

**IF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE IS** a social taboo, one could not guess it from Lincoln merchants and citizens who were encountered in a recent role-play experiment between two UNL students. The topic seems to be passe, to take second place behind such other social peculiarities as marriage between the same sex.

Egbert Thompson, a black UNL journalism senior and editor of the newspaper of the multicultural affairs office, acted as my fiancée and husband in stops at local stores and banks as we supposedly prepared for our wedding and to invest in the future.

We stopped at four jewelers to look for engagement rings, the County-City Bldg. to apply for a marriage license, and a savings and loan company to inquire about a joint account. First we allowed them to help us, and later we returned to uncover our real identity and gather comments.

Jewelers were especially helpful. They explained the different types of diamonds, helped me try them on, and in general were eager to make a sale.

"Oh Egbert, I like this one," I exclaimed over many. We looked at each other, suppressing laughter.

The clerk was beaming. Maybe they get a black groom and a white bride every day, we thought.

**ASKED LATER IF A BLACK-**white marriage mixture surprised them, the clerks said it did not. Once two women engaged to each other came in and wanted to buy a ring at Powell's. This surprised the saleswoman, she said. The same clerk said she would not condone interracial marriage in her own family, but added "It is what is in the heart that counts."

Sartor Hamann's was buzzing with customers and employees, many of whom did double-takes as we walked in. When we returned later I spied an elderly lady give us a sidelong glance.

"Interracial marriages are a common thing," said one Sartor's clerk. Randy Weblemoe. "There is no reason to get upset about them."

Fred Wilson at the jewelers bearing his name said that what people do is their business. His, he said, is helping whoever comes through his door.

An exuberant salesman at Zales, Dale Isackson, said that prejudice is "an ancient philosophy," and it would be

ridiculous to turn down a sale or treat a mixed couple differently simple because of their colors, he said.

"Money is green," said Egbert, "right?"

"Right! Isackson said, smiling. The color of money is the only one that matters, he said.

**THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN** outside the marriage license office at the County-City Bldg. looked from Egbert's face, then to mine, and asked us what we wanted. When we told her we wanted a marriage license, but then could not produce the blood test results or birth certificates she asked for. She directed us into the office.

The receptionist inside treated us as just another couple to fill out a form that afternoon. She went dryly about the task.

Egbert filled out the groom's information, including his name, age and race.

In case you're wondering, it is not illegal to ask for race on a marriage license, according to a spokesman for the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission. The information is to be used for statistical purposes, he said. The respondent does not have to answer the race question.

I filled out the brides portion, which asked for the same information. The receptionist, official form in hand, took our printed card and betan typing. A few more returns of the carriage and we might have been an official "Mr. and Mrs." I looked at Egbert with mild alarm, and we interrupted her typing.

Earlier, Egbert had asked her if she thought we would get a lot of hassles as a mixed couple. She said, "I guess you take that risk where ever you go," scarcely looking up from her desk.

I told her what we were actually doing. She coolly removed the paper from the typewriter and said "That's why you didn't have your blood test or ID with you."

We received details of how to open a joint account after our marriage from Irene Schroder, a helpful, pleasant First Federal Savings and Loan teller. The fact that we were a mixed couple might have bothered some of her fellow employees, she said. But customers are for service, she said. Luckily, we went to the right window.

**SOMEBODY'S GOT TO PROTEST**

our union, we still thought. We went to Miller and Paine's bridal registry, photography shop and bridal gown consultant. This time we did not come back and tell them what we were doing. Maybe we did not have the heart after they were so helpful.

Whether the bridal gown consultant was nervous because I told her the wedding was in two weeks or whether it was because she saw my black fiancée sitting next to me, I don't know. Nevertheless, she helped me choose an ivory wedding gown and happily filled out a card to register me. I was to try on and purchase the gown later.

No one was at the bridal registry desk, but one girl asked us if she could help.

At the photography shop, we looked at photo Christmas cards and asked about getting ours and "the baby's" picture taken. We went through scrapbooks, price lists and a discussion of special effects, but we saw no hint of surprise or disgust. The employee suggested we make a sitting appointment soon for the cards. She followed us halfway to the elevator, telling us different ways we could be framed.

**FINALLY, WE DID SOME LIMITED** apartment hunting. We went from door to door trying to stage an event, perhaps secretly wishing someone would say, "What, rent an apartment to you two?"

Out of five or six apartments near the UNL campus, only one manager was in, and he was more than willing to show us a third floor vacancy. It had a refrigerator like June Lockhart's on the *Lassie* television show.

I looked around the shabby interior. "Oh, Egbert, here's a shelf for all your books." Then I opened a tiny closet.

"Plenty of storage space," the manager said.

No evidence of prejudice. The apartment was ours or anybody's.

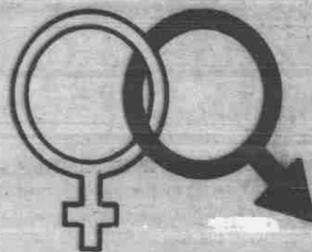
It seems nobody in Lincoln cares that one of us is black and one white. We shrugged our shoulders to the cool wind on this gray November day.

"Hey, Egbert said, "I'll bet we'd have trouble in (this other) area of town. The KKK's burned a cross in my friends yard once time."

"Really," I said, interested. But that's where we broke our engagement."

# 'Pretend' couple gets calm reception

By Terri Willson



## Interracial marriages still few here in Nebraska

Continued from p. 1

Once married (after Jack graduates from medical school in three years), this couple plans to have children. They want to pass on their "nice philosophy of life" and



Photo by Ted Kirk

help rid the world of prejudice, according to Sue.

Although the subject of interracial marriage has never taken up more than a few paragraphs in marriage and the family textbooks, older texts show a more negative attitude toward it. In fact, textbooks dated 1959 and 1960 came out blatantly against it.

"The most frowned-upon marriage and one rarely occurring in the United States is that between whites and nonwhites," said Ruth Cavan in her 1959 book *American Marriage*. In this year, marriage of whites with Negroes was legally forbidden in 29 states. Penalties of heavy fines or imprisonment were imposed upon such couples. In states legally allowing interracial marriage, negative public opinion often inhibited mixed marriages.

**I**n 1959, interracial marriages constituted about eight out of every 10,000 marriages in the United States. "(The) mixed marriage presents unusually difficult problems, which in some cases are hopelessly insoluble," said sociologist Henry Bowman in his 1960 book, *Marriage for Moderns*.

On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were unconstitutional. Today, however, 12 states still have statutes which prohibit it. They are Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia, mostly Southern states.

The following statistics come from the Nebraska Health Data and Statistics Dept. of the health department.

In Nebraska in 1965, 16 of 12,069 total marriages performed were black-white. Of 11,568 white men, six married black women. In the more common pairing, 10 black men out of 388 married white women.

In 1975, 57 of 13,087 marriages were black-white. Of 12,549 white men, three married black women. This time, of 338 black men, 54 married white women.

Altogether in Nebraska in 1965, 55 marriages of the 12,069 were racially intermixed. In 1975, 249 of the 13,087 were. These totals include blacks, whites, Indians, Mexicans, and orientals of any pairing.

Civil rights legislation of the '60s may have contributed to a changing, more open attitude toward mixed marriages. Modern sociologists and marriage and the family texts say the black-white marriage is comparatively more successful. For example, J. Richard Udry, in his 1974 text, *The Social Context of Marriage*, cites an Iowa study

done in 1970 which found that black-white marriages were more stable than black-black marriages. Black-husband, white-wife marriages were found to have lower divorce rates than white-white marriages.

Prof. Babchuk confirmed these findings and said reasons for black-white marital success are that the couples are "more aware and sensitive to problems they are likely to face."

For example, they have carefully considered money, parents, friends and society's attitudes and norms and have worked out ways to solve foreseen problems, more so than a racially similar couple, he said.

The effects these marriages might have on future society are being studied.

Even though those of the college-age generation seem to be more ready to choose this route, it is not yet free of prejudice and opposition from parents and peers. But it is worth bucking society to marry the person one loves, the participants claim.

### 3RD DIMENSION

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Third Dimension is published biweekly Thursdays as a magazine supplement to the Daily Nebraskan, UNL student newspaper. Third Dimension welcomes freelance submissions.