

Monday, October 01, 2007 [Marriage Gloom-and-Doomers Are "Divorced From Reality"](#)

Posted by: Michael Medved at 9:07 PM

For years, I've taken a lonely but outspoken stand against ubiquitous and, in fact, nearly universal lies about the state of marriage and the prevalence of divorce in the United States. In the past in this space I've used the authoritative Census Bureau figures to prove that the "50% divorce rate" that everyone loves to cite is, in fact, a pernicious myth: nearly 70% of first marriages manage to last until one of the partners dies.

On Saturday, I was pleased to see America's "Journal of Record," the New York Times, running a valuable column similarly decrying the current tendency to inflate and exaggerate the purported "collapse" of the institution of marriage. This column, by two professors of business and public policy at the prestigious Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, counts as especially significant because this same New York Times had previously run numerous articles by the shameless and agenda-driven Sam Roberts, who outrageously manipulates available data in order to prove his favorite point: that traditional marriage is finished in the USA and we need to get used to a brave new world of fresh romantic arrangements.

In any event, Professors Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers take on Roberts and all the other wedlock-is-dead advocates with their powerful, persuasive piece.

"The great myth about divorce is that marital breakup is an increasing threat to American families, with each generation finding their marriages less stable than those of their parents," they write. "The story of ever-increasing divorce is a powerful narrative. It is also wrong. In fact, the divorce rate has been falling continuously over the past quarter-century, and is now at its lowest level since 1970. While marriage rates are also declining, those marriages that do occur are increasingly more stable. For instance, marriages that began in the 1990s were more likely to celebrate a 10th anniversary than those that started in the 1980s, which, in turn, were also more likely to last than marriages that began in the 1970s."

Near the conclusion of their column, Stevenson and Wolfers cite specific numbers: "The narrative of rising divorce is also completely at odds with counts of divorce certificates, which show the divorce rate as having peaked at 22.8 divorces per 1,000 married couples in 1979 and to have fallen by 2005 to 16.7.... The facts are that divorce is down, and today's marriages are more stable than they have been in decades."

Given these figures, and the easily available and profoundly reassuring news about the persistent strength of the institution of marriage, how can we explain the widespread claim that traditional, life-long marriage is outdated and increasingly irrelevant?

The left promotes the lie in order to indicate that timeless family institutions no longer apply in the 21st Century, and we need new, experimental, exciting and "liberating" arrangements--- like living together without commitment, or single mother households, open multiple partner relationships, or gay marriage, or whatever. The right goes along with the claims about moral collapse because the bad news conforms to the gloomy, "we've-lost-America" temperament of

too many conservatives, as well as confirming the (often ill-informed) nostalgia for the recent past.

Of course, people of conscience and foresight need to work to defend the institution of marriage and, yes, the traditional family faces multiple threats and challenges that ought to give us pause. But one hardly helps the cause of matrimony by going along with the dumb and dishonest idea that the battle to preserve it is already lost. The column in the New York Times bears the appropriate title: “Divorced From Reality.” Thoughtful conservatives can’t afford that sort of divorce—and need to fight and win our crucial battles within the parameters of the real world.

<http://www.townhall.com/blog/g/8b51c0be-f52e-424c-b11f-f0f23d443fb3>