

priate to the attitudes and objectives of the poor and uneducated in matters of reproduction. Is the government responding to a mandate from the poor or to an ill-concealed mandate from the well-to-do? If there is no mandate from the poor, the provision of birth-control services may prove a convenience for certain women but is likely to have little effect on the reproductive performance of the poor in general. Let us look at the evidence.

IS THERE A MANDATE FROM THE POOR?

The notion that the poor have larger families than the affluent only because they have less access to birth-control information implies that the poor *desire* families as small as, or smaller than, those of the well-to-do. The poor are simply unable to realize this desire, the argument goes, because of lack of access to birth-control information. The National Academy of Sciences Committee on Population stated the argument very well (2, p. 10).

The available evidence indicates that low-income families do not want more children than do families with higher incomes, but they have more because they do not have the information or the resources to plan their families effectively according to their own desires.

The committee, however, presents none of the "available evidence" that "low-income families do not want more children than do families with higher incomes." Actually, my data supply evidence that runs counter to the statement quoted above, both with respect to the desired or ideal number of children and with respect to attitudes toward birth control.

I shall begin with the preferred size of family. A number of national polls, conducted over some 25 years, provide data concerning opinions on ideal family size. In addition, I include tabulations of data from two national surveys on fertility (the "Growth of American Families Studies"), conducted in 1955 and 1960 (13, 14). My detailed analyses of the results of these polls and surveys are given elsewhere (15) and are only briefly summarized here. Table 2 gives mean values for the family size considered ideal by white, non-Catholic women, according to education and economic status.

TABLE 2.—MEAN NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY NON-CATHOLIC WOMEN, ACCORDING TO EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC STATUS, FOR SELECED YEARS BETWEEN 1943 AND 1968

Date	Age range	Level of education *			Income or economic status†				Total respondents	
		Col- lege	High school	Grade school	1	2	3	4	X	N
1943.....	20-34	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.7	1983
1952.....	21+	3.3	3.1	3.6		3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	723
1955‡.....	18-39	3.1	3.2	3.7	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.3	1905
1955§.....	18-39	3.3	3.4	3.9	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.4	1905
1957.....	21+	3.4	3.2	3.6		3.3	3.2	3.5	3.3	448
1959.....	21+	3.5	3.4	3.9		3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	472
1960‡.....	18-39	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.2	1728
1960§.....	18-39	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.4	1728
1963.....	21+	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.4	483
1966.....	21+	3.1	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.7	3.3	374
1967.....	21+	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.3	488
1968.....	21+	3.2	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.3	539

* Level of education is measured by the highest grade completed. † Levels 1 to 4 for economic status range in order from "high" to "low". ‡ Minimum ideal (results from coding range answers to the lowest figure). § Maximum ideal (results from coding range answers to the highest figure).

The data lend little support to the hypothesis that the poor desire families as small as those desired by the middle and upper classes. Within both the educational and the economic categories, those on the lower rungs not only have larger families than those on the higher rungs (at least in the case of non-Catholics) but say they want larger families and consider them ideal. This differential has existed for as long as information on preferred family size in this country has been available, and it persists. It thus seems extremely hazardous to base a major governmental effort on the notion that, among individuals (white individuals, at least) at the lower social levels, there is a wide-