



Background

Executive Summary

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WHY CONGRESS SHOULD IGNORE RADICAL FEMINIST OPPOSITION TO MARRIAGE

PATRICK F. FAGAN, ROBERT E. RECTOR, AND LAUREN R. NOYES

Marriage is good for men, women, children—and society. Because of this simple fact, President George W. Bush has proposed a new pilot program to promote healthy marriage. Yet the President's initiative is opposed by radical feminists who seek to undermine what they call the “patriarchal family.” As feminist leader Betty Friedan has warned, this anti-marriage agenda places radical feminists profoundly at odds with the family aspirations of mainstream feminists and most other American women.

The Emergence of Radical Feminism. In its initial stages, modern American feminism was not hostile to marriage; but in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a wave of radical feminism emerged that was overtly hostile to the institution of marriage itself. In their influential 1968 pamphlet “Toward a Female Liberation Movement,” for example, Beverly Jones and Judith Brown proclaimed: “The married woman knows that love is, at its best, an inadequate reward for her unnecessary and bizarre heritage of oppression.” In 1969, University of Chicago sociology professor Marlene Dixon declared: “The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of wife that the subjugation of women is maintained.”

In 1970, author Robin Morgan referred to marriage as “a slavery-like practice. We can't destroy the inequities between men and women until we destroy marriage.” In 1971, Minnesota radical feminists Helen Sullinger and Nancy Lehmann released a manifesto that declared: “Male society has sold us the idea of marriage.... Now we know it is the institution that has failed us and we must work to destroy it....” In 1981, author Vivian Gornick, a tenured professor at the University of Arizona, proclaimed that “The choice to serve and be protected and plan towards being a family-maker is a choice that shouldn't be. The heart of radical feminism is to change that.”

Mainstreaming the Anti-Marriage Message. As their influence grew, such sentiments increasingly found their way into college textbooks and courses,

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exercising a detrimental influence on the intellectual formation of millions of students. In addition, radical feminist novelists have carried the same message into popular literature. Marilyn French, for example, in her 1992 book *The War Against Women*, wrote: “In personal and public life, in kitchen, bedroom and halls of parliament, men wage unremitting war against women.”

Such views help explain the shrillness of the opposition to President Bush’s policy to promote healthy marriage. Anyone who believes that marriage harms the emotional health of women, that men and women are locked in a predator–prey relationship, or that marriage exploits women will disdain any policy to promote healthy marriage. And while these views are not widely shared within our society, they do influence feminist interest groups, which in turn influence Congress.

The Facts About Marriage. Radical feminists view marriage as an oppressive institution that harms women and children. The facts, however, belie this view. On average, a mother who gives birth and raises a child outside of marriage is seven times more likely to live in poverty than is a mother who raises her children within a stable married family. Over 80 percent of long-term child poverty in the United States occurs in never-married or broken households.

Radical feminists claim that marriage foments domestic violence against women. Yet domestic violence is most common in the transitory, cohabitational relationships that feminists have long celebrated as replacements for traditional marriage. Never-married mothers are more than twice as likely to suffer from domestic violence than mothers who are or have been married.

The multiple fields of research that have investigated the effects of marriage show that for men, women, children, and communities at large, marriage leads to greater health and longevity; more education; higher income; less abuse of women, boys, and girls; less poverty; less crime; less addiction; and less depression.

President Bush’s Initiative. The federal welfare reform of 1996 set clear goals to increase the number of two-parent families and reduce out-of-wed-

lock childbearing. Regrettably, however, most states have done little to advance these objectives directly. President Bush has therefore sought to meet the original goals of welfare reform by proposing, as part of welfare reauthorization, a new model program to promote healthy marriage. He proposes spending \$300 million per year on his model program—or only one cent to promote healthy marriage for every five dollars the government now spends to subsidize single-parent families.

Radical feminists view the President’s proposal with alarm. NOW President Kim Gandy, for example, has declared: “Finding a man—the [Bush] administration’s approved ticket out of poverty—is terrible public policy. Marrying women off to get them out of poverty is not only backward, it is insulting to women.” But the radical feminists’ animosity toward marriage is not widely shared by any other group within American society. It would be a tragedy for America’s children and families if groups motivated by radical feminist thought were to succeed in their efforts to block or cripple the President’s healthy marriage proposal.

Conclusion. For decades, radical feminists have attacked marriage as an institution that economically oppresses women and as a prison that generates despair and mental illness for women trapped within it. The facts, however, show that marriage has enormous economic benefits for mothers and children. Stable marriage has substantial, positive, emotional and psychological benefits for women, and it dramatically improves the well-being of children.

American children, in particular, need a culture of stable, healthy marriage. Poor children need it most; they have consistently suffered the greatest damage from the erosion of marriage over the past 30 years. For the sake of all children, but most especially for the children of the poor, Congress should join the President in rebuilding a culture of stable, healthy marriages.

—Patrick F. Fagan is William H. G. FitzGerald Research Fellow in Family and Cultural Issues, Robert E. Rector is Senior Research Fellow, and Lauren R. Noyes is Director of Research Projects in Domestic Policy at The Heritage Foundation.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD IGNORE RADICAL FEMINIST OPPOSITION TO MARRIAGE

PATRICK F. FAGAN, ROBERT E. RECTOR, AND LAUREN R. NOYES¹

Marriage is good for men, women— and society. Because of this simple fact, President George W. Bush has proposed a new pilot program to promote healthy marriage. Despite demonstrated evidence in every major social policy area of the need to rebuild a strong and healthy culture of marriage, President Bush's new marriage initiative is still opposed by the extreme wing of feminism that sees no good in marriage or in unity between men and women, and between mothers and fathers.

Moderate, mainstream feminists have long rejected this animus against marriage; the vast majority of such feminists either are married or intend to marry. Mainstream feminists are focused on a worthy concern: removing obstacles to the advancement of women in all walks of life.

Radical feminists, however, while embracing this mainstream goal—even hiding behind it—go much further: They seek to undermine the nuclear family of married father, mother, and children, which they label the “patriarchal family.” As feminist leader Betty Friedan has warned, this anti-marriage agenda places radical feminists profoundly at odds with the family aspirations of mainstream feminists and most other American women.

Although radical feminists often claim that their opposition to the President's healthy marriage initiative is a matter of efficiency or program details, it is in fact rooted in a long-term philosophical hostility to the institution of marriage itself. *The Washington Post* underscored this point in an April 2002 editorial, stating that the unwarranted animosity to the President's policy grew out of “reflexive hostility” and the “tired ideology” of “the feminist left.”² Decision-makers in Congress should not allow the badly needed initiative to strengthen healthy marriage to be blocked by organizations, such as the NOW Legal Defense Fund, that are still wedded to the “tired ideology” of the radical feminist past.

The *Washington Post* editorial found “something puzzling about the reflexive hostility” to the Presi-

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1. The authors are deeply indebted to interns Darin Thacker and Anna Shopen, who contributed substantially to this paper.
2. Editorial, “The Left's Marriage Problem,” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2002, p. A22.

dent's proposal. This paper unravels much of this puzzle by reviewing major statements made by radical feminist leaders about marriage over the past three decades. Congress should review these radical feminist views on marriage, reject their influence, and uphold legislation that seeks to increase stable, healthy marriage—a better solution for men and women who are parents of children. Congress should never forget that it is children who suffer most when an anti-marriage agenda triumphs.

THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL FEMINISM

In its initial stages, modern American feminism was not hostile to marriage. True, in her magnum opus, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan did describe the traditional homes where wives were not employed as “comfortable concentration camps.”³ But Friedan's criticism was focused primarily on the role of the non-employed housewife. Her goal seems to have been to increase the employment of wives and mothers rather than to attack marriage itself. Thus, Friedan's criticism of marriage was limited; she never called on women to abandon the institution.

However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new wave of radical feminism emerged that quickly moved beyond the positions espoused by Friedan and others. This new feminism was overtly hostile to the institution of marriage itself. Among the key figures in this new, more radical feminism were:

- Kate Millett, who wrote the 1969 best-seller, *Sexual Politics*;
- Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch* (1970), an Australian who was educated at Cambridge, England, and taught at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom and the University of Tulsa in the United States;
- Marilyn French, Harvard fellow, best-known for her 1977 novel, *The Women's Room*;
- Jessie Bernard, author of *The Future of Marriage* (1972) and influential Pennsylvania State University sociologist who “converted” to radical feminism toward the end of her academic career and in whose name the American Sociological Association gives an annual award for feminist sociology; and
- Shulamith Firestone, author of *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) and founder of Radical Women, the first feminist collective.

In the late 1960s, attacks against marriage mounted swiftly, one upon the other. In 1968, radical feminists Beverly Jones and Judith Brown wrote the influential pamphlet “Toward a Female Liberation Movement.” It proclaimed: “The married woman knows that love is, at its best, an inadequate reward for her unnecessary and bizarre heritage of oppression.”⁴ In 1969, radical feminist Marlene Dixon, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago, declared: “The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of wife that the subjugation of women is maintained. In a very real way the role of wife has been the genesis of women's rebellion throughout history.”⁵

Also in 1969, Kate Millett declared in *Sexual Politics* that in “contemporary patriarchies... [wives'] chattel status continues in their loss of name, their obligation to adopt the husband's domicile, and the general legal assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female's domestic service and [sexual] consortium in return for financial support.”⁶ Millett argued that the impetus of the sexual revolution had the potential to collapse antiquated patriarchal systems, including the institution of marriage, thereby creating “a world we can bear out of the desert we inhabit.”⁷ In Millett's view, a dismantled patriarchy—resulting from the destruction of traditional marriage—would generate the down-

3. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1963), p. 337.

4. Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, *Toward a Female Liberation Movement* (Gainesville, FL: June 1968), p. 23.

5. Marlene Dixon, “Why Women's Liberation? Racism and Male Supremacy,” at edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/UHS/APUSH/2nd%20Sem/Articles%20Semester%202/8%20Dixon.htm - 7k.

6. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1969). pp. 34–35.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

fall of the nuclear family, a goal she called “revolutionary or utopian.”⁸

Millett suggested another alternative: that “marriage might be replaced by voluntary association, if such is desired.”⁹ The influence of Millett and others can be seen in the subsequent rise of cohabitation.¹⁰ In either case, Millett argued that the complete destruction of marriage and the natural family is necessary to produce an ideal society.¹¹

The Feminists, an organization formed in the late 1960s, whose leaders included authors Pamela Kearon and Barbara Mehrhof, became well-known for its hostility toward marriage. In 1969, The Feminists declared that “Marriage and the family must be eliminated”¹² and implemented a marriage quota when establishing membership guidelines for itself. The Feminists declared:

Because THE FEMINISTS consider the institution of marriage inherently inequitable... and (b) Because we consider this institution a primary formalization of the persecution of women, and (c) Because we consider the rejection of this institution both in theory *and in practice* a primary mark of the radical feminist, WE HAVE A MEMBERSHIP QUOTA: THAT NO MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF OUR MEMBERSHIP CAN BE PARTICIPANTS IN

EITHER A FORMAL (WITH LEGAL CONTRACT) OR INFORMAL (E.G., LIVING WITH A MAN) INSTANCE OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE.¹³

In 1970, radical feminist intellectual Shulamith Firestone, co-founder of the radical feminist group The Redstockings, proclaimed in *The Dialectic of Sex* that “The institution [of marriage] consistently proves itself unsatisfactory—even rotten.... The family is... directly connected to—is even the cause of—the ills of the larger society.”¹⁴

Sheila Cronan, a member of The Redstockings, in her 1970 essay “Marriage,” declared: “It became increasingly clear to us that the institution of marriage ‘protects’ women in the same way that the institution of slavery was said to ‘protect’ blacks—that is, that the word ‘protection’ in this case is simply a euphemism for oppression,”¹⁵ and proclaimed that “marriage is a form of slavery.”¹⁶ She concluded: “Since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the Women’s Movement must concentrate on attacking this institution. Freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage.”¹⁷

In 1970, leading feminist author Robin Morgan referred to the institution of marriage as “A slavery-like practice. We can’t destroy the inequities between men and women until we destroy mar-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

9. *Ibid.* Quotation from last sentence in original essay on which chapter 2 of *Sexual Politics* is based, at www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/millett.html.

10. The number of people cohabiting grew from 523,000 in 1970 to 4,236,000 in 1998. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P20-514, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements*, March 1998 and earlier reports, at www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/p20-514.pdf.

11. The deconstruction of marriage has certainly not produced an ideal society. For example, contrary to feminist claims, it is worth noting that *marriage* is the safest place for women. See Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 150–160, and Patrick F. Fagan and Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., “Marriage: The Safest Place for Women and Children,” *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 1535, April 10, 2002, pp. 1–4.

12. The Feminists, statement made on August 15, 1969, in Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, eds., *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), p. 376.

13. The Feminists, statement made on August 8, 1969, in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, eds., *Radical Feminism*, p. 374; capitalization and emphasis in original.

14. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970), p. 254.

15. Sheila Cronan, “Marriage,” in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, eds., *Radical Feminism*, p. 214.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

riage.”¹⁸ Morgan went on to become an editor at *Ms. Magazine*.

In 1971, Germaine Greer, scholar and lecturer at the University of Warwick, England, argued further in *The Female Eunuch*: “If women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry.”¹⁹ She asserted:

The plight of mothers is more desperate than that of other women, and the more numerous the children the more hopeless the situation seems to be. . . . Most women. . . would shrink at the notion of leaving husband and children, but this is precisely the case in which brutally clear rethinking must be undertaken.²⁰

Having argued that ordinary women should leave their families, Greer called for the establishment of “rambling organic structure[s]” that would “have the advantage of being an unbreakable home in that it did not rest on the frail shoulders of two bewildered individuals trying to apply a contradictory blueprint.”²¹ In short, Greer encouraged women not to marry, advocated that those already married leave their families, and proclaimed that transitory and free-form relationships should replace intact, two-parent homes. (Regrettably, a substantial transformation like that espoused by Greer has occurred, especially within low-income communities over the past three decades; this replacement of stable, two-parent homes with transient fragmented relationships has proved overwhelmingly detrimental to children, women, and men.)²²

Minnesota radical feminists Helen Sullinger and Nancy Lehmann also released a manifesto, the “Declaration on Feminism,” in 1971 that vowed

hostility toward marriage and a determination to destroy it:

Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women. . . . Male society has sold us the idea of marriage. . . . Now we know it is the institution that has failed us and we must work to destroy it. . . . The end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men.²³

In 1972, in a highly influential book entitled *The Future of Marriage*, sociologist Jessie Bernard of Pennsylvania State University wrote about the “destructive nature” of marriage for women, arguing that marriage generated “poor mental and emotional health” for women when compared to unmarried women or married men.²⁴ “Being a housewife,” Bernard asserted, “makes women sick.”²⁵

Bernard, however, had difficulty explaining why, given the supposedly destructive nature of marriage, married women consistently reported they were happier than were unmarried women. To resolve this paradox, she further asserted that society as a whole warped the minds of women:

To be happy in a relationship which imposes so many impediments on her, as traditional marriage does, women must be slightly mentally ill. Women accustomed to expressing themselves freely could not be happy in such a relationship. . . . [W]e therefore “deform” the minds of girls, as traditional Chinese used to deform their

18. Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 537.

19. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 317.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

22. For a research description of just such chaos, see: Andrew Cherlin and Paula Fromby, “A Closer Look at Changes in Children’s Living Arrangements in Low Income Families,” Johns Hopkins University *Working Papers* 02–01, February 2002.

23. Nancy Lehmann and Helen Sullinger, *Declaration of Feminism*, 1971, at www.spiritone.com/~law/hatequotes.html (September 20, 2002).

24. Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Marriage* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), p. 12.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

feet, in order to shape them for happiness in marriage. It may therefore be that married women say they are happy because they are sick.²⁶

Bernard also asserted that raising children reduced adult happiness.²⁷ She envisioned a future in which marriage would increasingly be childless and would involve an array of “free wheeling” and transitory relationships.²⁸

In 1974, the outcry grew still harsher. Ti-Grace Atkinson, a member of The Feminists and author of *Amazon Odyssey*, called married women “hostages.”²⁹ Atkinson concluded:

The price of clinging to the enemy [a man] is your life. To enter into a relationship with a man who has divested himself as completely and publicly from the male role as much as possible would still be a risk. But to relate to a man who has done any less is suicide. . . . I, personally, have taken the position that I will not appear with any man publicly, where it could possibly be interpreted that we were friends.³⁰

THROUGHOUT THE 1980s AND 1990s: RADICAL FEMINISM CONTINUES TO DECRY MARRIAGE

Feminism’s shrill animosity toward the married family continued beyond the 1970s. In 1981, radical feminist author Vivian Gornick, a tenured professor at the University of Arizona, proclaimed that “Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession. . . . The choice to serve and be protected and plan towards being a family-maker is a choice that shouldn’t be. The heart of radical feminism is to change that.”³¹

Some influential feminists asserted that marriage was akin to prostitution. In 1983, radical feminist author Andrea Dworkin declared, “Like prostitution, marriage is an institution that is extremely oppressive and dangerous for women.”³² In 1991, Catherine MacKinnon, a professor of law at both the University of Michigan Law School and the University of Chicago Law School, added, “Feminism stresses the indistinguishability of prostitution, marriage, and sexual harassment.”³³

In 1990, the organization Radical Women issued a group manifesto affirming that the traditional family was “founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife.”³⁴ The manifesto celebrated the growth of single-parent families and serial cohabitation in low-income communities as a positive step toward the liberation of women.³⁵

26. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 271. A large body of earlier research, as well as research conducted since Bernard’s book was published, has shown that married women fare better on average on most indicators of well-being than do unmarried women. See Norval D. Glenn, “Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage,” Council of Families, Institute for American Values, 1997, p. 6, at www.americanvalues.org/html/a-closed_hearts__closed_minds_.html (November 27, 2002). See also Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, chapter 12, pp. 161–173.

29. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1989), p. 178.

30. Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), pp. 90, 91.

31. Vivian Gornick in *The Daily Illini*, April 25, 1981.

32. Andrea Dworkin, “Feminism: An Agenda (1983),” in *Letters From a War Zone* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993), p. 146.

33. Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 59.

34. *The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminist Theory, Program, and Organizational Structure* (Seattle, Wash.: Red Letter Press, 2001), p. 28.

In her 1996 book *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*, Judith Stacey, Professor of Gender Studies and Sociology at the University of Southern California, consigned traditional marriage to the dustbin of history.³⁶ Stacey contended that “Inequity and coercion... always lay at the vortex of that supposedly voluntary ‘compassionate marriage’ of the traditional nuclear family.”³⁷ She welcomed the fact that traditional married-couple families (which she terms “The Family”) are being replaced by single-mother families (which she terms the postmodern “family of woman”):

Perhaps the postmodern “family of woman” will take the lead in burying The Family at long last. The [married nuclear] Family is a concept derived from faulty theoretical premises and an imperialistic logic, which even at its height never served the best interests of women, their children, or even many men.... The [nuclear married] family is dead. Long live our families!³⁸

Stacey urged policymakers to abandon their concern with restoring marital commitment between mothers and fathers and instead “move forward toward the postmodern family regime,” characterized by single parenthood and transitory relationships.³⁹

In 1996, Claudia Card, professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, continued the attack:

The legal rights of access that married partners have to each other’s persons, property, and lives makes it all but impossible for a spouse to defend herself (or himself), or to be protected against torture, rape, battery, stalking, mayhem, or murder by the other spouse.... Legal marriage thus enlists state support for conditions conducive to murder and mayhem.⁴⁰

Other radical feminists suggested that a culture of self-sufficiency and high turnover in intimate relationships is the key to independence and protection from hostile home life. Activist Fran Peavey, in a 1997 Harvard article ironically titled “A Celebration of Love and Commitment,” suggested that “Instead of getting married for life, men and women (in whatever combination suits their sexual orientation) should sign up for a seven-year hitch. If they want to reenlist for another seven, they may, but after that, the marriage is over.”⁴¹ Also in 1997, radical feminist author Ashton Applewhite, in her book *Cutting Loose—Why Women Who End Their Marriages Do So Well* proclaimed: “Women who end their marriages are far better off afterward.”⁴²

35. *Ibid.*, p. 29. For a picture of what is really happening to low-income women and children, see Cherlin and Fromby, “A Closer Look at Changes in Children’s Living Arrangements in Low Income Families.” The data paint a picture that is far from liberation.

36. In some places, Stacey says she is “ambivalent” about the decline of the traditional nuclear family based on heterosexual marriage, but it is difficult to find positive comment about traditional married-couple families in her writing. She is also relentlessly opposed to efforts to promote healthy marriage. Even when she makes remarks that are ostensibly pro-marriage, they quickly transmute into something else. For example, she states that “two compatible, responsible, committed, loving parents generally *can* offer greater economic, emotional, physical, intellectual and social resources to their children than can one from a comparable cultural milieu. Of course, if two parents are generally better than one, three or four might prove better yet.” She then discusses the need to promote not marriage between mothers and fathers, but networks of “para-parents” to support single mothers. See Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 80.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

40. Claudia Card, “Against Marriage and Motherhood,” *Hypatia*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 8, at www.indiana.edu/~iupress/journals/hypatia/hyp11-3.html (November 21, 2002).

41. Fran Peavey, “A Celebration of Love and Commitment,” *Radcliffe Quarterly*, Winter 1997, p. 18.

Another feminist widely read during the 1990s was Barbara Ehrenreich, a former columnist with *Time* magazine who now writes for *The Nation*.⁴³ Throughout her work, Ehrenreich extols single parenthood and disparages marriage. Divorce, she argues, produces “no lasting psychological damage” for children. What America needs is not fewer divorces but more “good divorces.”⁴⁴ Rather than seeking to strengthen marriage, policymakers “should concentrate on improving the quality of divorce.”⁴⁵ In general, Ehrenreich concludes that single parenthood presents no problems that cannot be solved by much larger government subsidies to single parents.⁴⁶

Ehrenreich writes enthusiastically about efforts to move beyond the narrow limits of the nuclear married family toward more rational forms of human relationship:

There is a long and honorable tradition of “anti-family” thought. The French philosopher Charles Fourier taught that the family was a barrier to human progress; early feminists saw a degrading parallel between marriage and prostitution. More recently, the renowned British anthropologist Edmund Leach stated, “far from being the basis of the good society, the family with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all discontents.”⁴⁷

While Ehrenreich recognizes that men and women are inevitably drawn to one another, she

believes male–female relationships should be ad hoc, provisional, and transitory. She particularly disparages the idea of long-term marital commitment between fathers and mothers. In the future, children will be raised increasingly by communal groups of adults.⁴⁸ These children apparently will fare far better than those raised within the tight constraints of the nuclear married family “with its deep impacted tensions.”⁴⁹

COLLEGE TEXTS: MAINSTREAMING THE ANTI-MARRIAGE MESSAGE

As their influence grew over three decades, radical feminists’ sentiments increasingly found their way into college textbooks and whole college courses on feminist studies, consistently expressing opposition to the natural family and to marriage. Over the years, these writings have exercised considerable detrimental influence on the intellectual formation of millions of college students, not only in many overtly hostile feminist studies courses, but even in the more mainstream family studies courses.⁵⁰

Many current college textbooks on the family rely heavily on sociologist Jessie Bernard’s erroneous arguments, now long contradicted by subsequent research, that marriage has harmful effects on women’s mental health. For instance, in her textbook *Changing Families*, Judy Root Aulette states: “Bernard’s investigation showed that the psychological costs of marriage were great for women.”⁵¹

42. Ashton Applewhite, *Cutting Loose—Why Women Who End Their Marriages Do So Well* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), p. xv.

43. Writer and social commentator Barbara Ehrenreich has appeared in a diverse range of national publications including *Time*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Ms.*, *Esquire*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Social Policy*, and *Mirabella*. She has also written the books *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*; *The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from The Decade of Greed*; *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*; *The Snarling Citizen*; *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*; *The American Health Empire*; *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*; *For Her Own Good*; *Re-Making Love*; *The Mean Season: The Attack on Social Welfare*; and a novel, *Kipper’s Game*. She has received numerous grants and fellowships and awards, including a Ford Foundation Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Sydney Hillman Award for Journalism. Ehrenreich is an honorary co-chairperson of the Democratic Socialists of America.

44. Barbara Ehrenreich, “In Defense of Splitting Up,” *Time*, April 8, 1996.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Barbara Ehrenreich, “Oh, Those Family Values,” *Time*, July 18, 1994.

48. Barbara Ehrenreich, “Will Women Still Need Men?” *Time*, February 21, 2000.

49. Ehrenreich, “Oh, Those Family Values.”

In another text, professors Randall Collins and Scott Coltrane (then both at the Department of Sociology, University of California, Riverside), assert: “We do know, for instance, that marriage has an adverse effect on women’s mental health.”⁵² In another text, authors Maxine Baca Zinn and D. Stanley Eitzen, imitating Jessie Bernard, explain away the enduring paradox that married women are more likely to report they are happy than are un-married women: “If marriage is so difficult for wives, why do the majority surveyed judge themselves as happy?... [The reason] is that happiness is interpreted by wives in terms of conformity. Since they are conforming to society’s expectations, this must be happiness.”⁵³

THE RADICAL FEMINIST VISION: MAN’S WAR AGAINST WOMAN

Many radical feminist novelists have carried the same message into popular literature. Marilyn French, popular radical feminist novelist⁵⁴ and prominent social critic,⁵⁵ is one such writer with wide influence. French’s writing, both fiction and non-fiction, is characteristic of more recent radical feminism that moves beyond hostility to the institution of marriage toward hostility to males in general.

In her 1992 landmark work of social criticism, *The War Against Women*, French declares that, “In personal and public life, in kitchen, bedroom and halls of parliament, men wage unremitting war

against women.”⁵⁶ In French’s view, the “war against women” is quite simply a war of men against women. Across all institutions, the attitudes of men toward women are characterized by hostility, domination, violence, and exploitation.

According to French, male oppression of females is often most pronounced in the institution where men and women live in intimate contact: the married family.

The family is the primary site of female subjection, which is achieved largely through sexuality: women are indoctrinated into their supposed “natural state” by male control of their sexuality in the family.⁵⁷

...Men expect women to perform the most important of all human tasks [child-bearing] with no reward, without much help, and with almost no consideration.⁵⁸

In French’s view, women are the natural prey of male predators who oppress them economically, mentally, and physically. Human sexuality, marriage, and family life are permeated by violence and aggression.

All women learn in childhood that women as a sex are men’s prey; many also learn that the men who supposedly cherish them are the worst offenders. They learn that “love” is about power and they are the powerless....⁵⁹

50. In 1997, Norval D. Glenn, a professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin and national expert and researcher on marriage, studied a sample of 20 college texts used in family studies courses. Glenn found that a small minority of the texts he reviewed were hostile to marriage and that the majority of these texts avoided marriage and its benefits, thus giving a totally false picture of marriage and the lives of married women. See Norval D. Glenn, “Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage,” Council of Families, Institute for American Values, 1997, at www.americanvalues.org/html/a-closed_hearts__closed_minds_.html (November 27, 2002), and “College Texts on Marriage: No Happy Endings,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 29, 1998, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/06/29/p11s1.html> (November 1, 2002).

51. Reported in Glenn, “Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage,” p. 6.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Her novels include *The Women’s Room* (1977); *The Bleeding Heart* (1980); *Her Mother’s Daughter* (1987); *Our Father* (1993); and *My Summer with George* (1996).

55. *Shakespeare’s Division of Experience* (1981); *Beyond Power: On Men, Women, and Morals* (1985); *The War Against Women* (1992); *Women’s History of the World* (2000).

56. Marilyn French, *The War Against Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 196.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Male sexual aggression is endemic, if any sex act against a person's will were considered rape, the majority of men would be rapists.⁶⁰

My own informal survey of adult women suggests that very few reach the age of twenty-one without suffering some form of male predation—incest, molestation, rape or attempted rape, beatings, and sometimes torture or imprisonment.⁶¹

For French, the fate of women in the world is bleak. Indeed, in her view, the well-being of women has been steadily declining since the Neolithic age.

For women, it has been downhill ever since [the stone age].... Women not only did not “progress” but have been increasingly disempowered, degraded, and subjugated. This tendency accelerated over the last four centuries, when men, mainly in the West, exploded in a frenzy of domination, trying to expand and tighten their control of nature and those associated with nature—people of color and women.⁶²

French's vision of the hostility of men toward women verges on the apocalyptic. “Humans,” she states, “are the only species in which one sex consistently preys upon the other.”⁶³ She believes that “men's need to dominate women may be based in their own sense of marginality or emptiness.”⁶⁴

Whatever the root causes, according to French, men's violent treatment, exploitation, and domination of women is so ubiquitous and extreme that it appears to threaten the survival of the species.

It cannot be an accident that everywhere on the globe one sex harms the other so massively that one questions the sanity of those waging the campaign: can a species

survive when half of it systematically preys on the other?⁶⁵

Some women today believe that men are well on their way to exterminating women from the world through violent behavior and oppressive policies.⁶⁶

Marilyn French's views should not be lightly dismissed as the rants of a lone extremist. Her book drew lavish praise from no less than feminist doyenne Gloria Steinem, who declared, “If you could read only one book about what's wrong with this country, *THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN* is it.”⁶⁷

The views of radical feminists help to explain the shrillness of the opposition to President Bush's policy to promote healthy marriage. Anyone who believes that marriage is harmful to the emotional health of women, that men and women are locked in a predator–prey relationship, or that marriage is a mechanism for the economic exploitation of women will certainly regard any social policy to promote healthy marriage with the utmost alarm. Though radical feminist views are not widely shared within our society, they do heavily influence feminist interest groups, which in turn influence Congress.

MODERATE FEMINISTS REACT TO RADICAL VIEWS

The views of radical feminism have become so extreme that more moderate feminists have felt compelled to react against them. In 1981, Betty Friedan distanced herself from the feminist movement she helped create, declaring:

The women's movement is being blamed, above all, for the destruction of the family.... Can we [feminists] keep on shrugging all this off as enemy

59. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

67. *Ibid.*, front cover.

propaganda—“their problem, not ours?” I think we must at least admit and begin openly to discuss feminist denial of the importance of family, of women’s own needs to give and get love and nurture, tender loving care.⁶⁸

Departing from her previous main argument, Friedan also criticized radical feminists’ hostility toward housewives and mothers:

Our [feminists’] failure was our blind spot about the family. It was our own extreme of reaction against that wife-mother role: that devotional dependence on men and nurture of children and housewife service which has been and still is the source of power and status and identity, purpose and self worth and economic security for so many women. . . . And not only for the 49 percent [of women] who are still housewives. Most of the other 51 percent still don’t get as much sense of worth, status, power or economic security from the jobs they now have as they get, or think they could get, or still wish they could get, from being someone’s wife or mother.⁶⁹

THE REALITY: MARRIAGE IS GOOD FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND MEN

For decades, radical feminists depicted marriage as an oppressive institution that was injurious to women and children. In reality, facts show exactly the opposite: In general, marriage has profoundly beneficial effects on women, children, and men.

Foremost is the positive impact of marriage in alleviating poverty among mothers and children. On average, a mother who gives birth and raises a child outside of marriage is seven times more likely to live in poverty than is a mother who raises her

children within a stable married family.⁷⁰ Over 80 percent of long-term child poverty in the United States (where a child is poor for more than half of his or her life) occurs in never-married or broken households.⁷¹ Moreover, the economic benefits of marriage are not limited to the middle class; some 70 percent of never-married mothers would be able to escape poverty if they were married to the father of their children.⁷²

The erosion of marriage is also a principal factor behind the growth of the current welfare state. A child born and raised outside marriage is six times more likely to receive welfare aid than is a child raised in an intact, married family. Each year, federal and state governments spend over \$200 billion on means-tested aid for low-income families with children through programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, food stamps, public housing, the earned income tax credit, and Medicaid. Of this total, some 75 percent (\$150 billion) goes to single-parent families.⁷³

Marriage has profound positive effects on the well-being of children. Children raised by single mothers are 14 times more likely to suffer serious physical abuse than children raised in intact, married families. Children raised in single-parent homes are much more likely to be depressed and to have developmental, behavioral, and emotional problems; such children are more likely to fail in school, use drugs, and engage in early sexual activity. They are also more likely to become involved in crime and to end up in jail as adults.⁷⁴

While radical feminists condemn marriage as an institution that foments domestic violence against women, in fact, the opposite is true. Domestic violence is most common in the transitory, free-form, cohabitational relationships that feminists have long celebrated as replacements for traditional mar-

68. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 10.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

70. Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., and America Peterson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, April 2002).

71. *Ibid.*

72. Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., Patrick F. Fagan, and Lauren R. Noyes, “Increasing Marriage Will Dramatically Reduce Child Poverty,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA03–06, May 20, 2003.

73. Fagan, Rector, Johnson, and Peterson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts*.

74. *Ibid.*

riage. Specifically, never-married mothers are more than twice as likely to suffer from domestic violence than mothers who are or have been married.

Similarly, contrary to the claims of Jessie Bernard, marriage improves rather than harms the mental well-being of women. Linda Waite of the University of Chicago is one of the world's premier family sociologists. She and Maggie Gallagher, critiquing Jessie Bernard's pivotal feminist work on marriage and mental health, point out that "when Bernard compared married and single women's mental health, she was, to a certain extent, contrasting apples and oranges: married mothers with childless singles."⁷⁵ Contrary to what Jessie Bernard claimed, research indicates that marriage actually protects women from depression, not adds to it.⁷⁶ Even when one controls for the hypothesis that those inclined to be happy are those who marry, it is shown that marriage leads to an increase in well-being for both young men and women⁷⁷ and that this difference only increases with age.⁷⁸ Further, after controlling for race, education, family structure, income, and living arrangements, married people—with or without children, male or female—are less depressed and emotionally healthier than singles.⁷⁹

One can summarize the multiple fields of research that have investigated the effects of marriage and say that for all concerned—men, women, and children, as well as communities at large—marriage leads to:⁸⁰

- Greater health and longevity;
- Greater mental health;

- More happiness;
- More education;
- More income;
- Less abuse of adult women;
- Less abuse, including less sexual abuse, of boys and girls;
- Less poverty;
- Less crime;
- Less addiction;
- Less depression and anxiety; and
- Less violence and abuse.

A SHIFT IN DIALOGUE: PROMINENT LIBERALS BEGIN TO ARTICULATE SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE

During the 1990s, after decades of feminist abuse, the reputation of marriage began a comeback. Increasingly, scientific evidence demonstrated the importance of healthy marriage to the well-being of children, women, and men. As the scientific evidence in support of marriage grew, prominent liberals began to speak of the need to strengthen the institution. Foremost among these was former President Bill Clinton.

During his first term in office, President Clinton repeatedly spoke of the importance of marriage and the link between the erosion of the family and a host of social pathologies such as crime, drug abuse, and school failure. For example, in a 1993 national television interview, Clinton declared: "It's

75. Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, p. 165.

76. The authors are indebted to the work of Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, especially chapters 5 and 12 in their book, *The Case for Marriage*.

77. Allan V. Horowitz, Helene Raskin White, and Sandra Howell-White, "Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 58 (1996), pp. 895–907.

78. John Mirkowsky, "Age and the Gender Gap in Depression," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 37 (1996), pp. 362–380.

79. Linda J. Waite and Mary Elizabeth Hughes, "At Risk on the Cusp of Old Age: Living Arrangements and Functional Status Among Black, White and Hispanic Adults," *Journal of Gerontology*, May 1999.

80. For key studies and reviews of the literature, see such publications as Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Patrick F. Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe," Heritage Foundation *FY.I.* No. 19, June 6, 1994; David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996); David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Patrick F. Fagan, "The Effects of Divorce on America," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1373, June 5, 2000; Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*; William A. Galston *et al.*, "Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences," Institute for American Values, New York, 2000; and Fagan, Rector, Johnson, and Peterson, *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts*.

important for me to speak out about the rising wave of crime and violence, how it is tied to the breakdown of the family, the rise in out of wedlock births.”⁸¹ A few months later, in his January 1994 State of the Union address, President Clinton forcefully reiterated this point:

The American people have got to want to change from within if we’re going to bring back work and family and community. We cannot renew our country when, within a decade, more than half of the children will be born into families where there has been no marriage. We cannot renew this country when 13-year-old boys get semi-automatic weapons to shoot 9-year-olds for kicks. We can’t renew our country when children are having children and the fathers walk away as if the kids don’t amount to anything.⁸²

President Clinton’s Domestic Policy Adviser, Professor William Galston, had much to do with shaping the debate within the Clinton White House. As co-author of “Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences,” Galston stated: “Marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike. . . . [W]hether American Society succeeds or fails in building a healthy marriage culture is clearly a matter of legitimate public concern.”⁸³

In remarks at the National Summit on Fatherhood in 2000, former Vice President Al Gore proclaimed, “We need to be a society that lifts up the institution of marriage.”⁸⁴ Mr. Gore and his wife concurred with the Statement of Principles of the Marriage Movement, which declares:⁸⁵

We believe that America must strengthen marriages and families. . . . Strong marriage and family make every one of life’s benchmarks infinitely richer. . . . Strong marriages are a vital component to building strong families and raising healthy, happy, well-educated children. Fighting together against the forces that undermine family values, and creating a national culture that nurtures and encourages marriage and good family life, must be at the heart of this great nation’s public policy.⁸⁶

Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute and Isabel Sawhill, widely respected welfare and family expert at the Brookings Institution, recently issued a paper entitled “Progressive Family Policy for the 21st Century.” Marshall and Sawhill repudiate “the relativist myth that ‘alternative family forms’ were the equal of two-parent families,” citing a growing body of evidence showing that, in aggregate, children do best in married, two-parent families. They argue: “A progressive family policy should encourage and reinforce married, two-parent families because they are best for children.”⁸⁷

81. Interview with Tom Brokaw, *NBC Nightly News*, December 3, 1993. Similarly instructive is the following exchange, taken from an interview on *Meet the Press* with Tim Russert and Tom Brokaw on November 7, 1993: Mr. Russert: “Is the breakup of the traditional family unit a national crisis?” The President: “Absolutely. It is absolutely a crisis.” Mr. Russert: “And what can you do about it as President? The President: “I think that as President I have to do two things. One is to speak about it and to focus the attention of the Nation on it. I went to the University of North Carolina recently and spoke to the 200th anniversary there of the university and gave a major speech trying to deal with the combined impact of the breakdown of the family and the rise in violence and the rise in drugs.” See National Archives, at <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/multidb.cgi>.

82. President William Jefferson Clinton, “1994 State of the Union Address” at www.thisnation.com/library/sotu/1994bc.html.

83. Galston *et al.*, “Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences,” p. 6.

84. Scott Shepard, “Gore Outlines Reforms to Make Absent Fathers More Responsible,” *Cox News*, June 3, 2000, at www.cox-news.com/2000/news/cox/060300_gore.html (December 9, 2002).

85. The Marriage Movement consists of a coalition of organizations that joined to encourage and strengthen marriage. Its Statement of Principles, issued in 2000, details the current “marriage crisis”; refutes arguments against marriage; defines marriage; explains the importance of marriage and costs of divorce; describes several ongoing pro-marriage movements; and outlines a call for action for government entities, married couples, and others. See www.marriagemovement.org/html/report.html (December 16, 2002).

86. Al and Tipper Gore, signed letter to “Supporters of The Marriage Movement, c/o Institute for American Values” from the Gore Campaign 2000, July 1, 2000.

PRESIDENT BUSH'S INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Recognizing the widespread benefits of marriage, both for individuals and for society, the federal welfare reform legislation that was enacted in 1996 set forth clear goals to increase the number of two-parent families and reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing. Regrettably, however, in the years since this reform legislation was passed, most states have done little to advance these objectives directly.

Recognizing this shortcoming, President Bush has sought to meet these original goals of welfare reform by proposing, as part of welfare reauthorization, a new model program to promote healthy marriage. The proposed program would seek to increase healthy marriage by providing target couples with:

- Accurate information on the value of marriage in the lives of children, men, and women;
- Marriage-skills education that will enable couples to reduce conflict and to increase cooperation, leading to greater happiness and permanence in their relationship; and
- Experimental reductions in the current financial penalties against marriage contained in all federal welfare programs.

All participation in the President's marriage program would be voluntary. In general, the programs would focus on younger couples before or around the time of the birth of a first child. The initiative would utilize existing marriage-skills education programs that have proven effective in decreasing conflict and increasing happiness and stability among couples; these programs have also been shown to be effective in reducing domestic violence.⁸⁸ The pro-marriage initiative would not

merely seek to increase marriage rates among target couples, but would also provide ongoing support to help at-risk couples maintain healthy marriages over the long term.

The President proposes spending \$300 million per year on his model program. This sum represents only one cent to promote healthy marriage for every five dollars the government currently spends to subsidize single-parent families.

RADICAL FEMINISTS CONTINUE TO OPPOSE PRO-MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

Despite the reasonable and limited scope of the President's proposal, it should come as no surprise that radical feminists view it with great alarm. Denunciation of the very idea of promoting healthy marriage has been widespread and shrill in the conventional mode of radical feminists:

- NOW President Kim Gandy declared: "I think promoting marriage as a goal in and of itself is misguided."⁸⁹ She added that "Finding a man—the [Bush] administration's approved ticket out of poverty—is terrible public policy. Marrying women off to get them out of poverty is not only backward, it is insulting to women."⁹⁰
- Leading feminist author Barbara Ehrenreich, who believed that the 1996 welfare reform was motivated by "racism and misogyny," was particularly alarmed by the President's modest healthy marriage proposal, declaring the idea a "lurid new low" in misogynist hostility.⁹¹
- Gwendolyn Mink, a professor of political science at the University of California at Santa Cruz and prominent liberal expert on women and poverty, has characterized marriage promotion as "a coercive act by the government."⁹² In

87. Will Marshall and Isabel Sawhill, "Progressive Family Policy in the 21st Century," presented at the Maxwell Conference on "Public Policy and the Family," Syracuse University, October 24–25, 2002, pp. 2, 6, at www-cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan-smeedingconference/marshall-sawhill.pdf.

88. Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson, and Robert E. Rector, "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence That Marriage Education Works," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1606, October 25, 2002, p. 7.

89. Brian Carnell, "NOW Elects New President," July 5, 2001, at [www.equityfeminism.com/discussion/fullthread\\$msgnum=398](http://www.equityfeminism.com/discussion/fullthread$msgnum=398) (October 17, 2002).

90. Karen S. Peterson, "The President's Family Man; Wade Horn Is Encouraging Welfare Moms to Wed; Not Everyone Says, 'I Do, Too,'" *USA Today*, July 30, 2002, p. 7.

91. Barbara Ehrenreich, preface in Randy Abelda and Ann Withorn, *Lost Ground* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), pp. vii, viii.

Mink's view, "The idea behind the marriage proposal is that we should cure poor mothers' poverty by curbing poor mothers' independence. Not only does this privatize social policy, but also it does so in a way that erodes the rights of poor mothers."⁹³

- Kate Kahan, executive director of Working for Equality and Economic Liberation, testified before the Senate Finance Committee in opposition to the President's proposal. She proclaimed: "Marriage promotion will not help these women in crisis leave [welfare], it will only serve as yet another barrier to leaving and that will not, under any circumstances, solve the poverty they face."⁹⁴
- The Center for Women Policy Studies argues: "We do not believe that the promotion of marriage as part of the social engineering... is an appropriate public policy strategy—if our goal is truly to put a dent in women's and children's poverty."⁹⁵
- Avis Jones–DeWeever, Study Director for Welfare and Poverty Research at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, adds that "Getting the government into the business of promoting marriage... does nothing to address the real needs of low-income single mothers."⁹⁶

Generally, radical feminists have attacked the Bush proposal not on the grounds of opposition to marriage *per se*, but on the technical grounds of efficiency or practicality. However, given the stridency of the opposition, there can be little doubt it is rooted in the habitual radical feminist hostility to marriage itself.

The Washington Post, for example, although it has reservations about some details of the Bush pro-

posal, also acknowledges that the passionate opposition to the proposal is unreasonable and rooted in radical ideology. In an April 5, 2000, editorial entitled "The Left's Marriage Problem," the *Post* stated:

So there's something puzzling about the reflexive hostility among some liberals to the not-so-shocking idea that for poor mothers, getting married might in some cases do more good than harm. Why not find out whether helping mothers—and fathers—tackle the challenging task of getting and staying married could help families find their way out of poverty?... It's wrong to suggest that any marriage promotion is equivalent to pushing women into abusive marriages. The Bush document specifically seeks to encourage "healthy marriage," a qualifier inserted in recognition that children in high-conflict marriages do not, in fact, do better.... "Right now we really don't know what it takes to build positive relationships among high-risk couples, and this is something that does need new research," says Kristin Moore, President of the nonpartisan research group Child Trends, who believes that small state programs could yield useful models. What, beyond tired ideology, is the argument against that?⁹⁷

The *Post* is correct in lamenting the negative influence of the "tired ideology" of the "feminist left" on this issue. For over three decades, the ideas and rhetoric of radical feminism have played a significant role within certain segments of American culture.

True, in recent years, the rhetoric of radical feminism has become somewhat less shrill, and the

92. Sarah Stewart Taylor, "Heated Debate on Welfare May Focus on Marriage," *Women's Enews*, March 5, 2001, at www.womense-news.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/467/context/archive (December 13, 2002).

93. Bryn Mawr College, "Government Promotion, Support of Marriage to Be Discussed at Conference," at www.brynmawr.edu/news/stories/marriage.shtml (December 13, 2002).

94. Kate Kahan, "Testimony for Senate Finance Committee Hearing, 'Issues in TANF Reauthorization: Building Stronger Families,'" May 16, 2002, at <http://finance.senate.gov/hearings/testimony/051602kktest.pdf>.

95. Center for Women Policy Studies, "Statement in Opposition to 'Promotion of Marriage' As a Public Policy Strategy for Ending Women's Poverty," May 2002, at www.centerwomenpolicy.org/papers/200205tanfandmarriage.html (December 11, 2002).

96. Avis Jones–DeWeever, "Marriage Promotion and Low-Income Communities: An Examination of Real Needs and Real Solutions," Institute for Women's Policy Research, June 2002, p. 4.

97. "The Left's Marriage Problem."

number of feminists willing to denounce marriage forthrightly has diminished. But the fundamental themes and concepts of radical feminism have changed little. Moreover, major feminist organizations, such as the NOW Legal Defense Fund, that have been heavily influenced by radical feminist thought enjoy considerable influence within Congress and are spearheading the opposition to the President's healthy marriage initiative.

But the radical feminist animosity to marriage is not widely shared by any group within American society, rich or poor, black, Hispanic, or white. It would be a tragedy for America's children and families if the NOW Legal Defense Fund and similar groups, motivated by radical feminist thought, were to succeed in their efforts to block or cripple the President's healthy marriage proposal.

CONCLUSION

For more than three decades, radical feminists have attacked and demeaned marriage. They have depicted marriage as an institution that economically oppresses women and as a prison that generates despair and mental illness for women trapped within it.

This ideological perspective stands in complete contrast to the facts. Marriage, as an institution, has enormous economic benefits for mothers and children. Stable marriage has substantial, positive, emotional and psychological benefits for women, and it dramatically improves the well-being of children.

Not surprisingly, the harsh anti-marriage views of radical feminists have failed to gain broad public acceptance. The overwhelming majority of Americans view marriage in a positive light. In all socio-economic classes, most men and women wish to become married and hope for happiness and stabil-

ity within marriage. But, despite rejection by the broad public, the harsh anti-marriage views of radical feminists have had an influence within feminist advocacy groups, such as the NOW Legal Defense Fund, and these groups in turn continue to enjoy significant influence on Capitol Hill.

Nevertheless, a broad consensus on the importance of marriage to society has emerged and continues to grow. The 1996 welfare reform act recognized that strengthening marriage should play a significant future role in reducing poverty and welfare dependence and improving child well-being. President Bush's proposal to create a model program to promote healthy marriage builds on this foundation.

Feminist groups, predictably, oppose the President's marriage initiative—often stridently. While this opposition is usually framed in narrow technical terms, there can be no doubt that it is rooted in what *The Washington Post* has called the “tired ideology” of radical feminism. Lawmakers should not be swayed by this tired ideology; instead, they should reaffirm the importance of healthy marriage.

American children, in particular, need a culture of stable, healthy marriage. The children of our poor need it most; they have consistently suffered the greatest damage from the erosion of marriage over the past 30 years. For the sake of all children, but most especially for the children of the poor, Congress should join with the President in the task of rebuilding a culture of stable, healthy marriages.

—Patrick F. Fagan is William H. G. FitzGerald Research Fellow in Family and Cultural Issues, Robert E. Rector is Senior Research Fellow, and Lauren R. Noyes is Director of Research Projects in Domestic Policy at The Heritage Foundation.