

Has Valentine's Day Been Massacred?

In the winter of 1929 a small group of gangsters, under the authority of the infamous Al Capone executed members of a rival gang. The St. Valentine's Day Massacre will go down in history as a day when evil triumphed in Chicago.

On the 80th anniversary of the massacre, St. Valentine's Day and the structure of marriage in our nation lays ambushed by evil. Let me explain.

Valentine's day has historically been a fun time for my wife and myself. We have often celebrated the occasion with a special dinner and sometimes a short respite in a resort-like setting. In contrast, this year I spent the entire day before the holiday in and around a hospital emergency room waiting for my wife of 32 years to be examined and treated for bronchitis. What a way to welcome in the year's most romantic holiday!

While the rest of the world continued with their seasonal celebrations, I was thankful for the sense of security, contentment, and commitment my wife and I have experienced over the years. I was shocked by how infrequently deep romantic love was depicted on television and in print this year. It seemed to me that stories like Romeo and Juliet were supplanted by appeals for Robert and "Hoochie Mama."

Overt sexuality was pushed in the name of modernity – not the kind of romance that leads to fidelity, trust, and marriage. Yes, diamonds and jewelry of all types were peddled and a few classic movies were rebroadcast. To my shock, the US Greeting Card Association reports that approximately one billion valentines are sent each year, worldwide. This makes the day

the second largest “card-sending” holiday of the year – topped only by Christmas.

Let me restate some thing obvious to folks over 40. The skill to maintain long term, romantic relationships is failing in this generation. In fact, the media seems to be sold on painting true romance as fleeting and unpredictable – like the relationships depicted on the afternoon soap operas or paper backed novels.

In January 2007, the *New York Times* took the campaign a step further by carrying a front-page story with the headline “51% of Women Are Now Living Without a Spouse.” The article proclaimed that this was a first for America. The report was misleading because it did not account for women whose husbands were serving in the military or who were married but living apart for some reason.

The point of that article, and of much of the cultural chatter about marriage these days, is that marriage was an institution in decline. This is the way the numbers are spun in news segment after news segment and article after article. It’s as if there’s an intentional effort to say, “If your family is falling apart, don’t worry. Everybody’s is. It’s OK. Life may even be better without the traditional family. Go ahead and feel liberated.” Even cultural conservatives find themselves riding on this bandwagon when they bemoan the sorry state of the family.

But while many in the media and academia are singing the same old song about the decline of the family, some of us see it much differently. The evidence actually suggests that amidst all the bad news, a revival of traditional marriage and family may well be in the works. It is happening mostly below the radar at the grassroots level in churches, communities, and legislatures to strengthen the family. I am convinced that belying the success of marriage amendments in the 2008 election cycle in Arizona, California and Florida is a

resurgence of faith in marriage.

Unfortunately all the news about marriage is not positive. Today, 41-50 percent of all marriages wind up in divorce. Sixty to 67 percent of those divorced once end up getting divorced a second time. Those who try the third time have a 73-74 percent chance of failing. Most disappointing to me is the fact that the divorce rate among Christians is running parallel to the national statistics at about 50 percent.

Worse than those statistics is that there is also a growing number of single people who will never get married at all. According to a *Washington Post* article written in 2006 ("Marriage Is for White People" by Joy Jones), "The marriage rate for African Americans has been dropping since the 1960s, and today, we have the lowest marriage rate of any racial group in the United States. In 2001, according to the U.S. Census, 43.3 percent of black men and 41.9 percent of black women in America had never been married, in contrast to 27.4 percent and 20.7 percent respectively for whites. African American women are the least likely in our society to marry... Howard University relationship therapist Audrey Chapman has pointed out that African Americans are the most uncoupled people in the country."

I do not quote these "never been" married statistics to promote one race over another. They show that white family breakdown is slowly trailing black and Hispanic family deterioration. If a culture is going to thrive, most men have to be socialized and married.

So what is marriage, anyway? An old adage says, "If you don't know what something is intended to be used for, you are destined to abuse it!"

Marriage is a sacred covenant or contract endorsed by God but simultaneously recognized by man. Marriage is a commitment made by one man and one woman to love and honor one another

through the highs and lows of life. This union becomes the natural haven for raising children and developing a family.

It is not too late to save both Valentine's Day and the family. Our nation

needs to recommit to the biblical truth of marriage and strategically focused upon creating a nation that respects marriage and the multiplied benefits it gives to us and our children.