Cohort is neither married nor has children, how and to whom are these emerging black middle-class householders going to transfer their wealth? Can this new black middle class reproduce itself?

These findings suggest that the black middle class is growing in absolute terms and also as a share of the black population, at least for those ages 25-54. This contradicts Besharov's (2005) claims about the stagnation of the black middle class. Similarly, Attewell et al.'s (2004) theory about the "economic braking effect" of declining marriage rates entirely overlooks the correlation between the rise in SALAs and the growth of the black middle class. Besides the number of "intact black families" that are doing quite well (Smith and Welch 1986), the Love Jones Cohort exists because SALAs are also doing moderately well; yet the Love Jones Cohort is overlooked by scholars, being overshadowed in the literature by the attention paid both to married-couple households and to single (never-married) households with children (the much-discussed "black single mother").

These findings indicate that a redefinition of the black middle class is in order. Scholars must study black households beyond single-parent and married-couple households (Billingsley 1968; Hill 1972; Hunter 2006; Stack 1975).

Our findings also cast tangential light on the question of the direction of causality between marriage and class status. Our finding that single and living-alone households (and living with another adult) are making steady progress into the middle class challenges neoconservative claims on behalf of marriage as an anti-poverty measure. What generalizations to draw about the direction of causality remains an open question for blacks.

Further investigation suggested by this research might include examining if the Love Jones Cohort is voluntarily or involuntarily choosing not to form the kind households considered normative for middle class status (married-couple with children). Where does the Love Jones Cohort live (Marsh and Roseman, unpublished manuscript) and what are its motivations? Does

the Love Jones Cohort demonstrate a collective identity? And if so, how is this identity different from the identities of the traditional black middle class? Ethnographic and other qualitative approaches are useful tools to pursue these questions. Such research could add significantly to scholars' understanding of the intersections between household type, class status and life chances for American blacks.

## Notes

1. We are not using the term "cohort" in the demographic sense of a birth cohort but simply as a group or band of individuals that have some characteristics in common.
2. Members of the Love Jones Cohort could potentially live alone or with other unrelated adult(s). The U.S. Census Bureau defines non-family households as those containing only unrelated individuals. Households with unrelated adults, who do not have a sexual relationship, are described as housemates. Households composed of unmarried adults encompass cohabitating heterosexual couples or homosexual partnerships. Because we are unable to clearly determine the nature of the relationships that fall into these kinds of households in the census data, for this paper we classify the Love Jones Cohort as those households that include individuals who are single (never-married) and living alone. This classification thus eliminates some potential Love Jones Cohort situations but is more clearly interpretable. We initially considered calling people in these single, living-alone, middle-class households "Buppies" – a black analogue to Yuppies. This term is often used in a derogatory fashion to describe young professionals who are perceived as selfish, materialistic and superficial. Given the derogatory nature of the term, we decided on the "Love Jones Cohort" as our term.
3. This BMCi is more stringent than that used by many researchers, but it provides stronger evidence that a new type of black middle class is emerging. The restriction in middle-class status to those with BMCi scores of four mostly excludes households in which all criteria are met except college graduation. This cutoff imposes a more contemporary definition of middle class, based on the growing importance of education in the determination of income in the U.S. economy after its transformation from manufacturing to service dominance. Although some middle-class positions could be attained without college degrees in the past, achieving the security of stable middle-class status without a four-year college degree is increasingly unlikely (Bowser 2007; Juhn, Murphy and Pierce 1993). For this reason, households that scored four on the BMCi will represent the black middle class in this analysis. This classification system is similar to Ashwini Deshpande's (2000) caste inequality index.
4. By our criteria, a young male professional who makes more than \$150,000 a year, holds an MBA, but leases a pricey loft in the heart of downtown Chicago would not rank as a member of the black middle class. Despite his high income and affluent lifestyle, he does not own a home (a source of wealth).

5. OCCSCORE provides a consistent measure with which to compare labor market outcomes from 1850 to 2000. However, OCCSCORE has four major shortcomings. First, it does not account for changes in occupational hierarchy across time. Second, the index does not account for variation in income within occupations. Third, the index does not account for cost of living differences. Finally, although the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series staff took great care when constructing OCCSCORE, re-categorizing occupations into the 1950 classification is problematic. Occupations evolve over time, and the census has periodically changed the occupational classification system (Dietrich forthcoming; Ruggles et al. 2004).
6. This truncated list provides an idea of occupational prestige based on 1950 occupations: physicians, surgeons and dentists equal 70-highest; lawyers and judges equal 60-69; airplane pilots, navigators and architects equal 50-59; actuaries, bankers, stockbrokers, college and university administrators and professors, school teachers, and government officials all equal 40-49; actors and directors, athletes, auctioneers, machinists and miners equal 30-39; truck and tractor drivers equal 20-29; agricultural laborers, farm workers, baggage porters and bellhops, child care workers, gardeners, vendors, domestic servants and nurses equal 0-19 (Darity, Dietrich and Guikley, 2001).
7. Separated, widowed and divorced householders comprise the formerly-married household category.
8. There is some evidence that the benefits of marriage are not as great for African Americans (Broman 1993; James 2002). This finding is especially true for black women (Blackman et al., 2005). Gender was not recoded for married couples. Age recodes relate to the householder or reference person.
9. Although the focus of this article is black households, for comparison purposes we calculated the BMCi for white households to see how many more white households would be middle class. We find that 25 percent of white households (25-54) would be considered middle class households in 2000, up from 19 percent in 1980. These percentages are more than double those of black households. This exercise reinforced the existence of racial and class status inequities. White households have higher rates than black households for all indicators. More than a third of white householders (25-54) have four or more years of college and two-thirds own (or are buying) a home. White households score close to three-quarters on the remaining indicators.
10. The white SALAs grew from 1980 to 2000 but at a slower rate than black SALAs. White SALAs (25-54) grew from 8 percent in 1980 to 11 percent in 2000. In 2000, white SALAs (25-54) were the fourth largest household, behind married-couples with children, formerly-married, and married-couples without children.
11. The distribution of household types by BMCi score is shown in Appendix A for householders ages 25-54 and in Appendix B for householders ages 25-44.

To avoid age bias in the results we performed the same calculations for householders ages 25-74, and our findings are consistent: SALAs constitute a growing share of the middle class household in each decade.

12. The Love Jones Cohort is not unique to blacks but is more pronounced for blacks than whites. In 2000, only 11 percent of white middle class householders with the householder in the 25-44 year old range were SALAs, up from 5 percent in 1980.
13. In this graph we collapsed married and formerly-married households into ever-married because people can move in and out of these statuses multiple times, confounding the comparison with the single (never-married) households.

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Appendix A. Black Households by BMCi Score and Household Type<sup>○</sup>

	1980				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	7	10	10	8	5
Single, Living with an Adult	2	2	3	3	2
Single, Living with a Child	19	7	3	1	1
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	3	3	3	1	1
Married, Living without a Child	3	6	10	15	16
Married, Living with a Child	14	28	39	53	60
Formerly-Married	52	44	33	20	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100
	1990				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	9	11	11	10	7
Single, Living with an Adult	2	3	4	4	3
Single, Living with a Child	29	12	5	2	1
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	5	6	4	3	1
Married, Living without a Child	2	5	10	16	17
Married, Living with a Child	11	22	32	43	52
Formerly-Married	43	41	33	22	18
Total	100	100	100	100	100
	2000				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	14	14	15	14	11
Single, Living with an Adult	3	3	5	5	4
Single, Living with a Child	30	17	8	4	3
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	6	7	5	4	3
Married, Living without a Child	2	5	9	15	18
Married, Living with a Child	8	18	26	34	43
Formerly-Married	37	35	32	24	18
Total	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>○</sup> Black Householders Ages 25-54

**Appendix B. Black Households by BMCi Score and Household Type**

	<b>1980</b>				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	7	11	11	10	6
Single, Living with an Adult	1	2	3	3	2
Single, Living with a Child	22	9	3	1	1
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	4	4	3	2	1
Married, Living without a Child	2	4	7	10	12
Married, Living with a Child	15	30	41	55	65
Formerly-Married	49	40	30	18	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>1990</b>				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	8	11	13	13	9
Single, Living with an Adult	2	3	5	5	3
Single, Living with a Child	33	15	6	3	2
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	6	8	5	3	2
Married, Living without a Child	1	4	8	10	12
Married, Living with a Child	11	24	35	46	58
Formerly-Married	38	35	28	20	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>2000</b>				
	0	1	2	3	4
Single, Living Alone (SALA)	13	14	17	17	14
Single, Living with an Adult	3	4	5	6	5
Single, Living with a Child	37	22	10	5	3
Single, Living with an Adult and Child	7	9	7	6	3
Married, Living without a Child	2	3	6	10	12
Married, Living with a Child	9	20	29	38	48
Formerly-Married	29	29	26	19	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Black Householders Ages 25-44