

families that work

Newsletter of the Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life

Couples learn a good marriage takes hard work



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"LOVE REVOLUTION" HAS TRANSFORMED MARRIAGE AROUND THE WORLD

Throughout most of history, marriage was the way to build alliances, consolidate wealth, and climb the social ladder. The traditional wedding march easily could have been replaced by the Tina Turner hit "What's Love Got to Do with It?" as an expression of the way things were.

Forget mutual respect and gender equality. Politics, property, and male dominance formed the foundation of marriage around the world. Until the late eighteenth century, men viewed marriage as the biggest infusion of cash they would ever see, thanks to their bride's dowry, and women considered marriage an investment in their future.

These realities were outlined by noted author and historian Stephanie Coontz, who recently traced the history of marriage in a public lecture sponsored by the MARIAL Center. In her talk, "Courting Trouble: The World Historic Transformation of Marriage," Coontz said that marriage has changed more in the past thirty-five years than the previous 3,500 years. As individuals and as a society, she noted, we are still trying to sort out the consequences of these changes and how to cope with them. (Her lecture is online at www.marial.emory.edu.)

"For thousands of years, the one thing that people agreed on everywhere was that you shouldn't allow young people to choose their own partners," said Coontz, who teaches history and family studies at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. "Marriage for thousands of years was not about love or intimacy."

By her estimation, it was only two hundred years ago that love began to be central to the definition of marriage and only one hundred



"Marriage today has to be based on deep friendship and greater negotiating skills than ever before."

Stephanie Coontz