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FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN RELATION TO
LIFE STYLES OF IN-MIGRANT NEGRO FAMILIES

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Preface

Students of marketing have long recognized the existence of a Negro market within the American economy. Differences in Negro-white behavior in the marketplace are associated with the wide disparity in the social and economic positions of the two groups within American society.

The Negro's consumption practices are said to reflect his cultural orientation, although--as with other cultural groups--many variations in consumption patterns within groups have been recognized by some students. The absence of uniform consumer behavior patterns among Negroes has prompted the marketing industry to undertake analyses of Negro market orientations. The complex behavior patterns of this cultural group have since been reduced to simplistic levels. Using the American white middle class as a reference group, the American Negro consumer is said to occupy one of two positions in the consumer market--the striver or the non-striver.¹

In actuality, consumption patterns among Negroes cannot be reduced to so simple a dichotomization. Consumer behavior of Negroes reflects individual values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as an individual's personal qualities, his orientation toward the dominant culture, and his specific response to the local economy, and to the social and physical environment. In other words, consumer behavior expresses the cultural, psychological, and social dimensions of an individual's world--essentially sociocultural in nature.

This paper demonstrates the relevance of sociocultural characterization to an understanding of the food consumption patterns of families headed by in-migrant Negro manual workers in the central city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.² The findings of this study have important applications to

current OEO policy concerns. In order to achieve the specific goals of the OEO program it is necessary to recognize and identify the various subcultural groups residing in target areas which may appear to be homogeneous communities. Progress will be made toward realization of the stated goals of the OEO program if its action programs are geared to the needs of these diverse groups.

Milwaukee's Negro Community

At the turn of the century, Milwaukee, like almost every large city, accommodated a portion of the Negro population that had participated in the massive migration from rural areas and particularly from the South to the central cities of large population areas. Since 1910 the Negro population has marked a steady increase,³ reaching 83,000 in 1966⁴--10.8 percent of the city's total population.

As has been recently pointed out by the U. S. Department of Labor, the main problem posed for the central cities by this influx is not the number or proportion of Negroes, but their spatial arrangement and their economic status. Half or more of the Negroes in most large cities in 1960 lived in census tracts in which the population was 90 percent or more Negro and in which the population density per square mile was especially high. Color is the most uniform characteristic of these Negro communities. Other socioeconomic characteristics of the population--for example, the range of income and education--are unusually heterogeneous. Milwaukee is no exception. "Because of segregation," the Labor Department states, "the residents of Negro neighborhoods tend to be more socially and economically heterogeneous but the choices available to them as consumers are more limited and more homogeneous than among whites."⁵ Segregation of the in-migrant Negro within certain census tracts of central cities promotes the development of tensions

within and outside the community, and retards the acculturation and assimilation of this racial group into major national cultural spheres. This gives rise to a multiplicity of subcultures which thrive upon the social and economic heterogeneity of the community.

Methodology

Field techniques employed in ethnological studies and in dietary surveys were followed in this study. The original population consisted of sixty-three female household heads⁶ of southern (predominantly rural) origin who resided in a specific census tract in the central city of Milwaukee. The census tract was characterized by a 75 percent Negro population with a gradual increase in Negro residency between 1940 and 1960.⁷ The heads of families originated from Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

Twenty-three of the sixty-three female household heads participating in the study were intensively interviewed. In the selection of these respondents, true randomness had to be subordinated to considerations of rapport. Measurements were made of one week's food consumption of these twenty-three families, permitting comparisons of the cost, variety, and nutritive quality of the diet. The holistic approach of anthropology, which permitted a knowledge of the culture in question, also enhanced an understanding of the food consumption and other behavioral practices of the respondent families under a wide range of circumstances.

National and racial indices of socioeconomic status were not very useful in classifying the respondents. In terms of education, occupation, type of housing, location within the city, income, and participation in the total life of the society, most residents of the area might be placed at the bottom of the tripartite class structure congruent with their semiskilled to unskilled occupational status. However, in terms

of values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, three sociocultural groups emerge. Group assignments are based on the following factors: (1) family background and farm tenancy in the South, (2) marital status and history, (3) migration pattern, (4) length of residency in Milwaukee, (5) home ownership, (6) dependency on public funds for family services, (7) church membership and affiliation, (8) leisure activities, and (9) reading habits. Two factors of value in further classification of the group yet unmeasurable in this study are leadership in church and other group life and degree of contact with the wider community.

One readily recognizes inter-group similarities within certain variables used in classifying the respondents (e.g. age, income, family size, stage in family cycle, education, and occupation; see Table 1). However, an aggregate of the sharp inter-group divergencies derived from the host of sociocultural factors aided in the establishment of definite categories.

Results and Discussion

Some salient characteristics of the three sociocultural groups are shown in Table 1. Data are included only for the twenty-three households, comprising 130 individuals that underwent intensive interviewing.

Group I. Group I was divided into two subgroups because of differences in educational achievement and in the stage of the family life cycle, despite their basically similar life styles.

The younger women in this group (Group Ia) are in their late twenties or early thirties and completed high school in a southern state. They are married to men of their age group who completed elementary school but not high school. These men are employed in heavy or light industry as unskilled or semiskilled workers and they earn an average of \$5,000 a year after taxes. The couples migrated from a rural area or small town

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS OF THE THREE SOCIOCULTURAL GROUPS

Group (Number of Families in Group)	Number of Individuals in Group	Years of Formal Education		Age		Range of Income After Taxes (dollars)	Average Annual Family Income After Taxes (dollars)	Owner Occupied Housing
		Male Head	Female Head	Male Head	Female Head			
Ia (3)	16	8-10	12	27-33	36-33	3,552-6,500	5,351	None
Ib (13)	68	2-12	8-11	35-64	30-58	3,427-13,000	6,917	50%
II (3)	29	5	6-8	30-45	37-44	4,000-6,000	4,997	None
III (4)	17	4-8	8-11	33-35	26-33	2,013-6,500	4,330	None

TABLE 1 (Continued)

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS OF THE THREE SOCIOCULTURAL GROUPS

Group	Family Size (Range)	Stage in Family Cycle ^{a)}	Occupation		Family Background and Farm Tenancy	
			of Male Head	of Female Head	Male Head	Female Head
Ia	4-9	II, III	Semiskilled and Unskilled	Housewife & Service Positions	Small farm owners Farm laborers	Small farm owners Domestic service
Ib	2-8	I, III, IV, V	Semiskilled and Unskilled	Housewife & Service Positions	Farm laborers Sharecroppers	Small farm owners Farm laborers Sharecroppers Domestic service
II	5-13	IV, VI	Unskilled	Housewife & Service Positions	Farm laborers	Farm laborers Domestic service
III	2-6	I, II, III, VI	Unskilled	Housewife & Service Positions	Farm laborers Sharecroppers	Small farm owners Sharecroppers Domestic service

a) The division into family cycles represents a modification of A. N. Tremblay's "Etude Economique et Sociale de la Ferme Familiale Paroisses Rizeraines du Comte de Kamourska." (M. S. Thesis, Laval University, Quebec Canada, 1950). The following division was used for this study: Stage I--no children, wife less than 50 years old; Stage II--one or more children, oldest under five years; Stage III--one or more children, oldest 5-19 years; Stage IV--one or more children, oldest 20 or over; Stage V--no children, wife over 50; Stage VI--widow or separated, with or without children.

TABLE 1 (Continued)

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS OF THE THREE SOCIOCULTURAL GROUPS

Group	Church Affiliation Female Head	Marital Status	State of Origin		Migration Pattern Female Head
			Male Head	Female Head	
Ia	Baptist (irregular attendance)	Married once	Mississippi Arkansas	Louisiana Arkansas	To other urban areas, finally Milwaukee
Ib	Baptist & Church of God in Christ (generally regular attendance)	Married once or twice or separated	Mississippi Alabama Tennessee Louisiana Arkansas	Mississippi Arkansas Alabama Georgia	To other urban areas, finally Milwaukee
II	Baptist (no local affiliation)	Married, widowed, separated	Mississippi Arkansas	Mississippi Arkansas	Directly to Milwaukee (majority)
III	Baptist (no local affiliation)	Itinerant "husbands"	Louisiana Mississippi	Mississippi	Directly to Milwaukee (majority)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS OF THE THREE SOCIOCULTURAL GROUPS

Group	Reading Habits	Leisure Activities	Milwaukee Residency		Public Welfare
	Female Head	Adults	Male Head	Female Head	
Ia	Newspapers Family magazines Fashions	Visiting friends Television Small house parties Small social clubs Card games (infrequently)	3	to 8 years	None
Ib	Newspapers Bible and Church literature	Dinners Visiting friends Small social clubs	7-30 years	7-29 years	None
II	None	Television	3-1/2 months	to 1 year	Food donations
III	Screen and Fashions	Card parties Beer parties Social gatherings in taverns Television	7 months	to 16 years	AFDC (majority)

in one of the represented states, then spent from six months to two years in an urban area of the South or North, before finally settling in Milwaukee some five years ago. They have from two to seven children and expect them to have "the better things in life." The neatly furnished apartments of these women feature modern furniture and indicate economical and thoughtful purchasing habits, while the many small kitchen appliances reflect an urge to compensate for the obsolete design and layout of the apartments. Replies to questions dealing with their relative position in society over a given period of time indicated that members of this subgroup are future-oriented and are highly optimistic about the future for themselves and especially for their children.

The older women of this group (Group Ib) are in their late thirties or mid-forties. Their migration pattern approximates that of the younger group, but they settled in Milwaukee about eleven years ago with the present or former mate. They completed an average of two years of high school study in their home state and their mates have an equivalent education or less. Husbands of this group are steadily employed and earn an average of \$6,000 per year after taxes. In addition to the children who may be at home, in many cases a relative, foster children, or roomers may reside with the family. Since most of the children have left home, parents feel that they can now relax and make purchases without incurring too many sacrifices. As a result, many families of this group own fairly new cars, food freezers, boats, fur pieces, pianos, and TV consoles. The increase in purchasing power is manifest by increased purchases of large pieces of furniture and a variety of household equipment. The axis of life is closer to the present than the future.

Group II. Female adults of this group fall within the middle-age bracket and are relatively recent migrants to Milwaukee. Their migration pattern was direct, partly because of family size, and partly because they entered with the intention of establishing a home in the city. They have large families--as many as eleven children. In some cases both the male and the female head are present. The median number of years of schooling is seventh grade for the woman and sixth grade for the man. Family income, dependent upon family stability and earning capacity, may be inadequate; consequently, the axis of life is generally centered around survival and adjustment to the various demands of the new environment. The accent on survival, bolstered by an air of optimism, may be recognized in the sparsely furnished but cheerful and neat interior of the apartment, as well as in statements contrasting the past with the present and with hopes for the future. Food, obtainable from certain relief organizations, and some guidance from relatives, may be the only stable sources of sustenance at this critical time. The family's ability to overcome this period of crisis and adjustment is the determining factor in its ascent from this group to Group I. Failure to surmount the many barriers to success may lead to acceptance of defeat and descent to Group III.

Group III. Generally, women of Group III may be characterized as those who, for various reasons, have failed to adjust to the requirements of the new environment and have yielded to frustration. On the average they obtained nine years of schooling and may once have been married to men who had completed five years of formal education in a southern state. The average family comprises four children and the current adult male head is an itinerate mate, either because the children are recipients of public welfare funds, because he is unemployed and has

"lost face," or because there is domestic strife. The average age of these women is thirty years. Their average income fluctuates, since it is dependent upon welfare payments, or the titular male head's presence, luck at games of chance, employment status, or generosity. Ordinarily, income increases during the spring and summer months and declines during winter when the male's income, if any, is derived mainly from unemployment compensation. Despite these fluctuations and irregularities, this group's average after-tax yearly income was \$4,000.

The majority of these women migrated directly to Milwaukee and have lived there for various periods ranging from seven months to sixteen years. The majority of families within this group obtain some form of financial support from public funds. The physical structure of their apartments and the rent are similar to those of Groups I and II; however, their interior furnishings reflect the blight of the area.

Generally, behavior patterns in every aspect of life reflect the predominant theme of mere existence; most actions are geared toward immediate gratification of needs and wants and reflect a low level of aspirations.

Food Expenditure Patterns With Reference to Sociocultural Groups

Sociocultural "status" appears to function as an important factor in determining the respondents' food selection and expenditure patterns. Table 2 illustrates how this factor is related to the distribution of money among the eleven food groups during one week in the winter of 1965-1966.

Generally, all twenty-three families may be characterized by the high proportion of their food budget devoted to meat items. Uniformities in expenditure patterns among sociocultural classes are also found among

TABLE 2

AVERAGE PERCENTAGES OF THE WEEK'S FOOD ALLOWANCE ASSIGNED TO EACH FOOD GROUP ACCORDING TO SOCIOCULTURAL CLASSIFICATION

Socio-cultural Group	FOOD GROUPS										
	Dairy Products	Meat Poultry Fish	Eggs	Peas Dry Beans Nuts	Flour Cereals Baked Goods	Potatoes	Citrus Fruits Tomatoes	Dark-Green Deep-Yellow Vegetables	Other Vegetables Fruits	Fats and Oils	Sugars and Sweets
Ia	12.06	37.55	5.08	2.73	11.37	1.85	4.41	4.96	6.19	6.09	7.73
Ib	10.56	36.97	4.41	2.45	12.51	1.54	2.95	3.00	6.03	6.30	13.02
II	5.39	42.21	5.18	2.83	14.16	1.03	.51	2.85	5.51	5.17	15.37
III	9.40	43.35	4.68	2.85	14.03	1.33	8.90	1.60	5.77	1.84	9.28
All Groups	9.87	38.84	4.44	2.60	12.93	1.47	3.90	3.00	5.68	5.27	12.00

some other food groups. Exceptions are dairy products, citrus fruits and tomatoes, dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables, and sugars and sweets. In the case of dairy products, contrasts are greatest between sociocultural Groups I and II: Group I revealed the highest percentage of expenditure for those food items despite having proportionately fewer children. There are differences among all groups in expenditure patterns for citrus fruits and tomatoes, dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables, and sugars and sweets. Extremes in expenditure patterns--low and high--are shown in Groups II and III for citrus fruits and tomatoes, respectively. Similar extremes in expenditure patterns are exhibited by Groups Ia and III for dark-green and deep-yellow vegetables, and by Groups Ia and II for sugars and sweets. An exception to their otherwise similar expenditure patterns is shown by the two subgroups of Group I in their money distribution patterns for sugars and sweets.

How relevant are the variations in food expenditure patterns to average food costs? Table 3 relates sociocultural classification to family income, size, and food costs. There is an inverse relationship between average income and the percentage of income spent on food. However, the relationship between average family size or family income and food expenditure units⁸ is not direct. Money outlay for food per food expenditure unit is more closely associated with sociocultural "status" than with other factors. This reflects the relationship of food expenditure patterns (Table 2)--and the implied food selection patterns--to sociocultural "status."

TABLE 3

FAMILY INCOME, FAMILY SIZE, AND FOOD COSTS, ACCORDING TO SOCIOCULTURAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Sociocultural Group	RANGE AND AVERAGE VALUES			
	Family Income After Taxes	Family Size	Food Expenditure Units ^{a)}	Income Spent on Food
	\$		\$	%
Ia	3,552-6,550 5,351	3 - 9 5.3	6.47 - 9.00 8.09	22.52 - 40.98 32.58
Ib	3,427-13,000	2 - 8 5.1	4.00 - 8.52 6.34	11.29 - 65.18 25.28
II	4,000-6,000 4,997	5 - 13 9.6	3.69 - 5.06 4.23	21.00 - 49.58 35.46
III	2,013-6,500 4,330	2 - 8 4.7	4.43 - 7.35 5.75	13.82 - 62.59 36.89

a) Defined in Note 7.

Meal Patterns and Diet Quality of the Three Sociocultural Groups

Meal patterns furnish a means of expressing traditional beliefs, scientific principles and convictions, and a level of living commensurate with individual or family values. Despite a basic uniformity in the overall meal pattern, many differences, reflecting the sociocultural level of respondents, exist. Table 4 relates the nutritive quality of the diet to sociocultural classification and indicates how food selection and expenditure patterns are related to diet quality.

Group I. Generally, the food selection practices of all the women in Group Ia as well as of those in Group Ib who have attended vocational school or have been exposed to principles of scientific nutrition in work situations reflect an understanding of basic nutritional concepts. Group Ia exceeded the National Research Council's recommended allowances for nutrients.⁹

A majority of the women in Group Ib exhibit conservatism and traditionalism in their food habits. For these women, variety in the meal pattern is achieved mainly through their propensity to add "new" foods to their basic southern meal pattern. This practice is in keeping with their relatively high spending power, stable income, settled way of life, and inclination to spend a good deal of money on consumer items. Their discussions of family meal patterns did not reveal a recognition of the necessity to plan and consume balanced meals. Generally, the diets of members of this group met or exceeded NRC recommendations for calories and for all nutrients but calcium; however, some individual households were low in all nutrients except protein and thiamine.

Group II. The meal pattern of this group accents the traditional southern pattern. This may be due to its members' relatively recent migration and their consequent low level of adjustment to the new environment. Age, family size, and income are important variables accounting

TABLE 4

NUTRITIVE QUALITY OF THE DIET ACCORDING TO SOCIOCULTURAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Socio-cultural Group	Percentage of Households Receiving Designated Levels of Food Energy and Eight Nutrients on the Basis of the Recommended Dietary Allowances								
	Calories	Calcium		Iron	Vitamin A Value	Riboflavin	Niacin	Ascorbic Acid	
	a)	a)	b)	a)	a)	a)	a)	a)	b)
Ia	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Ib	8	31	31	--	15	8	8	23	15
II	33	--	100	33	33	33	--	33	67
III	--	--	25	--	--	--	--	--	25

a) 66.66-99.99 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowances.

b) Below 66.66 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowances.

for the continuation of procedures of food preparation and patterns of food consumption learned in the southern milieu. Generally, members of this group met or exceeded NRC recommended levels of all nutrients except calcium and ascorbic acid; however, some individual households were low in all nutrients except protein and thiamine.

Group III. Irregularity, inconsistency, and speed in preparation seem to be the dominant themes affecting the meal patterns of this group. Much money is spent on food, but such expenditure is cyclical. This results in a period of high food consumption and a varied diet when finances permit, followed by a period of low food consumption and a monotonous diet. The fluctuating diet may be due to a tendency to spend a great deal of money on food whenever money is available, as this seems to offer a measure of security against future lean days.

Values sanction the expenditure of a minimum amount of time in meal preparation and the incorporation of many prepared, semi-prepared, and ready-to-serve items in the menu. Members of this group met or exceeded NRC allowances for all nutrients; however some individual households were slightly below recommended levels of calcium and ascorbic acid.

Conclusions

Food consumption patterns as recognized through expenditure patterns, food selection, meal plans, and diet quality, are relevant to many aspects of family life style and to the psychological, cultural, and social dimensions of an individual's world. Although the source, level, and regularity of income provide a measure of security to families, income per se is not necessarily definitive in either assessing or predicting the consumer behavior of in-migrant Negro families. The

additional factor of educational level is also of limited value where male household heads--the traditional family breadwinners--have relatively little schooling and usually less than their wives. The combined factors of financial security and life style, as analyzed in this study, are useful in identifying groups whose culture is undergoing change, and in understanding their behavior in the marketplace.

Notes

1. For a discussion of Negro market orientations see Raymond A. Bauer, Scott M. Cunningham, and Lawrence H. Wortzel, "The Marketing Dilemma of Negroes," Journal of Marketing, Vol. 29 (July 1965), 1-6.
2. Persons interested in additional details of this study should consult the author's Ph.D. dissertation, "Food Habits and Acculturation: Dietary Practices and Nutrition of Families Headed by Southern-Born Negroes Residing in a Northern Metropolis," University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1967.
3. Charles T. O'Reilly, "The Inner Core-North: A Study of Milwaukee's Negro Community," (The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Extension Division, 1963), 2.
4. Milwaukee Health Department, Vital Statistics Division.
5. U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Negroes in the United States: Their Economic and Social Situation," Bulletin No. 1511 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 3. This bulletin is a comprehensive treatise on the mobility patterns and socioeconomic status of the Negro population.
6. "Female household head" refers to the responsible adult woman of the household, not necessarily to the main financial supporter as designated in the U. S. Census.
7. O'Reilly, op. cit., 6.
8. A food expenditure unit was determined by dividing the amount of money spent for the family's food by the number of expenditure units per family, each adult being equivalent to one unit, each child under six years of age to .6 unit, and each child six to twelve years of age to .9 unit.
9. Levels of nutrients recommended by the National Research Council, for various sex and age groupings, as revised in 1963.

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1. Bauer, Raymond A., Scott M. Cunningham, and Lawrence H. Wortzel, "The Marketing Dilemma of Negroes," Journal of Marketing, Vol. 29 (July 1965), 1-6.
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