

“A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP OF PECULIAR INTIMACY”: MARRIAGE  
EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1920S-1960S

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Marriage education emerged in universities across the United States in the 1920s as a response to a perceived “marriage crisis.” Over the next several decades, marriage educators shaped marriage course content to reflect student interests and maintain relevance to students’ lives. With the goal of saving marriage from the abstract forces of modernity, faculty initially targeted a specific demographic: white, middle-class, college students. This thesis chronicles the trajectory of marriage education as it shifted from a mechanism of positive eugenics to a vehicle by which black students in the South could access rights of citizenship in the post-WWII period. What began as a method of civic exclusion with roots in the eugenic movement transformed into a means through which Southern black citizens asserted their rights to education, marriage, sexuality, and family. This democratization of education for citizenship reflected the diverse uses of marriage education from the 1920s through the 1960s.

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And for my parents,  
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and Dad who taught me the value of hard work

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 1939, college professor J. Stewart Burgess quoted a student who claimed that “[t]his is the only course I have had in my entire college curriculum that seems to be [explicitly] directed towards helping me to live satisfyingly now and in the future.”<sup>1</sup> The class was a college marriage course at Temple University and Burgess not the only sociology professor to teach a course like it by the late 1930s. The student’s declaration of the course’s relevance to his personal life was also not unusual. College marriage courses were designed to supply helpful information for navigating students’ own dating, marital, sexual, and familial experiences as they left their family homes and college communities. The immediate popularity of these courses facilitated a decades-long attempt to address a perpetual “marriage crisis” by preparing college students for their marital careers.<sup>2</sup> By 1949, fully half of all accredited colleges and universities in the United States offered such courses and thousands of students were enrolled in them.<sup>3</sup>

The crisis that marriage education tackled emerged from the period of social, economic, and political transition that occurred in the first few decades of the twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> J. Stewart Burgess, “The College and the Preparation for Marriage and Family Relationships,” *Living* 1, no. 2/3 (May-August 1939): 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Groves used the term marriage crisis to describe what he felt was the negative impact of modern society on marriage in the mid-1920s. His use of the word crisis highlights the changes in Victorian social and sexual mores which governed the institution of marriage prior to the early twentieth century. Marriage as the target of concern was not new by the time Groves pronounced American marriage to be in crisis, but by the late 1920s, there was a groundswell of support for initiatives which aimed to understand and provide solutions to these forces which threatened to alter marriage. Intellectuals pointed toward the rising divorce rate, the declining fertility rate, and women’s employment outside of the home as symptoms of crisis. The version of sexual morality they proposed to replace Victorian ideology included emphasizing the importance of sex within marriage and marriage as an egalitarian partnership.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 35, no. 9 (December 1949): 407-417.

century. The Great War, industrialization, immigration, and urbanization at the turn of the century altered the gendered dynamics and racial/ethnic composition of the nation as women increasingly entered the workforce and won female enfranchisement and as the household economies of immigrant families encountered both economic and cultural pressures to assimilate. Further, the rise of more effective birth control combined with a declining birth rate demonstrated to Americans that women could and did exercise control over fertility. The rising divorce rate (preceded by the rising marriage rate) acted as further evidence that American society was changing. The specters of female empowerment, changing sexual ideologies, and new family dynamics created a nationwide angst about the future of marriage, courting, gender roles, and the family. Rather than worry about the future of the nation's foundation, experts proposed numerous practical solutions to the looming problem of modern marriage.<sup>4</sup>

Marriage educators directed America's attention to the marital and sexual landscape and employed the rhetoric of crisis to incite action. They offered their expertise as professors in numerous academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology, home economics, and biology and suggested that education was the answer to the marriage crisis. The college marriage course aspired to prepare college youth for their marital careers by providing information about marital adjustment, heredity, mate selection, family finances, and married women's employment. Eventually marriage education boasted professional credentials such as marriage education departments, conferences, and journals. While the marriage crisis of the early twentieth century was enough to spark

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of publications by other intellectuals, see Paul Popenoe, *Modern Marriage: A Handbook*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925).; Ben B. Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, *The Companionate Marriage* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing, 1927).

the creation of a new academic discipline, it was not wholly responsible for the discipline's eventual proliferation and success. The social, political, and economic turmoil of the twentieth century consistently fueled anxieties about the institution of American marriage and marriage educators consistently shaped their courses to be relevant and functional to their students.

Ernest Groves was a leading figure in the early history of marriage education. In his 1927 book, *The Marriage Crisis*, Groves ignited a movement that consistently presented education as the antidote to a wide range of twentieth-century social problems, including birth control, married women's employment, divorce, and industrialization with direct implications for marriage. However, by the 1940s, marriage experts and marriage educators began to point to different factors that placed marriage and the family in crisis. The Second World War was held responsible for absent fathers, broken families, declining birth rates, and mothers and wives working outside the home. These threats to marriage and the American family instigated what I refer to as the *continuing* crisis. While both crises and the factors that caused them changed from the 1920s through the 1950s, the response of the intellectual community did not. The continuing crisis bolstered the burgeoning field of marriage education and ensured its significance and survival within academia. Crises may have supplied the need for marriage education, but students and professors together shaped the courses to meet student expectations and needs.

This thesis will uncover the relationship between the marriage crisis that Groves wrote about in the late 1920s, the continuing crisis in the two decades that followed, and the interconnected roles of professors and students in the creation of the marriage course, and ultimately, the marriage education discipline. I argue that while the crises provided

the ongoing rationale for the college marriage course, the negotiation between marriage educators and their students was ultimately crucial for the successful professionalization of marriage education. Marriage educators initiated the marriage course, but students participated in shaping its trajectory through content requests and course popularity. The complicated relationship that emerged between educators' critical concerns and students' demands for information institutionalized a new marital ideal and moved conversations about marriage and the family into academic territory. This "special relationship of peculiar intimacy" placed intimate conversations of marriage within the realm of the professor-student relationship and shaped the trajectory of marriage education.<sup>5</sup>

Originating during the Progressive Era, marriage education was sustained through the post-WWII era as a feature of higher learning and a tool which enabled young couples to make informed decisions about marriage and shape the next generation of American citizens.

Prior to the introduction of marriage courses in American colleges and universities, knowledge about marriage and family life was transmitted within the family. Children learned (or did not learn) about these topics from parents, extended family, and older siblings. As historian Beth L. Bailey has argued, marriage educators facilitated the

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest Groves, *The Marriage Crisis* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1928): 19. Groves used this phrase to describe the marital relationship between two individuals, but I am using it here to suggest that the phrase also describes the relationship between marriage educators and their students in college marriage courses. While other disciplines experienced professionalization in the American academy, few took the functional approach to student education. Marriage education's dedication to making their discipline a practical tool for students stands in contrast to both the advent of sociology in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the professionalization of psychology in the first half of the twentieth century. Though both disciplines gained traction in academia later than their initial creation and certainly found homes within institutions of higher learning, historians have not traced their professionalization to educators' relationships with students. See the official history of sociology presented at the 1926 meeting of the American Sociological Society in St. Louis, Missouri. Additionally, Ellen Herman traces the proliferation and sustained influence of psychology to its use during WWII. See *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*.

shift of knowledge production and dissemination from the home into the academy as they became the new “arbiters of convention and morality.”<sup>6</sup> Fully acknowledging this shift, Ernest Groves wrote that marriage courses were fundamentally altering the role of higher education in the United States. Introducing marriage courses into the curriculum demanded both “adding a new objective to the academic program and constructing new educational material,” he wrote in 1937.<sup>7</sup> In fact, by the late 1930s, many marriage educators began to bemoan the limited scholarship available to inform marriage course curriculums. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, marriage educators were joined by an array of other professionals with an interest in preserving and saving the institution of American marriage from the modern threats of divorce, family limitation, and shifting gender roles. Marriage professionals came from various academic and professional pursuits and contributed to the growing prevalence and esteem of the helping professions. Many were physicians, religious leaders, counselors, advice columnists, and academic faculty from such disciplines as biology, psychology, and sociology. Consistently pointing to a crisis of marriage, educators and professionals published prolifically about their experiences in marriage course classrooms and their research in the burgeoning field of marriage education.

The changing functions of marriage which inspired the rise of marriage education have been well-documented by historians. In *Public Vows*, Nancy Cott explored the multifaceted meanings and roles of marriage as an institution grounded in legal, social,

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<sup>6</sup> Beth L. Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love: The Marriage Education Movement in the United States,” *Journal of Social History* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1987): 713.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Groves, “Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina” *Social Forces* 16, no. 1 (October 1937): 87.



and religious frameworks. Cott articulated the ways in which marriage navigated the public and private spheres, always inhabiting the spaces in which the two overlapped. Most notably, Cott contributed to the growing historiographical discussion of the relationship between marriage and the state by chronicling the interventions of state authority on individual couples' choice to marry as well as the growing number of public incentives and functions that the institution of marriage played in relation to taxation, immigration, and social welfare benefits.<sup>8</sup> Several other historians have taken on the immense task of documenting places and moments of state incursion on private and intimate relationships. Margot Canaday has recently explored the widespread incursion of state power on the personal and intimate lives of citizens who came in contact with government agencies from the Bureau of Immigration and the Department of Defense, to New Deal programs such as the Federal Transient Program and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Canaday discusses the state's enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality by noting the various ways in which those who failed to conform were subject to state intervention.<sup>9</sup> Building on the conceptual framework of marriage as a tenet of American citizenship, Priscilla Yamin also elucidates a tradition of state control over marriage by highlighting the political work marriage accomplishes as a "fulcrum" between the "obligations and rights" of citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Yamin argues that we can understand marriage as a means through which race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship are produced and

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Priscilla Yamin, *American Marriage: A Political Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 1.

understood. By placing marriage within the framework of citizenship, these scholars contribute to the historiography which recognizes a long tradition of public regulation of private behavior and illuminate a consistent pattern in which full citizenship rights have been methodically withheld from gendered and racialized groups of people in ways other than political disfranchisement. The institution of marriage was certainly one avenue of state control in which rights and duties of citizenship were defined. Marriage education served in this capacity by propagating the continued importance and necessity of marriage as a foundational institution of nation building. Joining a long tradition of public regulation of marriage, marriage educators indoctrinated willing students in this process.

The state has not operated alone in shaping the institution of marriage. Importantly, professionals such as physicians, counselors, and educators have also worked to police the boundaries and accessibility of marriage because doing so legitimized their professional aspirations and extended their expert jurisdictions even as they expressed sincere commitment to preserving and strengthening an institution under pressure. In her exploration of the transition of marriage into a form of emotional labor, Kristin Celello suggests that marriage professionals fostered the shift toward understanding marriage as work. Central to Celello's illumination of marriage as work is her suggestion that marriage experts attempted to "develop strategies that would fortify marriage."<sup>11</sup> While Celello does examine the careers of several marriage experts, she fails to interrogate fully their education strategy dedicated to strengthening marriage. Marriage educators fit into this trend of professional assistance, but also differed in important ways. Many of the marriage experts Celello discusses targeted married couples to help

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<sup>11</sup> Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 7.

them succeed in their marriages, but marriage educators stressed to their students the importance of critically evaluating a relationship *prior* to marriage. They were joined by physicians, psychologists, advice columnists, and counselors in attempting to develop an understanding of marriage which, as Celello notes, incorporated modern ideas about love, partnership, and marital sexuality, into traditional concepts of marriage which promoted marriage as a necessary foundational and organizational component of American society. Rebecca L. Davis also forges connections between marriage experts, individual marriages, and the nation. Davis chronicles the changing ideologies surrounding marriage throughout the twentieth century. Pointing to the varying goals of a disparate group of marriage experts, Davis suggests that marriage was at once considered foundational to national projects, a strategy for upward mobility and economic security, and a religious practice steeped in spiritual meaning. Marriage, Davis argues, has been “a social and cultural battleground, as well as an arena for intimate conflicts.”<sup>12</sup> The decisions individuals make about when, who, and if to marry have historically had far-reaching consequences for individuals’ lives, as well as for the definition of marriage as a religious, social, and legal institution.

There are numerous commonalities across the historiography of twentieth-century marriage. These scholars point toward efforts of the state, government organizations, experts, and couples themselves to make marriage into something palatable and applicable to modern couples. “Making marriage modern” and “making marriage work” shaped the experiences of individuals and simultaneously reified the importance of

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 9.

marriage to the nation.<sup>13</sup> These trends in the historiography highlight changing marital ideals in the twentieth century, as well as the impact of broader prescriptive trends and advice on the state of marriage more generally. What much of this scholarship lacks is an analysis of the mechanisms other than marriage counseling which were established to facilitate marital success. Marriage education was certainly a tactic used by marriage professionals to establish new marital ideals and to reach a specific demographic of Americans.

As many of these historians have elucidated, the popular and professional debates and concerns surrounding marriage in the twentieth century were often specific to white, middle-class American couples. Certainly, marriage educators emphasized the marital and reproductive choices of this demographic. Marriage courses offered in institutions of higher learning across the country were permeated by eugenic ideas of human betterment and catered to white, middle-class college students. Acting as gatekeepers of idealism surrounding marriage, marriage educators propagated their programs of fitness and compatibility by stressing the importance of mate selection to their students.

Recent scholarship about the history of eugenics has asserted that negative and positive eugenics are more intertwined than scholars had previously suggested. Historian Molly Ladd-Taylor discusses “the limitations of the bifurcated approach to the history of eugenics” and argues that many avenues of advancing eugenics employed both strategies simultaneously. While pursuing a specifically positive eugenic agenda, eugenicists also discouraged those deemed unfit from pursuing marriage and family life. By virtue of

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<sup>13</sup> Both are titles written by historians of marriage. See: Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women’s Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* and Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States*.

systematic exclusion, practitioners of eugenics pursued both positive and negative eugenics “through non-compulsory means.”<sup>14</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern joins Ladd-Taylor in this approach to studying eugenics. Her work specifically challenges the periodization of eugenics by suggesting that eugenic ideology did not see a decline in the 1930s and 1940s; rather, Stern argues it was not until the Civil Rights era that an open assault on eugenics began.<sup>15</sup> Examining marriage education as having facets of both positive and negative eugenic strategies facilitates close examination of the more nuanced and implicit strategies marriage professionals used to further ideas of genetic betterment. Perhaps marriage educators were not actively stopping students from pursuing certain love interests or sterilizing those individuals deemed physically or mentally unfit, but they certainly were in positions of power to suggest to young college students which potential partners were best suited to marriage and raising a family. Specific discussions of physical fitness and mental competence, as well as family history were included in textbooks and marriage course outlines and suggest that marriage educators wielded their influence to further a eugenic agenda, even as they genuinely aimed to help their students have happy and successful marriages. The seemingly harmless guidelines for mate selection institutionalized marital and genetic ideals, intertwining them so completely that students often considered a potential partner’s hereditary possibilities alongside factors such as sexual attraction or sense of humor.

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<sup>14</sup> Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA: The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe,” *Gender & History* 13, no. 2 (August 2001): 299.

<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Minna-Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

In their discussion of marriage and divorce in twentieth century America, few scholars have incorporated the rise of marriage education into their narratives about sexual advice manuals, the location of the state in marriage and divorce practices, changing courtship traditions, and eugenic ideology as it informed the legal and medical aspects of marriage practices. Examinations of these aspects of the history of marriage construct the context in which marriage education was created and popularized. Emerging from Progressive Era ideas about science and reform, marriage education was sustained through the post-WWII era as a feature of higher learning and a tool which enabled young couples to prepare for marriage and shape the next generation of American citizens.

While I join many historians in elucidating the changes in twentieth century American marriage, this work engages most directly with the work of Beth L. Bailey and Christina Simmons, who have both closely examined the history of marriage education. Bailey's pioneering article in 1987 explores the ways in which marriage came under the purview of science in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> The article traces the rise of marriage education as an effort which "was riding the larger tide of American faith in science [and] planning."<sup>17</sup> Marriage educators sought to place marriage within the realm of science. Marriage was both an institution ripe for analysis and one which they hoped was measurable and predictable. Bailey's thorough analysis is an invaluable contribution which places marriage education within the larger context of the "planning movement"

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<sup>16</sup> Bailey also published *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* in 1988. The article "Scientific Truth...and Love" appears as the last chapter in the longer monograph. The book serves to place marriage education within the context of young people's changing courtship patterns which inspired the title.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, "Scientific Truth...and Love," 713.

and suggests that marriage educators were certainly “a product of the same forces” they hoped to combat.<sup>18</sup> I build on Bailey’s foundational work by delineating a longer and more nuanced history of marriage education from its conception through its ultimate twentieth-century extinction by the 1970s. My goal is to closely examine the process by which marriage education became its own academic social-science discipline and eventually a broader professional field.

Additionally, Christina Simmons’ extensive work includes a close examination of marriage education in a few Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the 1940s. Simmons argues that student papers saved by marriage educator, Gladys Groves suggest a continued effort by young black women to control the discourse around their own sexuality. While upholding the politics of respectability, these women incorporated social scientific data into their knowledge about sexuality and used it to assert the normalcy and legitimacy of black women’s sexual desires within marriage.<sup>19</sup> Using some of the same materials from the papers of Gladys Groves, as well as institutional records from numerous HBCUs in the South, I have constructed a narrative of marriage education in HBCUs which builds on, yet differs from Simmons’ examination. Simmons suggests in the conclusion of her article that the modern scientific information provided by Groves facilitated the reconceptualization of respectability strategies which “would be of use in the civil rights struggle to come.”<sup>20</sup> This thesis ties black marriage education efforts to the larger black freedom struggle, particularly to the Civil Rights Movement, suggesting the

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<sup>18</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love,” 714.

<sup>19</sup> Christina Simmons, “‘I Had to Promise...Not to Ask ‘Nasty’ Questions Again’: African American Women and Sex and Marriage Education in the 1940s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 27, no. 1 (2015): 110-135.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons, “‘I Had to Promise...Not to Ask ‘Nasty’ Questions Again,’” 126.

centrality of marriage and family to African Americans' community organizations, civic consciousness, and evolving conceptions of equal citizenship.

I place marriage education within the long history of black education and uncover the experiences of black students and black and white marriage educators in Historically Black college marriage courses. I argue that efforts to reshape marriage education to better fit the needs of black students and community members signaled not simply an adoption of white marriage education, but a unique expression of citizenship. Studying American marriage in a way more applicable to their own experiences allowed students, faculty, and community members to assert their legitimacy as African Americans *and* American citizens. This reshaping of marriage education to fit the needs of the black community should be seen as part of broader black educational efforts and another way in which marriage education served as a functional tool for students. Education has been connected to citizenship by both nineteenth and early-twentieth century black intellectuals and modern historians and I hope to place my work in conversation with both to forge connections between the history of education, the history of marriage and sexuality, and African American history by chronicling marriage education.

This project traces the history of marriage education in the United States from its inception as a solution to the infamous marriage crisis of the early twentieth century through its use as a mechanism to shore up marriage and the family as a crucible of democracy at midcentury. At various moments from the 1920s through the 1960s, marriage education was harnessed to meet various, often contradictory goals. Participants came to these educational programs for various personal reasons, but we cannot ignore



the context in which marriage education was forged, grew in popularity, and later ultimately disappeared by the 1970s.

To trace this development, I have used an array of sources. I have attempted to balance the overwhelming prescriptive source base with sources that provide descriptive evidence of lived experience. Inherently problematic in using sources created by knowledge producers is the system of power at play. As cultural commentators, marriage educators and professionals played a significant role in shaping the expectations and ideals of modern marriage. They were in a unique position of power to promulgate and dispense information, knowledge, and advice to their students. Their published material includes marriage course textbooks, articles which detail the state of the field of marriage education, and syllabi and lectures used in the construction of their various marriage courses. Institutions of higher learning not only cultivated and disseminated knowledge about American marital sexuality, they did so prolifically. Michel Foucault's claims about the production of modern discourse about sex and sexuality are certainly applicable to the history of marriage education programs.<sup>21</sup> Foucault suggests that the institutionalization of discourse about sexuality demonstrates the centrality of sex in society. Institutions have encouraged and even required discourse on the subject of sex, and created what Foucault refers to as a "science of sexuality."<sup>22</sup> Marriage educators included discussions of marital sexuality in their curriculums and often required students to discuss their personal and sexual lives in meetings or in written assignments. This

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, 11-13.

required sexual discourse illuminates the lived and embodied experiences of marriage course students both in marriage education classrooms, and in their sexual lives.

Equally important, however, is to read marriage educators' published materials for evidence about when and how students significantly influenced marriage education. Despite the dynamics of power at play in this unequal relationship, students did exert influence over the course material. These moments are numerous and allow for an interpretation of the relationship in which students directed the shape of the field and influenced what knowledge was accessible. I suggest through critical readings of professors' stories of marriage education that students indeed enjoyed unprecedented influence as producers and consumers of knowledge within the marriage education discipline. This "special relationship of peculiar intimacy" was a mutually beneficial one in ways uncharacteristic of most academic disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

I attempt to amend the preponderance of evidence gleaned from sources left by marriage educators by supplementing their perspectives with newspapers articles, institutional records, and student papers. These sources often facilitate glimpses into the lived experience of students. The popularity of the courses, and their continuation throughout several decades suggests student interest in less explicit ways. Their voices are clear however, in their papers, correspondences, and course evaluations extolling the importance and relevance of marriage education to their own lives and experiences. While their responses are often professor-directed, their narration of their experiences provides a clear depiction of their feelings regarding their professors and the course material.

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<sup>23</sup> Ernest Groves, *The Marriage Crisis*, 19.

This thesis seeks to illuminate the history of marriage education in American colleges and universities through the mid-twentieth century and chronicle its trajectory. Chapter 1 links prominent intellectuals' anxieties about the state of marriage to the emergence of marriage courses. By highlighting the works of Ernest Groves, Benjamin Lindsey, and Paul Popenoe, this chapter establishes the prevalence of concern regarding the shifting norms of courtship and marriage. Pointing to realities of early twentieth century life such as a rise in the divorce rate and the decline in the national birth rate, these key leaders emerged to voice the problems Americans faced as modern expectations of marriage, gender, family, and sexuality altered the Victorian era structures which had governed the institution of marriage for many generations. These intellectuals from fields such as eugenics, sociology, and law proposed and implemented marriage courses in response to the crisis of marriage. Their efforts to combat the marriage crisis with education stemmed from a Progressive Era tradition which often applied modern scientific approaches to social problems. This chapter discusses the exact topics of marriage courses by analyzing textbooks, lectures, and syllabi from prominent marriage educators Norman Himes, Ernest and Gladys Groves, and Alfred Kinsey, among others. Despite varied course material, general usefulness and practicality remained at the heart of marriage education. This continued emphasis on functionality facilitated the direct applicability of course material to students' lives and permitted the inclusion of eugenics by condoning the marriage of certain people while condemning and discouraging the marriage of others. I argue that the crisis of marriage provided the impetus for marriage education, but its growth and success granted it particular influence over its target demographic: white, middle-class college students.

By the late 1930s, the experiment in marriage education had proven successful and the college marriage course enjoyed widespread implementation. Chapter 2 examines the process by which marriage education became entrenched in academic and professional fields and experienced immense success and widespread adoption. Meeting student demands for modern, scientific information about marriage and working to solve the broader problems of the marriage crisis, marriage education was beneficial to participants on both sides of the lecture podium. This chapter analyzes the benefits reaped by marriage educators as the field experienced professionalization and the ways in which students benefited from these courses. I examine the institutionalization of marital knowledge and ideals. Further, this chapter will highlight the impact of mobilization and war on marriage education ideology and efforts in what I refer to as the continuing crisis.

Finally, Chapter 3 chronicles the emergence of black marriage education in the American South in the postwar era by examining the ways in which marriage education moved outward from HBCUs into African American communities. I argue that black marriage education became a vehicle toward full access of citizenship rights in the years after WWII ended. While black elites understood marriage education to be within the realm of respectability, the ways in which black marriage educators and leaders reshaped and restructured marriage education to better fit black community needs demonstrates both an adherence to and a rejection of white America's marital ideal. This chapter covers the movement of black marriage education from North Carolina and the college campus to many other southern states and communities.

Eugenics and the gatekeeping of access to information about marriage permeated the original marriage courses. While professors designed their courses differently across

the country, there were several unifying themes which knit the entire enterprise together and fostered its professionalization and widespread popularity. Initially, marriage education began as a mechanism for achieving “non-compulsory” eugenic goals by preparing a certain group of “fit” and desirable people for marriage.<sup>24</sup> As the nation approached WWII, marriage education less explicitly advocated for eugenic practices, but still encouraged certain students to fulfill their civic duty by contributing reproductively to the foundation of American democracy. However, over time, these eugenic goals were circumvented and renegotiated. By the postwar era, marriage educators at HBCUs shaped marriage education efforts into vehicles for asserting citizenship rights of the very people marriage education had initially excluded from the civic responsibility of marriage. While marriage education began as an effort informed by eugenic science to promote the prolific and healthy marriage and family life of white, middle-class students, by the end of WWII, it had been transformed into an avenue by which those previously deemed “unfit” could access the rights of marriage and family life.

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<sup>24</sup> Ladd-Taylor, “The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe,” 299.

**CHAPTER II**  
**“THE MARRIAGE CRISIS” AND THE EMERGENCE OF MARRIAGE**  
**EDUCATION, 1925-1939**

In 1928, Ernest Groves, professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, wrote that “[a]lthough it is impossible to measure the degree of disturbance which marriage at present is undergoing, it is perhaps not too much to assert that it is in the throes of crisis.”<sup>25</sup> His book, aptly titled, *The Marriage Crisis*, argued that the crisis of marriage in the United States in the early twentieth century was a product of cultural and social changes associated with modernity. Modernity, Groves asserted, had fostered a “pleasure philosophy of life” which led directly to increased use of divorce laws and birth control.<sup>26</sup> This “pleasure philosophy” led young couples to expect that the purpose of marriage was enjoyment, rather than self-denial, obligation, and “moral endurance.”<sup>27</sup> Young couples, Groves argued, were ill-prepared for obstacles that detracted from marital happiness and sexual satisfaction. Since these obstacles and problems in marriage were inevitable, yet rarely discussed, young couples were quick to end the marital relationship when it no longer satisfied their search for pleasure. This, in turn, had caused the rising divorce rates, declining fertility rates, and the increasing number of women working outside the home. These realities of the early twentieth century all indicated to Groves and his contemporaries that the institution of marriage was in flux. “While society

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<sup>25</sup> Ernest Groves, *The Marriage Crisis* (New York, London, & Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage Crisis*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage Crisis*, 36.

is passing through this period of new adjustment,” Groves wrote, “we say that it is experiencing crisis.”<sup>28</sup>

Groves was not alone in his fear that these changes signaled the impending demise of the marital institution. The publication of Groves’ book followed on the heels of Progressive Era reformers who had also targeted marriage around the turn of the twentieth century. The period from the 1880s through the second decade of the twentieth century yielded many legal reforms in marriage that policed the boundaries and meanings of marriage in new ways. Priscilla Yamin suggests that these Progressive Era changes created new requirements for legal marriage which included registering marriages with the state and established new eugenic laws which stipulated that couples wishing to marry needed to prove mental competency and physical health.<sup>29</sup> These formal changes to marriage legality occurred within the context of increasing anxiety about definitions of citizenship, nationality, and race.

Reforms in marital law represented one facet of Progressive Era reform efforts. At the turn of the century, intellectuals and reformers turned to the rising influence of science to further their goals. After World War I, the benefits of scientific advancement were firmly entrenched in the collective American consciousness as new medical and technological advances became accessible.<sup>30</sup> Progressive Era reformers employed the influence of science to popularize the idea that social issues could be combatted through (social)-scientific research and education. The fields of sociology, psychology, home

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<sup>28</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage Crisis*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Priscilla Yamin, “The Search for Marital Order: Civic Membership and the Politics of Marriage in the Progressive Era,” *Polity* 41, no. 1 (January 2009): 86-112.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987): 148.

economics, and anthropology all contributed to the increasing body of scholarship that analyzed social problems, especially those stemming from marriage and the family. At the turn of the century, these social scientists often joined forces with social reformers from organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA). These partnerships between reformers and social scientists facilitated a perception of science as a vehicle for identifying and resolving social maladies and supplied the necessary legitimacy to direct attention to the marriage crisis and propose solutions.<sup>31</sup>

These social organizations had roots in the late nineteenth century and gained support and further legitimacy by the turn of the twentieth century. Progressive Era reform fostered the first partnerships of social reform and social science. Attempting to regulate problems associated with urbanization and industrialization, reformers employed the rhetoric of science to problematize social phenomenon such as prostitution, alcoholism, venereal disease, and tenement hygiene. By the turn of the twentieth century, these efforts diverged and established two distinct patterns of reform. Social hygiene reformers established anti-vice campaigns, state and local Comstock Laws, and settlement houses in attempts to regulate the moral and social hygiene of modern Americans. Efforts to promote public health advanced programs rooted more firmly in medical science and focused on issues such epidemiology, particularly of venereal

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<sup>31</sup> Lawrence S. Bee, *The Social Scientists' Stake in Teaching Marriage and Family Relations*, (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1959).; Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority*, (Chicago & Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).; Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).



disease. Both sectors targeted specific groups such as immigrants and sexual deviants as objects of their concern and established a tradition of harnessing science to judge human behavior, worth, and fitness.

Social hygiene organizations such as the ASHA and the Bureau of Social Hygiene were created in the second decade of the twentieth century and tackled the continuing problems of prostitution, urbanization, and other issues they saw as threats to the moral integrity of American society. However, in the twentieth century, the Bureau and the ASHA both invested in social science research as well as educational reform efforts. The ASHA collaborated with organizations such as the YMCA and social scientists such as M. J. Exner to support research which examined sexual behavior and marriage. The Bureau of Social Hygiene, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation supported social scientists such as Katharine Bement Davis and the grantees of the National Research Council's Committee for Research in Problems of Sex. This new research was then employed by the Bureau, the ASHA, and the YMCA to educate the public in the concepts and methods of social hygiene.<sup>32</sup> Twentieth century social science and social reform faced the intimate problems of sex and marriage together.<sup>33</sup> This partnership established research and education as legitimate solutions to social problems and paved the way for social scientists such as Groves and his contemporaries to use social science and

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<sup>32</sup> Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 16-57.

<sup>33</sup> Sophie D. Aberle and George W. Corner, *Twenty-Five Years of Sex Research: History of the National Research Council Committee for Research in Problems of Sex, 1922-1947*, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1953).; Katharine Bement Davis, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1929).; Max J. Exner, *Problems and Principles of Sex Education: A Study of 948 College Men*, (New York: Association Press, 1915).; Max J. Exner, *The Sexual Side of Marriage* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1932).

education to remedy the marriage crisis and police the boundaries of civic participation within the institution of marriage.

Despite the growing dependence on science, pseudo-science facilitated the proliferation of eugenic laws and Progressive reforms aimed at policing reproduction. These ideas were deployed amidst the birth control revolution in the early twentieth century and advocates of birth control access joined forces with eugenicists. Though advocating for access for all, birth control was seen particularly as an option to limit the procreation of the “unfit.” The same ideology which produced the eugenic marriage laws worked to shape definitions of fitness. Intellectual and physical fitness demanded that individuals seeking marriage, and ultimately, a family were free from venereal and hereditary disease, as well as being mentally stable and competent. Determinations of who met these criteria often intersected with a person’s race, class, and nationality. Policing access to marriage and birth control through federal and state laws, the United States reshaped the framework of marriage and family life. Those who were deemed fit to marry and procreate were most often those who were within the “cultural and biological boundaries of civic inclusion.”<sup>34</sup> Venereal diseases such as gonorrhea could inhibit the health of a fetus in utero and conditions such as deafness or “feeble-mindedness,” if found to be hereditary, would limit an individual’s right to marry. Indeed, by the 1930s, “forty-one states had passed statutes that required tests of mental capacity” prior to receiving a marriage license.<sup>35</sup> By 1940, there were twenty states which required one or both partners to submit to a venereal disease screening prior to issuing a marriage license and

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<sup>34</sup> Yamin, “The Search for Marital Order,” 87.

<sup>35</sup> Yamin, “The Search for Marital Order,” 98.

seventeen states had laws which required pregnant women to submit to prenatal blood tests to screen for various illnesses, diseases, or defects.<sup>36</sup> The possibility of passing diseases or unwanted traits to the next generation of citizens was actively combatted by twin pillars of marital regulation: marital law and marriage education.

Intellectuals such as Groves expressed profound concern which encapsulated broader anxieties about marriage and family “in regard to the responsibilities of citizenship.”<sup>37</sup> After highlighting the problems surrounding modern marriage, Groves suggested that the best solution to the problems of divorce and the decline of white, middle-class family life was to educate young people in preparation for the civic duty of marriage. Indeed, Groves had begun educating his students for marriage the year before, in the spring semester of 1927. Though he referred to the course as the “first college course in preparation for marriage,” in actuality, Groves joined a burgeoning community of intellectuals with the same concerns and goals.<sup>38</sup> With roots in the Progressive Era reformist tradition of using education to combat social problems, Groves and his contemporaries began a new era of reform: marriage education.<sup>39</sup> By moving education for marriage and family life from the home to the university, Groves and his contemporaries became the “new arbiters of convention and morality.”<sup>40</sup> They institutionalized and formalized the norms and expectations of marriage and family life

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Himes, *Your Marriage: A Guide to Happiness* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1940): 130-31.; Gladys Hoagland Groves, *Marriage and Family Life* (Cornwall: Cornwall Press, 1942): 204-205.

<sup>37</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage Crisis*, 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933), dedication page.

<sup>39</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love,” 711.

<sup>40</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love,” 713.

by making the university a place of knowledge production and dissemination about topics such as marital adjustment, courtship and engagement, family finances, and child rearing.

This chapter traces the origins of marriage education to its roots in Progressive Era reform and eugenics and documents the creation of numerous marriage courses in the late 1920s and their continued success throughout the 1930s. I argue that academics and intellectuals conceived of college marriage courses in response to changing social and sexual norms in the early twentieth century and joined a long tradition of marriage reform efforts. These courses fostered an idealized version of white, middle-class, heteronormative marriage and family structure which departed from the Victorian model of marriage, but depended on contemporary eugenic ideals of parenthood and procreation. This changing marital ideal emphasized egalitarian marriage built on designated gender roles and the possibility of nonprocreative sexual satisfaction.<sup>41</sup> College marriage courses named new expectations of marriage within the context of shifting social and sexual norms.

By locating the solution to a larger social problem within individual persons and relationships, marriage educators joined state and federal laws in sanctioning the marriage and procreation of some individuals, while discouraging the marital and reproductive lives of others. Although marriage education advanced eugenics “through non-compulsory means,” the practice of helping white, middle-class college students navigate the new legal and social parameters of modern marriage contributed to the narrowing definition of American citizenship in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997): 266-267.

<sup>42</sup> Ladd-Taylor, “The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe,” 299.

Marriage and family life was “pushed as obligatory and necessary for the good of society” so long as those who took up this civic duty were intellectually, racially, physically, and financially fit to do so.<sup>43</sup> Most often, those young adults who populated the classrooms of marriage courses across the country met these qualifications by the very fact that they could afford to attend a predominantly white and still very elite institution of higher learning. The marriage course promoted the marriage of these students and aimed to help them fulfill their civic obligation to marry and produce a future generation of fit citizens. Marriage educators believed that marriage was the foundation of American democracy. American society, they believed, depended on the continued success of marriage as both a building block of the nation and an institution in which citizens fulfilled their civic duty.

### **Marriage Experts Articulate the Marriage Crisis**

A few years prior to the publication of Groves’ *The Marriage Crisis*, marriage expert Paul Popenoe authored *Modern Marriage: A Handbook*. Arguing that “something is wrong with marriage today,” and that this fact was “universally admitted and deplored,” Popenoe submitted to his readership the factors he found to be the cause of the decline of marital success.<sup>44</sup> Highlighting that “young people are not properly educated for marriage” and did not “have the guidance to choose mates wisely,” Popenoe foreshadowed Groves’ argument that education was the solution to the marriage

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<sup>43</sup> Yamin, *American Marriage*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Popenoe, *Modern Marriage*, vi.

problem.<sup>45</sup> Casting marriage as a natural and necessary component of human existence, Popenoe placed responsibility for marital success in the hands of those who sought and entered into marriage. One historian has argued that both Groves and Popenoe “blamed marriage’s problems on the individuals who entered into it, not the institution itself.”<sup>46</sup> While their proposed solution directly addressed individual people and their experiences with marriage, both men fully acknowledged the impact of changing notions of ideal marriage. Their insistence that marriage continue its essential role in society with educational assistance rather than alterations to the economic and social structure of the institution itself, has led historians to believe that both men rejected the ideas of Judge Ben Lindsey. In fact, many of their ideas were quite similar, despite a relationship of personal and professional antagonism.

Ben Lindsey achieved national recognition through his advocacy of companionate marriage which he offered as the solution to the marriage problem. The tenets of a companionate marriage included easy access to divorce for childless couples, use of birth control until a couple was ready for a family, and a foundation of close sexual and emotional intimacy. Lindsey’s promotion of the idea instigated publicity and debate. His book, *Companionate Marriage*, was first published in 1927, but by the time the book was available to the public, the concept of companionate marriage was already well known and debated. His book acted as a defense of this idea rather than a mere explanation. Struggling to differentiate his ideas from the contentious “trial marriage” debate and the

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<sup>45</sup>Popenoe, *Modern Marriage*, viii.

<sup>46</sup>Rebecca L. Davis, “‘Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry’: The Companionate Marriage Controversy,” *The Journal of American History* 94, no 4 (March 2008): 1158.

concept of free love, Lindsey's preface asserted the legality of companionate marriage.<sup>47</sup> Trial marriages were different from Lindsey's companionate marriage concept in that they were meant to be temporary marital arrangements; they could be ended easily at any time by choice of one or both participants. This idea was often compared to the free love debate originating in the late nineteenth century. Popularly and erroneously associated with promiscuity and the dismantling of the American family, free love or sex radicalism advocated for the willing participation and consent of individuals into emotional or sexual relationships without institutional regulations.<sup>48</sup> Lindsey's explanation of companionate marriage shared similar elements to trial marriage and free love and was often compared to both as a means of discrediting companionate marriage. However, Lindsey emphasized the use of legalized birth control and the right to divorce for childless couples. Describing love and sex as an art, Lindsey suggested that sex was an important component of marriage and discussed the "problem of sex ignorance" as a contributing factor to the larger marriage crisis.<sup>49</sup> Companionate marriage, Lindsey maintained, was the solution to the problem of marriage in America. Providing sex education and emphasizing communication and friendship in marriage were Lindsey's proposed methods for saving the institution of marriage from the threats of modernity. Interestingly, Popenoe's concept of modern marriage also maintained the importance of

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<sup>47</sup>For information on trial marriages, see William Kuby, "Till Disinterest Do Us Part: Trial Marriage, Public Policy, and the Fear of Familial Decay in the United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23, no. 3 (September 2014): 383-414.

<sup>48</sup> For more information about free love or sex radicalism, see Joanne E. Passett, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).; John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Lindsey and Evans, *The Companionate Marriage*, 69.

sex in marriage and advocated for marital education. The concept of sex education was borrowed from Progressives who promoted education for social hygiene in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Their motives were also quite similar to those of Lindsey, Popenoe, and Groves. Historian Christina Simmons suggests that social hygienists “emphasized the need to control sexuality for the sake of social and moral order.”<sup>50</sup> Groves and his contemporaries joined a growing movement of reformers, organizations, and concerned intellectuals in the late 1920s. Their concern over the institution of marriage was part of a broader expression of anxiety over the changing sexual practices and mores of modern life.

Lindsey, Popenoe, and Groves all described changes to the sexual ideology of the country in the twentieth century. While Groves and Popenoe originally emphasized in their publications that individuals were responsible for problems in their marriages, these intellectuals still recognized the significant influence of broader social circumstances. By suggesting that sexual satisfaction was a crucial component of a successful marriage, these men joined a conversation about changes to the marital institution for which sex radicals and feminists had long advocated. Emphasis on mutual sexual satisfaction dovetailed with the growing idea of “the democracy of modern marriage.”<sup>51</sup> Expectations of mutual emotional and sexual fulfillment replaced the Victorian era ideas of female subordination and passionless, procreative sex within marriage. In this way, marriage experts supplied an alteration to the institution of marriage. Originally, these experts placed blame in the hands of participants of failed marriages, but their solution

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<sup>50</sup> Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern*, 133.



recognized the broader social factors contributing to changes in marriage and supported both individual and institutional change by suggesting education for marriage.

The social factors Groves and his contemporaries listed as contributing to the marriage crisis were exaggerated and oversimplified, but were nonetheless authentic features of the early twentieth century. Groves' reflection on the "new woman" of the early-twentieth century rested on several economic, social, and political changes that altered the gendered dynamics of the family and the workplace. Women's enfranchisement in 1920 created a flurry of panic and raised questions about the sexuality, morality, and priorities of vote-wielding women. After the vote was won, feminism was born of the successful suffrage movement and demanded recognition of women's domestic work while also fighting for women's right to work in safe industrial environments outside the home for equal pay. Winning many protective legislative victories may have relegated women to certain low-paying jobs, but it also legitimized their presence in the workforce.<sup>52</sup> By 1920 though, only 6.3 percent of married white women were listed in the census as being "occupied" outside the home. However, 32.5 percent of married black women were "gainfully employed" in 1920. This data suggests that while Groves and his contemporaries expressed concern about married women's employment outside the home, their concern the gender role deviation of white women was virtually unfounded and certainly misplaced. The national average of working women did rise, but married black women were much more likely to enter or remain in the paid workforce after marriage.

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<sup>52</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 166.

Demographers and social scientists substantiated Groves' assertion that the availability of birth control information negatively impacted the birth rate, however, other factors such as the "urban mentality" were also listed as possible causes for the declining birth rate throughout the country.<sup>53</sup> Industrialization and urbanization, demographer Bernard Okun argued, influenced the number of children couples wanted or could afford to support. Information about how to control fertility was also more readily available in urban areas. This decrease in the national birth rate began in urban areas, he asserted, but eventually spread to more rural areas. He called this phenomenon the "urban mentality."<sup>54</sup> "The birth rate declined in an irregular fashion" between the years of 1909 to 1933, Grabill, Kiser, and Whelpton reported in their 1958 analysis.<sup>55</sup> Their chart shows after its postwar high in 1921, the birth rate in America reached a substantial low point in 1933. This also suggests that economic factors contributed to a couple's reasons for family limitation.

Groves' concern about the divorce rate was also grounded in fact. While the rise in marriage rates and divorce rates mirrored each other, the divorce rates were always much lower than marriage rates. However, over the eighty-year span of 1867-1946 the divorce rate demonstrated a "consistent increase."<sup>56</sup> During the 1920s specifically, the

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<sup>53</sup> Bernard Okun, *Trends in the Birth Rates in the United States since 1870*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958): 101. See also: Paul C. Glick, "Updating the Life Cycle of the Family," *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* 39, no. 1 (February 1977): 5-13.

<sup>54</sup> Okun, *Trends in the Birth Rates in the United States since 1870*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson H. Grabill, Clyde V. Kiser, and Pascal K. Whelpton, *The Fertility of American Women* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958): 25.

<sup>56</sup> U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics United States, 1867-1967*, (Rockville: Health Resources Administration, 1973): 9.

number of divorces nationwide climbed from approximately 160,000 to 200,000.<sup>57</sup> The 1930 census estimated that approximately 9.6% of women over the age of fifteen in the United States were black. While this figure is similar to the percentage of married women who were black (9.2%), black women were disproportionately represented in the national divorce rate for American women. Approximately 16% of divorced women were black. While concern for the national divorce rate was articulated in terms of native-born, white, middle-class women, these figures suggest that the very trends which concerned white intellectuals were markedly more apparent in the black female population in the 1920s. The fertility rates and divorce rates exhibited by people of color and immigrants were noted by white intellectuals in the 1920s as a trend they were eager to deter in the white population.

The transition into the twentieth century was fraught with enough social change to cause great concern, even panic among the intellectually elite. Marriage experts such as Groves, Popenoe, and Lindsey articulated to the public that this period of transition amounted to a crisis.<sup>58</sup> By the mid-1920s, their articles, books, and guides to navigating the crisis took a secondary position to the college marriage course. They shifted from alerting the public to the crisis of white, middle-class marriage, to combatting the crisis

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<sup>57</sup> U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics United States, 1867-1967*, 8. The report also discusses the rise in divorce rate from 1890 to 1920 in which the rate of divorce per 1,000 couples more than doubled.

<sup>58</sup> Ernest Groves, *The Marriage Crisis*; Popenoe, *Modern Marriage*; and Lindsey, *Companionate Marriage*. Various marital sex guides and marital sex studies assisted in moving America forward from its Victorian era sexual ideologies and created a new version of ideal marriage. For more information about marital sex guides, see Jessamyn Neuhaus's "The Importance of Being Orgasmic: Sexuality, Gender, and Marital Sex Manuals in the United States, 1920-1963," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 4 (October 2000): 448.

through marriage education, made most readily available to white, middle-class college students.

### **The College Marriage Course: Origins and Content**

In 1922, Ernest Groves taught a family life course at Boston University. College courses about the family and children were popular in sociology and home economics departments. Although Groves distinguished between the family course and the marriage course, the two were actually quite similar and many colleges merged them into a course on marriage and family living. However, when Groves moved to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to teach what he heralded as “the first college course in preparation for marriage,” he differentiated between family life and marriage courses in a way that few other marriage educators later did.<sup>59</sup> Historians have tended to accept Groves’ UNC marriage course as the first, stating that North Carolina was “especially fertile ground for marriage education.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, North Carolina did have quite a few schools which offered a marriage course.<sup>61</sup> However, a study executed in 1935 by marriage educator, Cecil Hayworth offers much different information about the origins of the marriage course. Hayworth’s study indicated that in or prior to 1925, courses on marriage were initiated at

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<sup>59</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, unnumbered dedication page.

<sup>60</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...And Love,” 715.

<sup>61</sup> The state of North Carolina had many schools which adopted marriage education programs in the 1920s through the 1960s. The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill was a university which was no stranger to trailblazing educational programs. Howard Washington Odum, the sociology professor who recruited marriage educator, Ernest Groves in the 1920s, also established the university’s sociology department and the School of Public Welfare. See Laura Micheletti Puaca, *Pioneer to Powerhouse: The History of Graduate Education at Carolina*.

twenty-two colleges.<sup>62</sup> A North Carolina college newspaper published an article in 1939 with similar statistics about the popularity of the college marriage course. The article noted that “growth of the [marriage education] movement is shown by the fact that there were only 22 such courses 12 years ago.”<sup>63</sup> By this math, the author of the article suggested that by 1927, there were twenty-two colleges and universities that offered a marriage course.

A later study, conducted by marriage educator Henry Bowman in 1949 polled 1,270 colleges and universities across the country. Included in his report were statistics about the origins of the courses. This study found information strikingly similar to Hayworth’s study about the origins of the marriage course. Bowman located the initiation of 79% of the college marriage courses to the years since 1934.<sup>64</sup> This finding implies that 21% of the courses were established prior to 1934 and Hayworth’s study listed a total of 91 created in that time frame.<sup>65</sup> Both studies implicitly challenged Groves’ origin story. The fact that Groves’ course was not the original college marriage course suggests that the crisis Groves pointed to in his book was recognized years before he formally articulated it. In fact, professors at other institutions of higher education acknowledged and acted years earlier by promoting education as a solution to the problem of marriage.

Hayworth’s study provided limited information about course content, but it did gather preliminary details that highlighted emerging trends in marriage education by the

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<sup>62</sup> Cecil A. Hayworth, “Education for Marriage Among American Colleges,” *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*, no. 1 (November 1935): 479.

<sup>63</sup> “Another Step Forward,” *The Guildfordian* (February 4, 1939): 2.

<sup>64</sup> Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” 408.

<sup>65</sup> Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” 408.; Hayworth, “Education for Marriage Among American Colleges,” 479.

1930s. The study polled state schools, private schools, and schools with religious affiliations, as well as colleges for men, for women, and coeducational schools. Of the 403 colleges polled for the study, 225 offered marriage courses. Further, Hayworth discovered that 188 of the marriage courses were offered through the sociology departments of these institutions, but some were located within home economics, religion, zoology, psychology, or their own marriage departments. Hayworth did not note the prevalence of an age or class year prerequisite for taking the course, but marriage courses were often only available to students near the end of their college career (usually sophomore status or higher). Courses were rarely given academic prerequisites and were open to all majors. Schools variably offered the course for credit or as an uncredited elective. Hayworth did report that women's schools were often giving more explicit and comprehensive attention to this field and the report indicated that the marriage course was more frequently taken by the female students at coeducational schools.

Using 105 of the reporting schools, Hayworth indicated that topics such as divorce, personal adjustments in marriage, partner choice, eugenic aspects of marriage, birth control, courtship problems, family finances, and married women's careers were very popular topics discussed in the majority of the polled marriage courses. To a lesser extent, Hayworth indicated that the topics of engagement, the wedding, the honeymoon, petting, pregnancy, deviations in sex life, and the physiology of sex organs were also discussed in marriage courses, to varying degrees. In closing his article, Hayworth noted the lack of uniformity among the courses and expressed dismay at the "lack of standards and materials in this field."<sup>66</sup> The marriage courses of the early-1930s were still a new

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<sup>66</sup> Hayworth, "Education for Marriage Among American Colleges," 481.

experiment and content varied greatly. Hayworth's comment aptly noted that marriage education was growing into its own academic field and disciplinary standards would need to be applied in the future.

Despite varying content, marriage educators did make attempts to standardize material. They contacted each other with inquiries and published articles detailing the successes and failures of their schools' marriage courses. This burgeoning network of marriage educators is documented most clearly in the journal *Marriage and Family Living*, started by marriage educator and researcher, Ernest Burgess in 1939 as the organ of the National Council on Family Relations.<sup>67</sup> The articles reveal a widespread commitment to making marriage education a respectable academic endeavor while also providing "functional" information for students. The marriage course, Groves pointed out, "enlarg[ed] college function."<sup>68</sup> Just as professionals and educators became the new locus of information about marriage and family life in the early twentieth century, the university shifted its role with the introduction of the marriage course. No longer was higher education simply a tool for liberal arts education or vocational training; it had shifted to make room for functional courses which taught students information that was designed to assist them in their personal, marital, and sexual lives. Numerous professors articulated the importance of the course design. Professor Henry Bowman of Stephens College wrote that "as time passed and student interests and needs have been more fully analyzed, the theoretical and sociological emphases have given way to the personal and

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<sup>67</sup> The National Council on Family Relations was started by Ernest Burgess in 1938. Its journal, *Living*, was first published in 1939. In 1941, the title changed to *Marriage and Family Living*. I use this title to reference the publication since the journal published under this title throughout the majority of the years covered in this study.

<sup>68</sup> Ernest R. Groves, "Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina," *Social Forces* 16, no. 1 (October 1937): 87-88.

functional.”<sup>69</sup> Many who began the course by teaching the history and sociology of marriage eventually altered the aims of the course to suit the specific needs of their students. This tactic was ubiquitous and served to homogenize content across hundreds of marriage courses.

Keeping functionality at the forefront of his course in the late 1930s, Professor Norman Himes of the all-men’s school, Colgate University in New York, designed a specific exercise for the men in his marriage course. Himes had his students submit papers in which they listed traits they associated with an “ideal mate,” as well as those they would consider “acceptable.” This exercise forced Himes’ students to think critically about exactly what they wanted in a partner, and by extension, a marriage. The changing expectations of modern marriage and the information they learned in their marriage courses guided their responses. Their lists coincide with many of the course topics listed in syllabi, articles, and bibliographies. While several of these young men wrote that they wished for a companion and someone with similar interests, many emphasized issues surrounding sexual relationships, children, gender roles, hereditary traits, and finances. These same topics appeared in numerous marriage courses and textbooks.

Many of Himes’ students broached the subject of sex. While “not afraid of intercourse” was noted on one man’s “acceptable” list, another wrote that the ideal woman “must be able to satisfy me sexually and be quite warm blooded.” Several students wrote about sexuality in both columns, indicating a refusal to compromise in the area of sexual adjustment. However, there were numerous lists which listed that a virgin wife was ideal. The tension surrounding sexuality is most clearly expressed by the varied

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<sup>69</sup> Henry Bowman, “The Marriage Course at Stephens College,” *Marriage and Family Living* 3, no. 1 (February 1941): 8-9, 11.



answers listed by the students in this class. While some men wanted a woman who was sexually experienced, there were others who wished for a wife who was a virgin, or at the very least, “not a loose girl.”<sup>70</sup> Clearly, expectations of sexual pleasure were prioritized, but women’s sexuality was policed by potential mates, as well as within the marriage course classroom.

Topics such as courtship, premarital relations, and marital adjustment were often included in marriage courses and texts and served to establish and regulate sexual norms for young couples. Gladys Groves, Ernest Groves’ wife, wrote a 1936 textbook for women titled *The Married Woman* which covered these topics in much detail. Groves diplomatically refrained from condemning or endorsing premarital sex by acknowledging that social expectation of chastity was shifting to allow more sexual experimentation before marriage, but that the older generation still expected women to be virgins on their wedding night. Groves highlighted the wide array of information young women received. She devoted several pages to a discussion of the personal nature of deciding one’s own “sex code,” suggesting that sexual experimentation was very much a personal choice. However, she also articulated the numerous ways in which premarital sex could end an engagement. The moment in which Groves takes the strongest stance is her definitive assertion that “[t]he widely publicized notion that pre-marital intercourse is a wise means of avoiding sex maladjustment in marriage has nothing but ignorance to bolster it up.”<sup>71</sup> Groves was invested in reassuring women that sex adjustment within marriage was

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<sup>70</sup> Norman E. Himes papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Series I, C, 5, Box 62, Folder 688.

<sup>71</sup> Gladys Groves, *The Married Woman: A Practical Guide to Happy Marriage* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1936): 38.

entirely possible and premarital experimentation was not the only, or the best avenue to relieving fears and cultivating healthy sexual outlooks. Instead, she argued that education and the help of a trained physician would facilitate healthy sexual adjustment.<sup>72</sup>

Two such physicians were Dr. Hannah Stone and her husband, Dr. Abraham Stone. Their 1935 textbook, *A Marriage Manual*, reassured students that sexual dysfunction was natural. Blaming the social stigma surrounding sex for young couples' lack of preparation for sexual intercourse within marriage, the Stones suggested that sex within marriage was complicated if both the husband and wife were inexperienced.<sup>73</sup> They were particularly concerned with negative associations that women developed about sex and their participation in it, even within marriage. "The fears and inhibitions accumulated by a woman during a lifetime cannot after all be thrown off by her on the very day she is united in wedlock," they wrote and thus, tasked the man with "the role of initiator" in sexual intercourse and adjustment.<sup>74</sup> The assumption that not all women were adhering to the Victorian expectation of chastity by the 1930s is evident in both Gladys Groves' and the Stones' books. While both books refrained from giving explicit approval of premarital sex, they both approached the subject from a realistic position that modern expectations of sexuality were diverging from older expectations. The tension between modern concepts of pre-marital sexuality and older concepts of chastity before marriage

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<sup>72</sup> Groves suggests, much like her husband and many other contemporary marriage educators and experts, that education was a solution to the problems of marriage. However, Gladys Groves goes a step further and suggests in this text that the premarital pelvic examination would also reduce wedding night jitters by assuring "an easy entrance upon the marital function" by having a doctor "gradually stretch" the hymen prior to sex. Gladys Groves, *The Married Woman*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah and Abraham Stone, *A Marriage Manual: A Practical Guide-Book to Sex and Marriage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1935): 182-185.

<sup>74</sup> Stones, *A Marriage Manual*, 182.

is illustrated in the array of expectations Himes' students listed in their papers. Both the marriage course textbooks and the students policed the boundaries of acceptable female sexuality.

Discussions of sex often included information about birth control. Many marriage course textbooks devoted chapters to the subject and often cautioned that the only appropriate use of contraception was within marriage. This assertion reified the expectancy of premarital chastity by promoting birth control as legitimate only within the confines of marriage, even as the Stones implicitly suggested their awareness of the growing departure from this ideology. There were several reasons a married couple's use of birth control was considered legitimate. The Stones limited the prescription of contraceptives to certain circumstances. The Stones asserted that contraception should be used "in order to conserve the health or life of the wife and the welfare of the family, or to prevent the birth of defective offspring."<sup>75</sup> The health of the mother was the most obvious reason to use contraception. Certain medical conditions which would make pregnancy and childbirth hazardous to the life of the woman warranted vigilant use of birth control methods. The health of both husband and wife were of crucial eugenic concern, as well. The Stones suggested that birth control was necessary if there was a chance of producing a child who would inherit undesirable genetic diseases or defects. Lastly, the intentional spacing of children for economic and familial stability was essential and a justifiable reason for a couple to use birth control.<sup>76</sup> However, after an extensive discussion of available birth control methods, the Stones warned their readers

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<sup>75</sup> Stones, *A Marriage Manual*, 96.

<sup>76</sup> Stone, *A Marriage Manual*, 97.

that “the ideal contraceptive still remains to be developed” and that no current method provided absolute insurance in the prevention of pregnancy.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, Ernest Groves’ texts consistently served to remind readers about the fallibility of available birth control methods. His 1933 textbook, *Marriage*, reminded students that “birth control, thus far at least, is a relative limitation of offspring, not an absolute prevention of unwanted fertilization.”<sup>78</sup> Groves and the Stones offered similar lists of circumstances under which a couple should legitimately use contraception. Eugenic concerns topped the lists in the works of Groves and the Stones and suggested that individual eugenic fitness determined a person’s right to marry.

In his discussion of marital fitness, Groves indicated that the “inheritance” of tuberculosis, epilepsy, alcoholism, cancer, insanity, and feeble-mindedness were all reasons a person’s fitness for marriage could be called into question.<sup>79</sup> Groves suggested that “the right to marry” was directly influenced by the chances of passing one of these undesirable traits to the next generation.<sup>80</sup> In regard to feeble-mindedness specifically, Groves argued that “unless feeble-mindedness appearing in a recent generation is clearly of environmental influence, the right of marriage is questionable, and that of parenthood more so.”<sup>81</sup> Here Groves agreed with Popenoe again. They argued that marriage should not be the right of everyone and certain problems of heredity should impinge on a person’s right to marry. The assumption that marriage was the first step to starting a

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<sup>77</sup> Stone, *A Marriage Manual*, 123.

<sup>78</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage* (New York: Henry Hold & Company, 1933): 336.

<sup>79</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933): 47, 53-57.

<sup>80</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 45. This is the title of chapter four.

<sup>81</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 57.

family, rather than just a romantic commitment to another person drove this ideology. Groves and Popenoe believed that if individuals with questionable inheritance could be stopped from marrying, then their undesirable genes would not be passed to the next generation. Groves' textbook conformed to these preventative eugenic measures again when he asserted that prior to marriage, couples should gather family histories to determine their compatibility and their "fitness for marriage."<sup>82</sup> For this, he recommended employing the services of a "competent specialist."<sup>83</sup>

These specialists that Groves recommended to his readers were often medical doctors in the fields of urology, obstetrics, and gynecology, much like the Stones. In his 1937 article about his marriage course at the University of North Carolina, Groves recommended the services of various professionals in the fields of medicine, psychology, and counseling.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, other marriage educators recommended books in the growing body of research on marriage and the family to the students in their marriage courses.<sup>85</sup> While they all covered a range of topics, the eugenic theme of heredity and concern for potential children that would result from an unfit union remained prevalent.

With these eugenic concerns in mind, many of the students in Himes' course gave consideration to health in one, or both columns of their papers on ideal mates. While

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<sup>82</sup> Stones, *A Marriage Manual*.

<sup>83</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Ernest Groves, "Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina," 91-92.

<sup>85</sup> Perry P. Denune, "Education for Marriage at Ohio State University," *Marriage and Family Living* 7, no. 1 (February 1945): 7.; "Marriage Course Books," 1940-41, Indiana University Vice President and the Dean of Faculties records, 1940-1959 (C26), Box 5, "Marriage Course" Folder, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana. Two such examples include, Denune's specific reference to the Stones' *A Marriage Manual*. He states that Ohio State University's Institute for Social Living kept five copies on reserve in the library to ensure student access. Similarly, Alfred Kinsey's 1940 marriage course included *A Marriage Manual* on its course book list.

many simply noted that an ideal and/or acceptable mate should be healthy, several papers listed more specific information pertaining to “family background” and “hereditary character.”<sup>86</sup> Their desire to find a partner who would pass on good hereditary traits to future offspring was encouraged by most marriage courses. These hereditary traits would determine fitness for marriage and, by extension, fitness for citizenship. The idea that young couples were producing and raising future American citizens guided marriage education efforts. Fitness for marriage and fitness for citizenship were so closely linked under the guise of science that marriage educators and professionals allowed factors such as heredity to infiltrate the information and advice they administered to students. As Ernest Groves argued, marriage was not a right of every citizen. It was a duty of some and something to be discouraged in others.

This policing of potential mates for ideal genetic traits fostered specificity in other aspects of an ideal mate. Some of the men went further than general health and genetics and stipulated they wanted a wife who was “blonde,” had a “perfect body,” was the “same height or a little shorter than myself,” or weighed between “110-115 pounds.” Numerous men mentioned they wanted an educated woman and someone from the same socio-economic background, however, none of the men specified that their wife should be white and yet, this was implied. When the students asserted that their ideal mate was from a good family, was “eugenically sound,” or of the “same national background,” they had a very specific set of expectations in mind. These men wanted a middle-class, native-born, white woman with no hereditary traits that would jeopardize future children’s

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<sup>86</sup> Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Series I, C, 5, Box 62, Folder 688.

“genetic capacity for citizenship.”<sup>87</sup> The Stones addressed this concern in their textbook under the heading “Racial Eugenics.” In attempting to explain the “program of the eugenic movement,” the Stones articulated that education was a main component of the eugenics program. Encouraging “superior people” to reproduce by “developing in them a eugenic consciousness” while simultaneously “diminish[ing] the reproduction of the socially inadequate by general eugenic education,” the eugenic movement’s goals would be furthered. Eugenic education was blended seamlessly into marriage education programs in which students learned if their genetic traits were ideal enough for contributing to the national project of genetic betterment and fitness. The Stones also explicitly called for encouraging the fit to marry and have children by “giving them special bonuses and other privileges.”<sup>88</sup> These incentives were not listed, but clearly, fitness for marriage and reproduction were rewarded in full civic belonging and participation. Himes’ students certainly were never deemed unfit based on their race and their fitness for marriage could be ascertained by virtue of their race, class, and health.

In search of the ideal wife, many of Himes’ students listed traits of fitness which departed from women’s reproductive capacities. Most students mentioned in their lists that the ideal or even the adequate wife would be proficient in domestic work and running a household. Only one mentioned that a wife should work outside the home (in the first few years of marriage, anyway). The lack of discussion of women working outside the home in the student lists conflicts with the prominence of this subject in marriage course syllabi and textbooks. Marriage educators included discussions of

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<sup>87</sup> Yamin, “The Search for Marital Order,” 86.

<sup>88</sup> Stones, *A Marriage Manual*, 20.

married women's careers in their courses, but students failed to include it in their lists. This phenomenon illustrates a widespread anxiety among both the older generation of marriage educators and their students. That students consistently felt it necessary to list that an ideal wife would be domestic demonstrates that this was perhaps, no longer assumed and yet, still a coveted feature of married life among young men. Marriage educators' consistent attention to the topic of married women's employment suggests that they felt it necessary to examine the changing gender roles and expectations of modern marriage. The increasing number of married women in the workforce was part of the initial anxiety surrounding the marriage crisis in the mid-1920s and continued to be an area of contention throughout the 1930s. The Great Depression increased the number of women who acted as primary breadwinners for their families and contributed to the disparity between gender role expectations and realities. While different marriage educators held different views about the merits or the problems of married women working outside the home, it was still a frequent topic of class discussion and one that students appreciated addressing.

Marriage educators also addressed topics seemingly unrelated to sex and children. Students in Himes' course often mentioned that they wanted a wife from a similar socio-economic background, or, as one student wrote: "she must not have a champagne appetite on a beer salary."<sup>89</sup> Professors often addressed issues of home economics and family finances. Indeed, Hayworth's 1935 study indicated that approximately seventy percent of the marriage courses included discussions of family finances on the syllabus.<sup>90</sup> In his

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<sup>89</sup> Norman E. Himes papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Series I, C, 5, Box 62, Folder 688.

<sup>90</sup> Hayworth, "Education for Marriage Among American Colleges," 480.



textbook, Ernest Groves began the chapter on “economic adjustment” by arguing that in marriage, couples “enter upon a new economic relationship which requires adjustment just as certainly as does sex.”<sup>91</sup> Pointing to the changing nature of gender roles and the increasing likelihood that women would be financially self-sufficient before marriage, Groves wrote that modern marriages faced a greater burden of financial adjustment. Employing case studies from his own research and from the research of others, Groves laid out cautionary tale for readers. He advised them to make economic adjustments early, create and use a budget which allocates money for saving, and task one person with handling funds.<sup>92</sup> Groves asserted that following this advice would lead to less marital discord.

Marital discord and divorce were topics usually only alluded to by marriage educators. Initially, many marriage educators devoted significant course instruction to the topic of divorce. However, as courses shifted toward functionality, the topic of divorce was discussed much less. While divorce had been such an enormous concern to them in their discussions of the marriage crisis, the disinterest of students and their requests for different information removed or lessened discussions of divorce in marriage courses. At Stephens College, the first year of the marriage course devoted nine course hours to the topic of divorce, however, five years later, that had been reduced to one course hour.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the Purdue course virtually dropped divorce from the syllabus after the first term when it was noted that divorce was not a subject of much interest to students.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 289.

<sup>92</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 289-311.

<sup>93</sup> Bowman, “The Marriage Course at Stephens College,” 8.

<sup>94</sup> Wilkening, “The Purdue University Marriage Course,” 36.

Groves experienced similar feedback from students in his UNC course. He wrote that divorce “has come to have a very insignificant place in the course, having been crowded out by the students' interest in the other problems.”<sup>95</sup> Groves reported that the best way to deal with the topic of divorce was to teach students how best to avoid it.

Avoiding divorce began with the appropriate and strategic choice of a marital partner. The emphasis on mate choice in marriage courses demonstrates that marriage educators were dedicated to functionality and helping students think critically about what they expected from a partner and a marriage. Perhaps their logic assumed that if students thought and discussed their expectations prior to marriage, they would be more careful in selecting a partner and be less likely to divorce later. Certainly, marriage educators realized that by helping students wisely choose a mate, they would be more likely to take into consideration a person's physical, mental, economic, and sexual fitness. Himes' students' lists indicate that marriage courses accomplished the promotion of eugenics through discussions of mate choice. The language students used to discuss their ideal partners illustrates the pervasive nature of eugenics in marriage courses. Students employed similar language to that found in their textbooks and in the articles written by marriage educators to analyze the fitness of a future mate.

These expectations of a future mate illustrate a very deep entrenchment of eugenic ideology. Not only was Himes' particular marriage course only available to white, male, presumably middle-class or upwardly mobile students; it also fostered ideas of fitness for marriage that adhered to eugenic philosophies which aimed to combat the declining fertility rate of white, native-born, middle-class women and promote a very specific

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<sup>95</sup> Ernest Groves, “Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina,” 89.

version of civic participation. Marriage education efforts joined the new marital laws enacted in the early twentieth century to institutionalize and formalize eugenic ideas. These concepts guided young college students in their choice of a future partner. Appropriately performing citizenship meant exercising the civil right to wed, but carefully choosing a spouse who met the same cultural and biological standards of ideal Americanness. These student lists and the marriage course textbooks demonstrate that marriage education worked as an extension of state authority and helped to police the boundaries of civic participation by promoting the marriage and procreation of some people and discouraging it in others.

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Despite the lengthy reading lists and Himes' claim that students had much more assigned reading in his marriage class than the average Colgate course, marriage educators bemoaned the thin literature and research in the field. This complaint prefaced the research and publication of hundreds of books on marriage and family life, which mirrored the marriage courses themselves in the array of topics and information. Often, the same intellectuals who taught marriage courses became those who wrote the books and organized the research studies. Students in marriage courses very quickly became both the consumers of the information in class and the providers of information to research studies. Ernest Groves kept meticulous records about personal interviews with students and individuals who met with him seeking marital advice. His notes listed their

problems and his directives about how they should handle various situations.<sup>96</sup> He and his wife, Gladys Groves, also used the dedication of one of their numerous books to thank “those students and friends who by trusting us with their problems have given us a better understanding of life.”<sup>97</sup> Evidently, a “better understanding of life” was not all the Groves gleaned from their meetings with their students. These meetings between troubled students and seemingly omniscient and benevolent professors often fed the research and writing of the latter’s books and materials in the field of marriage. This was particularly true in the case of Alfred Kinsey, who during the summer session of the marriage course at Indiana University in 1938 reported that he and his colleagues “handled 32 cases involving marital problems and personal sex adjustments.”<sup>98</sup> Kinsey’s personal conferences with students provided the motivation behind his studies of human sexuality. Thus, Kinsey joined other marriage educators in working to provide the research needed for marriage courses and used the most available and interested demographic: white, middle-class, college students. Indeed, later marriage educators would point out that the research on marriage and family life in the United States was limited not in number, but in content. The statistics and norms established in this literature only applied to northern

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<sup>96</sup> Ernest R. and Gladys Groves Papers, MS 169, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo. Case Studies, Box 22, Folder 28.

<sup>97</sup> Ernest R. Groves and Gladys Hoagland Groves, *Wholesome Marriage* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927): dedication page.

<sup>98</sup> Alfred Kinsey, “Summary of Student Answers, Indiana University Marriage Course Summer 1938,” Indiana University Vice President and the Dean of Faculties records, 1940-1959 (C26), Box 5, “Marriage Course” Folder, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana.

and mid-western, white, middle-class couples.<sup>99</sup> As such, this information was not applicable or relevant to students in different geographical and social locations.

Marriage courses were designed for a very specific group of people and the course content reflected the borders of civic inclusion regulated by law and eugenic ideology and practice. Students with access to marriage education were taught about expectations of women's labor and women's sexuality, as well as possible sexual dysfunction in marriage and its causes. They learned about problems of heredity and their fitness for marriage based on family background and personal and sexual health. They were warned about the limited effectiveness of birth control, but given information about best practices and devices, as well as legitimate reasons to obtain and use contraception.

The marriage crisis articulated by Groves and his contemporaries joined a growing movement of reformers, educators, and intellectuals who voiced concern for and solutions to the problems of modern marriage. The marriage crisis was far from over and marriage education grew in popularity and implementation across the country as students demanded access to information which had previously been limited by Victorian-era sexual and marital practices. Broader American social and political changes continued to influence the institution of marriage in important and irrevocable ways. Expectations of modern marriage promoted careful consideration of potential partners' personality, biology, and class status. Increasing importance was placed on marital sexuality, particularly sexual fulfillment. These changing social and sexual norms of the middle-class were acknowledged and incorporated into marriage educators' course material and

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<sup>99</sup> Joseph Himes, "Some Fringe Problems of Teaching Marriage in Negro Colleges," *Marriage and Family Living* 15, no. 2 (May 1953): 114-116.

research. As the demand for marriage courses grew, so too did the importance and relevance of the field.

Prominent marriage educators such as Colgate University's Norman Himes, fielded many letters making inquiries about the difficulties and successes of their marriage courses. By 1939, Himes had typed a list of sixty-one schools which he knew offered a marriage course.<sup>100</sup> Many often asked for copies of his reading lists, assignments, and syllabi as they attempted to construct their own marriage courses at institutions across the country. Consistently, Himes reminded his correspondents that not everyone was qualified to teach marriage courses and urged schools to find a qualified professor to do so. He argued, "I doubt if there are more than ten men in the country competent to give a first-class course in this field. But there are probably 10,000 who think they are."<sup>101</sup> Groves and Popenoe echoed Himes' admonitions to those who he considered to be underqualified to teach marriage courses.<sup>102</sup>

The popularity and continued relevance of the marriage course in the face of World War II highlighted new crises in marriage and family life and demanded that marriage educators establish professional standards. The debate over qualifications and standards brought up questions of professors' training and education, as well as the success of their own marriage and family. Professors' personal and professional

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<sup>100</sup> Norman Himes, "List of Institutions Answering Questionnaires Concerning Courses on Marriage." Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Box 61, Folder 682.

<sup>101</sup> Norman Himes to William Stark, November 24, 1937. Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Series I, C, 5, Box 61, Folder 676

<sup>102</sup> Ernest Groves, "Professional Training for Family Life Educators," *Marriage and Family Living* 8, no. 2 (May 1946): 25-26.; Paul Popenoe, "A College Education for Marriage," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 25 (April 1939): 168-173. Both articles summarize growing concerns about the necessary education and training needed to be an effective and legitimate marriage educator.

credentials were sites of discussion and debate. Should a marriage educator be married themselves? Should their training be in the field of marriage, or did related fields offer legitimate training? Ultimately, they promoted this burgeoning field of marriage education as its own academic discipline and worked to articulate the legitimacy, methodology, and purpose of this field in the 1940s and 1950s.

**CHAPTER III**  
**“AGGRESSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE” COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE**  
**NEGOTIATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF MARRIAGE**  
**EDUCATION, 1930s-1950s**

In May of 1943 marriage and family life professionals from a variety of disciplines and professional affiliations convened in Cleveland, Ohio for a joint meeting and annual conference of both the National and the Midwest Conference on Family Relations. The conference’s theme was “Marriage in War Time” and panels, roundtables, and sessions were devoted to various facets of marriage and family life during World War II. Presentations included discussions of the impact of war on family finances, medical and psychological health, religious life, and the success of new marriages. Participants came from universities, research institutes, marriage counseling organizations, medical schools and practices, mothers’ clinics, military service organizations, and religious organizations.

By the 1940s, marriage education had expanded, and marriage educators were joined by experts from various helping professions. Mobilization and war had caused renewed and widespread interest in the preservation of American marriage and family life. This was demonstrated in the program of the 1943 conference. While marriage experts from various professional fields attended and participated, marriage education held a prominent place in the program. Eight of the twenty-five sessions explored the importance of maintaining and expanding marriage education during wartime.<sup>103</sup> One of

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<sup>103</sup> “Program of Conference on Marriage in Wartime,” *Marriage and Family Living* 5, no. 2 (May 1943): 37-39.



these sessions specifically tackled this topic by examining “The Contribution of College Courses on Marriage and the Family to an Understanding of the Problems of Marriage in War Time.”<sup>104</sup>

Despite the increased and diversified interest in marriage and family life, marriage educators still spearheaded the campaign to save marriage from crisis in the 1940s. Their continuous concentration on marriage crisis, from the 1920s to the WWII years expanded marriage education from a small project to a widely acknowledged, burgeoning academic discipline. War conditions threatened the family and the home in new ways and marriage educators and professionals legitimized their growing professional and academic field by raising concerns about marriage and family life during war time at conferences, in journals, and in the classroom.

Indeed, during WWII, marriage educators called for further research, publications, courses, and even graduate programs to train future marriage educators. University faculty devoted to marriage education were not solely responsible for the field’s growth and continued relevance. Students supported marriage education through demand for courses, enthusiastic enrollment in them, and requests for additional information. Together, students and faculty moved marriage courses toward greater relevance in students’ own lives and marriages. This relationship between marriage educators and their students was a mutually beneficial arrangement. Students gained access to new forms of institutionalized knowledge about marriage and family life, while faculty gained professional benefits which fostered the new discipline and legitimized both their research and teaching in the field of marriage education. Continuing to draw

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<sup>104</sup> “Program of Conference on Marriage in Wartime,” 37-39.

attention to the crisis during the war years allowed educators to police the boundaries of legitimate marriage and family life among a group of impressionable, young college students who turned to marriage education to gain personally meaningful and urgent information about marriage, sex, and family life. As the language of negative eugenics began to fall out of public favor by the beginning of the 1940s, it was replaced by rhetoric which emphasized democratic families and egalitarian marriages, even as eugenic marriage laws remained on the books in numerous states throughout the 1940s. Increasingly, marriage professionals pointed to the family – and especially its childbearing activities – as essential because the children of today would be the democratic citizens of tomorrow. This emphasis on children allowed conversations about fitness and heredity to flourish within the wartime context. These conversations about fitness remained a foundational component of marriage education in much more discreet and nuanced ways.

Many historians have documented the increased concern and anxiety over the state of marriage and family life during the war years and in the postwar era, but the continuity of marriage education has remained unexamined. The prevalence of marriage courses by the beginning of World War II has been documented by several scholars, but few have seriously explored the role of wartime marriage education. Instead, historians have emphasized broader changes in sexual mores, expectations of female sexuality, and courtship rituals.<sup>105</sup> Several other historians have articulated the changes in professional

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<sup>105</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).; Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern.*; Nancy Cott, *Public Vows.*; Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).

help and advice literature during the war and postwar years.<sup>106</sup> These scholars have contributed to the historiography of marriage and marital sexuality by examining birth control, family size, gender roles, marital advice literature, and marital expectations. They use a variety of sources to highlight the changing nature of marriage and family life during and after WWII. However, we still know very little about how the marriage education from the 1920s and 1930s transitioned into the WWII era. This chapter places the histories of wartime marriage and sexuality in conversation with the shifting expectations of marriage and family life in the 1920s and 1930s. I will suggest that marriage courses and marriage education continued into the war years with the support of marriage professionals and college students hoping to learn how to achieve a successful marriage. Marriage education serves as an excellent lens through which to examine some of these broader trends in American marriage, sexuality, and family life during the socially and politically turbulent years of WWII.

This chapter will examine the shift from scattered marriage courses to the emergence of a marriage education discipline and illuminate the conversations between students and marriage educators about course content. The continuing crisis of the war years renewed the need for marriage education and harnessed a growing network of support to create a sustainable program dedicated to saving American marriage from the threat of immense social and political changes.<sup>107</sup> Americans feared for marriage as war

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<sup>106</sup> Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).; Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Importance of Being Orgasmic," 447-473.

<sup>107</sup> For examples about the growing support for research and education about marriage, see *Marriage and Family Living*, Volumes 4 and 5. These volumes each have four issues and were published in the years 1942-1943. While there are some specific articles that mention the impact of war on marriage and family life in the preceding and succeeding volumes, it was during these years that marriage professionals expressed the most concern. Educators and professionals wrote about the possible ramifications of war on

marriages proliferated and divorce rates continued to rise. Deployment threatened temporary or permanent family separation, as men left for the frontlines. Women increasingly entered the workforce, altering deeply engrained traditional gender roles and creating a heightened need for childcare.<sup>108</sup> For professors of marriage education, the stakes were heightened by the context of war. Marriage education had been growing prior to America's entry into WWII, indeed, it had begun to show signs of permanence by the mid-1930s. However, the war created a new sense of urgency and marriage and the family became a site of democracy and nationalism which lent increased credibility to the emerging discipline. Not only was marriage facing a new crisis, marriage educators were professionally and patriotically invested in the continuation of marriage education and scholarship. Their new discipline fostered a general acceptance of marriage and the family as the crucible of democracy. Wartime fostered the entrenchment of marriage education into the system of American higher education so firmly that by the close of the war, student demand combined with the professionalization of the field was enough to sustain marriage education through the postwar years.

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social protocols of courtship, engagement, marriage, child-rearing, and families. This concern united marriage professionals and mobilized them for combat on the home front. Marriage education became more important and was joined by various other efforts to resist possible negative effects of war on domestic life and shore up the importance of marriage and family life as a measure of national security and democracy.

<sup>108</sup> I will address each of these specific concerns in more detail and provide examples later in the chapter. However, both Rebecca L. Davis' *More Perfect Unions* and Kristin Celello's *Making Marriage Work* outline these broader trends. Additionally, *Marriage and Family Living*, volume 5, no. 2 contains numerous articles which reflect the concerns marriage professionals had about the impact of war on marriage and family life in the 1940s.

## The Continuing Crisis of Marriage

By 1942, much of the scholarship began to emphasize problems associated with marriage and the family during wartime. Marriage education remained a priority, but through the lens of war. As America's involvement became inevitable, scholarship about its impact on marriage and the family proliferated. Educators were joined by a diverse intellectual community which expanded to include social scientists with specializations in marriage, physicians such as gynecologists and obstetricians, religious leaders, and counselors.

While the immediacy of the marriage crisis originally articulated by Groves in the 1920s had passed, the continuing crisis of marriage and the family during mobilization and war quickly replaced it. The factors contributing to the marriage crisis which Groves and his contemporaries had listed in the 1920s were exacerbated by the Great Depression of the 1930s, and were still pervasive in the literature of the 1940s. In his 1941 marriage course syllabus, Professor Reuben Hill of the University of Wisconsin listed all the factors of modernity which he claimed could and did impact marriage and family life. In addition to echoing the previous discussions of the rising divorce rate, declining fertility rate, and movement of women into the paid workforce, Hill suggested that modern conveniences and urbanization had an impact on the function of the American family. Additionally, Hill expanded on the importance of the Great Depression and WWI in studying modern marriage and family life.<sup>109</sup> The crisis of marriage in the 1940s was compounded by the context of America's entry into World War II. Marriage rates rose as

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<sup>109</sup> Reuben Hill, "Marriage and the Family, Sociology 160, Second Semester 1940-1941." Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Series I, B, 8, Box 39, Folder 434."

soldiers hurriedly wed their sweethearts before deployment, families were separated by temporary circumstances of deployment or permanent tragedies of war, women entered the workforce in large numbers, and the divorce rate continued to rise.<sup>110</sup>

Much like the first iteration of the crisis, the concerns expressed by the intellectual community in the 1940s were based on legitimate changes in American society. Marriage professionals and marriage educators highlighted these continuities, but also emphasized the changes in American marriage and family life which were caused by the wartime context. The divorce rate consistently rose during the war years.<sup>111</sup> A Cornell University professor, Svend Riemer wrote in 1943 that the divorce rate was “higher for marriages consummated between 1917 and 1921.”<sup>112</sup> Suggesting that he expected a similar trend for the Second World War, he asserted that this “leaves no doubt about the disadvantage of marrying in war time.”<sup>113</sup> In 1941 and 1942 the marriage rate rose, only to drop in the mid-1940s, and spike again at the end of the war.<sup>114</sup> Reimer was not alone in his condemnation of war marriages; rather, he entered into an intense debate in the professional community. Historian Kristin Celello has illuminated the war marriage debate and the anticipation of a rising divorce rate. While marriage professionals and eugenicists had long promoted early marriages, America’s entry into the war changed

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<sup>110</sup> For more information about “marital instability” during WWII and the postwar years, see Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2005): 128-164.

<sup>111</sup> U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Svend Riemer, “War Marriages are Different,” *Marriage and Family Living* 5, no. 4 (November 1943): 84.

<sup>113</sup> Reimer, “War Marriages are Different,” 84.

<sup>114</sup> U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics*, 10.

their perspective as they referenced the rate of failed wartime marriages in the years surrounding World War I. Many marriage experts warned against war marriages, arguing that these couples often did not know each other for very long before marrying. Couples' immediate separation created by military service threatened the individual marriage, but also the sanctity of the institution more generally. Celello also notes that while many professionals articulated condemnation of war marriages, the issue was quite divisive. Other professionals promoted war marriages as patriotic and cited the fact that many of the newlywed couples were long-time sweethearts and would have married eventually regardless of the war. This debate increased the attention paid to marriage during wartime and supplies evidence of growing concern which emphasized the private ramifications of international affairs.<sup>115</sup>

Marriage professionals were not the only ones to highlight the potential problems of war marriages. In 1942, while marriage rates were still on the rise, Colonel Arthur V. McDermott, of the New York City Selective Service Administration wrote an article in *Marriage and Family Living*. He cautioned experts against men who were recently married and may be intending to use their marriage to avoid the draft. "The recently married Registrant," he warned "is no longer presumed to be innocent."<sup>116</sup> Concerns over marriage were expressed by a widening array of marriage experts during WWII. The establishment of college marriage courses in the previous decades provided the academic infrastructure and professional outlets necessary to express these concerns.

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<sup>115</sup> Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 48-50.

<sup>116</sup> Arthur V. McDermott, "Selective Service and the Married Man," *Marriage and Family Living* 4, no. 2 (May 1942): 30.

Women's increasing role in the workforce fed anxiety about potential consequences for the family. In 1943, economics and sociology professor, Margaret G. Reid, of Iowa State College wrote an article that contained a section titled "The War Draws More Women into Industry," but this was not her main concern. Instead, Reid was preoccupied with childcare arrangements. If men were at war and women were employed outside the home, childcare became a central problem for many American families.<sup>117</sup> Historian Rebecca L. Davis highlights this wartime anxiety surrounding married women's employment, suggesting that it "provoked fears of child neglect."<sup>118</sup> Increasingly, women's patriotic duty to work in wartime industry detracted from their obligations as citizens to be unfailing wives and mothers. Discussions about the future of the children and the family more generally were increasingly pervasive among marriage professionals. In the war years, over twenty-eight articles were published in *Marriage and Family Living* that explored marriage, motherhood, and family through the lens of war.<sup>119</sup> These factors of crisis, caused by America's entry in WWII bolstered the legitimacy of research, scholarship, and education which centered domestic life. Marriage education faculty and other marriage professionals readily contributed to the scholarship by addressing these factors particular to the wartime home front.

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<sup>117</sup> Margaret G. Reid, "Trends in Work of Married Women," *Marriage and Family Living* 5, no. 4 (November 1943): 81-83.

<sup>118</sup> Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions*, 72.

<sup>119</sup> Between 1942-1944, there were twelve issues of *Marriage and Family Living* published. Twenty-eight articles were published within this timeframe with titles that specifically addressed the war. An additional five were published within this timeframe as conference papers. A total of thirty-three articles were published during this time that directly addressed issues of marriage and family life during wartime. Numerous others mentioned or briefly addressed the context of war, but did not center it in their analysis.



Wartime rhetoric infiltrated much of the scholarship produced by marriage educators and professionals during the 1940s. The integration of nationalistic and democratic rhetoric into the marriage education programs was a hallmark of the field during the war years. Increasingly, marriage and the family were emphasized as the building blocks of the nation and democracy. In the dedication of her 1942 textbook, Gladys Groves wrote that her father, Napoleon S. Hoagland, had “long practiced his belief in democratic family life.”<sup>120</sup> Historians have often noted the shift in expectations of marital relationships at the turn of the twentieth century. Marriage was slowly transformed from an institution of patriarchal, unequal relationships to marital relationships which valued love, sexual intimacy, egalitarian partnerships.<sup>121</sup> The rhetoric which emerged during the war years capitalized on this trope and altered the expectation of American marriage even further. The concept of marriage as an egalitarian partnership in which emotional and sexual fulfillment was expected became the bedrock of democracy. By practicing democracy within marriage and family life, couples could fortify the American way of life and help secure democracy’s continued success.<sup>122</sup> This was done, Gladys Groves argued, by abandoning any sense of “despotic” rule in the home. Neither the “unquestioned boss” father or the “domineering wife” were conducive to democratic family life.<sup>123</sup> After suggesting several tenets of democratic family life

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<sup>120</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life* (New York: Cornwall Press, 1942): dedication page.

<sup>121</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters.*; Cott, *Public Vows.*; Davis, *More Perfect Unions.*; Coontz, *Marriage, A History.*

<sup>122</sup> For more information about concepts of democracy within the family in the postwar years, see Miriam G. Reumann’s *American Sexual Character*. While Reumann’s work examines the postwar years, the trends I am discussing here in the context of the war years continue and strengthen in the years after WWII.

<sup>123</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life*, 406-408.

which included sharing the burdens and work of interpersonal relationships and practical household management, Gladys Groves argued that only when “individual families [were] characterized by their democratic functioning,” could American society maintain democracy. Democracy, she asserted, started in the home.<sup>124</sup> In this way, Groves and many of her contemporaries cast marriage and family life as duties of citizenship which ensured the continued success of democracy and the American way of life. By harnessing the nationalistic and democratic rhetoric of the war years, marriage professionals ensured the continued relevance of marriage education and research.

Contributing to and harnessing this widespread wartime anxiety, marriage educators capitalized on their position as experts. They used the renewed interest in marriage and family life to sustain and expand marriage education. Networks of marriage educators grew to include a variety of professionals and cast educators, social scientists, lawyers, physicians, and religious leaders as marriage and intimate relationship experts.<sup>125</sup> Experts from the fields of psychology, sociology, and home economics spearheaded conversations, but as the pool of marriage experts expanded and professionalized, more professionals gained access to marital gatekeeping. These professionals joined marriage educators in determining which marriages were desirable. While the eugenic goals of marriage education grew less explicit by the early 1940s, marriage education still functioned to determine the potential success or failure, and

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<sup>124</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life*, 421.

<sup>125</sup> Ellen Herman has also noted the way in which WWII fostered the emergence of “social experts,” especially in the field of psychology in her 1995 book, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*.

desirability of certain marriages, and by extension, the next generation of American citizens.

### **The Emergence of the Marriage Education Discipline**

“The time has come when no institution of higher learning can fully meet its social obligations without including education for marriage,” Ernest Groves wrote in the preface of one of his numerous textbooks.<sup>126</sup> As early as the late 1930s, marriage education showed signs of permanence beyond Groves’ demand for continued marriage education efforts. The National Council on Family Relations (NCFL) was established in 1938. Organizations such as the NCFL founded journals and conferences, and instituted committees charged with promoting marriage education and standardizing content among diverse marriage courses. The NCFL had a sub-committee on college courses and in 1940, it appointed a joint sub-committee on education for marriage and the family.<sup>127</sup> These professional credentials signaled the growth of marriage education and assisted its establishment as a legitimate academic discipline.

As the field established professional credentials, the debate surrounding legitimate training and expertise intensified. Norman Himes’ had suggested in numerous letters to new marriage educators that most college faculty were not qualified to teach marriage education. Henry Bowman agreed in 1942 after a meeting of the committee on college marriage courses. He suggested that attendees disagreed about many things, but the need for defining professional standards was unanimous. The committee’s “growing

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<sup>126</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, vii.

<sup>127</sup> Henry Bowman, “Report of Committee on College Courses in Preparation for Marriage,” *Marriage and Family Living* 3, no. 2 (May 1941): 36.

professional consciousness” demanded the establishment of new standards and argued that professionals should not be “deemed qualified to teach a marriage course merely because [they] ha[ve] an interest in it.”<sup>128</sup> However, the same year, marriage professionals, Allan and Jeannie Risedorph argued that the field could not afford such high exclusivity. The war brought a new level of urgency to the field and marriage professionals needed to embrace those who had questionable credentials, but were willing to work.<sup>129</sup> This controversy signals that first, marriage education was becoming a legitimate academic discipline which was joined by numerous professionals. Secondly, this discussion suggests that the war distinctly shaped the field’s trajectory.

America’s entry into the war invigorated the growing field. The journals, conferences, and committees turned their attention toward marriage and family life in wartime. The need for new information to inform this new discipline was prompted by both professors and students. When marriage educators began teaching students about various aspects of married life, they realized, just as Hayworth noted in his 1935 study of marriage courses, that there was very little in the way of academic research on the subject. As professors searched for information to supply course material, they fostered a national community of marriage educators and professionals. Their informational exchange allowed this burgeoning network to forge a new vocabulary and a new discipline.

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<sup>128</sup> Henry Bowman and Florence Schroeder, “College Courses in Preparation for Marriage,” *Marriage and Family Living* 4, no. 2 (May 1942): 31.

<sup>129</sup> Allan E. and Jeannie R. Risedorph, “Education for Marriage and the Family as a Means of Strengthening National Security in the Community” *Marriage and Family Living* 4, no. 3 (August 1942): 56-58.

Professors of marriage benefited from this new network and academic profession. Marriage professors filled new positions, chaired departments and programs, and published groundbreaking research as pioneers of a new field. The NCFR's Committee on College Courses in Preparation for Marriage published a report in 1942 which expressed the hope of chair, Henry Bowman and secretary, Florence Schroeder that eventually, marriage educators would not be sidelined as members of other disciplines whose interest lay in marriage. The committee advocated for positions specifically "designated by titles descriptive of their work, which by then will have become their primary responsibility."<sup>130</sup> Bowman and Schroeder's discussion of the formation of other disciplines suggested a standard creation process of disciplines. Sociology, they argued, emerged from the field of political economy and psychology had roots in philosophy. They asserted that marriage education would follow a similar path by becoming its own discipline with interdisciplinary origins in sociology, biology, and psychology.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, the 1940s and 1950s saw numerous reports of marriage departments and institutes. In 1950, Bowman's credentials mentioned his role as a marriage educator for sixteen years and his position as "chairman of the Department of Marriage Education and of the Division of Home and Family, at Stephens College."<sup>132</sup> Marriage educator Howard Wilkening wrote about the marriage department at Purdue University and Perry Denune discussed the creation of Ohio State University's Institute for Social Living which housed

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<sup>130</sup> Bowman and Schroeder, "College Courses in Preparation for Marriage," 32.

<sup>131</sup> Bowman and Schroeder, "College Courses in Preparation for Marriage," 32.

<sup>132</sup> Henry Bowman, "Collegiate Education for Marriage and Family Living," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 272, (November 1950): 155.

the marriage program.<sup>133</sup> Professors from the University of Utah discussed their interdisciplinary program for education for family living with pride, stating that the program was “keeping with the pioneer tradition of strengthening family life and preparing for marriage and parenthood.”<sup>134</sup> Universities and colleges across the country adopted the marriage course and often created departments, programs, or institutes under which education for marriage was housed. In 1953, a study conducted in southern colleges reported that 24.1% of the 159 participating schools in the study had specifically hired faculty to instruct the marriage course.<sup>135</sup> By acknowledging the legitimacy of the new field, institutions of higher learning not only made marriage courses more accessible to their students, they also provided marriage educators with new professional opportunities and promoted their status as pioneers of a new profession.

Henry Bowman’s 1949 study of marriage courses illustrated to the marriage education profession that while pioneering marriage professors were most often formally trained in another discipline, the future generation needed to obtain credentials specific to the new field. His study discovered that professors of marriage were most often sociologists, though his statistics covered numerous other popular fields of training such as psychology, biology, and home economics, as well as a few marriage educators who

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<sup>133</sup> Howard E. Wilkening, “The Purdue University Marriage Course,” *Marriage and Family Living* 7 no. 2 (May 1945): 35.; Perry P. Denune, “Education for Marriage at Ohio State University,” *Marriage and Family Living* 7, no. 1 (February 1945): 6.

<sup>134</sup> Hulda Van Steeter Garrett, Alma Nemir, and Rex A. Skidmore, “Preparation for Marriage and Parenthood at the University of Utah,” *Marriage and Family Living* 11, no. 4 (November 1949): 130.

<sup>135</sup> Report by Members of the Committee on the Teaching of Sociology of the Southern Sociological Society, “Education for Marriage and Family Relations in Southern Colleges.” *Social Forces* 32, no. 1 (October 1953): 63.

had been trained in health education, political science, or family relations.”<sup>136</sup> Groves himself agreed with Bowman’s prognosis, stating that although pioneers of the field were “trained in some other specialty,” the future leaders of the field would need to be trained within the field itself.<sup>137</sup> “College administrators,” he asserted in 1946, “are now beginning to seek persons who have especially prepared to teach marriage rather than, as in the past, selecting the most available person on the faculty.”<sup>138</sup> As graduate programs in marriage studies were discussed and developed, Groves predicted, marriage educators would no longer be a variety of social scientists; rather, he suggested they would be scholars “who approached their task from a background shared by no other science.”<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, no other science would effectively educate future marriage educators in a way Groves and his contemporaries hoped. Groves was joined by many of his colleagues in calling for the establishment of graduate programs to produce future marriage educators. After returning from the annual Groves conference in 1938, Norman Himes wrote to his colleague, Howard Becker about the need for a graduate program. Again, Himes emphasized his fear that marriage courses would “be given by crack-pots and well-intentioned ignoramuses” from the fields of biblical literature or home economics if action was not taken to create proper training for marriage educators.<sup>140</sup> Himes’ insistence that a program be established to train future marriage educators in the field

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<sup>136</sup> Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” 410.

<sup>137</sup> Ernest Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” 26.

<sup>138</sup> Ernest Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” 25.

<sup>139</sup> Ernest Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” 26.

<sup>140</sup> Norman Himes to Howard Becker, April 20, 1938. Norman E. Himes papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Box 31, Folder 346.

reflects his broader concerns about the professionalization of marriage education. Himes advocated training for the future generation of marriage educators to ensure some standardization in the field.

Marriage educators were not simply idealistic about who was qualified to teach marriage; they were also concerned about how marriage education potentially fostered idealism about marriage itself. The information professors taught in their marriage courses reflected America's modern expectations of marriage. One of Groves' many textbooks, *Marriage*, examined the new demands Americans placed on the institution of marriage. The "growing conviction" that a successful marriage would bring happiness and a fulfillment of the needs of both members represented a new "individualistic trend" in understanding the institution of marriage.<sup>141</sup> The marital relationship, Groves argued, was very individualized and he maintained that "there cannot be any universal or unchanging type of marriage relationship toward which every person in marriage should aspire."<sup>142</sup> Groves' insistence that marriage education was not "designed to help people achieve constant and final ideals," was reflected in the ways in which the field altered and grew to facilitate the dissemination of the most current information and expectations of modern marriage.<sup>143</sup> Eduard C. Lindeman, a professor of social work at Columbia University wrote of the marital ideal as a tool "to provide a sense of direction," "not to set before one's self, a fixed goal."<sup>144</sup> Marriage education did seek to provide students with a

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<sup>141</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 10.

<sup>142</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 10.

<sup>143</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Eduard C. Lindeman, "Ideals for Family Life After the War," *Marriage and Family Living* 4, no. 1 (February 1942): 7.



sense of direction and in this endeavor, an ideal was necessary. This new marital ideal reconceptualized marriage as an individualistic avenue through which each partner could achieve happiness and fulfillment. Marriage education purported to apply science to the very personal relationship of husband and wife. In doing so, it also brought that personal relationship into the halls of academia to be studied. This movement of personal relationships into institutions of higher education served to institutionalize the modern concepts of marriage. In turn, students took the information they learned in marriage courses and applied it to their own lives, further embedding the marital ideal into American society. Marriage educators clearly rejected a static marital ideal, but as Beth Bailey has argued, “they were a product of the same forces that had unsettled the family.”<sup>145</sup> The rise of marriage professions, she argues, reflected an attempt to “control the chaotic forces of modernization.”<sup>146</sup> Modernity had altered expectations of marriage and made room for the growing helping professions. Marriage educators had begun to institutionalize changing marital expectations and ideals in the 1920s and the more forces of modernity the nation faced, the more relevant marriage education became. The ideal marriage was admittedly unattainable, but marriage educators hoped to at least guide students toward healthy partnerships in a chaotic time.<sup>147</sup>

This attempt was never entirely benevolent. While eugenic programs had seemingly receded, the concepts still permeated marriage education efforts well into and after the war years. While marriage professionals maintained an emphasis on personal

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<sup>145</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love,” 714.

<sup>146</sup> Bailey, “Scientific Truth...and Love,” 714.

<sup>147</sup> Christina Simmons has complicated the narrative of ideal marriage during the early twentieth century, instead offering three distinct “visions” of marriage that emerged in her book, *Making Marriage Modern: Women’s Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II*.

choice in marriage, their dissemination of information strongly guided those choices. Marriage, they claimed, should not be the right of everyone. Despite these assertions by some marriage professionals, their careers depended on consistent access to white, middle-class couples who were shoo-ins for marital fitness. Professionals devoted to ideals of genetic betterment and the continued procreation of white, middle-class couples consistently employed eugenic ideologies in their professional endeavors. They couched eugenics in the language of increasing nationalism and rhetoric of marriage, family, and the children. The concern for possible children often played on the fears of couples trying to start a family and emphasized the health of potential children as a consideration in choosing a partner.

In 1942, Gladys Groves also published a textbook for marriage education. In a style similar to her husband's, Gladys Groves discussed the hereditary possibilities of numerous illnesses and disabilities before ultimately counseling her readers to consult an "expert" before having children.<sup>148</sup> Mandatory blood tests to discern venereal disease were part of the process of obtaining a marriage license in some states, Groves informed her readers. While a full exam was not compulsory, the blood tests, she argued, served to "protect children from being born to undesirable unions."<sup>149</sup> By placing the emphasis on protecting children, Groves highlighted the importance of couples knowing their possible "problems of heredity."

In 1940, marriage educator, Norman Himes also proclaimed support of the state mandated blood tests prior to receiving a marriage license. His textbook, *Your Marriage*

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<sup>148</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life*, 204.

<sup>149</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life*, 193.

included a summary of the state mandated blood tests for the prevention of syphilis and gonorrhea. Himes also argued that these laws “are not eugenic laws in any direct or true sense,” thus indicating the negative connotation that eugenics had garnered by 1940.<sup>150</sup> Despite Himes’ assertion that the blood test stipulation was not a eugenic law, its position as a condition of marriage suggests quite the opposite. Groves’ support of these laws made the case for ensuring the health of children that may result from a marital union. She mentioned the effects of gonorrhea and syphilis on a fetus, stressing the potential for disability and illness.<sup>151</sup> Both Groves and Himes pointed to the fact that seventeen states required prenatal blood tests of pregnant women, further indicating that the state prioritized the fetal health of future citizens over the health of the individual parents. Marriage and pregnancy were the moments in which the state intervened into the lives of citizens to ensure that any potential progeny would not be affected by the disease of the parents. However, marriage professionals often intervened earlier and more often.

Wielding the specter of ill or disabled children skillfully, marriage professionals promoted a specific genetic agenda among white, middle-class couples. As marriage professionals cultivated expertise in problems of marriage and the family, they used their influence to educate couples in preparation for marriage and reproduction. Often, the marriage educators, physicians, and marriage counselors spent time discussing the importance of eugenic considerations and problems of heredity. Indeed, marriage

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<sup>150</sup> Norman Himes, *Your Marriage: A Guide to Happiness* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1940): 130.

<sup>151</sup> Gladys Groves, *Marriage and Family Life*, 204-205.

educator, Perry Denune wrote in 1945 that a survey of his students indicated that one of the course themes they found most helpful was “problems of heredity.”<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, marriage education continued to draw on concepts established under eugenic programs well in the 1940s. As professionalization offered marriage educators and professionals more opportunities, it also presented access to broader audiences and legitimized their roles as arbiters of marital fitness. The spread of the college marriage course had facilitated the idea of marriage education as its own discipline, so marriage educators began to advocate for its separation from its fields of origin. They recognized that in order for marriage education to succeed as a fixture in modern academia, scholars would need to be able to complete programs and degrees in marriage education. The pioneers of the field had earned their degrees in fields such as sociology, psychology, home economics, religion, and many others, however, a coincidental interest in marriage would not be a recognized credential for the next generation. Establishing marriage as a legitimate field of study served their own interests as well. Faculty wielded dual authorities of science and morality which they used to educate college students and carve out a new niche within academia. This provided marriage educators numerous opportunities to chair departments, publish in journals, and most notably, to be immortalized as pioneers of a new field of scholarly inquiry.

### **Students and Faculty Negotiate Marriage Education**

“Fourteen college years ago a group of seniors visited the President of the University of North Carolina, asking that a course be offered that would help them

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<sup>152</sup> Denune, “Education for Marriage at Ohio State University,” 6.

prepare for marriage,” Groves wrote in a 1937 article about the marriage course at the University of North Carolina.<sup>153</sup> The assertion that students were directly involved in demanding was accompanied by frequent accounts of student involvement in adjusting course content. These discussions of student involvement were often corroborated by accounts in student newspapers. Despite the origins of the marriage course as a solution to the marriage crisis, marriage educators and students consistently reported that the marriage course was created and shaped at the demand of the students. The overwhelming emphasis on student demand served dual purposes. For professors, it offered means through which they could assert the legitimacy of their burgeoning new discipline. For students, establishing their role in marriage education facilitated an unprecedented and continued influence over university and college course offerings and content.

By the 1940s, marriage education had gained widespread implementation due to increased popularity and the context of WWII. A new discipline may have faced public scrutiny, or more likely, institutional inspection. The way student involvement was consistently and prominently featured in the professional conversations surrounding marriage education suggests there may have been some institutional friction. Indeed, Groves’ disappointment that “even large universities [are] hesitating to allow the work in marriage to become a specialty” indicates some tension between faculty and university administrations.<sup>154</sup> The country’s participation in the war condensed most university enrollment rates. Professors’ emphasis on their students’ role in shaping the marriage

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<sup>153</sup> Ernest Groves, “Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina,” 87.

<sup>154</sup> Ernest Groves, “Teaching Marriage at the University of North Carolina,” 89.

course could have been a collective effort to demonstrate the necessity, success, and relevance of their new disciplinary pursuit. The relationship between faculty and students was symbiotic in nature, offering the benefits of access to marital information to students, and professional opportunities to marriage educators during a time of declining wartime enrollments. While the intellectual community was responsible for initially verbalizing the marriage crisis and suggesting education as a solution, the relationship between students and professors, influenced by wartime concern for marriage and family life, ultimately shaped the marriage discipline.

In 1941, Henry Bowman wrote about the creation of the marriage course at Stephens College. He narrated that their “first step” in establishing such a course “was to ask students in a number of classes to state in writing what they would include” in a college marriage course.<sup>155</sup> In this description, Bowman included information that implicated both the educators and the students in the creation of the course. He successfully demonstrated that the students were instrumental in creating the course at Stephens College, however, the original effort was that of the professors. A few years later, professor Howard Wilkening published an article about the Purdue University marriage course in *Marriage and Family Living*. Wilkening described a marriage lecture series that preceded the marriage course. After demands from several “aggressive and progressive” students, Purdue created a more permanent iteration of the series by establishing a marriage course. Wilkening asserted that the course was created due to student demand.<sup>156</sup> His insistence that students were responsible for instigating the

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<sup>155</sup> Bowman, “The Marriage Course at Stephens College,” 8.

<sup>156</sup> Wilkening, “The Purdue University Marriage Course,” 35.

marriage course is an interesting one considering that the university already had a system in place to educate its students for marriage. The same year, marriage educator B. F. Timmons remarked that “in practically all cases the courses on marriage and the family... had been initiated by the particular college or university at the request of students.”<sup>157</sup> Professors of marriage education were consistent in reporting student involvement in individual marriage courses. This emphasis is evident in their publications and demonstrates that the marriage course was often a product of students’ and professors’ combined efforts.

Many of the students enrolled in colleges and universities during the war years were women. Indiana University’s male enrollment dropped from 3,580 in 1940 to 830 in 1944.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, in 1944 the University of North Carolina reported that more than half of their civilian students were women.<sup>159</sup> This shift may help account for the student demand for marriage courses during the war years. In *Making Marriage Work*, Kristin Celello suggests that marriage professionals held young women responsible for the statistical increase in marriages during wartime. This assumption helped to foster the growing expectation that “young brides [were] responsible for keeping their marriages together both during and after the war.”<sup>160</sup> The growing emphasis on the expectations of modern marriage was compounded during the war years by a renewed focus on how

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<sup>157</sup> B. F. Timmons, “Personal Conferences in College Courses on Marriage and the Family,” *Marriage and Family Living* 7, no. 1 (February 1945): 14.

<sup>158</sup> Indiana University Archives Exhibits, “IU During the War Years I,” <http://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/iubarchives/exhibits/show/iu-and-world-war-ii/iu-during-the-war-years> (accessed April 16, 2018).

<sup>159</sup> University of North Carolina Libraries, “A Nursery of Patriotism: The University at War 1861-1945,” <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/patriotism/wwii> (accessed April 16, 2018).

<sup>160</sup> Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 53.

couples could maintain successful marriages during and after the war. This trend suggests that perhaps as students felt increasingly responsible for the success of their marriages, marriage education courses grew in popularity and functionality. The new discipline rested on a foundation of anxious students eager to avoid divorce or an unhappy union.

Faculty accounts of individual course origins or alterations were frequently corroborated by student descriptions of their instigation for courses. Often, students used their school newspapers as a platform to lobby for the introduction of a marriage course to the school's curriculum. In 1938, Meredith College's newspaper, *The Twig*, demanded in a brief article that the school invest in creating a marriage course. Pointing to other local universities, the article asserted that if The University of North Carolina had a marriage course and the students at North Carolina State were petitioning for one, then Meredith College should have one as well. "Is it not our desire to keep Meredith a progressive college?" the article queried.<sup>161</sup> The importance of marriage courses to campus culture is also evident in student newspapers. The author of Salem College's gossip column referenced the marriage course in 1939 as a euphemism for the social sexual behavior of one of a fellow student, "Martha R."<sup>162</sup> The off-hand nature in which the term was deployed to suggest the sexual behavior of a student illustrates how deeply marriage education had been entrenched in college and university campuses after only a few decades. Its importance to campus culture continued into the postwar years. In 1951, a Princeton University student and WWII veteran was honored with an award bestowed by the school newspaper for his advocacy and leadership in bringing a marriage and

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<sup>161</sup> "Instruction in Marriage," *The Twig*, Meredith College Student Newspaper (February 12, 1938): 2.

<sup>162</sup> "Beaux and Arrows," *The Salemite*, Salem College Student Newspaper (September 29, 1939): 3.



family life course to campus. While the student was involved in many other campus activities, the *New York Times* article specifically acknowledged his leadership role in establishing a marriage course as the impetus behind his nomination for the award.<sup>163</sup> Both professors and students consistently deployed student demand as a useful strategy to promote the importance of marriage education and to highlight the purchasing power student demand had on university academics. Their lobbying efforts were successful. After two decades, the college marriage course had infiltrated almost half of the institutions of higher learning in the country.<sup>164</sup>

At the heart of marriage education was an emphasis on functionality, which professors gaged based on the direct applicability of course content to student's lives and experiences. The emergence of marital success and adjustment prediction tests allowed them to test students and guide their romantic choices. The process of determining success in marriage was perfected by Ernest Burgess and Leonard Cottrell in their 1939 textbook, *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage* which appeared on the reading lists of many marriage courses. Burgess and Cottrell's prediction test rested on the assumption that marital compatibility and adjustment could be quantifiably predicted based on various factors in each partner's social, economic, educational, familial, and romantic background. This system of measuring compatibility and predicting successful marital adjustment provides a clear example of the ways in which marriage professionals employed Progressive Era faith in science to measure human relationships. Historian Rebecca L. Davis has suggested that "quantifying compatibility" allowed marriage

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<sup>163</sup> "Princeton Senior Honored by Paper: Townsend, Jr. Gets Award at 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Campus Daily," *New York Times* (February 4, 1951): 43.

<sup>164</sup> Bowman, "Marriage Education in the Colleges," 407-417.

professionals to harness the idea of scientific objectivity to “steer individuals” toward partner choices that remained within social norms and fit within the professional’s own ideas of compatibility and acceptability.<sup>165</sup> While Davis’ analysis emphasizes compatibility tests administered by religious leaders attempting to discourage interfaith marriages, she also mentions the ways in which marriage professionals, specifically Paul Popenoe, employed these compatibility and marital success prediction tests to wield influence over individuals’ partner and reproductive choices.

The professionalization of marriage education and marriage expertise rested on the ability of professionals to employ science to answer questions of human relations. Employing the Burgess and Cottrell method for predicting the marital success and adjustment of their students allowed marriage educators to demonstrate the applicability of science to their students’ own personal experiences and relationships, making marital predication a functional tool. Interestingly, as Burgess and Cottrell, as well as many marriage professionals suggested, the institution of marriage “ha[d] become a personal rather than a social relation” so, they argued, “adjustment is to be defined in terms of personalities.”<sup>166</sup> Even as they asserted the movement of marriage from a social to personal experience, marriage professionals moved the study of marriage into the public realm. Predicting success in marriage based on a test created by social scientists was certainly a public affair, not personal or private. In this way marriage education exerted social influence on private decisions.

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<sup>165</sup> Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions*, 101-103.

<sup>166</sup> Ernest Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939): 10.

Marriage educators discussed the tests with students, and had students take them. The 1941 marriage course offered by Reuben Hill and several other instructors at the University of Wisconsin lectured to students on the importance of “Mate Selection and Courtship” for three class meetings. On the fourth day, Hill administered a “Marital Prediction Test and Courtship Problem Survey.”<sup>167</sup> During his time in the sociology department at Colgate, Norman Himes sent out a survey to “hundreds of people” in order to ascertain “with some accuracy those qualities which are associated with a happy marriage and those with marital failure.”<sup>168</sup> By collecting data and developing prediction tests, professors made the marriage course personal to their students. Students may have taken the prediction test with a sweetheart in mind, or made decisions about pursuing a partner based on information they received in the course. In this way, marriage educators continued their roles as gatekeepers of marriage. Evaluating the probability of success or failure and discussing qualities of marital partners allowed them to shape the minds of impressionable students and suggest which partners and relationships were fit or were doomed for failure. This process of having students critically evaluate potential partners or relationships before marriage emphasized that preparation for marriage was the solution to the crisis of marriage in the United States.

Course evaluations proved a useful way to evaluate and incorporate student demands and requests for information. Professors from the University of Utah and Boston University published articles in 1949 about the importance of the anonymous

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<sup>167</sup> Reuben Hill, “Sociology 160,” Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Box 39, Folder 434.

<sup>168</sup> Letter to Married Couples, Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Box 61, Folder 682.

course evaluations in determining which content the students found most helpful.<sup>169</sup> Norman Himes condensed his 1939 course evaluations into a single page which highlighted the number of students who thought the course should be offered to freshman, made into a year-long course, or developed a positive attitude toward early marriage.<sup>170</sup> Alfred Kinsey performed a similar analysis of his student evaluations in the late 1930s. Most students responded favorably and often articulated how valuable the course had been to them. One student, identified as a thirty-year old, married female, wrote that had the course been available prior to her marriage, “it would not have taken my husband and me several years of patient endeavor to have worked out a certain aspect of sexual adjustment.”<sup>171</sup> Gladys Groves asked her students at Fayetteville State Teacher’s College various questions during the course to ensure that topics, reading lists, and use of class time provided optimal benefit to her students.<sup>172</sup> Perry Denune of Ohio State University stated that each year students were asked about which topics they were most interested in learning. Most popular, he stated were “family finances, adjustment problems between husbands and wives, and problems of heredity.”<sup>173</sup> These content requests and course feedback most effectively illustrate the intimate subjects that students

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<sup>169</sup> Van Steeter Garrett, Nemir, and Skidmore, “Preparation for Marriage and Parenthood at the University of Utah,” 128.; Herbert D. Lamson, “Next Steps in College Education for Marriage,” *Marriage and Family Living* 11, no. 2 (May 1949): 46-47, Groves Conferences on Conservation of Marriage and the Family, 1947-1948 Proceedings.

<sup>170</sup> Summary of Marriage Course Evaluations, Norman E. Himes Papers, 1918-1956 (inclusive), 1925-1950 (bulk). B MS c77. Boston Medical Library, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts. Box 61, Folder 682.

<sup>171</sup> Alfred Kinsey, “Summary of Student Answers, Indiana University Marriage Course, Summer 1938.” Indiana University Vice President and the Dean of Faculties records, 1940-1959 (C26), Box 5, “Marriage Course” Folder, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana.

<sup>172</sup> Gladys Groves, “Examination,” undated. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>173</sup> Denune, “Education for Marriage at Ohio State University,” 7.

and professors discussed in the classroom. These interactions allowed both parties to shape the marriage course and established a new type of relationship between faculty and their students. Ernest Groves once referred to the relationship between husband and wife as a “special relationship of peculiar intimacy.”<sup>174</sup> Perhaps this phrase more accurately describes the relationship between marriage educators and college students.

Marriage educators saw marriage education as a necessary and permanent part of higher education and students implied their agreement through course enrollment and requests for specific information. The University of Utah marriage education program insisted that “it is imperative that [students] prepare themselves in a practical way for this relationship.”<sup>175</sup> Students agreed. Bowman’s comprehensive 1949 report emphasized the “student demand for marriage education,” with marriage course favorability statistics from students and professors.<sup>176</sup> It was noted that 92% of the schools reported that students had either an “enthusiastic” or “favorable” attitude toward the marriage course, while faculty were reported at 71% “enthusiastic” or “favorable.”<sup>177</sup> It is important to note that the schools included in the study self-reported their favorability to Bowman. Asserting that students were in favor of the marriage course was in the best interest of marriage educators who hoped to continue the course, however, institutions of higher learning would not keep a course that failed to attract satisfactory enrollment. Marriage education’s popularity among students shored up its importance and legitimacy in a time

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<sup>174</sup> Ernest Groves, *The Marriage Crisis*, 19.

<sup>175</sup> Van Steeter Garrett, Nemir, and Skidmore, “Preparation for Marriage and Parenthood at the University of Utah,” 130.

<sup>176</sup> Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” 413.

<sup>177</sup> Bowman, “Marriage Education in the Colleges,” 413, 416.

of depressed university enrollments and increased professionalization of the field of marriage. While marriage educators were responsible for creating and offering marriage courses, its popularity among students and continued growth sustained its existence in course catalogs across the country.

While the relationship between students and professors shaped marriage courses, so too did the context in which marriage education's expansion occurred. America's entry into WWII left imprints on marriage course content as well. Accounting for the impact of war on marriage and family life, Gladys Groves' students at Fayetteville State Teacher's College in the early 1940s often mentioned the war in their papers. Rationing, deployment, and dating servicemen all appeared as brief mentions in student papers, which influenced their conversations in the classroom. One student wrote about her personal rule for dating servicemen. "[I]n case I find out they are inclined to be hot blooded I refuse [a second date] immediately because it just isn't worth it." This is exactly how Groves counseled her female students to handle this situation. She was quoted in *The Bennett Banner* in 1943 in answer to a question regarding the college girl's role in boosting soldier morale. "College girls should help make soldiers feel that there is somebody who is interested in them," she told the students, but she cautioned the young women that "relationships with soldiers should not reach a point of frustration and in such cases the relationship should be broken off."<sup>178</sup> Enlisted men often pressured women for sex after a date and this student made this a central component of her final paper. She expressed relief that women were allowed in the service, writing that now

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<sup>178</sup> "Outstanding Authority on Personal Adjustment Visits Campus," *The Bennett Banner* (January 1943): 3.

“maybe [servicemen] can get satisfied without pestering civilian girls.”<sup>179</sup> While this suggests the risks associated with joining the military effort as a woman, it also illustrates the changing sexual landscape for the younger generation. War accelerated these changes and this student’s paper reflected upon the ways in which the war shaped young people’s dating and courtship patterns. This student was disturbed by the changes she witnessed and wrote of her frustrations with modern expectations of dating servicemen. Her concern suggests that by the 1940s, social and sexual mores were deep in the throes of change. The presence of this issue in a student’s marriage course paper demonstrates that functionality remained a hallmark of marriage education during wartime. War shaped the romantic experiences of students and they turned to their professors for answers. Based on the amount of power students wielded in marriage education and professors’ dedication to providing useful and relevant information, marriage courses most likely included discussions of these changing social and sexual protocols.

Professors and students worked together to mold marriage education into a tool relevant both to students’ personal lives and the forces of modernity which governed them. Together, students and professors negotiated the boundaries of marriage courses, altering structure and content. Marriage educators consistently reported student involvement in establishing and shaping marriage courses. This is corroborated by the consistent offering of marriage courses at universities and colleges across the country and the continued ability of marriage professionals to publish textbooks and research which centered problems of marriage. While professors enjoyed considerable autonomy in

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<sup>179</sup> Unknown author, “How This Course Has Helped Me,” undated. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

creating and teaching their courses, it was in the best interest of the burgeoning discipline of marriage education to take student feedback and requests seriously. By the end of the 1940s, college students grappled with the changing dynamics of married life and they turned to marriage educators to help them make sense of new marital expectations. Their need for information that would help them navigate their personal lives ensured that functionality would remain a hallmark of marriage education. Indeed, Ernest Groves was right when he suggested in 1937 that marriage education would alter the function of institutions of higher learning.

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In 1946, just months before his death, Groves also predicted that “[a] new profession is emerging.”<sup>180</sup> After teaching marriage education for almost two decades, Groves observed that marriage was becoming its own discipline, but his discussion of marriage education was hardly unique. Other marriage educators detailed similar observations about the field of marriage education. The marriage course, Groves argued, was “beginning to be an academic convention” in which there were “individuals seeking to prepare themselves as teachers of marriage... just as a specialist in medicine or surgery prepares for his life work.”<sup>181</sup> Bowman agreed, stating in 1950 that the marriage course “has been established... with a definite place in the curriculum.”<sup>182</sup> In their endeavors to prepare students for their marital careers, experts in marriage education cultivated

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<sup>180</sup> Ernest R. Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” *Marriage and Family Living* 8, no. 2 (May 1946): 25.

<sup>181</sup> Ernest Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” 25.

<sup>182</sup> Bowman, “Collegiate Education for Marriage and Family Living,” 149.



professional credentials. They conducted studies and published their findings in marriage journals; they presented their research at conferences on marriage and the family; and they were governed by councils and committees dedicated to the advancement of marriage education. Perhaps the best indicator that marriage education was evolving into its own academic discipline was the prevalence of articles published in academic journals. Professors of marriage education contributed often to the vibrant body of scholarship and solidified its legitimacy by raising new questions and contributing to professional conversations about marriage, marriage courses, and marriage education. Their participation entrenched the field of marriage education in the national community of colleges and universities. A brief note from the ASHA prefaced Henry Bowman's 1949 study of marriage courses. It stated that the goals of the study were "not only for the interest of those now concerned with this type of education, but also with the hope that through this report others may be led to undertake projects in this fruitful field."<sup>183</sup> Marriage educators contributed to the field of marriage education to provide new information and to encourage others to propagate the discipline by pursuing research in this field as well.

By the late 1930s, marriage education had grown from a collection of several college marriage courses into a widespread and more deeply institutionalized phenomenon in higher education. America's entry into WWII facilitated its continued growth and relevance as the realities of war and its impact on marriage and family life became unavoidable. Students demanded information which directly informed their personal choices and marital lives and professors responded by shaping course content to

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<sup>183</sup> Bowman, "Marriage Education in the Colleges," 407.

reflect these demands. This negotiation reified marriage education as an emerging discipline and formalized marriage professionals' roles as guides to and gatekeepers of American marriage.

After America's entry into the war, marriage educators and professionals began to ponder the role of marriage and family life in the postwar years. By 1943, scholarship appeared which contemplated the way in which couples could successfully navigate society after the war ended. Anticipating a changed social and political context, marriage professionals sought to prepare students for life in the postwar world. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was particularly invested in discussing the ways in which life would shift for African American citizens. Frazier predicted that the war would alter race relations toward a more fully integrated society and economy. Placing the burden of preparing black students for life after the war on institutions of higher learning, Frazier redefined the role of colleges and universities in young people's lives.<sup>184</sup> Again, academia was tasked with preparing students for facets of life which had previously been the duty of family networks. He was ultimately quite prophetic; the war did alter America's race relations and HBCUs in the South took up the task of preparing black students to face those changes.

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<sup>184</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "The Role of Negro Schools in the Postwar World," *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1944): 473, 467.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**TEACHING “SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE”: MARRIAGE EDUCATION AND THE**  
**PROMISE OF CITIZENSHIP IN SOUTHERN BLACK COMMUNITIES,**  
**1920s-1960s**

In the 1940s, a student at Fayetteville State Teachers College wrote in her course essay that “the information this course offers, had it been available, would have simplified and clarified many adjustments of my early married life.”<sup>185</sup> Another student in the same course wrote in her course evaluation that she and many others wished the professor had dedicated more time to lecture than discussion since the information offered by the professor was “worth so much more than anything we could contribute.”<sup>186</sup> The course was Education 172 taught by marriage educator, Gladys Hoagland Groves. Under the auspices of the Department of Education and Psychology at Fayetteville State Teacher’s College, in southern North Carolina, Gladys Groves taught a course which provided students information to prepare them for their own marital careers as well as information they would need to be educators themselves. This course was just one of many black marriage education programs in the 1940s and 1950s in the American South.

Marriage education stood at the center of black higher education in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>187</sup> Students and professors at Historically Black

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<sup>185</sup> Mildred Taylor, “Applying this Course,” undated. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>186</sup> Unknown author, “Criticism of the Course,” 1944. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>187</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, the primary debate surrounding black education, particularly Southern black education, was framed by W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. These debates over

Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as well as many members of black communities in the South, participated in the nationwide implementation of marriage education.

However, black marriage education moved away from the standard curriculum. Black marriage education offered accessible and practical information about birth control, adopted realistic expectations of gendered division of labor, and took into account the impact of American racism on black marriage and family life. HBCUs tailored marriage education efforts to the particular needs of black students without diverging from the discipline's standards. Marriage education was at once key to promoting the "respectability" favored by black elites and a method of orienting marriage and family ideals to the particular economic and political challenges that black men, women, families, and communities faced.

Middle-class black culture was prevalent in the university atmosphere of HBCUs and emphasized white, middle-class ideal of marriage in mid-century. Experiences of marriage and sexuality were often divided along class lines in both white and black communities. Middle-class blacks depended on respectability politics to differentiate themselves from their working-class counterparts and the sexual culture shaped by poverty. As such, the marital ideal adopted by middle-class blacks most closely resembled the broader white, middle-class marital ideal in the postwar years. Marriage in the years during and after WWII no longer condemned the erotic, but legitimized it

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the merits and problems of liberal arts education and vocational training were eventually replaced by midcentury. While DuBois' "talented tenth" certainly remained the primary group of black students who attended liberal arts colleges and universities, debates about content of education shifted. By the end of WWII, marriage education transcended this debate and represented a distinct shift in the educational philosophies of black leaders. Education for citizenship became the primary focus rather than education for work and careers. The post-WWII years saw unprecedented democratization of higher education. More black students from varying socio-economic circumstances gained access to college education. However, black college students still represented a privileged class.

within the boundaries of matrimony. Birth control had lost its connotation with women's liberation and become viewed as necessary to successful family living. This shift facilitated the ideological parting of sexuality and reproduction which fostered a version of marriage in which sexual expression was not only accepted, but necessary.<sup>188</sup> Black marriage education propagated this new ideal of marriage with hesitation. This new expectation of marital sexuality collided with middle-class black respectability politics which acknowledged sexuality within marriage, but also required discretion and privacy regarding intimate parts of marriage and family life.<sup>189</sup> In this process, black marriage education in HBCUs navigated an impossible territory which continued to emphasize respectability by promoting the necessity and legitimacy of marriage while also promoting sexuality within it. Worlds collided as the gendered and class implications of this met in black marriage education programs. Christina Simmons has suggested that marriage education facilitated the reconceptualization of respectability politics among black female students in North Carolina in the 1940s. Marriage education, she argues, fostered discourse about marital sexuality within the classroom and the legitimacy of science and academia allowed respectability to remain a central feature of black resistance.<sup>190</sup>

These marriage education programs answered prominent black sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier's 1944 call for "social intelligence" education in black institutions of

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<sup>188</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 265-274.

<sup>189</sup> For an original description of the "politics of respectability," see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). For an analysis of the culture of dissemblance, see Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): 37-47.

<sup>190</sup> Simmons, "'Nasty' Questions."

higher learning.<sup>191</sup> Anticipating the changing racial dynamics of post-WWII society, Frazier asserted that blacks needed to prepare for expanding opportunities and access to rights of citizenship. In order to meet the challenge that inclusion offered, HBCUs had a duty to prepare their students for full access to American democracy and citizenship. This should be done, Frazier argued, by teaching black students how to function in a society which had previously barred them from access to the rights of American citizenship. Activist and scholar Melinda Chateauvert frames the rights of citizenship as “more than civil, social, and political rights.” As a site of government sanction, “[p]rivate matters, including sexual expression, household structures, and gender roles, are intimately connected to citizenship.”<sup>192</sup> Access to marital, sexual, reproductive, and household choices were framed along racial and gendered lines in the war and postwar years. Marriage education provided a methodology for operating within these government structures of power as expectations of marriage and family life shifted to demand that American citizens adhere to democratic values in their political *and* personal lives.<sup>193</sup> Marriage education exemplified the goals of social intelligence education by preparing black students to meet the new expectations in the war and postwar era associated with their personal lives – those of marriage and family life.

While black citizens gained many social and political rights after emancipation, segregation in the Jim Crow South limited their ability to exercise these rights of

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<sup>191</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, “The Role of Negro Schools in the Postwar World,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1944): 473, 467.

<sup>192</sup> Melinda Chateauvert, “Framing Sexual Citizenship: Reconsidering the Discourse on African American Families,” *The Journal of African American History* 93, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 205.

<sup>193</sup> The 1970s feminist assertion that the “personal is political” is an articulation of a trend which appeared much earlier in Civil Rights activism.

citizenship. Marriage education provided information about a facet of life which historically, African Americans had little control over. These courses considered legal marriage. They discussed family planning and reproductive choice, as well as partner choice in an educational environment which was often created by and for black Americans. Marriage, partner choice, reproductive choice, and education coalesced in marriage education efforts and provided southern black communities with a guide to accessing rights of American citizenship – rights of personal choice which were unavailable in slavery and severely restricted under Jim Crow.

In the postwar years, Cold War competition with the Soviet Union also highlighted the hypocrisy of American democracy that systematically denied rights to black Americans.<sup>194</sup> Competition on the international stage, as well as Civil Rights activism called attention to America's race relations and motivated the United States' to end legal discrimination. This pressure fostered many legal changes and opened new opportunities for blacks in the postwar South, as Frazier predicted. However, de facto discrimination demanded that they navigate these changing racial politics carefully. Cold War competition partially inspired the nationalistic fervor of the 1940s and 1950s and situated the American family as the center of democratic life. African-American marriage and family life still struggled under the weight of racial oppression in the postwar era. By infusing their marriage education programs with the rhetoric of the new family-centered ideals of Cold War politics, African Americans laid claim to the rights of citizenship in ways which had been historically unavailable to them.

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<sup>194</sup> For an example of scholarship which highlighted the hypocrisy of America's race relations in an era of increased rhetoric of democracy and equality, see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944).

Few historians of black education and historians of the black family have contributed to the story of black marriage education in the South. While histories of black education often highlight the connections that black communities made between education and citizenship in the early to mid-twentieth century, there has been no connection forged between marriage and family life education and citizenship.<sup>195</sup> This chapter draws on established trends in the history of the black family and the history of black education to illuminate the overlap and the importance of marriage and family life education to southern black communities as a vehicle for access to citizenship. This chapter emphasizes the period of marriage education's rapid expansion in Southern black communities during the 1940s and 1950s. I join historian Christina Simmons in elucidating the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersected in black marriage education programs in the South.<sup>196</sup> This study includes information from fifteen HBCUs in Washington, D.C., Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.<sup>197</sup> Other historians have considered North Carolina the epicenter for marriage education nationwide, but I suggest it was particularly critical to creating a black marriage education movement in the South.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Sarah Caroline Thuesen, *Greater Than Equal: African American Struggles for Schools and Citizenship in North Carolina, 1919-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>196</sup> Simmons, "'Nasty' Questions," 110-135.

<sup>197</sup> The schools included in this study are as follows: Howard University, Hampton University, Virginia State University, Fisk University, Bennett College, Shaw University, St. Augustine's University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Central University, South Carolina State University, Voorhees College, Savannah State College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clarke Atlanta University. In total, this study includes information about marriage education from fifteen schools since some marriage educators kept documents from other institutions. Only one of the schools did not have any information indicating that it participated in marriage education in any capacity. Six schools offered a formal, for credit, marriage course. Seven offered a public marriage education program or institute, and six participated in marriage education programs offered by other schools.

<sup>198</sup> Bailey, "Scientific Truth...and Love," 715.



In 1953, black sociologist and marriage educator at North Carolina College at Durham (NCC),<sup>199</sup> Joseph S. Himes, wrote about some of the issues surrounding marriage education in HBCUs. In the article, Himes suggested that “race affects every phase of life for the Negro college student.”<sup>200</sup> This was particularly true in the South, he wrote, “where segregation, discrimination, and symbolic inferiority have been institutionalized in the regional way of life.”<sup>201</sup> Taking this into consideration, marriage educators reshaped marriage courses to acknowledge the ways in which systemic racism impacted African Americans’ experiences of marriage and family life.

Marriage educators at HBCUs across the South were creative. They added to and altered generic marriage education curriculums to apply new egalitarian ideals of American marriage to black citizens. These efforts often included information about the black family or the roles of black men and women in the community. Marriage educators worked with local organizations to make marriage education widely available. This distinctly black marriage education movement addressed the ways in which racial oppression influenced marriage and family life for African Americans in the Jim Crow South and equipped blacks with the knowledge they needed to successfully navigate an increasingly integrated postwar society. This chapter chronicles the shift from college marriage courses to community-oriented marriage education programs in southern black communities. I argue that marriage educators harnessed the respectability of marriage

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<sup>199</sup> This school changed names several times over the course of the mid-twentieth century (North Carolina College for Negroes, North Carolina College at Durham, North Carolina State College, North Carolina Central University). For the duration of this chapter, I will refer to this school as North Carolina College (NCC).

<sup>200</sup> Joseph S. Himes, “Some Fringe Problems of Teaching Marriage in Negro Colleges,” *Marriage and Family Living* 15, no. 2 (May 1953): 115.

<sup>201</sup> Himes, “Fringe Problems,” 115.

education to prepare black citizens for integrated postwar life in which socio-economic mobility and full access to American citizenship were possible. By including information particular to the black experience under Jim Crow and making marriage education available to local communities, black citizens in the South reshaped and restructured marriage education to fit their specific needs. Black educators, students, and communities harnessed programs which initially promoted the marriages of white, middle-class Americans and transformed what had originated as a means of exclusion into a method by which they could access the full array of citizenship rights.

### **Studying the Black Experience in Marriage and Family Life Education**

The most illustrious example of the dynamics of black marriage education was Bennett College.<sup>202</sup> Bennett began to exemplify the goals of black marriage education in its annual Homemaking Institute, established in 1927. By the 1940s, the themes of the Institute reflected the social and political turmoil of the decade. The Institute endeavored to educate women for their post-college careers. What began as an effort to prepare black women for lives of domesticity, quickly evolved into a program to educate young women facing a society of shifting race relations. Themes addressed timely issues such as the black family in the postwar world, women's careers, religion in family life, and democracy in the family.<sup>203</sup> The students, faculty, and community members heard lectures from famous marriage counselor, Paul Popenoe, and listened to impassioned

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<sup>202</sup> Bennett College is an Historically Black College located in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was, and remains, a women's college with ties to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church).

<sup>203</sup> Box 5023: Homemaking Institute Programs and Other Materials, 1940-1948, 1952-1955, Folder 2, 3, 4. Bennett College University Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.; Box 5036: Homemaking Institute Programs, Folder 3. Bennett College University Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.

speeches about women's ability to have careers outside the home and raise a family. They attended discussion sessions about the expanding role of women in modern society and heard ideas about black female leadership in a changing world.<sup>204</sup> The 1949 summary of the Institute asserted that the modern black woman was "not only faced with the problem of being a good homemaker, wife and mother, but [sic] the solving of the world's problems and leadership of world movements rest also on her shoulders."<sup>205</sup> By couching this progressive ideology in the rhetoric of respectable homemaking and the family, this small women's school was able to promote a program of marriage and family life education that blended modern ideals of marriage and the family with the responsibilities of citizenship while taking into consideration the impact of American racism. Marriage education at HBCUs in the South began early and developed quickly to best serve the interests of black students.

While some HBCUs were early adopters of marriage education, most incorporated marriage courses in the years following the end of World War II. By the end of the 1950s, approximately half of the HBCUs included in this study offered a college marriage course. The changing racial climate in post-war America widened access to the responsibilities and benefits of full citizenship. Black marriage education acted as a social intelligence initiative by giving students and communities access to information which would allow them to meet the new expectations of modern American marriage. Realizing that blacks were on the precipice of full democratic citizenship, more HBCUs

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Box 5036: Homemaking Institute Programs, Folder 3. Bennett College University Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.

emphasized the postwar ideals of the nuclear family and democratic marriage between equals.

However, courses generally covered information about marriage and family life common to most marriage courses across the country. Topics such as marital problems and marital adjustment, mate selection, reproduction, child care and parent-child relationships appeared frequently in marriage course descriptions. Each of these issues suggests an emphasis on choice in marriage and family life. Howard University, Fayetteville State Teachers College, Virginia State University, and Fisk University all listed “mate selection” specifically as a course topic.<sup>206</sup> This was emphasized in black scholars’ published materials as well. Marriage educator, Joseph Himes published an article about “mate selection among negros” in 1952. The article listed numerous factors which restricted absolute choice in mate selection, among them “class prejudices, and racial segregation.”<sup>207</sup> While Himes cites several other scholars’ studies of mate selection in the white population, he suggests that the data he had accumulated needed to be considered in reference to the context in which the black family had developed over the previous century. Referring to slavery, industrialization, urbanization, the Great Depression, and World War II as a “traumatic panorama of change,” Himes emphasized that the factors which influenced young black individuals’ choice of partner were inseparable from their experiences as African Americans under the oppression of Jim Crow.<sup>208</sup> While in theory all Americans were free to choose a partner, Himes argued, for

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<sup>206</sup> Course catalogs from each university listed indicate that mate selection was covered in the marriage course.

<sup>207</sup> Joseph S. Himes, “Value Consensus in Mate Selection Among Negroes,” *Marriage and Family Living* 14, no. 4 (November 1952): 317.

<sup>208</sup> Himes, “Value Consensus in Mate Selection Among Negroes,” 321.

African American citizens, the choice was shaped by racism, segregation, and discrimination.

Mate choice was shaped by intraracial discrimination as well. “Intraracial colorism” among the upwardly mobile black middle-class worked to create correlations between skin color and social status. Historian Anastasia Curwood argues that the New Negroes of the 1920s and 1930s “pretended to ignore the importance of skin color within their own marriages and families while they did their best to engineer the lightening of succeeding generations.”<sup>209</sup> However, after WWII, students placed increasingly less emphasis on these factors in the process of choosing a marital partner. It is very clear from the reports of the black educators who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s that physical features such as skin color and hair texture of a potential partner mattered much more to them than the next generation of their students. Joseph Himes’ 1949 study indicated that his questions about hair texture and skin color elicited varying responses, but the overwhelming majority of students did not prioritize these factors in the process of choosing a partner. This indicates a departure in the years after WWII. Students in marriage courses at HBCUs preferred to consider more seriously their potential partner’s height, weight, and age, rather than skin color and hair texture. That Himes polled students about these factors at all indicates that he suspected they mattered to students much more than they did. Himes made note of this discrepancy in his expectation and the survey results by stating that perhaps “[hair texture] does not possess the status value which is often attributed to it” and speculated that “college-trained Negroes may feel they

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<sup>209</sup> Anastasia C. Curwood, *Stormy Weather: Middle-Class African American Marriages between the Two World Wars* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 110-111.

do not need to use this device for gaining social status.”<sup>210</sup> He later referred to students’ disinterest in a potential mate’s skin color as a “striking fact,” indicating his surprise that 67% of the male students and 76% of the female students noted that it was not an important factor in selecting a partner.<sup>211</sup> However, despite the majority of students who indicated that this was not an important factor, there were only five out of 130 students in the study who wrote that they actively sought a marital partner who was darker than themselves. The small minority of students who valued darker skin tone suggests that colorism did exert some influence on their decisions.<sup>212</sup>

In fact, skin color was not the only manifestation of eugenic ideology in the educational programs of Southern HBCUs. Heredity and the intentional selection of a partner based on the genetic capacity for a more fit generation permeated HBCU courses in biology in the 1920s and 1930s, but disappeared in all explicit forms by the beginning of WWII. Throughout the 1930s, NCC listed classes on eugenics in course catalogs. Similarly, Fayetteville State discussed the topic of eugenics in one of the biology courses listed through the 1920s. By the 1930s, Fayetteville had removed this from the course description and in the 1940s, NCC had amended these courses and assigned them titles such as “genetics” rather than “heredity and eugenics.”<sup>213</sup> The existence of eugenics in HBCU course catalogs suggests that black elites did employ eugenic concepts in the

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<sup>210</sup> Joseph Himes, “Mate Selection Among Negro College Students,” *Sociology and Social Research* 3 (1949): 209.

<sup>211</sup> Himes, “Mate Selection Among Negro College Students” (1949): 211.

<sup>212</sup> Himes, “Mate Selection Among Negro College Students” (1949): 204-211.

<sup>213</sup> North Carolina College for Negroes, 1930-1931 Course Catalog, 62.; North Carolina College for Negroes, 1942-1943 Course Catalog, 43. North Carolina Central University Archives, Durham, North Carolina.; Fayetteville State University, 1923-1930 course catalogs, digitalnc.org (accessed April 4, 2018).

classroom prior to the decline of explicit eugenic practices in the war and postwar years. The degree to which these ideals penetrated marriage courses is unclear, but certainly, some of the same educators responsible for teaching marriage courses published about eugenics indirectly, such as Joseph Himes' interest in mate choice. More specifically, they weighed in on skin color in reference to mate selection in a way completely absent from Norman Himes' (no relation) students' discussion of mate selection at Colgate University.

Joseph Himes' 1949 study also noted the increased emphasis by students on personal factors rather than institutional ones. That the students in his study "stress[ed] personal values" rather than "social and institutional values" demonstrated to him that African Americans were participating in the trend of a "changing American family culture" in which personal satisfaction and happiness in marriage were expected. The postwar efforts to restructure American marriage and family life were evident in black marriage education efforts. Textbooks and courses catered to the problems of modern marriage and the modern family. Bennett College's 1962-1963 marriage course listed as one of its course objectives "to furnish the student with both the critical and practical knowledge for marriage reform and family reorganization."<sup>214</sup> Similarly, the course description in NCC's 1952-1953 catalog provided a justification for the marriage course. The class was designed to examine premarital considerations, marital problems, home accidents, child care, and reproduction "because the problems and relationships of the

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<sup>214</sup> Shang-Ling Fu, "Sociology 128, Family Life 124: Marriage and the Family." Faculty Outlines of Courses, Division of Social Science, Volume XVIII, 1962-1963. Bennett College University Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.

modern family are becoming increasingly complex.”<sup>215</sup> These complex family problems included changing constructions of gender and the threat of the rising divorce rate. For black students, however, race also influenced marital and familial experiences and shaped marriage education initiatives. Partner choice, financial circumstances, and educational opportunities were shaped by race. Interestingly, while black students were participating in the broader trend of personalizing marriage and family life, they took marriage courses which institutionalized ideal marriage and their choices were most certainly influenced by social and institutional factors.

Evidence of the impact of these factors was made widely available by Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 report which showcased America’s race relations to the world. Commissioned in 1937 by the Carnegie Corporation, Myrdal undertook the project of studying “the Negro in the United States [sic] as a social phenomenon.”<sup>216</sup> The final report, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, illustrated the hypocrisy present in America’s democratic rhetoric and the reality of segregation and discrimination against black Americans. Turning the “negro problem” around and “indicting white America[’s]” compliance and advocacy of segregation, Myrdal demonstrated that discrimination impacted black life in myriad ways.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> North Carolina College for Negroes, 1952-1953 Course Catalog, 106. North Carolina Central University Archives, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>216</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Sterner, and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York & London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944): ix.

<sup>217</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway and Ben Keppell, eds. *Black Scholars on the Line: Race, Social Science, and American Thought in the Twentieth Century*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007): 18. Myrdal detailed specific aspects of American society, economics, and politics which actively shaped the lives of black citizens such as anti-amalgamation laws, scientific racism, birth control, discrimination in court, economic exploitation, poverty, segregation, class and caste, housing discrimination, etc. He specifically addressed “segregation and discrimination in interpersonal relations” and various aspects of “the negro community” which he argued had been pathologized.



Myrdal devoted an entire chapter to black institutions, and several pages to a specific discussion of the black family. Drawing heavily from the work of black sociologists E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson, Myrdal asserted several claims about the black family. First, he acknowledged that the “uniqueness of the Negro family is a product of slavery” and illustrates the ways in which slavery shaped the black family in American society, particularly in the South.<sup>218</sup> Employing data from numerous studies and census records, *An American Dilemma* asserted to the American public that lower classes of African Americans in the South, “built up a type of family organization conducive to social health, even though the practices are outside the American tradition.”<sup>219</sup> Specifically, Myrdal noted that This argument acknowledged the legitimacy of family dynamics and structures which departed from the idealism of postwar white American society. Black marriage and family life were shaped by legacies of slavery and contemporary racism and in reaction to these atrocities, African American communities established institutions which differed in function and appearance from white American idealism. According to Myrdal, a “Negro family” was just as legitimate and functional as a white family.<sup>220</sup>

Myrdal acknowledged the work of several black scholars and elites such as Alain Locke, W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph J. Bunche, Charles S. Johnson, and E. Franklin Frazier in the researching and writing of the book. Many of these scholars actively worked to study and analyze the conditions caused by segregation and discrimination. In particular, E.

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<sup>218</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 931.

<sup>219</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 935.

<sup>220</sup> Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 930.

Franklin Frazier was concerned with the black family, the black church, and black education. His work laid the foundation for Myrdal's study. His 1939 monograph, *The Negro Family in the United States* examined many of the same issues which Myrdal took up just a few years later. Tracing the roots of the modern black family to the "crisis of emancipation," Frazier suggested that many of the features of black marriage and family life in modernity originated in the social and economic circumstances surrounding the Civil War and formal emancipation.<sup>221</sup> The book methodically analyzed the numerous factors which Frazier credited with shaping the black family. Much like Myrdal would do several years later, Frazier highlighted the impact of emancipation, migration, urbanization, and the Great Depression as social and economic realities which shaped the construction of the black family within the black community. In the conclusion, Frazier pointed to the emerging black middle-class as the group who had most successfully adapted to the demands of urbanization. These families, he argued, had made "gains in civilization which result from participation in the white world."<sup>222</sup> This conclusion was remarkably different from Myrdal's declaration of the black family as legitimate on its own terms, not through an adoption of white American culture. In the same year *An American Dilemma* was published, Frazier called upon HBCUs to offer students education in "social intelligence" to facilitate the continued success of the black family in assimilating in the years after WWII.<sup>223</sup> Myrdal's study illustrated the problems with

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<sup>221</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939): 106.

<sup>222</sup> Frazier, *The Negro Family*, 488.

<sup>223</sup> Frazier, "The Role of Negro Schools in the Postwar World," 473, 467.

America's race relations and Frazier anticipated changes in the American racial system. The postwar years witnessed steady change and progress in America's race relations.

While there is only sporadic evidence of the inclusion of Myrdal or Frazier's studies of the black family in Southern black marriage courses, the courses were certainly constructed within the context of the growing concern and discussion surrounding black marriage and family life in the United States. By discussing the realities of race relations in the country after WWII, black marriage education programs challenged racial oppression and reshaped the discipline to better meet the needs of the black community. Bennett College marriage educator, Rita Jain, included a discussion of "the changing status of the Negro woman" in her 1963-1964 marriage course.<sup>224</sup> Evidence that the school addressed roles of black women in marriage, the family, and the community is present in both the marriage courses offered for course credit and those of the Homemaking Institute available to the broader community. While they often challenged gendered expectations, these programs also served to reify the expectations of respectability in both racial and gendered terms.

Students were aware of both racial and gendered systems of power which shaped their experiences and the marriage courses offered a constructive space through which to examine their personal experiences. An unnamed student in Gladys Groves' Education 172 course at Fayetteville in the 1940s wrote about her personal experiences learning about "the facts of life." Toward the end of her paper, the student expressed frustration with the double standard that existed for black women under the politics of respectability,

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<sup>224</sup> Rita Jain, "Marriage and Family Relationships." Faculty Outlines of Courses, Division of Social Sciences, Volume XIX, 1963-1964. Bennett College University Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.

writing that she was “a little weary of the ‘pure white virgin’ type of girl.” Her specificity regarding the standard of respectable female sexuality highlighted both whiteness and virginity as ideal. Unequivocally rejecting this standard of womanhood and female sexuality, the student wrote that she “would rather have a daughter of mine wear the traditional little ‘scarlet letter’ than enter marriage so hopelessly ignorant and unprepared.” Based on her personal experience outlined earlier in the paper, this student and her husband had encountered great frustration in marriage, having entered into it with very little knowledge about sex. Whether or not Gladys Groves discussed the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality with her students is unclear, but this student had certainly learned that her individual experience with marital sexuality could have been avoided and was not unique. “Perhaps it is better,” she wrote in the last line of her paper, “that I have two little boys.” Acknowledging the divide between expectations of black women and black men, this student made clear that her sons could seek sexual knowledge through education and experience while still maintaining a respectable reputation in a way that she had been unable to do. She felt this ignorance was remedied by Gladys Groves’ course and much like many of Groves’ other students, wished the course had been available prior to her marriage. In this way, the course acted as a pillar of respectability in that it supplied knowledge of sex without compromising a young woman’s virginity, but also prepared students for successful and fulfilling sex within marriage, a hallmark of modern marriage in the years surrounding WWII.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Unknown author, “Reminiscence on Sex,” undated. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

The study of the black family permeated community-oriented marriage education efforts as well. In the late 1950s, marriage educator, Beautine DeCosta planned and organized a “family relations workshop” which considered the particular needs of black families and children in rural North Carolina. Such needs took into account information based on geographic location, economic background, education, and religion.<sup>226</sup> In 1959, sociology professor at Virginia State University, Harry Roberts planned a family life conference for the Petersburg community which took into consideration several factors. Among the “certain basic assumptions” of the program was the impact of systemic racial oppression on black family life. The conference explicitly addressed this impact by stating that “because of the status of the Negro people in this country, [sic] problems have been intensified for Negro families.”<sup>227</sup> The conference featured a program for the public, as well as for students at four local high schools, thus making the information widely available to the Petersburg community. By centering the particular experiences of African Americans in America’s mid-century racial climate and by addressing issues relevant to college students, high school students, and parents, marriage educators molded their courses and programs to be more relevant to the black communities they served. Including discussion of black families and the impact of racism on the private realm of marriage and family life allowed educators to reshape the modern American expectations of democratic marriage and family life for a wider audience of Americans.

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<sup>226</sup> Beautine DeCosta, Catherine B. Gordon, Barcie and Irving Barcliffe, “An Institute for Teachers on Family Life Education,” Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 34. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>227</sup> Harry Roberts, “Proposal for Family Life Conference,” Harry Walter Roberts Papers, Box 23, Folder 4. Special Collections and Archives, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA.

Universities prioritized the goals of black marriage education and consistently ensured that marriage and family life educators were on staff. When white marriage educator, Gladys Groves left her post at North Carolina College in 1946, black sociologist and marriage educator Joseph Himes immediately appeared in the course catalog to replace her. Similarly, white sociology professor Ernestine Cookson Milner, Bennett College's marriage educator in 1933, was no longer listed in the 1939-1940 catalog. Instead, black social-science professor, Frances E. Johnson, took on the role of marriage educator when she began her post at Bennett in 1939. Fayetteville State Teachers College borrowed marriage educators Gladys Groves and Edward Hargrave from other North Carolina HBCUs. The constant effort to ensure that someone was on staff to teach the marriage course demonstrates an institutional dedication to marriage education in HBCUs. Furthermore, the careers of these marriage educators illuminate a broad network of educators in the South which crossed gendered, racial, and state boundaries.

Black marriage education in the South began in segregated North Carolina. White professors taught marriage education at predominantly white institutions, and often implemented the initial programs at HBCUs as well. Ernest Groves, Donald Klaiss, and Howard Odum, all of whom were white sociology professors at the University of North Carolina, in the 1930s and 1940s, each appear on faculty lists at various HBCUs in North Carolina. Similarly, Gladys Groves taught marriage education at Fayetteville and North Carolina College in the 1940s. While many southern HBCUs hired black professors to teach marriage education, it is no coincidence that early courses were taught by white professors on loan from white institutions. Eventually black professors such as Charles E.

King, Frances E. Johnson, and Joseph Himes replaced the white professors who worked temporarily at HBCUs. Bennett College later hired Asian-American professors to teach the marriage course. This suggests that while white professors were initially hired on a part-time basis to establish marriage education programs at HBCUs, they were replaced rather quickly by professors of color.<sup>228</sup> These professors supplemented programs with information about the black family and often worked collaboratively with local organizations to promote marriage education in the community. They also appear in course catalogs at different HBCUs at different points in time, suggesting that they were employed at various institutions to teach marriage education.

Black elites who did not necessarily teach marriage education still participated in and encouraged the development of marriage education programs on HBCU campuses. President of NCC, James E. Shepard, participated in organizing the annual marriage conference at the school by selecting the keynote speaker and offering “words of welcome” at each conference.<sup>229</sup> Similarly, famous African-American historian and professor at NCC, John Hope Franklin, participated in and approved of the goals of the annual marriage conference.<sup>230</sup> President James W. Seabrook of Fayetteville State Teachers College delivered a speech at the 1944 conference titled “Marriage and Family

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<sup>228</sup> Gladys Groves was replaced by Joseph Himes at North Carolina College for Negroes. She was also replaced by Edward Hargrave at Fayetteville State Teachers College. Donald Klaiss appeared in the course catalog at Bennett College after Ernestine Cookson Milner, and both were eventually replaced by Frances E. Johnson and later Charles E. King. I wish to thank North Carolina Central University librarian, Mr. Andre D. Vann for sharing his thoughts on this with me. Noting broader trends in HBCU education in the mid-century South, Mr. Vann first brought me to the idea that HBCUs harnessed white faculty credibility in order to establish programs and then quickly replaced these white professors with black professors.

<sup>229</sup> Gladys Groves to James E. Shepard, March 1, 1944, James E. Shepard Papers, 1905-1990, Folder 89. North Carolina Central University, James E. Shepard Memorial Library, Digital Collections, [http://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/50001/#folder\\_89#1](http://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/50001/#folder_89#1). (Accessed December 5, 2017).

<sup>230</sup> Simmons, “‘Nasty’ Questions, ” 114.

Life in Wartime.”<sup>231</sup> These black elites and university administrators not only encouraged the growth of marriage education, but also participated in marriage education programs themselves. These leaders assisted in developing and expanding the growing network of marriage and family life educators across the South.

These networks served to link black marriage education with the national trend in predominantly white universities as well. Both Gladys and Ernest Groves facilitated marriage education courses and programs at both black and white institutions of higher learning. Gladys Groves did most of her teaching at Fayetteville and North Carolina College in the 1940s. Christina Simmons has noted that Gladys Groves was “racially liberal” and that she taught marriage education to black and white students in the exact same way.<sup>232</sup> This is problematic in that Gladys Groves may have been considered progressive for her time, by black colleagues, but by teaching marriage courses the exact same way to black students, she failed to account for the ways in which black students’ experiences with courtship and marriage may be altered by the social and legal parameters in the Jim Crow South.<sup>233</sup> Black marriage educators, however, altered courses to acknowledge the reality that race was a defining factor in black students’ experiences of marriage and family life.

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<sup>231</sup> Program for the “Third Annual Conference on Conservation of Marriage and the Family,” Friday April 14, 1944. Vertical File “NCCU-Conference-Marriage and the Family,” North Carolina Central University Archives and Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>232</sup> Simmons, “‘Nasty’ Questions,” 116.

<sup>233</sup> Simmons’ article suggests that Gladys Groves’ black colleagues, namely John Hope Franklin and Ruth Brett Quarles thought of Groves as non-condescending and scientific. Simmons argues that Groves was “dedicated to offering African Americans the same sex and marriage education as whites.” This may be true, but problematic. Joseph Himes, for example, replaced Groves as the marriage educator at NCC in 1946 and his course took into consideration the factors specific to black students’ experiences in courtship and marriage. He published prolifically on the subject and often used black students as subjects in his research.



In many other ways marriage courses at HBCUs had very similar content to courses offered at predominantly white institutions. In fact, some black elites did suggest that the marital research conducted by white marriage professionals could be useful in studying other groups of people. Sociologist and marriage educator at Bennett College and NCC, Charles E. King published an article based on his dissertation in *Marriage and Family Living* in 1952. King applied the Burgess-Cottrell method of predicting marital success and applied it to black couples in Greensboro, North Carolina. The study concluded that the Burgess-Cottrell method, which was developed using middle-class white couples was just as applicable to “other population groups.” King ended by noting that the fact that the method developed by and for white population groups was just as useful when studying black population groups was evidence of “the cultural assimilation of the Negro in American society and culture.”<sup>234</sup> This stands in contrast to other black marriage educators such as Joseph Himes who argued that research done by and for white groups was not applicable to black communities’ experiences.<sup>235</sup> This inconsistent use of white dominated research and its applicability to black groups suggests that there was contention among black elites in regard to the place of wider marriage education and research trends in black marriage education. King also disagreed with Myrdal’s report by suggesting that blacks had successfully assimilated into American culture. Respectability demanded that black elites propagate the sameness narrative and King’s work suggested that black couples had similar experiences to white couples. The frequent addition of studies, reports, and discussions of the black experience suggest that many educators did

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<sup>234</sup> Charles E. King, “The Burgess-Cottrell Method of Measuring Marital Adjustment Applied to a Non-White Southern Urban Population,” *Marriage and Family Living* 14, no. 4 (November 1952): 285.

<sup>235</sup> Himes, “Fringe Problems,” 115-116.

think it was necessary to discuss the role of race in their students' personal lives and choices.

By networking between universities and across state borders, marriage and family life educators expanded the marriage education movement beyond North Carolina and its universities. Professors from the Home Economics departments at Howard University and the Hampton Institute attended the annual marriage conference at NCC in 1945, resolving to create something similar at their respective institutions.<sup>236</sup> Walter Chivers of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, acted as a consultant for the family life institute at South Carolina A & M in 1949. Beautine DeCosta, professor at South Carolina A & M and later an educator in Baltimore, Maryland, organized marriage and family life programs in South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s. These networks connected HBCUs across the South to unite marriage education efforts across various black communities. While North Carolina was the epicenter of black marriage and family life education, the reverberations were felt as far away as Georgia and Washington, D. C.

### **Community Marriage and Family Life Education**

Gladys Groves' students often indicated in their papers that they learned about marriage, sex, menstruation, and childbearing from female family members. Reflecting on these family efforts to educate children for marriage and family life, many students

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<sup>236</sup> Flemmie Kittrell of Howard University and Grace G. Reeves of the Hampton Institute. Program of the "Fourth Annual Conference on Conservation of Marriage and the Family," April 6-7, 1945, North Carolina College for Negroes. North Carolina Central University Archives and Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina.; Letter from Gladys H. Groves to James Shepard, April 10, 1945, James E. Shepard Collection, Series I, Folder 89, [http://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/50001/#folder\\_88#1](http://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/50001/#folder_88#1). (Accessed November 15, 2017).

wrote that they felt the books and information Gladys Groves provided them were much more thorough and fostered a more positive understanding of sex and marriage. Many students reflected on the negative ways in which family members told them about aspects of marriage and sexuality. Writing about her education in sexual matters, one student wrote that her “childhood knowledge of sex [was] a most ugly picture.”<sup>237</sup> Others wrote that their quests for knowledge as children and teenagers never gave them the information they so desperately sought. Many of Groves’ students were aspiring teachers who wished to mobilize their newfound knowledge about marriage and family life in their communities. They were future community leaders and educators who desired to provide their communities with the information they themselves had never received. Their dedication to their own education in marriage and family life reflected a commitment to community activism with the goal of fostering full civic participation.

Marriage educators’ efforts to provide students with the information they needed to adjust to an integrated society not only crossed state lines, they also crossed institutional boundaries. Many of the institutes and conferences on marriage and family life were open to the general public. Professors of marriage education taught marriage and family life in conjunction with local community organizations. In this way, black marriage education joined a tradition of community-oriented education and activism which emanated from black institutions such as schools and churches. The most consistent examples of this were the marriage and family life institutes held at HBCUs across the south. Often, schools that did not offer a standard marriage course held these

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<sup>237</sup> Unknown author, “My Sex Autobiography,” undated. Ernest & Gladys Groves Papers, Box 23, Folder 12, North Dakota State University, Institute for Regional Studies and University Archives, Fargo, North Dakota.

institutes and invited marriage educators and experts to speak, head panels, or act as consultants. Community organizations participated in organizing and running these programs, and national and local newspapers consistently documented these events.<sup>238</sup>

Gladys Groves' services as an expert in marriage education and counseling clearly extended outside of North Carolina and eventually surpassed the expertise of her husband, Ernest Groves. When Ernest Groves died in 1946, Gladys continued to host his annual marriage conference at Chapel Hill, but still prioritized the annual marriage conference she organized at NCC between the years 1942-1953. Joseph Himes codirected the conference after taking over Groves' marriage courses there in 1946. Each spring, participants, students, and marriage educators converged on Durham to attend the North Carolina College for Negroes Annual Conference on Conservation of Marriage and the Family. Durham's black newspaper, *The Carolina Times*, often reported the conference's themes, experts, and schedules, encouraging readers to attend the public sessions.<sup>239</sup> The annual conference also benefitted students at HBCUs where marriage education was not listed in course catalogs or programs. Students from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina attended the 1945 conference with two Shaw professors who attended and contributed.<sup>240</sup> Shaw University did not offer marriage courses, but the conference in Durham allowed Shaw students to gain exposure to marriage and family life education.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Announcements of conference and program schedules appeared throughout the 1940s-1960s in *The Future Outlook* in Greensboro, North Carolina; *The Carolina Times* in Durham, North Carolina; and several university and college newspapers in North Carolina. *The Chicago Defender* consistently reported events which occurred on Georgia HBCU campuses, most notably Morehouse College and Georgia State College through the 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>239</sup> "Schedule Annual Marriage, Family Conference at NCC, April 21-23," *The Carolina Times*, April 12, 1952, 6.

<sup>240</sup> Gladys Hoagland Groves, "Fourth Annual Conference on Conservation of Marriage and the Family," Vertical File "NCCU-Conference-Marriage and the Family," North Carolina Central University, James E.

The 1945 conference at NCC also hosted a roundtable discussion titled “What the Community can do toward Building Success in Marriage and Family Life.” The summary of the conference offers a detailed analysis of the information covered in this session. Participants expressed concern for the children of families in which both parents are compelled by economic necessity to work outside the home. They also discussed the role of community organizations such as parent-teacher associations, churches, schools, and civic organizations in assisting members of the community. These organizations were held responsible for helping to create economic security, compulsory education, adequate space and housing, sex education, and preventative medical care. The roundtable discussion placed the responsibility of creating happy and healthy marriages and families on the community. Not only did marriage education programs include the community in educational initiatives, they also placed responsibility in the hands of community members and organizations. This grassroots community service prefaced the later community-oriented initiatives of the Civil Rights Movement.

Community responsibility is evident in the consistent presence of Planned Parenthood field consultants at community marriage education programs across the South. Programs consistently enlisted the attendance and participation of such consultants, as well as funding assistance from the New York branch. The annual conference at NCC often listed the financial support and expertise of Planned Parenthood on the conference programs each year. Field consultant Mary Langford attended the

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Shepard Library, Archives and Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina. Professor Caulbert A. Jones and Dr. Young of Shaw attended and participated in the conference.

<sup>241</sup> Shaw University’s course catalogs do not indicate a regularly offered marriage course. However, Shaw’s archives are not easily accessed and further information about the programs, lectures, and conferences at Shaw are currently unavailable.

conference for several years and in 1952, her transfer to a different post and her successor, Naomi Thomas, were announced in *The Carolina Times*.<sup>242</sup> Thomas later appeared at a family relations workshop organized for the Durham community by Beutine DeCosta in 1958 and gave a speech titled “Community Resources for Improving Family Life.”<sup>243</sup> Planned Parenthood was also affiliated with marriage and family life conferences at South Carolina A & M, Savannah State College, Morehouse College, and Georgia State College in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>244</sup> Consultants were often available for individual conferences with students and community members to ensure access to accurate information and guidance in personal problems. Planned Parenthood field consultants and financial assistance were hallmarks of black marriage education in the postwar years. The organization’s presence at these programs suggests that education for family planning was prioritized in the black community. Not only did black marriage education extol realistic information about segregation’s impact on the black family and reasonable gender role functions, but marriage educators also ensured student and community access to practical information about family planning and birth control.

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<sup>242</sup> “Miss Naomi Thomas Gets Consultant Post,” *The Carolina Times*, August 30, 1952, pages 2, 7.

<sup>243</sup> Beutine DeCosta, “Family Relations Workshop Schedule of Events” July 9-12, 1958, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 36. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>244</sup> Program for the “Second Annual Institute on Education for Marriage and Family Life,” March 12-14, 1950, Savannah State College, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 30. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.; Program for the “Third Annual Marriage and Family Life Institute,” March 5-7, 1950, South Carolina State A & M College, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 45. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.; Program for the “Marriage Institute,” March 11-13, 1948, South Carolina State A & M College, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 50. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia. See also, “Marriage, Family Institute to Meet,” *The Chicago Defender* (March 8, 1947): 7; “Series on Marriage,” *The Chicago Defender* (March 5, 1949): 10. Both articles mention the assistance of Planned Parenthood at conferences in Georgia.

The participation and attendance of church leaders in black marriage education programs also reflects the importance of community in black marriage and family life. Christian overtones are present in each conference or program in this study. Reverends and pastors were often present to perform an invocation at the beginning of a program or a closing prayer. In several instances church leaders were part of marriage education programs to share their perspective regarding religion as it related to marriage and family life. The 1948 NCC conference offered a session titled “Church Seminar” and discussed the topic of the “Role of the Church in Educating for Marriage and Family Life.”<sup>245</sup> Two years later, the Marriage and Family Life Institute at South Carolina A & M listed the talk given by Reverend William Sample as “Christianity and Marriage.”<sup>246</sup> Similarly, when Professor Beautine DeCosta organized a family life workshop for the Durham community in 1958, an entire segment of the program was devoted to considering “Family Life Education in the Church.” It was led by Dr. Frederick W. Widmer, acting “Director of Family Life for the Presbyterian Church.”<sup>247</sup> The place of the Christian church within black marriage and family life education involved more than just the delivering of the benediction or invocation. The church was an active participant in organizing programs, workshops, and institutes throughout the South in the postwar era.

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<sup>245</sup> Program for the “Seventh Annual Conference, Conservation of Marriage and the Family,” May 12, 1948, North Carolina College for Negroes, Durham North Carolina. Vertical File “NCCU-Conference-Marriage and the Family,” North Carolina Central University, James E. Shepard Library, Archives and Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>246</sup> Program for the “Third Annual Marriage and Family Life Institute,” March 5-7, 1950, South Carolina State A & M College, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 45. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>247</sup> Program for the “Family Relations Workshop,” June 9-12, 1958, Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 36. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia

The presence of the Christian church in marriage education initiatives reflects the church's central place in Southern black communities and demonstrates a legacy of resistance and activism through church networks and programs. In fact, marriage education represented just one avenue through which church organizations and communities mobilized to promote education for citizenship.<sup>248</sup> Civil Rights activist and educator Septima Clark organized citizenship schools for small, rural black communities in South Carolina in the 1950s which emphasized literacy, arithmetic, and other practical skills and knowledge "to generate an understanding of the relationship of education to freedom and the acquisition of one's civil rights."<sup>249</sup> Sponsored at various times by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and various other civil rights organizations, Clark's citizenship schools worked to accomplish similar goals as the marriage education programs.<sup>250</sup> Church organizations participated in emphasizing education as an avenue to exercising the rights of citizenship and offered programs which aided communities in this pursuit.

Both Christian pastors and Planned Parenthood field consultants were consistently on hand to discuss marriage and family life with students and community members.

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<sup>248</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 40. Higginbotham explores the role of black Baptist church life in Atlanta, Georgia at Spelman College in the early years of the twentieth century. The school's role as a teacher's college caused community leaders such as Henry Morehouse to conclude that Spelman was "creating leaders able to mold the masses of former slaves into a productive and stable working class." Higginbotham's analysis of Spelman's role in the community places its graduates firmly within a tradition of activism and community uplift. By the 1940s, Southern HBCUs had established their role in cultivating community leadership with the black freedom struggle at the forefront of the agenda.

<sup>249</sup> Jacqueline A. Rouse, "'We Seek to Know...in Order to Speak the Truth': Nurturing the Seeds of Discontent – Septima P. Clark and Participatory Leadership," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2001): 108.

<sup>250</sup> For more information about the career of Septima Clark, see Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).



While the simultaneous presence of these two groups displays a remarkable tension in black marriage education, their coexistence also demonstrates a sense of realism that departed from the idealistic marital and familial goals of postwar white America. Black marriage education programs emphasized the importance of information about family planning, but also stressed the importance of faith in marriage and family life. Both groups participated in panels, led discussions, and offered advice on the importance of community in the marital and familial decisions of couples.

Church groups and HBCUs were occasionally joined by local grassroots Civil Rights organizations in organizing marriage education programs. Virginia State University's family life conference was organized by marriage educator Harry Roberts with the assistance of the Petersburg chapter of the Frontiers Club. When recruiting speakers for the event, Roberts sent letters "on behalf of the Frontiers Club" where he served as the president. The local chapter of the Frontiers Club was founded by faculty at Virginia State in collaboration with a local high school and was devoted to the "total betterment of African-American young men."<sup>251</sup> Roberts' participation in marriage education programs in the college classroom and in the community testifies to his dedication to providing the Petersburg community with information about marriage and family life which would aid them in civic participation.

Information from Bennett College's Homemaking Institute depicts varied levels of community engagement. There were a few years in which the organizers of the Institute kept track of attendance and participation. In 1949, the Institute held lectures for

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<sup>251</sup> "A Guide To the Papers of Harry Walter Roberts," Accession #[ 1984-39], Special Collections and Archives, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA. <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=vsu/vipets00062.xml#subseries12>

a week. The extent visitor attendance (which is listed as anyone not affiliated with the school as a student or faculty member) varied according to the time of day the programs were offered. Many of the late morning and early afternoon programs recorded zero visitors, while the lectures held in the late afternoon and evening drew community attendance averaging around twenty-nine people.<sup>252</sup> Beautine DeCosta's Family Relations Workshop in June of 1958 was advertised to begin at eight o'clock in the evening; this was well after business hours and would have facilitated attendance. The list of "questions asked by audience" implies that this time was convenient for many. DeCosta's programs also partnered with local churches to reach a wider audience and to promote marriage and family life education through affiliations with respectable organizations.<sup>253</sup> The attendance of community members at marriage education programs in the South demonstrates a commitment to incorporating ideas of modern marriage in black communities. Community members did not need to be young, middle-class, college students in order to access this information. Instead, community-oriented marriage education reached a receptive audience of African Americans from varying social, economic, and religious backgrounds. Communities' participation in marriage education programs employed and solidified networks which were ready to organize at the grassroots level to work toward full civic participation. Modern American marriage, and education for it were prioritized as intertwined facets of citizenship in postwar America.

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<sup>252</sup> There were five late afternoon and evening lectures held at Bennett for the Institute in 1949. The times were 4:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., and 7:30 p.m. The total number of visitors for those events were 70, 26, 5, 24, and 21. This averages to 29.2 visitors per lecture. "Section III, Statistical Report, Attendance and Participation," Box 5036: Homemaking Institute Programs, Folder 3. Bennett College Archives, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Greensboro, North Carolina.

<sup>253</sup> Mrs. Beautine H. DeCosta and Mrs. Catherine B. Gordon, "A Plan for a Family Life Education Program Which Will Improve Home and Church Relations." Hubert Family Collection, Box 3, Folder 32. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

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Marriage education in the postwar South expanded rapidly from North Carolina to surrounding states; from sociology and home economics departments to public functions. The growth and expansion of black marriage education can be attributed to the broad network of dedicated marriage educators and black intellectuals who worked to restructure and reshape marriage education for the benefit of students and communities living under oppressive social, political, and economic conditions. Southern black communities saw marriage education as an avenue toward future integration into American society. Postwar Americanism emphasized democratic and egalitarian marriage and family life as a hallmark of American citizenship.<sup>254</sup>

Black efforts to reach broader communities and to challenge racial oppression by discussing its personal impact on daily life helped to entrench communities in modern notions of marital and familial respectability while acknowledging that marriage and family life was inherently different for black citizens having lived under Jim Crow. Black marriage education catered to American postwar ideologies of democratic family life, but also challenged the systemic racism which made accessing this ideal difficult for African Americans. By including discussions of the black family, southern black communities asserted that American racism shaped their daily lives. By reshaping the content and structure of marriage education, members of black communities asserted the legitimacy of their experiences and challenged the system which constructed them. These efforts

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<sup>254</sup> I employ George S. Sanchez's term, "Americanism," from his foundational text, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. This term describes the ways in which racial minorities adopt, alter, and redefine the dominant tenets of American culture and citizenship to create a version of American culture and citizenship which includes minority communities.

should be seen as part of the longer narrative of black education, activism on college campuses, and black community development. Marriage education helped to make southern HBCU campuses fertile ground for assertions of citizenship and the foundations of postwar civil rights activism.

Indeed, the presence of black family studies in marriage and family life education set a significant precedent for black studies in institutions of higher learning across the country. Student organizations on college campuses in the 1960s and 1970s advocated for black studies programs and black student unions. Sociology, education, and home economics departments, as well as community programs, had been including studies of black life, culture, and community since the 1920s. By the time student activists called for specific programs dedicated to studying the black experience, there was already a history of including this information in marriage education initiatives at HBCUs across the South. Marriage education provided a foundation for civic participation and functional and relevant knowledge dissemination in black institutions of higher learning.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In 2004, a team of professors at Northwestern University quoted a student in their Marriage 101 course who claimed that “[t]his was one of the most practical, useful, fascinating and inspiring classes at Northwestern.”<sup>255</sup> Just as marriage educators in the twentieth-century quoted satisfied students from their marriage courses, these professors signaled the success of their college marriage course through student evaluations which indicated the course’s relevance to students’ lives. These professors began an endeavor to educate college students in preparation for marriage in 2001. Their efforts aimed to combat the rising divorce rate and to help students concerned for their future marital success. Giving an in-depth summary of the course format, objectives, and assignments, these professors asserted to the intellectual community that prevention of potential marital problems rather than treatment of existing marital problems was an effort worth considering and which they had successfully initiated.

Marriage 101 is taught by staff from The Family Institute at Northwestern and is offered through the Human Development and Psychological Services Department. As recently as 2017, the course has been noted as the most popular course at Northwestern.<sup>256</sup> The course incorporates self-reflective, experiential, and theoretical components and activities. Half of the class time is dedicated to lecture, while the remaining half is used to work in small groups to reflect on readings and critically engage

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<sup>255</sup> Arthur Nielsen, William Pinsof, Cheryl Rampage, Alexandra H. Solomon, and Shayna Goldstein, “Marriage 101: An Integrated Academic and Experiential Undergraduate Marriage Education Course,” *Family Relations* 53, no. 5 (October 2004): 491.

<sup>256</sup> Alexandra Solomon, “7 Secrets to a Lasting Relationship from the Hugely Popular ‘Marriage 101’ Class” *Today* (June 26, 2017): <https://www.today.com/health/7-secrets-about-love-marriage-101-class-t112825> (accessed June 2, 2018).

with the material. Students complete assignments which ask them to reflect on their own abilities and priorities in relationships. Course topics include friendship and romantic love, dating, conflict and problem solving, cohabitation and same sex marriage.<sup>257</sup> The course also emphasizes many of the same issues that marriage educators in the first half of the twentieth century discussed in their marriage courses such as marital sexuality, partner choice, and raising a family. However, these professors assert the uniqueness and urgency of their marriage course experiment. They argued that the course was different from other contemporary efforts to promote success in marriage. Targeting college students for marriage education was strategic. College students were old enough to understand the relevance of the information, but young enough to be able to use the information to inform their relationship choices. College level marriage education, they asserted, was the ideal program to promote successful marriages. The course at Northwestern administered compatibility tests, incorporated group counseling, and asked students to complete projects which reflected on their personal experiences and worldviews, much like the specific course requirements of Reuben Hill, Ernest and Gladys Groves, Norman Himes, Joseph Himes, and Alfred Kinsey, among many others. The similarities between these early marriage courses and the one described by the professors at Northwestern are striking, but the 2004 article only briefly mentions connections to the past in the conclusion by citing the support of the NCFR.

In February 2014, *The Atlantic* ran an article about the marriage course at Northwestern and the reporter made distinct connections between the marriage education efforts which began in the 1920s and the project spearheaded at Northwestern in 2001.

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<sup>257</sup> "Marriage 101: Building Loving and Lasting Relationships," Course Syllabus, (Winter Quarter 2006): [https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/HDPS\\_351\\_SyllabusW05.pdf](https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/HDPS_351_SyllabusW05.pdf) (accessed June 2, 2018).

Citing historian Rebecca L. Davis and author Stephanie Coontz, *The Atlantic* reporter suggested that the Northwestern marriage course had roots in the sexist and eugenic practices of the early twentieth century.<sup>258</sup> If a reporter understood this marriage course as part of a longer history of marriage education in the United States, were the faculty at Northwestern aware of their predecessors?

The article ended by quoting one of the marriage course students who explained that the most important piece of information they learned in the marriage course was that “[l]ove is a lot of work, but it’s worth it if you put the work in.”<sup>259</sup> The emphasis on personal accountability and awareness in the Northwestern marriage course demonstrates modern understandings of marriage as a relationship which requires effort from both partners and departs from early marriage educators’ emphasis on marriage maintenance as a woman’s responsibility.<sup>260</sup> These twenty-first century marriage educators join an almost century-long tradition of attempting to understand how social and political contexts shape Americans’ understanding of the marital relationship. This tradition also attempts to help combat the problems couples face as they enter a centuries-old institution fraught with changing legal, religious, and social meanings. Presenting themselves as experts in marriage, modern marriage educators join a diverse professional community which seeks to help Americans better navigate the intricacies of married life.

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<sup>258</sup> Christine Gross-Loh, “The First Lesson of Marriage 101: There Are No Soul Mates,” *The Atlantic* (February 12, 2014): <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/the-first-lesson-of-marriage-101-there-are-no-soul-mates/283712/> (accessed May 5, 2018).

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> This topic is covered extensively by Kristin Celello in her book, *Making Marriage Work*, but neither the faculty at Northwestern nor *The Atlantic* reporter mentioned the relevance of this book to the Northwestern marriage course.

Twentieth century marriage educators sought to provide the same service. They offered courses, published research, and established a professional network and academic discipline to best meet the needs of their students. Despite their genuine attempts to guide students through the murky and changing institution of modern marriage, the application of science to marriage resulted in the sustained influence of eugenics in marriage courses. In the 1920s and 1930s, the intellectual community articulated an explicit eugenic agenda. Paul Popenoe and Ernest Groves asserted that marriage was not a right of every citizen, but a luxury afforded only the genetically fit.<sup>261</sup> Marriage education emphasized mate selection, fitness for marriage, and problems of heredity, even while giving valuable and practical information about raising children, sexual adjustment, and family finances. The legal parameters of marriage, even as they shifted from the 1920s through the postwar years, continued to regulate fitness for marriage and provided the broader context in which marriage educators directed their students. Serving as an unofficial regulatory apparatus, marriage educators guided students and couples through the legal and social parameters of modern marriage. Their authority rested on the twin pillars of law and science.

Marriage education in the United States was created and shaped by social and political turmoil throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but students also wielded some control. As student demands for information changed, marriage educators altered course content to continuously meet those needs. While marriage courses were shaped by students in predominantly white colleges and universities, black students and communities also exerted influence over marriage education. Marriage education was

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<sup>261</sup> Ernest Groves, *Marriage*, 57.



malleable and was often refashioned to meet the needs and goals of diverse audiences. Functionality and specificity remained hallmarks of marriage education through the postwar era. While marriage education had origins in eugenic ideology and acted as a device of marital gatekeeping, by the postwar era, black communities in the South inverted the function of marriage education. Understanding marriage to be an expression of citizenship, black communities reshaped marriage education into a method by which to achieve full civic participation in postwar America. In the twenty-first century, marriage education has also noted the widened access to legal marriage by incorporating discussions of same-sex marriage into the curriculum. In this way, marriage education shifted from a system of civic exclusion to a process of civic inclusion.

The twenty-year gap between the decline in college marriage courses by the end of the 1960s and the rise in research referenced by the Northwestern professors beginning in the early 1990s can be explained by exploring the rise of various other marriage intervention tools.<sup>262</sup> In 1946, Ernest Groves wrote that the profession was “advancing along two lines,” referencing the professional split between marriage education and marriage counseling.<sup>263</sup> While Groves dabbled in both and there are definite connections between the two interventions, changing social contexts of midcentury facilitated the decline of marriage education while marriage counseling burgeoned into a successful academic discipline and professional field. Accounting for this shift in priorities among

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<sup>262</sup> By the end of the 1960s, most course catalogs that still included sociology courses on marriage and family life departed from the functionality component which had defined marriage education for several decades. Increasingly, courses on the family became prevalent and while marriage and family life was still studied in the academy in sociology, psychology, home economics, philosophy, and history departments, these courses were no longer designed to prepare students for their own marriages; rather, they were courses dedicated to historical, sociological, and theoretical knowledge of marriage and the family.

<sup>263</sup> Ernest Groves, “Professional Training for Family Life Educators,” 25.

marriage professionals is difficult, but the two programs worked together beginning in the 1930s with the establishment of several marriage counseling centers across the country and the creation of the American Association of Marriage Counselors in 1942.<sup>264</sup>

The difference between education and counseling is subtle, but relevant. The faculty at Northwestern point to this difference while suggesting the novelty of marriage education at the college level. While marriage counseling solves the problems of married couples, marriage education prepares individuals for married life prior to marriage. This difference in methodology can be simply put as treatment versus prevention and was understood as much less distinct by early marriage educators. The advent of counseling occurred alongside many marriage education efforts and they grew separately by the 1940s. Ernest and Gladys Groves, Norman Himes, and Alfred Kinsey all included individual counseling sessions on their course syllabi. The requirement that students speak to faculty about the material in reference to their own lives demonstrates a very clear connection between education and counseling in the early years. As marriage courses developed and proliferated, this expectation was less frequently included in marriage courses and professors began to refer students to other professionals who could help them navigate their relationships.

Though a divide emerged by the 1940s between education and counseling, faculty did use their access to student information to inform more than the course material. It drove their research and confirmed the necessity of marriage education in modern society. Indeed, Alfred Kinsey's experience with individual student conferences prefaced

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<sup>264</sup> Abraham and Hannah Stone, Emily Mudd, and Paul Popenoe all set up marriage counseling centers in the 1930s in New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, respectively. They were some of the founding members of the American Association of Marriage Counselors.

his (in)famous studies of human sexuality. His students at Indiana University were often his first interviewees and the primary demographic of his studies.<sup>265</sup> Ernest Groves similarly kept notes about meetings with students complete with his own insight into their questions and problems. Eventually, Groves began referring students to other marriage professionals and Kinsey was asked to choose between teaching and his study of human sexuality.<sup>266</sup> Marriage counseling's roots in marriage education efforts and programs is clear. The interests of individual marriage educators, as well as methodological variations may help account for the profession "advancing along two lines."<sup>267</sup>

Marriage counseling steadily grew in popularity and remains a well-known profession and academic field today. However, marriage education declined by the 1960s. Just as changing social and sexual norms created the context in which marriage education emerged, it can also be understood as a contributing factor to its decline. The rhetoric of crisis and national interests sustained marriage education through the postwar years, but the rising tide of social movements such as anti-Vietnam protests, Women's Liberation, Gay Rights, Civil Rights, and Black Power all substantially altered the academy in specific and lasting ways.<sup>268</sup> Women expressed discontent with the male breadwinner model of family organization; gay and lesbian rights activists asserted the legitimacy of same-sex relationships; activists problematized, and courts overturned anti-

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<sup>265</sup> Donna J. Drucker "A Noble Experiment": The Marriage Course at Indiana University, 1938-1940" *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 3 (September 2007): 259-260.

<sup>266</sup> Ernest R. and Gladys Groves Papers, MS 169, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo. Case Studies, Box 22, Folder 28.; Drucker, "A Noble Experiment," 262-262.

<sup>267</sup> Ernest R. Groves, "Professional Training for Family Life Educators," 25.

<sup>268</sup> For specific information regarding the impact of social movements on marriage and family life, see: D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters* and Coontz, *Marriage, A History*.

miscegenation laws; and students advocated for the creation of Black Studies and Women's Studies programs in colleges and universities across the country.<sup>269</sup> Campuses became epicenters of social justice activism and provided spaces in which students reflected on scholarship that applied directly to their personal experiences, lives, and identities. Marriage education preceded the widespread advent of departments and programs which catered to functionality and relevance for students in the 1960s and 1970s.

As student need for knowledge about marriage and family life dissipated or was met in other ways, the demand for marriage courses and programs diminished. Marriage advice and information was still widely available in magazines, newspaper columns, and books. The intellectual community demonstrated sustained interest in studying marriage and family life in the years after marriage education lost its cultural and intellectual currency. The NCFR's journal, *Marriage and Family Living* continued to be the unofficial organ of research and education in marriage and family life. Through the 1960s, there were articles published sporadically about the role of marriage education, but more frequently, discussions of the family took precedent. In 1967, articles debating the professional standards of family life educators began and the field moved distinctly

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<sup>269</sup> For information about anti-miscegenation laws, see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*. For information about the history of black studies programs, see Nick Aaron Ford, "Black Studies Programs," *Current History* 67 (November 1974): 224-227. See also: Ibram H. Rogers, "The Black Campus Movement and the Institutionalization of Black Studies, 1965-1970," *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 1 (March 2012): 21-40. For information about the history of women's studies programs, see: Florence Howe, *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers* (New York: Feminist Press, 2000). See also: Florence Howe, "Still Changing Academe After All These Years," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2002): 27-31.

toward that end.<sup>270</sup> Marriage education was subsumed by family life education and marriage counseling by the end of the 1960s.

The recent reintroduction of marriage education to institutions of higher learning demonstrates continued concern over the state of American marriage. In their article, the Northwestern marriage course faculty note the existence of several other marriage courses and research studies which document the courses' successes and failures. Advocating for a broader commitment to marriage education, the professors also mention conferences and organizations which promote marriage through community outreach and suggest that marriage education could have a broader impact if "teachers of the numerous purely academic courses on marriage and relationships could be convinced to add experiential and practical components."<sup>271</sup> Their goal is for "marriage to be viewed more hopefully within our society." Marriage education, as a method of achieving that goal is really "just a start," they argue.<sup>272</sup> Certainly, marriage education in the 1920s was also just the beginning of a long tradition of providing education as a preventative solution to the problems of modern marriage. Nearly a century later, marriage professionals are still debating how best to combat the divorce rate. Calling for "experiential and practical" education for marriage is reminiscent of "functional" education for marriage. Regardless of the plan to solve the problems of marriage or to promote marriage, experts have tended to agree that marriage is an institution worth saving.

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<sup>270</sup> Eleanore B. Buckley, "Professionalization of the Family Life Educator," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 29, no. 2 (May 1967): 225-226. This letter to the editor mentioned the need for a committee to establish professional standards and credentials in the field of family life education. The letter was written in response to a call from another colleague earlier that year to think about the future role of the NCFR.

<sup>271</sup> Nielsen, Pinsof, Rampage, Solomon, and Goldstein, "Marriage 101," 493.

<sup>272</sup> Nielsen, Pinsof, Rampage, Solomon, and Goldstein, "Marriage 101," 493.

Scholars' and professionals' continued attention to the institution of marriage in the United States makes studying the history of marriage, its crises, and its various uses as tools of nation-building, compulsory heterosexuality, and civic inclusion/exclusion particularly relevant. Marriage professionals' preoccupation with marriage demonstrates that the institution still has political, economic, and cultural currency. As the value of marriage changes, so too should our approach to marital success. Perhaps the time for measuring marital success by the yardstick of divorce rates has passed. Instead, we should consider measuring marital success in terms of its availability and adaptability. In 2014, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article that suggested that the institution of marriage is no longer simply an institution of economic necessity, social sanction for sexual relationships, or a child-bearing arrangement. Instead, the reporter argued that couples are reshaping marriage into something that works best for their individual circumstances.<sup>273</sup> While there are certainly still economic and social incentives attached to marriage, the reporter's assertion that marriage is a flexible institution is quite accurate. Much like marriage education, marriage itself constantly shifts to best serve its participants and this flexibility has become vital to the institution's survival and relevance. Marriage has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to changing social climates and its ability to take the shape of what society at large demands, as well as what individual couples need, reifies its importance. If marriage is to remain a foundational institution and a hallmark of civic participation, perhaps access to marriage and all its

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<sup>273</sup> Heidi Stephens, "Reinventing Marriage for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Chicago Tribune* (October 7, 2014): <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/sc-fam-1014-rethinking-marriage-21st-century-20141007-story.html>. (Accessed May 24, 2018).

political, financial, and cultural incentives and benefits, as well as its general adaptability are more accurate indicators of the institution's success.

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