

Let Them Eat Wedding Rings

Read the entire report, second edition released June, 2007. (PDF)

Executive Summary:

Let Them Eat Wedding Rings: The Role of Marriage Promotion in Welfare Reform brings to the welfare reform debate the perspective of unmarried people, the population directly affected by policies that promote marriage. The report critiques the marriage-promoting welfare policies that have been implemented and proposed, and offers "Ten Golden Principles" on which welfare policies should be based.

The report's conclusions include:

- Marriage is not an effective solution to poverty. Research shows that for a significant proportion of poor parents, getting married would not lift them out of poverty.
- If poor families' basic needs are met, they are more likely to get married. Being unmarried is more a symptom of poverty than a cause.
- Children and families are harmed by policies that deny privileges and support to unmarried families, often in an attempt to "promote marriage."
- Marriage and child poverty rates in other countries show that there is no clear link between these two factors. Some countries with very low marriage rates, and very high rates of births to unmarried parents, also have a much lower percentage of children in poverty than the United States.
- Given that 44% of American adults are not married, discrimination against this group and their families threatens their well-being. The negative impact on American

children is unacceptably large.

The report's recommendations include:

- Keep welfare policy focused on its primary objective: reducing poverty, not increasing marriage.

- Help poor families become more stable by meeting basic needs, like access to education, decent health care and housing, and living wages.

- Respect privacy and freedom in decisions as personal as whether or not to marry.

- Treat unmarried families, including their children and dependents, like other families. Do not punish members of these families because they are not married.

- Eliminate both financial incentives and disincentives to marriage, to avoid penalizing either married or unmarried people.

- Reward states for reducing poverty, not decreasing births to unmarried parents.

- Take into consideration how marriage promoting policies can negatively impact victims of domestic violence.

Second Edition (2007)

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First Edition (2002)

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