

## In Middle America, Marriage is in Retreat

### New Report Finds Marriage Trends Among the 58 percent of Americans With A High-School Education Increasingly Resemble the Poor

From an e-mail Press Release, Institute of American Values, Dec 6, 2010

Released today by the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and the Institute for American Values, [The State of Our Unions 2010](#) finds that marriage in Middle America is in trouble.

New data indicate that trends in nonmarital childbearing, divorce, and marital quality in Middle America increasingly resemble those of the poor, where marriage is fragile and weak. Yet among the highly educated and affluent, marriage is stable and appears to be getting even stronger.

"When Marriage Disappears," authored by W. Bradford Wilcox, associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, is the first report to address the causes of the retreat from marriage in Middle America. It finds that shifts in marriage attitudes, increases in unemployment, and declines in religious attendance are among the trends driving the retreat from marriage in Middle America. In a striking reversal of historic trends, highly educated Americans are moving to embrace a pro-marriage mindset even as Middle Americans are losing faith in marriage.

#### THE REPORT FINDS:

- The moderately educated middle (high-school-educated Americans who make up 58% of the adult population) is dramatically more likely than highly educated Americans (college educated Americans who make up 30% of the adult population) to have children outside of marriage.
- Divorce rates are up for moderately educated Americans, relative to those who are highly educated.
- The cultural foundations of strong marriages--adherence to a marriage mindset, religious attendance, and faith in marriage as a way of life--are stronger now among the highly educated than among the moderately educated.
- Because marriage plays a central role in securing financial stability for families, this retreat from marriage among Middle Americans is jeopardizing the futures of children and their families who aspire to enter and stay in the middle class and realize the American dream.

#### DISCUSSION ABOUT THE THE REPORT

**The Changing Culture War**, By Ross Douthat, *New York Times*, Dec 6, 2010

"We've known for a while that America has a marriage gap: college graduates divorce infrequently and bear few children out of wedlock, while in the

rest of the country unwed parenthood and family breakdown are becoming a new normal. This gap has been one of the paradoxes of the culture war: highly educated Americans live like Ozzie and Harriet despite being cultural liberals, while middle America hews to traditional values but has trouble living up to them." [Read the Article](#)

#### Unmarried With Kids: A Shift In The Working Class

By Jennifer Ludden, *NPR*, Dec 6, 2010

"The path to adulthood used to be clear -- love, marriage, baby carriage -- and no one embodied that more than America's working class. But today, for those with only a high school education, that order no longer holds; in fact, a new study suggests that marriage is foundering in Middle America."

[Read the Article](#) | [Listen Here](#)

#### The State Of Our Unions: New Study Reports Growing 'Marriage Gap'

By Amy Lee, *The Huffington Post*, Dec 6, 2010

"[W]hy sound the alarm bells over these findings? Because when marriage is at risk, so, too, the study argues, is the very foundation of our society:

'Marriage is a core social institution, one that helps to ensure the economic, social and emotional welfare of countless children, women, and men in this nation.'" [Read the Article](#)

#### More Education Means More Faith in Marriage, New Report Says

By Antoinette Campbell, *CNN*, Dec 6, 2010

"The amount of education a person has plays a big role when it comes to deciding whether to make a long-term commitment to that special someone or to have a child outside of marriage, a new report says."

[Read the Article](#)

#### Marriage: Marginalized in the Middle

By W. Bradford Wilcox and Chuck Donovan, *Christianity Today*, Dec 6, 2010

"Marriage is in trouble in Middle America. High rates of divorce, nonmarital childbearing and single parenthood were once problems primarily concentrated in poor communities. Now, the American retreat from marriage is moving into the heart of the social order: the middle class." [Read the Article](#)

---

The "When Marriage Disappears" issue of *The State of Our Unions* is part of the "Nest and Nest-egg Initiative," a multi-year inquiry based at the Institute for American Values, supported by The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, into the prudential values and institutions that are essential to sustaining a secure and thriving American middle class.