

may be found in the news that they probably won't always feel so beleaguered. "Parenthood changes lives in both positive and negative ways, many of them unexpected by the parents themselves," Margolis and Myrskylä write.

SOCIETY

Homeownership and Race

THE SOURCE: "Race and Home Ownership from the End of the Civil War to the Present" by William J. Collins and Robert A. Margo, in *The American Economic Review*, May 2011.

IT'S UNSURPRISING THAT homeownership rates for blacks and whites have converged since the Civil War. What is surprising is that nearly all of the convergence happened before 1910. The gap has narrowed by only one

percentage point in the past century.

There have been two distinct periods during which African Americans increased their homeownership: the decades after the Civil War (1870–1910), when the rate increased by 16 percentage points, and the decades after the Depression (1940–80), when it shot upward by 37 percentage points. However, note economists William J. Collins of Vanderbilt University and Robert A. Margo of Boston University, during that latter period white homeownership increased by an equal amount, so the two rates did not converge.

The only real convergence occurred between 1870 and 1910. Black homeownership increased as freed slaves and their children bought small farms. At the same

time, white homeownership fell, chiefly because many whites moved from farms to cities, where they were more likely to rent. About two-thirds of the convergence during the period can be explained by the gains of African Americans.

The black homeownership rate stagnated after 1910, partly because of the Great Migration to northern cities, where most blacks became renters. Both races lost ground during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

From 1940 to 1980, new governmental efforts such as the Federal Housing Administration helped boost homeownership. So did postwar prosperity. Whites increasingly owned homes in the suburbs, which often excluded black families; many African American families bought into

EXCERPT

On Boredom

Some people claim never to have been bored. They lie. One cannot be human without at some time or other having known boredom. Even animals know boredom, we are told, though they are deprived of the ability to complain directly about it. Some of us are more afflicted with boredom than others. Psychologists make the distinction between ordinary and pathological boredom; the latter doesn't cause serious mental problems but is associated with them. Another distinction is that between situational boredom and existential boredom. Situational boredom is caused by the temporary tedium everyone at one time or another encounters: the dull sermon, the longueurs-laden novel, the pompous gent

extolling his prowess at the used-tire business. Existential boredom is thought to be the result of existence itself, caused by modern culture and therefore inescapable. Boredom even has some class standing, and was once felt to be an aristocratic attribute. Ennui, it has been said, is the reigning emotion of the dandy.

When bored, time slows drastically, the world seems shadowy and vague. Truman Capote once described the novels of James Baldwin as "balls-achingly boring," which conveys something of the agony of boredom yet is inaccurate—not about Baldwin's novels, which are no stroll around the Louvre, but about the effect of boredom itself. Boredom is never so clearly localized. The vagueness of boredom, its vaporuousness and its torpor, is part of its mild but genuine torment.

—**JOSEPH EPSTEIN**, essayist, short-story writer, and former editor of *The American Scholar*, in *Commentary* (June 2011)

the urban neighborhoods whites had fled.

In 2007, only 54 percent of African Americans owned their own homes. That rate is two percentage points lower than the

white rate in 1870. In recent decades, white homeownership has averaged about 77 percent.

Because homes are a major form of wealth in the United States, more is at stake than sim-

ply who owns the roof over a person's head. With income and educational inequalities persistent, there is little prospect for a quick reduction in the racial homeownership gap.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy for the Few

THE SOURCE: "Philosophy That's Not for the Masses" by James Ladyman, in *The Philosopher's Magazine*, Second Quarter 2011.

IT'S A COMMON CHARGE THAT philosophers do little of practical value and fail to make their work relevant and accessible to the general public. University of Bristol philosophy professor James Ladyman has had quite enough of this sort of rubbish. "I do not see why all philosophers, or even most, should be interested in communicating their thoughts . . . to the world," he writes.

The masses generally want answers to big questions: What is the meaning of life? Does a respect for animal life require me to be a vegetarian? But any answer philosophy could provide has long since been offered by generations of wise men past. Today's philosophers immerse themselves in fields such as physics and computer science that push the outer limits of human knowledge. There they can do the work of the gadflies Socrates exalted, applying their philosophical tools to expose flaws in scientists' episte-

mology and methodology. But in order to do so, philosophers must master these obscure, technical fields, and it is this specialization that makes their work so unintelligible to the layperson.

Philosophy should not be held to a different standard than other fields of academic inquiry, Ladyman argues: "Who understands the terms in which mathematicians and theoretical physicists communicate, other than those with sufficient training in the relevant technical areas?" The public is simply not equipped to understand the intricacies of these disciplines. "To these people, much of the dictionary will be impenetrable jargon," he asserts, "so philosophical journals pose no unique problems."

And with so many popular books on philosophy by writers who specialize in mediating between academia and the general population, why should academics have to translate their work themselves?

Perhaps, Ladyman suggests, the charge that philosophy does nothing of value stems from the

fact that the unschooled find it easier to believe that they aren't missing out on anything important than to do the hard work that is needed to understand modern philosophy.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Big Religion

THE SOURCE: "American Postwar 'Big Religion': Reconceptualizing 20th-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model" by Benjamin E. Zeller, in *Church History*, June 2011.

THE 20TH CENTURY SAW THE rise of the "bigs": big business, big government, and big science. Benjamin E. Zeller, a professor of religion at Harvard College, wants to add one more to the list: big religion.

Although no one has attached the "big" narrative to religion before, Zeller says that American religion since World War II has the same hallmarks as "big science"—heightened institutionalization and professionalization, increased entanglement with the government, a growth of popular support, and, of course, critics.

After the war, church membership jumped, growing from 90 million in 1950 to more than 114 million in 1960. The National Council of Churches (NCC) was established in 1950 (the same year as the National Science Foundation), bringing 25 Protestant denomina-

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