MARRIAGE AT THE CROSSROADS

The institution of marriage is at a crossroads. Across most of the industrialized world, unmarried cohabitation and nonmarital births have skyrocketed while marriage rates are at record lows. These trends mask a new, idealized vision of marriage as a marker of success as well as a growing class divide in childbearing behavior: the children of better-educated, wealthier individuals continue to be born into relatively stable marital unions while the children of less-educated, poorer individuals are increasingly born and raised in more fragile, nonmarital households. Meanwhile, growing numbers of same-sex couples seek access to marriage as an important political and personal goal.

These trends have generated political controversy and pose a number of challenges for policy makers: Should access to marriage be extended? Should lawmakers increase or reduce government support for marriage? And, with marriage rates declining, what policies will best support families in their important function of caring for children? The interdisciplinary approach offered by this edited volume provides tools to inform the debate and to assist policy makers in resolving these questions at a critical juncture. Drawing on the expertise of social scientists and legal scholars, the book will be a key text for anyone who seeks to understand marriage as a social institution and to evaluate proposals for marriage reform.


Elizabeth S. Scott is the Harold R. Medina Professor of Law at Columbia University School of Law. She is the coauthor of Rethinking Juvenile Justice (with Laurence Steinberg, 2008), which received the 2010 Society for Research in Adolescence award for the best social policy book.
Marriage at the Crossroads

LAW, POLICY, AND THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY FAMILIES

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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book grew out of numerous conversations over lunch in a small restaurant in the West Village – about family law issues generally, and about the future of marriage at this interesting historic juncture. As family law experts who share a belief that social science research can inform the legal regulation of families, we thought that an edited volume on “marriage at the crossroads,” that brought together the leading social scientists studying families and leading family law experts could make an important contribution to the literature. We were delighted that virtually every scholar we invited to contribute to the book accepted our invitation, and we are extraordinarily grateful to all of our contributors for making this project such an amazing success. We are also grateful to the Columbia Law School and to the Henry Schneider Memorial Fund for funding a wonderful and productive conference that brought the authors together to present and discuss chapter drafts. The Columbia Center for Gender and Sexuality Law was a co-sponsor of the conference and Vina Tran provided invaluable assistance in its organization. We thank Dean David Schizer, of the Columbia Law School, and Interim Dean Michael Gerber, of Brooklyn Law School, for their enthusiasm about the project and for their financial support. We are grateful to our research assistant, David Berman, and to Peter Graham, who carefully organized the chapters into a coherent manuscript. Our Cambridge University Press editor, John Berger, was terrific; his enthusiasm for the book and guidance at critical points were invaluable. Finally, we are grateful to Shana Meyer who managed the production process with efficiency and good humor.