

Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage

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A historical analysis of the traditional institution of marriage traces its role as a practice designed to acquire favorable in-laws and improve a family's labor force, detailing how marriages have evolved from loveless, arranged unions to their present-day state, in an exposé that reveals the impact of Victorian-inspired marital intimacy, divorce, and alternative lifestyles.

Politics, economics, greed, sex, cars-without them, matrimony wouldn't have caused the historical revolution ensuing today, concludes social historian Stephanie Coontz, in *Marriage, a History*. Modern marriage is in crisis; but don't pine for a return to "the good old days," when men earned money and women kept house. Don't even assume the crisis is all bad. For as Coontz reveals in this ambitious, multi-century trek through wedlock, marriage has morphed into the highest expression of commitment in Western Europe and North America; and though assumptions no longer exist regarding which partner may say "I do" to work, childcare, or other shared responsibilities, a clear set of rules about saying "I don't" (to infidelity and irresponsibility) rings loud as church bells.

"This is not the book I thought I was going to write," Coontz admits. She intended to show that marriage was not in crisis; merely changing in expected ways. But her exhaustive research suggested the opposite was true. Tracing matrimony's path from ancient times (when some cultures lacked a word for "love" and the majority of pairings were attempts to seize land or family names) through present day, she closely examines the many external forces at play in shaping modern marriage. Coontz details how society's attempts to toughen this institution, have actually made it more fragile. Her rich talent for analyzing events, statistics, and theories from a myriad of sources--and enabling the reader to put them all in perspective--make this provocative history book an essential resource.--Liane Thomas

"In a book brimming with surprises and rich with insight Stephanie Coontz provides a penetrating and fresh look at an institution we thought we knew well. *Marriage, a History* is not just a survey of varying cultural and historical approaches to marriage; it is a probing yet unbiased analysis of some of the most important, and divisive, issues of our day. For anyone who cares about the future of our society."

--Ellis Cose, author *Bone to Pick* and *Envy of the World*

"I love this book! It is sheer pleasure: trenchant analysis, interesting data, and graceful prose. I can think of no other modern scholar who so perfectly helps us explore the themes of modern marital malaise or who helps us understand who we are now--and how we got there. This book is the best source we could possibly use to credibly inform us about how modern marriage was created and what our past tells us about our future. Stephanie Coontz has delivered another path breaking, dialogue creating, scholarly tour de force!"

--Pepper Schwartz Ph.D., author of *American Couples: Money, Work and Sex* and *Love Between Equals, How Peer Marriage Really Works*

"Fair, lucid and enormously informative, it may outlive us all, for Coontz has captured our times like a bug in amber."

--Dr. Helen Fisher, author of *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Love*

"This is a magnificent, beautifully written book on an eternally interesting--and politically timely-- subject. Coontz's vast knowledge and superb scholarship should make this book

the resource for anyone who is married, was married, wants to marry, can't marry, hates the very thought of marrying, or thinks they know what the one right kind of marriage is."

--Carol Tavis, Ph.D., author of *The Mismeasure of Woman*

"Marriage, a History is filled with amazing stories and examples for all eras. Coontz is scholarly, incisive and entertaining. She tackles our most central questions about the meaning of marriage with evidence, not platitudes. Her powerful book is timely and profoundly apt."

--Dr. Mary Pipher, author of *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*

"This is an engaging, highly-readable guided tour of marriage from its beginnings to its current state. Stephanie Coontz shows us convincingly that marriage's history is, at heart, a love story."

-- Andrew Cherlin

"Stephanie Coontz has written an extraordinary book with a powerful message: that today's marriages are fragile not because Americans have become more self-centered and career-minded, but because we expect more from marriage than any previous generation. Scrupulously researched, filled with fascinating detail, and written with grace, humor, and wisdom, this book reveals that marriage is not a static, unchanging, and increasingly unattainable ideal, but a relationship whose success or failure ultimately depends on our willingness, as individuals and as a society, to adapt to social realities unlike any that existed in the past."

--Steven Mintz, John and Rebecca Moores Professor of History, University of Houston

Other Books

The Children of Divorce. A recognized authority on youth ministry explores from a theological and spiritual standpoint the baffling sense of loss of self experienced by children of divorce.

1 2 3 4 5 . Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005). 3. *Ibid.*, 31. 4. *Ibid.*, 44. 5. "Probably the single most important function of marriage through most of history. ..."