Social Status, Race, and the Timing of Marriage in Cuba’s First Constitutional Era, 1902–1940

Enid Lynette Logan

Abstract
This article examines the practice of marriage among whites, mestizos, blacks, Cubans, and Spaniards during the first constitutional era, focusing upon the reported ages of brides and grooms. The study consists of a quantitative examination of trends found in the records of some 900 Catholic marriages celebrated in Havana during the opening decades of independence. The first major finding of the research is that according to most major indicators of status, age was negatively correlated with rank. Thus, contrary to the conclusions of studies conducted in many other contexts, those in the highest strata of society married younger. Furthermore, very significant differences were detected in the marital patterns of those identified as mixed-race and those labeled as black. This finding offers empirical weight to the notion that the early-mid twentieth-century Cuban racial structure would best be characterized as tripartite, rather than binary in nature.

Keywords
Cuba, marriage, timing of marriage, race, racial hierarchy, parish archives

This article examines the timing of marriage among whites, mestizos, blacks, Cubans, and Spaniards in the opening decades of Cuban independence. The data for the study consist of the records of 900 Catholic marriages celebrated in the city of Havana between the years 1901 and 1940.1 The first goal of the research is to provide much-needed empirical data on marriage and family in the years following Spain’s exodus from the island. The larger theoretical aim of the research is to use marriage as a way to explore the social construct of race and to outline the contours of the racial stratification system.

To date, there is very little published scholarship on gender, marriage, and family in Cuba between the years 1898 and 1959. The small number of existing demographic studies focuses either on the colonial period or on the Castro era.2 Cuban demographer Sonia Catasús writes that understanding marriage patterns in the first half of the twentieth century is a particularly daunting task.

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Unlike studies of fertility and mortality, she claims, it is practically “impossible” to conduct a detailed study of marriage due to the scarcity and fragmentary nature of the available sources.3

On the other hand, a thriving body of scholarship on race in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century has appeared in the last fifteen years.4 One of the key questions that remains is whether the racial structure of the island during this period would best be characterized as binary or as tripartite in nature.5 Cuban racial nomenclature has for centuries recognized three major race/color groups, said to exist along a racial “continuum.” But how different were blancos, mestizos, and negros in fact, from each other?6 Was the only fundamental dividing line the one separating whites from Cubans of African descent, as scholars such as Aline Helg have suggested? Or did Cuban society offer an “escape hatch,” allowing mixed-race Cubans to live as a sort of buffer group between whites and blacks, or even in some instances to be treated as “honorary whites?”7

One way to measure the degree of distinctiveness or similarity between groups is to assess differences in aspects of their everyday lives, including patterns of social interaction, cultural expectations, and norms concerning family formation. Scholars have demonstrated that marriage is intimately tied to the issue of race on many levels. In a society stratified by color, for example, the rules structuring mate selection are a crucial dimension of the social logic of race. I believed for these reasons that marital data could be used to assess the questions posed above concerning gender and racial stratification in Cuba after colonialism. If negros and mestizos appeared to be essentially the same to each other, but quite different from whites, on all nuptiality-related measures, then my data would offer evidence that the racial structure was binary. If I found, however, that mixed-race persons fared substantially better than Cuban blacks in the marriage market, this would lend additional credence to the view that the tripartite divisions referred to in racial terminology translated into concrete, material disadvantages or advantages. Furthermore, the degree of racial intermarriage, or lack thereof, would serve as a barometer of the rigidity or porousness of racial boundaries in the period under study.8

Data and Method

Scholars have used Catholic parish records to reconstruct hidden histories of the family in a variety of international contexts.9 I turned to parish archives based upon my recognition of the limitations of the Cuban census—the main source of quantitative data available to researchers. As the original forms were lost or burned, what remains of the censuses carried out during the period under study (1899, 1907, 1919, 1931, and 1943) are the bound registers now found in library archives. Thus, the census yields only broad, aggregate measures pertaining marriage, race, and other population characteristics.

Through review of this data, however, I was able to surmise that the rate of marriage among Cuban whites (one in four adults over the age of fifteen) was considerably below early twentieth-century marriage rates in the United States, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America, but over twice that among Cubans of color (approximately one in ten were married).10 The highest rates of marriage and lowest rates of illegitimacy were found among foreign-born whites, almost all of whom were Spaniards. While the census provided a useful starting point, it was silent about many other issues of interest. It told us nothing about differences between blacks and mulattos, who were categorized together as “people of color.” It was also impossible to determine how broad trends in marriage varied according to class, color, birth status (legitimacy), and place of origin.

Civil registries, established in Cuba in 1885 were another possible source of information.11 The first major drawback of this data, however, is that color terms appear in twentieth-century civil records very sporadically.12 Furthermore, while a registrar may be willing to provide a copy of an individual birth certificate, civil registries are not generally open to historical researchers. Thus, I turned to the archives of the Cuban Catholic church.
Catholic parish records of births, marriages, and deaths are a vital resource of information on the ancestry and origins of Latin American peoples. Numerous parish-based studies exist documenting population dynamics in Puerto Rico, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, and elsewhere. Scholars of Cuba, however, have yet to make extensive use of parish records. In 1990, Alejandro de la Fuente, who used Cuban ecclesiastical archives to study the marriages of slaves in the sixteenth century, characterized parish registers as a “rich and forgotten” resource (507). Similarly, in the preface to his study of colonial era Spanish immigration, Jesús Guanche stated that the archives of the Catholic church constituted “one of the richest and least studied sources” on the island.

Data for this study was gathered from two historic parishes in major residential areas. Nuestra Señora de la Caridad, located in the barrio of Centro Habana, was founded in 1739. In the first constitutional era, Centro Habana was characterized by considerable socioeconomic and racial diversity, including a sizeable population of Chinese ancestry. The second site selected was Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, situated in the Vedado neighborhood. This parish was founded in 1892, just before the final war of independence (1895–1898).

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Cuban sacramental records are organized into series of bound books, dating as far back as the mid-sixteenth century. While the earliest records are written by hand, parish registers from the 1910s forward contain printed forms with blanks filled in by priests and scribes. In the colonial era, the records of whites and non-whites were found in separate books. It was not until the turn of the century, as the island transitioned from a colony to a republic, that the churches in the diocese of Havana began to seat sacramental documents in single registers.

The vast overrepresentation of whites in parish records underscored the need to oversample marriages involving non-whites in order to attain sufficient data for these groups. Nearly 80 percent of marriages in the two parishes joined two persons classified as white, and over 95 percent of blancos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,264</td>
<td></td>
<td>184</td>
<td>9,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98% white men</td>
<td>.4% white men</td>
<td>2% white men</td>
<td>100% white men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97% white women</td>
<td>9% women of color</td>
<td>9% women no race</td>
<td>100% all women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.5% total</td>
<td>.3% total</td>
<td>1.5% total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| [B] Men of Color |                   |                  |       |
|------------------|                   |                  |       |
| 16               |                   | 13               | 433   |
| 4% men of color  | 93% men of color  | 3% men of color  | 100% men of color |
| .2% white women  | 88% women of color| 1% women no race| 100% all women |
| .1% total        | 3.3% total        | .1% total        |       |

| [C] Men No Race |                   |                  |       |
|-----------------|                   |                  |       |
| 273             |                   | 1,897            | 2,185 |
| 12.5% men no race | 1% men no race | 87% men no race | 100% men no race |
| 3.0% white women | 3.3% women of color | 91% women no race | 100% all women |
| 2% total        | .1% total         | 16% total        |       |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9,553</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>2,094</td>
<td>12,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79% all men</td>
<td>4% all men</td>
<td>17% all men no race</td>
<td>100% all men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% white women</td>
<td>100% women of color</td>
<td>100% all women</td>
<td>100% total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Marriages celebrated in the parishes of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús and Nuestra Señora de la Caridad between 1901 and 1940 ($P = 12,106$). Percentages over .5 are rounded up. A periodic sample was taken within each of the nine marital strata, resulting in a total sample size of 906 marriages. When conducting the statistical analyses discussed below, weights were applied according to the kind of comparison being undertaken. (For further discussion of methodology, see Appendix A).
married persons also classified as white (see Table 1). Therefore, it was clear that if I wished to gather
information from a significant number of marriages between white men and women of color, or from any
of the marriages between men of color and white women, I would have to oversample these marriages.

Data collection took place in two phases. In phase 1, I counted and classified the entire population by
race. Between the two parishes, 12,106 marriages were celebrated between 1901 and 1940. Spouses were
then sorted into one of three racial strata. Those labeled as white (blanco) fell into strata A, Cubans of
color (mestizo, pardo, moreno, negro, de color, or amarillo), were placed into strata B, and those missing
racial data were assigned to strata C. The letters were combined to create a two-letter code, or “marital
strata,” in which the first letter referred to the race of the groom and the second to the race of the bride.

A contingency table representing the couples found in each of the nine marital strata is found in Table 1.

After the population was counted and classified, I discovered, unsurprisingly, that the marital strata
varied dramatically in size. The largest three strata—AA, BB, and CC—consisted of the endogamous
marriages of couples, given the same racial classification. Mixed-race pairings were far less frequent,
and even with oversampling, these strata remained dwarfed by the larger ones. Only 4 percent of mar-
rriages took place between individuals who were not equally racially ascribed. If we consider only
unions in which one partner was specifically labeled as white and the other was labeled mestizo, negro,
or amarillo, then the number of such marriages drops to one half of one percent. Thus, despite cen-
turies of open miscegenation, acknowledged in Cuban racial nomenclature, religious iconography,
books, poems, music, and popular sayings, mixed-race couples appear to have almost never entered
into formal marriage. Well into the twentieth century, Catholic marriage in Cuba remained an over-
whelmingly white and overwhelmingly racially endogamous practice.

Research on the Timing of Marriage and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

A periodic sample was taken within each of the nine marital strata, resulting in a total sample size of
906 marriages. Almost all of these cases (900) included information on the age of the bride or groom.

There are two primary schools of thought concerning the relationship between the timing of mar-
rriage and social status. A large body of research from societies across the globe has found that higher
levels of socioeconomic and educational attainment correspond to later marital ages.

A second, less prominent body of scholarship has documented the opposite trend. In certain soci-
eties, a negative correlation has been demonstrated to exist between social rank and the timing of
marriage. In these contexts, employment stability and educational attainment may promote, rather
than discourage marriage. Furthermore, lower-status individuals may marry later—or not at all—
because they do not gain as much social capital from formal matrimony. Socioeconomic barriers
may also delay or annul the possibility of marriage for individuals in societies where legal marriage
is a particularly costly and elaborate enterprise.

Reported age was considered a particularly useful—and straightforward—variable to consider in
evaluating the questions offered earlier concerning race and family in Cuba. If members of different
racial groups were found to evidence similar ages at first marriage, this might indicate that they were
immersed in a shared “marital culture,” implying an alignment of cultural definitions concerning
the appropriate place of marriage in the life course or a similar marital opportunity structure. Significant
differences in the timing of marriage, on the other hand, would indicate more disparate life styles, expectations, and/or opportunities, and greater social distance between groups.

The first major finding of this research is that according to most major indicators of social status,
age at first marriage was negatively correlated with rank. Thus, those in the highest strata of Cuban
society in the first part of the previous century married younger. The second major finding is that
there were very significant white/non-white differences in the timing of marriage. But Cubans clas-
sified as mestizo or pardo (mixed race) were more similar to whites than they were to other Cubans
of African descent. These findings and their implications are discussed below.
Table 2. Average Age at First Marriage, All Men and Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest age</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Sample of marriages celebrated in the parishes of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad and Sagrado Corazón del Vedado, Havana, Cuba, 1901–1940. Data on age was available for 896 grooms and 900 brides, out of 906 total marriages comprising the sample. The table above includes data only on those who were known to be contracting their first marriage, described as “soltero/a.”

Table 3. Average Age at First Marriage of by Country of Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cubans</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>456 Cuban</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban whites</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>325 Cuban whites</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaniards</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>302 Spaniard</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Foreign-Born</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>355 All foreign-born</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No birthplace info</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2 No birthplace info</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All men</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>811 All men</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cuban/Foreign-Born and Cuban White/Spanish comparisons detect mean differences significant at .01 or greater, for both grooms and brides. Means were compared using ANOVA and the transformed age variable log_age.

Global Measures of the Timing of Marriage

The first question asked of the data concerned the average age at first marriage observed in the overall sample. As shown in Table 2, the men and women in the study population tended to marry well into their adult lives. The average age at first marriage for men was twenty-nine years and for women it was twenty-five.

I next explored the relationship between place of birth and the timing of marriage (see Table 3). Were foreign-born men and women, I asked, likely to marry before or after their Cuban counterparts? My findings were in line with those of the wider literature. Men born in Cuba married at an average reported age of 28.5 years. Foreign-born men married just a year older (sig $F = .01$), at 29.5. If we compare only Spaniards to their white Cuban counterparts, the differences in the timing of marriage are somewhat greater (sig $F = .001$). Cuban men classified as white married an average of two years earlier (27.5) than those born in Spain (29.5). The same pattern held for women. Cuban women married at an average age of 24.5 years, while foreign-born women married about a year older (sig $F = .01$). The average age at first marriage for Spanish-born women (who were 91 percent of all foreign born women) was twenty-six, two years older than that of white Cuban women (sig $F = .001$).

Civil Status

Ninety-three percent of brides and ninety-one percent of grooms who married in Havana during the period under study were contracting their first marriage. Unsurprisingly, there were very significant differences in age at marriage based on marital status. While men marrying for the first time did so at an average age of twenty-nine, widowers (4 percent of the sample) were on average a decade older (thirty-nine).
Interestingly, for those who had contracted a civil marriage prior to the canonical one (5 percent of the sample), their average age was also quite advanced—thirty-seven years. The late age at marriage for this group suggests that the secular and religious marriages may have taken place at different points in the life course. For a variety of possible reasons, such as legitimizing offspring in the eyes of the church (perhaps, that these children might gain admission to Catholic educational institutions), some couples may have decided to marry again, years after their union had been formalized by the state. The same results were found among brides. Solteras (93 percent of the sample) married at an average age of twenty-five. Widows (who comprised only 2 percent of the weighted sample), married again over a decade later, at thirty-six. Women who had already wedded civilly (5 percent) contracted church marriage at age 32.5.32

Legitimacy

The relationship between legitimacy and the timing of marriage was of particular interest. Though Spanish law and the Cuban Catholic church recognized multiple levels, or degrees of legitimacy, here I used a dichotomous variable in which persons were simply coded as either legitimate or illegitimate.33 I expected that persons born to unwed parents would marry later because they faced less social pressure to marry, and because in a society where marriage was primarily practiced among persons of higher status, they would be disadvantaged in the marital market.

My expectation was confirmed. I found that those whose parents had been married (87 percent of men and 86 percent of women), married younger than persons of illegitimate birth. Thus, we see again that in the marital system under study, younger ages at marriage were correlated with elevated social status. Higher status people, who were thus presumably more desirable mates, or for whom the status of marriage conferred greater benefits, married younger. Among those illegitimate persons who did contract a canonical union, birth status delayed marriage by three years for women and by four years for men (Table 4).34

Timing of Marriage and Ascribed Race

Very significant differences were also found in the average age at which people first married, according to their ascribed race. Men were considered first. Those classified as white married considerably younger than men in the other two racial strata.35 The average age at first marriage for men described in their records as white was 28.5 years.36 For men of color it was 33, and for men with no race it was 31. The last two groups were statistically identical.

When I disaggregated strata B by color, a very curious result was derived. I found that differences between men of color and whites were driven largely by the very high average age at first marriage found among negros (thirty-seven years) and men described as “de color” (thirty-four years). Those classified as mestizo (mixed race) or amarillo (chinese-born) married at an age statistically identical to whites.37 This is true despite the fact that mestizos were, like negros and men de color, very likely to have themselves been born to parents who never married.38
The same pattern was identified among women. White women married an average of four years earlier than women of color and women with no given race. But again, color explained differences that were hidden within racial strata. The average age at marriage for mestizas was found to be statistically identical to that of blancas. The other groups of women of color married older and were statistically indistinguishable from women with no race (Table 5).

There are a number of reasons we might expect whites to have married younger. As far more whites than non-whites were married in the general population, whites would have faced more social pressure to marry, and would have been able to draw from a wider pool of available partners (i.e., other persons likely and able to marry as well). In a society just decades past slavery, whites were more likely to have been able to assume the financial burden associated with Catholic marriage. And compared to its counterparts in other parts of Latin America, the Cuban Catholic church was considered to have been a determinedly elite institution, which made little effort to go beyond its largely urban, white, affluent, and Spanish base.

The last finding, however, concerning the mediating effect of color—is unexpected. Why mestizos married at similar ages to whites but diverged so substantially from other non-whites is unclear and is a question that will have to be answered definitively by other scholars. Here, however, I offer some suggestions. It is possible, first, that for Cuban blacks, information on age found in the marital registries was incorrect. In 1907, for example, census enumerators recorded the higher-than-average ages of Cuban negros (especially elderly ones) with some skepticism, believing that many simply did not know what age they were, and thus tended to exaggerate. Second, while rates of marriage overall were low among all Cubans of color, they were particularly low among Cuban blacks. Compared to their mixed-race counterparts, blacks may have faced less pressure to marry, and the status of marriage may not have conferred as much social capital. Those few that did marry may have done so in order to celebrate a successful union, rather than in order to signal its initiation.

As a follow-up to the analyses above, I asked if the average age at first marriage varied according to the race of the spouse. Such analyses—which look at the characteristics of persons in conjunction with those of their partners—allow us to more fully exploit the unique advantages afforded by marital data. The theory of status exchange, for example, would suggest that white men who married women of color (or those with no race) would be older than those married to brides classified in their records as white. According to this principle, racial advantages or disadvantages might be partially offset by other considerations, including honor, reputation, economic success, political power, or, in this context, the youth, or advanced age, of a bride or groom (Table 6).

I found that the timing of marriage varied by spousal race for whites only. Among white men, the differences in the mean age at marriage were very substantial and significant. At twenty-eight, white men who married white women (marital strata AA) had the lowest average age of marriage of any

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Table 5. Average Age at First Marriage by Racial Strata and Color

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Men</th>
<th>28.9</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>All Women</th>
<th>24.9</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White men</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>white women</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All men of color</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>all women of color</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mestizos</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>mestizas</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negros</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>negras</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de color</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>de color</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amarillo</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>amarilla</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men with no race</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>women with no race</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means are reported to highlight differences found in the sample data. Identical letters in superscript signify that means are statistically indistinguishable. Sig F for means determined to be different was .01 or greater. Sample sizes vary from earlier tables as those involving race are weighted differently to take oversampling of marital strata into account.
strata in the sample. White men who married women whose race was not provided (marital strata AC) married considerably older (33). Those who married women of color (marital strata AB) married older still (34). The last two groups were found to be statistically identical. This result was generally in line with expectations. If, as I have posited above, younger ages at marriage corresponded to higher social status and greater desirability of partners, then we would expect white women to find younger husbands than their counterparts of color.

White women also evidenced significantly different ages at marriage depending on the race of their partner. It is interesting to note though the strata is tiny in size (n = 16), the difference in the mean age of white women who married men of color (marital strata BA) and those who married white men (marital strata AA) was not significant. Those few men of color who married white women married ones of just as high status, on this measure, as their white male counterparts. This was quite a different result than was found for white men. Men with no race, however, were substantially “disadvantaged,” as their white brides were almost three years older.

For the other groups—men and women of color (strata B), and men and women with no given race (strata C), no significant differences were found in the age at which they married according to the race of their spouse.

### Spousal Age Gap

To a considerable extent, the difference in age between men and women is conditioned by a culturally perceived ideal. As Klinger-Vartabedian and Wispe have argued, “One’s own status can be altered by marriage to someone whose age does not conform to societal expectations.” The age gap may also be structured by differences in life course expectations, opportunities, and the “asymmetrical assets” of men and women in the marriage market. Some researchers view a smaller difference in age to indicate more egalitarian relations between spouses. Others have argued that the age gap tends to be largely determined by the size of the pool of available partners.

The mean gap in age between grooms and brides in my study was 4.5 years. The gap was a bit (six months) larger than that found in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century, but only half the size of the gap found in colonial Mexico, where men were nearly a decade older. The median age difference between grooms and brides in my sample was four years and the mode was zero. At one extreme, the sample contained a man 35 years older than his wife, and at the other we found a groom 22 years younger.

Differences in the age gap for foreign-born and Cuban-born spouses were not found to be significant. As for race, no significant differences were found between men (sig \( F = .15 \)). Among women, marginally significant results were detected (sig \( F = .07 \)). White women were found to be somewhat closer in age to their grooms (four years) than women of color (5.5 years). This difference could reflect greater equality in gender relations between white women and their partners, or greater socioeconomic opportunities afforded to the spouses of white women, which allowed them to marry at younger ages.

### Table 6. Age at First Marriage of Whites According to Race of Spouse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strata</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Strata</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[AB] White/of color</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>[BA] of color/white</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AC] White/no race</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>[CA] No race/white</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The mean ages at first marriage of men in AB and AC are statistically identical. The mean ages of women in AA and BA are identical as well. Bonferroni tests found differences between the other groups significant at .001. “N” here measures actual group size and therefore reflects oversampling of certain marriages. Strata AA differs in size for white men and for women because five of the men were missing age data and their spouses were not.
Timing of Marriage and SES

It is to be expected that average age at marriage will vary according to the SES of the person in question. In many societies, SES is been found to be positively correlated with age at marriage. As mentioned above, I found more support for the opposite dynamic.

The SES of couples in the parish records may be ascertained based on the occupation of the groom. Marriages were sorted into one of three ranked tiers, based upon a historically grounded assessment of the relative standing of different occupations in the period under study (see Appendix B). In the first tier were unskilled manual laborers (referred to as jornaleros, obreros, or labradores), very small-scale entrepreneurs (i.e., carretoneros and carboneros), and those in personal services (drivers and servants). The middle tier was primarily comprised of skilled manual laborers (barbers, brick masons, carpenters, electricians, tailors, shoemakers, engravers, etc.). It also included shop clerks, telegraph operators, office workers, bank tellers, and others whose labor was not primarily based upon their physical effort. In the “upper” part of the middle tier were artists, writers, musicians, and low-ranking members of the police and armed forces. The highest tier was comprised of men in business or management, upper-level members of the police and military, professionals (lawyers, surgeons, professors, dentists), landowners, and one member of the Cuban congress (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Variability in age at marriage and socioeconomic status by racial strata.
For men overall, SES was not demonstrated to have a significant effect on the timing of marriage (sig $F = .2$). Separate analyses were then run for men in each of the three racial strata. For white men and men with no race, using the log of age, the same result was found—SES was not shown to significantly impact the timing of marriage (sig $F = .5$ for each).

For men of color, however, the effect of SES on the timing of marriage was marginally significant (sig $F = .07$). Men in the lowest tier (primarily comprised of unskilled agricultural workers) had the highest average age at marriage, at thirty-six years. They were followed by men in the middle tier (mainly bakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other skilled workers), at thirty-three years. Men of color in the highest tier (educated professionals, merchants, and businessmen) married youngest, at twenty-nine years. This pattern is clearly demonstrated in Figure 1. It also conforms to the broader pattern found in the data—that higher social status corresponds to earlier marriage.

When strata B was disaggregated by color, we began to derive very small sample sizes, and thus results cannot be presented with conclusiveness. However, it appears, again, that the pattern described above was driven largely by the much higher than average age at marriage for negro grooms. The average reported age of black men in the lowest socioeconomic tier was fifty years old. Blacks in the higher two tiers married at thirty-six and thirty-five years, respectively.

Mestizos and chinos, like white men and men with no race, did not evidence differences in the average age at marriage according to SES. According to my data, then, the age at which these groups of men were likely to marry was robust—it did not vary significantly according to their SES. For those described as negro, however, the opportunity structure or expectations concerning marriage varied considerably by class. It is instructive to look at the absolute numbers of such men in the weighted sample. Though a majority of the negros residing in the city of Havana during the first constitutional era would have been found in the lowest socioeconomic tier, there are only eight such men in the sample. This is in line with other data indicating that through the first half of the twentieth century, canon marriage was a highly unlikely event for poor black men and women. Formal marriage remained a costly, elaborate process, primarily practiced by whiter, wealthier Cubans, born to parents who had been married themselves.

**Change over Time**

As the study covered four decades, it was important to ask if the timing of marriage changed as the century wore on. The average age at marriage may rise or fall due to shifts in the economy, changes in the political climate, or variability in the size of the pool of available partners. Wars, depressions, and other kinds of social instability may affect both the timing of marriage and the rate at which marriages are contracted.

I began my analysis of the covariance of age and time by plotting these variables against each other. While graphs of age by year and five-year failed to provide clear trends, patterns did emerge when looking at age plotted against decade. Men in Havana began to marry later as the century progressed (using an analysis of variance [ANOVA] and log_age by decade, sig $F = .001$). The average age at first marriage in the first two decades of the study was 27.5 and 28 years, respectively. Between 1920 and 1930, the average rose to 30 years. It decreased by six months in the last 10 years of the study period, to land at 29.5 years (Figure 2).

The trend in the timing of marriage over time for women was very similar to that for men (sig $F = .001$), except it was almost perfectly linear. The average age at first marriage among women rose from 23 years in the 1900s to 24 years in the 1910s. By the 1920s, age had risen again to 25.5 years, and by the last decade of the study period, women were marrying at 26. Thus by the end of the constitutional era, brides in the city of Havana had begun to marry three years later, on average, than their counterparts at the opening of the century. Grooms by contrast, only aged 1.5 years during this period.
It may be surmised therefore, that while the first constitutional era brought about significant changes in the life course expectations and opportunity structures for men and for women, those for women were more substantial. Such a conclusion is supported by the historical record as well. A 1917 law declared married women, for the first time, to have a legal identity separate from that of their husbands, and to have the right to manage their own property. The first law of divorce was passed in 1918. Feminists in the 1920s and 1930s fought for women’s increased participation in paid employment, education, and other aspects of civil life. Legislation passed in the 1930s recognized consensual union as akin (though legally inferior) to marriage. The progressive constitution of 1940 granted many new rights to natural children, including the right to investigate paternity.

These legislative and social changes redefined the relationships of men and women to each other, lessened the status differentials between formal marriage and consensual union, and decreased the stigma associated with illegitimacy. They would have had the most substantial impact upon women, who, more than men, were defined by their roles as spouses; and lessened the imperative of women to marry in order to signal a successful transition to adulthood.

**Conclusions and Summary of Findings**

This study has determined that the timing of marriage in Cuba’s first constitutional era was negatively correlated with social status. Thus, those higher in social rank overall married younger.
I have suggested that higher-status Cubans married younger because they derived more social capital from marriage, were better able to shoulder the expense associated with Catholic marriage, and were more identified with the largely affluent, Spanish, urban Church.

The average age at first marriage for all brides and grooms in the sample was determined to be quite high, at twenty-nine years for men and twenty-five for women. Native-born Cubans married a year earlier, on average, than those born elsewhere. Cuban whites married two years earlier than their Spanish-born peers. As for civil status, men and women who had never married were a decade younger than the widowers and widows in the sample. Those already civilly married to their spouse at the time of the canonical marriage were approximately eight years older than the never married. Brides and grooms classified as “natural” or “ilegítimo” comprised only 15 percent of the sample. Among the natural children who did marry, having been born to unwed parents delayed marriage by four years for men and three years for women.

Significant differences in the timing of marriage were found according to the racial designation attributed to brides and grooms. Whites married youngest (men at 28.5 years and women at 24.5), followed by those with no given race (at 31 and 27, respectively), and by Cubans of color (who were 33 and 28.5 years old on average). That over 90 percent of whites in the sample had themselves been born to married parents in part explains their earlier average age at marriage. However, the similar ages at first marriage between whites and those identified as mestizo cannot be similarly explained. When strata B, comprised of all Cubans labeled as non-white, was subdivided by color, it was found that mixed-race Cubans married at about the same age as Cuban whites, despite their drastically lower rates of legitimacy (~ 35 percent). People with no given race (strata C), negros and gente de color married much later than whites or mixed-race Cubans. This finding constitutes the clearest evidence that measurable differences in outcomes and life chances separated Cubans categorized as mixed race from those identified solely in terms of African descent.

My other findings pertaining to race were more complex. The effect of the race of one’s spouse on the timing of marriage was significant for white brides and grooms only, providing some evidence for the theory of status exchange. White men who married women of African descent were considerably older (thirty-four) than those who married white women (twenty-eight). They were also statistically identical to white men who married women with no race. A different pattern was found among white women. White women who married men of color were as young (twenty-four) as those who married white men. White women who married men with no given race, however, were several years older (twenty-seven).

The difference in age between men and women averaged 4.5 years. White women were somewhat closer in age to their spouses (4 years difference) than were women of color (5.5 years difference). No race effect was detected among men. Neither were Spanish men statistically likely to be older or younger than their brides than their white Cuban counterparts.

Overall, male occupation was not demonstrated to have a significant effect on the timing of marriage. Among men of color, however, age was slightly negatively correlated with SES. Those in the lowest-status professions married much later than higher-ranking men of African descent, suggesting that the former group of men may have been consecrating a preexisting union. Further, the high ages at first marriage, and the fact very few low-SES men of color were found in the registers of those contracting canonical marriage, in the suggests that for this group, low occupational status and color severely diminished the likelihood of marriage.

The average age at first marriage increased by 1.5 years for men and by 3 years for women during the period under study. The greater increase in age for women is hypothesized to have been due to the legal and social changes that unfolded toward the close of the era, which would have most directly affected single and married women, natural children, and their unwed mothers.
Appendix A

Further Discussion of Methodology

As I selected the cases to be included in the sample, I assumed, statistically, that each parish was its own population. Though most marriages (65 percent) took place under the authority of the parish of Sagrado Corazón, I sought to attain roughly equal sample sizes from each individual parish. The distinct socioeconomic and racial characteristics of the zonas in which the parishes were located meant that the marriages recorded there potentially captured diverse slices of the local population. Furthermore, variations in racial labeling and other aspects of annotation used by scribes in different parishes urged against the indiscriminate blending of information.

I took a periodic sample from each of the nine marital strata in each year in each parish, to ensure that data would be distributed evenly across the period under study. Three cases from each marital stratum were chosen per year. This technique was particularly useful in paring down the number of couples chosen from the largest groups. Following a random start, cases were selected at intervals determined by the size of the marital strata in each year. If there were three cases or fewer in a given year, all were chosen. Thus, for the very smallest marital strata, the total sample size is very close to the number of such cases in the study population. This multistage technique allowed me to select a stratified, statistically random periodic sample, with optimal representation of each of the different racial pairings found in the data. The final sample is comprised of 906 cases, 900 of which include information on the age of bride or groom.

Because I had oversampled by race, it was necessary to weigh the data in carrying out subsequent statistical tests. Two types of weights were calculated: a parish-level weight and weight applied at the level of the racial strata. Using the first weight, the influence of each case would be proportionate to its relative size in the entire population. When the second weight is used, the influence of the case is determined by its relative size among persons of the same gender and racial group (i.e., white women). The second weight was necessary when comparing races to each other because the data was sampled by marital strata rather than by the race of brides and grooms individually. Only when comparing the different marital strata directly to each other were weights unnecessary, as the cases within each stratum had been selected at random. An example of such a comparison would be one in which I contrasted the characteristics of white men married to white women (AA), with those of white men married to women of color (AB), and white men married to women whose races were not provided (AC), as in section 3.6, below.

Information was transcribed by hand onto printed forms prepared by the researcher, then transferring into Microsoft Excel as text. Later, the data was standardized and converted into numerical format for use in the statistical software package SPSS 12.0.
Appendix B

Categorization and Ranking of Occupations of Grooms

Level 1 (Low)

1) **unskilled manual laborer**—jornalero, labrador, obrero, farolero
2) personal service—sirviente, chofer, cochero, planchero, motorista
3) very small-scale enterprise—carbonero, carretonero

Level 2 (Middle)

1) **skilled manual worker**—agricultor, albañil, barbero, carnicero, cocinero, carpintero, carralero, carrero, carretero, cocinero, confitero, constructor, dulcero, ebanista, electricista, escojedor, fundidor, grabador, herrero, instalador, jardinero, mosaista, panadero, peluquero, pintor, platero, rezagador, sastre, tabaquero, talabartero, tapicero, tipógrafo, tonelero, tornero, torrero, zapatero
2) salesclerk or employee—dependiente, empleado, empleado de comercio
3) arts & letters—artista, periodista, dibujante, escultor, fotograbador, litógrafo, músico, organista, pintor, tenedor de libros
4) police, state, & military—policía, policía nacional, veterano, marinero, empleado del servicio consular, artillero

Level 3 (High)

1) business and managerial—comercio, constructor civil, agente de negocios, maestro de obras, perito mercantil
2) higher-ranking police, state, & military—capitán de caballería, agente de aduana, militar, oficial de la marina, teniente de la policía, militar retirado
3) professional—abogado, arquitecto, catedrático, cirujano, cirujano dental, dentista, farmacéutico, ingeniero, magisterio, médico, procurador, profesor, químico
4) landowner—propietario, hacendado, colono
5) high-ranking elected official—representante

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Notes

1. When Cuba’s final war of independence ended in 1898, the island was immediately transferred from a colony of Spain to an occupied territory of the U.S. military. The first Cuban constitution was ratified in 1901 and inaugurated the following year, when the island formally gained its independence. The first constitutional era spanned some four decades, until the ratification of the progressive constitution of 1940. For discussion see for example, Enid L. Logan, “The 1899 Cuban Marriage Law Controversy: Church, State and Empire in the Crucible of Nation,” *Journal of Social History* 42 (2008): 469-94.


that “Cuba’s social construct of race . . . differs from the three-tier or multitier racial systems prevailing in many countries of the region and tends to show a two-tier racial system similar to that of the United States” (p. 3), Ferrer, on the other hand, believes that the question may not be worth answering at all. She writes, “Sometimes people and institutions drew distinctions between blacks and mulattos (as in pardo and moreno) and sometimes they did not . . . even in cases in which multiple lines existed, they were not always observed. Sometimes historical protagonists drew multiple lines, sometimes one, and sometimes (more rarely) they drew none” (p. 21).

6. In colonial era documentation, mixed-race Cubans were referred to as pardos and blacks as morenos. By the turn of the century, pardo gave way to mestizo, or mulato, and blacks became known as negros. I use the Spanish-term mestizo, rather than mulato, in the text above, in keeping with the terminology used in the church records upon which this study is based. It must be noted that in addition to the three overarching racial terms, many other labels (such as blanconazo, jabao, trigueño, chino, indio, mulato claro, negro carbon, etc) referring to a multiplicity of phenotypes arrayed along the socially constructed “continuum” have long been recognized. For further discussion of racial terminology in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cuba, see Enid L. Logan, “Each Sheep With Its Mate: Marking Race and Legitimacy in Cuban Catholic Parish Archives, 1890–1940,” New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 84, 1-2 (2010): 5-39; de la Fuente, A Nation for All; Ferrer, Insurgent Cuba; and Mark Q. Sawyer, Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

7. See Helg, Our Rightful Share; Degler, Neither Black nor White; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “We are all Americans! The Latin Americanization of racial stratification in the USA,” Race and Society 5, 1 (2002): 3-16; and Mia Tuan, Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). Alternately we may ask, is there evidence to suggest that the construct of race was in fact a “fluid continuum?” Or were distinctions of color rigidly maintained and policed, in areas from employment to politics, schooling, recreation, and formal marriage?


10. These figures are averages from the five censuses. The rate of marriage among Cubans of color doubled between 1899 and 1919, from 6 percent to 13.5 percent, where it stayed more or less the same through 1943.


15. Twentieth-century marital records contained a great deal of information. They began with the date of inscription of the register, the date of the ceremony, and the location of the wedding. The records then listed the name, place of birth, age, and marital status of the groom (single, widowed, or civilly married to the bride), his race, place of residence, and birth status (usually “legitimate” or “natural”). Marital registers continued with the groom’s profession and the names and birthplaces of his parents. Next was information pertaining to the bride—name, place of birth, age, marital status, race, and place of residence. Following that were her birth status and parents’ names and places of origin. After the 1920s, some records also provided the bride’s occupation—which was usually listed as “su casa” (“homemaker”). Married couples had godparents—male and female, for whom often only names were given—as well as official witnesses. The witnesses were almost always both male, and marital registers provided their place of birth, profession, civil status, and place of residence, or some combination of this information.

16. Logan, “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”

17. Because of my interest in the process of racial labeling, after much consideration, I decided classify brides and grooms strictly on the basis of the ascriptions used in the documents, rather than upon ancestry. Thus if a Spanish-born man was listed as blanco he fell into strata A. But if his race was omitted he fell into strata C. Rather than treating race as an objective, immutable “fact,” or imposing my own logic of race upon the data, I decided to try to make sense of the logics guiding scribes and priests working in local parishes in the previous century. Detailed discussion of the possible reasons for omissions of labels pertaining to race and to legitimacy in parish registers is found in my 2010 article, “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”

18. Thus, the designation AA would be give to the marriage of a man and a woman who were both labeled as white. AB included the few formal marriages between white men and women of color (who might be described as negra, morena, parda, or mestiza). Strata BB included all non-white spouses, in any combination. Strata BC referred to the marriages of men of color to women with no listed race.

19. There were forty recorded marriages of white men to women of color and sixteen recorded marriages of men of color to white men. Out of a total of 12,106 marriages between 1901 and 1940 in the two parishes, this is .46 percent.


21. I probe beneath the surface of this finding in my 2010 article, “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”


27. Following convention, I differentiate between first and higher order marriages. A histogram of age revealed that the data was skewed to the left, thus runs were done using a transformed age variable log_age. In order to make the results easily interpretable, however, I report mean age, rather than means of the log of age, throughout. All significance levels are reported in conventional units of either .05, .01, or .001. The minimum level for statistical significance was set at .05. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was selected for means comparisons, followed up by Bonferroni post hoc tests where necessary. The means provided below are weighted, in accordance with the sampling technique employed during data collection. Further discussion of methods is found in Appendix A.

28. In the tables, summary measures of age are reported to one decimal place. Ages are rounded to the nearest half year in the text, however, to facilitate assimilation of the information.

29. As there were a number of outliers (i.e., people first marrying very young or very old), it is helpful to also consider the median as a measure of central tendency. The median age at marriage for all men was twenty-eight, and for women it was twenty-four. The modal age for men, or, the most frequent age at which they married, was twenty-six. For women it was twenty-three.

30. Researchers have found that immigrants often marry later than the native-born. Often, those who emigrate are able to do so because they did not marry in the home country. Male immigrants also marry later because of the additional time needed to establish themselves financially. Immigrants of both sexes may additionally be forced to postpone marriage due to a shortage of available partners in their adopted country. See Elwood D. Carlson, “The Impact of International Migration Upon the Timing of Marriage and

31. For persons of color, differences between the native-born and foreign-born were not found to be significant. This may have been due to the very unequal sample sizes and the fact that so few persons identified as *mestizo* or *negro* were foreign-born.

32. For men, the $F$ statistic of an ANOVA comparing the mean log$_{age}$ of these groups is quite large—57, and significant at .001. For women, the differences between the three groups are also quite significant ($F = 38$, significant at .001). Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni tests reveal that differences between the widowed and the civilly married were not statistically significant, either for men or for women.

33. In accordance with Spanish law, the majority of those born to unwed parents were classified as “*hijos naturales*” or “natural children” in their marital and baptismal records. Natural children were those whose parents had not faced a canonical or civil impediment to marriage at the time of birth, yet had not been married. Natural children might subsequently legitimated by the later marriage of their parents. Individuals classified using the Spanish term “ilegitimo” were far less frequently found in the documents. “Hijos ilegitimos” were children of parents who could not have contracted marriage at the time of birth, because one or both was married to someone else, had taken a vow of religious celibacy, or because the two were related within four degrees consanguinity. I discuss the social relevance of birth status in late colonial and early republican Cuba further in my article “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”

34. It should be noted that the number of persons classified as illegitimate in the weighted sample is somewhat below their representation in the general population. According to the census data, the average rate of illegitimacy in the period under study for the province of Havana was 17 percent. Thus, it appears that illegitimacy depressed the likelihood of marriage.

35. Sig $F = .001$. The reader will recall that strata A includes persons classified as white (*blanco*), strata B includes all grooms or brides of color (*mestizo*, *negro*, *amarillo*, *de color*, etc.), and strata C is comprised of those for whom no race was recorded.

36. This includes all men—born in Cuban, Spain, or elsewhere—categorized as *blanco*.

37. ANOVA followed by a Bonferroni test using the log of age found whites, *mestizos*, and Chinese-born men to be statistically identical, as were men *de color*, *negros*, and men with no race.

38. Logan, “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”

39. Using an ANOVA to test the effect of race on log$_{age}$ _women_, the overall $F$ was 22, significant at .001.

40. There were no women classified as *amarilla* in the study population.


43. Oficina del Censo, *Censo de la República de Cuba bajo la administración provisional de los Estados Unidos, 1907* (Washington, DC, 1908), 222-23. Individuals wishing to contract marriage were required to certify their date of birth and ancestry by providing a record of their baptism. If they had not been baptized, or the baptismal record had been destroyed or lost (as was common following the independence war), then origins were to be certified on the basis of testimony from “witnesses” who had known the individuals for many years. This last means of ascertaining information would certainly have introduced the possibility of error.


45. In the weighted sample, 35 percent of grooms of color were classified as *mestizo* or *pardo* (mixed-race) and 26 percent as *negro* or *moreno* (black). The remainder were labeled *de color*—an ambiguous color term that could refer to Cuban blacks or mulattoes. For further discussion of the varying using of racial labels in Cuban ecclesiastical records, see, again Logan, “Each Sheep With Its Mate.”


52. All tests in this section were ANOVAS of the log_age_difference.

53. The age gap for women with no reported race was 4.8 years. However, it was not determined to differ statistically from either of the two other groups.

54. While data on occupation is provided for 93 percent of men, it is offered for only 1 percent of women.

55. In early twentieth-century Cuba, the status distinction between manual labor and nonmanual labor in early twentieth-century Cuban society was a particularly important one. See de la Fuente, *A nation for all*, p. 154.

56. For men in each racial strata, the overall trend was also positive. Statistical significance was detected between the means over time for white men (sig $F = .04$) and for men with no recorded race (sig $F = .01$).

57. Again, as with men, the overall trend was positive for white women, women of color, and women with no recorded race. However, for the middle group, the increase in the timing of marriage was not proven to be statistically significant.


**Bios**

**Enid Lynette Logan** is an assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. Her research concerns race and gender relations in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. She has published articles constructs of race and gender in Cuba in *Political Power and Social Theory*, the *Journal of Social History*, and the *New West Indian Guide*. Her first book, “At This Defining Moment:” Barack Obama’s Presidential Candidacy, the Triumphant Nation, and the Perils and Promises of the New Politics of Race, will be published by New York University Press in Fall 2011. She is currently working on a second book, based on over 125 in-depth interviews conducted with undergraduate students in the weeks running up to the 2008 U.S. presidential election.