

The family: Alive and changing

The late Margaret Mead said the family is not dying out, but it very well may be changing its character. A newly released report by the U.S. Census Bureau tends to corroborate this.

The bureau's latest statistics reflect an apparently still-strong drive to get married. Ninety-five percent of all Americans are married or will get married at some point, the bureau reports in its study, "Perspectives on American Husbands and Wives."

But though the urge for a family may still be prevalent, success toward achieving that goal — particularly on the first try — is often elusive. The divorce rate has more than doubled since 1960 (from 2.2 to 5 per 1,000 people), and about 20 percent of all married persons have been previously divorced. Most who get divorced ultimately get remarried — "so, Americans spend most of their adult lives married," according to the report.

And the character of marriages is becoming increasingly diversified. According to the study, the number of interracial marriages has increased by 36 percent since 1970; and between 1960 and 1970, "the number of married couples consisting of husbands and wives of different races increased by 108 percent." Still, such marriages account for only 1 percent of all married couples.

Census researchers also found that in 22 percent of all married couples at least one member is college educated and 17 percent have at least one spouse in a "professional" occupation. Only one of six married women has an income comparable to or greater than that of her husband. But in those families where the wife does have an income, it is equal to or greater than her husband's one-third of the time.

Other findings include:

- Eighty-one percent of the husbands and 47 percent of the wives were in the labor force in 1977.
- Married couples had a median income of \$14,554 in 1976 — \$16,271 for whites, \$13,280 for blacks and \$11,969 for Hispanics.
- Three-fourths of married couples — 78 percent of whites and 61 percent of blacks — own the homes in which they are living.
- The average family size is 3.42 persons.
- About 7 percent of the wives have husbands 10 years or more older than themselves.

Bureau officials say they undertook the research in order to produce a study that takes an equal look at wives and husbands. In considering areas such as college education and employment, most previous studies considered only the husband's background, they said.

Sequoyah to Washoe: You talkin' to me?

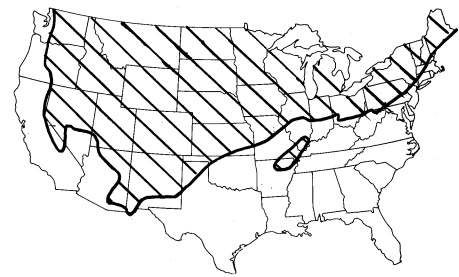
When last we left Washoe the chimp, she and her psychologist/caretakers were anticipating her first offspring (SN: 7/29/78, p. 72). Now, University of Oklahoma officials proudly announce that Sequoyah (named after the creator of the Cherokee alphabet) was born Jan. 8. Psychologist Roger Fouts and his colleagues are anxious to see if Washoe can and will teach any of her 240-sign vocabulary to her baby. "My bet is that the infant will pick it [the sign language] up," says Fouts. If he does, Sequoyah would probably give his first sign in four to 12 months, Fouts says. The mother-child relationship, however, has not started out on the best foot possible. Washoe seems more interested in her human friends and has refused to nurse the baby. So, Sequoyah, who in turn was not aggressive enough to make Washoe nurse him, is currently being fed by hand. The human handlers plan to reunite the two shortly in a cage with one-way mirrors to "remove the human element totally" from the interaction of Washoe and her new baby.

Gas 'show' in Baltimore Canyon

A test well being drilled to determine the geologic characteristics of an area in the Baltimore Canyon, 94 miles southeast of Atlantic City, N.J., recently found "significant" indications, or a "show," of gas and possibly oil or an oil-like condensate. Not only is it surprising to find a show in a well that is purposely drilled "off-structure" — where oil and gas is not expected — but the find is significant following a series of disappointing results from drilling in the canyon, some areas of which have been designated for leasing to oil companies by the U.S. Geological Survey. A show is defined as a trace of oil or gas detected (as this one was) in circulated drilling muds, a drill core or cuttings, or interpreted from electrical or geophysical logs run in the well. Though the show may be encouraging to industry, the area may not yet be within their economic grasp: The well was drilled in 2,686 feet of water, well beyond present commercial capabilities.

Snow, snow everywhere

Yes, Chicago, it really is as bad as you thought. As some readers have already discovered (p. 67), snow covered more of North America in December



1978 than during any December in the last 13 years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Studies of satellite data by Donald R. Wiesnet and Michael Matson showed that an average of 6.3 million square miles of North America (58 percent of the United States) was covered by snow last December. The previous record for December, 6.2 million square miles, was set in 1972. And, though Wiesnet and Matson hesitate to make any predictions for the rest of the winter, the December 1978 snowcover was 8.6 percent greater than that of December 1977 — the beginning of a record-shattering winter in the East.

Self-destructing tea fields

Hail damage is often the largest natural variable affecting crop growth on the tea estates of Kenya. Hail falls an average of 132 days a year in those areas, 10 times more than the record for any point in the United States. Now, with a twist of scientific irony, two researchers have suggested the tea may be causing its own destruction.

In a paper presented at the American Geophysical Union meeting in December, Suan N. Tan-Schnell of Boulder, Colo., and Russell C. Schnell of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Boulder described their studies in the tea fields for the possible sources of ice nuclei — the airborne particles around which droplets of supercooled water collect and turn into hail. They found that tea plant litter sent aloft by the activities of tea pickers and found on the ground between tea trees contained "more active" ice nuclei than did samples of soil or other plant litter. That is, tea tree dust and particles could cause supercooled water to form hail at warmer temperatures (−5°C or 23°F) than could other particles. Other vegetation and soil samples contained no ice nuclei active at temperatures warmer than −9°C (16°F) to −15°C (5°F). As a result, hail could occur at warmer temperatures — and therefore more often — in areas around tea fields than where tea trees are not found.