



Marriage Opportunity: The Moment for National Action *A Statement from the Marriage Opportunity Council*

Executive Summary: **Our Argument in Ten Propositions**

1. For the first time since the controversial Moynihan Report of 1965, marriage as culture war in America can now be replaced by marriage as common cause and a common conversation.
2. An organizing principle of this conversation is to identify, reduce, and where possible eliminate social, economic, and legal barriers to marriage.
3. We, like other Americans, continue to hold diverse views on gay marriage, but we come together to acknowledge that it is here to stay and to emphasize and enhance the good that it can do.
4. America's growing separation into two countries—upscale America in which marriage typically succeeds and mainstream America in which marriage typically fails—threatens all of us and threatens the American idea, which is based on broadly shared thriving.
5. The splitting of American marriage along class lines both results from and significantly contributes to American inequality. The issues of inequality and family are inextricably linked.
6. Liberals fighting for social justice and economic opportunity are now called by the logic of their values to help extend the advantages of marriage to low- and middle-income couples who seek it for themselves, much as they fought to help gay Americans attain marriage.

7. Conservatives fighting for social stability and stronger families can now, based on the logic of their deepest values, recognize gays and lesbians who seek the same family values.
8. Gays and lesbians who are winning marriage for themselves can also help to lead the nation as a whole to a new embrace of marriage's promise.
9. Americans can come together as a nation to make marriage achievable for all who seek it.
10. We come together as a Marriage Opportunity Council to make this argument, to appeal to our fellow citizens to join us, and to carry out this work.

Why We Come Together

Make marriage achievable for all who seek it.

At this moment in our country's history, reducing legal, social, and economic barriers to marriage has become something America must do. It is also something the country can do—together, in a way that has not been possible before.

For the couples who seek it and for the nation as a whole, marriage is fundamental. Marriage creates family and strengthens social bonds. It's a wealth-producing institution. It's almost certainly society's most pro-child institution. Warts and all, it's today's best bet if you are seeking faithfulness and lasting love.

But American marriage today is becoming a class-based and class-propagating institution. In upscale America, marriage is thriving: most people marry, fewer than 10 percent of children are born to unmarried mothers, and most children grow up through age eighteen living with their two married parents. Among the more privileged, marriage clearly functions as a wealth-producing arrangement, a source of happiness over time, and a benefit to children.

But for millions of middle- and lower-class Americans, marriage is increasingly beyond reach, creating more fractured and difficult family lives, more economic insecurity for single parents, less social mobility for those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, more childhood stress, and a fraying of our common culture.

This growing class-based marriage divide threatens all of us. It endangers the very foundations of a broadly middle-class society. Such a core fracturing of our civil society surely calls for—but has not yet received—sustained national attention and commitment to reform.

Why? Much of the explanation is that for nearly fifty years marriage has been a source of deep cultural conflict in our society. Since the 1960s, the nation has argued almost continuously over the worth of marriage and engaged in a series of polarizing culture wars over the institution's relationship to family formation and stability, racial equality, women's rights, traditional family values, and, most recently, the rights of gay and lesbian couples to marry.

But now, particularly as the legal and social barriers to gay marriage come down, we have reached a moment when we may finally be able to change course. Today we have a remarkable and perhaps even unique opportunity to think anew about the meaning and role of marriage and to come together as a nation to address the growing class divide in American marriage.

Everyone should have the opportunity to marry: that is a cultural message that gay marriage has sent. It is a broadly inclusive message, and it is the message that America needs to hear, whether the issue is sexual orientation or social class.

In addition, scholars and leaders from across the political spectrum are in growing agreement on the importance of marriage in both promoting social mobility and improving children's well-being.

For these reasons, we believe that today the broad theme of *marriage opportunity* can help give birth to a new pro-marriage coalition that transcends the old divisions.

Liberals fighting for social justice and economic opportunity are now called by the logic of their values to help extend the advantages of marriage to low- and middle-income couples who seek it for themselves, much as they fought to help gay Americans attain the right to marry.

Conservatives fighting for social stability and stronger families can now, based on the logic of their deepest values, recognize gays and lesbians who seek the same family values.

Gays and lesbians who are winning marriage for themselves can also help to lead the nation as a whole to a new embrace of marriage's promise.

In short, for the first time in decades, Americans have an opportunity to think about marriage in a way that brings us together rather than drives us apart. What for most of our lives has been a culture war can now become a common cause.

The Gay Marriage Moment: From Culture Wars to Convergence

Fifty years ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant secretary of labor, issued a report on the deterioration of the black family that soon became both famous and notorious. He noted that out-of-wedlock childbearing was at the then-astronomical rate of 25 percent among black Americans, and he famously concluded that the result in affected communities would be "chaos." Moynihan wrote out of a real concern for the well-being of African Americans, but the report set off a backlash that lasted a generation. Many people interpreted the report as an attack on African American communities, or family diversity, or both.

It turned out that out-of-wedlock childbearing among African Americans was a harbinger of what would happen later among whites. By 1995, the percentage of white children born out of wedlock surpassed the African American rate that had so alarmed Moynihan in 1965. Today more than 40 percent of *all* American children are born out of wedlock.

In the 1970s, another wave of controversy began: religious conservatives and others sounded public alarms about divorce, single parenthood, and other worrisome indicators. They perceived that family norms were breaking down, and they were right to see something amiss, but the norms they promoted made no room for gay and lesbian Americans and at times seemed at odds with the growing social and economic independence of women. Already interpreted by many as an attack on blacks, pro-family advocacy now picked up additional baggage as an attack on gay rights and feminism. The result was to set up a long conflict in which personal freedom and civic equality were seen as being fundamentally at odds with family stability and traditional norms.

Even as the so-called “family values” debates raged in the popular culture, many family scholars were quietly finding empirical support for the proposition that family structure matters. In the 1980s and ‘90s, they noted the importance of fathers, the disadvantages of divorce and single parenthood, and the independent economic and social value of marriage. This emerging consensus, however, was swamped by yet a third wave of controversy: in the 1990s, the gay marriage debate emerged and seemingly swept all other family issues off the agenda.

For two generations, then, those who favored women’s equality and gay rights went hammer and tong against those who favored traditional values such as durable, child-centered marriage. For two generations, Americans took for granted that marriage would be a subject of pitched battle. It seemed almost as if, where issues concerning marriage and family were concerned, America was capable of nothing but endless conflict.

That has changed. Events of the past few years have turned the old culture war assumptions upside-down. If there ever was a conflict between social equality and family values, it is over today.

Even as it was igniting political firefights around the country, the gay marriage movement was quietly bringing about a cultural realignment. Gays and lesbians emerged as champions of marriage—something unimaginable when the Moral Majority entered the scene in the 1970s. They also emerged as parents, embracing the premises and practices that put children’s interests at the center of adults’ relationships and communities’ purposes.

Meanwhile, it increasingly became America's better-educated elites who were most successfully forming and maintaining "traditional" marriages. In working-class America, by contrast, family values, as actually practiced, came under growing stress. The old cultural story about libertine elites undermining working-class traditionalism has come to seem backward. A sign of the times came when, in 2012, the conservative scholar Charles Murray called upon elites to "preach what they practice" by doing more—not less—to propagate their own family values. Surely no one could have foreseen that in the 1970s.

In this emerging world, where gays and straights alike are marrying and raising children, the cultural boundaries have shifted. Today, the most meaningful distinction is not between gays and straights or between traditional and liberal values: it is between those who are part of a strong marriage culture and those who are not.

In the present social environment, what is politically new is the opportunity to discuss the marriage gap with much less of the polarization and hostility that have vexed the public conversation until now. This opportunity stems from at least three cultural confluences.

First, the facts on the ground are creating a natural confluence of interest between progressives who care about equality and conservatives who care about family. Today's class-based marriage divide is an important contributor to inequality, and it is a gap that no politically plausible amount of government transfers can fill. Progressives thus are coming to realize that they need to be concerned about family structure if they care about social justice.

By the same token, as it becomes increasingly clear that aspirations to family formation are being stymied by wage stagnation and disappointing job prospects among working-class and less-educated men, conservatives are coming to realize that they need to be concerned about economic and labor market bottlenecks that reduce men's employability, damage their marriageability, and help drive the cycle of family decline. To be sure, important non-economic factors are also at work. But the increasingly dire situation of less-skilled men in the marriage market and in the labor market implies that no amount of moral suasion can, by itself, restore a marriage culture among the less privileged. Improving the economic prospects of the less educated, especially men, is vital.

This confluence presents a new dynamic. Reducing the marriage gap will reduce inequality; reducing inequality will reduce the marriage gap. Instead of being asked to choose between the egalitarian and family agendas, today America has little choice but to pursue both agendas at once.

Second, the onset of same-sex marriage has given gay and lesbian Americans a new stake in family values, while it has detoxified family values among progressives. Until now, touting marriage was tantamount to excluding gays and lesbians, because, of course, they could not participate. Before gay parenting became common, emphasizing the centrality of children in society's priorities likewise could seem exclusionary.

Today, however, "family values" is an *inclusive* rubric. As same-sex marriage and parenting reach the cultural mainstream, gay equality and family values increasingly become one and the same. Same-sex spouses and parents have all the same interests as opposite-sex spouses and parents in strong marriages, safe streets, good schools, healthy communities, and the other ingredients of a child-friendly society. Once viewed warily even by some within the LGBT community itself, marriage now frames the aspirations of many young gay and lesbian Americans. Indeed, the gay population is emerging as an important new constituency for family values.

By the same token, the fervent pursuit of marriage opportunity by gay-rights advocates has sensitized many progressives to the critical role that marriage plays in promoting social equality. In the past, many progressives (including many gay progressives) saw marriage as patriarchal, confining, or reactionary. Gay marriage supporters showed that marriage makes sense for reasons that have nothing to do with social hierarchy or gender inequality. Indeed, they showed that social equality is impossible without access to marriage.

Progressives, meanwhile, did not fail to notice how matrimony was bringing new self-esteem and social inclusion to previously marginalized gay people and families. For progressives, a question naturally arises: If marriage opportunity gives such a boost to equality among gays and lesbians, then could it not also help to reduce other forms of inequality?

In sum, today there is a new audience for family values among progressives, and a new energy and constituency for marriage among gay Americans.

Third and finally, conservatives are coming to recognize that their interests and values are best served today by an agenda that builds on rather than merely opposes same-sex marriage. Some conservatives may perceive the rise of same-sex marriage as a defeat and a dead end. We believe that it is better seen as an open doorway. Same-sex marriage is a durable fixture of the American landscape. The trend in public opinion is obvious. According to most polls, same-sex marriage now boasts the approval of a national majority, and among young Americans it is close to uncontroversial. A conservative family agenda premised on the exclusion of gay people and families is a nonstarter with young Americans and would, if carried forward, do more to marginalize conservatism than strengthen families.

This change is an opportunity for the pro-family movement. Conservatives today are able to talk to a much broader portion of the public. They can ask, “What does a pro-family agenda look like if it does not feature the exclusion of gay and lesbian people? What do ‘family values’ look like when freed of any tincture of anti-gay animus?” When the discussion is framed in those terms, conservatives can take a leading role in building a broader pro-family consensus than the country has seen in three generations.

Unlike the older family values agenda, this new agenda need not and should not write off anyone who seeks to be a good parent or spouse. On the contrary, it is difficult to think of measures to strengthen opposite-sex marriage and parenthood that do not also strengthen same-sex marriage and parenthood—and vice versa.

For conservatives, the paradigm that once seemed to pit equality and inclusion against family and children has stopped making sense. The right, like the left, cannot very well advance either equality or family without advancing both.

Millions of Americans—indeed, a large majority of Americans—have opposed same-sex marriage in the past. For some, same-sex marriage was a first choice and an early calling, but others fought it sincerely and in good faith. Yet regardless of how we got here, we can now come together in seeing a common way forward.

To follow this new path, it is not necessary for anyone to recant old positions, confess sins, or re-litigate old debates. All that is necessary is to accept the fact of same-sex marriage and to seek out and emphasize the good that it can do. At a minimum, by directing attention and energy to the importance of broad access to marriage, the same-sex-marriage moment has helped to set up exactly the conversation that America now needs to have.

That conversation bridges center left and center right, aiming to replace a culture war with a growing consensus. It would not have been possible a decade ago. Today, it is unavoidable.

The Two Americas Moment: The Marriage Gap and Its Consequences

On basic indicators, American marriage is not doing very well. The U.S. marriage rate is the lowest it has been in over a century, having fallen by more than half since the early 1970s. Partly, this happened because people are marrying later, but partly it is because so many people are not marrying at all. As a result, today more than 40 percent of all American children are born to unmarried parents. Fewer than two-thirds of children under eighteen live with two married parents. Almost a quarter live with their mothers only.

These trends may seem inconsistent with the gay and lesbian community's embrace of marriage, and in important respects they are. When we look deeper, however, a clear theme emerges, and that theme is *bifurcation*. Where marriage and family structure are concerned, America is becoming two countries.

One America has as its main denizens what might be called “two-two-two-one” households: homes with two parents, two college degrees, two incomes, and one stable marriage. A good way to view this group is through the lens of education: its members generally have at least a college diploma, often more. Among this college-educated group—about a third of the nation—marriage is in good shape.

But in what might be called the “new Middle America”—the two-thirds of Americans without a four-year college degree—marriage is in decline. And the further you go down the educational totem pole, the more you find the institution of marriage in trouble. Toward the bottom of the spectrum, marriage is ceasing to be a norm altogether.

As a result, the country has seen a remarkable divergence. Over the past several decades, the norm of marriage has eroded across all economic and educational classes, but much less among the elite. In 2011, according to Census Bureau data, the child of a woman with a bachelor’s degree or higher had a less than 10 percent chance of being born out of wedlock. But for the child of a woman with a high school degree or less, the odds of being born to a single mother were greater than 50 percent. Of children born to women with some college but no bachelor’s degree, about 40 percent were out of wedlock.

The situation of children reflects that of marriage. In the late 2000s, if you were a fourteen-year-old girl whose mother was college educated, odds were 80 percent that you were living with both your mother and your father. If, on the other hand, your mother was among those with a high school degree or less, the odds of being with both your parents were below 60 percent. Writes Isabel Sawhill of the Brookings Institution, “It used to be that most children were raised by their married parents. For the children of the college-educated elites, that is still true. But for the rest of America, meaning roughly two thirds of all children, it is no longer the case.”

This is the *marriage gap*, and it’s something new in America. Far from being merely statistical, it is a pervasive everyday reality. Where family structure is concerned, the people on the two sides of the gap increasingly live in different and separate worlds. At the high end, children take marriage and the relative security it brings for granted; at the low end, children may know barely anyone in their community who is married. The marriage gap is therefore a *cultural gap*.

Perhaps of even greater concern is that it is increasingly also a *class gap*. The marriage gap is propagating across generational lines. In that sense, its attributes are becoming, to a troubling extent, hereditary. A child’s odds of successfully marrying and building a stable two-parent home depend quite substantially on whether that child grew up with those same advantages.

On average, children who grow up in “two-two-two-one” households are in a fortunate situation. In their world, they and most of the people they encounter will attend college, enjoy economic security, and form successful marriages, generally with each other—thereby passing on the same advantages to their own kids. They may hear from time to time about places where two-parent, married households are not the norm, but they probably can’t imagine living there.

The same cycle runs in reverse among the less educated and less well off. Sub-standard schools, low incomes, and low marriage rates chase each other to make the two-two-two-one world seem like a distant planet. “The poor . . . have all but given up on marriage,” write June Carbone of the University of Minnesota and Naomi Cahn of George Washington University in their book “Marriage Markets.” Low-income children commonly grow up in an environment where marriage seems inaccessible, or, when it is accessible, unsustainable.

Carbone and Cahn spell out the demographic essence of this new class structure stratified by marriage and family: “For the majority of Americans who haven’t graduated from college, marriage rates are low, divorce rates are high, and a first child is more likely to be born to parents who are single than to parents who are married.” The result is that marriage “has emerged as a marker of the new class lines remaking American society. Stable unions have become a hallmark of privilege.” They conclude: “The result of these changes is a new elite—an elite whose dominant position is magnified by the marriage market.”

A vigorous debate is taking place today over which is more to blame for the marriage gap: structural forces such as the economy, or cultural forces such as social norms and behavioral habits. “Structuralists” often see “culturalists” as at best being naive about powerful macro influences on family behavior, and at worst blaming people for a predicament largely outside of their control. In turn, “culturalists” often see “structuralists” as at best being naive about the importance of social norms, and at worst wanting to create large government programs that can backfire and render people more dependent.

At the same time, as William J. Doherty of the University of Minnesota has pointed out, when not in a polarized conversation most people will acknowledge that both structural and cultural forces are in play. It is hard not to

conclude that macro-social forces such as deindustrialization, educational inequalities, high rates of incarceration, and the overall decline in working-class jobs for men profoundly shape family structure and family life in non-affluent America. So a valid theoretical explanation of the marriage gap can start with a focus on how structural forces influence family norms.

But at the level of effecting change, to ignore cultural values is to court wishful thinking. Economic and other structural forces can give rise to cultural patterns that become “baked in” over time, becoming self-reinforcing and developing, so to speak, a life of their own. Members of a family—or a community—with few or no successful marriages over generations will have difficulty creating enduring, healthy marriages for themselves, even if they become economically more stable. The clear implication is that both economic and cultural opportunity need attending to. Structures and values both matter at the level of intervention, whatever their relative importance as original causes of the predicament.

The marriage gap has baleful consequences.

First, *it harms children* by reducing the likelihood that they will know and be supported by both their parents throughout childhood, and it often further disadvantages them by trapping them in a multigenerational cycle of poverty or family instability.

Second, *it harms adults* by reducing their odds of economic and social success. For example, research finds that marriage itself, in part because of the greater personal stability it brings, tends to improve earning power, particularly of men.

Third, *it harms communities* by eroding the expectations and norms that channel young people toward family formation, depriving them of role models and support networks that would help them succeed as spouses and parents.

Finally, *it harms the country* by fueling economic and social inequality, splitting America into separate worlds of marital haves and have-nots.

This situation hurts all of us. American marriage cannot thrive as a gated community. Marriage draws its strength from broadly shared assumptions and values. Its unmatched power to bind families together, over time and through hardship, stems from its standing as a social norm, not just a legal status. It needs the social legitimacy and broad cultural buy-in that come, in America, from being a realistic aspiration of the many, not just a privilege of the few.

Recall, too, that even among those in communities where marriage is breaking down, the aspiration to marry has remained strong. Polled in 2010, only 12 percent of Americans told the Pew Research Center they did not want to get married. The less well off are no exception. Surveying evidence from the Fragile Families Project and other research, Carbone and Cahn write, “The majority of the women in these studies have a relationship with the father at the time of the birth, and many of the couples hope to marry eventually, though the majority will break up without doing so.” They conclude, “These studies suggest that rather than the marital ideal changing—both men and women continue to regard marriage as an important commitment to someone they regard as a cherished partner—what is changing is the expectation that they will be able to realize that ideal.” Many young men and women who are on the “wrong” side of the marriage gap feel that marriage is unattainable, not that it is undesirable.

Many advocates of strengthening the family, for many years, have praised the two-parent married family as a touchstone of America’s economic and moral vitality. So it is, but where marriage advocates may often have gone wrong in the past was to imply that those who could not or did not conform to the standard template—gays, single mothers, and others—were opponents rather than potential recruits. In fact, what the same-sex marriage movement shows is that gay and lesbian Americans did not want to undermine marriage: they wanted to join it.

Increasingly, it is becoming clear that the same is true of many single mothers and fathers: they are not rejecting family values so much as feeling rejected by them, or at least unable to sustain them. No doubt, there are people out there who purposefully reject social norms like marriage and parental responsibility. But they are not the typical case or the case to which public policy should primarily address itself. The constructive focus is on the many more who would

like to practice family values, if only they had the social, cultural, and economic capital to do so.

This is why we stress marriage *opportunity*. Changing minds and hearts has much value, but as a social-policy goal, removing impediments to success is more achievable and less polarizing. More important, improving opportunity has been, arguably, the great unifying American idea since before the days of the Declaration of Independence. Speaking of marriage opportunity is as natural in American public conversation as speaking of social opportunity and economic opportunity. It is a goal Americans can broadly agree on.

Toward Family Opportunity

Here, then, is the question for the nation: What are the legal, social, and economic barriers to marriage in America today, and how can they be reduced or eliminated?

In offering some possible answers, our goal is to start a conversation, not to control that conversation or predetermine its outcomes. There are two important reasons for taking this open-ended approach.

Probably most importantly, and notwithstanding the important and encouraging work of many leaders, there are currently few (if any) major policy or program interventions that have been clearly demonstrated by independent evaluations to be effective over time in areas such as improving marriage rates and improving marital quality and stability. This fact is not surprising, given both the complexity of the challenge and the still-early stage of the national policy response, and it should certainly not discourage us. But it *should* cause us to favor an approach to reform that is experimental, non-doctrinaire, and sensitive to emerging evidence and unfamiliar ideas.

In addition, it would be wrong to expect—or even wish for—liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, suddenly to put aside their differences and agree on the details of a policy agenda to expand marriage opportunity. What we do expect and will do our best to achieve, however, is a healthy conversation

between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, to articulate the theme of marriage opportunity and propose the best ideas for making progress. The goal, then, is not one agreed-upon blueprint, but many competing ideas with many inflections, all connected to a core concept for the nation.

Guided by these considerations, there are five broad themes that we believe deserve attention and further development, as we work together in the months and years ahead to expand marriage opportunity in America.

1. Make the public argument for marriage opportunity.

The first and most important step is to put the issue of marriage opportunity squarely on the national agenda. The goal is for thousands of American leaders and millions of American citizens to know what marriage opportunity means and why it's important.

2. Increase marriageability in non-elite America.

Arguably the very core of America's marriage crisis is the decline of marriageability—the reduced likelihood of being or finding someone who is able to make marriage work—among middle- and lower-income Americans. Economically oriented strategies to improve marriageability might include apprenticeship and training innovations to help those without a college degree enter the workforce; wage and income policies to help lesser-paid workers cross the breadwinner threshold; the removal of unnecessary impediments to workforce participation; helping non-elite Americans connect to institutions and practices that reward saving and that thereby increase the financial viability of family formation (more than 40 percent of U.S. households have no or very little savings); and more.

Culturally oriented strategies to improve marriageability might include marriage-friendly community-organizing projects; seeking out, and listening to and learning from, twenty-something leaders from non-elite America on topics of sex, children, family, and marriage; engagement and mobilization by non-profits and religious organizations; and more.

The two dimensions—economic and cultural—are both important, and they go together.

3. Change marriage incentives in public policy.

Probably the most obvious reform in this area is to identify and eliminate (or at least reduce) marriage penalties in public policy, such as reductions in benefits or income that are triggered simply by two persons getting married. Another example might be to reform state-level divorce laws in ways that would offer help for couples in troubled marriages wishing to reconcile. A third possible incentive change might be to create more opportunities in public education, as well as in government social welfare programs, for young people and couples to learn life literacy skills, particularly regarding healthy relationships, thrift, and financial literacy. There might also be numerous incentive shifts in marriage and family policy that would more effectively promote among young Americans the so-called “success sequence”—first get your basic education, then get married, then have children.

Moreover, there is a growing bipartisan consensus to consider changes in incarceration and law enforcement policies that function to remove men from the marriage market and make fathers inaccessible—a good example of why it’s important to cast the net beyond family laws and policies narrowly defined, and also to look at the ways in which laws and policies of many kinds affect marriage opportunity.

4. Support LGBT families and build on their success.

Establishing marriage opportunity for gays and lesbians is an important dimension of expanding marriage opportunity in America—not only for gay and lesbian couples, but, as we’ve tried to suggest, for the nation as a whole. Supporting gay couples who seek to form lasting unions, gay parents who seek to raise successful children, and gay young people who aspire to a future in marriage—this is part and parcel of re-establishing a culture of marriage. And it brings society that much closer to ending forever the conflict between gay rights and family values: that is, to being a society in which all Americans, regardless of sexual orientation or social class, can aspire to a rich family life and a lasting marriage in a supportive community.

5. Conduct new, and newly inclusive, research.

A great deal of important work has been done on marriage and family, but to respond adequately to today's challenge, much more needs to be known about cultural factors such as sexuality, family formation, childbearing, marriage, and views of marriage in lower-middle-class, blue-collar, and lower-income America. Helpful, too, is to educe evidence on why marriage matters for gay couples and their children, just as scholars have long done on why marriage matters for straight couples and their children; and to investigate ways to improve the lives of young people who are gay or have gay parents, just as we've long done for other young people. In both scholarly and public discourse, the time has come to remove barriers between gay studies and the field of marriage and the family, thereby expanding scholars' and policy makers' capacity to understand marriage opportunity.

We emphasize that the suggestions above are meant merely to start a conversation, not to prejudge its outcome. They are examples of how people might talk about marriage opportunity, not what they should say. If you have a better idea, please join us. Through the formation of the Marriage Opportunity Council, we intend to begin the work of bringing a multitude of voices and perspectives into the new conversation about marriage, and to developing, propagating, and implementing their most promising ideas. (You can reach us at info@americanvalues.org.) Together, we can expand opportunity for those who are being left behind, and, in the process, consign the old conflict between social equality and family values to the history books.

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About the Marriage Opportunity Council

The Marriage Opportunity Council is an independent, non-partisan group of scholars and leaders who come together to develop proposals to reduce legal, social, and economic barriers to marriage. Through collaborative research, interdisciplinary deliberation, and jointly authored public statements, the Council seeks ways to make marriage achievable for all who seek it, end the conflict between gay rights and family values, and help lead the nation to a new pro-family, pro-equality consensus.

The Council’s co-directors are David Blankenhorn of IAV and Jonathan Rauch of the Brookings Institution.



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