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Politics & Marriage: The Generational Gap in Marriage Priorities and Political Ambition Among  
Black Women in Politics

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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the Upper Division Honors Program.

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Louisiana State University  
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes how Black women's different societal environments, specifically concerning marriage priorities, and the origins of their political motivations, intersect with their marital status. To answer this question, I extensively researched the background of Black women's marriage throughout history, including the trends of Black women's political ambition, marital status, education, and attitudes of Black men toward women within their racial group. My research employs an intersectional perspective and sheds light on Black women's politics and how the political career paths of women of color intersect with their marital status. "Rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool" (Carbado et al., 2013, p.303). The concept of intersection is used to illustrate how different pieces of someone's identity, like race and gender, are mutually formed and constitutive. My results show that there is a generational and political ambition gap in the internal demographic of Black women in U.S. politics, which intersects with their marital status. My results also reveal that this generational gap has a lot to do with the ideas and perspectives that have been ingrained in many generations of our nation who will later grow up and hold political office. Individual motivations also influence the relationship between political ambition and marriage; however, we will never be able to trace them with absolute certainty. This study emphasizes the need to consider the impact of these cultural changes and how women have adapted to the shift in the spousal race demographic to fit their political ambitions.

## **Introduction**

As a young, Black woman in the South, I often contemplate my career and life trajectory and question if I will fall into the same pattern as the women of color I see in local, state, and national politics. I contemplate how my southern upbringing, my Black culture, my pathway towards higher education, and my political ambition will affect my outlook on a potential spouse and future marriage prospects. Based on the research and the data I collected for this project, I theorize that a relationship exists at the intersection of political life and marital status. This desire to examine the unknown led to the research question: How do the political career paths of women of color intersect with their marital status?

Kamala Harris and Ketanji Brown Jackson are both young, ambitious Black women at the top of the U.S. political system. Both women came from distinctive origins that served as the cornerstone to shape their political ambitions.

Kamala Harris was raised by a single South-Asian immigrant mother. She emphasized the value of education and helped Harris develop into a strong woman. Harris's desire to assume leadership and authority positions in her work was fostered by her upbringing. She received her undergraduate education at Howard University. This university has frequently sought the top rank for the highest performing Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the nation, and is known as the "Black Ivy" or "The Mecca." Harris received a Bachelor of Arts in political science from this esteemed college, which has produced luminaries like Thurgood Marshall. Immediately after graduation, she enrolled at the University of California Berkeley Law School. After earning her Juris Doctorate, Harris strategically went on to the San Francisco District

Attorney Office, where she quickly rose through the ranks. Later, she became the District Attorney of San Francisco. And seven years later, she became California State's Attorney.

After serving as a U.S. senator representing California for more than 20 years, Barbara Boxer said in January 2015 that she will not seek reelection in 2016. The next week, Harris made an announcement about running for the Senate (Mehta 2015). Harris was a strong candidate from the start of her campaign (Kane 2016). At the party convention in February 2016, Harris received 78% of the vote from the California Democratic Party, allowing the party to contribute money to his campaign (Cadelago 2016). Governor Jerry Brown gave her his support three months later (Willon 2016). With 40% of the vote in the primary on June 7, Harris won with majorities in most counties. Harris ran against fellow Democrat and politician Loretta Sanchez in the general election. Since California started choosing senators directly in 1914, it was the first time a Republican failed to run in a general election for the Senate (Myers 2016).

It was not until Harris's later years in life, at 49 years old, that she met Doug Emhoff through a mutual friend. Harris and Emhoff, a white man with similar legal career backgrounds, married in 2014. In her direct journey to becoming Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris is a perfect example of how intense political ambition may affect every decision a person makes in life.<sup>1</sup>

Kamala and Ketanji, have positions in what are perhaps the most important government posts in the United States. The similarities don't end there; both ladies have political aspirations, great degrees, and successful husbands who are white and successful. Ketanji Brown Jackson is the poster child for my findings on political ambition. Jackson's childhood environment

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-harris/>).

consisted of a two-parent household of higher education. She attended high-performing schools throughout her primary education, and the adults in her life influenced her career path early in life. This ambition was cemented when she applied to Harvard University as a high school senior. Once admitted, she graduated undergraduate magna cum laude in government. A year later, she returned to Harvard, but this time as a law student. Here she excelled in her courses, was a part of Harvard Law review, and took on three clerkships at some of the highest levels of government. The most prominent one was with Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. At 26 years old, she married a white man named Patrick Jackson. Patrick, similar to Harris' background, came from similar interests and careers, seeing as they met at Harvard University as undergraduates<sup>2</sup>.

Both Husbands of the two most powerful black women in US politics are white males with political ambitions of their own. Yet they have taken on the supportive spouse role to allow for the wives' ambition to bring major career opportunities to fruition. Typically, the female partner in a relationship plays the role of the politically-supportive spouse. This disruption of socially accepted gender roles says a lot about the inherent qualities that white males hold. These husbands introduce the question: Are these traits in every male married to a black woman in politics with political ambition or just white males of similar interest?

There is a systematic pattern in these two political powerhouses whereby high-ranking Black women in American politics are disproportionately married to non-Black men, particularly White males, as opposed to their same-race counterparts. My theory, which examines the frequency at which highly accomplished Black women in politics marry white or non-Black

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<sup>2</sup> (<https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/home.nsf/content/VL+-+Judges+-+KBJ>).

men, was inspired by these two accomplished women. Due to the rising number of Black women and other women of color running for political office, and the possibility that interracial marriage will become the normative state of political acceptance, this systematic trend is crucial to the future sociological makeup of our sub-political culture. This raises concerns about the interconnectedness of political ambition, political acceptance, race, and education, which is related to a decline in the appeal of Black women serving in politics among Black males.

I hypothesize that this trend has to do with a psychological and sociological link to the views of Black males regarding marrying Black women historically and today. In addition, my theory is based on the fact that Black women pursue the greatest levels of education at a startlingly higher rate than their peers traditionally. I've learned through my research that the women who fit into this category are outliers in a larger group link between Black women in politics and marriage. My results suggest a more nuanced hypothesis, namely that there is a generational and political ambition divide among Black women who are involved in politics that overlaps with their married status.

Existing literature examines the political ambition of Black women or other women of color in comparison to males or across generations. Additional studies seek to understand the relationship between marriage and politics and how certain demographics may see being married to a woman in politics. When examining why the data is presented in this way, environmental, educational, socioeconomic, social, and racial aspects are relevant. It has much to do with the thoughts and mindset instilled into the different generations of our country, who then grow up and go into political office, as well as the individual motivations of people, whom of which we

will never be able to truly track for certain. However, no research has illuminated the reasons why women of color seek political office and how that factor among generational values and ambition intersects with the marital status of these women.

### **Theory**

My theory studies the incidence of high-achieving Black women in politics marrying white or non-Black men. This systematic trend is essential to the future sociological composition of our sub-political culture because of the increase in the number of Black women and other women of color running for political office and the potential that interracial marriage will become the socially constructed condition of political acceptance.

My theory may be divided into three different groups. The first is that older black women in politics prioritize their marriages. These women, who range in age from the early 60s to the early 80s, entered politics after receiving a call to action. The second group of Black women in politics is the younger generation, who are focused on education and entered politics due to a call to action. Last but not least, there is a rare group of Black women in politics who, regardless of their ages, have the trait of having clear objectives to enter politics. This group largely consists of women who are married to white males.



## Hypotheses

In *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court held in 1967 that states could not ban interracial marriage. In 16 southern states at the time, interracial marriage was forbidden. Interracial marriages have increased in frequency in the United States over the past 50 years<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, African Americans' likelihood of interracial marriage increases as they move up the educational ladder<sup>4</sup>. Equally important, this US election cycle has seen record-breaking numbers of women, including 133 Black women running for seats in the US House of Representatives, and 21 more Black women are vying to fill positions in the US Senate.<sup>5</sup> Given the above, I hypothesize the following:

– **Hypothesis 1:** The higher education a Black woman earns, the more likely she is to marry a non-Black or White male.

– **Hypothesis 2:** The more politically ambitious a Black woman is, the increased chance she will marry a white male.

– **Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between the inter-marital status of Black women seeking political office influences how Americans view such candidates' competence.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/05/18/interracial-marriage-in-the-u-s-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jbhe.com/2017/05/how-higher-education-impacts-the-likelihood-of-interracial-marriage/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/>

## **Background**

### ***How does marriage relate to black women?***

The Moynihan Report on the Black family, which was published in 1965, is the source of the present disagreement on the causes of the high percentages of female-headed households among Black Americans (Moynihan 1965.) The Report made the case that Black family structures differed significantly from those of white Americans and that the social and economic problems that Blacks faced were mostly due to familial instability among Blacks. Black family structures were related to racial oppression and slavery, which emphasized dehumanizing the Black male. The Report sparked a ferocious discussion because it described black families as "crumbling" and "a tangle of pathology" based on a comparison of 1950 and 1960 Census data (University of Chicago Press, 1939).

According to Frazier (1958), the consequences of slavery on Black family life contributed to the instability of Black families. (E. Franklin Frazier. pp. 253-268). The absence of marriage among slaves and the ongoing division of families as males and older children were sold contributed to the pattern of unstable Black households that slavery generated. Thus, with the exception of mother and child relationships, all familial ties were severed by slavery, creating a pattern of Black households that were centered around the mother (Cherlin 1992). Furthermore, Frazier contends that emancipated Black people were rural dwellers with the normal agricultural society family patterns of unmarried childbirth and unstable marriages. These masses ran against strange customs in the industrial centers as they traveled in great numbers to the North. Their family life disintegrated as a result of their inability to deal with the changing circumstances, which led to rising criminality, juvenile delinquency, and other problems (Lemann 1986, and

Dash 1989). Thus, the connection between illegitimacy, violent crime, and the absence of parental attachment to children is established. It indicates that the loss of fathers' and mothers' capacity to be accountable for taking care of the children they give birth to is at the root of the expansion of crime in America. For children and the larger community, the loss of love and leadership at the personal levels of family and marriage has far-reaching societal repercussions. The empirical data demonstrates that a disproportionate number of young people from dysfunctional households tend to feel considerably less connected to their community and are more likely to take advantage of its residents to fulfill their unfulfilled wants or ambitions. As a result, neighborhoods lose their feeling of community and degenerate into social instability and violent criminality.

Racial and cultural inequalities in marriage are also particularly noticeable. In 2010, Black women's median ages at the time of their first marriages were 30, this is four years older

than white women's median age of 26 years. (Elliott, Diana B., et al.(2012). Black Americans have lower marriage rates than other racial and ethnic groupings at all ages (see table 2, panel A).

As a result, a far smaller percentage of Black women have been married at least

**Table 1**

Women's Age-Specific Rates of First Marriage and Divorce by Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity

| Panel A. Marriage |       |       |                           |                                   |                    |                        |                           |  |
|-------------------|-------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Age               | White | Black | Asian/Pacific<br>Islander | American<br>Indian/Native Alaskan | Hispanic,<br>Total | Hispanic, U.S.<br>born | Hispanic,<br>foreign born |  |
| 15–19             | 8.7   | 5.0   | 8.5                       | 20.3                              | 16.7               | 13.1                   | 32.6                      |  |
| 20–24             | 58.9  | 23.0  | 41.4                      | 53.5                              | 59.1               | 50.4                   | 81.3                      |  |
| 25–29             | 115.6 | 43.0  | 133.7                     | 76.6                              | 81.0               | 75.9                   | 89.2                      |  |
| 30–34             | 130.6 | 47.6  | 152.5                     | 74.9                              | 87.4               | 83.0                   | 92.1                      |  |
| 35–39             | 123.0 | 44.6  | 129.1                     | 70.5                              | 80.4               | 72.7                   | 86.8                      |  |
| 40–44             | 111.6 | 39.4  | 100.5                     | 51.8                              | 77.9               | 72.6                   | 82.2                      |  |
| Panel B. Divorce  |       |       |                           |                                   |                    |                        |                           |  |
| Age               | White | Black | Asian/Pacific<br>Islander | American<br>Indian/Native Alaskan | Hispanic,<br>Total | Hispanic, U.S.<br>born | Hispanic,<br>foreign born |  |
| 20–24             | 48.44 | 40.13 | 12.23                     | 63.61                             | 26.79              | 36.74                  | 16.13                     |  |
| 25–29             | 38.80 | 44.29 | 13.23                     | 52.02                             | 26.71              | 40.43                  | 15.31                     |  |
| 30–34             | 31.60 | 44.43 | 15.95                     | 40.15                             | 25.03              | 37.09                  | 16.83                     |  |
| 35–39             | 29.66 | 41.20 | 12.98                     | 41.58                             | 23.70              | 36.31                  | 16.43                     |  |
| 40–44             | 26.33 | 38.86 | 13.07                     | 48.60                             | 21.47              | 30.15                  | 16.78                     |  |

[Open in a separate window](#)

Source: Authors' computations from the 2008–12 American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

Note: Rates are calculated as the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women and number of divorces per 1,000 married women.

once by the time they reach 40 years of age. Tabulations of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey from 2008 to 2012 reveal that by the time women reach their early 40s, nearly 90% of white women, nearly 80% of Asian women or those of Pacific Island descent, more than 80% of Hispanic women, and more than 75% of American Indian or Native Alaskan women had ever been married.

Marriage was widespread among Black families in the mid-twentieth century, despite the fact that social scientists occasionally blame racial variations in family patterns on long-term historical factors like the legacy of slavery (Wilson, William Julius. 2012.) Therefore, ethnic diversity in marriage formation is quite recent today. Between 1890 and 1980, Black women

tended to marry earlier than white women, and by the middle of the 20th century, the ages at which both groups of women had their first marriages were similar. (Elliott, Diana B., et al. (2012).

Black women in the 40 to 44 age group in 1950 were actually more likely than white women of the same age to have never been married (table 1). As recently as 1970, 94.8 percent of white women and 92.2 percent of Black

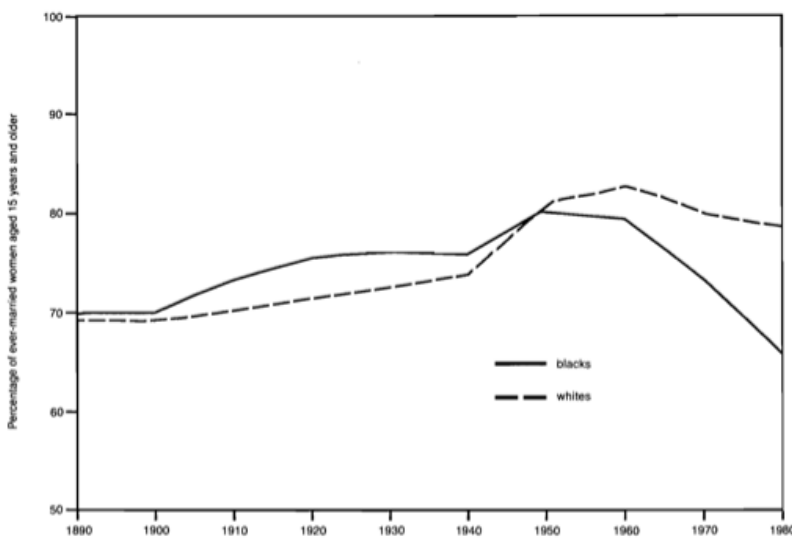


Figure 1. Comparison of Marriage Patterns of Blacks and Whites, 1890-1980.

Source: Data from decennial censuses.

Table 1  
Marital Status of the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, 1890-1920

|           | Blacks |      |      |      | Whites—Native Parentage |       |       |       |
|-----------|--------|------|------|------|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|           | 1890   | 1900 | 1910 | 1920 | 1890                    | 1900  | 1910  | 1920  |
| Single    |        |      |      |      |                         |       |       |       |
| Male      | 39.0   | 39.2 | 35.4 | 32.6 | 41.7                    | 40.2  | 39.0  | 35.3  |
| Female    | 30.0   | 29.9 | 26.6 | 24.1 | 32.0                    | 31.4  | 30.1  | 27.7  |
| Married   |        |      |      |      |                         |       |       |       |
| Male      | 55.5   | 54.0 | 57.2 | 60.4 | 53.9                    | 54.6  | 55.7  | 59.1  |
| Female    | 54.6   | 53.7 | 57.2 | 59.6 | 57.0                    | 57.3  | 59.0  | 60.7  |
| Widowed   |        |      |      |      |                         |       |       |       |
| Male      | 4.3    | 5.7  | 6.2  | 5.9  | 3.9                     | 4.5   | 4.4   | 4.6   |
| Female    | 14.4   | 15.4 | 14.8 | 14.8 | 10.5                    | 10.7  | 10.1  | 10.7  |
| Sex ratio | 99.5   | 98.6 | 98.9 | 99.2 | 105.4                   | 104.9 | 106.6 | 104.4 |
| % urban   | —      | 23.0 | 27.0 | 34.0 | —                       | 42.0  | 48.0  | 53.0  |

Source: Data from the decennial censuses.

women of the same age had never been married. Overall, racial variations in marriage were minimal. (Waite and Bachrach 2000.)

***Marriage in relation to black men's attitudes toward marrying black women.***

The quality of relationships between Black men and Black women has been one of the most contentious topics affecting Black Americans in recent years. First, there was a great deal of worry about the so-called black "matriarchy" and the notion that Black women had too much authority and power in their households starting in the 1960s, which continued into the 1970s (Blood & Wolfe, 1969; Bracey, Meier, & Rudwick, 1971; Moynihan, 1965; Staples, 1970). The idea that Black men are socially "castrated" and the acknowledged involvement of Black women in this process of "holding the Black man down" was another pertinent subject that contributed to the negative attitudes Black men have toward women in their own race (Bond and Peery, 1969; Hare, 1971a, 1971b; Staples, 1971). During the 1960s and 1970s, Black women joined Black men in the efforts to address racial injustice, which was positive for their racial group as a whole, but created a trade-off because they only lacked time to cope with domestic issues, the issues surrounding Black male-Black female relationships, which remained unresolved. Unfortunately, the perception that there is something inherently wrong with relationships between Black men and Black women has persisted, just as racial injustice in the United States has.

Interracial marriage rates have significantly increased recently, notably between Black males and non-Black women, which has coincided with recent dips in the rate of marriage among Black women in general (Crowder & Tolnay 2000). Black women's decline in marriage

has been attributed to shortages in both the amount and quality of spouses, with racial intermarriage playing a generally neglected role. Black men's interracial marriages affect Black women's chances of getting married (Crowder & Tolnay 2000). The 1990 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data shows that intermarried Black males favor partners with the greatest levels of money, education, and professional status. The chance that Black women will become married and remain married locally is decreased by the high rates of intermarriage among Black males.

### ***Highly Educated Black Women's Attitudes Towards Marriage.***

As Black single women seek good educations and high-paying jobs, they find it more difficult to locate suitable marriage partners of any race. Although we are aware that race and status traits, such as education, have a significant impact on who one marries, the issue of whether and how these two factors might interact in the "marriage market" is far more complicated. The research echoes this claim that many Black-educated women "will accept nothing less than a mate of similar educational level" (Teachman, Polonko, and Leigh. p. 157). Further accentuating the plight of educated Black women. Among the Black female population in the United States, Black women who possess college degrees are the least likely to marry. Indicating that the higher the level of education Black women attain, the higher their probability of divorce should they marry (Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra 2015).

To exacerbate the issue of educated Black women marrying at any probability, Black men are less likely than Black women to graduate from college (Yeakey & Bennett 1990). Far more Black women than Black males attend both historically Black and largely white colleges

and universities (Washington & Newman 1991). Additionally, Black women are receiving more advanced degrees. Black men's doctoral completion rates fell by 20% between 1982 and 1992; by 1992, Black women outnumbered Black males by 565 to 386 in Ph.D. degrees. (Manegold 1993).

The findings of the current study support Bronzaft's (1991) and Washington and Newman's (1991) call for greater emphasis to be placed on educational opportunities for Black men because so many educated Black women continue to plan to forego marriage, or are choosing to marry outside their racial/ethnic group, with many of these marriages most likely being unsuccessful.

Black-white marital disparities are present at all educational levels, indicating that factors other than socioeconomic position are at work. At the same time, marriage trends are increasingly linked to socioeconomic standing. Higher rates of divorce and declining marriage have been linked to lower levels of education among Black women, and, more recently, among white women (Martin 2006) This growing relationship between education and the creation of strong families raises the possibility that various educated groups may experience distinct structural differences that influence racial variations in marriage and marital stability. Traditional theories linking lower marriage rates among Black women to a scarcity of marriageable males frequently center on disparities in men's work opportunities and imprisonment. These factors likely impact marriage rates between poor and working-class Black women since unemployment and incarceration are more prevalent among Black males who are already disadvantaged.

In early adulthood, some researchers contend that the lack of better-off Black men compared to Black women is exacerbated by the relatively lower educational attainment and

higher rates of interracial marriage among Black men. This may increase Black men's bargaining power and decrease their desire for marriage, particularly to women within their racial group (Banks 2012). Despite having access to a wider pool of women who are eligible for marriage, this argument suggests that men would rather have casual relationships with women than get married.

### ***Women and Black Women's Political Ambition.***

Female figures in Politics are more represented now than ever (Lawless & Fox. 2011). Women hold the offices of Speaker of the House, and Vice President, and comprise 45% of the United States Supreme Court. The head of the congressional committee looking into the January 6th coup de tat at the Capitol is a Republican named Liz Cheney. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, two fiery conservatives, are well-known on social media. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, also known as AOC, is a household political name. And, by March 2022, Ballotpedia had already named seven female Republicans and 13 female Democrats as potential 2024 presidential contenders (Ballotpedia 2022).

When running for office, women do just as well as males do. They raise the same amount of money, receive the same number of votes, and win elections just as frequently (Lawless & Fox. 2005). Consider only the significant and persistent gender disparity in "political ambition." Men continue to be far more interested in running for elected office than women, even when factors such as occupation, wealth, education, and political activity are equalized. Across a range of demographic groupings, there is a persistent gender disparity in ambition. For instance, "women are 18 percentage points less likely than males to have thought about running for office



among possible White candidates. That is essentially identical to prospective candidates of color, who had a gender difference of 19 points” (Holman and Schneider 2016; Lawless and Fox 2005) The gender disparity in political ambition is startling, regardless of political party allegiance, occupation, yearly household income, or parenting status.

There are two types of theories that explain the gap in political ambition. The "second shift" of domestic labor, lack of confidence, and job decisions impacted by gender role socialization—all of which may steer women into less competitive paths—are highlighted as supply-side causes that have an impact on women's interest in running for political office. Demand-side theories place an emphasis on political system elements that restrict women's ability to run for office, including reduced recruitment of women owing to gender stereotypes and discrimination against them (Piscopo 2019). The overall gender gap in political ambition disappeared when using a demand-side explanation pointing to lower party recruitment of women rather than a supply-side explanation pointing to personal factors like a lack of confidence in qualifications or a lack of time due to caregiving responsibilities. However, the effects were mixed for women of color. Overall, women expressed much less political ambition than males across all racial/ethnic groups (-0.16 vs. 0.08, with a gender gap of 0.24). Across racial/ethnic groupings, men's and women's political ambitions varied, but the gender difference persisted. In comparison to women who read a demand explanation, women of all racial/ethnic origins who read a supply explanation often reported having much less political ambition (-0.13 vs. 0.07) (Holman and Schneider 2018). However, results varied between racial groupings. These results imply that highlighting personal obstacles to women's political aspirations may increase the gender representation gap, but stressing external obstacles may shrink the gap by motivating

more women to run. The need for a greater intersectional understanding of women's interest in political office is evident from the fact that messages that support white and Asian women may discourage black women and neglect Latinas.



## **Method**

### **Participants**

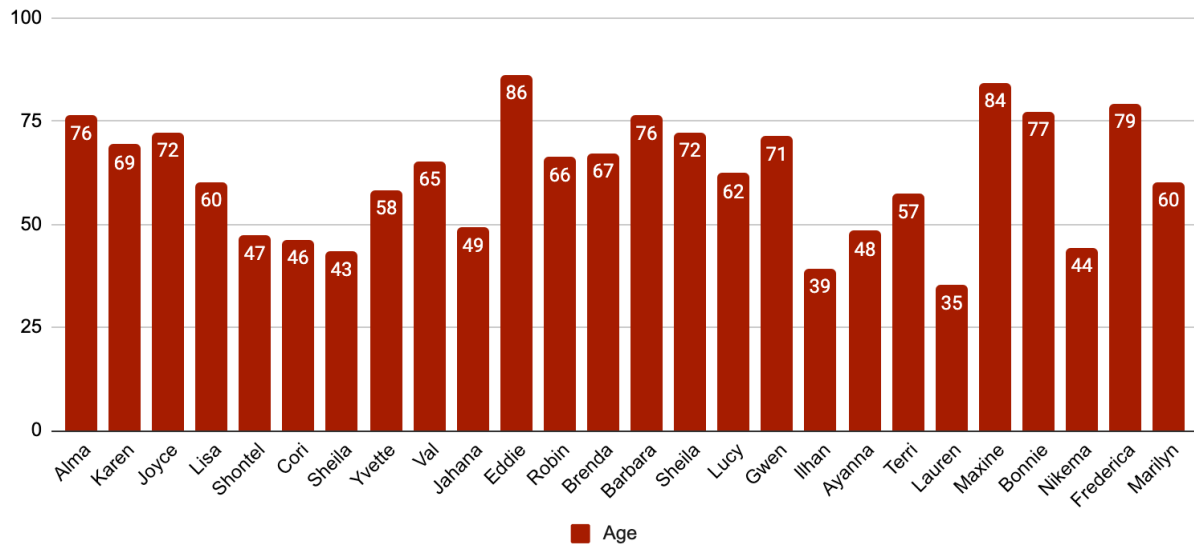
Twenty-seven current female members of the U.S. House of Representatives were chosen, along with the vice president and a supreme court justice. Black or women of color comprise the majority of the participants, who are aged 35 to 86. Race, gender, and political status were taken into consideration while choosing the study's participants. My research was confined to information from the 2022 U.S. House of Representative's term, the vice president of the United States, and a Supreme Court Justice. These subjects are not representative of the overall population; however, they represent a portion of specific generations of Black women in the U.S.

### **Materials**

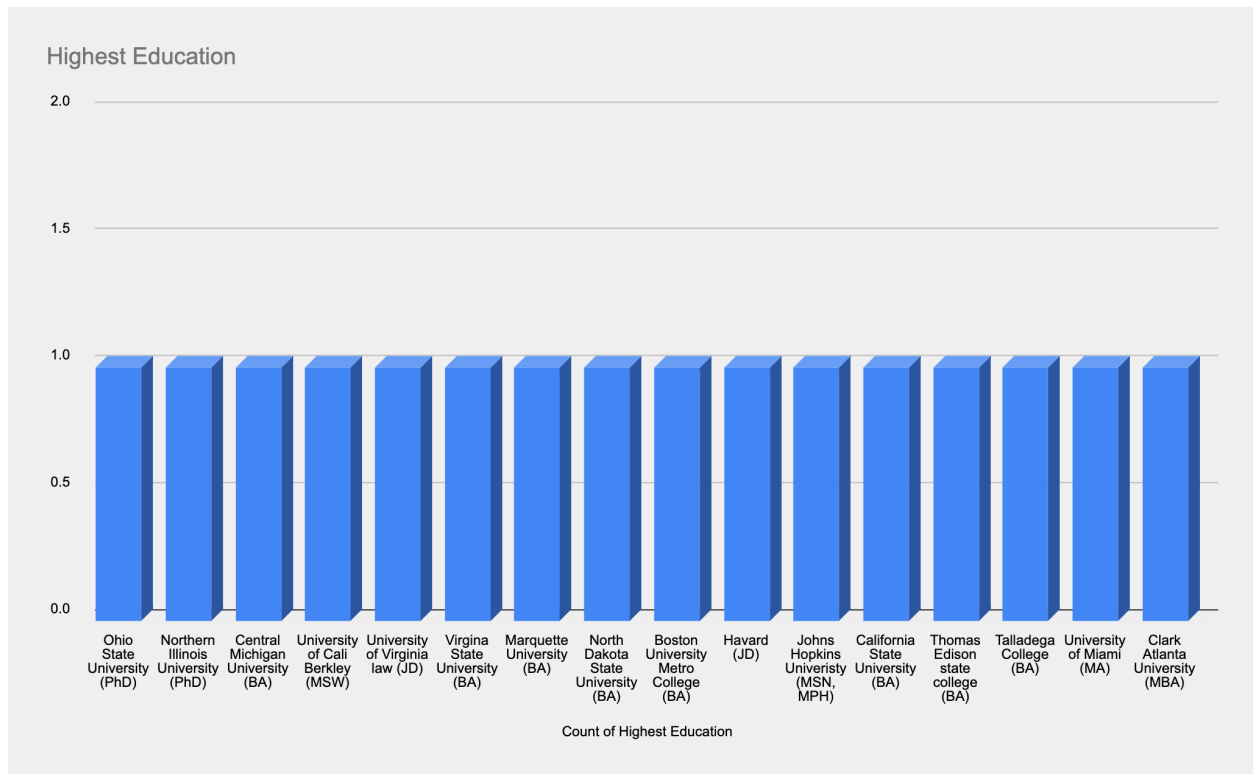
A Macintosh computer from Apple was used to create the data. I utilized Microsoft Sheets software to gather and arrange the qualitative data collected from the twenty-nine participants.

### **Data Collection**

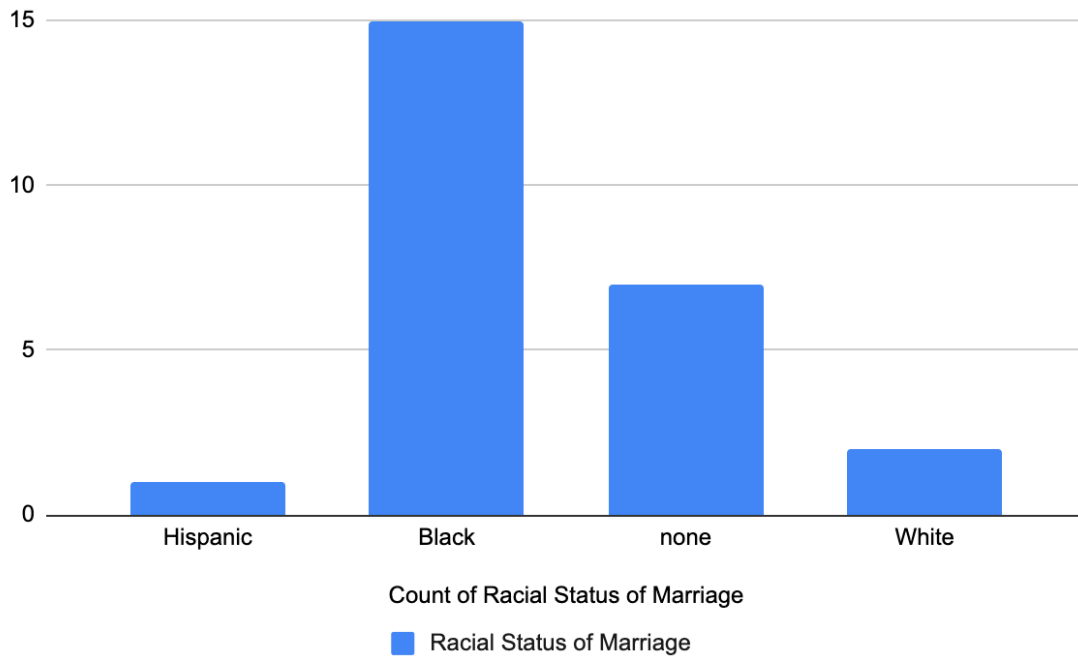
Over the course of six months, I collected qualitative data about each subject's personal and professional backgrounds. In examining the subjects, articles, biographies, and previous research were all considered. Age, race, marital age, spouse's race, highest educational attainment, and spouse's employment were all put into an excel document to be examined for a relationship to the study topic. Other qualitative information about the subject's life, including socioeconomic situation, generational values, surroundings, academic background, and family structure, were taken into account. Graphs were then created from the quantitative data for comparison.



**Ages of Black Women in 2022 U.S. House of Representatives**



**Highest Education of all Black Women in 2022 U.S. House of Representatives**



**Racial Marriage Status of Current Black Women in 2022 U.S. House of Representatives**

## Results

### *The Generational Difference Between Black Women in Politics and Marriage Priorities vs. Career-Oriented Priorities.*

The elder generations of female politicians came from a time when being a wife was considered the most significant and prestigious job a woman could do. Black women in their early 50s to mid-80s years of age in the current House of Representatives were a part of a time when women had limited rights in our country. Including, but not limited to, attending higher education at a lower rate than their white counterparts. The environmental and social factors in these women's lives change the dynamic of priorities in their personal lives. The women in this category often are married to co-racial Black men or on their second marriage after divorce, but they are seldom single due to their marriage being their first priority in life. Their upbringing is ingrained with the idea of being a "good wife." As a result, it ranks higher than having a job.

In contrast, Black women in politics who are in their late 20s to late 40s came of age with a different mentality than their more experienced counterparts. They had instilled in them the value of starting with education. On average, Black people are frequently more likely to be single parents or to originate from lower socioeconomic class households (Damaske, et al. 2016). This framework gives Black women the mentality they need to obtain the best education possible to not only support their families but also to end the cycle and improve conditions for present-day Black women. This leads to less time to focus on romantic relationships, which require a certain degree of nurturing to progress to the level of marriage. "Young adults in the United States are waiting longer to marry than at any other time in the past century. Women's median age at first marriage currently stands at 27, compared to a median marriage age of 24 as

recently as 1990 and a low of just over 20 in 1955. Although social scientists debate whether today's young people will eventually marry in the same numbers as earlier generations, marriage remains commonplace. In 2013, more than 80% of women in their early 40s had ever been married.”<sup>6</sup>

***Call to Action vs. Definitive Political Ambition and the Effect on Racial Marital Status.***

Some women have a life-altering experience that inspires them to consider running for political office — a call to action. The older generation of Black women called to political office through life-changing events tends to make up the current majority and often have Black husbands. For instance, Maxine Waters, a Democrat, is serving her fifteenth term in the House. She presided over the Congressional Black Caucus from 1997 to 1999 and is the oldest of the 12 black women currently serving in Congress (*Time* 2020.) After Nancy Pelosi, she is a senior member of the California congressional delegation. The House Financial Services Committee is led by her. Waters is the best illustration of an older Black woman in congress who prioritized marriage and who also had a call to action that propelled her into a career in politics.

In St. Louis, Missouri, Maxine Waters was born as the fifth of a single mother's 13 children. At the age of 13, she started working in segregated restaurants and industries. She worked in the telephone business and in clothing manufacturing after relocating to Los Angeles. She received a Bachelor of Arts from California State University, Los Angeles, where she was a student. In the Head Start program, she worked as a teacher and volunteer coordinator to start her career in public service ( Encyclopedia 2008.)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4850739/>



For a very long period, Maxine Waters was married to a Black man named Edward Waters. When they first met, she was 18 years old, and they married shortly after. They welcomed two children, Edward and Karen, after relocating to California in 1961. Maxine worked in the clothing industry at the time to help support the family. Having been married for 16 years, Maxine and Edward got a divorce in 1972. After they divorced, Waters began her career as a politician (Brownstein 1989). She enrolled in college, and it took Maxine nearly five years to meet Sidney Williams, a Black male who would eventually become her second husband.

Sidney Williams, a former American ambassador to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, is now married to Waters. When they were both working for Los Angeles City Councilman David Cunningham in the middle of the 1970s, the couple first met. Williams worked as the councilman's head of staff and assistant (Murphy, Patricia). They got married in 1977 and are still together. Williams played football professionally for the Cleveland Browns and the Washington Redskins before entering politics (Hall 1994). My findings on the older generation of Black women in politics are reinforced by Maxine Water's two early marriages to Black men before her call to action propelled her into politics.

The younger demographic of women in political office who achieved political success through a call-to-action are more likely to be single, have never been married, or have married people of different races. For example, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, an American politician and activist. She is a Democrat who has represented New York's 14th congressional district in the United States since 2019. Ocasio-Cortez attracted widespread attention on June 26, 2018, after

she triumphed in the Democratic Party's primary election for New York's 14th congressional district (Merica & Bradner 2018). However, this formidable political rival wasn't always. Her life's journey and intentions for seeking government office make her a role model for a woman of color in politics who was motivated to enter the field by a call to action and the effect that had on her marital status.

Ocasio-Cortez, the daughter of Sergio Ocasio-Roman and Blanca Ocasio-Cortez, grew up in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City (Ocasio 2018). Her mother was born in Puerto Rico, while her father was born in the Bronx to a Puerto Rican family and went on to become an architect (Wang 2018). Ocasio-Cortez graduated in 2007 from Yorktown High School. She was a stellar student earning numerous awards and honors, such as having the MIT Lincoln Laboratory named an asteroid after her (Malloy 2018). These accomplishments led to her earning the John F. Lopez fellowship at Boston University (*NHI Magazine* 2017).

AOC experienced a series of call-to-action events that led her to life as a politician. Alexandria's father passed away from cancer in 2008, just as the markets plummeted. Her family was abruptly thrust into a situation where it was forced to deal with both a recession and losing its main source of income. Alexandria found herself working two jobs and 18-hour shifts working as a waitress and bartender to support her mother, a school bus driver and house cleaner, who was facing foreclosure on their home (Frej 2018).

After Graduating cum laude with a double major from Boston university in 2011, the call to action grew more urgent. In 2016, AOC began working for the Bernie Sanders primary campaign. This inspired her to drive across the country, meeting with those impacted by the Flint water crisis and the Dakota Access Pipeline, stopping in areas including Flint, Michigan, and the

Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota (Murphy 2018). She described her trip to Standing Rock in December 2016 as a turning moment in an interview, adding that before that, she had thought that having access to income, social influence, and power was the only way to run for government successfully. However, she was motivated to start working for her own town after visiting North Dakota and witnessing people "putting their whole life and all that they had on the line for the defense of their neighborhood." (Piaella 2018).

Alexandria's experience put her on the opposing side of laws and policies; instead of examining economic outcomes, she directly encountered families struggling to preserve good housing, access to healthcare, and immigration status. She obtained a far better grasp of how policies affect families outside the scope of white papers because of her own life experiences.

These humble beginnings had an impact on AOC's political career, which in turn had an impact on her marital situation. Marriage requires a time commitment, which makes relationship maintenance a primary responsibility. AOC was raised with a focus on education rather than marriage since she belongs to the newer generation of women of color holding political office. AOC has put her personal relationship on the back burner as a result of her upbringing and experiences that have inspired her to take action. AOC, 33, is recently engaged to Riley Roberts. A White male and web developer. They first met as undergraduates at Boston University. The two studious individuals often attended a weekly Student town hall held by the Dean of the University. Although they met in 2011, they began dating in 2018. While only recently taking the next step toward marriage by getting engaged in April 2022 (Mahdawi 2019). My observations on the younger generation of women of color in politics are confirmed by AOC's engagement with a white man later in life after her call to action propelled her into politics.

Women in the outlier collective are politically aspirational and have career-driven aspirations, which force them to make calculated choices in every area of their lives. These women support the initial hypothesis that most politically successful Black women marry non-Black men, particularly white men. The findings of the study support this premise of outliers. (Autumn 1997). This is a result of the racial disparity in higher education, particularly at elite universities like the Ivy League, where the majority of politically aspirational women enroll. Black women are forced to look for suitable mates among members of other races because they meet their wives in a community that is becoming less and less racially homogeneous<sup>7</sup>. The lives of Kamala Harris and Ketanji Brown Jackson, who were previously discussed, suggest that they are powerful examples of outliers.

### **Implications**

The central implication of these results is racial abjection—how race creates an altered conceptualization of a low or downcast state and what this means for Blacks within the political environment. Racial abjection is a powerful mythological, psychological, and physical response to the Black body and Black sexuality. Abjection is a concept in critical theory referring to becoming cast off and separated from norms and rules, especially on the scale of society and morality. The term has been explored in post-structuralism as that which inherently disturbs conventional identity and cultural concepts.

There is a propensity to suspect hidden agendas in interracial unions. Numerous psychological factors, such as parental disobedience, sexual desire for people of different races,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www-jbhe-com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/2017/05/how-higher-education-impacts-the-likelihood-of-interracial-marriage/>

and other factors, can lead to interracial marriages. Many individuals have the opinion that marriages between people of different races occur for a variety of bizarre, unconscious motives. People occasionally marry others who are "their own kind" for the weirdest of reasons, but these motivations do not make all marriages suspect. It is possible that assuming interracial couples have hidden motives says more about the interpreter as opposed to the couple. Approaching this topic with politics can insinuate that Black women in politics enter into interracial marriages to appeal to a broader voter demographic. Instead of marrying for love and compatibility, Black women with political ambition will deliberately seek white males to marry to boost their vote share among non-crucial constituents at the polls. This produces a deceitful pool of potential candidates who build up the ideal politician by cultivating the perfect life that appeals to the most voter demographics.

According to academic research, having more elected women of color is essential to establishing racial and gender balance in American politics. But there are still a lot of obstacles in the way of women of color running for office in proportion to their share of the population (Shah, Scott, & Juenke 2019). A wide and expanding body of research reveals that a legislator's objectives and actions in political office are influenced by factors such as their gender, color, ethnicity, class, and even their family situation (Burden 2007; Schwindt-Bayer 2011; Carnes and Lupu 2015; Sharrow et al. 2018). Legislators across the world often come from a small group of people, disproportionately representing upper-class males from the dominant racial or ethnic group, despite strong evidence of the value of descriptive representation (Best 2007; Hughes 2011; IPU 2015). The same rule holds true for this particular set of powerful white men who are

not running for office but are married to the black women who are. During the campaign, their spouse is subject to their influence when it comes to the polls.

The alteration to the social construction of acceptability in the United States is the end consequence of Black women in politics being married to people of different races. Voters won't be able to accept the reality of that pair if the representation of Black women married to Black men continues to deteriorate. They will view interracially married Black women as being more capable, likable, trustworthy, and patriotic (Barnes & Holman 2019).

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