



Racial Inter-marriage: Canada & the U.S. by Reginald W. Bibby

Canadians More Likely Than Americans to Approve of Black-White Marriages

Long-Time Pattern Reflects Greater Acceptance of Diversity in Canada

A new U.S. Gallup poll released in mid-August has found that 77% of Americans currently approve of marriages involving blacks and whites, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged in recent years. However, sociologist Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge notes that the figure is considerably below the most recent poll figure of 92% found in Canada.

Bibby's surveys for Canada and Gallup's surveys for the United States reveal that the pattern of Canadians being more accepting of interracial marriages is not new.

- In 1990, 78% of Canadians — similar to the U.S. figure today — approved of blacks and whites marrying, compared at the time to just 48% of Americans.
- In the mid-1970s, the Canadian approval level for such unions was 55% versus 40% in the United States.

Bibby notes that differences in attitudes toward interracial marriages obviously reflect very different historical experiences in the two countries. Blacks and other racial minorities clearly experienced considerable discrimination in Canada, but not the realities of slavery and segregation of African Americans. It was only in 1967 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled laws forbidding racial intermarriage to be unconstitutional. Canada never had any such laws

But Canada's endorsement of the mosaic ideal is also contributing to the differences in attitudes, he maintains. The freedom movements of the 1950s and 60s have resulted in Canada enshrining diversity through policies such as bilingualism and multiculturalism and the enactment of the Charter. To date, says Bibby, Canadians are more likely than Americans not only to endorse intermarriage but also to embrace immigration and to be more accepting of a wide range of controversial activities, including same-sex marriage, the legalization of marijuana, and abortion on demand. The mosaic ideal is being expressed everywhere.

Most social scientists maintain that there is probably no better index of racial and cultural integration than intermarriage.

- And between the mid-1970s and now, the percentage of Canadians who say they approve of marriages between whites and groups including Aborigines, Asians, East Indians/Pakistanis, as well as blacks, has risen from levels as low as 55% to current approval levels of almost 95%.¹
- Approval levels are higher among younger adults in both countries and differ little by gender. However, while regional differences are small in Canada, evidence points to the persistence of a higher resistance to black-white unions among Americans in some southern states.²

¹ A 2001 Yankelovich poll in the U.S. found 76% of Americans approved of intermarriages with Asians (Matthew Yi and Ryan Kim, "Asian Americans seen negatively," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 27, 2001).

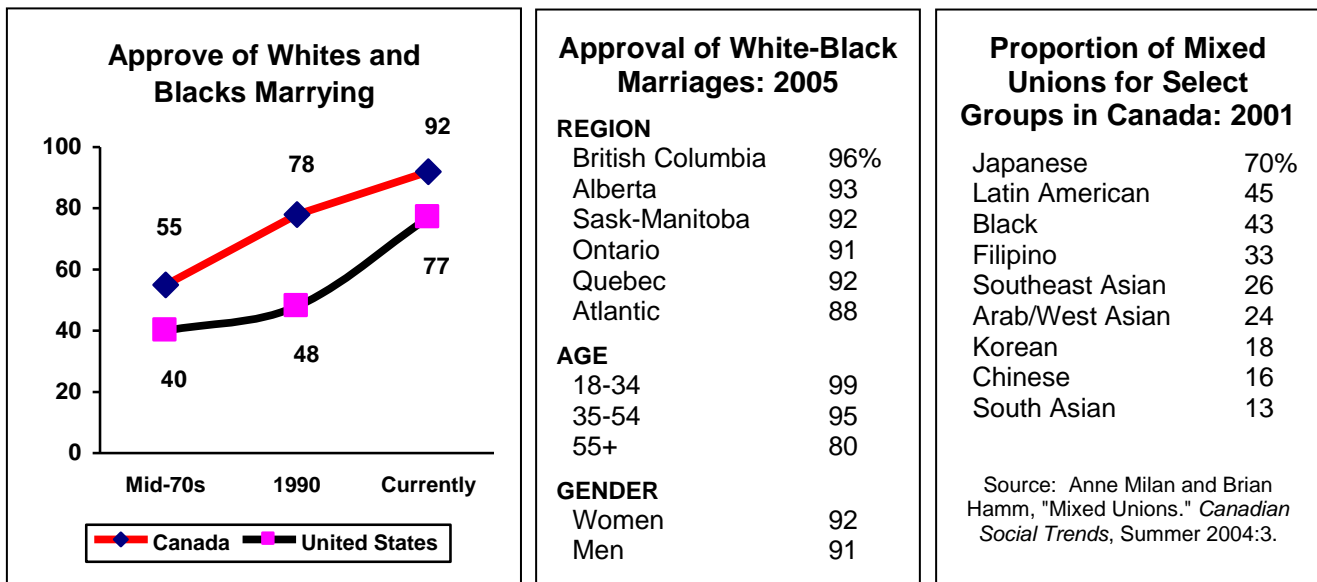
² My analysis of GSS data available from NORC, Chicago, shows that, as recently as 1998, 26% of people living in the KY-TN-AL-MS region felt there should be laws forbidding marriages between whites and blacks. The last of such laws was rescinded by a narrow margin in an Alabama referendum in 2000.

The differences between Canada and the United States are not just attitudinal. Census counts for the two countries show that 43% of black Canadians who are married or living common-law have non-black partners, compared to only about 10% of African Americans.³

For all but a small minority of Canadians who are disproportionately, but not always white, racial intermarriage is no longer an issue. Such a finding lends support to the possibility that, at this point in history, the ideal of racial and lifestyle diversity is endorsed more pervasively in Canada than it is in the United States.

Illustrative graphics

Sources: U.S - The Gallup Poll - August 16, 2007;
Canada - Reginald W. Bibby, *Project Canada Survey Series*



Reginald Bibby holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. He has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through a large number of media and personal appearances and ten best-selling books. His most recent book, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, was released in October of 2006 and gives considerable attention to the trend toward greater diversity in Canada. Details on Bibby and his work can be found at "reginaldbibby.com".

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³ Anne Milan and Brian Hamm, "Mixed Unions." *Canadian Social Trends*, Summer 2004:3; Rose M. Kreider and Tavia Simmons, "Marital Status: 2000, Census 2000 Brief." U.S. Census Bureau, Washington DC, October 20003.