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FROM ISSUE NUMBER 1 ~ FALL 2009

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The Evolution of Divorce

W. BRADFORD WILCOX

In 1969, Governor Ronald Reagan of California made what he later admitted was one of the biggest mistakes of his political life. Seeking to eliminate the strife and deception often associated with the legal regime of fault-based divorce, Reagan signed the nation's first no-fault divorce bill. The new law eliminated the need for couples to fabricate spousal wrongdoing in pursuit of a divorce; indeed, one likely reason for Reagan's decision to sign the bill was that his first wife, Jane Wyman, had unfairly accused him of "mental cruelty" to obtain a divorce in 1948. But no-fault divorce also gutted marriage of its legal power to bind husband and wife, allowing one spouse to dissolve a marriage for any reason — or for no reason at all.

In the decade and a half that followed, virtually every state in the Union followed California's lead and enacted a no-fault divorce law of its own. This legal transformation was only one of the more visible signs of the divorce revolution then sweeping the United States: From 1960 to 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled — from 9.2 divorces per 1,000 married women to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women. This meant that while less than 20% of couples who married in 1950 ended up divorced, about 50% of couples who married in 1970 did. And approximately half of the children born to married parents in the 1970s saw their parents part, compared to only about 11% of those born in the 1950s.

In the years since 1980, however, these trends have not continued on straight upward paths, and the story of divorce has grown increasingly complicated. In the case of divorce, as in so many others, the worst consequences of the social revolution of the 1960s and '70s are now felt disproportionately by the poor and less educated, while the wealthy elites who set off these transformations in the first place have managed to reclaim somewhat healthier and more stable habits of married life. This imbalance leaves our cultural and political elites less well attuned to the magnitude of social dysfunction in much of American society, and leaves the most vulnerable Americans — especially children living in poor and working-class communities — even worse off than they would otherwise be.

THE RISE OF DIVORCE

The divorce revolution of the 1960s and '70s was over-determined. The nearly universal introduction of no-fault divorce helped to open the floodgates, especially because these laws facilitated unilateral divorce and lent moral legitimacy to the dissolution of marriages. The sexual revolution, too, fueled the marital tumult of the times: Spouses found it easier in the Swinging Seventies to find extramarital partners, and came to have higher, and often unrealistic, expectations of their marital relationships. Increases in women's employment as well as feminist consciousness-raising also did their part to drive up the divorce rate, as wives felt freer in the late '60s and '70s to leave marriages that were abusive or that they found unsatisfying.

The anti-institutional tenor of the age also meant that churches lost much of their moral authority to reinforce the marital vow. It didn't help that many mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders were caught up in the zeitgeist, and lent explicit or implicit support to the divorce revolution sweeping across American society. This accommodationist mentality was evident in a 1976 pronouncement issued by the United Methodist Church, the largest mainline Protestant denomination in America. The statement read in part:

In marriages where the partners are, even after thoughtful reconsideration and counsel, estranged beyond reconciliation, we recognize divorce and the right of divorced

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persons to remarry, and express our concern for the needs of the children of such unions. To this end we encourage an active, accepting, and enabling commitment of the Church and our society to minister to the needs of divorced persons.

Most important, the psychological revolution of the late '60s and '70s, which was itself fueled by a post-war prosperity that allowed people to give greater attention to non-material concerns, played a key role in reconfiguring men and women's views of marriage and family life. Prior to the late 1960s, Americans were more likely to look at marriage and family through the prisms of duty, obligation, and sacrifice. A successful, happy home was one in which intimacy was an important good, but by no means the only one in view. A decent job, a well-maintained home, mutual spousal aid, child-rearing, and shared religious faith were seen almost universally as the goods that marriage and family life were intended to advance.

But the psychological revolution's focus on individual fulfillment and personal growth changed all that. Increasingly, marriage was seen as a vehicle for a self-oriented ethic of romance, intimacy, and fulfillment. In this new psychological approach to married life, one's primary obligation was not to one's family but to one's self; hence, marital success was defined not by successfully meeting obligations to one's spouse and children but by a strong sense of subjective happiness in marriage — usually to be found in and through an intense, emotional relationship with one's spouse. The 1970s marked the period when, for many Americans, a more institutional model of marriage gave way to the "soul-mate model" of marriage.

Of course, the soul-mate model was much more likely to lead couples to divorce court than was the earlier institutional model of marriage. Now, those who felt they were in unfulfilling marriages also felt obligated to divorce in order to honor the newly widespread ethic of expressive individualism. As social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has observed of this period, "divorce was not only an individual right but also a psychological resource. The dissolution of marriage offered the chance to make oneself over from the inside out, to refurbish and express the inner self, and to acquire certain valuable psychological assets and competencies, such as initiative, assertiveness, and a stronger and better self-image."

But what about the children? In the older, institutional model of marriage, parents were supposed to stick together for their sake. The view was that divorce could leave an indelible emotional scar on children, and would also harm their social and economic future. Yet under the new soul-mate model of marriage, divorce could be an opportunity for growth not only for adults but also for their offspring. The view was that divorce could protect the emotional welfare of children by allowing their parents to leave marriages in which they felt unhappy. In 1962, as Whitehead points out in her book *The Divorce Culture*, about half of American women agreed with the idea that "when there are children in the family parents should stay together even if they don't get along." By 1977, only 20% of American women held this view.

At the height of the divorce revolution in the 1970s, many scholars, therapists, and journalists served as enablers of this kind of thinking. These elites argued that children were resilient in the face of divorce; that children could easily find male role models to replace absent fathers; and that children would be happier if their parents were able to leave unhappy marriages. In 1979, one prominent scholar wrote in the *Journal of Divorce* that divorce even held "growth potential" for mothers, as they could enjoy "increased personal autonomy, a new sense of competence and control, [and the] development of better relationships with [their] children." And in 1974's *The Courage to Divorce*, social workers Susan Gittleman and Janet Markowitz argued that boys need not be harmed by the absence of their fathers: "When fathers are not available, friends, relatives, teachers and counselors can provide ample opportunity for youngsters to model themselves after a like-sexed adult."

Thus, by the time the 1970s came to a close, many Americans — rich and poor alike — had jettisoned the institutional model of married life that prioritized the welfare of children, and which sought to discourage divorce in all but the most dire of circumstances. Instead, they embraced the soul-mate model of married life, which prioritized the emotional welfare of adults and gave moral permission to divorce for virtually any reason.

THE MORNING AFTER

Thirty years later, the myth of the good divorce has not stood up well in the face of sustained social scientific inquiry — especially when one considers the welfare of children exposed to their parents' divorces.

Since 1974, about 1 million children per year have seen their parents divorce — and children who are exposed to divorce are two to three times more likely than their peers in intact marriages to suffer from serious social or psychological pathologies. In their book *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, sociologists Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur found that 31% of adolescents with divorced parents dropped out of high school, compared to 13% of children from intact families. They also concluded that 33% of adolescent girls whose parents divorced became teen mothers, compared to 11% of girls from continuously married families. And McLanahan and her colleagues have found that 11% of boys who come from divorced families end up spending time in prison before the age of 32, compared to 5% of boys who come from intact homes.

Research also indicates that remarriage is no salve for children wounded by divorce. Indeed, as sociologist Andrew Cherlin notes in his important new book, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, "children whose parents have

remarried do not have higher levels of well-being than children in lone-parent families." The reason? Often, the establishment of a step-family results in yet another move for a child, requiring adjustment to a new caretaker and new step-siblings — all of which can be difficult for children, who tend to thrive on stability.

The divorce revolution's collective consequences for children are striking. Taking into account both divorce and non-marital childbearing, sociologist Paul Amato estimates that if the United States enjoyed the same level of family stability today as it did in 1960, the nation would have 750,000 fewer children repeating grades, 1.2 million fewer school suspensions, approximately 500,000 fewer acts of teenage delinquency, about 600,000 fewer kids receiving therapy, and approximately 70,000 fewer suicide attempts every year (correction appended). As Amato concludes, turning back the family-stability clock just a few decades could significantly improve the lives of many children.

Skeptics confronted with this kind of research often argue that it is unfair to compare children of divorce to children from intact, married households. They contend that it is the conflict that precedes the divorce, rather than the divorce itself, that is likely to be particularly traumatic for children. Amato's work suggests that the skeptics have a point: In cases where children are exposed to high levels of conflict — like domestic violence or screaming matches between parents — they do seem to do better if their parents part.

But more than two-thirds of all parental divorces do not involve such highly conflicted marriages. And "unfortunately, these are the very divorces that are most likely to be stressful for children," as Amato and Alan Booth, his colleague at Penn State University, point out. When children see their parents divorce because they have simply drifted apart — or because one or both parents have become unhappy or left to pursue another partner — the kids' faith in love, commitment, and marriage is often shattered. In the wake of their parents' divorce, children are also likely to experience a family move, marked declines in their family income, a stressed-out single mother, and substantial periods of paternal absence — all factors that put them at risk. In other words, the clear majority of divorces involving children in America are *not* in the best interests of the children.

Not surprisingly, the effects of divorce on adults are more ambiguous. From an emotional and social perspective, about 20% of divorced adults find their lives enhanced and another 50% seem to suffer no long-term ill effects, according to research by psychologist Mavis Hetherington. Adults who initiated a divorce are especially likely to report that they are flourishing afterward, or are at least doing just fine.

Spouses who were unwilling parties to a unilateral divorce, however, tend to do less well. And the ill effects of divorce for adults tend to fall disproportionately on the shoulders of fathers. Since approximately two-thirds of divorces are legally initiated by women, men are more likely than women to be divorced against their will. In many cases, these men have not engaged in egregious marital misconduct such as abuse, adultery, or substance abuse. They feel mistreated by their ex-wives and by state courts that no longer take into account marital "fault" when making determinations about child custody, child support, and the division of marital property. Yet in the wake of a divorce, these men will nevertheless often lose their homes, a substantial share of their monthly incomes, and regular contact with their children. For these men, and for women caught in similar circumstances, the sting of an unjust divorce can lead to downward emotional spirals, difficulties at work, and serious deteriorations in the quality of their relationships with their children.

Looking beyond the direct effects of divorce on adults and children, it is also important to note the ways in which widespread divorce has eroded the institution of marriage — particularly, its assault on the quality, prevalence, and stability of marriage in American life.

In the 1970s, proponents of easy divorce argued that the ready availability of divorce would boost the quality of married life, as abused, unfulfilled, or otherwise unhappy spouses were allowed to leave their marriages. Had they been correct, we would expect to see that Americans' reports of marital quality had improved during and after the 1970s. Instead, marital quality fell during the '70s and early '80s. In the early 1970s, 70% of married men and 67% of married women reported being very happy in their marriages; by the early '80s, these figures had fallen to 63% for men and 62% for women. So marital quality dropped even as divorce rates were reaching record highs.

What happened? It appears that average marriages suffered during this time, as widespread divorce undermined ordinary couples' faith in marital permanency and their ability to invest financially and emotionally in their marriages — ultimately casting clouds of doubt over their relationships. For instance, one study by economist Betsey Stevenson found that investments in marital partnerships declined in the wake of no-fault divorce laws. Specifically, she found that newlywed couples in states that passed no-fault divorce were about 10% less likely to support a spouse through college or graduate school and were 6% less likely to have a child together. Ironically, then, the widespread availability of easy divorce not only enabled "bad" marriages to be weeded out, but also made it more difficult for "good" marriages to take root and flourish.

Second, marriage rates have fallen and cohabitation rates have surged in the wake of the divorce revolution, as men and women's faith in marriage has been shaken. From 1960 to 2007, the percentage of American women who were married fell from 66% to 51%, and the percentage of men who were married

fell from 69% to 55%. Yet at the same time, the number of cohabiting couples increased fourteen-fold — from 439,000 to more than 6.4 million. Because of these increases in cohabitation, about 40% of American children will spend some time in a cohabiting union; 20% of babies are now born to cohabiting couples. And because cohabiting unions are much less stable than marriages, the vast majority of the children born to cohabiting couples will see their parents break up by the time they turn 15.

A recent Bowling Green State University study of the motives for cohabitation found that young men and women who choose to cohabit are seeking alternatives to marriage and ways of testing a relationship to see if it might be safely transformed into a marriage — with both rationales clearly shaped by a fear of divorce. One young man told the researchers that living together allows you to "get to know the person and their habits before you get married. So that way, you won't have to get divorced." Another said that an advantage of cohabitation is that you "don't have to go through the divorce process if you do want to break up, you don't have to pay lawyers and have to deal with splitting everything and all that jazz."

My own research confirms the connection between divorce and cohabitation in America. Specifically, data from the General Social Survey indicate that adult children of divorce are 61% more likely than adult children from married families to endorse the notion that it is a "good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first." Likewise, adult children of divorce are 47% more likely to be currently cohabiting, compared to those who were raised in intact, married families. Thus divorce has played a key role in reducing marriage and increasing cohabitation, which now exists as a viable competitor to marriage in the organization of sex, intimacy, childbearing, and even child-rearing.

Third, the divorce revolution has contributed to an intergenerational cycle of divorce. Work by demographer Nicholas Wolfinger indicates that the adult children of divorce are now 89% more likely to divorce themselves, compared to adults who were raised in intact, married families. Children of divorce who marry other children of divorce are especially likely to end up divorced, according to Wolfinger's work. Of course, the reason children of divorce — especially children of low-conflict divorce — are more likely to end their marriages is precisely that they have often learned all the wrong lessons about trust, commitment, mutual sacrifice, and fidelity from their parents.

THE DIVORCE DIVIDE

Clearly, the divorce revolution of the 1960s and '70s left a poisonous legacy. But what has happened since? Where do we stand today on the question of marriage and divorce? A survey of the landscape presents a decidedly mixed portrait of contemporary married life in America.

The good news is that, on the whole, divorce has declined since 1980 and marital happiness has largely stabilized. The divorce rate fell from a historic high of 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women in 1980 to 17.5 in 2007. In real terms, this means that slightly more than 40% of contemporary first marriages are likely to end in divorce, down from approximately 50% in 1980. Perhaps even more important, recent declines in divorce suggest that a clear majority of children who are now born to married couples will grow up with their married mothers and fathers.

Similarly, the decline in marital happiness associated with the tidal wave of divorce in the 1960s and '70s essentially stopped more than two decades ago. Men's marital happiness hovered around 63% from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s, while women's marital happiness fell just a bit, from 62% in the early 1980s to 60% in the mid-2000s.

This good news can be explained largely by three key factors. First, the age at first marriage has risen. In 1970, the median age of marriage was 20.8 for women and 23.2 for men; in 2007, it was 25.6 for women and 27.5 for men. This means that fewer Americans are marrying when they are too immature to forge successful marriages. (It is true that some of the increase in age at first marriage is linked to cohabitation, but not the bulk of it.)

Second, the views of academic and professional experts about divorce and family breakdown have changed significantly in recent decades. Social-science data about the consequences of divorce have moved many scholars across the political spectrum to warn against continuing the divorce revolution, and to argue that intact families are essential, especially to the well-being of children. Here is a characteristic example, from a recent publication by a group of scholars at the Brookings Institution and Princeton University:

Marriage provides benefits both to children and to society. Although it was once possible to believe that the nation's high rates of divorce, cohabitation, and nonmarital childbearing represented little more than lifestyle alternatives brought about by the freedom to pursue individual self-fulfillment, many analysts now believe that these individual choices can be damaging to the children who have no say in them and to the society that enables them.

Although certainly not all scholars, therapists, policymakers, and journalists would agree that contemporary levels of divorce and family breakdown are cause for worry, a much larger share of them expresses concern about the health of marriage in America — and about America's high level of divorce — than did so in the 1970s. These views seep into the popular consciousness and influence behavior — just as they

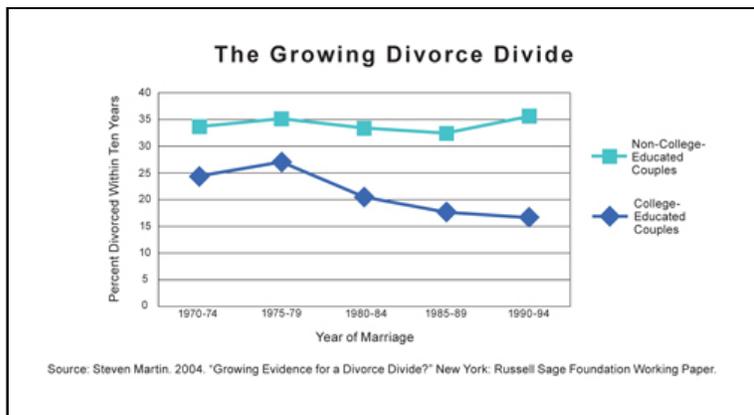
did in the 1960s and '70s, when academic and professional experts carried the banner of the divorce revolution.

A third reason for the stabilization in divorce rates and marital happiness is not so heartening. Put simply, marriage is increasingly the preserve of the highly educated and the middle and upper classes. Fewer working-class and poor Americans are marrying nowadays in part because marriage is seen increasingly as a sort of status symbol: a sign that a couple has arrived both emotionally and financially, or is at least within range of the American Dream. This means that those who do marry today are more likely to start out enjoying the money, education, job security, and social skills that increase the probability of long-term marital success.

And this is where the bad news comes in. When it comes to divorce *and* marriage, America is increasingly divided along class and educational lines. Even as divorce in general has declined since the 1970s, what sociologist Steven Martin calls a "divorce divide" has also been growing between those with college degrees and those without (a distinction that also often translates to differences in income). The figures are quite striking: College-educated Americans have seen their divorce rates drop by about 30% since the early 1980s, whereas Americans without college degrees have seen their divorce rates increase by about 6%. Just under a quarter of college-educated couples who married in the early 1970s divorced in their first ten years of marriage, compared to 34% of their less-educated peers. Twenty years later, only 17% of college-educated couples who married in the early 1990s divorced in their first ten years of marriage; 36% of less-educated couples who married in the early 1990s, however, divorced sometime in their first decade of marriage.

This growing divorce divide means that college-educated married couples are now about half as likely to divorce as their less-educated peers. Well-educated spouses who come from intact families, who enjoy annual incomes over \$60,000, and who conceive their first child in wedlock — as many college-educated couples do — have exceedingly low rates of divorce.

Similar trends can be observed in measures of marital quality. For instance, if we look at married couples aged 18-60, 72% of spouses who were both college-educated and 65% of spouses who were both less-educated reported that they were "very happy" in their marriages in the 1970s, according to the General Social Survey. In the 2000s, marital happiness remained high among college-educated spouses, as 70% continued to report that they were "very happy" in their marriages. But marital happiness fell among less-educated spouses: Only 56% reported that they were "very happy" in their marriages in the 2000s.



These trends are mirrored in American illegitimacy statistics. Although one would never guess as much from the regular *New York Times* features on successful single women having children, non-marital childbearing is quite rare among college-educated women. According to a 2007 Child Trends study, only 7% of mothers with a college degree had a child outside of marriage, compared to more than 50% of mothers who had not gone to college.

So why are marriage and traditional child-rearing making a modest comeback in the upper reaches of society while they continue to unravel among those with less money and less education? Both cultural and economic forces are at work, each helping to widen the divorce and marriage divide in America.

First, while it was once the case that working-class and poor Americans held more conservative views of divorce than their middle- and upper-class peers, this is no longer so. For instance, a 2004 National Fatherhood Initiative poll of American adults aged 18-60 found that 52% of college-educated Americans endorsed the norm that in the "absence of violence and extreme conflict, parents who have an unsatisfactory marriage should stay together until their children are grown." But only 35% of less-educated Americans surveyed endorsed the same viewpoint.

Likewise, according to my analysis of the General Social Survey, in the 1970s only 36% of college-educated Americans thought divorce should be "more difficult to obtain than it is now," compared to 46% of less-educated Americans. By the 2000s, 49% of college-educated Americans thought divorce laws should be tightened, compared to 48% of less-educated Americans. Views of marriage have been growing more

conservative among elites, but not among the poor and the less educated.

Second, the changing cultural meaning of marriage has also made it less necessary and less attractive to working-class and poor Americans. Prior to the 1960s, when the older, institutional model of marriage dominated popular consciousness, marriage was the only legitimate venue for having sex, bearing and raising children, and enjoying an intimate relationship. Moreover, Americans generally saw marriage as an institution that was about many more goods than a high-quality emotional relationship. Therefore, it made sense for all men and women — regardless of socioeconomic status — to get and stay married.

Yet now that the institutional model has lost its hold over the lives of American adults, sex, children, and intimacy can be had outside of marriage. All that remains unique to marriage today is the prospect of that high-quality emotional bond — the soul-mate model. As a result, marriage is now disproportionately appealing to wealthier, better-educated couples, because less-educated, less-wealthy couples often do not have the emotional, social, and financial resources to enjoy a high-quality soul-mate marriage.

The qualitative research of sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, for instance, shows that lower-income couples are much more likely to struggle with conflict, infidelity, and substance abuse than their higher-income peers, especially as the economic position of working-class men has grown more precarious since the 1970s. Because of shifts away from industrial employment and toward service occupations, real wages and employment rates have dropped markedly for working-class men, but not for college-educated men. For instance, from 1973 to 2007, real wages of men with a college degree rose 18%; by contrast, the wages of high-school-educated men fell 11%. Likewise, in 1970, 96% of men aged 25-64 with high-school degrees or with college degrees were employed. By 2003, employment had fallen only to 93% for college-educated men of working age. But for working-aged men with only high-school degrees, labor-force participation had fallen to 84%, according to research by economist Francine Blau. These trends indicate that less-educated men have, in economic terms, become much less attractive as providers for their female peers than have college-educated men.

In other words, the soul-mate model of marriage does not extend equal marital opportunities. It therefore makes sense that fewer poor Americans would take on the responsibilities of modern married life, knowing that they are unlikely to reap its rewards.

The emergence of the divorce and marriage divide in America exacerbates a host of other social problems. The breakdown of marriage in working-class and poor communities has played a major role in fueling poverty and inequality, for instance. Isabel Sawhill at the Brookings Institution has concluded that virtually all of the increase in child poverty in the United States since the 1970s can be attributed to family breakdown. Meanwhile, the dissolution of marriage in working-class and poor communities has also fueled the growth of government, as federal, state, and local governments spend more money on police, prisons, welfare, and court costs, trying to pick up the pieces of broken families. Economist Ben Scafidi recently found that the public costs of family breakdown exceed \$112 billion a year.

Moreover, children in single-parent homes are more likely to be exposed to Hollywood's warped vision of sex, relationships, and family life. For instance, a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that children in single-parent homes devote almost 45 minutes more per day to watching television than children in two-parent homes. Given the distorted nature of the popular culture's family-related messages, and the unorthodox family relationships of celebrity role models, this means that children in single-parent families are even less likely to develop a healthy understanding of marriage and family life — and are therefore less likely to have a positive vision of their own marital future.

Thus, the fallout of America's retreat from marriage has hit poor and working-class communities especially hard, with children on the lower end of the economic spectrum doubly disadvantaged by the material *and* marital circumstances of their parents.

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE

There are no magic cures for the growing divorce divide in America. But a few modest policy measures could offer some much-needed help.

First, the states should reform their divorce laws. A return to fault-based divorce is almost certainly out of the question as a political matter, but some plausible common-sense reforms could nonetheless inject a measure of sanity into our nation's divorce laws. States should combine a one-year waiting period for married parents seeking a divorce with programs that educate those parents about the likely social and emotional consequences of their actions for their children. State divorce laws should also allow courts to factor in spousal conduct when making decisions about alimony, child support, custody, and property division. In particular, spouses who are being divorced against their will, and who have not engaged in egregious misbehavior such as abuse, adultery, or abandonment, should be given preferential treatment by family courts. Such consideration would add a measure of justice to the current divorce process; it would also discourage some divorces, as spouses who would otherwise seek an easy exit might avoid a divorce that would harm them financially or limit their access to their children.

Second, Congress should extend the federal Healthy Marriage Initiative. In 2006, as part of President George W. Bush's marriage initiative, Congress passed legislation allocating \$100 million a year for five

years to more than 100 programs designed to strengthen marriage and family relationships in America — especially among low-income couples. As Kathryn Edin of Harvard has noted, many of these programs are equipping poor and working-class couples with the relational skills that their better-educated peers rely upon to sustain their marriages. In the next year or two, many of these programs will be evaluated; the most successful programs serving poor and working-class communities should receive additional funding, and should be used as models for new programs to serve these communities. New ideas — like additional social-marketing campaigns on behalf of marriage, on the model of those undertaken to discourage smoking — should also be explored through the initiative.

Third, the federal government should expand the child tax credit. Raising children is expensive, and has become increasingly so, given rising college and health-care costs. Yet the real value of federal tax deductions for children has fallen considerably since the 1960s. To remedy this state of affairs, Ramesh Ponnuru and Robert Stein have proposed expanding the current child tax credit from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and making it fully refundable against both income and payroll taxes. A reform along those lines would provide a significant measure of financial relief to working-class and middle-class families, and would likely strengthen their increasingly fragile marriages.

Of course, none of these reforms of law and policy alone is likely to exercise a transformative influence on the quality and stability of marriage in America. Such fixes must be accompanied by changes in the wider culture. Parents, churches, schools, public officials, and the entertainment industry will have to do a better job of stressing the merits of a more institutional model of marriage. This will be particularly important for poor and working-class young adults, who are drifting away from marriage the fastest.

This is a tall order, to say the least. But if our society is genuinely interested in protecting and improving the welfare of children — especially children in our nation's most vulnerable communities — we must strengthen marriage and reduce the incidence of divorce in America. The unthinkable alternative is a nation divided more and more by class and marital status, and children doubly disadvantaged by poverty and single parenthood. Surely no one believes that such a state of affairs is in the national interest.

Correction appended: Paul Amato estimates that, if the United States enjoyed the same level of family stability today as it did in 1960, the United States would have approximately 70,000 fewer suicide attempts every year, not 70,000 fewer suicides, as was originally stated in this article.

W. Bradford Wilcox is the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and a senior fellow at the Institute for American Values.

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