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A study of twenty-one British war bride cases from the Boston Provident Association

Constable, Olivia

Boston University

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Boston University
A STUDY OF TWENTY-ONE BRITISH WAR BRIDE CASES
FROM THE BOSTON PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION

A Thesis

Submitted by
Olivia Constable
1949
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CHAPTER I

SOME REMARKS ABOUT BRITISH GIRLS
WHO BECAME BRIDES OF AMERICAN SERVICEMEN

A large number of servicemen who, during World War II, were in England or other parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations, married British brides. As far as social agencies or British Consulates are aware, by far the larger part of these marriages have been successful. This assumption is made on the basis of the girls' non-appearance for assistance. We have no means of estimating the strains under which many of them may be living. We can only assume that those who do not apply directly for help with their problems are more or less able to handle them adequately. We shall go into numbers later. At this point it may be useful to consider the general background of these marriages and try to see what particular factors may be expected to be strengths or weaknesses in them.

Since the 1914-1918 war there have been markedly less men than women in England. Marriage has therefore for many years been somewhat more competitive from a woman's point of view there than in the United States. Parties to which more boys are invited than girls and 'stag lines' are there unknown. This may be one of the reasons for a more painstaking social manner among American young men and among English girls. Small attentions such as the giving of "corsages" are not the custom for these girls, and they and the manner that goes with them are not taken for granted as is usual here.
As is well known, the American army uniform was during the war
of far better cut and quality than the British. In fact, the private's
uniform approached the British officers' quite closely, while the
British Tommy's outfit looked extremely coarse by comparison. The
American pay was so much greater that to English eyes they all seemed
rich men.

We must also remember that the "American Invasion" of England
took place after the English had been for a long time at war, many
men had been killed, terrible bombing had been endured, shortages and
restrictions of all kinds were everywhere; and America must have
looked even more desirable, safe, rich, and full of promise than usual.

When these young men came away from home, many of them were in a
happy-go-lucky frame of mind which made them even more attractive to
girls than they might have been in their normal home frame of mind.
This may, with the factors above, account for the twenty thousand il-
legitimate children they left in England. Some of the marriages ap-
pear to have been contracted in somewhat of a holiday spirit, and to
have been rejected by the men on their return home. Some even seemed
to think they were no more binding than Pinkerton felt his to be with
Madame Butterfly. We have quite a few of these on record, but as our
study is to be concerned with brides whose marriage was accepted at
least as legal marriage by their husbands, we cannot consider them
here.

In spite of enormous advances in social services and in levelling
of classes in England, brought about politically and by the uniting
experiences of total war, there is still far more class consciousness there than here. It is carried into more elaborate detail and jealously guarded, sometimes, in its subtle distinctions. Members of the lower-middle class are extremely aware of their social superiority to the laboring class and their daughters would, in many cases, not care to mix with their sons. This is the rigid class, with its hard-won prestige. Accent is almost a social label in England, not a geographical one as it is in the United States. Before the war it was impossible for anyone with certain elements in his speech to rise from the middle to the upper class. Since Labor peers and cabinet members are more numerous and since the general shake-up of the war, this is less absolute. But among the English one can still observe a wariness suggestive of the approach of strange dogs at a lamp post, which is very foreign in this country except in certain very small groups on the Eastern Seaboard.

It may be helpful to an understanding of these attitudes to observe the feeling of superiority which most people here have towards domestic servants. It is this kind of snobbery which is elaborated in England. A small shop-keeper's daughter might look down upon a filling station attendant in the same way as sales personnel appears to feel superior to household help. It is fairly easy by this analogy to translate the feelings of social superiority into American terms, but less easy to understand the corresponding feelings of inferiority in certain classes in England. Here, any traveller may see that a well-to-do man considers himself superior to the garage attendant, but there
is nothing to show that the garage attendant feels himself inferior to the bank president—he only feels less fortunate. In England it is often sadly easy to see that while the better classes feel as they do here, the less well-placed are clearly aware of not-belonging and being inferior.

This subject has been treated at some length because it accounts for some of the difficulties in adjustment which we shall see in the cases that follow and in the girls' relations to one another over here.

We also observe a fairly frequent tendency to use the snob value of being English, in this part of the country, to exaggerate their home background. This background may often be very simple, but the girl may be unable to resist enhancing it. The case of Mrs. W, which is not being used in our study because it does not fall into the selected group, illustrates this tendency. To quote from her record:

International Social Service arranged for a home visit before Mrs. W's return to England. Their worker's report states, "the family is on a marginal level economically but close-knit and eager for Mrs. W's return." The Boston Provid- ident Association worker records: "She was constantly trying to raise her social status in our eyes by exaggerating her family background in England and assuming false airs. However, her poor English construction and her cheap taste in jewelry and dress belied the reports she gave us."

Racial discrimination, on the other hand, is much less customary there. Jewish blood is not necessarily a drawback, is often not considered, and there is no segregation of Italian or other national groups. The negro problem does not exist, and before the war a country child would turn to stare at the rare spectacle of a black man. People are not conscious of Greek or Italian origin. When, therefore,
these handsome dark men in their expensive uniforms with well-lined pockets made love to the deprived lower-middle or working class girls in England, it would not have entered their heads that these men might belong to groups which are not accepted on an equality with the corresponding Anglo-Saxon group in their home town in America. These young men who come from Mediterranean cultures have strong family feeling and would have told the girls how wonderful their parents were in glowing terms, but would probably omit to mention that the mother could not speak English and that the family still live in their national setting. In the movies the American home is nowadays not always shown as palatial and most of the sensible girls expected the simplicity they had often seen in pictures of small-town working-class living. Few of them would ever have seen pictures of the first-generation Italian tenements which were the homes of these handsome, well-dressed Americans.

It is perhaps because of this basic misunderstanding that so large a proportion of our Boston war-bride case load is among this particular foreign background group. Mrs. Scotson, at the British Consulate, puts their difficulties down to inability to find separate accommodation, mother-in-law trouble, homesickness, and incompatibility with the "Italian tendency to grand opera approach," in that order. Because we have access to all the records of this group of cases, we have selected them for study; and we shall attempt to see to what extent this estimate of their difficulties is true.
The twenty-one cases are from the files of the Boston Provident Association. They have been selected because they represent the whole case load in their particular field. That is to say, cases referred to the agency and accepted for service, each with a case record, in which the husband is an American Army veteran of first generation Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, or Armenian family and the wife a British girl who met him while he was serving overseas.

The writer worked in this agency for two winters and knew personally five of the brides. For the rest, the agency generously gave her access to its case material, and the workers concerned were most helpful.
CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND
LIMITATIONS OF THE FIELD UNDER STUDY

In the Boston area, the Red Cross, English-Speaking Union, and British Consulate have had cognizance of most of the British brides' arrivals. There has been, however, no formal record kept and it is not possible to give figures at all exactly. According to the English-Speaking Union estimate, which is supported by the Consul General's office, some twenty-five hundred to three thousand British girls, either wives or fiancées of service men, came to the New England area. The Boston Metropolitan Chapter of the Red Cross has no records of numbers. They gave brief service, where necessary, at the time of arrival but where case work was involved they were referred to the Boston Provident Association. Many of these girls may only have passed through here and may be scattered far away.

The English-Speaking Union runs a "British Brides' Club," and their register contains some six hundred and twenty names and addresses, while about a thousand have had some sort of contact with this association. They mostly formed this contact as a result of publicity given to the Union's activities on their behalf on a social level. Some were referred by the International Institute and some through the Red Cross while others were contacted by the Union because their names appeared on the passenger lists of boats docking here in Boston. The number in the register does not, however, repre-
sent the number on the active list. There are about two hundred receiving notices regularly and one hundred well known to the Club.

The Consul General's office and the executive secretary of the English-Speaking Union agree that of the total number of brides in the area, about one hundred have had difficulties for which they have sought professional assistance; of these about fifty only have been very serious. About half of these are the Latin background group selected for study.

The "Club" is an informal group open to all British war brides and meets once a week at the English-Speaking Union headquarters. They meet in the afternoon, their children are welcomed also, and tea is served. The responsibility for the running of this plan rested at first entirely with the members of the English-Speaking Union—a paying membership devoted to the promotion of goodwill in the English-speaking world. It has been most interesting to observe the gradual shift in the girls' attitude, from one of passive desire to be led to a wish to handle their own affairs. Now they run their teas, and indeed all their activities, without assistance. They have organized sales, and so on, to raise the necessary money. They give each other baby showers and form a really friendly background for new or homesick members. The secretary has observed, however, that they do not work easily together. They have such brutal frankness that it is quite difficult for them to function as a group. This is a national characteristic and is probably the reason why there are few women's clubs and similar women's group activities in England. However, they show
great capacity for improvement in this respect. For some time a social worker from the Boston Provident Association, a family agency, attended the teas every week, with the author occasionally assisting her. Problems which the girls discussed with her, when they seemed to need agency assistance, were then handled from the office.

The British Consul-General had a large number of appeals for help, mostly from girls wishing to get divorces or to go back home. There seems to exist a widespread impression in England that divorce in America is very easy to obtain. However, divorces cannot be obtained in England in the absence of the husband, and it has been the duty of the Consulate to enlighten the wives in this respect. The divorce has to be obtained here before they leave. It has been the policy of the Consulate to refer all such requests to the Boston Provident Association for case work, and a close working arrangement has been in force for several years. This agency was selected partly because it has access to special funds for the use of Britons in need.

A study of the total war brides case load in the agency shows that some have been referred from other sources, a few from the Red Cross—which carried only brief-service cases in this field, the graver ones requiring consular help having been routed to the Boston Provident Association. Some have been referred directly through friends of the agency or through miscellaneous sources.

The problems for which the referral has been made show little or no homogeneity, except in the group selected. The rest of the group seems to present a range of marital and other difficulties which might
be met in any family agency records, and their numbers are too small to have any statistical value in so wide a field of troubles. We do seem to find, however, certain recurring patterns in the selected group, and as this represents the whole group there may be some validity in our observations. Three cases required service not involving family conflict: these are included in order to cover the whole group, and each does give some background. But we should be conscious of these three in evaluating numerical instances of conflictual factors, such as physical abuse, in our study.

We shall name our cases A to U, in order to conceal their identity, and will first present two cases, F and G, in some detail because these two are strikingly similar and both show a large number of the factors which predominate in the whole group.
CHAPTER III

CASE MATERIAL

Summary of G. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant, becoming Roman Catholic to marry.

Mrs. G was referred indirectly by the Red Cross where she had gone for help with marital difficulties. She is an attractive, immature-looking English girl of twenty-eight, with light brown hair.

She met Mr. G, a first generation Italian-American of thirty-seven, in England and went out with him nightly for a week, when he was sent to the Continent.

He courted her for two years by mail but returned to America without seeing her again. The courtship culminated in his sending her her passage money and her agreement to come over to marry him. She went direct to his home-town upon arrival, but on seeing him and his own setting realized at once that she did not love him and could not accept the cultural pattern of his home.

She was greatly disturbed and unable to turn to anyone for help because she was living with his people in a remote city and knew no one with whom she could talk. Mr. G and his family finally persuaded her

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1 All ages given are those at time of marriage.
to "take a chance" and marry him. After less than a week of marriage, which she found intolerable, a quarrel occurred in which he ordered her from his home.

She had no idea that divorce would not be easy to obtain, and came to Boston to her war-bride sister with a view to returning to England and starting divorce proceedings there. She came to the Boston Provident Association for financial assistance in carrying out this plan.

The impossibility of securing a divorce in England in this way was explained to her, and the case worker gave her temporary financial assistance and helped her to find a job which very soon made her independent of this.

The question of adjusting her attitude towards her husband and his family was then carefully explored. She was absolutely firm in her refusal to accept either.

She herself came of a lower-middle class, highly respectable background. Her small family lived in a single house in a quiet street and "kept themselves to themselves." She was brought up in the Church of England but became a Roman Catholic to marry Mr. G.

Mrs. G, Senior, never accepted her as a person, although taking her son's side in forcing her into the marriage. She took all the money Mrs. G had brought from England for board and gave her back none at all to spend.

The family had a small English vocabulary, spoke mostly Italian, and had few interests. The household was noisy and there was much ex-
cited shouting in Italian. The English girl had to eat Italian food which, in a more travelled class among her compatriots, is much appreciated, but which was as foreign and distasteful to her rigid provincialism as was the general atmosphere.

After marriage there was no question of living alone with her husband. She merely occupied his bed. As he did not find her very satisfactory there, apparently, he had no further use for her and wished only to be rid of her.

Religious scruples do not seem to have interfered with the desire of both for divorce; the case worker therefore assisted her in getting legal advice and a divorce was eventually granted.

This young woman, frightened and immature, gained confidence with financial security, and the agency lost contact with her. She did not wish for intensive case work, but accepts American life well and is happily employed here.

Summary of F. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant.

Mrs. F came from England at the age of nineteen to marry Mr. F, an Italian-American veteran of twenty-five.

She was referred to the Boston Provident Association for case work by a fellow member of the British Brides' Club with whom she had discussed her attempts at abortion and also her general marital unhappiness.

She is a slim blonde girl with a child's prettiness and a somewhat petulant expression. Her family in England is a rather unhappy one
though adequate socially and financially. She appears to have had a poor relationship with her parents but a fairly good one with her sister, her only sibling. Her parents would not be willing to have her back home, and the sister to whom she wrote asking for a welcome was also unwilling to receive her in her home. This young girl came over to marry her fiance, Mr. F., a handsome young man to whom she had become engaged in England, while practising her profession as a dancing teacher.

When she arrived at his home she knew at once that she could not marry him. Seventeen people lived in his family home, most of whom spoke Italian, though her fiance's mother could speak some English. She describes them as "peasants" with extreme bitterness, and some accuracy—as this worker was able to observe them on a home visit.

The family all "ganged up" on her and talked to her until two in the morning, attempting to make her marry Mr. F. He himself kissed and petted her into agreeing to "try it." He promised her an apartment and had already bought some furniture for it, convincing her of his good faith. After a three-day honeymoon they returned to Water-town, and no more was said about the apartment. The furniture was sold, and Mrs. F. was obliged to live with her in-laws. The Brides' Club was her only relaxation, and her unhappiness was acute. She soon became pregnant and rejected it violently. She spent thirty dollars at the local drugstore attempting to abort, but without success.

Two or three home visits by the case worker reduced her extreme tension; and she then gave the details recorded above. She spoke with
great bitterness of her own parents and of her parents-in-law, especially complaining of her husband's attachment to his mother. The worker tried to arrange pre-natal care for her, but she would not accept any plan for it. She was coldly civil to her mother-in-law, but had no affection for anyone that the worker could observe, and did not relate well to her, being unwilling to accept case work on anything but a superficial level.

After a few months Mr. F was able to find a furnished room and then the situation began to improve. Mrs. F became willing to accept a referral for pre-natal care and gradually accepted her pregnancy. When the child was born both she and her husband were united in joy over it. She now seems reasonably happy with him but entirely rejects his family and says proudly that she has broken his own attachment to them.

Comment:

These two cases have been given together because they have such marked similarities. Many of their characteristics will appear in the cases which follow, but not many have quite so much in common; although the outcome for the younger F couple was so different from the divorce of the G's, their situation and the factors involved, which will be listed later, are strikingly alike.

The rest of the cases will be summarized in alphabetical order.
Summary of A. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-eight-year-old Italian husband came to the agency referred by the British Consulate to get help in trying to get his British bride to return to him. He had married her in England, in the Church of England, and brought her to America, in 1944, aged seventeen. When here they had been remarried in the Roman Catholic Church because Mr. A did not feel the English marriage was valid. His wife did not accept his ideas on this and went through with the second marriage unwillingly. After a short period of married life, in their own home apart from his family, Mrs. A asked to go home. He understood that his very young wife was homesick and paid her passage back. She has since written him harsh letters saying she will not return and asking for a divorce. He appeared to be bewildered and cannot agree to her wishes.

He told the worker that his parents are dead and he was brought up by his grandmother, to whom he appeared intensely devoted. She did not object to his foreign bride, at least overtly accepting her. The difficulty may lie in the sexual field. He said several times that she was so young and inexperienced, he had had to go very gently with her. He claimed only to have had intercourse once with her in their first week of marriage. He showed the worker her cold letters, in which she said she had "proved her ability as a wife" but wished to have nothing more to do with him.
Through International Social Service a family worker went to visit Mrs. A at her parents' home in England. She received a cold refusal when offering her services, and a repetition of the statement that her ability as a wife had been shown, that nothing further was possible, and strangers should keep out of her affairs. The English agency worker reported her home as being a rigid lower-middle class one.

In view of this, the agency felt unable to carry out any plan and the case was closed.

Comment:

It is not possible to record many of the factors in this case about which we would like to know. We had short contact with the husband and a short, indirect, and unsatisfactory interview with the wife. We observe great dependence on the grandmother, who clearly represents his mother to Mr. A, and we do not know how she actually treated young Mrs. A. Nor do we know whether Mr. A was really understanding in his sexual approach to his wife, or whether she is frigid. Her letters, her attitude to the English worker, and her rigid-appearing family set-up may suggest the latter. The husband struck the Boston worker as gentle and probably considerate, also supporting this hypothesis.

Summary of B. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This nineteen-year-old, red-haired English girl was referred by the Red Cross on account of marital difficulties. The Red Cross
worker asked the agency to provide a neutral ground on which these two young people could meet to discuss their problems.

Mr. B, aged twenty-three, had married Mrs. B in England. She was a war widow with a three-year-old girl.

He had then returned to the United States and had tried to get her to join him. She had, however, refused and had spent the passage money he had sent her. Both had then started divorce proceedings. The young woman had suddenly notified Mr. B of her impending arrival, and he had gone to the Red Cross for advice, knowing that if his wife lived with him here, his divorce proceedings would be nullified. His support had been irregular, and she had sent him such rude letters that he had ceased to want her.

The case worker had both young people and the husband's brother in her office to discuss plans. It was agreed that the brother and his wife would take her in, the husband sleeping elsewhere.

The divorce was continued and finally granted. Mrs. B sailed home, again prepaid, on a basis of gradual repayment by a reduced support check, eight dollars a week having been ordered by the court.

This young man had an unsettled family background with Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children record. His father had had a breakdown and there was no steady income in the family.

Mr. B seemed more accessible to case work than did his wife, but he was a vacillating character who had a poor work record and appeared unable to decide whether he wanted a divorce or not. He admitted that he had another girl friend. His ex-wife returned to England again
pregnant, but this did not affect the divorce, though it may cast more light on the unstable attitudes involved. Her family was willing to receive her. This girl appeared to have very little warmth in her relationships and did not accept case work nor form a good rapport with the worker, her brother-in-law, or his wife. She did not complain of the Italian background nor of homesickness in the United States.

Comment:

This case shows, as do almost all the cases under consideration, that the religious background of the husband does not affect his attitude toward divorce.

Summary of C. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-three-year-old, red-haired English girl came from a quiet, middle-class family to marry her twenty-eight-year-old Italian-American fiancé.

She found she was expected to live with his family of sixteen people in an eleven-room house. The mother-in-law is a kindly woman who seemed to welcome her but showed no understanding of her different needs and occasionally refused to speak to her for days together. Her worst difficulty was absolute lack of privacy. The young couple had a room to themselves, but the mother-in-law did not permit the door of it to be closed. The family of all ages screamed and shouted and the bride felt she would go mad. The Italian food also upset her.
null
Her husband was immature, dependent on his mother, and said himself he was not ready for marriage, and doesn't love a woman after he has 'had what he wants.' He pets his wife when she cries but resents her depending at all upon him, and is violent to her but not abusive.

She appears to have made a tremendous effort to adjust to all this and spoke in a controlled way about it. She said her husband had promised her an apartment and had bought furniture (using all the two hundred and fifty dollars she had brought with her), but had rented the apartment and sold the furniture. He gave up his job and lived by gambling. He never spoke of money matters to her, and she was afraid to open the subject because of his violent temper. She feels she knows nothing about him. But she said, "Even if he breaks his promises again and again, my anger melts away when I look into his brown eyes."

Mrs. C. eventually decided to return to England, with her baby which was born eight months and one week after the marriage.

He requested her to return to him, and she did so. The situation appears to be about as before, the case is now open, and the wife is being helped in all areas by the worker, who is assisting in changing the living arrangements.

Comment:

This twenty-one-year-old girl has shown remarkable powers of adaptability. She looks neat and pretty, shows no outward sign of strain, and cares beautifully for her baby. Her manners are charming.
Her comment about looking into his brown eyes and feeling her anger melt away is illuminating and probably applies to a great many of these situations, though she was the only one to define it in words.

Summary of D. Case

This forty-five-year-old Italian-American husband married a twenty-one-year-old bride in England. It is a short record because the marriage is a happy one and the problem only one of assistance in returning to England to visit the father and settle business matters on the death of the wife's mother. The referral was a personal one. The couple live alone with their baby and are apparently well adjusted in spite of the difference in age. He has no family nearby. Mrs. D comes from a happy middle-class background. She is much larger and more commanding than her husband and although clearly the boss, she defers to him. The service rendered was superficial but adequate and the case closed.

Comment:

This case is only recorded in order to include the whole of this particular group handled by the agency. Unfortunately, we do not know any further particulars.

Summary of E. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant, becoming Roman Catholic

This young couple presented no marital conflict. They were mar-
ried in England; the wife, a blonde twenty-one-year-old Protestant girl, became a Catholic in order to marry her Italian-American twenty-three-year-old husband. Her parents sent over to enquire about their prospective son-in-law before the marriage took place, and were informed that he came of a family of good Italian standing. He is an only and much loved child, but his parents are not possessive and do not interfere with his marriage. The young couple live alone.

They applied for agency help in getting the wife's sister over and for assistance in a Veterans Administration rating problem, requiring no case work service.

Comment:

Like the preceding case, though lacking much desirable information, this is included for completeness of sample.

Summary of H. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-three-year-old re-haired girl was referred to the agency by a hospital social worker, for help with her hospital bill.

She married her twenty-four-year-old Spanish-American husband in Australia where he was on war service. Her family is a prosperous and happy one, and they approve of her marriage. She loves her husband and is 'lost without him.' He is in a Veterans Administration hospital with tuberculosis.

She lived with her in-laws who were 'kind' to her, but they yell,
scream, and quarrel, and have the radio on full blast most of the time. This made her unhappy and lonely. But her husband told the medical social worker that she is brooding and emotional and better, in his opinion, living with his family.

Mrs. H was unwilling to tell her family in Australia of her unhappiness for fear of distressing them; though anxious for advice and assistance in planning, she did not wish to accept money from the agency.

Later she made a plan for herself, to live with another Australian bride in another state. Her husband, seen again by the medical social worker, said he now thought this best, and that he had come to see that his family had probably not been good to her. He was later discharged and has broken with his family and plans to set up housekeeping with his wife.

Comment:

We see considerable maturity in this young wife, who did not wish to distress her parents, and was able to make a plan for herself to tide over her husband's absence, and even in her unsupported state she did not take money from the agency. The outlook is good for this young couple.

Summary of I. Case

Husband, Greek Orthodox - Wife, Protestant

Referred by the secretary of the English-Speaking Union, this
young English woman married her Greek-American husband when she was twenty-three and he twenty-one years old. They married in England where he was stationed. She is a light-brown-haired, quiet person of lower-middle class, with evident affection for her young husband.

She was pregnant at the time of referral and needed help in planning her future after discharge from her confinement. Her Greek-speaking parents-in-law, with whom she had at first lived, entirely rejected her and had finally turned her out of their home. Her husband, a round-faced, extremely immature-appearing boy, had accompanied her without apparent affect, and they were living in a furnished room at the time of the agency worker's visit. He had given all his army money to his mother and expected to be supported by her. His wife had helped him to secure a soda-fountain clerk's job, where he behaved with childish jocularity but which he kept, and through which they paid their way. His intelligence seemed limited, but he was good-humoured and fond of his wife.

Neither wanted case work, nor would they come to the agency for help with planning. Contact was lost and the case closed.

Comment:

This boy is perhaps the most immature of the whole group. He seemed perfectly willing to shift his total dependence from his mother to his wife, who fortunately seemed herself mature enough and fond enough to shoulder it.
Summary of J. Case

Husband, Greek Orthodox - Wife, Protestant

This case was referred as an emergency by the secretary of the English-Speaking Union. Mr. J, an Armenian-American, had come in in search of his wife who had been out all night and he was in a frantic condition.

It appeared that he had married his blonde, eighteen-year-old wife at a registry office in England when he was twenty-two. He had not wished her to come to America, did not feel ready for marriage, and several times referred to her as his 'girl friend.' He now totally rejected the marriage but at the same time felt a jealous fury at her cheating him.

She had left her in-laws' home after a quarrel and had not returned, though she had told her husband she was going to the Brides' Club. She applied the same day to the consulate for assistance and was sent over to the agency.

She was a very pretty, heavily made-up, peroxide-aided natural blonde who told substantially the same story as her husband.

The worker tried to arrange temporary accommodation for her, but she was more interested in financial help and quite resistive to case work. She showed no desire to save her marriage. She described her mother-in-law as a 'loathly old witch.' Her husband had given her a black eye (visible to the worker), did not seem to want her, and spent no time with her because he worked all day and studied at college in the evenings. He told her he could not afford a wife and gave all his
money to his mother who gave her none. Her mother-in-law spoke only Armenian to him, and she could hear her own name frequently in their conversation. The food was distasteful to her; she had to eat raw meat balls, an Armenian dish, she told the worker. She was not homesick, but wished to be rid of her husband.

When the worker could not help her on a cash basis only, she left the agency and did not get in touch with the worker. Some time later a newspaper article said she had appeared in court with a sailor, charged with registering with him in a downtown hotel in violation of the true name law. Her husband had been summoned, and the reporter stated that she and he had left the court as 'friends.'

Later she appeared at the consulate, without job or funds. They sent her back to the agency. She told the worker that her husband had divorced her some months previously and that she had been earning her living singing in night clubs. She was, however, in charge of the probation officer since her court appearance, and had been hampered in her work by him because, her age being only nineteen, she was legally forbidden to work in certain places. She was entirely resistive to case work, again wanting only money.

She disappeared again. The worker learned from the probation officer that she had gone off with a theatrical touring company. Both agency and consulate felt that should she reappear for assistance they would hesitate to give it because of her unwillingness to cooperate.
Comment:

It was the opinion of all who tried to work with this pretty, wayward girl that she had been a prostitute before her marriage and continued to be one after its failure, which was probably not her fault.

Summary of K. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This English bride of a Portuguese-American applied to the consulate for assistance in returning to England. She was a divorced wife of twenty-four and he thirty-eight when she came to this country to marry him, as the alleged father of the child she was shortly to bear. She had two children, with her, by her former husband.

Mr. K accepted his paternity and married her in a civil ceremony as he was a Roman Catholic. He also paid for her transportation here.

The mother-in-law was a chronic invalid, with very little English. She rejected violently her divorced daughter-in-law, and threatened that she would die if not relieved of the strain.

The husband became much discouraged, complained also of her, and started drinking. He was throughout a good father. Mrs. K appeared to be very fond of him, but the situation became so difficult that she finally returned to her family, who paid the fare.

She had at first lived with her husband's sister, then in an attic which she complained was inadequate and that she had a 'cute' home in England which she would greatly prefer. The worker reported
that this attic was indeed peeling and a very poor dwelling.

While waiting for her passage she was not supported by her husband and the agency helped her to find a job. While working, she showed a marked personality deterioration. The worker, who had not seen the husband but had spoken with him on the telephone and commented on his very smooth voice and manner, states that this personality change "may show the husband had some grounds for his complaints."

Comment:

"This is one of the very few cases indicating any religious feeling in either party. It seems clear that this Portuguese man is torn between affection for his wife and child and loyalty to his mother and the religion he shares with her; the conflict seemed insoluble to him and he sank into depression and drunkeness.

Summary of L. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This young woman was seventeen at the time she married her twenty-five-year-old Italian-American husband in England. Her family was simple but her home kind and adequate. She was employed as a tailoress. Her coloring is medium. Her husband promised her an apartment, but when she arrived she had to live with her sister-in-law and sleep in the same room. Only a curtain divided their bed from hers, and Mr. L made "excessive sexual demands" upon her. She complained bitterly of this and of his lack of other interest in her and
of the absence of privacy, and went to the consulate for a divorce.

Case work and assistance in finding adequate accommodation were attempted, but Mrs. L was resistive and difficult to help. She was pregnant at this time. She went South for the birth of the child and deserted it shortly after. (A psychiatric test after court action showed low intelligence and poor group relationships.) While there she enlisted the sympathies of several elderly ladies, who did not know about the baby, and who raised funds for her fare back to England.

Had she not been able, through her youthful appeal, to get this backing, she might have been deported because of her low intelligence and desertion of her child.

Comment:

We do not have enough evidence to evaluate the reality of the young woman's complaints. We do have evidence of her own inadequacy, but if her story is true, she was placed in a situation which few seventeen-year-old girls could have handled.

Summary of M. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This tall, blonde young woman was twenty when she married her handsome Italian twenty-year-old husband in England. Two children were born. Both husband and wife seemed extremely young when they applied to the consulate for divorce and were referred to the Boston
Provident Association. The worker there interviewed them both, and found them quarrelling but loving.

The principal trouble was the wife's jealousy of a possessive mother-in-law, with whom, however, she was on quite good terms. The husband's attachment to his mother seemed excessive but not abnormal.

Short, intensive case work helped these young people to settle their differences and the case was closed with excellent prognosis for their continued adjustment.

Comment:

This case presents the classic picture of successful marital counselling. The young couple had reached the end of their endurance and thought they wished to part. The case worker saw the strengths in their marriage, saw the problems which threatened and almost overwhelmed it, and helped them to save it by case work which is a joy to read.

Summary of N. Case

Husband, Greek Orthodox - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-two-year-old, fair-haired English girl married her Greek-American, twenty-three-year-old husband in England. He had told her he would give her her own home here but she and her child found they had to live with his mother. Her husband re-enlisted in the army, and her mother-in-law was 'impossible' to her, she stated. She also was unable to eat the Greek food. She applied to the consulate
for assistance in planning divorce because, though she loved and wanted him, her husband said he did not want her and did not want to return. He sent her no money but supported the child through his mother. Later he rejected the child also.

She likes the United States and wished to remain. She finally returned to England, without any improvement in her situation.

Comment:

This girl was in great distress and appeared adequately mature to the worker. She loved her husband, who may have been influenced to re-enlist by his mother, who clearly had great power over him and who, from the first, bitterly rejected this blonde foreigner. Had the husband been present, it might have been possible for a wise case worker to have helped him detach himself from his mother and assume his role as husband and father.

Summary of O. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-four-year-old Italian-American married his English seventeen-year-old wife in England. She came of a small-business family with happy relationships.

On arrival here she found the Italian-speaking family with which she was expected to live "coarse, noisy, abusive, and ignorant." Her husband found her lazy and childish, preferring to read magazines than to cook and clean. He provided a separate dwelling for her as she ob-
jected so much to his family, but he refused to give her money for housekeeping. He was frequently bad-tempered and abusive to her.

She finally left him, taking their child, and applied to the consulate for divorce. The agency worker paid a home visit, as Mrs. O had no one with whom to leave the child, and found her neat and friendly with a beautifully kept child.

She told the worker that his ignorance was one of the things that was most troublesome to her in her husband. She herself had worked for the Kodak Company but though she knew more about photography than he did, this was his hobby and he was unwilling to admit her superiority. She was willing to conceal it also. She told the worker that intolerable as she found her life, she would never be happy with a boring husband and found this one 'the exciting type.'

The worker concentrated on reconciliation and saw both husband and wife. Unfortunately, this created suspicion in both; though considerable progress was made, the case is closed. The couple is reconciled but probably only superficially.

Comment:

Here we see a very young girl who is unable to cope with her Italian in-laws. She is lazy, as her husband said, and childish while under their domination. After she had left them we observe that she is neat, clean, a good mother, and able to plan for herself.

Although the difficulties are very great, this marriage shows certain strengths which may save it.
Summary of P. Case
Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

This twenty-year-old English girl had married her twenty-one-year-old Italian-American husband in England and had joined him here two years later.

A year after that she had had a child and was in difficulties over paying the hospital bill for her confinement. The referral came in two ways: her parents in England contacted the British Consul here because they had no news of her for many months; and the medical social worker at the lying-in hospital also referred her for assistance with her bill (through the Red Cross). She was greatly comforted by having a letter home written for her. She said she had been so confused at the time of the child's birth and so worried by fear of inability to pay for it that she had let the weeks go by without writing. She was not basically unhappy, however.

Her mother-in-law, with whom the young couple lived, was good to her. She worked herself, and so did her husband. He seemed a shadowy figure for whom the wife and mother took joint responsibility.

The case is still open. More problems than have appeared probably exist, but for the present the situation is calm and apparently happy, the bill having been settled and the parents' anxiety set at rest.

Comment:
Contact was too brief and service too superficial for us to know much about this case.
**Summary of Case**

**Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant**

This highly complex case involves a twenty-three-year-old English graduate nurse, who married a twenty-six-year-old Italian-American in England. A boy was born there the following year. Three years after marriage she was able to join her husband here, and a second child was born a year later.

At first things went fairly well, and her relations with her in-laws have remained superficially good throughout. But she was amazed at their ignorance and Italian ways. She managed to get her husband to provide a separate home for her and the children, though he broke his promises to do so several times. She wished to live as far away as possible because, as she said, "Although he is Americanized on the surface, when he is with his family he takes on some of their mannerisms."

He physically abused her considerably, and at the birth of the little girl she found he had infected her with venereal disease. She was especially upset by this, being a nurse. She had to have a radical operation and needed a great deal of supportive case work throughout this period.

She is still with the agency and has many problems, money among them, but shows great desire to save her marriage and has two beautiful children.
Comment:

This girl is the more powerful partner and has succeeded in weaning her husband from his family. She has shown stability in the face of particularly acute problems, and although she feels justified in taking this man from his family, she does not show bitterness towards them.

Summary of R. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant

The Greater Boston Community Council referred this case to the agency. It involves a thirty-year-old English wife of a forty-six-year-old Italian gardener. She was suffering from severe post-partum depression. The worker made a home visit. He saw 'one of the most beautiful babies' he had ever seen, beautifully cared for, but the mother looked deeply depressed and did not say a word throughout his visit. Her husband was there, a kindly, gentle, older man, who was extremely worried about the situation, especially his inability to work and leave his wife. His savings were gone and he was desperate. The couple lived alone.

House-keeper service was arranged, the wife gradually came out of her depression, and the whole family co-operated very well. A medical examination was arranged. It appears the wife had had sleeping sickness in England. This may have had something to do with her condition rather than emotional causes, in the doctor's opinion.

The case was closed, with excellent prognosis.
Comment:

This is again one of the shorter cases with too few data to be of much value for this study.

Summary of T. Case

Husband, Roman Catholic - Wife, Protestant, becoming Roman Catholic to marry.

This case was referred by the consulate as having "some marital and financial difficulty." The twenty-year-old Australian bride married her twenty-one-year-old Italian-American husband in Australia. They lived there near her parents, who are small hotel owners, very happily for one and one-half years, when he was sent back to the United States.

She followed shortly and lived with his family. There were no children.

She found him very different here. He showed dependence on his extremely possessive mother who "has no use for me," and accuses Mrs. T of ruining her son's life. There is no money shortage in his family but he lies, gave up his job, and lives by gambling. He had apparently gambled since he was sixteen but had shown no signs of it in Australia.

Things became worse and worse until the wife grew to want divorce. Her husband gambled away all they had, selling the car, and shaming her in the eyes of the neighbors and tradesmen. But he always promised to reform, and the young couple were much in love.
Her family was most anxious that both of them should return to Australia and recommence their happy life there, but his mother would not hear of it, and the girl said, "I do not want to be the death of that old lady."

The husband did not follow suggestions for psychiatric help, though he had agreed to do so. Eventually he pawned her belongings and even forged her name. She was out working at this time.

She was not herself easy to work with. She repeatedly broke appointments and was very impatient if kept waiting at the agency. Finally she planned to return to Australia with her husband and has probably done so, but without letting the worker know.

Comment:

The situation that this young girl so far from home had to contend with is so overwhelming that she perhaps cannot be considered difficult because she showed tension and impatience. Her inaccessibility to case work and departure from the agency may only show real independence of character and ability to plan for herself—and her husband as well. She also showed this in securing a job for herself.

Summary of U. Case

Husband, ? - Wife, ?

This was an out-of-town case in which neither husband nor wife were seen by a worker from this agency. It was referred by the British Consul who had received a letter from a neighbor of the young
couple. This woman wrote a well-balanced letter, stating that the English bride of an Italian-American husband (the ages were not given) was suffering from gross abuse.

She had, according to this neighbor, been so badly injured by her father-in-law that she had required hospitalization. On discharge, her husband had lodged her and their two small children in an unheated one-room shack without toilet, water, or lighting.

The agency worker got in touch with the nearest family agency, who promised a home visit. The record consists of many patient letters from the Boston Provident Association worker and rare replies eventually elicited from the local worker. This makes our knowledge meagre. A home visit was at last made and the conditions were as described by the neighbor.

The husband evidently beat her. He was at first defensive and abusive, but became communicative and admitted destroying his wife's mail and passport, also her suitcase, to prevent her leaving him. The visitor thought he showed "persecution complex." The living conditions were no better than a pig's, but the place and the children were neat. The wife said she wished to go home.

On the basis of this report, the Boston Provident Association worker enquired of the consulate what should be done to secure a new passport. The necessary forms and information were sent and eventually passed on by the local worker. But the wife took no steps to proceed with the matter.
Because of her expressed desire to go home but her failure to take any steps in the matter of her passport, the worker questioned her real wish to leave her husband. Nothing more has been done.

Comment:

This distressing case would probably have a better prognosis if the couple involved were not so far away. It seems that the evidence of non-application for a new passport is not enough to suppose this young woman really does not need help in returning home. If her husband destroyed her passport, destroys her mail, and allows her no money, it may be impossible for her to take any steps for herself. He may have destroyed the re-application blank as he did her other papers. She showed certain remarkable qualities in being able to keep so poor a place neat and the children well-kept. But what does her endurance indicate? Is she afraid, or is this another case of neurotic gratification? Is the agency justified in closing the case? The worker involved is so able that probably it is correct to do so.
CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We see certain problems again and again, and others less frequently than might be expected. The author worked on five of the cases and was familiar with some others, and has had to correct certain impressions in the face of the statistical evidence of this study.

Rejection of wife by mother-in-law

For example, overt rejection by the mother-in-law would seem almost universal among them to anyone working with this group. But if we look at the table at the end we see that ten out of twenty-one were overtly and unequivocally rejecting, two more probably were, six were accepting, and the remaining three doubtfully so. It is, of course, not possible to evaluate the degree of rejection present in each case. In a study of this kind we are considering overt behavior only. In some cases we may lack sufficient evidence even to record that adequately.

The three cases which applied for service not involving help with personal adjustments may somewhat falsify the picture that begins to emerge from our survey. In discussing some of the factors which follow, and also this one of rejection by the mother-in-law, we should work on a basis of eighteen rather than twenty-one cases.
Physical abuse, for instance, was present in seven out of the eighteen cases involving conflict, or 39 per cent. Whereas if we include the three well-adjusted couples where there would obviously be no question of such a factor, we get the less meaningful 33 per cent. We have only included physical abuse when it appears in the record. Were we able to interview these girls again, more might appear. The one case, M, where the wife is known to have scratched and hit the husband, while he did not apparently retaliate, is not included.

Also in the three cases involving only superficial service, the agency did not obtain enough information to cover all our enquiries. We must, therefore, bear these three in mind when we refer to our twenty-one cases, and make mental allowance for them in evaluating the incidence of the various factors we are computing.

The average ages of the twenty couples whose ages we know are twenty-six years and nearly ten months for the men and just over twenty-one for the women. The two men of fortysix and one of thirty-seven greatly pull up the average age of the men which, without these, would be just under twenty-two. The women's ages vary from seventeen (three) to thirty-one. If we eliminate the three oldest (aged twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and
null
thirty-one), we also get a considerable drop and a truer picture of their average age: nineteen years and nine months. Two of the three older women were married to the older men, one was three years older than her twenty-four year-old husband, and one forty-six-year-old man's wife was twenty-one. None of the three older men beat their wives.

Children

Four of the couples had no children, twelve had one, four had two, and one was pregnant. One wife also had two children by a previous marriage and another was pregnant when, divorced, she left for England.

Place of marriage

The majority were married before coming here. Only four came as fiancées and married in the United States.

Religion

Religion seems to have played a small part in the lives of most of these young people. All the wives were Protestant, mostly Church of England. All the husbands were Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox, where the religions were known (most cases). Three girls became Catholics to marry. In their feelings about divorce we do not see the Church's attitude strongly affecting them. Only in one case was conflict clearly present. Naturally, we do not know that it was not a strong factor in other cases; only we have no evidence of it.
Perhaps the most overwhelming problem these girls had to meet was the housing shortage. We find that only five lived alone but either so near their in-laws or so frequently visited by them as scarcely to count so, six lived with their in-laws to start with and later moved to their own homes, and eight lived with their in-laws. Of these, one was with a brother-in-law and one with a sister-in-law, the rest with the mother-in-law. None of those living alone suffered physical abuse.

A United Press news item from London appeared recently under the caption, "Hospital Report Shows New Malady -- 'In-Laws Disease'," and read:

Kings College Hospital reported that one out of every hundred casual patients it receives suffers from a new post-war disease. The hospital's annual report indexed this malady as 'in-laws disease.'

Chief sufferers, it said, were young wives, who through the housing shortage, have been forced to live with their husbands' relatives. 'Doctors send them to hospitals for treatment although there is nothing wrong with them,' the report said.

Hospital authorities said the 'disease' takes many forms -- sometimes fainting fits, general depression, or 'weepiness.' The hospital concluded sadly that nothing could be done for the victims until the housing situation improved.

Food was one of the main problems of those who did live with or very near the husband's family. The mother-in-law usually insisted on doing all the cooking and the foreign food was sometimes acutely distasteful to the
inexperienced young girls. And in the home the cultural differences are glaringly apparent. The noisy, cheerful, quarrelsome, excitable in-laws, talking a language—or often screaming it—which was not understood, and the near-illiteracy that went with non-English-speaking families were all more difficult for these frequently rigidly provincial girls to bear at such close quarters. In the whole of the handbook called, "A Bride's Guide to the U. S. A.," issued to British brides of servicemen before they left England, there is no mention of foreign groups maintaining their cultural pattern in America. Helpful sections on family expenditures, manners, and many other subjects are given. And we are also told what the typical American eats. Most English girls would be delighted to serve or be served this diet. It must have been a shock indeed to those readers of this manual to go into a home almost exactly like a South European peasant's home.

The number of cases of neurotic dependence on the mother or extreme possessiveness by her is interesting. About two we know nothing. Eight cases are glaring examples of it. Five seem to have started so but to have modified in favor of the wife, one seemed dependent upon whichever he was with, one showed evidence of a tie with
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his grandmother who had brought him up and so could perhaps be counted as his mother, while four only seemed positive in favor of the wife from the start. It is probable that the evidence does not justify black-and-white classification in most cases but in some it does seem to do so. That eight should show definitely unhealthy emotional states in this respect establishes this as a major problem for the group. It is perhaps a more frequent phenomenon here than in England, where motherhood is less glorified. Geoffrey Gorer\(^1\) gives a fascinating and horrifying description of the American mom-cult in his recent controversial book. The attitude of the mother towards the son who has been in service is also apt to be abnormal. She appears in some cases to regard him as one back from the dead or as a hero from whom normal behavior is not to be expected, and to feel that having got him back her absolute right to him should be undisputed.

Money difficulties

There is, in general, in the South European cultures a feeling against the wife's working outside the home; she is supposed to concentrate her efforts inside it. However, in this group we see no less than fourteen

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1 The American People: a study in national character.
cases of serious money difficulties all due to the man's refusal to allow the management of money to his wife. Some gave it all to their mothers, some kept it themselves, so that cases of absolute pennilessness are not infrequent among girls who are accustomed to handling their own affairs. Some did work, some made the best of it, some were unable to endure it. The mother-in-law, where there was conflict between her and the bride, almost in every case criticized her use of whatever money she had for housekeeping. The husbands also showed reluctance to discuss finances with their wives and, in those cases where his temper was bad, the wives did not dare to mention money and were sometimes miserable over this.

We see five cases of extremely poor work history and status among the men. Five are "fair." By this is meant not good, usually casual, workers. One re-enlisted apparently to be out of the way and free to let his wife and mother settle his difficulties between them. His work status is therefore hard to evaluate. Ten are recorded as good; this means that as far as we know they are usually in steady employment. Two of the men with bad work records are gamblers, with no other occupation. But one of them only behaved in this way when with his
mother. He had lived for a year and a half in Australia with his bride without her ever seeing this tendency, and so he is classified as "poor" but not as an inveterate gambler.

Evidence of desire to save the marriage

(1) On the husband's part:

Eleven of the husbands showed positive signs of wishing to keep their wives. Five positively rejected them. One, who beat and ill-used her, would not let her go. One who at first wanted her came to reject her; one who at first rejected her later accepted her. The remaining two ill-treated their wives, verbally rejected them, but perhaps showed minimal evidence of wishing to save their marriages. Both of these were fathers.

(2) On the wife's part:

Thirteen of the wives clearly wished to remain with their husbands. Four positively rejected the marriage. Two who appeared to reject it later came to accept it; one reversed this order; and one, whom we were not able to see, is impossible to evaluate.

Based on what evidence we have of the girls' behavior, their adaptability to America or to foreign ways, their appearance, adequate motherhood, ability to plan for themselves, and their handling of their conflicts, we estimate that only three of them were immature per-

Maturity of the wife
sonalities who really failed to adjust. One, again the one we were not able to see, we cannot evaluate; but all the rest showed strengths which in normal circumstances would make for excellent adjustment and, in the circumstances in which we see them, usually made for steadiness and adequacy. Those who endured extreme ill-use may have done so for neurotic reasons; or may have felt too proud to return home, having failed; or may have had too much deprivation there to wish to return.

Wife's accessibility to case work

It is striking that of these girls eleven show definite resistance to case work on any level. Four of the others did not need it so there is no evidence of what their attitude would have been had they done so. In four resistive cases, study of the record shows a questionable quality of case work. One of the writer's own cases was probably lost for this reason. In two cases we are not able to tell, for lack of evidence, what would have been acceptable. In only two were the girls really able to accept case work, and two others showed fair response. The eleven who were inaccessible to this help are a much higher proportion (over 73 per cent of the known cases) than would be found in an American group seeking aid in marital conflicts. This does seem to indicate a difference due to the English character, and also perhaps to
the fact that agencies offering case work are very rare there. During the war, Citizens Advice bureaux were established all over the country and gave excellent service; but they were staffed by volunteers in almost all cases and did not offer case work as we know it here. In dealing with these girls it might be helpful to be aware that more agency interpretation than is usual should be given, and the worker should be prepared for a more reserved attitude with greater resistance to strangers' interest in their affairs, on an intimate level. Whether we should put this down to emotional adequacy, self-reliance and discipline, or to inhibition, stubbornness and introversion is hard to say. Probably many factors enter into it. But in this study we do observe that of fifteen cases requiring case work and with sufficient record to study what went on, only four girls were able to receive it on a level classifiable as such.

Another remarkable observation is that of the sixteen girls who were seen and whose colouring was recorded or remembered, only one was dark. Five were shining blondes, four were red or reddish haired, five had medium brown hair, and one had dark hair with fair skin and blue eyes. The average colouring of girls in England is about the same as it is here. So we see that these dark young
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men selected girls who are not as a rule available to them here. There is discrimination among the fairer Anglo-Saxon or Nordic group here against the Italian and South European group which usually restricts them to their own dark-haired women. When in a setting free from this discrimination they seem to select these girls.

The twenty-one cases with their principal characteristics summarized and tabulated appear on the following chart.

Approved,

Richard K. Conant
Dean
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


