

The Supreme Court has not weighed in on the issue of Gay Marriage yet, but plenty of people have had their say, in and out of the court. Even those who believe that it is time to recognize that a same sex couple should have the dignity of being recognized as a family with the same rights as a married couple do note that marriage has a long traditional history of being the sacred union of one man and one woman.

However, I choke when I hear that one. Does it really? Do these sentimentalists really know the history of marriage, even marriage in Western Civilization, not to mention around the world? And please do not get me wrong. I am a very happily married woman, but that is because I am American, 20th and 21st century, and it took me two tries to get it right. I do have those luxuries. I dare say, the majority of women alive around the world today are not so blessed. When I survey the statistics of wife abuse around the world, the hostility toward women in the Muslim world, Africa, India, rural China, and Latin America, I do not have a rosy view of marriage in the world today.

Now, let us look at those words: a union of one man and one woman. We hear this mostly from those who are religious, and they surely must read their Old Testaments, realizing that although Adam and Eve were a monogamous couple, particularly since they were the first and only human beings created, their progeny were polygamous. The Bible stories tell of contentious marriages with competitive wives, concubines, half-brothers who were jealous and did not like each other, and they behaved as polygamous families notoriously behave to this very day. Remember the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery? Not nice.

The concept of monogamous marriage comes from the Romans, and it was unique to them. No other civilization to my knowledge had it. Jews picked it up when under Roman rule, but not under Muslim rule. Christians picked it up and eliminated the Roman custom of divorce, which protected some women but trapped others into permanent abusive marriages.

Until the late 18th century in Europe, marriage was never thought of as an institution of volition or affection; it was a family arrangement. Young people were not to have choices. If love came later, it was a matter of luck.

The purpose of this sacred union was to produce as many progeny as the woman's body would yield, until it either gave out or she entered menopause. A man could expect to marry several times and have several broods of children before his old age. During certain times in history, plagues, warfare, and just childhood mortality took care of surplus population, until the scientific revolution made possible an enormous population explosion that has only now begun to turn.

The 20th century has, for the first time, made it possible for women to have choices as never before. A women has the choice of mates, choice to select for love---and choice to leave a bad choice. She has choice to procreate or not, to select how many children to have, and when to have them.

The greatest transformation of our time has been in marriage. Marriage is no longer a matter of family corporations. It is a matter of two people merging their lives in pure volition, wanting to live together in mutual support, and in volition to have children together. They do not need to be of different genders. They need to be decent, not abusive, and have support systems of friends and family---the modern way that marriages are structured.

I certainly do not look back with nostalgia to the good old-fashioned marriages of the past. It is a short list. John and Abigail Adams are a rare exception. They were equals. The rest of the good marriages are 19th and 20th century, when people had choices and married for love.

Since the marriages of the past are nothing to sentimentalize, the Supreme Court should know better.

685 words

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