THE POLITICS OF MARRIAGE: A MUSEUM EXHIBIT

How do we view marriage—as a lifelong contract to stay together “in sickness and in health” or a commitment to remain wedded as “long as we both shall love”? Do we envision marriage as including same-sex unions as well as partnerships between women and men? Does marriage have a primary purpose such as the rearing of children or the happiness of the spouses? How does the ideology of romantic love influence attitudes toward marriage and divorce? How does a “love marriage” contrast with an arranged marriage? Does marriage imply monogamy? Can a marriage include multiple partners? This exhibit examines these and other questions through exploring the changing face of American marriage in light of transformations in: law and gender roles, marriage patterns, divorce rates and attitudes toward sexuality, gender identity and same-sex unions.

ARTIFACTS INCLUDE:
Examples of older (promising wife’s obedience) and modern (egalitarian) marriage vows
Excerpt from New York Times article on arranged marriages in the U.S.
TV clip: 2003 Goodridge decision on legal right to same-sex marriage in Massachusetts.
Current newspaper wedding announcements (illustrating female/male and same-sex couples, variety in races/ethnicities/ages/genders of couples and choices of last name)
Charts of marriage, divorce and remarriage statistics in the U.S. over the 20th century
Timeline of U.S. laws defining marriage
Excerpt from Newsweek article on couples deciding whether to become parents
TV clips: Interview with a man and woman married for 60 years; Interview with a middle-aged male/female couple in a nonmonogamous marriage (“polyamorous union”)
Photos of: individuals in different types of marriages/families
Marriages with and without children (male/female and same-sex unions)
Arranged marriage
Blended marriages—couples with children from previous marriage(s)
Polygamous marriage—one husband/multiple wives