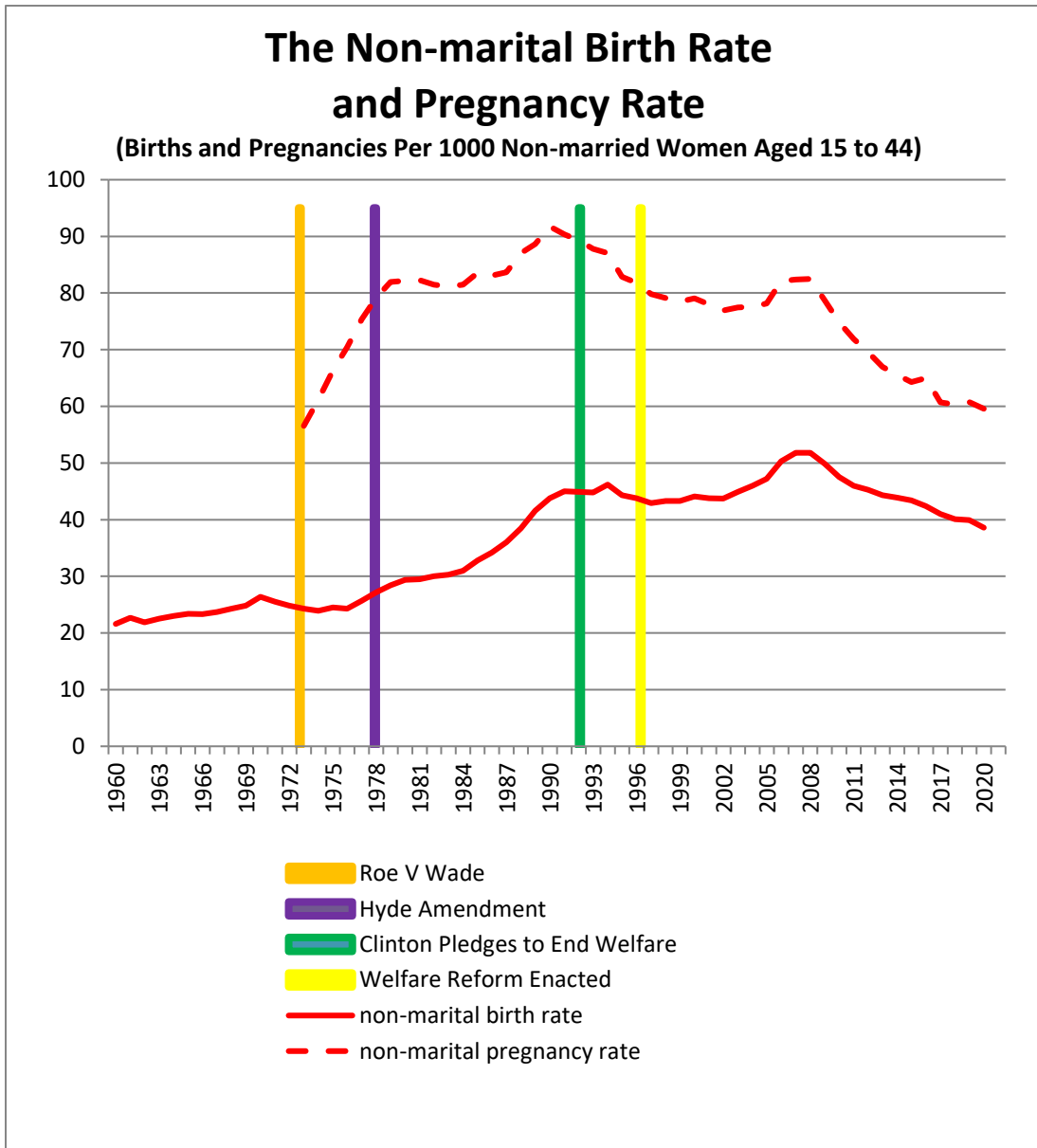


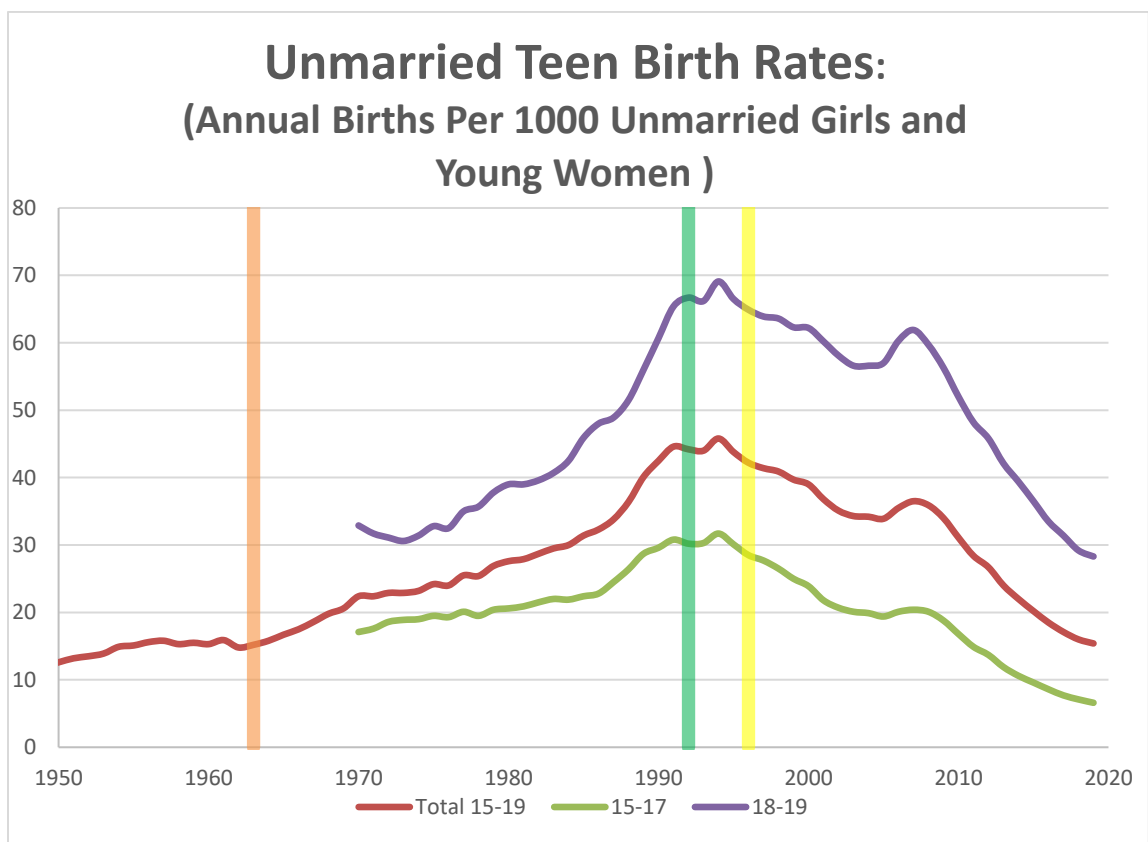
# **Welfare, Marriage, and Abortion**

**Robert Rector**



### Halting the Rise in the Non-Marital Birth Rate and Pregnancy Rate

Following welfare reform, the non-marital pregnancy rate stops rising and begins to fall. The non-marital birth rate (births per 1000 non-married women) stops rising.

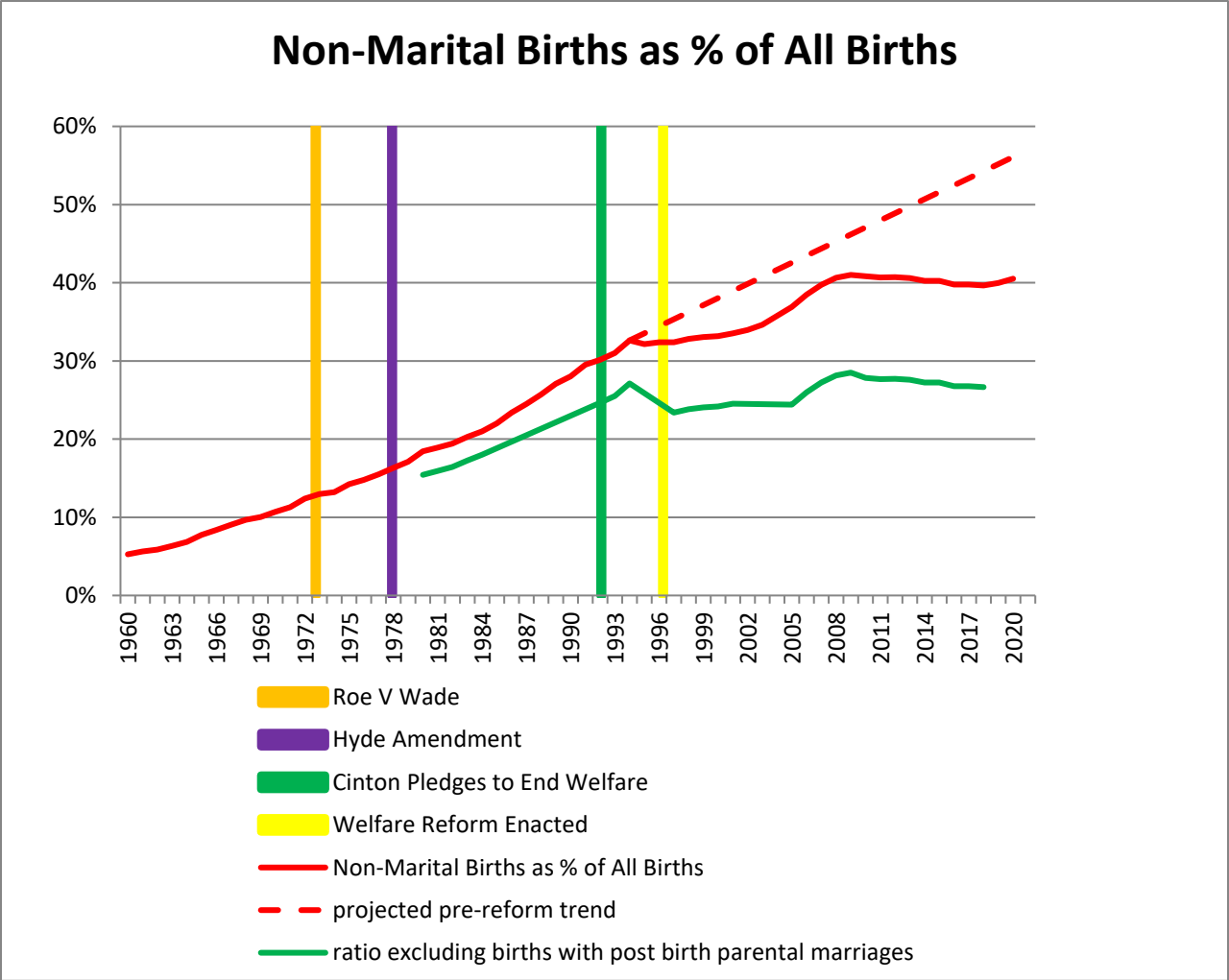


### **Reversing the Historic Rise in Teen Non-marital Pregnancy and Births**

Welfare reform also led to a dramatic drop in the teen non-marital birth rate. (This rate measures the number of births outside marriage for each 1000 non-married girls aged 15 to 19.)

For three decades before reform, the teen non-marital birth rate skyrocketed. In 1960 there were 15 non-marital births for each 1000 non-married girls and young women. By 1992, the rate had tripled, to 44 births per 1000 non-married girls and young women.

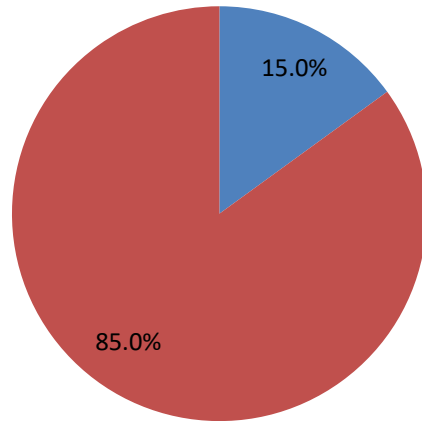
With the onset of welfare reform, this steady increase promptly reversed -- the non-marital birth rate began to fall rapidly. By 2019 the non-marital teen birth rate had dropped all the way back to the 1960 level of 15 non-marital births per 1000. Welfare reform effectively ended a severe and rising problem which had plagued the country for three decades.



In 1965, at the beginning of the War on Poverty, 8 percent of children were born outside marriage. This number rose with increasing rapidity during the permissive welfare period reaching 30 percent in 1992, the year candidate Clinton promised to end welfare. Welfare reform coincided with a decisive shift in the trajectory of family formation. If the pre-welfare trends in non-marital birth ratio had continued unabated, over 55 percent of children would now be born out-of-wedlock. The actual number today (shown on the red line on the chart) is 40.5 percent. The shift toward marriage and away from single parenthood that occurred with welfare reform means that an additional 15 percent of children or 550,000 children are born to married couples rather than single parents each year.

In addition, around 13 percent of children are born to parents who were co-habiting at the time of birth and marry after the births. If these births in which the biological parents marry after the child is born are counted as de facto “marital births” there has been no significant decline in marital births as a share of all births since the beginning of welfare reform.

### Percent of Abortions by Marital Status: 2017



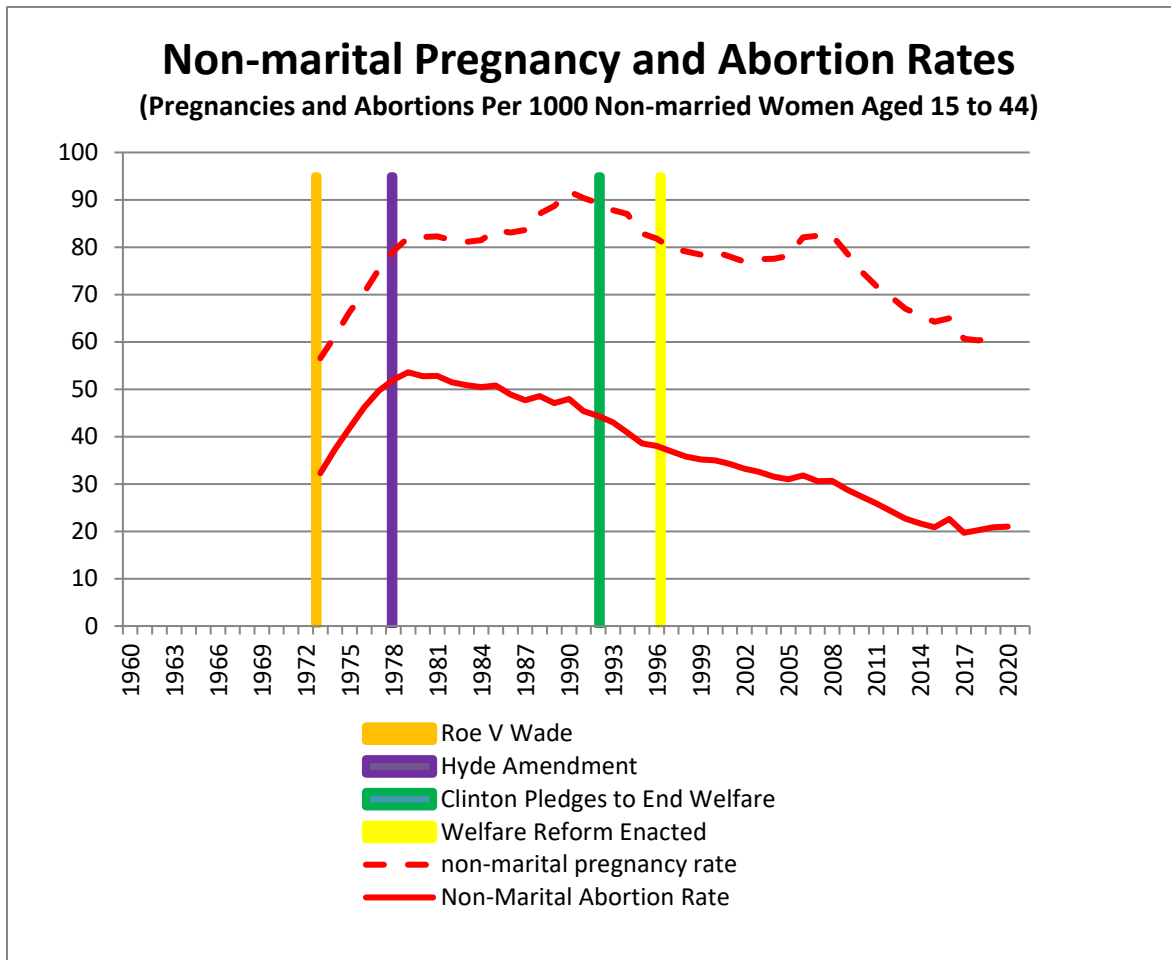
- Abortions to Married Women
- Abortions to Non-married Women

Welfare reform replaced the guarantee of unconditional cash aid to non-working single parents with a new program which required aid recipients to work or at least prepare and look for work. What effect did this shift to a work-oriented welfare system have on abortion?

Abortion occurs predominantly among non-married women. According to the latest available data from 2017, 85% percent of abortions occurred among non-married women and only 15% among married women.

The abortion rate is four times higher among non-married women -- at 20 abortions per 1000 non-married women (aged 15 to 44) -- than among for married women who have 5 abortions per 1000 women of the same age group.

Higher levels of abortion are directly linked to lower levels of marriage.



Following Roe V. Wade, the pregnancy rate of non-married women rose steadily. By the early 1990's it was nearly double the pre-Roe rate. (By contrast, the pregnancy rate of married women remained largely unchanged during this period.) With the onset of welfare reform, the upward trend promptly reversed; a steady 30-year decline began, and the rate fell from 89 per 1000 in 1992 to 59 per 1000 in 2020. Since, historically, a third to a half of non-marital pregnancies end in abortion, the substantial drop in non-marital pregnancies yielded a similar drop in abortions. Overall, there were at least, 400,000 fewer abortions in 2020 due to the steady decline in non-marital pregnancies induced by welfare.

Moreover, this estimate likely understates the impact of welfare reform in reducing abortion because it assumes that the non-marital pregnancy rate would have remained flat without welfare reform; in reality, it is likely that the rate would have continued its steady rise. In that case, welfare reform, through its effect on reduced pregnancy, would have reduced non-marital abortions by as much 800,000 per year.