



Helping Families Thrive

# FAMILY FORMATION TRENDS AND ANALYSIS U.S. OVERVIEW 2008

## CHILDREN: THE HEALTH OF GROWING UP IN AMERICA

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### INSIGHT

More so than 30 years ago, children today are significantly more likely to grow up in the types of families their parents have chosen based on their own desires. Unfortunately, these families are often seriously at odds with what is best for children. Our culture's increasing lack of child centeredness is driven by a marked decline in selflessness, sacrifice and maturity--all of which are required to raise the next generation.

Ironically, a contributing factor to our lack of child centeredness is the emergence of "delayed adolescence" among young adults. This is in part a result of a prosperous society in which many young people do not have a coming-of-age experience that launches them into adulthood. Rather than learning that healthy adulthood requires the consideration of others, many twenty- and thirty-somethings seem to view life as "all about me" as they pursue gadgets, fun, money and peer approval. This is at cross-purposes to the self-sacrifice and commitment necessary for marriage and child-rearing.

As a result, the United States is experiencing a declining birth-rate, and more children born into a variety of family forms which often do not include a child's natural mother and father. Children are the losers in an environment in which the desires of adults to create family on their own terms are met at the expense of children's needs.

### CURRENT CHILD TRENDS

- ☒ Fewer children living with two parents, but level still high
- ☒ Fewer children living with married parents, but level is still relatively high
- ☒ More children living with cohabiting parents
- ☒ More children living with single-parents, mostly mom
- ☒ Increasingly, grandparents are raising their children's children
- ☒ Despite strong economy, child poverty not dramatically lower
- ☒ Fertility rate and homes with children, decreasing

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

*Why, when we know that family form is such a significant driver of all the important measures of child well-being, do we find nearly all the family growth trends moving in the most harmful directions?*

*Are these a result of natural consequences beyond our control or of choices we make?*

*If the latter, how can we make better choices?*



### Child Centeredness: Steep decline in fertility rate and child-present homes

2007 saw the highest number of annual births ever in the United States, surpassing the peak of the postwar “baby boom” in 1957.

And 2007 marks the second consecutive year in which the total fertility rate (TFR) has been above the replacement level since 1971<sup>1</sup>

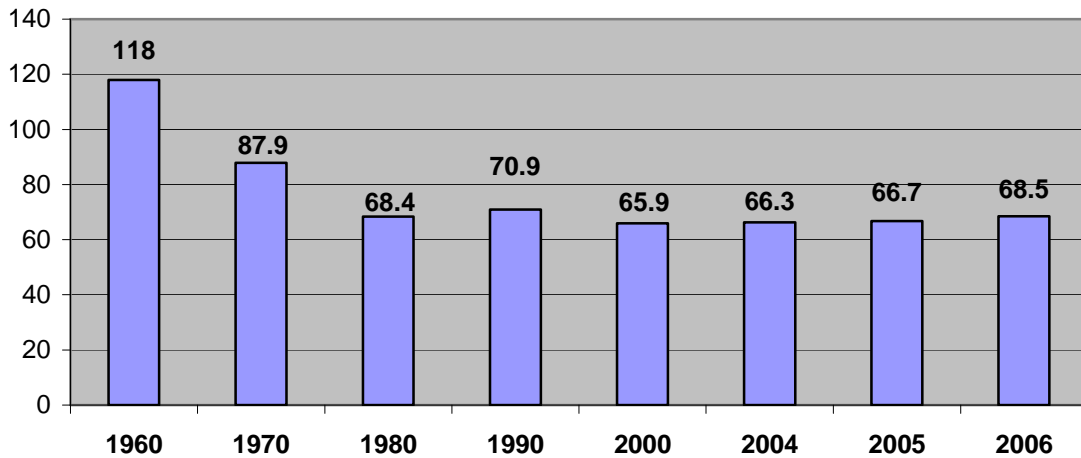
Births rose for all races, ranging just less than 1% for white women to 6% for Asian and Pacific Islanders. Demographers have referred to last few years of U.S. fertility as a growing “baby boomlet.” (More people for us to help them raise their children!)

In the 1850s, 75 percent of all homes had children present.<sup>2</sup>

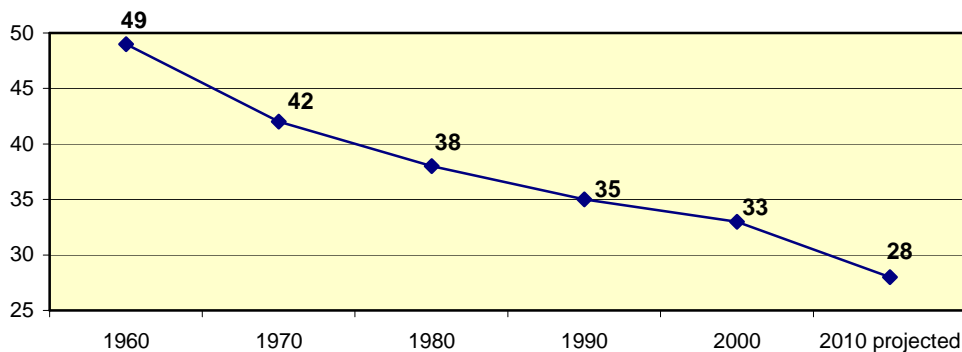
By 1960, just under half of all households had children present.

Less than one third of households included children in 2000, and that number is expected to drop to 28 percent by 2010.<sup>3</sup>

#### Fertility Rates: Number of U.S. Births per 1,000 Women by Year



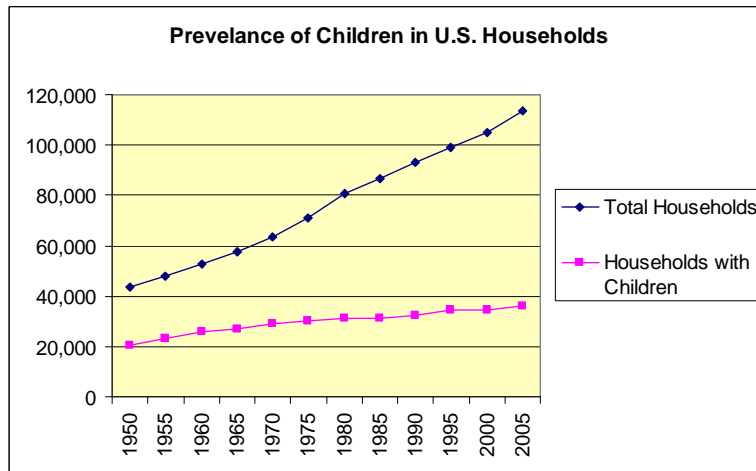
#### U.S. Homes with Child(ren) Present by Percent



<sup>1</sup> The TFR is the rate at which a given generation can exactly replace itself, generally considered 2,100 births per 1,000 women.

<sup>2</sup> James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1990), p. 588. As cited in *The State of Our Unions 2005, The Social Health of Marriage in America*, The National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, “The State of Our Unions 2006: The Social Health of Marriage in America,” *The National Marriage Project*, (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, July 2006), p. 23.



*"We are in the midst of a profound change in American life. Demographically, socially and culturally, the nation is shifting from a society of child-rearing families to a society of child-free adults. ...Indeed, if the twentieth century aspired to become the 'century of the child,' the twenty-first may well become the century of the child-free."<sup>4</sup>*

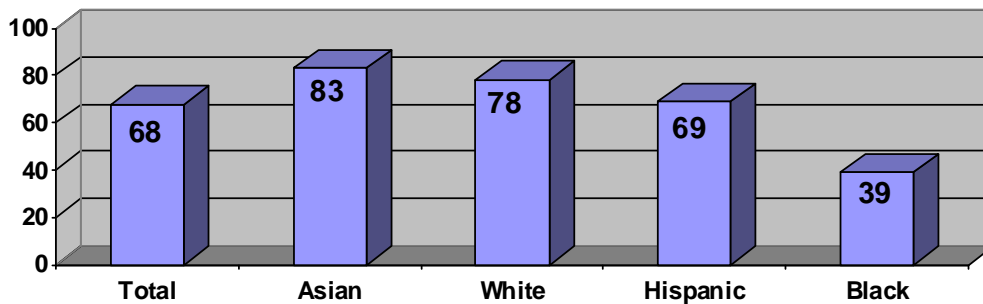
**David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, National Marriage Project**



**Living With Two Parents: Decreasing, but still relatively high**

The difference by race in the percentage of children living with two parents is dramatic, spanning a high of 83 percent for Asians and a low of 40 percent for Blacks.<sup>5</sup>

**Percentage of U.S. Children Living with Two Parents by Race**



*An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage... Thus, it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of two biological parents that seem to support child development.<sup>6</sup> (emphasis in original)*

**Kristin Anderson Moore, Child Trends**



**Type of Two Parent Homes: Cohabiting increasing, but married parenting still high**

Married parenting is declining compared to cohabiting and single parenting, but still relatively strong.<sup>7</sup> Households consisting of married parents and their natural children declined by 1.7 percent from 1990 to 2000 while all other household categories increased modestly or dramatically.<sup>8</sup>

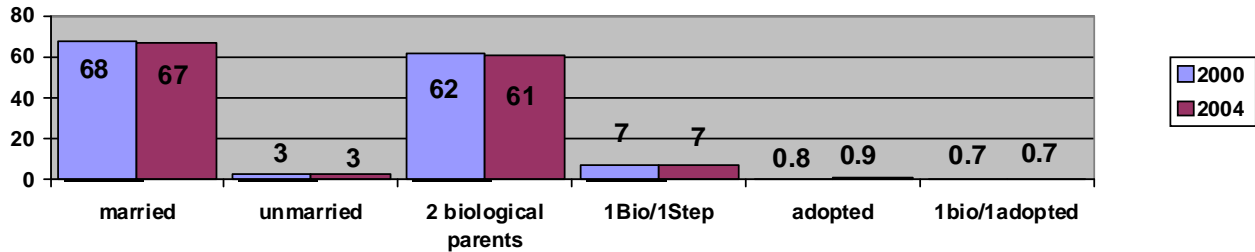
<sup>4</sup> Popenoe and Whitehead, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Rose M. Kreider and Jason Fields, *Living Arrangements of Children: 2001*. Current Population Reports, P70-104. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC. (July 2005), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Kristin Anderson Moore, et al., "Marriage From a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?" *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002, p. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Krieder and Rose, 2005, table 1, page 3.

### % of All U.S. Children by Two-Parent Type



*“Over the past 20 years, a body of research has developed on how changes in patterns of family structure affect children. Most researchers now agree that together these studies support the notion that, on average, children do better when raised by two married, biological parents who have low-conflict relationships.”<sup>9</sup>*

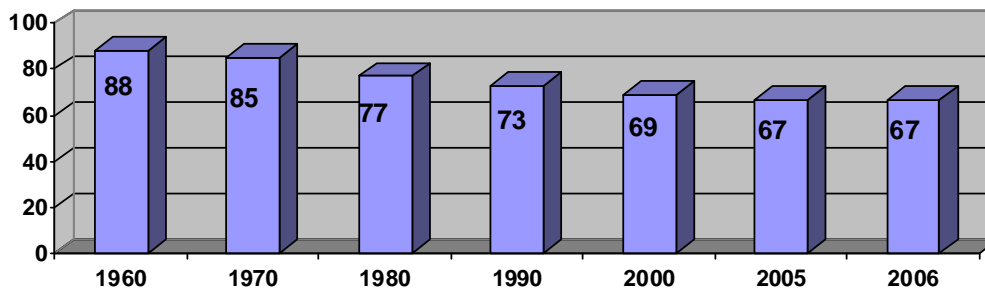
**Center for Law and Social Policy, a leading child-advocacy think-tank**



### Children Living with Married Parents: *Declining But Still High*

From 1970 to 1996, the percentage of all children under age 18 who were living with two married parents decreased steadily from 85 percent to 68 percent. This percentage stabilized during the late 1990s and is one percentage point lower in 2005 and 2006 at 67. The percentage is dramatically lower for Black than White children.<sup>10</sup>

### Percentage of U.S. Children Living with Two Married Parents



*“Research clearly demonstrates that children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely than other children to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems, not only during childhood, but also in adulthood. Although it is not possible to demonstrate that family structure is the cause of these differences, studies...suggest that this is the case.”<sup>11</sup>*

**Paul Amato, Penn State sociologist**



### Children Living with Cohabiting Parents: *Increasing steadily*

Over 41 percent of cohabiting couple homes contain children.<sup>12</sup> Among women over age 20 who have non-marital births, more than half do so in cohabiting relationships.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Frank Hobbs, “Examining American Household Composition 1990 and 2000,” *Census 2000 Special Reports*, U.S. Census Bureau, August 2005, table 3, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Parke, “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?” *Center for Law and Social Policy Policy Brief*, May 2003, p. 1.

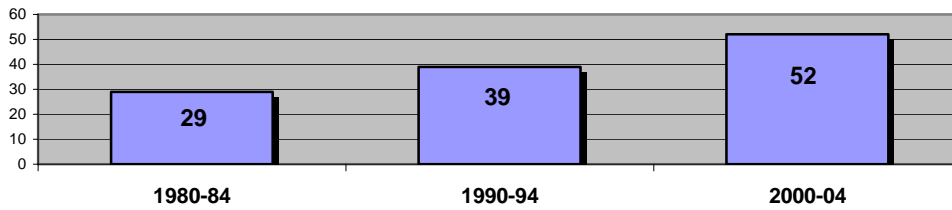
<sup>10</sup> “Family Structure,” Child Trends DataBank [http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/pdf/59\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/pdf/59_PDF.pdf) (accessed April 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation,” in *The Future of Children*, “Marriage and Child Wellbeing,” Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2005, (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton and The Brookings Institution), 89.

<sup>12</sup> Popenoe and Whitehead, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Mincieli, et al, “The Relationship Context of Births Outside of Marriage: The Rise of Cohabitation,” *Child Trends Research Brief*, May 2007, p. 2.

### Percentage of All Non-Marital Births to Cohabiting Homes by Years



*“Children in cohabiting couples also show poorer emotional health than children from married, two-parent families – closely resembling children in remarried and single-parent families.”<sup>14</sup>*

**University of Chicago professor, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher**

*“Moreover, children living in cohabiting unions with stepfathers or mother’s boyfriend are at higher risk of sexual abuse and physical violence, including lethal violence, than are children living with married biological parents. ...Several studies have found that children currently living with a mother and her unmarried partner have significantly more behavior problems and lower academic performance than children in intact families.”<sup>15</sup>*

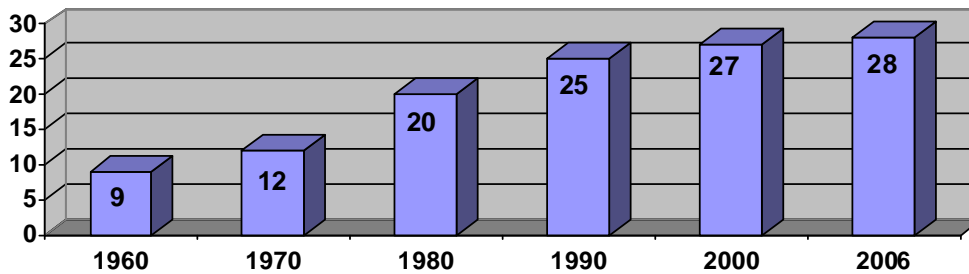
**David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, National Marriage Project**



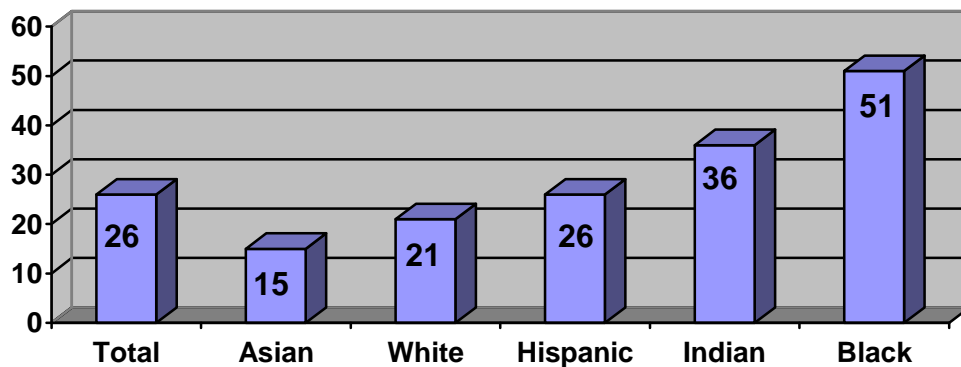
### Children Living with Single Parents: *Increasing dramatically*

In 1960, only 9 percent of all children lived with a single-parent, with little change over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By 2006, that percentage jumped to 28 percent.<sup>16</sup>

### Percentage of U.S. Children Living with Single Parents: Historical View



### Percentage of U.S. Children Living with Single by Race



<sup>14</sup> Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, “The Case for Marriage,” (New York: Doubleday Books, 2000), p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, “Should We Live Together?” a report from the National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, 2002, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Popenoe and Whitehead, 2008, p. 24; Krieder and Fields, 2005, figure 1, p. 4.

*“Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents.”<sup>17</sup>*

**Sara McLanahan, Princeton sociologist**

*“When the Department of Health and Human Services studied some thirty thousand American households, it found that for [every race and income level] children raised in single-parent homes were more likely to be suspended from school, to have emotional problems, and to behave badly. ... The children of single moms are more likely than those of two-parent families to be abused, to drop out or be expelled from school, to become juvenile delinquents, to take drugs and to commit adult crimes.”<sup>18</sup>*

**James Q. Wilson, UCLA sociologist**

**Children Living with Adoptive Parents, 2004:**

1.9 percent of children in the U.S. live in an adopted home.<sup>19</sup>

0.9 percent of U.S. children live with an adoptive mother and father, up from 0.8 in 2000

0.7 percent of U.S. children live with a biological and adoptive parent, stable since 2000

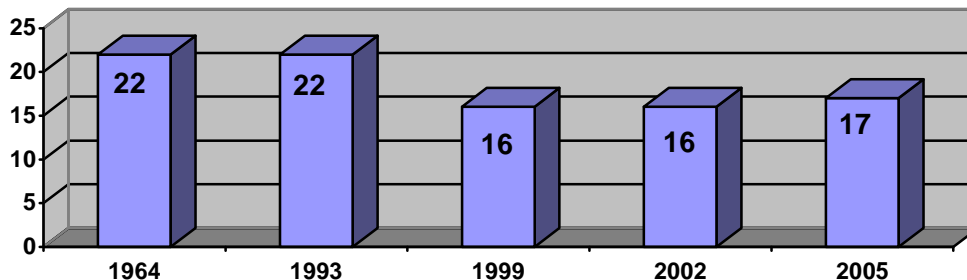
**Children Living with Neither Parent: *Grandparents increasingly filling the gap***

4 percent of all U.S. children live in a home with neither parent; grandparents only fill the gap in the majority of these cases, but other relatives also provide care.<sup>20</sup>

**Children Living in Poverty: *Rate driven by family form rather than parental employment***

Poverty as a primary determinant of child well-being has decreased overall over time, but has seen a slight increase recently.<sup>21</sup> Family form has replaced parental employment as the primary driver in child poverty.<sup>22</sup>

**Child Poverty Rate by Year**



<sup>17</sup> Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> James Q. Wilson, *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 8.

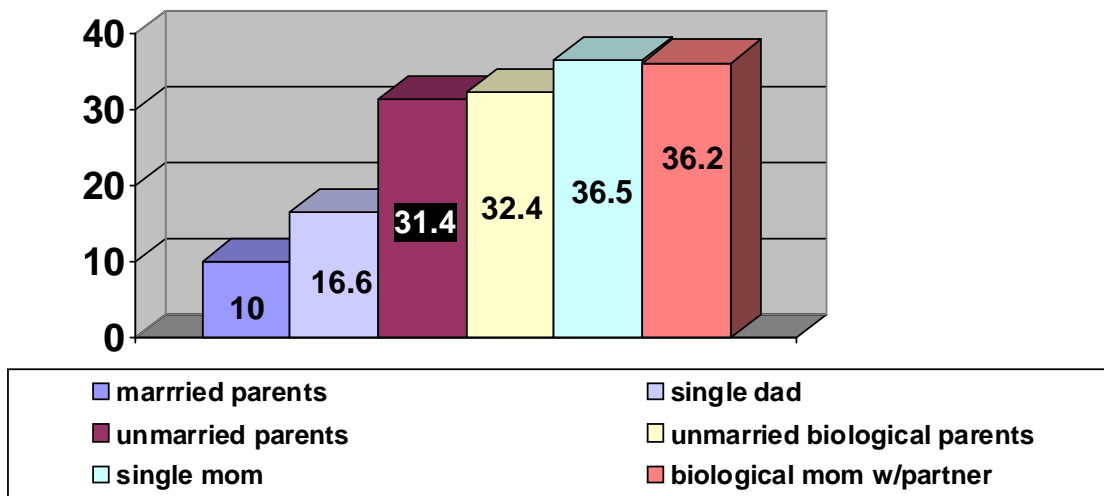
<sup>19</sup> Krieder and Fields, 2005, table 1, page 3; Rose Krieder, “Living Arrangements of Children: 2004” *Current Populations Reports*, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), table 1, page 4.

<sup>20</sup> Krieder, 2008, table 1, page 4.

<sup>21</sup> “Children in Poverty,” Child Trends DataBank [http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/pdf/4\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/pdf/4_PDF.pdf) (accessed April 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Krieder, 2008, table 2, page 6.

## Percentage of Children Living in Poverty by Family Form



*"The vast majority of children who are raised entirely in a home where parents are married will never be poor during childhood. By contrast, the vast majority of children who spend time in a fatherless home will experience poverty."<sup>23</sup>*

**David Ellwood, Harvard professor**

*"It is no exaggeration to say that a stable, two-parent family is an American child's best protection against poverty."<sup>24</sup>*

**The Progressive Policy Institute**

*Avoiding family poverty requires three primary things:*

- 1) finish high-school,*
- 2) marry before having children and*
- 3) marry after the age of 20.*

*Only 8 percent of families who do this are poor, while 79 percent of those who fail to do these are poor."<sup>25</sup>*

**Professor Bill Galston, former domestic policy advisor for President Bill Clinton**

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*Glenn T. Stanton is the director of global family formation studies at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, CO and the author of [Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society](#) and [Marriage on Trial](#).*

<sup>23</sup> David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> Elaine Kamarck and William Galston, "Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s," whitepaper from the Progressive Policy Institute (September 27, 1990), p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> As explained by James Q. Wilson, "Why We Don't Marry," *City Journal*, located at [www.city-journal.org/html/12\\_1\\_why\\_we.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/12_1_why_we.html).