

UNC researcher finds growing number of black middle class are single

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

For generations, social scientists have defined the black middle class in family terms, as married couples with children. But a study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill shows that a growing percentage of the black middle class are young single people living alone.

"We've dispelled the assumption among scholars that blacks have to be married to be middle class," said Kris Marsh, Ph.D., a post-doctoral scholar at UNC's Carolina Population Center and author of the study, which appears in the December issue of the journal *Social Forces*.

Pop culture already reflects this trend. In her study, Marsh names single middle-class blacks the Love Jones cohort, borrowing the title of a 1997 movie about a similar group.

And, in the acronymic spirit of social science, which gave us DINKs (dual-income, no kids) and DEWKs (dual-earners with kids), Marsh coined the phrase SALA for people in all income brackets who are single (never married) and living alone, which includes Oprah Winfrey, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and radio and TV personality Tavis Smiley.

Marsh and her colleagues studied United States census data from 1980, 1990 and 2000. The data show that among the black middle class, ages 25 to 44, the Love Jones cohort more than doubled its share between 1980 and 2000, from 5.8 percent to more than 14 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of married couples, living together, with children declined from 64.6 percent to 48 percent in that same time period.

By following the data through three decades, the study also confirmed that SALAs, and especially the Love Jones cohort, do not simply delay marriage but remain single and continue to accumulate wealth.

This contradicts previous research that said a reduction in marriage and childbearing has created a black middle class in stagnation or in decline. Instead, Marsh said, her work reveals a vibrant population, but the composition is changing.

"Numerous studies suggest that the black middle class has been losing economic ground - objectively and relative to whites," said Karyn Lacy, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Michigan who was not part of the study.

"Marsh's innovative study makes clear that scholars reached this conclusion because they've been focusing on the wrong people. By looking exclusively at married couples, scholars miss the group, which is slowly becoming a fixture in the black middle class - single black professionals who do not marry or become parents. Their status as single and middle class challenges us about everything that we think we know about life in the middle and will demand new research on the consumption patterns, housing preferences and lifestyles of this influential group," Lacy said.

Acknowledging the rise of the Love Jones cohort, and the decline in married-with-children households, also challenges a neoconservative perspective that marriage is the way into middle class. It also challenges policies that support marriage, which could be an issue in the 2008 presidential election.

"Identifying SALAs as a legitimate and growing population could have policy implications for home ownership, health care programs and income," Marsh said.

SALAs and the Love Jones cohort have been large-



ly overlooked by academics, Marsh said, because it is conceptually easier to think in terms of families, and in American culture single people are generally not considered a family.

And while income is generally a measure of status, and dual-income households are more easily middle-class, that does not necessarily translate into higher per-person income. So Marsh looked a little deeper and included home ownership as a measure of wealth.

One question that remains unanswered is what social scientists call the "intergenera-

tional transference of wealth" - basically, without children, what will happen with their money and property?

It is not an alarming problem, Marsh said, but something people need to be aware of. "SALAs might transfer their wealth to nieces and nephews, cousins or even siblings," Marsh said.

She said her future studies will seek to determine where SALAs are living and if they are living happily, and to find differences between blacks and whites and between men and women.

Co-authors on the study are Philip Cohen of UNC; William Darity and Danielle Salters of Duke University; and Lynne Casper of the University of Southern California. Cohen and Darity are fellows at the CPC.



Marsh

News Clips

CCC seminar will focus on balancing budget

Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Forsyth County will present a seminar, "Getting Your Budget Back on Track After the Holidays," at 6 p.m. Monday, Jan. 14, at CCCS' office, 8064 North Point Blvd., Suite 204, Winston-Salem.

The seminar will cover such topics as: "Organizing Your Bills: Determine Who You Owe and Which Bills are Delinquent"; "Create an Action Plan for Past-Due Debts"; "Determine Ways to Decrease Spending and Increase Savings"; and "Recognize when help may be needed from a credit counselor at CCCS."

The seminar will also include the "how-to's" of creating a plan for Christmas, 2008 through such methods as a holiday savings club, monthly savings and shopping for gifts year 'round.

First Citizens Bank is sponsoring the seminar, which will last an hour and a half. Seating is limited and light refreshments will be provided. For more information, or to register, call 336-837-0656 or email: pam.odom@cccsforsyth.org.

Conservation Trust wins grant from Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

The Conservation Trust for North Carolina has received a \$100,000 grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the latest in a

stream of funding that the foundation has provided since the Trust's creation in 1991.

The grant, approved by the foundation's board at a meeting Nov. 16, will help cover the Conservation Trust's operating expenses over the coming two years.

The Conservation Trust for North Carolina is a statewide, non-profit land trust working with landowners to protect North Carolina's most treasured lands and waters. It supports a network of 23 local land trusts across the state, working with them and with private landowners, public agencies and concerned citizens to ensure that critical lands are voluntarily protected for clean drinking water, recreation, and working farms and forests.

Mayor Joines, Council Member Clark to meet with West Ward residents

Mayor Allen Joines and West Ward Council Member Robert Clark will hold a "Talk of the Town" meeting Thursday, Jan. 10, in the Building B dining room of Calvary Baptist Church, 5000 Country Club Road.

They'll discuss what's going on in city government and issues important to the West Ward, including sidewalks on Kirklees Road, break-ins in the Buena Vista and Country Club neighborhoods, and the missing section of the Muddy Creek greenway. The meeting will start at 7 p.m.



Clark

WSSU grad earns Bronze Star

Army National Guard Master Sgt. Joey M. Ireland has been decorated with the Bronze Star Medal for supporting the mission of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The medal is awarded to an individual who, while serving in the U.S. armed forces, has performed a heroic act, meritorious achievement or distinguished service during armed conflict or ground combat while engaged against an armed enemy of the United States.

Operation Iraqi Freedom is the official name given to military operations involving members of the U.S. armed forces and coalition forces participating in efforts to free and secure Iraq. Mission objectives focus on force protection, peacekeeping, stabilization, security and counter-insurgency operations as the Iraqi transitional governing bodies assume full sovereign powers to govern the peoples of Iraq.

Members from all branches of the U.S. military and multinational forces are also assisting in rebuilding Iraq's economic and governmental infrastructure, and training and preparing Iraqi military and security forces to assume full authority and responsibility in defending and preserving Iraq's sovereignty and independence as a democracy.

Ireland, a field artillery senior platoon sergeant, is assigned to the 113th Field Artillery, Balad, Iraq. He has served in the military for 23 years.

He is the son of Geneva M. Ireland of Winston-Salem. The master sergeant graduated in 1984 from North Forsyth High School, Winston-Salem, and received a degree in 1988 from Winston-Salem State University.

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