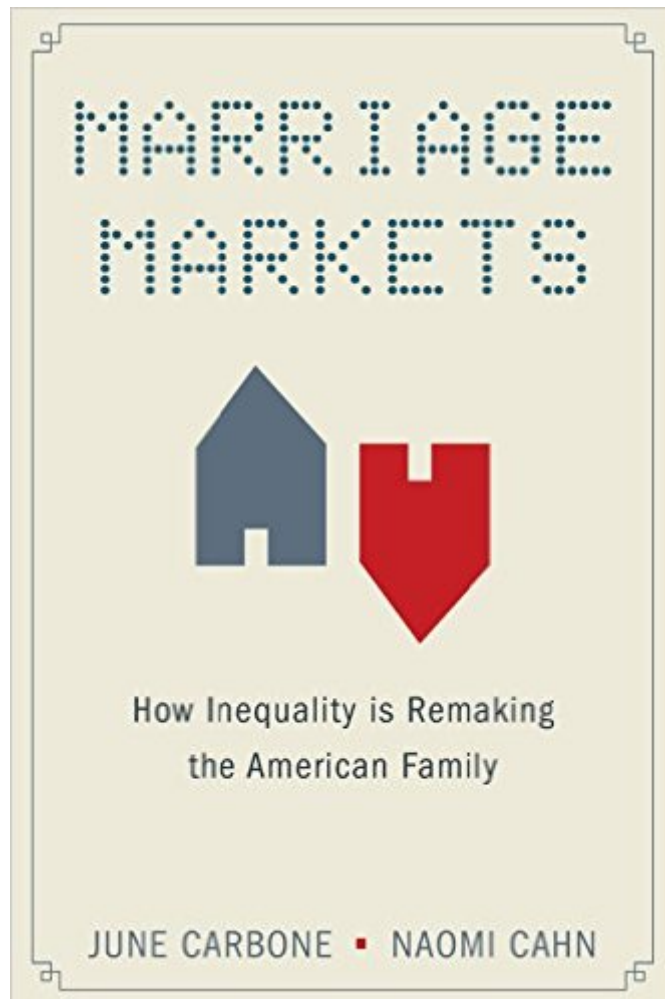


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# Marriage Markets: How Inequality Is Remaking The American Family



## Synopsis

There was a time when the phrase "American family" conjured up a single, specific image: a breadwinner dad, a homemaker mom, and their 2.5 kids living comfortable lives in a middle-class suburb. Today, that image has been shattered, due in part to skyrocketing divorce rates, single parenthood, and increased out-of-wedlock births. But whether it is conservatives bewailing the wages of moral decline and women's liberation, or progressives celebrating the result of women's greater freedom and changing sexual mores, most Americans fail to identify the root factor driving the changes: economic inequality that is remaking the American family along class lines. In *Marriage Markets*, June Carbone and Naomi Cahn examine how macroeconomic forces are transforming our most intimate and important spheres, and how working class and lower income families have paid the highest price. Just like health, education, and seemingly every other advantage in life, a stable two-parent home has become a luxury that only the well-off can afford. The best educated and most prosperous have the most stable families, while working class families have seen the greatest increase in relationship instability. Why is this so? The book provides the answer: greater economic inequality has profoundly changed marriage markets, the way men and women match up when they search for a life partner. It has produced a larger group of high-income men than women; written off the men at the bottom because of chronic unemployment, incarceration, and substance abuse; and left a larger group of women with a smaller group of comparable men in the middle. The failure to see marriage as a market affected by supply and demand has obscured any meaningful analysis of the way that societal changes influence culture. Only policies that redress the balance between men and women through greater access to education, stable employment, and opportunities for social mobility can produce a culture that encourages commitment and investment in family life. A rigorous and enlightening account of why American families have changed so much in recent decades, *Marriage Markets* cuts through the ideological and moralistic rhetoric that drives our current debate. It offers critically needed solutions for a problem that will haunt America for generations to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was prompted to read this book by the rather provocative title: imagining marriage to be an economic transaction, devoid of romantic, intimate love and hormonal chemistry. The very analytic, scholarly presentation by the authors, with facts and inferences drawn from a wide range of academic studies - reinforced by a dry, expository style - reaffirms the emotion-free, rational view of the institution. I must say, however, that it is worth the effort to get through the 200 pages of relatively small font and consider the impressive amount of evidence gathered leading to the conclusion that here in America over the past 50 odd years, marriage has become a more pronounced marker for those with better educations, incomes, and other resources. And, as marriage goes in this direction, so goes trends in better childrearing and family stability. And for those moving in the other direction, just the opposite. Becoming more aware of this trend is the first, necessary step to understanding what possibly might be done to change it to improve the prospects of perhaps two-thirds of the young adult (20's-30's) population, who - as trends seem to indicate - will fall further behind the economic attainment curve, with resulting negative consequences for their children's upbringing and family unity. The author's principal conclusion that greater economic inequality - particularly among men - has produced this marriage market divisible into segments that seem to be growing more and more apart. They use educational attainment (i.e. college grads, high school grads, and less than high school education), as the basic building block to then explore the variables (e.g.

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