

MARRIAGE

THE ISSUE

Marriage and family are the building blocks of all human civilization and the prime institutions of civil society. Intact married families are a guarantor of individual liberty, the building block of a strong and stable American culture, and the first engine of economic growth. Preserving the institution of marriage by restoring a culture of marriage and protecting its fundamental definition is integral to promoting a healthy civil society.

Strong marriages and intact families serve the ends of limited government more effectively, less intrusively, and at less cost than picking up the pieces of a shattered marriage culture. Government steps in more when it is compelled to provide (whether more or less directly) for the welfare of those who are affected by the collapse of marriage and family.

Laws and regulations should continue to protect and promote intact married family life as the basis of a stable and prosperous society. As the nation faces efforts to fundamentally redefine marriage, policymakers should stand up for the truth of marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Understand and promote the many benefits of marriage.

Married men and women tend to have better financial health, increased savings, and greater social mobility than unmarried individuals. Children raised in families headed by a married couple have a greater chance of experiencing economic stability, high academic performance, and emotional maturity. Teens from intact married families are less likely to be sexually active and also less likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol, exhibit poor social behaviors, or participate in violent crimes. Consistent parental involvement, especially from fathers, is also related to decreased likelihood of teen pregnancy.

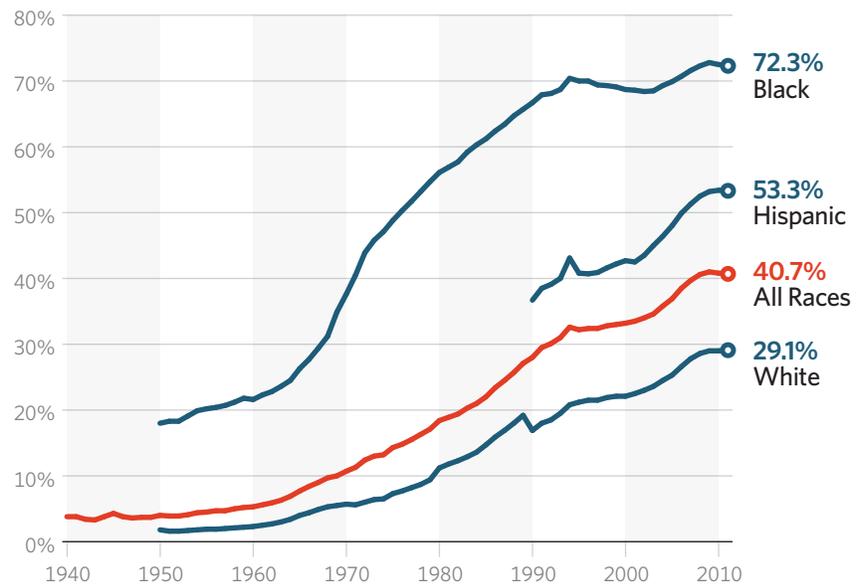
TALKING POINTS

- Marriage is critical to every indicator of individual well-being, from employment and earnings to avoidance of delinquency, school dropout, and abuse. Marriage promotion should be a routine public policy.
- Policymakers should eliminate or reduce the marriage penalties in the tax code, welfare programs, and Obamacare. Discouraging men and women from enjoying the benefits of marriage harms adults and their children.
- Marriage brings a man and a woman together to be father and mother to any children their union produces. Redefining marriage further distances it from the needs of children and denies the ideal that a child needs both a mother and a father.
- Policymakers should understand the benefits of marriage for individuals and society and defend the institution in law. Promoting marriage does not ban anything. Adults are still free to make choices about their relationships, and do not need government permission to do so.

Four in 10 Children Are Born to Unwed Mothers

The percentage of children born outside of marriage has skyrocketed, with a sixfold increase since 1960. Currently, the figure is highest among blacks, but the rate of increase is highest among whites and Hispanics.

PERCENTAGE OF BIRTHS TO UNWED MOTHERS



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 2012.

Given the positive influence of marriage on significant indicators of individual well-being—from employment and earnings to avoidance of delinquency, school dropout, and abuse—public policy should promote, rather than undermine, the institution of marriage.

Promote marriage as America’s greatest weapon against child poverty. Today, more than four in 10 children are born outside of marriage. These children are seven times more likely to experience poverty than are children born and raised by a married mother and a father in the home. Moreover, children raised outside of a biological family arrangement are at greater risk of lower educational attainment, elevated rates of delinquency, more unwed pregnancy and childbearing, and other consequences.

Marriage reduces the probability of child poverty by 80 percent. Of the nearly \$450 billion in annual federal and state welfare funding spent on low-income families, three-quarters goes to those led by single parents. The restoration of marriage in low-income communities requires educating young men and women on the importance of marriage in reducing poverty and improving children’s well-being, as well as eliminating the marriage penalties in welfare programs.

Eliminate marriage penalties in federal law. Government assistance programs that create disincentives to marriage can have unintended, harmful consequences. Any form of financial penalty in tax policy that masks or subverts the benefits of marriage—thus acting as a deterrent—should be eliminated. For instance, the structure of health care tax credits under Obamacare will mean that married couples generally receive \$1,500 to \$10,000 less per year in health care premium support than cohabitating couples with the same combined income.

Likewise, the incentive structure of many welfare programs discourages single mothers from marrying the employed fathers of their children. Discouraging men and women from enjoying the financial and emotional supports of marriage in order to continue receiving public assistance harms adults and their children, who are more likely to continue the cycle of poverty for another generation. Policymakers should eliminate or reduce the penalties for marriage in the tax code, welfare programs, and Obamacare.

Defend marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Marriage brings a man and a woman together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces. The institution is based on the biological fact that reproduction depends on a man and a woman and the reality that children need a mother and a father. Government recognizes marriage because it is society's least restrictive means of ensuring the well-being of children. State recognition of marriage protects children by encouraging men and women to commit to each other and take responsibility for their children. The overwhelming conclusion of social science studies over decades is that children tend to have better outcomes when raised by a married mother and father. Redefining marriage would further distance marriage from the needs of children and would deny, as a matter of policy, the ideal that a child needs both a mother and a father. Policymakers should understand the benefits of marriage for individuals and society and defend the institution in law. Promoting marriage does not ban anything. Adults are still free to make choices about their relationships, and do not need government permission to do so.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- In 1964, only 7 percent of births in America were outside of marriage. Today, more than 40 percent are.
- Over the past six decades, the percentage of married adults has declined steadily among all Americans. The decline has occurred more rapidly among African-American adults, less than 40 percent of whom are married.
- Fathers' involvement is an important factor in children's well-being, from health and behavioral outcomes to school performance. Research shows that religious participation appears to bolster fathers' involvement.

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- Adolescents who do not live in intact families are more likely to engage in substance abuse, exhibit behavioral problems, have poor academic performance, and engage in risky behavior, including becoming sexually active at an early age.

SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ryan T. Anderson, "Marriage: What It Is, Why It Matters, and the Consequences of Redefining It," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2775, March 11, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>.

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The Heritage Foundation, "Parents' Influence on Adolescents' Sexual Behavior," Heritage Foundation *Family Facts Brief* No. 42, 2011, <http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/42/parents-influence-on-adolescents-sexual-behavior>.

Robert Rector, "Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2465, September 16, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/09/marriage-america-s-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty>.

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