

# 'Conveyor belt' to divorce

Can pieces be put back in 'marriage hospitals'?

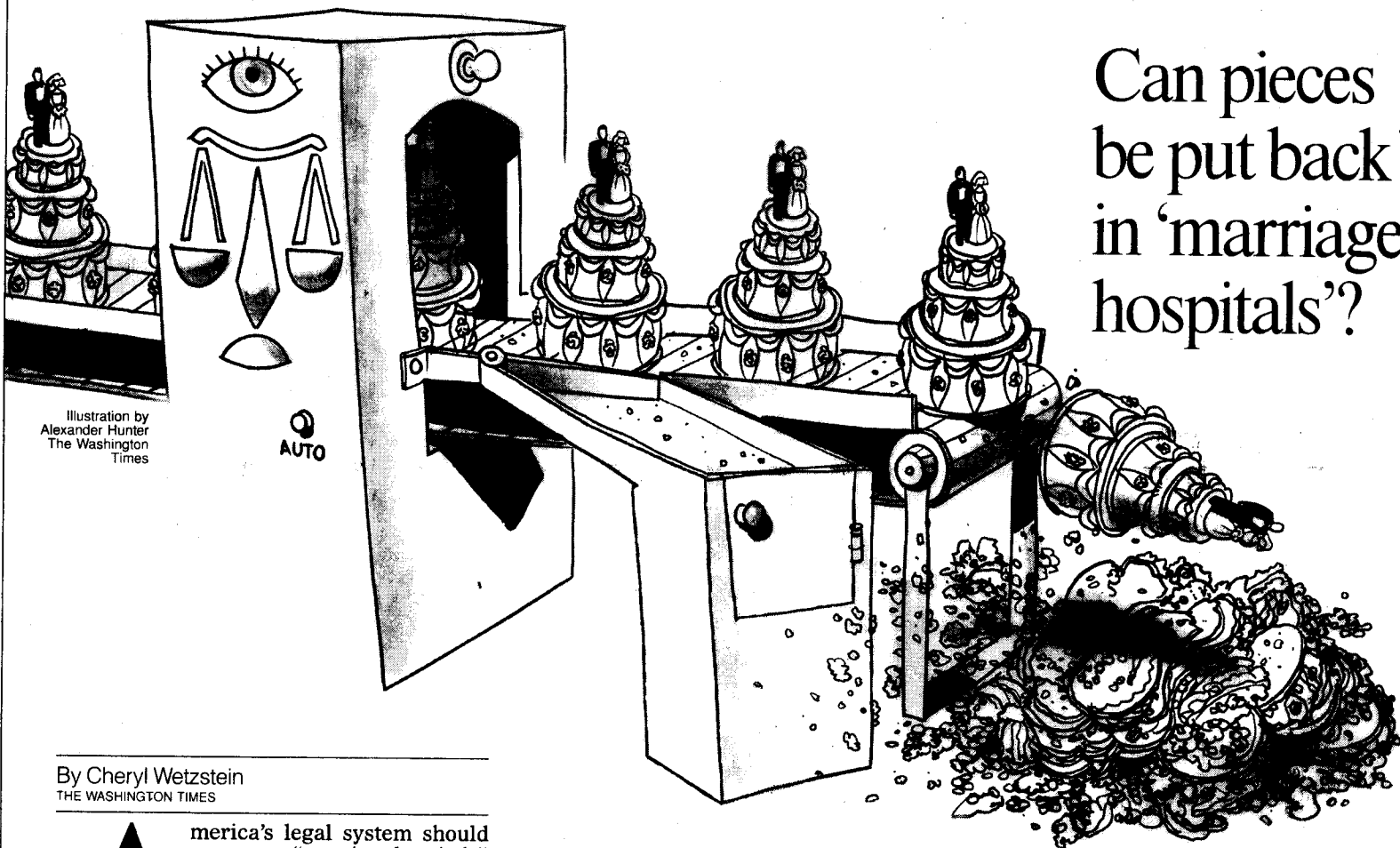


Illustration by  
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The Washington  
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**A**merica's legal system should create "marriage hospitals" for troubled couples instead of just putting them on a "conveyor belt" to divorce, a former divorce mediator contends.

The opposite view is that court-ordered reconciliation services already have been tried — and dropped — and what troubled couples need are services that help them achieve divorce amicably.

These competing outlooks illustrate America's ongoing struggle about whether divorce should become "normalized" or resisted with greater vigor.

Judy Parejko, a former divorce mediator in Wisconsin, believes the no-fault divorce reform of the 1960s is "a bait-and-switch" on the American people.

In the 1960s, legal analysts agreed on the wisdom of ending the practice of requiring a spouse to prove that the other was "at fault" for abandonment, abuse or adultery before a divorce could be granted. Mrs. Parejko wrote in her self-published book, "Stolen Vows: The Illusion of No-Fault Divorce and the Rise of the

ation Courts in Madison, Wis.

These reconciliation services were well-intended, he said, but many times couples didn't want the services and just went through the motions. The courts eventually stopped referring couples to marriage counseling "because the demand dried up."

"Courts try to serve the needs of the clients who come to them," Mr. Salem said. "In divorce, they've taken a legal action. The court's responsibility is to assess that legal situation and respond to the legal action."

He noted that dozens of courts now require parent education and/or mediation services to promote constructive resolution of family conflict.

Divorce remains common in America. In 2000, 18.9 divorces were reported per 1,000 married women, according to the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. That was a smaller rate than the 19.8 divorces per 1,000 married women in 1999 and considerably lower than the peak rate of 22.6 divorces per 1,000 wives in 1980.

In the 1960s, before no-fault divorce swept America, the rate was a modest 9.2 divorces

per 1,000 wives and everything would be just fine," Mr. Blankenhorn said.

John Crouch, executive director of Americans for Divorce Reform in Arlington, said a significant change in divorce law would be to deny no-fault divorces in cases where a couple has minor children or if one spouse doesn't want it. The group tracks such laws on its Web site, [www.divorcereform.org](http://www.divorcereform.org).

Meanwhile, in Michigan, two judges are trying their own approaches to divorce reform.

Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Helen E. Brown, who handles divorce and related custody and support cases, has promoted a mediation program with the potential to help divorcing couples consider reconciling. Most couples who took the mediation program didn't return to the court for services.

However, that mediation program was dropped in favor of another one that focused on counseling couples about their divorces; its major innovation was that the divorce counseling was conducted without attorney pres-