

More than Marriage: Forming Families after Marriage Equality

John G. Culhane

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John G. Culhane's powerful book *More than Marriage* explores what it means to be a family in both human and legal terms.

Applying close readings to important court cases concerning marriage and families, Culhane argues that contemporary marriage is more than just a ceremony—and that it carries more legal weight than many people think about, including tax benefits and inheritance rules. Further, he argues that, while the courts have changed some of the rules around marriage, it remains up to society to reckon with how best to support its families.

Concise but complex, the book covers fifty years of marriage laws in total—beginning with the story of Tom Brougham and Barry Warren, who, in the 1980s, struggled to achieve the status of having a domestic partnership. Its five parts explore changing legal definitions of relationships in clear terms, including frameworks like civil unions and designated beneficiaries, to show how each option and title represented a mixed bag for those involved. There are moving stories about partners, however they were defined, struggling to care for one another within the confines of such legal roles.

This material is personal for Culhane, whose own struggle to form a civil union is included in the book's second chapter. Here and elsewhere, the coverage of the lived realities of contemporary families is fascinating—including families whose bonds are committed, but who, for a variety of reasons, find themselves outside of the powerful, supportive framework of a marriage. Culhane puts forth convincing arguments about what needs to happen next for there to be actual equality in society, suggesting ways to fix marriage itself in the process.

More than Marriage is an inspired introduction to legal understandings of marriage equality that issues an urgent argument for continued reforms.

JEREMIAH ROOD (May / June 2023)

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