

# Women's Work, Mother's Poverty: are men's wages the best cure for women's economic insecurity?

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In the 2008 Democratic Party platform, the only provision with women in the title was one promising "Opportunity for Women." The provision pledged "that our daughters should have the same opportunities as our sons,"<sup>1</sup> confining measurement of women's equality to our access to men's jobs and men's wages. The nomination, then election, of the first African-American presidential candidate portended and promised great change. But through its platform, the Democratic Party looked backwards to an equality agenda drawn by women's exclusion from men's world. This agenda finds singular and transformative power in direct comparisons between women's and men's status, earnings, and opportunities. But to focus only on such comparisons misses many of the persistent inequalities imposed on women.

Certainly, women who enter men's world encounter signal inequalities: Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and Lilly Ledbetter's unequal wages are just two high-profile examples. But women who do the work historically assigned to women, whether in the labor market or in the family, face inequalities, as well-inequalities rooted in the low value ascribed to work performed primarily by women.

The low valuation of women manifests, whether women are labor market workers or caregivers in families. In the labor market, a gender-based earnings gap disfavors women and leads inextricably to a gender-based distribution of poverty that breeds misery for mothers and their children. In families, the lack of economic compensation for caregiving means inevitable poverty for mothers who cannot earn or depend on a male wage. Both the earnings gap in the labor market and the earnings vacuum for caregivers follow from the value we assign to women's work, whether it is performed for wages or for families.

Women's Work & Women's Poverty: Evidence of

The Low Value of Women's Work in the Labor Market

Data on the wage gap document the depressed value of women's work in the labor market: work that is performed mostly by women earns low pay; work that usually is performed by men earns less pay when it is performed by women; and work that usually is performed by women earns more pay when it is performed by men.

Women who worked in the labor market full-time, year-round in 2007 earned only 78 cents for every dollar earned by men. Twenty-two cents is the wage differential for women as a whole in comparison to men as a whole. The Cadillac of all wages belongs to white men, however, so we really should measure wage inequality in terms of white men's wages. [See Table 1] In comparison to each dollar earned by white men, white women earned about 73 cents; Asian/Pacific women earned 70 cents; African-American women earned 62 cents; American Indian and Alaska Native women earned 57 cents; and Latinas earned only 51 cents.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1

WOMEN'S EARNINGS as a percentage of WHITE MEN'S EARNINGS

(full-time/full-year workers, 2007)

White

Asian Pacific

Black

American Indian

Latina & Alaska Native

73%

70%

62%

57.5%

51%

The median annual income for full-time, year-round women workers of all races in 2007 was \$34,278-as compared to \$44,255 for their male counterparts of all races (an income gap of \$10,000). Among men, whites earned the highest median income, \$50,139. White women earned \$14,000 less than white men in 2007-or \$36,398. Asian/Pacific women earned \$15,000 less than white men, or \$35,249. African-American women earned even less: their median wage was \$31,035-\$19,000 less than white men's. Meanwhile, the earnings gap for American Indian and Alaska Native women was \$22,000 and for Latinas was \$25,000.3 (See Table 2)

Table 2

MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME

(full-time/full-year workers, 2007)

White Men

White Women

API Women

Black Women

AI & AN Women

Latina Women

\$50,139

\$36,398

\$35,249

\$31,035

\$28,837

\$25,454

Educational disparities do not explain these wage inequalities: the wage gap tracks within and across all educational levels. (See Table 3) In 2007, the median income for women who completed high school was \$21,219, while for men it was \$34,435. A two-year associate's degree garnered women \$27,046, but got men \$14,000 more (\$41,035). A \$19,000 wage gap takes hold at the Bachelor's degree level: women with BA's earned \$38,628 in 2007 as compared to \$57,397 for men. These income figures are for women and men of all races. If we compare white men's income to everyone else's, the gaps are even wider. In fact, in 2006, white men with just a high school diploma made almost as much (\$36,539) as white women who had graduated from college (\$39,006).<sup>4</sup>

Table 3

# MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME BY EDUCATION

(full-time/full-year workers, 2007)

All Men

All Women

HS degree

\$34,435

\$21,219

AS degree

\$41,035

\$34,435

BA degree

\$57,397

\$38,628

The wage gap data takes a snapshot of wage differences in a single year. If you compare men's and women's wages longitudinally-across time-the income gap is much larger than the 22 percent reported by the Census Bureau. The Institute for Women's Policy Research compared the income of female and male full-time/full-year workers over a fifteen-year period. Over fifteen years, the earnings gap favored men by 36 percent overall-that is, men's income was 36 percent higher than women's income. When the sample was broadened to look at everyone who was employed at all-not only those who were employed full-time/year-round, but also part-time and part-year workers-the gap was substantially larger, at 62 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Across a lifetime, these disparities add up to huge losses. Among full-time/full-year workers, a woman with a high school diploma loses \$700,000 in earnings as compared to a man with a high school diploma. A woman with a BA loses \$1.2 million over her lifetime. A woman with an advanced degree loses \$2 million.<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, the cost of inequality follows women into retirement, especially unmarried women. The retirement income gap averages about \$8,000 each year for single women.<sup>7</sup> Overall,

single older women-widows and divorcees, as well as those who never married-share a poverty rate of approximately 20 percent.<sup>8</sup>

#### Women's Poverty

The wage statistics show that women in general have lower incomes than men. Women's lower earnings, in turn, mean that women are more likely than men to be poor.

Today, more than 37 million people live below the poverty line-live on less than \$16,530 per year for a family of three.<sup>9</sup> Sixteen million people-slightly less than half of all those in poverty-live in what is called "extreme" poverty, meaning that they live on less than half the poverty line income, or \$8250 a year for a family of three. Another 15 million people live just above the poverty line (125 percent, or about \$20,000 a year for a family of two). Altogether, 50 million people are almost poor, officially poor, or extremely poor. Women figure disproportionately among them.<sup>10</sup>

There has been a gender poverty gap every year since the official poverty line was drawn in the 1960s. While poverty statistics consistently have shown that women in general are somewhat more likely to be poor than men in general, they also reveal deep poverty gaps based on the race and marital status of women. Women of color are much more likely to be poor than white men and white women. (See Table 4) Women whose family incomes do not include a male wage are disproportionately poor, as well: only 20 percent of women in poverty are married.

Table 4

#### POVERTY RATES by SEX and RACE/ETHNICITY, 2007

women

men

all

13.8%

11.1%

African American

26.5%

22.3%

Latina/o

23.6%

19.6%

Asian American

10.7%

9.7%

White

11.6%

9.4%

Among women, single mothers (with children under age 18) carry the greatest risk of poverty. (See Table 5). In 2007, more than one in three single mothers was officially poor-for a poverty rate of 37 percent. In contrast, the married parent poverty rate was 6.7 percent-or 1/6th the poverty rate of single mothers. For the population as a whole, the poverty rate was 12.3 percent.<sup>11</sup> Race exacerbates the disproportionate poverty of single mothers: while white single mothers' poverty rate was 29.2 percent in 2007, for African-American single mothers the poverty rate was 43.9 percent and for Latina single mothers it was 46.6 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Table 5

POVERTY RATE and MEDIAN INCOME by FAMILY TYPE, 2007

poverty rate

median income

single mothers (all)

37%

\$33,370

White

29.2

Black

43.9

Latina

46.6

single fathers (all)

17%

\$49,839

married parents (all)

6.7%

Sixty-two percent of poor families with children in 2007 were single mother families, as compared to just 15 percent of non-poor families. In eighty-three percent of single mother families, at least one person (usually the mother) was in the labor force. Yet, even when single mothers are wage earners, the poverty rate for their families is 27.2 percent-more than twice the poverty rate of the general population.

Federal Policy and Women's Impoverishment:

Employment & Wages

If families that must survive on a woman's wage alone are more likely to be poor, then women's low wages must have something to do with women's disproportionate poverty. If poverty implicates low wages, both implicate employment inequality.

Forty-five years ago, Congress enacted Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which forbids discrimination in employment-including sex discrimination. Over the years, Title VII has helped to open up the labor market to women-it ended job classifications based on sex, for example, and enabled women to challenge hiring, firing, and promotion decisions based on sex. But although Title VII has been a powerful weapon against workplace exclusion and abuse, it has provided relatively weak mechanisms for achieving income fairness for women workers.

Title VII is concerned with letting women into the labor market, and with ensuring that being female will not disadvantage a woman in her struggle to survive in the labor market. Title VII insists that women have access to employment and prohibits workplace discrimination, including wage discrimination. But Title VII does not insist that employment itself change to respond to the perspectives and circumstances women bring into the labor market. Nor does it recognize gender-based wage differentials as discrimination unless it can be proved that the differential was imposed deliberately "because of" a worker's sex.

Where wages are concerned, Title VII works in conjunction with the Equal Pay Act, which avows that women and men shall receive the same wages for the same work. This has turned out to be a very constrained guarantee, as courts have interpreted the Equal Pay Act to protect women against wage discrimination only where their jobs are identical to men's, and only in single workplaces or establishments, at that.

Even so, women who do perform the same job as men-as welders or engineers or gardeners, say-do not receive the same pay as men. This is because the Equal Pay Act allows pay differentials based on "factors other than sex"-which usually turn out to be factors related to sex, such as negotiating skills, or family interruptions, or unstated biases against women.

Wage gaps based on sex (and race) within job categories attest to wage discrimination that Title VII and the Equal Pay Act are supposed to prevent. But for various reasons, wage discrimination persists despite the law. Heinous as they are, discriminatory wage decisions do not by themselves account for the scale of the earnings gap I have just outlined.

Another factor that contributes to sex-based income inequality is sex-based occupational segregation. Occupational segregation manifests as the disproportionate clustering of women or men in particular jobs: most pilots are men, for example, while most nurses are women. Studies show that the more female a job, the lower the pay in comparison to similar jobs that require similar training but are performed mostly by men. So, for example, maids and housecleaners (mostly women) earn about \$3000/year less than janitors (mostly men).<sup>13</sup> At all levels of employment, from the best jobs to the least desirable ones, female jobs earn less pay.<sup>14</sup>

Some people argue that the only way around the wage impasse that arises from occupational segregation is to get women into men's jobs, where they can earn men's pay. Women who want those jobs certainly should be able to get them; but I'm afraid that's not necessarily going to get them men's pay. Movement into traditionally male jobs is happening, if slowly; but unequal pay follows women into those jobs.

Take the legal profession, for example: in 2007, the median salary for men in law jobs

(paralegals, attorneys, judges) was \$105,233. For women, the median salary was \$53,790. That's a nearly 50 percent gap! Among judges, there's a 36 percent wage gap, with male judges earning a median \$108,100 while female judges earned a median \$69,500. Looking just at lawyers narrows the gap, but a gap remains: \$120,400 median annual income for men, as compared to \$93,600 for women.<sup>15</sup>

Focusing on wages attached to particular jobs reveals significant sex-based disparities. But focusing exclusively on the wage gap misses the bigger picture. Women's poverty does follow from the wage structure: women are more likely to earn low wages and low wages keep women poor. Two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women; and a full-time/year-round minimum wage income-\$13,624-barely brings a family of two to the poverty line. Thirty-one percent of full-time, continuously employed women earn less than \$25,000 per year.<sup>16</sup>

If we compare women's and men's earnings longitudinally, we can see gross disparities that exceed the disparities linked to particular jobs. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) study, among workers who had earnings in all fifteen years reviewed, men's average earnings were 57 percent higher than women's-\$49,068 to \$29,507.<sup>17</sup> This income differential widens for the majority of women (52 percent, as compared to just 16 percent of men) who spend at least one calendar year without any earnings. Women who take time out of the labor force usually do so to care for children, parents, or a sick spouse. Among women who do not leave the labor force altogether, large numbers work part-time or part-year to accommodate similar care needs of their families. Even the most persistent women workers are in the labor market for fewer hours each year than are male workers-21 percent fewer hours (1,766 for persistent women workers vs. 2,219 for male workers overall). Overall, women workers spend a third less time in labor market jobs each year, widening income disparities between women and men.<sup>18</sup>

These income disparities are due in part to discrimination in the valuation of women's work, as well of women themselves. But they also reflect longstanding conflict between the time demands of labor force participation, on the one hand, and the care needs of families, on the other. The "work-family" conflict for women is not just psychological or emotional. It is tangibly economic, a fact that is most apparent when we consider the degree to which mothers are employed. In the IWPR study, whether married or single, all mothers with children in the home were employed on average for about 1331 hours per year-which is about 820 hours less than the average for fathers.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, fewer hours of employment mean less income. Lower wages for the jobs women do compounds the impoverishing effect of the current "work-family balance."

So far, policymakers have been reluctant to do what it will take to make the labor market friendly to the care concerns women bring into it. What it will take is, for starters: 1) universal, subsidized child care so that parents don't have to worry about meeting the routine care needs of children; 2) paid family leave and paid childbirth leave so that caregivers and pregnant women do not have to trade an income for a family; and 3) liberal leave policies at work-so that workers can take an occasional sick day or care day, or take time to deal with personal issues.

We came close to comprehensive child care in the early 1970s, but Nixon vetoed the legislation. We've been fighting over whether poor people deserve child care ever since. In 1996, welfare reform ended the child care entitlement for low-income families. So unless a family can afford \$1,000 to \$2,000 a month for child care, somebody in the family has to take responsibility for children's supervision and nurturance. Partly by default and partly by choice, that "somebody" usually is a woman.

The federal government enacted a family leave law in 1993, but 40 percent of workers are not covered because their firms employ fewer than 50 workers. For those who are covered, many cannot avail themselves of leave because the leave is unpaid. The Family Medical Leave Act does not provide income assistance to workers who leave jobs under its terms; nor does it require employers to do so. Our unemployment insurance system does not recognize family considerations as legitimate reasons to lose or leave a job, so unemployment compensation is not available when a worker takes family leave. It is not surprising that seventy-eight percent of the workers who have not been able to

take family leave report that the reason is that they couldn't afford to go without an income.<sup>20</sup>

## Poverty & Policy

The discrimination and unfairness I've described affect all women who need an earned income. But they affect some women more than others—low-wage women workers more than elite women workers; women of color more than white women; and single mothers more than either single women or married mothers.

Women in general have a slightly higher poverty rate (13.8 percent) than men (11.1 percent), as measured by family income.<sup>21</sup> But women who are single mothers have a whoppingly high poverty rate of 37 percent.<sup>22</sup> All women face inequality in the labor market; the wage gap straddles the entire economy. So why are single mothers disproportionately poor?

Because they are single mothers.

That is, because they are raising children without a man's wage. According to the Census Bureau's income and poverty statistics (see Table 4), in 2007 the median family income for married couples was \$72,785 and for male-headed households (no wife present) was \$49,839. For female-headed households, by contrast, the median income was \$33,370.<sup>23</sup> The IWPR longitudinal study confirms that marriage vastly increases the family income and standard of living of women, cushioning them from the harsh reality of life on a woman's wage. According to the study, only 5 percent of consistently married women experienced chronically low family incomes, while 35 percent of single women did.<sup>24</sup>

The income benefit of marriage for mothers is even more pronounced when there are children under age 18 in the family. Single mothers with children have the lowest of all individual earnings and an increased likelihood of living on a family income of less than \$25,000/year for a period of time. Worse, the average income deficit for poor families—the dollar difference between a family's income and its poverty threshold—is highest for single mother families, at \$9,059. While income deficits afflict all types of families in poverty, single father families and married families fare better than single mothers, with average income deficits of \$7,780 and \$7,937, respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Raising kids on a woman's wage means economic hard times. Low and unequal wages are just part of the problem. The widespread assumption that employment and caregiving are trade-offs (rather than complementary aspects of family responsibility) contributes significantly to mothers' poverty both in the labor market and in families. The idea that "working mothers" trade caregiving for employment when they enter the labor market permits employers and government to refuse support for child care, paid family leave, and flexible personal days. At the same time, the idea that "at-home mothers" trade employment for caregiving permits employers and government to regard family work as part of a private economic calculus worthy of no public economic support at all.

## Welfare

Powerful and consistent empirical evidence shows that the devaluation of women's work in the labor market and in families destines women's families to economic insecurity. Public policy has responded to that insecurity primarily by goading mothers into low wage jobs and marriage. Rather than revalue and support women's work, the public policy designed to mitigate the economic insecurity of mothers' families actually disdains single mothers as labor market workers, as caregivers, and as unmarried women.

That public policy is what we call welfare—or what anti-welfare reformers of the mid-1990s named Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). At the time welfare reform policy was enacted, it was widely hailed for transforming single mothers into breadwinners by forcing them to take low wage jobs in the labor market. While compulsory labor market work is a feature of welfare reform, the reform equally emphasized the compulsory introduction of fathers into single mother families.

Indeed, the guiding principle of welfare policy is that the economic security of families requires mothers to have relationships with fathers. This is a privatizing move, tying the economic well-being of families to the presence of fathers' wages. It also is a patriarchal move, conferring economic security only to those mothers who conform to traditional father-mother norms.



The pro-patriarchal attributes of welfare policy are not accidental. The 1996 welfare law was rife with condemnation of single mothers and was concerted in its efforts to insert fathers into low-income single mother families. The preamble to the law began with the assertion that "marriage is the foundation of a successful society." It then proceeded to blame numerous social ills—among them child abuse, truancy, and crime—on nonmarital childbearing and single motherhood.<sup>26</sup>

The law went on to tie the purposes of welfare to promoting marriage, preventing nonmarital childbearing, and fostering two-parent (heterosexual) family formation.<sup>27</sup> While the law declared that one goal of welfare is to "provide assistance to needy families" with children, it conditioned assistance on reform of the reproductive and family decisions of such families. Program rules regulating teenage mothers, discouraging illegitimacy, promoting abstinence, and compelling mothers to identify biological fathers and cooperate with child support enforcement—all advance these goals.

The welfare reform law enacted in 1996 was revised and extended in 2006.<sup>28</sup> The renewed welfare program fastens the economic security of single mothers ever more tightly to the end of single motherhood. The principal addition to welfare policy was the creation of funding streams dedicated to promoting married fatherhood: \$1.5 billion over five years (\$750 million each year) for pro-marriage, pro-father activities. Beyond dedicated federal spending, the renewed welfare law gives states incentive to spend their TANF block grants and their own state funds to support federal pro-marriage, pro-father activities.<sup>29</sup>

Although married fatherhood promotion is a distinctive feature of the renewed welfare program, welfare is not the only federal policy arena to fund marriage and fatherhood promotion activities.

The Office of Child Support Enforcement has offered grants to promote married fatherhood, as well as to teach unmarried biological fathers that if they pay child support they can get access to their children. The Office of Refugee Resettlement also sponsors marriage promotion—to the tune of \$4.4 million in 2006.<sup>30</sup> Even Head Start has gotten involved—since 2004, the federal Head Start agency has encouraged local Head Start facilities to promote fatherhood. A federal Head Start bulletin tells program workers to make sure fathers feel welcome at Head Start centers by, among other things, removing posters and other materials about domestic violence, as well as by creating comfort zones for dads through events like "Guys Night Out" and masculine activities like "Dads' Day at Home Depot."<sup>31</sup>

The Easy Way to Get a Woman a Man's Wage: Find a Man

It should certainly come as no surprise that the Bush Administration used federal money to promote patriarchy. But the emphasis on marriage and the focus on fathers is not the provenance of conservatives alone. Indeed, marriage promotion got its start before Bush, when the Clinton Administration promoted marriage through incentive payments to states. Beginning in the late 1990s, many Democrats sponsored fatherhood promotion legislation; as Senator and now as President, Barack Obama energized the cause. No longer monopolized by Dan Quayle and the "family values" lobby, marriage and fatherhood are now widely regarded—by progressive and conservative alike—as the keys to ending poverty.

Many progressive anti-poverty advocates are uncomfortable with conservative-inspired marriage promotion, to be sure; but they have been equally uncomfortable with feminist arguments that single mothers should be able to bear and raise children on their own. In fact, I can't think of a single non-feminist progressive policy advocate or policymaker who affirms single mother family formation as the right of women—not the hard luck of such women—or as good for children. On the left as on the right, it is axiomatic that single motherhood is a bad thing. Liberals might pity single mothers, while conservatives chastise them; but either way, single mothers are defined as a social problem.

Some progressive anti-poverty advocates have even adopted the frame drawn by conservative proponents of the traditional married family. Some anti-poverty advocates now publicly endorse the claim that helping fathers enter mothers' families should be a goal of government and a cornerstone of anti-poverty policy.

The liberal Center for Law and Social Policy, for example, espouses "marriage-plus" to

encourage two-parent family formation among the poor. While CLASP wants to "ensure that public policy helps all parents-whether never married, cohabiting, separated, divorced, or married," its bottom line is that married biological parenthood is a desirable public goal that should be advanced by government. As CLASP put it in a 2005 report, "public policy should try to help more children be born into, and grow up with, two biological married parents, who have a reasonably healthy, cooperative relationship." 32

This position continues to stigmatize single mothers as deficient and single mother families as disadvantaged-not because of economic status but because mothers are single. What's more, the emphasis on biological parenthood heightens the preferred status of heterosexual parents and supports longstanding impediments to gay and lesbian adoption and/or legally recognized de facto parenthood for nonbiological mothers or fathers.

To foster biological married parenthood, some anti-poverty advocates have called for programs focused on low-income men. The purpose of these programs is to make low-income men more marriageable father material, and so to advance the goal of heterosexual, biological family formation. For example, at a poverty summit convened by John Edwards in November 2005, several prominent anti-poverty advocates and researchers complained that "welfare reform focused on everybody but adult men" and argued that "we need to put men back on the agenda . . . and . . . support men in the same way that we do women." According to several anti-poverty advocates and researchers who spoke at the conference, we need to focus on men as fathers because "the growth of single [mother] families is a major cause of poverty." One speaker also justified investing in men as a way to get mothers to "play by the rules"-especially the "rule" against bearing and raising children outside of marriage. 33

Progressive anti-poverty advocates differ from their conservative counterparts in that most do not argue that "Life with Father" is intrinsically morally superior to growing up in other family forms. Nonetheless, the pro-father, "marriage-plus" approach does advance a heterosexist, two-parent essentialism in the name of what's best for children.

For progressive and mainstream marriage proponents, what makes married families "better" for children is that married families have more money-so children are better off financially when raised by married parents. This is empirically true: as I pointed out earlier, the median income for married families was \$72,785 in 2007, as compared to \$28,832 for single mothers. Pro-marriage poverty advocates reason that because children are financially secure when parents are married, children in married families do better in school and behave better than they do in single mother families.

Although advocates of this position claim to "follow the data"-their faith in married fatherhood produces cherry-picked data that evades important questions. For example: the number of single father families has risen exponentially since 1970 (from a half a million to 2 million) just as has the number of single mother families (from 3 million to 10 million). But no one singles out father-only families to show the harms of one-parent childraising and the benefits of married parenthood.

There's a huge income disparity between single mother and single father families (about \$15,000/year). This is a gap we should expect from what we know about gender-based wage disparities. It is a gap that illuminates women's inequality, not women's inferiority either as workers or as parents.

Thirty-seven percent of single mother families have incomes below the poverty level, as compared to 17 percent of single father families. Single mothers are 106 percent more likely to be poor than single fathers. This poverty arises not because single mothers refuse to work for wages in the labor market. Single mothers are in the labor force: in fact, they work at greater rates and for longer hours than single mothers anywhere in the advanced capitalist world; and they are employed at greater rates than are married mothers, especially married mothers with children under age 6.34

So the problem isn't that single mothers are lazy or have less of a work ethic than married parents, or than single fathers. The problem isn't intrinsic to the structure of single mother families but to the low economic value assigned to women-both in the labor market and as caregivers in their own families.

Marriage promotion may indeed improve economic circumstances for many women. But it won't move us closer to equality for women, and it won't improve options for women and children whose safety and well-being is endangered by the presence of particular men in their families. Binding family economic security to men's earning power, not women's, may force wage-poor women to stay in abusive relationships; exposes mothers to poverty at divorce; and assures disproportionate poverty to mothers who never marry. Even for mothers who eke through these dependencies and disparities, economic inequality comes home to roost later on when fewer retirement assets and lower pension income spell high rates of poverty for elderly women who are on their own.

In their 2008 platform, Democrats congratulated themselves for "eighteen million cracks in the highest glass ceiling," yet economic equality for women seems like a wistful dream. Despite the new demographics of official power, the demographics of inequality persist. The Obama Administration retained marriage and fatherhood promotion funding in its first budget request; its Department of Health and Human Services continues marriage and fatherhood initiatives undertaken by the Bush Administration; and the new Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives makes supporting fathers "who stand by their families" one of four key priorities.<sup>35</sup> The Obama economic recovery plan stresses work supports to the exclusion of direct poverty mitigation for poor families, such as the repeal of time limits on welfare eligibility and participation. The White House website's brief on poverty notices poor mothers only once, when it calls for "home visits to low-income, first-time parents by trained professionals."<sup>36</sup>

Emblematic of incorrigible disregard for women's work in families and in the labor market, marriage and fatherhood promotion is the nail in the coffin of hope, the defeat of equality for women. Comparable worth for women? Raise the minimum wage to a living wage? Change unemployment insurance to take women's work patterns into account? Paid family leave? Universal child care? Provide income support to caregivers in economic recognition for the work of raising children and caring for family members? Why fight poverty the hard way when all women need is a man with a family wage?

[Sources for all tables: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement; American Community Survey; Historical Poverty Tables, 1959-2007.]

## Footnotes

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  25. U.S. Census Bureau, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
  26. P.L. 104-193, Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, Title I, Sec. 101.
  27. Ibid., Title I, Part A, Sec. 401.
  28. P.L. 109-171, Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. For TANF provisions see Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program: Interim Final Rule," *Federal Register*, Vol. 71, No. 125 (June 29, 2006).
  29. Ibid., Sec. 7103, "Grants for Healthy Marriage Promotion and Responsible Fatherhood."
  30. See here.
  31. Head Start Bulletin, "Father Involvement," (June 2004).
  32. Paula Roberts and Mark Greenberg, "Marriage and the TANF Rules: A Discussion Paper," Center for Law and Social Policy (Washington DC, 2005).
  33. "Panel 1: Confronting Poverty: What Role for Public Programs?," and "Panel 2: Family Structure, Poverty and Family Well-Being," *Proceedings of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity Summit, Chicago-Kent Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, vol.10, no. 1 (2006).
  34. In the mid-1990s, before punitive welfare-to-work policies took effect, 76% of single mothers in the U.S. were employed at least 10 hours per week, as compared to 20% in the Netherlands, 27% in the U.K., and 72% in France and Austria. See Libertad Gonzalez, "Single Mothers and Work," *Socio-Economic Review* (2004), pp. 285-313.
  35. See here.
  36. See here.