# Old Coverage

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# Fatherless families called U.S. tragedy

**NEW YORK** Louis Sullivan, the secretary of Health and Human Services, said Thursday that fatherlessness was "the greatest family challenge of our era," and he urged that the issue be placed "front and center on our national agenda."

Speaking in New York before the inaugural meeting of the Council on Families in America, Sullivan detailed the economic, social and health problems that children suffer when raised without fathers.

Sullivan

Sullivan, in his speech, said 60 percent of American children would spend some part of their childhood in single-parent homes. "Generally speaking, children missing a parent are more vulnerable," he said, and he listed several problems:

▶ "They are five times more likely to be poor and twice as likely to drop out of school."

▶ "Approximately 70 percent of juveniles in long-term correctional facilities did not live with their father growing up."

▶ "Even after controlling for age, sex, race and socio-economic status, children from disrupted families were 20 to 40 percent more likely to suffer health problems than children living with both biological parents."

Institute For American Values
1841 Broadway Suite 211
New York, N. Y. 10023

The Philadelphia Inquirer

FRIDAY
January 10, 1992

# Linking social ills and absent fathers

By Murray Dubin
*Inquirer Staff Writer*

The absence of fathers in American homes "is the greatest family challenge of our era," said Health and Human Services Secretary Louis W. Sullivan yesterday.

While much of the national dialogue on family and parenting has been focused on the mother, Sullivan called for a shift "to the issue of male responsibility."

"It is not women who are abandoning or neglecting their children," he said. "The vast majority of single parents are women raising their children without the biological father in the house."

Sullivan made his remarks in a speech in New York before the Council on Families in America, a new group of scholars and experts who plan research and public education on family issues.

Sullivan has spoken on family and children's issues before, but yesterday's talk was the first time he focused his remarks on fathers.

Youth poverty, poor health, violence and incarceration all increase when a father is not present, Sullivan said.

David Blankenhorn, the council's staff director, said that the male role "has been a hole in the discussion" of the American family.

Blankenhorn, also president of the Institute for American Values, the principal sponsor of the council, has written: "If we are seeking the identity of the rapist, the hater of women, the occupant of jail cells, research shows that we look first to the tragedy of boys growing up without fathers."

Research indicates that more than 40 percent of the children born between 1970 and 1984 will spend "at least a significant part of their childhood living in a single-parent home," he said.

Sullivan said that all fathers are not loving parents and that some women succeed as sole parents, but generally "children missing a parent are more vulnerable.

"They are five times more likely to be poor and twice as likely to drop out of school as are children who live with both parents.

"I see a direct link between the senseless violence on our streets and a generation of young males raised without the love, discipline and guidance of a father."

About 70 percent of "juveniles in long-term correctional facilities did not live with their father while growing up," he said.

A recent National Center for Health Statistics study found that children living in single-parent or step-parent families "suffer more ill health and emotional distress than children living with their biological mother and father," he said.

"Too often," Sullivan said, "the debate about family life avoids definitively answering some basic questions:

"Do children need fathers? Is marriage a realistic option?

"It is time we answered these questions with a resounding 'Yes.'"

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THE BOSTON GLOBE • FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 1992

# Fathers called crucial to families

## Health chief stresses need for two parents

By Irene Sege
GLOBE STAFF

Louis W. Sullivan, the secretary of health and human services, said yesterday that fatherlessness is "the greatest family challenge of our era," and he urged that the issue be placed "front and center on our national agenda."

Speaking in New York before the inaugural meeting of the Council on Families in America, Sullivan detailed the economic, social and health problems that children suffer when raised without fathers.

His comments, observers said, reflected a consensus across the political spectrum that increasing divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births and step-families have weakened family relationships. Last year, for instance, the bipartisan National Commission on Children suggested that children fare best in families formed by marriage.

"Though our society is only beginning to recognize it, the greatest family issue of our era is fatherlessness – male absence from family life," Sullivan said in prepared remarks. "I am here to put the issue of fatherless families front and center on our national agenda and to call for national action on what is surely the most important family challenge of the '90s."

The newly formed council is a group of 18 nationally known scholars and family experts whose goal is both to produce research on the American family and to make policy recommendations. About a third of American children are living apart from their natural fathers, either in single-parent homes or in stepfamilies, the council notes.

"What I observe happening out there is a new consensus on the two-parent home that cuts across ideological lines," said David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, sponsor of the council. "Over the last 15 to 20 years we have focused on the role of women and the plight of children. We have talked about: Should moms work? Is day care bad? Can Johnny read? What has been missing is focus on the male role and male responsibility."

"Conservatives have long been concerned about single-parent families," said Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University who is not on the council and describes himself as a liberal academic whose own views have evolved.

"Over the past decade more and more liberals have come to see it's a problem, too," Cherlin said. "Conservatives are concerned about the passing of the traditional family. Liberals are concerned about the numbers of children in poverty. Both groups are seeing that the father is important. You will see this in the campaign of 1992."

Sullivan, in his speech, said 60 percent of American children will spend some part of their childhood in single-parent homes. "Generally speaking, children missing a parent are more vulnerable," he said, and he listed several problems:

- "They are five times more likely to be poor and twice as likely to drop out of school."
- "Approximately 70 percent of juveniles in long-term correctional facilities did not live with their father growing up."
- "Even after controlling for age, sex, race and socio-economic status, children from disrupted families were 20 to 40 percent more likely to suffer health problems than children living with both biological parents."
- "The mortality rate of infants born to college-educated but unmarried mothers is higher than for infants born to married high school dropouts."

Some observers cautioned against giving the issue of fatherless families too much weight. To Sara McLanahan, a sociologist at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs, the economic condition of children is at least as important.

"I wouldn't say fatherlessness is the single most important problem, but it's certainly a big problem," McLanahan said. "I think the most important problem is poverty, and it's not just single-parent families. Over half the children who are poor are living in two-parent families. The costs of poverty are even greater than the family structure itself, but I would agree family structure is important."

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The Washington Times SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 1992

# Problems rooted in fatherless families

Louis W. Sullivan, secretary of health and human services, may be the most perceptive person in Washington.

Last week, the secretary gave a speech to the Council on Families in America, wherein he identified "male absence from family life" as the greatest challenge of our generation.

Noting that one-third of the nation's children live apart from one biological parent and 60 percent will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent household, Dr. Sullivan cited some grim statistics. These children are "five times more likely to be poor and twice as likely to drop out of school" as those from intact families. "Approximately 70 percent of juveniles in long-term correctional facilities did not live with their father growing up."

Princeton sociologist Sara McLanahan cautioned against putting undue emphasis on fatherlessness, claiming the economic condition of children is at least as important. That is akin to saying that a man's death is at least as significant as the bullet in his brain, as if there were no connection between the event and condition.

Almost every vexing social problem (crime, poverty, drug abuse, even declining productivity) is related to family dissolution. Nationally, the poverty rate is just 6 percent. Yet fully one-third of all female-headed households are in poverty.

Children from these homes are far more likely to fail academically, commit crimes, use drugs and become sexually active at an early age. More than half of the teens who've attempted suicide live in single-parent families.

The ghetto is a terrifying testament to the social pathology produced by the flight of fathers. While the poverty rate for intact black families is only 12 percent higher than for their white counterparts, nearly half of black families headed by a woman are poor.

By making the low-income breadwinner obsolete, and persuading young women from impoverished backgrounds to produce welfare babies of their own (as a ticket to independence), we've created a climate where 60 percent of black children are born out of wedlock.

Blacks comprise 46 percent of the prison population. Statistically, a young black man is 10 times more likely to commit a homicide than a young white. That our inner cities are festering sores of drugs, crime, illegitimacy and dependency is due primarily to a shortage of black fathers.

What AFDC has done for the underclass, no-fault divorce is doing for the middle class. Nearly two-thirds of today's marriages will end in divorce or separation.

The average income of women with children declines 73 percent after divorce. Half of all new welfare recipients are recently divorced women and their children. Says Michael Schwartz, director of the Center for Social Policy of the Free Congress Foundation: "Divorce is an even more efficient generator of poverty than socialism."

*As strong families are absolutely essential to social cohesion, one would think that government would do everything in its power to promote family stability. In fact, government and society have conspired to fashion an environment inimical to families.*

Louis Sullivan

As strong families are absolutely essential to social cohesion, one would think that government would do everything in its power to promote family stability. If, that is, one were naive enough to think of the American welfare state as: (a) well-intentioned or (b) rational in relating means to ends.

In fact, government and society have conspired to fashion an environment inimical to families. Through the declining value of the personal exemption, the tax structure penalizes families with children. Between 1960 and 1984, the percentage of income paid in taxes by singles and married couples without children stayed the same. For married couples with four children, it soared into the stratosphere, climbing 233 percent.

Legitimizing lifestyles further undercuts the family. Providing spousal benefits for homosexuals, condoning cohabitation and removing the stigma from out-of-wedlock births reduce families to the status of a mere preference.

Feminism has made its own inimitable contribution. Says Mr. Schwartz: "Feminists, of course, take the position that fathers are largely irrelevant. In terms of child rearing, mothers are all that matter. Whatever feminists say, the media dutifully echoes."

As a result, many men are confused about their proper function. Gender roles? They're sexist. Man as the breadwinner, sole support of his family? Out of date. Discipliner of children? They'll grow up with complexes.

Our fathers knew what yuppies never learned, or quickly forgot. There is no substitute for paternal affection and discipline. Those deprived of the right role model often choose a toxic alternative.

To avoid social chaos, we must engender responsibility. Men must be made to want to marry the mothers of their children and not to cast off their families. This will require nothing less than a total reorientation of current government policy and societal attitudes. Dr. Sullivan has identified the problem. Embracing the obvious solutions will take considerably more courage.

*Don Feder is a nationally syndicated columnist.*

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# Sons require real 'fatherhood'

■ In modern society, what are we teaching our sons about what it means to be a man?

**WILLIAM RASPBERRY**

Washington Post

WASHINGTON — David Blankenhorn tells this true story. A group of fathers — professional, highly educated, affluent — are discussing their sons when the question comes up: What are we teaching our sons about what it means to be a man?

"The answers varied, as might be expected," Blankenhorn recalls. "Several men cited the value of honesty. Other values were also stressed: respect for others, kindness, generosity, communication, being true to principles, sensitivity to the needs of others. Yet one thread united all the answers: These men sought to teach their sons about manhood through universal human values — the very same values, they agreed, that they would try to teach their daughters."

Blankenhorn, who is president of the Institute for American Values in New York City, makes clear that the conversation left him uneasy. Pressed, he cannot say just what special, gender-specific values fathers ought to be conveying to their sons. But he has no doubt that such things exist, and that the androgynous responses of his friends (which they tend to see as evidence of their sexual enlightenment) are symptomatic of something gone wrong.

He fears, in short, that fatherhood is losing its specialness, and that society is paying the cost. So do I. It is easier to feel than to talk about, though Blankenhorn talks about it better than most in a paper, *The Good Family Man*, written for the Institute a month or so ago.

"I am the father of a son," he wrote. "I want to teach my son how to be a good person. But while that is necessary, it is not sufficient. I also want to teach my son how to be a good man and how to be a good father. But when I look around me for help and reinforcement in that crucial task, I see a culture that, at its best, communicates confusion, fear and anxiety on the entire subject of what it means for a boy to become a man. At its worst, I see our culture as actively hostile to this entire enterprise."

Blankenhorn remembers, as I do, an earlier time when it was easier for fathers to bring their sons into that special company of manhood. Sometimes it was individual, as when a son became his father's actual or quasi-apprentice. My generation has no difficulty picturing the father humped over a balky engine, asking his son to hand him a three-eighths box-end wrench and the feeler gauge — or knowing that only a part of the ritual concerns tools and engines. Sometimes it was communal. The older boy recruited to the local men's baseball team, or brought along with the men on an overnight hunting trip, was never really a child again.

It's easier to know that there's something special about such moments than to articulate it or to say why we think it matters in the long term. It has nothing to do with shutting out daughters or inclining boys toward violence, though it certainly must appear that way.

Myriam Miedzian (in her book, *Boys Will Be Boys*) argues that the notions fathers traditionally tried to convey to sons — toughness, competitiveness, holding back the tears — "reinforce in their sons just those qualities that serve to desensitize them and make them more prone to commit violent acts, or condone them."

Blankenhorn, rushing in where his intellectual peers have feared to tread, says of Miedzian's archetypal father:

"Doubtless he is far from perfect, as a man or as a father. But there is one sin of which he is almost certainly innocent. He is not the reason why young men commit crimes. . ."

"There are exceptions, of course, but here is the rule. Boys raised by traditionally masculine fathers generally do not commit crimes. Fatherless boys commit crimes."

Blankenhorn does not defend (nor do I) the specifics of what men have traditionally taught their sons. He does not insist on the particular curriculum — only that it is in society's interest that there be a curriculum of values passed from fathers to sons.

# The superfluous father?

By William Raspberry

WASHINGTON — Motherhood is necessity, a part of our nature as animals. Fatherhood is sociocultural invention — perhaps a device for permitting men to feel as important and indispensable as women clearly are.

It's not an original thought. The anthropologist Margaret Mead said something like it when she offered: "The central problem of every society is to define appropriate roles for the men."

What, particularly, do you do with men once they've ceased to be biologically necessary?

MEN — HUSBANDS — used to be necessary as hunters and defenders, then modified those roles as humankind moved from hunting to agriculture, and again when we went industrial. But however modified, there has been a role for men.

Until now. He's not exactly wearing a sandwichboard announcing the end of fatherhood, but David Blankenhorn is worried. The head of the Manhattan-based Institute for American Values thinks we may be hurtling blindly into the Age of the Superfluous Father. On the one hand is the unlamented absent father, the divorced father, the never-was-there father, the father shrunken to the size of a wallet. On the other is the "new father," the father who believes that human progress depends on his ability to transcend gender-specific male roles in favor of gender-neutral "parenting."

The absent father may be more prevalent among the poor, the transformed father among middle-class intellectuals, but Blankenhorn thinks they're both part of the same troubling trend.

"I find much to commend in the concept of the new father," he acknowledges in his provocative paper, "The Good Family Man." "I may well be something a new father myself — if more in practice than in theory. In short, I have a lot to say in support of nurturing fathers.

"But at the risk of being the skunk at the garden party, I will also argue that, as a cultural proposition, the new father is part and parcel of a culturally impoverished conception of fatherhood. . . . The new father closely resembles the unnecessary father.

William Raspberry

"As a cultural proposition, the new father rests upon a premise and an imperative. The premise is that social progress, especially for women, as well as the attainment of individual male happiness, depends in large part upon overturning traditional masculine norms within the home. . . . The imperative that flows from this premise is role convergence — the removal of socially defined male and female roles from family life."

Supposing it's all true, what is Blankenhorn so upset about?

Two things — or, rather, two categories of things. The first is more noticeable among the overwhelmingly fatherless "underclass," where boys, denied the traditional male roles of provider and defender — often denied any utility whatever — turn to increasingly anti-social behavior. Boys who have no fathers to guide them into manhood learn their manhood from the street, to the peril of us all.

The second category involves doing the best for the children themselves. It is not a question of right or wrong but of difference that a mother seeing her small child on a jungle gym is more likely to say "Be careful!" while the father may say "Can you climb to the top?" The mother who asks "Where does it hurt?" is not wrong, but neither is the father who says "You're OK, shake it off."

"Here is the point," Blankenhorn said in a recent interview: "Pity the boy or girl who does not receive BOTH of these types of love. Neither by itself is sufficient. But together, they will make a whole and will add up to what a child needs. This is the most basic reason for the importance of the two-parent home."

BLANKENHORN MAKES one other point. "Many adults today, for their own reasons, seek to ignore or dismiss or deny the differences between males and females. But as any parent knows, children do not share these concerns. They are quite interested in the meaning of their embodiment, in how girls are different from boys. So in a certain sense, the androgynous imperative in our elite culture is simply an adult fashion that ignores some of the most basic concerns of children.

"The only decision for us to make is whether, for example, boys will define their masculinity with the help and guidance of strong fathers and other adults, or whether they will define it by themselves, perhaps with the help of MTV, or their peers in schools, or gangs of boys on the street who will be quite ready to tell them — especially if no one else does — what it means to be a real man."

*William Raspberry is a columnist for The Washington Post.*

San Gabriel Valley Tribune Tuesday, January 28, 1992

# New council to examine family roles

All the research points to one conclusion: Children need the love, financial support and guidance of both their mother and father.

**— Louis W. Sullivan, U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services**

The revolution that brought self-fulfillment to women has promoted self-indulgence in men. From a family perspective, we live in the age of the vanishing male.

Rap Anthems of rape and torture are the advertising jingles of a world wholly devoid of male authority.

**— Working papers by sociology scholars at the Institute for American Values**

Growing fatherlessness is the greatest family challenge of this era, according to Louis W. Sullivan, U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services.

"It is time to shift our attention to the issue of male responsibility and the indispensable role that good fathers play in our society," he said Jan. 9 at the inaugural meeting of the Council on Families at Brandeis University in New York City.

From the kitchen table to the White House, the challenge is to define the basic changes needed to strengthen the family, said David Popenoe, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University. He is chairman of the private, nonpartisan "think tank" made up of 18 nationally prominent family specialists and scholars from such places as Harvard, Yale, Vanderbilt and the University of Chicago.

"We know that family decline is real and serious, especially from the perspective of children," Popenoe says.

Through research and interviews with families, the council will try to assess the role of the family in modern society and how society can foster strong families in the 21st century.

While the topic generally is associated with political conservatives, the council is a cross-section, said David Blankenhorn, director of the council and president of the Institute for American Values.

"There is a whole school of thought out there that the nuclear family should be buried," he said. "Our diversity doesn't extend that far."

Council members come from across the political spectrum and from diverse branches of the human sciences, he said.

They include people who served on the National Commission on Children, historians, economists, family counselors, an attorney specializing in family as well as specialists in African-American, Jewish and Hispanic relations.

The Institute for American Values is the principal sponsor of the council. A private, non-partisan founded in 1986, the institute is devoted to research, publication and public education on major issues of family well-being, family policy and civic values.

Co-sponsors include the Rutgers University Foundation — the main fiscal sponsor — and the Rutgers University Social Science Research Center. Other backers include the Allstate Foundation; the J.M. Foundation, the Joyce Foundation; the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; the MassMutual Life Insurance Co, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The number for information is (212) 246-3942.

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Rocky Mountain News
Thurs. February 20, 1992

# Fatherlessness is the mother of too many disasters

David Blankenhorn has traveled an interesting road. He was a few years too late for the heyday of the New Left — and thus missed out on the fun of occupying deans' offices and such. Nevertheless, when he finished college in 1977, he was imbued with enough passion to join Citizen Action and spend the next 10 years as a "community organizer."

**Mona Charen**

But a funny thing happened on the way to organization. Blankenhorn discovered that there was very little community left. He spent days and weeks picketing the offices of the local public utility in an attempt to get lower rates and badgering the sanitation department to improve trash collection. But as time went by, he found that there was something far more important missing from the lives of the poor than his band of single, childless "activists" was inclined to recognize. What most concerned the lives of the poor was not trash collection or utility bills, it was family life.

Blankenhorn began to rethink some of his liberal assumptions — especially regarding culture. Together with similarly reflective colleagues, he founded the Institute for American Values (1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023), a think tank on the family. Though the name sounds suspiciously conservative, Blankenhorn is quick to point out that if the board of directors (himself included) had had its way, Michael Dukakis would be president today.

Blankenhorn's current ruminations concern the role of fathers in our culture. In a sweeping essay entitled "The Good Family Man," he surveys the fatherhood horizon, from the inner city to the blue-collar worker to the elite Volvo driver, and delivers a stinging indictment of the post-feminist world.

By attempting to create a creature called the "new father," a nurturing, empathic, gentle parent, feminists and other social revolutionaries have systematically devalued the traditional roles of fatherhood, Blankenhorn argues. It's hard to think of any aspect of the traditional father that does not now meet with ridicule. Good provider? Passe. Final authority? Hah. Teacher of manly virtues like courage and honor? Who says those are manly?

There's just one problem with the movement toward androgyny in "parenting." It robs the father of his role. That's a dangerous thing, Blankenhorn told me, because unlike motherhood, fatherhood is not a tight biological bond. The mother-child tie is so strong that almost nothing (crack excepted) can break it. Divorce doesn't weaken it. Nor does the absence of matrimony. Motherhood doesn't need culture to reinforce it.

For fathers, it's a different matter. Look at the number of divorced fathers who scarcely see, far less support, their offspring. Look at the indifference of many unmarried fathers to the children they've sired.

Fathers need to be encouraged and appreciated by the culture. How do you do that? Well, one way *not* to do it is to insist that the "new father" — a pale imitation of mother — is the best. There is a distinct role that fathers must and do play in the lives of their children, particularly their sons. Even in the age of the two-earner couple, Blankenhorn argues, some of the traditional male roles continue to be relevant. Most women with very young children still prefer, when possible, to stay at home with their babies. The male role as provider is accordingly still relevant.

Fathers also protect their families. The feminist movement has not yet been able to obliterate the physical strength of men. When a prowler breaks into the house, Blankenhorn asks, who goes downstairs?

But without fancy elaboration, the most important role of the father may well be to *stick around.* The social statistics are groaning under the weight of disasters caused by absent fathers. Crime is one. Statistically, fatherlessness is more closely associated with crime than either race or poverty.

Blankenhorn's plea is more than a cultural corrective. It is also a very personal credo about the nature of human happiness, which, he argues, grows out of family life and family responsibility. Here is a modern liberal who is not afraid to finish his essay with an approving quote from St. Paul: "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

Creators Syndicate

Institute For American Values
1841 Broadway Suite 211
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The San Diego Union-Tribune

Saturday, February 22, 1992

## Richard Louv

# Two debates are raging on family

NEW YORK — On the subject of the family, two debates are going on in America, two separate conversations — a conference table discussion and a kitchen table discussion.

That's the analysis of Barbara Whitehead, a social historian and fellow with the Institute for American Values. Whitehead, of Amherst, Mass., is fast becoming one of the leading voices in the family debate.

"The conference table conversation takes place in rooms like this," she told a symposium audience on Feb. 3, at a national media conference at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

"The typical conference table conversation takes place among people like us — representatives of the media, the academic world, the policy community."

It's a conversation among credentialed experts and advocates. The language of the conference table discussion is that "of the policy sciences — politics and economics."

Much of the conference table conversation has veered off into the theoretical ozone.

Then there's the kitchen table conversation, largely overlooked by the media. The kitchen table conversation is among families themselves, and "the language of cultural norms and values."

At the kitchen table, parents quote their grandmother, other parents, common sense values, the problems of daily life.

The kitchen table discussion and the conference table are addressing two quite different agendas.

### Changing the culture

Whitehead describes four topics where the kitchen table and the conference table have diverged:

■ *What's happening to American families?*

The conference table says the family is changing in response to large economic, social and technological forces; that families are changing, generally, in progressive ways, at least among middle-class families.

The kitchen table conversation, however, revolves around the decline of the family, in two ways: it's harder to be a parent and it's harder to be a child. "In survey after survey, adult Americans and parents say this is the case," says Whitehead, who has conducted focus groups around the country.

■ *What's the best family structure?*

"The conference table sets up a horse race between the traditional and non-traditional family," says Whitehead, "a race between Ozzie and Harriet and Kate and Allie, and especially between stay-at-home and working mothers." Which family form is advancing, which is out of date — and which one should government help?

To the folks around the kitchen table, these distinctions aren't particularly meaningful.

Says Whitehead: "People do not march under a demographic banner. Family forms are fluid, dynamic. Today's working mother is tomorrow's stay-at-home mother. Mothers who have home-based work or part-time work share something with both."

There is one area of agreement. The kitchen table conference and the conference table agree that the two-parent family is usually better able to secure a child's well-being than the single-parent family.

■ *What's the relationship between parenting and work?*

Throughout the '80s, says Whitehead, the conference table asked: How can we make parents better workers? But the question at the kitchen table was: How can working parents find the time to be better parents?

"Again and again, parents told me that their biggest problem was not enough time with the children. They said lack of parental time was the principal reason that children were not doing well," she says.

In recent months, the conference table has finally begun to address the issue.

■ *What should be done to improve family well-being?*

The conference table calls for more government policies and programs.

The kitchen table says government programs aren't enough; we've got to change the *culture* — by strengthening family relationships and rebuilding the web of support surrounding families.

To fully appreciate the cultural perspective of the kitchen table, you have to literally imagine the kitchen table as the center of the family universe, says Whitehead.

"Down the hall is the TV. This week, the nightly news featured Jeffrey Dahmer, Mike Tyson and Gennifer Flowers. Outside the door are a street and a neighborhood that parents fear are no longer safe. A few more blocks down is the mall where kids learn that you can buy an identity and respect with the sneakers and the designer clothes you wear."

Both the conference table and the kitchen table have something important to tell us about the family, says Whitehead. "But the two conversations should inform each other."

Until now, that hasn't happened.

The kitchen table needs a public voice.

"Journalists should knock on a few doors, sit down at a few kitchen tables," she says.

Indeed, what we really need is a *national* kitchen table discussion.

That discussion is about to begin.

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**RICHARD LOUV'S** column also appears on A-2 of Wednesday's San Diego Union-Tribune.

# Families destroyed in many ways

■ The absence of fathers has been called "the most socially consequential fact of our era."

**ELLEN GOODMAN**

Boston Globe

BOSTON — This began as a story about "granny-dumping." An old man had been left at a racetrack in Idaho holding a teddy bear, seated in a wheelchair, and wearing a baseball cap with the deadly ironic message: "Proud to be an American."

John Kingery, a resident of Oregon and a victim of Alzheimer's, came to represent the modern American elder sent off on the modern American ice floe.

But then the news story took one of those odd twists. The spotlight turned from one daughter who presumably deserted her father to another daughter who discovered him.

In Tennessee, Nancy Kingery Myatt caught this man's picture in the paper. He was the father she had not seen in 28 years. He was the father who "just slipped away from us," after divorce, after remarriage. The father who just slipped away from five children.

The pathos in their nursing home reunion is hard to overstate. A 55-year-old woman tearfully and gratefully greeting an 82-year-old father who could no longer recognize her. "I didn't have a Dad for all those years," she said. "Now I have one." One who does not know his own name. Or hers. But a father all the same.

What a mix of family dramas in this sad tale. Granny-dumping and kiddie-dumping. Children who abandon their parents and parents who abandon their children. But what my ear picked up in Nancy Myatt's words was the simple, endless hunger of a child of any age for the father who disappeared.

Some 70,000 elderly Americans are abandoned by their families each year. But that figure is overwhelmed by the numbers of deserted children.

Today, about one-third of all American children — 19 million — live away from their fathers. Among the children of divorce, half have never visited their father's home. In a typical year, 40 percent of them don't see their father. One out of five haven't seen their father in five years. There are millions of adults like Nancy Myatt and her four siblings who simply graduate to the next stage of fatherless life.

It is no wonder that the search for a man missing in the action of parenthood is such a recurrent theme in our culture and conversation these days.

The search for father, the longing for father is at the root of Robert Bly's *Iron John*, and at the heart of *Boyz N the Hood*. It's on the mind of nearly every child whose father simply "slipped away."

Today's favorite image may be that of the "new father," says David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values, but "the real direction is toward fatherless children." He cites this absence as "the most socially consequential fact of our era."

It is not simply an economic matter, though the public conversation about missing fathers revolves around money. We speak less about the missing man than about the missing child-support payment. We call them deadbeat dads.

But the children who talk about their missing fathers are less calculating than yearning. In both fiction and real life, they speak about the "disappeared" in the language of emotional loss, not financial.

A sense of longing carries over to Nancy Myatt's reunion with her father who is now present but literally absent-minded. "The more I see him," she says, "the more I want to see him and talk to him."

There is an unhappy symmetry to the Kingery story of loss and reunion. A father abandoned by one daughter. A father discovered by the daughter he abandoned. How many ways are there to destroy a family? How many portraits as sad as the one of a woman "finding" her father only after he is lost.

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THE PALM BEACH POST
MONDAY, APRIL 13, 1992

# LIFE WITHOUT FATHER

## It's time to sound the alarm on fatherless families. Experts say kids with absent dads often turn to crime and have troubled relationships as adults.

By KAREN UHLENHUTH
Kansas City Star

Researchers have identified a novel strategy to aid troubled children and reduce delinquency and teenage pregnancy: the two-parent household.

"The best social program for children in America is a loving two-parent home," said David Blankenhorn, a social historian and president of the Institute for American Values, a think tank on family issues based in New York.

Unfortunately, he added: "That's the program we're disinvesting in."

Blankenhorn and many other social scientists are sounding the alarm about fatherless homes, which they contend have reached an unprecedented level in the United States and are to blame for some of our society's greatest and most intractable ills.

This year the Institute on American Values assembled the Council on Families in America, comprised mostly of researchers and writers, to examine the status of the American family and make recommendations on strengthening it.

At the council's inaugural meeting Jan. 9, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan gave a stark assessment of the state of the nation's families.

"I am here to put the issue of fatherless families front and center on our national agenda, and to call for national action on what is surely the most important family challenge of the '90s," he said.

"We speak glibly of 'new families' and 'single-parent homes.' However, in the eyes of a child, what is almost always happening is the loss of a father. I see a direct link between the senseless violence on our streets and a genera-

# Cost of being fatherless great, family experts say

tion of young males raised without the love, discipline and guidance of a father.

"All of the research points to one conclusion: Children need the love, financial support and guidance of both their mother and their father."

On that point, agreement has not been universal.

The notion of the "superfluous father" has taken root in American culture, perpetuated by government welfare policies and television sitcoms alike, Blankenhorn says.

Karl Zinsmeister, a researcher and author who is writing a book about families in the United States, said the dispensability of dads is "trumpeted throughout mass culture." For example, the father in *The Cosby Show* is "an amiable and slightly foolish foil for his children's precocities and his wife's no-nonsense wisdom," Zinsmeister writes in an essay titled *The Nature of Fatherhood.*

"There's been a big focus on the roles of women and the plight of children," Blankenhorn said. "As you look at what's happening, and at the social science evidence, it becomes increasingly clear that what we're overlooking is the male role in family life. It's as if there was this silence in our conversation regarding the male role."

To the extent that fathers are in the limelight, he said, "it's a phenomenon of 'the new father,' the nurturing, involved father. If you looked at television on Father's Day, they'd bring out these guys who were holding infants and changing diapers. The idea of the nurturant father is really played up, when in fact for every father you find doing that, you find three or four homes with no male in them. When we in a self-congratulatory way focus on this admirable group of men, we overlook the fact that this generation of children is spending less time with their fathers than almost any previous generation — less time with men in general."

The dual forces of divorce and out-of-wedlock births account for the approximately 35 percent of American children who are growing up without their biological father at home. In 1990, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, mothers were the only parents in 22 percent of households, an all-time high.

Children who don't see their father every night at the dinner table rarely see him at all, according to some studies.

"At present, a majority of American children who live in mother-headed families have essentially no contact with their biological father and receive little or no material support from him," Zinsmeister wrote.

"1981 data from the U.S. National Survey of Children showed that about half of all single-parent youngsters had not seen their biological father at all during the preceding 12 months, and another sixth had seen him only once or twice. Only one-sixth saw their fathers an average of once a week or more."

Blankenhorn urges that Americans look at the cost of the current wave of fatherlessness "in terms of delinquency, sexual behavior of delinquency, sexual behavior that is not so good, welfare and crime.

"Father absence is a more important predictor of criminal activity than race or economic level," he said.

One study, cited by Sullivan, found that 70 percent of men in prison had grown up without their father.

The pattern exists in part because fathers divorce themselves from their children when they divorce their wives, said Gary Frechette, executive director of Palm Beach County's Drug Abuse Treatment Association

"A lot of these kids really feel abandoned. Mom and Dad may not be able to get along, but both should have a good relationship with the kids," he said. "Let that nourishment with the father continue."

Children who don't learn within the family how to establish and maintain close relationships grow up to be crippled adults, said Judith Wallerstein, executive director of the Center for the Family in Transition in Corte Madera, Calif.

"What you learn about (from parents) is human relationships," she said. "You need an inner vision to build on."

While girls suffer primarily in their attempts to establish intimate relationships, boys experience a different version of what Blankenhorn calls "psychological and cultural desertion."

"Psychologists will tell you that they go through a separation from the mother and identification with the father in a search to determine what it means to be male. The father is the gatekeeper to the community of men. The father introduces the meaning of masculinity.

"Some men who don't know what it means to be a strong man make up their own rituals. They say: 'Maybe it means I'm a real man if I'm a member of this gang and kill a lot of people. Or maybe if I impregnate a lot of girls."

Studies and clinical encounters consistently support the thesis that a boy looks to his father "as a role model, disciplinarian, guide and friend," said David Popenoe, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J.

Philip Sprinkle, a West Palm Beach lawyer who is Big Brother to a 15-year-old boy, said he feels he competes with negative influences of the streets for making an impression on his "little brother," Darrell.

"If you don't have a father at home, you're going to go to the resources that are available to you — the street," Sprinkle said.

"Knowing the neighborhood he's from, he does have some problems being with groups that lead him astray. Everything I'm telling him, he soaks it up," Sprinkle said. "But many times, I feel like I'm spitting on a forest fire. There's so many things I'd love to help him do. And I just don't have enough time."

The nation's epidemics of divorce, out-of-wedlock births and fatherlessness signal "an attitude shift ... at the level of cultural values (regarding) marital permanence and cultivating this environment for children," Blankenhorn said. "We've shrugged our shoulders and said, 'People are going to do what they are going to do.' "

(OVER)

Many social scientists think changes can, and must, be made. Welfare policies, for example, should be altered so that benefits do not depend on the father's absence.

In addressing fatherlessness, Popenoe said: "Marriage is the bottom line. Something is happening in marriage where the man is pulling away. How to keep men in marriages is one of the fundamental issues of our time."

Ramp said it's too easy to get married in this country and that, consequently, weak unions result.

"People don't appreciate what commitment means," she said. "When problems develop, they just start over. They say, 'The kids will be fine.' But often, they're not OK."

She said that divorce, like drug abuse, "has to become socially unacceptable."

But not everyone agrees that a reduction in divorces is the answer.

Single mother Kathy Weaver said she believes society accepts men's failure to nurture their children.

"The man is not expected to be responsible. He only inserts the penis," said Weaver, who has two teenage sons. The Port St. Lucie mother has been divorced four years.

Wallerstein points out that prohibition didn't stop drinking and tougher divorce laws "would not make for better family life."

Other academics point out that some husbands — perhaps even many — are themselves the problem because of alcohol or other drug addictions, or abusive behavior.

Joseph Pleck, a research associate at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, warns against focusing on marriage and family relations to the exclusion of all else.

"While fathers' roles are important," he said, "it's another thing to say that fatherlessness is the biggest problem facing the American family." As other candidates for that distinction, he nominates "poverty and workplaces that are not responsive to the fact that most kids are in two-earner families."

Rather than put a choke-hold on divorce, he suggests, society should explore why teenagers have sex without contraception, why teenage girls choose to raise children alone.

Fatherlessness is a particularly difficult problem because "a lot of it isn't something we can ask the government to correct," Popenoe said. "It's asking for a national reexamination."

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THE WASHINGTON POST FRIDAY, MAY 22, 1992

*Richard Cohen*

# Len Garment's Letter

NEW YORK—We are coming up on the third anniversary of the Great Unanswered Letter. It was written May 30, 1989, by Leonard Garment, the Washington lawyer and one-time Nixon White House aid, to John Sununu, then George Bush's chief of staff. Appropriately respectful, seeking common ground ("I have been in the environs, and know what it's like"), it asked for a "brief" meeting to discuss urban policy. Garment's still waiting.

Now, of course, Bush is running around the country talking urban this and urban that. He is weeding and seeding, confessing to empathetic feelings toward the poor and visiting the ghettos of various cities, including Los Angeles's riot corridor. Busy man though he be, he dashed clear across town to see the blighted and impoverished Washington neighborhood of Anacostia. It was always a cab ride away.

This frenzy, both epic and expensive, could well have been avoided. Had the administration moved earlier, it might not be necessary now to try to convince America that the president has a program for the cities. It turns out that he did—enterprise zones and the like. It also turns out that he made no attempt to push it through Congress or—a necessary prerequisite—to marshal public support for it. It existed like a plan for what to do in the event of nuclear attack. It's important to say you have such a thing.

It's worth recalling what prompted Garment to act in the first place. It was the 1989 "wilding" incident in Central Park, in which a female jogger was raped and beaten by a group of teenagers who left her for dead. The viciousness and nihilism of that deed, comparable in fury to what was done to Los Angeles truck driver Reginald Denny, set some people to thinking and fretting. It was only a matter of time, they thought, until something even worse happened in some city—probably New York. They were wrong only as to venue.

Now, of course, Vice President Dan Quayle is engaged in a policy debate with a fictional television character, one Murphy Brown. For about a week now, she's been a single mother. "I know it is not fashionable to talk about moral values," the veep said, "but we need to do it." Quayle is right about that. Of course he is wrong too—and crassly opportunistic as well.

Having done almost nothing for the inner city, the Bush administration in the person of Quayle is now attempting to milk the Los Angeles riots for all their political worth. To that end, Quayle has been talking law 'n' order and values. Those homilies are the Republican answer to almost anything—and, demonstrably, by themselves they have failed. Still, that doesn't mean that one parent is as good as two or that fathers, like wood-burning fire places, are of use only around Christmastime and then mostly for decorative purposes.

Here I must introduce David Blankenhorn, the president of the Institute for American Values. He argues that role models and the TV *Zeitgeist* matter. Media characters such as Murphy Brown do have an impact, and values do change. Blankenhorn cites smoking. It's no longer glamorous, and even the most die-hard smoker is careful about where he or she smokes. Society, the smoker knows, no longer approves.

The Los Angeles riots just speeded up what's become the normal urban decaying process. L.A. erupted, but other cities smolder—a slow catastrophic burn. In south-central L.A., a furious mob turned on its own neighborhood and trashed it. In New York, Washington and other cities, the process is a bit slower but just as mean. Here, for instance, you can see park benches vandalized down to their concrete bases. Who does this to their own parks? Who soils his own neighborhood? The same people who riot.

On the weekend after the riots, 53 people in Los Angeles County were shot. That was a normal weekend. This is what has been happening in our cities for quite some time now. It seems that every year Washington sets another murder record—and so do countless other cities. Each year, the middle class pulls up and pulls out of the cities. Each year, the relative number of poor people increases, and poverty compounds, feeds on itself and scares even more people away. This was happening before the L.A. riots. It will continue to happen when L.A.'s pain has been forgotten.

Alarmed, Len Garment and some others decided to act. They pulled together a study group. They came up with a proposal. The names were submitted to the White House and, at exactly 2:35 p.m. on May 30, 1989, a messenger was called to deliver the package to Sununu. "For some months, I have been trying, without success, to schedule a brief appointment with you," is how it began. It ended, so to speak, in south-central L.A.

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# What the Bishops Don't Know About Families

*Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Blankenhorn*

The U.S. Catholic Bishops' most recent contribution to our national debate on the family, a statement entitled *Putting Children First*, approved last November, calls our attention to the worldwide trend of declining child well-being. With each passing year, in the United States and around the world, it is getting harder to be a child. To such a stunningly consequential fact, the bishops tell us, moral and political attention must be paid.

There is much good sense in the attention that *Putting Children First* pays. To begin with, the bishops, unlike some children's advocates, recognize that children are not a stand-alone constituency. The bishops understand that the most important "children's program" is a stable, loving family; that the parent is the child's first and most important teacher; and that the role of the church, the school, and the state should be to support, rather than supplant, the parental role.

The bishops also usefully focus our attention on moral reasoning and ultimate ends. It is refreshing to find at least one report on children that does not insist on framing the issue in terms of dollars saved and lost or the health of our economy. Mercifully, the Bishops refrain from calling every good thing an "investment." They know that more vital matters are at stake.

At the same time, like the report of the National Commission on Children and other recent initiatives, *Putting Children First* does call for a wide range of new public policies. The bishops want better health care and more affordable housing. They want more jobs. They endorse child tax credits, family-sensitive workplace policies, tougher requirements for child support payments, and a host of other public initiatives—almost all of which the authors of this essay find reasonable and commendable.

Given these virtues, therefore, it may seem uncharitable to find fault with *Putting Children First*. Yet the bishops' statement is deeply flawed. And what is wrong is not simply this or that detail, but rather the document's master idea, its defining narrative. Throughout, the bishops offer us not only flabby and misguided sociology, but also, and more seriously, flabby and misguided moral reasoning.

First, sociology. When the bishops speak of the family, they have a particular family in mind. It is the family of women and children. To be sure, they speak of "parents" and, late in their discussion, applaud the ideal of the two-parent family. On page twenty-five of the twenty-nine-page statement, they put in a brief good word for fathers. But clearly the family model that animates their concern and dominates their report is the female-headed family.

The bishops marshal all the familiar evidence to support their focus on the mother-child family. They point to the growing number of children who grow up in single-parent families, most "headed by women who are more likely to live in poverty." They state that "mothers and children make up an increasing proportion of the homeless in our land." They tell us that women and children are exploited both economically and sexually, assaulted daily by pornography and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. They remind us that women and children are more likely than others to go to bed hungry. In essence, the bishops tell us, the mother-child family is the home of the helpless and the exploited.

This particular sociological understanding of contemporary family life, so prevalent in today's elite discussions, might be termed the sociology of the Christmas appeal. Its core moral claim is captured by the venerable holiday reminder: "Remember the neediest." Only Scrooge, of course, could ignore such an appeal. Certainly, the many women and children in our society who struggle in harsh circumstances to live decent lives ought to exert a powerful claim on our compassion and on our resources. Yet by making the beleaguered mother-child family the central focus of their attention, the bishops offer an inadequate and distorted account of family problems.

First, with the one exception noted above, the bishops are virtually silent on the subject of men. Fathers and husbands are largely missing from this document. The word "husband" does not appear at all; the gender-neutral "parent" or "parenting" is much preferred to its gender-specific variants. The bishops offer no affirmative portrait of paternal authority, provision, or influence. If a young man in a parish in Omaha or Austin were to read this document, seeking wisdom and instruction on how to be a good family man, he would find little guidance. By ignoring the role of men in the family, the bishops overlook what is arguably the most consequential trend in American society today: male flight from family life.

Approximately one-third of our nation's children today are growing up without the daily provision, discipline, sponsorship, and love of their biological fathers. The empirical evidence on the social costs of fatherlessness is so strong that one wonders why the bishops overlook it. Some 70 percent of juveniles in long-term correctional facilities, for example, did

not live with their father while growing up. And considering their focus on poor children, it is especially odd that the bishops ignore the relationship between the growing incidence of fatherlessness and the growing incidence of child poverty. It is simply not the case that contemporary economic trends are driving otherwise stable families into poverty, as one might conclude from *Putting Children First.* In fact, even in difficult economic times, nine out of ten children in mother-father families avoid poverty. Rather, it is that a contemporary social trend—fatherlessness—is driving children into poverty. Today, for the first time in our nation's history, the majority of all poor children live in mother-headed households.

Finally, the bishops' sociology offers an excessively narrow reading of the family as a social institution. The bishops portray families as needy claimants on our compassion. Utterly missing from this document is any sense of the family as a core institution of the civil society: an institution that society depends on to provide essential social goods. The bishops tell us what families need but seem oblivious to what families do.

Imagine that the bishops were describing not families, but business corporations. Surely, they would not limit their focus to the needs of unemployed workers. Surely, they would consider the institutional role of the corporation in capital formation, in the structure and organization of work, and in the distribution of goods and services.

Yet families, like corporations, serve a broad range of social purposes. We depend on the family to transmit values, to foster character and competence, and to generate social goods. If corporations produce economic capital, families produce social capital. Consequently, for families, as for corporations, the moral category of compassion is simply insufficient, by itself, as a way of describing the social goods that are at stake.

Their weak sociology leads the bishops into weak moral reasoning. *Putting Children First* would have us believe that the principal problem facing families and children is a deficit of societal compassion and political will. To improve the well-being of children, the bishops say, we must "use our values, voices, and votes to hold our public officials accountable and shape a society that puts children first." Yet this challenge, stirring as it is, is insufficient. It fails to acknowledge that the principal problem facing children today has to do less with flawed public policy than with flawed moral behavior.

We see the bishops as the inheritors and custodians of a rich repository of moral wisdom on the family. In a society dominated by the trendy fashions of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, we look to the bishops for stronger stuff: for much-needed help in writing our cultural scripts of family life. This is their special province and unique responsibility. Yet in the effort to reconcile trendy sociology with their own moral tradition, the bishops fail to do what we most count on them to do: make moral distinctions. Instead, they employ language that obscures or conflates morally distinguishable situations and actions.

The bishops base their moral claim on the biblical injunction of St. James: "Religion pure and undefiled before God is this, to care for orphans and widows in their affliction." "In our day," they go on, "the orphans and widows are poor children and single parents." This statement is no mere rhetorical flourish. It is the bishops' central explanatory metaphor, the sustaining core of their morality. And it is deeply confused.

In our biblical and republican traditions, a specific meaning and moral claim is associated with widows and orphans. They have lost husbands and fathers through death. Widows are women whose husbands have died, and orphans in this sense are not so much children without parents as children without fathers. It is this meaning of widow and orphan that Abraham Lincoln intends when, in his Second Inaugural, he calls upon the nation to "bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan. . . ."

It is simply not true—empirically, historically, or morally—that there is no meaningful difference between "mother-headed households" and "widows and orphans." The escalating number of mother-headed families in our society today is not due to the deaths of fathers, but instead to two behavioral phenomena: divorce and out-of-marriage childbirth. On these two issues, we might expect the bishops to speak up. Yet they not only fall curiously silent about those issues, they employ a framework of analysis of family life that invites the rest of us to ignore them as well.

In their equivocations, the bishops offend common understandings and diminish their own moral authority. Ordinary men and women understand that there is a difference between a widow and an unwed mother. There is a difference between a man who dies and a man who deserts his family. And there is all the moral difference in the world between the widows and orphans of whom St. James spoke and the mother-headed families of whom the bishops speak.

Just as they fail to confront men's failure to meet their family obligations, the bishops also ignore the moral agency of women. While it is true that the mother-child bond remains the strongest of all family bonds, women, too, increasingly make choices today that are hostile to children's interests. And while it is true that women have been abused,

abandoned, and exploited, women are not simply victims in a cruel world. Women, too, determine outcomes for children through their own activity. The most striking example is the growing number of women who choose to have children outside of marriage. There are also women who divorce casually and frequently. Yet the bishops are so eager to avoid the appearance of sexism or gender bias that they scrupulously resist any criticism of women. The irony is that this failure to criticize women or to hold them morally accountable comes perilously close to the worst kind of sexism—treating women as moral inferiors.

The larger irony is that in their effort to be sociologically current and culturally relevant, the bishops seem to forget that their distinctive role is to criticize contemporary fashion. We look to the bishops to guide us in our moral choices, to offer models that are countercultural in the sense that they are not derived from contemporary secular culture. Yet the bishops' statement is anything but countercultural. It has no cultural bite. It would go down easily at a Beverly Hills fundraiser or at a meeting of the *New York Times* editorial board. What *Putting Children First* most conspicuously lacks is a consideration of moral agency and choice in the decline of children's well-being. Or, to put it more theologically, what is missing is a consideration of sin.

And herein, sadly, lies the final and greatest irony: The more the bishops call for compassion but ignore responsibility—the more they obscure and conflate moral categories, the more their script for family life resembles the scripts for "Murphy Brown"—the less influence they will retain as serious writers of our cultural script and the less authority they will wield as our teachers in matters of family life.

BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD *is a Research Associate at the Institute for American Values in New York.* DAVID Blankenhorn *is President of the Institute.*

# Urban Families Panel Convenes

## 2 Experts Address National Commission Headed By Gov. Ashcroft

By Robert L. Koenig
Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — As the national debate rages over the causes of rioting in Los Angeles and the ethics of Murphy Brown, a new urban families commission headed by Missouri Gov. John Ashcroft got off to an alarming start Friday.

A false fire alarm emptied the conference room a couple of hours after Ashcroft and other members of the National Commission on America's Urban Families started their first meeting.

The loud clanging at the Capitol Hill hotel echoed the alarm expressed by Ashcroft, other members of the commission and two academic experts about the deterioration of America's families. Ashcroft's panel — which resumed its meeting after the fire alarm was canceled — is supposed to report by year's end on ways to strengthen families.

Coming the same week as the debate over TV's "Murphy Brown" — who gloried in having a child out of wedlock in the situation-comedy show — much of the discussion at the first commission meeting centered on the problems of fatherless families.

"The absolute, central ... thing to look at is how we can, in some ways, reconnect men with family life," said David Blankenhorn, a commission member and president of the Institute for American Values, a research group based in New York.

David Popenoe, a sociologist from Rutgers University, told the commission that he reluctantly agreed with Vice President Dan Quayle's criticism of the "Murphy Brown" one-parent role model.

"The [sit-com's] message is a lousy one," said Popenoe, who appeared as an expert witness. "It is extremely important for our children, and for our society, that men are attached to child-rearing families."

But Irene Johnson, a member of the commission who runs a tenant group at a public housing complex in Chicago, called the Murphy Brown debate "a non-issue." Rather than criticizing media role models, she said, the government should start an ambitious jobs program and change welfare programs to encourage fathers to stay with their wives and children.

Ashcroft, for his part, sidestepped a direct response to the Murphy Brown dispute. He said two-parent families are the ideal, but he also praised "single-parent men and women who struggle against time to balance job and parenting duties to provide a safe nest and moral keel for their children."

In his opening remarks, Ashcroft said "family decline is a problem common to all Americans" — not just those in inner cities, but also in affluent suburbs or dirt-poor rural communities.

He said the recent riots in Los Angeles brought urban family issues into sharp focus, but he added that "we will leave it to other commissions" to explore the root causes of the unrest there.

The commission's co-chairwoman, former Dallas Mayor Annette Strauss, said she wanted to "go beyond analysis" and develop "a practical action agenda" to help families. "The future of this country depends on the healthy family," Strauss said. Among her suggestions were:

- Adding classes on parenting skills as part of the regular curriculum of public schools.
- Using vacant school buildings to house after-school programs for "latch-key" children.

The commission spent most of its time Friday listening to two experts: Popenoe, author of "Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies"; and Norval D. Glenn, a sociology professor at the University of Texas at Austin, who discussed surveys on American attitudes toward family values.

One outspoken commission member was Alphonso Jackson — a former St. Louis official who is now executive director of the Dallas housing authority.

He said he was upset at the way television and other media sometimes glorify wealthy single parents, such as Murphy Brown, and disparage single mothers who are on welfare.

**Gov. John Ashcroft**
*"Family decline is a problem"*

"I work with low-income people every day. I am trying to convince them not to have babies out of wedlock. And when we glorify it on TV," the message is confusing. He said moral standards should be the same for the rich and the poor.

The two sociologists and several members of the commission — including Ashcroft — said they were concerned that American culture was placing far too much emphasis on self-indulgence, sometimes at the expense of family and children.

Popenoe said, "As an overall approach to promoting family life, nothing is more important than trying to diminish, and even turn back, the trend toward radical individualism."

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, MAY 24, 1992

# A Political Movement Blends Its Ideas From Left and Right

By PETER STEINFELS

HERE'S a barely noticed fact that could augur a serious change in the political landscape: not everyone who agrees with Dan Quayle about Murphy Brown is a conservative.

On the same day the Vice President complained in California that the popular television series was contributing to the woes of the poor by rendering single motherhood glamorous and derogating the importance of fathers, two speakers at a largely liberal gathering in New York City made exactly the same point.

One was William A. Galston, a political philosopher at the University of Maryland, who occasionally advises Bill Clinton. The other, David Blankenhorn, heads the Institute for American Values, a Manhattan-based research center dealing with family issues. Both referred to a critique of Murphy Brown's motherhood by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a scholar who is a colleague of Mr. Blankenhorn's, that appeared in The Washington Post two weeks ago. The meeting was a "Communitarian Teach-In," and Mr. Galston, Mr. Blankenhorn and Ms. Whitehead all signed a "Communitarian Platform" that was issued last November.

Communitarianism is the new kid on the political block, staking out territory somewhere between the liberal advocates of the welfare state and civil liberties entrenched on one corner, and conservative devotees of laissez-faire and traditional values on the other. Communitarians generally line up with liberals as defenders of individual rights, equality and democratic change. But none of these things, they argue, can be preserved unless the nation's basic communities and institutions — families, schools, neighborhoods, unions, local governments and religious and ethnic groups — succeed in building character and instilling the virtues of citizenship.

"Strong rights presume strong responsibilities," said Amitai Etzioni, a George Washington University sociologist and one of the founding fathers of a movement he compares to the environmental movement.

Just as Americans could once take the quality of their air and water for granted, he explained, they could once concentrate on spelling out rights while assuming that citizens were endowed with a well-developed sense of obligation and responsibility. Where environmentalism focuses on the degradation of nature, communitarianism concentrates on the social environment.

Communitarians fault liberals for reflexively blaming economic and political forces for poverty, drug abuse, crime and urban and environmental blight while neglecting the importance of personal responsibility and the forces that have traditionally nurtured it. They also fault conservatives for exalting the free market and the pursuit of self-interest as remedies for social problems while ignoring the corrosive effect of economic pressure and a competitive ethos on family life and community spirit.

Communitarianism's leading concern is the family, "where each new generation acquires its moral anchoring," according to its platform. Most communitarians unabashedly endorse the two-parent family as the norm for society, although they acknowledge that some single parents succeed.

They also want to put the issue of widespread divorce back on the public policy agenda. Divorce laws, they argue, should be changed to ensure the economic support of children.

If that sounds conservative, communitarians sound liberal when proposing European-style child benefits, extended paid and unpaid parental leaves and flexible working hours.

From kindergarten to college, the communitarians argue, schools should make moral education and character formation leading priorities, rejecting the idea that Americans are so divided over basic values that moral education is impossible. Classroom instruction, they add, is less effective than the personal example set by educators and the atmosphere of the institutions.

An increased sense of public safety and order, stronger local government and renewed public spiritedness are other communitarian interests.

## No 10-Point Program

To achieve these ends, the group considers ideas from both liberal and conservative toolkits: informal social pressure on personal behavior, government funding of political campaigns and access to television, national service for young people and strict limits on gun ownership. But there is no 10-point program to which all communitarians agree. Some people view it more as a mood than a movement. "I see it simply as "a fresh way of talking and listening," said Mary Ann Glendon, a professor at the Harvard Law School, "an effort to break out of well-worn mental grooves and get a conversation going about things that aren't being addressed."

Professor Glendon helped formulate the group's platform, published in The Responsive Community, a quarterly journal founded — "with some reluctance," Dr. Etzioni said — to explore communitarian notions.

(over)

# Communitarianism: basic family and community values help preserve individual rights and a vital democracy.

The signers of the platform include educators, feminists, former presidential advisers — Republican and Democratic — economists, theologians and a least one pollster. Democratic Senators Daniel P. Moynihan of New York and Al Gore of Tennessee and Republican Senator David Durenberger of Minnesota joined in a teach-in on Capitol Hill last year. Secretary of Housing Jack Kemp has also signaled his interest.

Like Ross Perot, the communitarian impulse appears to have surfaced out of a dissatisfaction with the alternatives. And like Mr. Perot, this neophyte movement has yet to define itself on many tough issues.

Its amorphousness has led critics on the right to dismiss communitarianism as merely warmed-over Great Society, while critics on the left fear it as the thin edge of the Moral Majority or a retreat to the 1950's.

"A lot of communitarian rhetoric appears to emphasize voluntary measures," said Nadine Strossen, president of the American Civil Liberties Union. "But that rhetoric is very slippery," she added, when it involves government in creating legal obstacles to divorce, indoctrinating through the public schools or giving police more leeway to search suspects.

Joan W. Konner, dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, puzzled over communitarianism at a dinner preceding last week's teach-in. It appeared to be one part church sermon, one part reassertion of old values, one part political campaign message and one part social movement, Dean Konner said.

The implicit criticism left Dr. Etzioni unfazed. "I couldn't have said it better myself," he replied.

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# The Murphy Brown Policy

## Quayle's attack on Hollywood role models triggers anger, jokes and a national debate

BY ELEANOR CLIFT

There they go again. Only this time, instead of Willie Horton, the GOP is making Murphy Brown its symbol of what's wrong with the liberal elites. The fictitious Murphy, an unmarried TV journalist, gave birth to a baby boy last week. And Vice President Dan Quayle went nuts. He decried the Hollywood glamorization of Murphy's plight; and, in a neck-wrenching segue, blamed the Los Angeles riots on the "poverty of values" that Murphy's out-of-wedlock momdom represents. Quayle didn't see the show: a spokesman explained that the Quayle family never watches TV on school nights. But the vice president's comments jolted the country, igniting a long-simmering debate about cultural values and the American family.

The Bush campaign announced months ago that it would make the decline in so-called traditional values a major theme this fall. But Quayle's attack on Murphy Brown—played by actress Candice Bergen—left many top Republicans puzzled. "You can't be strongly pro-life and then criticize single mothers," says a GOP woman appointee. "This is a major blunder." Indeed, the confusion over which note to strike was evident in the public statements of both President Bush and spokesman Marlin Fitzwater. Bush said he prefers two-parent families (who doesn't?) but didn't want to "get into the details of a very popular television show" (38 million people watched Murphy scream and swear her way through the simulated labor). Fitzwater started out criticizing Murphy; by nightfall, he sounded like he was ready to propose marriage.

It's not easy to devise a winning us-against-them strategy when it comes to the American family. There's just too many *them*. The '50s fantasy of mom and dad and 2.2 kids went the way of phonograph records and circle pins. The modern family is all kinds of arrangements—including single mothers. Dan Quayle is right about some things. The absence of fathers is one of the central pathologies of the underclass. As a society, we do need to address the spiraling teen-pregnancy rate, especially in the inner cities. But that's a different phenomenon from Murphy Brown, an over-40, overachieving figment of some screenwriter's imagination. If personal responsibility is the test, Murphy passes.

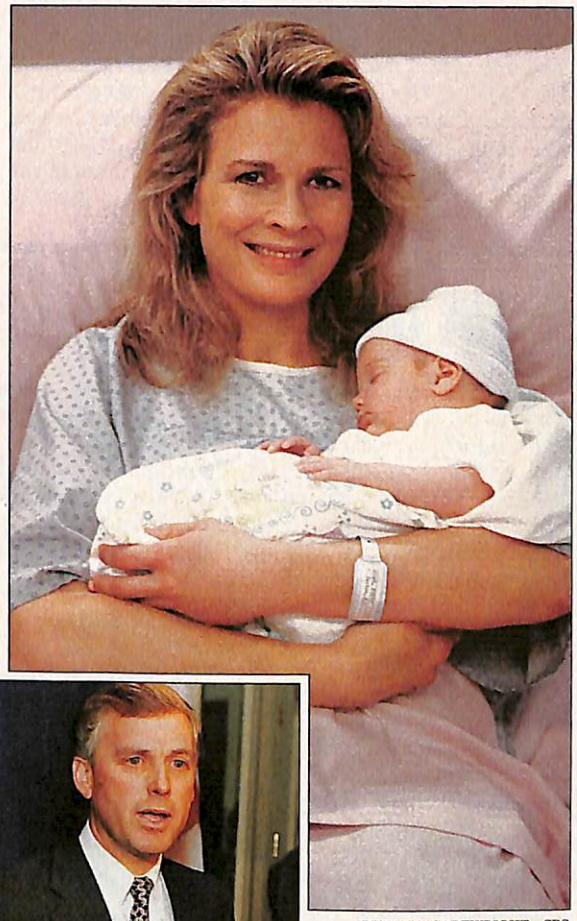
By mixing his metaphors, Quayle risks offending other groups, including Republican women essential to Bush's victory. Everyone agrees that values are an important issue. Democrats—belatedly—have begun to stress personal-responsibility themes. And there is a great deal of common ground on what to do, despite the rhetorical fog. Last week it wasn't just the message that rattled people; it was the messenger. "He's the goof-off made good; and when he starts wagging his finger at us, we don't like it," says Ann Lewis, a Democratic consultant. Quayle's background of privilege makes him a natural target. His bootstraps were pulled up by his well-connected family. How can he relate to an inner-city youngster who never had a break? Quayle's comments are discounted because of who he is and his persistent unpopularity in the polls.

**Code language:** Quayle's foray into family issues provoked lots of jokes, invigorating Johnny Carson's final week. But Quayle thinks he's onto something. Lisa Schiffren, a 32-year-old speechwriter, suggested early this month that the veep cite Murphy Brown as an example of the moral decay in pop culture. Quayle liked the idea. Then, after reading reviews of Murphy's baby shower, attended by real-life anchorwomen, he wondered "why the show was celebrating single parenthood." A Mother's Day column in The Washington Post made the same point, calling "this new cultural idea . . . hostile to the needs of children."

The politics of values is clearly up for grabs. Bush said the word "family" 19 times in a recent speech at Notre Dame and got almost no coverage. Much of Ross Perot's appeal stems from his embodiment of old-fashioned American virtues. Democrat Bill Clinton moved aggressively last week to counter Quayle. He assailed the GOP for having used family values as code language for policies of neglect, and he nailed Democrats for thinking money alone could make a difference. Clinton's public policy is value-driven: he calls for a crackdown on deadbeat parents and welfare reform that would require recipients to work after two years. He says "it's wrong for children to have children"—and favors sex education at an early age, another loaded issue.

Bush aides think Clinton's personal baggage undermines his credibility and that if the election is fought on values, Bush wins. The reason the White House is tacking right can be found in the polls. Bush is running third in California, behind Perot and Clinton. In a three-way race Bush can win if he turns out the conservative GOP base. Otherwise, Quayle would never have attacked a situation comedy with higher ratings than the one he's part of in Washington.

*With* CLARA BINGHAM *in Washington*



RICHARD CARTWRIGHT—CBS

GREG GIBSON—AP

**Mixing his metaphors in an attempt to find a winning us-against-them strategy:** *Bergen as Murphy postpartum, the vice president*

winter to "sodomy and indecent acts" aboard the USS Blue Ridge, based in Yokosuka, Japan, the navy began what gay activists have called a "witch hunt" on the high seas. Investigators pressured seamen to confess and betray shipmates; of the 40 or so men targeted, 13 have been discharged so far.

Such arm-twisting is not a military monopoly. Four years ago Jerald Johnson, a management analyst for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), applied for security clearance. After his homosexuality was raised as an issue, he objected that there were plenty of other gay staffers with clearance. At that point, security officers at FEMA asked him to name names. He refused and withdrew his request. When he reapplied for clearance three years later, his boss again demanded a list; that time he complied. When gay Congressman Barney Frank heard about the incident and objected, FEMA quickly repudiated its actions. Frank has called the episode "an aberration"; many gay activists say that the federal bureaucracy is, in fact, a basically tolerant workplace.

Critics of the Pentagon's policy believe it's only a matter of time before the ban against gays, like earlier ones against blacks and women, becomes a thing of the past. Though politicians are unlikely to embrace the cause during an election year, polls show a majority of Americans believe gays should be allowed into the armed forces. And it is expensive keeping them out: government reports show it costs tens of millions of dollars every year to recruit, investigate, dismiss and replace gay personnel. Activists plan to keep up pressure on the brass with lawsuits; ultimately, they say, the Pentagon will find it easier to switch than fight. Until then, gays in the armed forces face a painful choice between serving their country and remaining true to themselves.

ELOISE SALHOLZ *with* DANIEL GLICK *in Washington and* JEANNE GORDON *in Los Angeles*

# Running a Gantlet of Sexual Assault

The navy describes the Tailhook Association's annual convention as a "symposium" where its pilots can catch up on developments in aviation technology. Yet for most junior officers, the gathering—sponsored by a private association of active and retired aviators—is three days of high-altitude partying. At their meeting last September, liquor from some squadron hospitality suites at the Las Vegas Hilton was flowing well before noon, some of it from the penis of a mock rhinoceros. When porno movies got too dull, strippers were available. But the revelry didn't stop there. A naval investigation last month found that some airmen's idea of a good time included sexual abuse. At least 26 women, half of them naval officers, say they were assaulted while forced through a hotel corridor gantlet of drunken, groping pilots.

The aftermath of Tailhook (the name describes the hook that snags a restraining cable on a carrier deck, allowing aircraft to land safely) is equally troubling. So far only one officer has been disciplined. That was Rear Adm. John Snyder, whose aide was molested in the gantlet. She said Snyder brushed her off when she complained, saying, "That's what you get when you go to a hotel party with a bunch of drunk aviators." He has been removed from his command and assigned to a lesser job. Investigators say they've been stalemated by pilots who closed ranks to protect buddies. Naval officials say sanctions, which could range from reprimand to dismissal, will be left to the commanding officers of those implicated. Two members of the House Armed Services Committee, Patricia Schroeder and Barbara Boxer, are calling for hearings.

Naval documents contain harrowing accounts of assaults. One officer shoved by her buttocks through the gantlet says an attacker put his hands down her shirt and bra, grabbing her breasts. Attempting to escape, she bit his left forearm and right hand. She says another assailant reached under her skirt and grabbed her panties; when she asked another man for help, he grabbed her breasts. She eventually fled.

The navy has severed formal ties with the Tailhook Association and reaffirmed a "zero tolerance" policy toward sexual misconduct. But analysts say the remoteness of naval life—long sea tours and visits in foreign ports—has caused the service to lag behind other branches in treatment of women. While about 60,000 women serve in noncombat roles, they are still comparatively isolated from men. "Army units have dealt much more interactively with women," says Carolyn Becraft, a military-personnel expert.

Tailhook is the latest scandal underscoring hostility toward women in the navy. In 1990, a female cadet quit Annapolis after male classmates chained her to a urinal and took pictures. That year an internal investigation criticized the failure to prosecute eight reported rapes at a Florida training center. The military can change when it wants to. Since a series of racial disturbances in the 1970s, the armed forces have made dramatic strides in fostering ethnic tolerance and opportunity. Military women are now looking for the same commitment to safeguarding their basic rights.

BILL TURQUE

LARRY DOWNING—NEWSWEEK

**Remote duty and a service lagging in treatment of women:** *A-6 takes off from a carrier*

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# The war over 'family values'

## *How much effect do middle-class mores have in the ghetto?*

ABC NEWS VIA AP

**Searching for a cause.** *The race rage in Los Angeles had no simple explanation.*

*Quickie quiz: Which of the following did Dan Quayle say in his controversial "Murphy Brown" speech?*

**a)** "Governments can't raise children, people do, and the people who bring children into this world should all bear a responsibility for raising them."

**b)** " 'Murphy Brown' . . . celebrate[s] unwed motherhood as a glamorous lifestyle."

**c)** "The basic moral standards of the society are dropping. Somebody must say that babies making babies is morally wrong."

**d)** "Every night, prime-time television assails [children] with mindless sitcoms and soap operas that present materialism and unrelenting self-gratification as the only goals worth pursuing."

The correct answer: none of the above. In fact, all the quotations were uttered by liberals. To take the most pointed example, *before* Quayle gave his speech, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a left-leaning researcher with the Institute for American Values, penned statement b in the *Washington Post*. Yet leading Democrats who had delivered sermonettes nearly identical to Quayle's promptly criticized his speech, including Bill Clinton (statement a), Jesse Jackson (c) and Mario Cuomo (d). Meanwhile, conservatives—most notably George Bush—hemmed and hawed as to whether Quayle was right to attack Murphy Brown for bearing a child out of wedlock. It seems that Murphy's Law (if anything can go wrong, it will) has a new corollary: If any politician waxes morally indignant over declining social mores, the only colleagues to attack him will be those who share his indignation.

Perhaps without intending it, Quayle's broadside on television and middle-class social mores implicated *white* Americans in worsening ghetto problems and harked back to a dispute from the 1960s over "blaming the victim" vs. "blaming society." Unlike Quayle, many conservatives take the position that burgeoning problems in white communities—the spread of illegitimacy, conspicuous consumption and drug abuse—have little direct impact in the slums. They say the ghetto has a separate "culture of poverty," with values alien to the American mainstream. But many Democrats counter that white America is implicated in urban ghettos not just by the force of racism but by its own example of greed, self-absorption and indifference to others during the 1980s. When white America gets a cold, they argue, black America gets pneumonia.

Unfortunately, in the din following Quayle's speech, two important facts were largely overlooked. First, as social-policy expert Douglas Besharov points out, not all single mothers are created equal. While never-married moms and their offspring are indeed the fulcrum of many ghetto "pathologies," the far larger group of divorced women and their children is not. Second, neither Republican nor Democratic candidates have credible programs for stopping the decades-long explosion of illegitimacy.

Reduced to their simplest form, Quayle's remarks understandably produced little more than jests. Comparatively few girls in the ghetto watch "Murphy Brown," and those who do are unlikely to try to follow her example. But if the equation is shifted a bit—if the question becomes do TV and white-middle-class culture *contribute* in general to undermining mores in the ghetto—then the evidence becomes more disturbing. In the past decade, Hollywood heavies have been quick to push for select causes in TV and movie scripts, including more sympathetic coverage of the environment and homosexuals and less fa-

**The troubled children of single-parent families**

| | Of kids who live with: Unmarried mothers | Divorced mothers | Both parents |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Children in poverty** | 63% | 34% | 11% |
| **Repeated a grade in school** | 33% | 23% | 13% |
| **Suspended or expelled** | 17% | 11% | 5% |
| **In families on welfare for more than 10 years** | 39% | 14% | n/a |
| **Children in juvenile correctional facilities** | 56% had lived with one parent | | 28% |

*USN&WR*—Basic data: National Center for Children in Poverty; Child Trends Inc.; Douglas Besharov, American Enterprise Institute; Prof. David Ellwood, Harvard University; National Center for Juvenile Justice

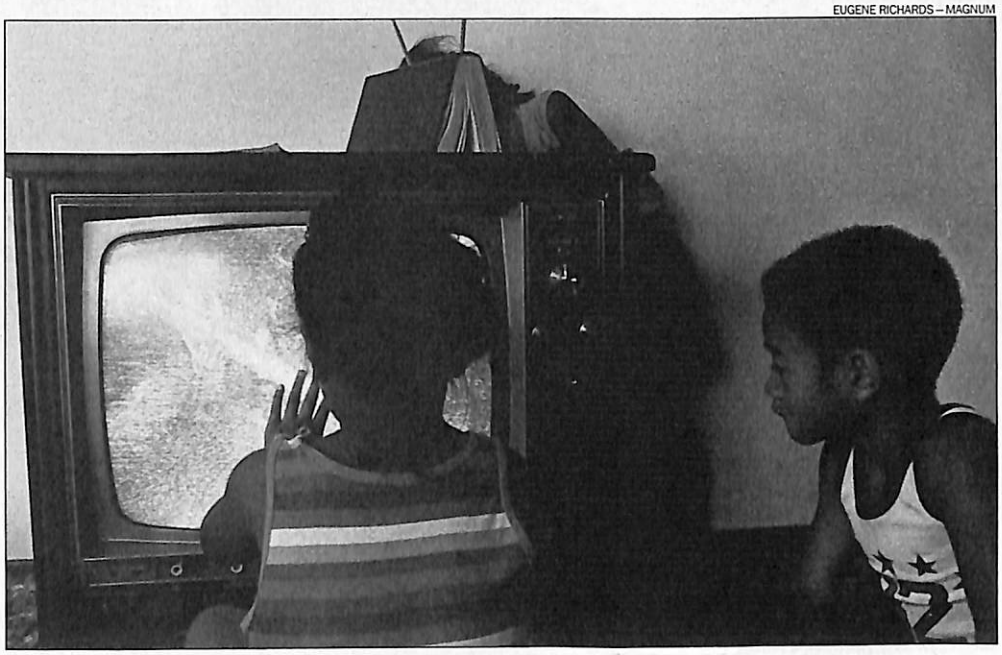
vorable depictions of smokers. But the industry has remained largely indifferent to celluloid depictions of violence, sex and greed. That is doubly unfortunate for disadvantaged children, since they watch more television—and more violent TV—than kids from affluent homes. Moreover, black children watch more TV than whites—and opinion polls show that black parents are especially likely to believe that TV role models warp family values. Here's some of what children now see repeatedly:

■ **Violence.** According to a recent American Psychological Association task force report, the average child witnesses at least 8,000 TV murders by the time he leaves *elementary* school. The APA and numerous other groups have surveyed the vast literature on TV violence. Most have essentially come to the same conclusions: Watching screen mayhem rarely leads directly to copycat violence, but heavy viewing is linked to more-aggressive behavior and boosts mistrust and insensitivity to the pain of others.

■ **Sex.** A study by the conservative American Family Association estimated that in 1991, the three networks displayed more than 10,000 sexual incidents during prime time; for every scene depicting sexual intercourse between married partners, the networks showed 14 scenes of sex outside marriage.

■ **Materialism.** TV relentlessly touts immediate gratification. The APA says that children see roughly 20,000 commercials a year.

EUGENE RICHARDS—MAGNUM



**Insidious force?** *Children are bombarded daily with images of greed, sex and violence.*

Not surprisingly, social scientists are unable to conclusively prove or disprove that the upsurge in violence, idleness and broken families in ghettos stems from TV's fare or a decline in social mores. Those who claim that there is a link, like the liberal sociologist Christopher Jencks, argue largely by a process of elimination. In his new book, "Rethinking Social Policy," he points out that none of the conventional explanations for the rise in unwed motherhood—such as a lack of jobs for inner-city males or the spread of welfare benefits—explains why illegitimacy has also mushroomed among middle-class whites. However, polls show that Americans today are far less willing than earlier generations to commit to marriage or stick out a bad marriage for their children's sake. As norms have loosened in society at large, Jencks suggests, leaders in poor neighborhoods have lost moral authority. "The preachers, the grandmothers in poor communities no longer find that the mass media and political establishment endorse their exhortations to people to behave in traditional ways," says Jencks. "And when it is OK for white middle-class people to have babies out of wedlock, it's very hard to impose social sanctions on poor people who do the same."

Conservatives like political scientist Lawrence Mead allow that trends in white values have hardly helped inner-city families. But Mead, author of "The New Politics of Poverty," contends that while social indices have generally gone in the same direction for whites and blacks, there is a difference in kind, rather than degree, in family breakdown among the two groups. One in 5 single-parent white families is now headed by an unwed mother, yet more than half of black single-parent heads of households have never married. "In inner-city areas, you have 60 to 70 percent illegitimacy rates," says Mead, "and when unwed motherhood is the communal norm it's not because of Murphy Brown."

Amid the cultural debate, one thing is clear: Both sides believe that fatherless families are at the heart of most problems in urban ghettos. Last year, the National Commission on Children reported that children in single-parent families are at greater risk than those in two-parent families for alcohol and drug use, adolescent childbearing, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, suicide and dropping out of school. And that dismal litany understates the risks to children of unwed mothers. They are far more likely than the children of divorce to live in poverty, to go without child support from their fathers and to engage in crime.

Not unexpectedly, politicians and social-policy experts are realizing that marriage is the surest way out of poverty. (Steady work and high-school graduation are the two other main paths of upward mobility.) Bill Clinton is touting a "third way" to "write into our social programs incentives for stronger family values" that includes more-exacting welfare regulations and tougher child support laws. Dan Quayle, who says "we should promote the idea of marriage," pushed a similar "empowerment" program in his Murphy Brown speech. The problem with such proposals is that decades of government intervention in areas like taxes, birth control and divorce laws have failed to stem the explosive growth of female-headed families. Decisions of couples to marry or live apart just aren't much influenced by government.

Ultimately, many scholars trace the causes of family breakdown to changes in attitudes. And for all the attention candidates now pay to promoting marriage, they seem less prepared to challenge mores after elections. Few Republicans who deplore gang members' killing other kids for their Air Jordans, for instance, lament the conspicuous consumption of the Reagan era. There may well be a need for politicians to preach but it's not just after a riot. ■

BY DAVID WHITMAN
WITH DORIAN FRIEDMAN



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THE NEW YORK TIMES SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 1992

# Beliefs

Peter Steinfels

## The story calls for fathers, but too many have written themselves out of the script.

Father's Day is here, and a lot of fathers aren't. The flight of fathers from the home is one of the great social changes of recent years — a vast ozone hole in the family ecology.

There is a debate among those who find the causes and the cures of this change in economic forces, those who emphasize government policies and those who point to basic American beliefs and moral standards as well as everyday culture. It is simply inconceivable that a shift of this magnitude, or a sensible discussion of that shift, could occur without involving all these things.

In 1960, 8 percent of American children were living with their mothers as the only parent. Today that figure is 22 percent. Another 8 percent live with a mother and a stepfather, and 5 percent more are in some fatherless arrangement. In short, a third of the nation's children live apart from their biological fathers.

In 1960, 1 out of 20 births was to an unmarried mother. Today the figure is more than 1 out of 4. If a change of that proportion took place in atmospheric warming, the world's seaports would have been flooded and its farmlands turned into deserts long ago.

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"Never before in our nation's history have so many children grown up without a father's presence and provision," David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a small New York research organization dealing with family issues, said yesterday at a Washington meeting.

Homes without fathers can be models of love and courage, but homes without fathers are also among the likeliest to be visited by poverty, domestic violence, juvenile crime and teen-age pregnancies. "If current scholarship proves anything," Mr. Blankenhorn has written, "it is that children who grow up without their fathers are worse off — economically, educationally, psychologically, every way we can measure — than children who grow up with their fathers."

Yet in all the comedy and commentary inspired by Vice President Dan Quayle's recent speeches on "family values," the bulk of attention has been focused on "single mothers" rather than on the real issue of absent fathers.

Actually, the bulk of attention has been focused on Mr. Quayle himself. His critics call his oratory polarizing, and they say his crusade in fact puts up obstacles to a serious discussion of the topic. And he is an easy target for those who would prefer to avoid it.

Mr. Quayle says the breakdown of family structure is primarily a matter of our culture — we are "reaping the whirlwind of decades of changes in social mores" — and secondarily a consequence of poor government policies. He says scarcely a word about the economy.

Mr. Blankenhorn, in fact, argues something similar. His favorite metaphor in talking about fatherhood is a "cultural script" — a social story, a set of cues, an ideal character and a classic plot line that shapes, guides and at time pressures men into a certain sense of who they are and how they should act. Like the Vice President, Mr. Blankenhorn emphasizes the role of opinion leaders and cultural elites in telling or reshaping the "prevailing story of fatherhood."

But that analysis is a far cry from Mr. Quayle's stark picture of "two cultures — the cultural elite, and the rest of us," the one upright, the other "guilt free," respecting "neither tradition nor standards" and believing that "all life styles are equal."

•

In reality, America has not one but a number of cultural elites: the universities, the national news media, the makers and brokers of popular entertainment like movies, television and music, the presiding geniuses of advertising, religious leaders, foundation executives and so on.

They each not only honor certain traditions, standards and ways of life and reject others (and are anything but "guilt free"), but they are also often quite antagonistic to one another in their prevailing values.

If Hollywood and Harvard converge to give a particular twist to our norms about family, fatherhood and marriage, the reason deserves serious analysis. As Mr. Quayle himself says, "a sneer is not an answer."

What has emerged is a war of sneers. As Mr. Quayle assails his critics in the "cultural elite," they accuse him of hypocrisy, pointing to the Administration's opposition to measures that might arguably shore up economically endangered families, or launching attacks on the rich kid from Indiana (who can't even spell "potato") lecturing the poor on their morals.

The effect of these attacks is to sweep the cultural questions about fatherhood and family off the public agenda. And it is not true that everyone agrees on those more philosophical questions about family norms, disagreeing only on the practical means to strengthen them.

Last month, Mr. Blankenhorn shared the platform at a New York political meeting with Betty Friedan. Both agreed on many things, but where Mr. Blankenhorn spoke of "fathers," Ms. Friedan spoke of "parents."

Asked whether children were better off with two parents, she said "at least two parents" and went on to endorse "all kinds of families" and family "support systems." Presumably, two women, two men or half a dozen of either might be as serviceable as a mother and father. Tomorrow should not really be Father's Day but Second Parent's Day.

Mr. Blankenhorn believes that such a vague "cultural script," in which gender-neutral parents are celebrated rather than mothers and fathers, is doomed to failure. Ms. Friedan puts a higher priority on avoiding all appearances of stigmatizing broken or nontraditional families than on the need for a clearly defined "cultural script."

Both are debatable positions. Both should be debated thoughtfully, along with other questions about sexual ethics, government incentives, economic pressures. That discussion is not very likely in the atmosphere created by the Vice President's speeches.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer SUNDAY
June 21, 1992

# The 'New Father' is no 'Good Family Man'

By **DAVID BLANKENHORN**

The irony of this Father's Day is that the United States is an increasingly fatherless society. Tonight, more than one-third of our nation's children will go to sleep in homes in which their fathers do not live. More than half of our nation's children will spend a significant portion of their childhood living apart from their fathers. Fatherlessness is now approaching a rough parity with fatherhood as a defining feature of American childhood.

*It's wrong to think of "parenting" as if motherhood and fatherhood were gender-neutral skills — like plumbing. Dads must be men.*

This fact is so disturbing many people prefer to ignore it. Our public debate on the family, for example, focuses almost exclusively on the roles of women and the plight of children, as if the male role in family life were irrelevant.

We disguise the sex of the problem with prim euphemisms. We say "single parent homes," when we mean mothers raising children without fathers. We speak of "parenting" as if motherhood and fatherhood were a set of gender-neutral "skills," like plumbing. In short, we turn fatherlessness into a problem with no name.

Yet male absence from family life is surely the most socially consequential family trend of our era. The scholarly findings on the results of this trend could not be clearer; children who grow up with their fathers do far better — emotionally, educationally, physically, every way we can measure — than children who do not. The simple truth is that fathers are irreplaceable in shaping the competence and character of their children.

Moreover, fatherlessness is the engine that drives our most pressing social problems. Consider crime. Fatherlessness is the most important predictor of juvenile crime — a greater predictor than either race or income. More than 70 percent of juveniles in long-term correctional facilities grew up without their fathers.

Special to The Inquirer / JOHN OVERMYER

Consider teenage pregnancy. One recent study finds that females from fatherless homes are more than twice as likely to have children as teenagers and before being married.

Consider domestic violence and child abuse. Both are many times more likely to occur in homes where the man in the house is not the married husband and father.

But these facts, while certainly alarming, still fail to reveal the heart of the matter. For our society is not only losing fathers. It is also losing the idea of fatherhood. What we face, therefore, is not simply a physical loss, affecting some homes. We face a cultural loss, affecting *every* home.

As a cultural ideal, our inherited understandings of fatherhood are under siege. Men in general, and fathers in particular, are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life — either expendable or part of the problem. Masculinity is widely viewed with hostility, blamed by experts as the cause of everything from nuclear weapons to the destruction of the rain forests. As a result, we are changing our minds about the role of men in family life. The core question is simple: Do children need fathers? Increasingly, our answer is "no," or at least "not necessarily."

Our current cultural stereotype for fathers is a fellow whom we might call the Superfluous Father. At best, his role is desirable but expendable. At worst, he is a villain, a problem to be overcome.

Sometimes, for example, he plays the role of sperm bank. It's a small part. He impregnates, then exits. Fatherhood in this case is reduced to biology.

At other times, our character appears in the guise of the Deadbeat Dad — the runaway father who refuses to mail in his child support payments. Everybody dislikes him, and for good reason, but the central lesson he teaches is that fatherhood is mostly a matter of economics. As a social role, fatherhood is reduced to the size of a wallet.

Or he might appear in the guise of the New Father — an altogether more likeable guy. He is nurturing. He expresses his emotions. He changes diapers. He shares equally in the responsibilities of domestic life. He is a favorite of the media, a required guest on every television show that does a special segment on Father's Day.

Yet despite his virtues, there is very little maleness to be found in the New Father. In fact, the role advises men to suppress many historically masculine traits (such as competitiveness, aggression, and protection and provision for wife and children) and cultivate historically feminine traits (such as emotional sensitivity and the nurturance of young children). In short, the New Father teaches that there is no basic difference between a father and a parent — that there is nothing specifically male about fatherhood as a social role. He is the Superfluous Father with a humane face.

In an important sense, the New Father is the modern, improved version of the Old Father — that dutiful but disappointing fellow from an earlier generation who did not talk about his feelings, changed tires rather than diapers, and expected someone else to do the dishes. In today's script, the Old Father is part nostalgia figure and part straw man — someone who can make today's baby-boomer fathers feel good by comparison.

Yet on this Father's Day, we might do well to remember that the central character of an earlier fatherhood script was a fellow called the Good Family Man. Ponder the three words. Good: moral values. Family: purposes larger than the self. Man: a norm of masculinity.

This phrase was once widely heard in our culture, bestowed as a badge of honor to those deserving it. Rough translation: He puts his family first. Yet today, especially within elite culture, who hears the phrase? It sounds antiquated, almost embarrassing. Today we mostly hear it at funerals.

Certainly, the good family man still exists. But he is losing ground. He lives in increasingly hostile territory. He is no longer a star in our cultural script. Indeed, his role has become less important than many of the anti-family male roles now prevalent in that script: the sexual adventurer, the careerist, the individualist concerned with self-expression, and the romantic loner with little need for the entanglements of family life.

In short, when it comes to marital commitment and family obligation, many of us new fathers — fathers in an increasingly fatherless society — could do worse than remember our fathers, the good family men. No, we cannot relive an earlier era. No, we will not, and ought not, return to patriarchy, the subordination of women by men. But the central challenge of our generation is to revise and revive, for modern conditions, a widely shared conception of the good family man, the man who puts his family first. If we do not, we must not be surprised by the continuing decline of our society.

David Blankenhorn is president of the Institute for American Values, a New York-based organization concerned with family issues.

THE CLARION-LEDGER ■ JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 1992

FAMILY

# Does Dad count?

## ■ Researcher probes for ideas on fatherhood.

By Gary Pettus
Clarion-Ledger Staff Writer

David Blankenhorn calls them "co-mothers."

They are the New Fathers, lauded for their willingness to change diapers, cook, wash the dishes and the clothes — in short, for just about everything a mother can do.

But not for what the traditional father can do, or used to do.

The philosophy "has this ironic quality of undermining fatherhood in society. It tends to deny that there's anything specifically male about the father role," said Blankenhorn, president of the Institute of American Values in New York. "It's as if Father's Day should be called Second Parent's Day."

That's just one man's opinion. Blankenhorn wants to hear more.

He and colleague Dr. Barbara Whitehead heard about two dozen in Jackson Tuesday when they conducted focus groups on fatherhood to find out why or if it's a dying art.

The result of this and similar opinion-gathering sessions will be a book tentatively titled *The Good Family Man, Fatherhood and the Pursuit of Happiness in America.*

About 200-225 fathers will participate in the formal focus groups. Hundreds more will be interviewed. Blankenhorn, father of a 2½-year-old son, and Whitehead, mother of three, collected data Tuesday when they met with unmarried students at Jackson State.

Blankenhorn chose Jackson as a research site for two reasons: 1) He wanted opinions from the Deep South, and 2) he grew up here, watching his father umpire little league games at the fields he played on. They also attended father-son functions and went hunting and fishing together.

As he was growing up, he said, that strong father-son relationship seemed to be the norm in Jackson, where he attended Callaway High School and lived until his family moved to Virginia in 1972.

Now, at age 37, he believes that such a relationship is threatening to become the exception.

"Children who grow up with their fathers do better than children who do not. That is true even if you control for such factors as income and race. Fatherlessness is the major predictor of crime among juveniles.

"Thirty years ago, if you asked people should a troubled marriage stay together for the sake of the children, they would say yes; not so today."

If this sounds Dan Quayle-ish, it's no wonder. On Mother's Day, *The Washington Post* ran an op-ed story by Whitehead, who attacked the TV series *Murphy Brown.*

She, like Vice President Quayle, bemoaned the episode where Murphy, an unmarried and pregnant TV newswoman, decides to bear and rear her child without its father, who has abandoned the role.

About a week after Whitehead's story, Quayle attacked the show for suggesting that fathers are not essential. "We feel perhaps he or his staff might have seen that article," Blankenhorn said.

"In that sense, it's gratifying that the political debate is now increasingly taking up the issues."

Blankenhorn, who was educated at Harvard University and Warwick University in England, created his organization five years ago. It draws on the research of 35 scholars of varying political philosophies.

"Our main goal is to study the status of the family and to make recommendations for strengthening the family as an institution."

Institute For American Values
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Jackson broadcast media interviews July 9:

WLBT - TV Channel 3
WAPT - TV Channel 16
MPR - Radio

# What's the biggest problem facing families today?

## Lack of fathers hurts kids

*David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a New York-based organization concerned with family issues:*

"For most people, family values are not about liberal vs. conservative or Democrat vs. Republican. In our surveys of parents, we find deep concern about family values that cuts across political lines. Parents worry that it is getting harder to be a child. They worry about family breakup. They report that today's culture is often indifferent or even hostile to their efforts to be good parents. They point to the breakdown of neighborliness and increasingly fear for the physical safety of their children. They view family values mostly in ethical terms — right and wrong — rather than in terms of politics or economics.

"Fatherlessness is a special concern. Tonight, more than one-third of our nation's children will go to sleep in homes

Blankenhorn

in which their fathers do not live. Before they reach age 18, more than half of our nation's children will spend a significant portion of their childhood living apart from their fathers. Fatherlessness is now approaching a rough parity with fatherhood as a defining feature of American childhood.

"If I had to pick the most important family issue facing the nation today, it would be fatherlessness."

## 'Victims of our arrogance'

*Midge Decter, distinguished fellow of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, New York:*

"That we should nowadays be discussing something called 'family values' is itself a symptom of our pathology. Families

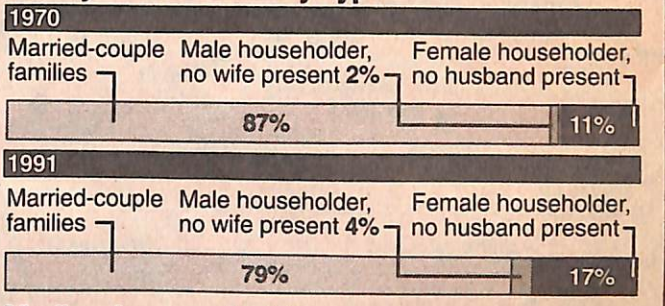
Decter

are not mere arrangements of things to be defended or criticized — or, above all, 'redefined' — they are nature, like rocks and rivers. It takes one man and one woman to produce a child; there ought to be a message in that, and when we were a civilization that could make its way even in the dark, we knew it.

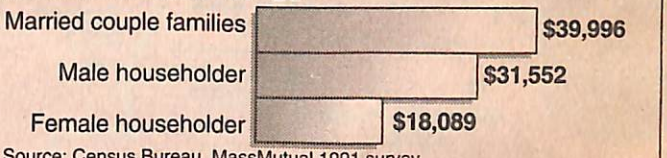
"Families are not meant to make you happy; they are meant to make you *human*. The behavior we recently witnessed in Los Angeles, and more recently in Chicago, is the behavior of feral beings. Unless we begin to understand that they are the victims of our arrogance in believing we could tamper with nature itself, there will be no hope, not for them and not for us."

## How families are changing

### Family households by type




### Median income in '90




Source: Census Bureau, MassMutual 1991 survey

By Julie Stacey, USA TODAY

## Poor, minorities 'scapegoats'

*Josefina Lopez, playwright and author of* Real Women Have Curves, *Los Angeles:*

Lopez

"Whenever there is a national crisis, such as our economy, politicians will find a scapegoat. If it isn't the undocumented people, it's the poor. There is no doubt that a two-parent family that teaches the family values of hard work and self-respect will raise children that will contribute to the economy. However, not all families have a father. Yet these mothers do their best to teach family values. If politicians are truly concerned about family values, they should be more supportive of Planned Parenthood."

Rodgers

## Work pressures

*Fran Sussner Rodgers, CEO of Work/Family Directions, Boston:*

"The problem is not the decline of family values but increased difficulties that families face. There has been a serious erosion in the ability of families to meet the needs of their members, partly because Americans have been forced to work longer hours in unsupportive environments. This has made family life and family time more marginal and has contributed to difficulties with children and disillusionment with the American Dream. To turn this trend around, it is critical to see a productive workforce and caring for families as related goals. There is a need for more dependent care, workplace flexibility and more daily acceptance of work and family needs."

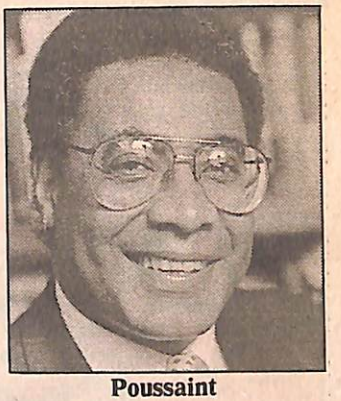
# Need 'more than values'

*Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and former* Cosby Show *consultant:*

"Talking about all the issues that have to do with family support and the survival and well-being of families is a legitimate issue, and not just this gimmicky one about values only.

"The family is not like it was a hundred years ago, when families had total control over their environment and their children and could work to support them and have adequate income. The times have changed, and that's why families are in trouble — not because values have changed, but because society has changed in many ways, putting more demands, bringing more pressures and bringing more stresses on families and people trying to raise children.

"Families can't exist on family values alone. They need economic support. They need social support from their community and society. If you don't have a job, and if you don't have a job that pays a living wage, it's very hard to support a family. If you don't have money, you're less likely to want to be married or to take on the responsibility of a family. The poor economic conditions in the country make it more difficult for families to survive because they're not getting enough support. So, a community and a society where there's economic support is essential if you're going to talk about families having values and being able to carry them out."

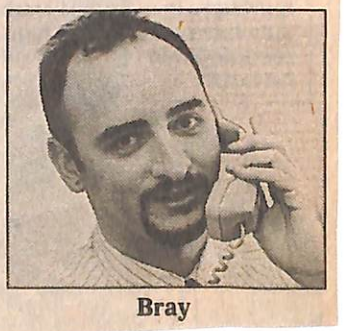


Poussaint

# 'Problem is homophobia and racism'

*Robert Bray, director of public information, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Washington:*

"Family diversity is one of the cutting-edge social issues in this country. We live in a country that has a vibrant and textured mosaic of loving unions, ranging from elderly families to single parents to gay and lesbian families. Unfortunately, the Ozzie and Harriet family myth drives social policy in this country. What's not messed up are family values. What's messed up is society's reaction to diverse families. The problem for us isn't who's in the kitchen and who's at work. The problem for us is homophobia and racism which threaten to undermine those loving unions."



Bray

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opportunity for all. Instead, quota hiring, elimination of general tests for employment and promotion, race norming of test scores (giving extra points to blacks and Hispanics), dumbing down of standards, double standards—in general, "inferior action"—are all liberal policies that are inherently unjust.

Worse, the liberals favor a corporate identity above the individual identity. We will be labeled and represented as whites, blacks, Asians, gays, etc. Liberals divide Americans, demanding that the government treat each according to "category," rather than treating all equally. Liberalism has embraced a dangerous concept, one that has failed where tried in the past. Gay Americans, like other Americans, should work to defeat this discriminatory corporate liberalism.

HUGH MURRAY
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

## Fatherhood

**To the editors:**

In all the uproar over "Murphy Brown" versus Dan Quayle, I have seen little to match the fundamental unseriousness of Michael Kinsley's "Happy Families" (TRB, June 15). Kinsley's equation of unwed parenthood with "the pursuit of happiness"—the idea that our moral traditions regard freedom and license as identical "paths to happiness"—would prompt a laugh from any historian, a groan from any student of the moral underpinnings of liberal societies, and a sigh of sadness from almost any real-life single mother. He also suggests an awkward double standard in which unwed parenthood is morally OK for affluent, educated women, but not OK for other women.

His idea that the debate over cultural values all boils down to a political ploy by right-wing Republicans is an insult to many people across the political spectrum who have been pointing out the hard facts of declining child well-being. It also perfectly illustrates the mindset of many people from Washington who actually believe that the world begins and ends with politics, and that "culture" is something that can be understood only through a political prism. The important issue, after all, is who gets elected president, right?

DAVID BLANKENHORN
*President, Institute for American Values*
*New York, New York*

**To the editors:**

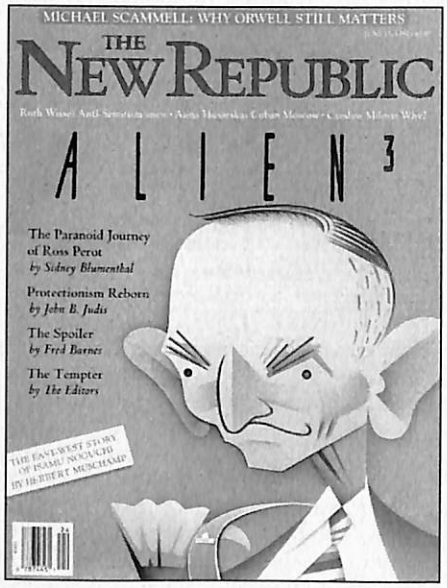
In his attempt to support an indefensible statement made by Dan Quayle, Fred Barnes has gotten the facts wrong ("Insurrection," June 22). Murphy Brown did not "spurn" her baby's father. He pre-empted all discussion of the future of the pregnancy by announcing that the decision was hers, that he did not want to be involved, and that she could contact him in the Amazon. In the United States, vanished fathers, not spurned fathers, are the source of many of the problems associated with one-parent households. Lucky for the baby that his mother is rich and won't be relying on child support.

ANNE WOLFSON
*Washington, D.C.*

## Fathoming the hushed awe

**To the editors:**

Your derision for William Shawn, in a review of a book he had no hand in producing ("Chipmunk Serenade" by James Wolcott, June 8), seems rather shabby to me, but I suppose you must




have your reasons. I'd just like to mention that Mr. Shawn was an editor who edited for fifty years, reading every word in every manuscript that he published, which astounded me when I began writing for *The New Yorker* years ago and which amazes me still. His penciled queries and suggestions laced the margins of every galley proof I saw, and I don't know of another editor in the history of American magazines who was so painstaking for so many years. He put his intelligence, taste, and curiosity at the service of every writer whose work he touched. He was an awful lot of fun to write for and to argue with. As you say in the review, "Future survivors of global warming may find it hard to fathom the hushed awe that attended Shawn," but writers can fathom it: it is awesome to have an editor who pays so much attention to your work.

GARRISON KEILLOR
*New York, New York*

## Stern stuff

**To the editors:**

As soon as I saw the *Esquire*-spoof cover, I knew Howard Stern would be mentioned within. But I was disappointed to see Carl Bernstein, in an otherwise excellent piece, lump Stern with infotainment perpetrators like Donahue and Geraldo ("The Idiot Culture," June 8). First off, Stern is up front about seeking out "freaks" for their ratings potential and regularly lampoons Donahue, Oprah, et al. for pretending it is therapeutic to recount bizarre sexual experiences. Second, Stern is among the few who have brutally satirized today's empty-headed journalism.

Perhaps Bernstein does not know it was Stern's reporter stuttering John Melendez (himself a walking parody of blow-dried, brainless, but *smooth* TV newshounds) who put the obsession with Bill Clinton's sex life in proper perspective by taking it to its logical extreme. At a press conference held by Gennifer Flowers it was stuttering John who asked if the governor practiced safe sex and whether Gennifer planned on sleeping with any other presidential candidates. In recent weeks Melendez also buttonholed news icon Walter Cronkite to ask if he was attending an enviro-benefit because he cared about the rain forest or because his publicist told him it would be a good idea. Cronkite's gruff response suggested that Melendez had stumbled onto an important truth about the media biz's fondness for appearances over reality.

JEFF A. TAYLOR
*Silver Spring, Maryland*

## Notches

**To the editors:**

In his June 8 reply to letters on his April 20 article ("Flat Chance"), Alan Reynolds misstates the nature of the progressive income tax, contending that it creates "sharp 'notches'" at the points where brackets change. He implies that when a worker earns an extra dollar that moves him or her from the 15 percent to the 28 percent bracket, the tax rate on the worker's entire income rises from 15 percent to 28 percent, creating an additional tax liability of thousands of dollars.

In actuality, however, only the extra dollar is taxed at 28 percent; the rest of the worker's income is still taxed at 15 percent. The worker's tax liability increases by only 28 cents. "Notches" are not a reason to criticize progressive rates.

ALAN D. VIARD
*Columbus, Ohio*

*William Raspberry*

# Back to The Family

Don't call it good news—at least not yet. Call it a glimmer of hope, tenuously supported by still-tentative data, that, when it comes to the American family, things just may be getting better.

This flickering candle of "a new familism" is the sighting of the culture watchers at the Institute for American Values, and especially of the Manhattan-based institute's Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. Its source? The baby boom generation, creator of the singles "lifestyle," is settling down into family life.

Is she blaming the boomers (as opposed to, say, economics, technology or family-unfriendly worksites) for the decline of the family in the first place? Well, yes. Those other anti-family pressures play their part, she acknowledges in the summer issue of the institute's publication, Family Affairs.

"But the principal source of family decline over the past three decades has been cultural. It has to do with the ascendancy of a set of values that have been destructive of commitment, obligation, responsibility and sacrifice—and particularly destructive of the claims of children on adult attention and commitment.

"The family has weakened because, quite simply, many Americans have changed their minds. They changed their minds about staying together for the sake of the children; about the necessity of putting children's needs before their own; about marriage as a lifelong commitment; and about what it means to be unmarried and pregnant. And many American men changed their minds about the obligations of a father and husband."

It has been easier to plot the cultural shifts Whitehead talks about than to know what to do about them.

A personal case in point: When we were married nearly 26 years ago, my wife and I agreed that she would continue working until we started our family. Then she'd quit her job and make a home for the children and me.

It worked out well all around. Neither of us has any doubt that the children—that we as a family—are better off for her full-time home-making (and personal sacrifice). We'd do it again.

But if one of our daughters told us she was getting married and that she and her husband would do it the way we did it, I'd probably be more worried than pleased. I've seen too many marriages fall apart to be comfortable with the thought of my daughter trying to re-enter the work force with atrophied or obsolete skills. I've heard too many brides and grooms pledge their mutual faith for "so long as we both shall love." I have seen too many wives abandoned and pauperized. I have witnessed, in short, the erosion of "commitment, obligation, responsibility and sacrifice."

Whitehead has seen these changes, too: from the much-maligned traditionalism of "Ozzie and Harriet" to the careerism of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and "L.A. Law," the latter two of which "treat workplace relationships and the workplace as the primary realm of intimacy, nurturing and fulfillment. Children do not exist in the workplace world at all."

*The baby boomers are settling down.*

Not, at least, until the onset of the "new familism," which, so far, has no paradigmatic TV show. But just wait.

"If there is a single common experience that contributes to the New Familism," says Whitehead, "it is parenthood. A majority of the baby boomers—roughly 45 million—are now parents. . . . It makes you settle down, think ahead, become less selfish."

And, she is convinced, it changes the culture. Why? Because the baby boomers are screenwriters, moviemakers, journalists, book editors and, yes, TV producers.

"Since much of our culture today is a media culture, they have an enormous influence on what values and behaviors are depicted, what values and behaviors are affirmed and celebrated and what roles are held up as models.

"In fact, I believe that one of the reasons we see such an explosion of media interest in the family today is that many journalists belong to this segment of the baby boom generation and are settling into family life themselves."

Whitehead and her co-authors in "Family Affairs" are treading tricky ground—terrain that is trickier still for men. Family values can, in some guises, be just another way of wishing women back in their submissive, nonthreatening roles, a way of repudiating the positive changes of recent years: greater gender equality, greater tolerance for diversity, increased freedom and opportunity for women.

The problem is how to salvage the best of the gains for individuals without undercutting the values that exalt families. And we're talking about far more than the tax code and improved child care arrangements. Says Whitehead:

"We have a political conversation about the family that's giving rise to public policy solutions. We have an economic conversation about the family that's giving rise to workplace solutions. We do not yet have an equivalent cultural conversation about the family that's giving rise to cultural solutions."

She's right. So let's talk.

Institute For American Values
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The Clarion-Ledger ■ Wednesday, July 29, 1992

# 'Baby boomer' parents may be what's needed to develop the 'New Familism'

■ Members of the baby boom generation are now settling into family life themselves.

**WILLIAM RASPBERRY**

Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Don't call it good news — at least not yet. Call it a glimmer of hope, tenuously supported by still-tentative data, that, when it comes to the American family, things just may be getting better.

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THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL
Sunday
August 2, 1992

# A Question of Values

By MARY C. HANSON
of The Journal staff

EVERYONE'S talking about our values — or lack of them — these days.

Vice President Dan Quayle's criticism of unwed TV mother Murphy Brown only brought to a head a discussion that's been brewing at least since 1988 — the year Good Housekeeping magazine began its "New Traditionalist" campaign, predicting a return to old-time family values. It's been the focus of endless media hype, academic scrutiny and conflicting studies, polls and surveys: Whatever happened to those traditional All-American values?

"They went the way of the traditional All-American family," say some. (You remember: the bread-winning father and stay-at-home mother sharing marriage and couple of kids?)

"Family values? Got trampled in the stampede for women's rights," say others.

"Try looking for them in the ashes of the LA riots," says another group.

"We need them back," cry politicians grasping at a timely tonic for the nation's many ills.

"They're on their way," say those whose job it is to manufacture new markets and slogans from any mere hint of a social trend.

Despite the debate, there's no denying that the family — that last bastion of all that Americans hold near and dear — has undergone some drastic changes since the days of Ward and June Cleaver. And however experts differ on the causes and consequences of these changes, most seem to agree that we must find new ways to support our new families.

Alan Waxenberg, publisher of Good Housekeeping magazine, says, "All our research clearly identifies that the New Traditionalist movement continues to flourish." Waxenberg defines this New Traditionalist as "a woman who brings a contemporary attitude to a traditional lifestyle." And he paints the picture of a new frontier woman who "brings home the bread" and somehow "bakes it, too," all while balancing a baby on each hip. What about the effects of stress and high divorce rates?

"After years of struggle, women are learning to live with it," he says. "And I don't think divorce rates affect the movement of traditionalism. The whole concept is a value system that marks a return to family, home, kids."

Psychologist John Guidubaldi, a professor at Kent State University in Ohio and past president of the National Association of School Psychologists, says that "only about 27% of American households still represent the 'traditional family.'" Having conducted a long-term and wide-ranging study on divorce in 38 states, Guidubaldi finds it a little more difficult to ignore the divorce statistics, which he blames partly on a court system that facilitates divorce and an economy geared increasingly to two-income households.

Sure, says Barbara Gutek, who has done extensive research on women, work and family issues: Blame it on working mothers. A professor of business at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Gutek says, "Most feminists feel that all this discussion of traditional family values is a tremendous backlash against women. It's a very narrow definition of family that they're talking about. We're glorifying something that doesn't exist anymore. I see a big gap between the realities of American life and what people are trying to hold up as an ideal."

David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a non-partisan think tank on family issues in New York City, finds it ironic that so much attention is focused on mothers' roles and whether mothers should work outside the home, when in his mind, "the No. 1 family issue in our nation today is fatherlessness. Never before have so many kids lived their lives away from a father's presence.

"We still have the world's highest rate of family breakup, out-of-wedlock childbirth continues to zoom ahead, and child well-being is declining in this society in terms of just about every measurement we have: educational attainment, psychiatric problems, medical problems, competence and character. We've become an increasingly adult-centered society and unable to make sacrifices for our children."

We can't go back to the '50s, says Blankenhorn. But with the baby boomers reaching the middle of their years as parents, we finally may be leaving behind a 30-year cycle of individualism and deteriorating marital commitment and turning to a "new familism."

(over)

Call it anything you want, says Rosalie Streett, president of a national organization in Baltimore, Md., called Parent Action: "Whether a New Traditionalist or a New Familist or whatever, we have to find a way to address the changing needs of families. All families. However they look. They are what they are and it's not for any of us to say which is right, because all families need support. We've got to be sure that our children are brought up in a country that loves and supports their optimal growth. That's the bottom line for me."

Streett believes that the absence of community and public support for parents is at least as significant as the absence of fathers, and that the big problems are economic and structural: "Society isn't structured to provide the supports we need — partly because everyone is at work, and partly because we just haven't thought about it. What are we doing to make it easier for families?"

That will be a major concern for corporations during the '90s, says "The Values Gap," a recent international survey of personal values, lifestyles and productivity released by Priority Management Systems of Bellevue, Wash. The poll of a thousand people from seven countries reveals a growing gulf between the increased commitment companies are demanding from employes and the personal values those employes bring to work. About 98% of respondents said they led "imbalanced lives."

Milwaukeean John Matchette, president of the local Priority Management Systems franchise Matchette & Associates, says, "The main victim of this values gap is the family. Time at work has increased 20% and leisure is down 33% since 1975. The trade-off? People are spending less time with their children and spouses. It's very important that business be aware of this values gap, of the fact that people are much more productive when leading balanced lifestyles, and of the need to help people work smarter — not longer."

The experts seem to agree on at least one point: We must put our focus and faith in families, not figures.

Values don't seem to have changed as much as families and the world around them. But a failure to deal with these changes and challenges today will haunt us — and our children — for generations. The family itself has adapted to and survived centuries of evolution and change. And the solutions we seek may well be found in truths far older and simpler than today's problems: A recognition of community; a sharing of time, resources, goals and responsibilities; a pulling together for the common good.

Streett likes to quote an old African saying: "It takes a village to raise a child."

# Where have all the fathers gone?

"BY THE time they are 18, over half the kids in this country will spend a significant part of their childhood away from fathers," says David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values. "I find the increasing absence of men from the lives of their children to be the most disturbing and socially consequential trend today."

And although we can't go back to the '50s, he anticipates the beginnings of a cultural shift he calls "the new familism." It still is very modest, affecting more what people say than what they do, he says, but it's becoming evident in answers to surveys and polls.

"Trends don't last forever. There's some evidence we are leaving behind that 30-year period where individualism was the reigning cultural idea and the ultimate responsibility in life was to oneself," says Blankenhorn. "Remember terms like 'doing your own thing'? Family commitments and family itself were seen as a drag on personal freedom. We're beginning to see the limits to that philosophy, but it affected everyone.

DAVID BLANKENHORN

"The ideal of marital permanence declined dramatically," he says. "People actually redefined marriage into a much more open and contingent relationship. While some argue this is good because people are no longer trapped in bad relationships, there's no doubt it produces a less secure environment for kids. The family as an institution in our society is getting weaker and less able to carry out its social function, which is to produce children of competence and character. And a lot of happy talk about new family values won't change that."

The youth of today, however — the children of the divorce revolution — just might.

"Young people of the 1990s will rebel against the family chaos of their parents' generation in the same way their parents rebelled against the family conformity of the '50s," Blankenhorn says. "To be countercultural in the '90s will be to say: 'Till death do us part.' "

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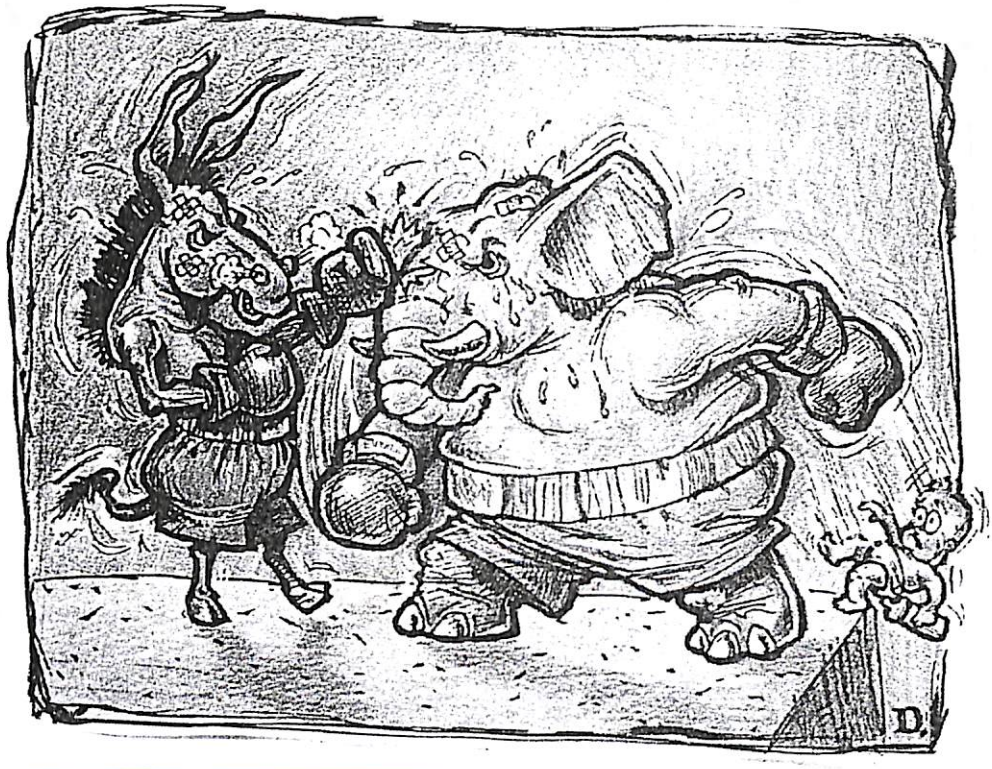
# '92 campaign has obscured the real family-values issues

The Atlanta Journal
The Atlanta Constitution

Sunday, Sept. 6, 1992



By Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

"Family values" has gotten a bad name, and deservedly so. The family-values debate of 1992 has degenerated into nothing more than a cynical effort by politicians to use the phrase to discredit their opponents and polarize the electorate.

What's most unfortunate about this tactic is that it may sabotage the work of finding common ground on one of the great social questions of our time: how to reverse cultural trends that threaten the well-being of our children.

The serious family-values debate is not about who bakes cookies or who likes Woody Allen or who dislikes homosexuals or who favors women in military combat. It is about widespread public concern that the family is in trouble when it comes to raising children.

This concern is not part of a backlash against working women or the two-earner family. It stems from the hard evidence of family failure in recent years: the rising rate of juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse and teen suicide; the growing number of single-parent and no-parent families; the explosion in the number of babies born addicted to drugs; the dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock births; the unprecedented rise in child poverty; and a divorce rate that ranks as one of the highest in the world.

Each of these trends represents a threat to child well-being; taken together, they represent a devastating assault on everything that fosters character and competence in children.

In the minds of many Americans, these harmful trends are rooted, not in our politics or economics, but in our culture. Specifically, they are rooted in irresponsible adult behavior: mothers who take drugs; fathers who abandon children; boyfriends who abuse mothers and children; parents who marry and divorce casually, or never marry at all; families who neglect to love and guide their children. The consequences of this private behavior are not limited to individual children or individual families. They are borne by the society as a whole.

Thus we face the difficult but inescapable question: How does a democratic and pluralistic society — a society committed to tolerance and diversity — change private behavior in ways that improve child well-being? How do we encourage adult responsibility and sacrifice in order to create better outcomes for children? What are the carrots and sticks we should use to promote stronger families?

These are the questions on which the genuine family-values debate (not the phony one being waged by this year's politicians) is focused. As with all debates,

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(over)

# Family: Phony debate ignores real issues

there are two opposing poles. At one end is the view that family behavior is purely a matter of private choice over which society has no rightful claim. At the other end is the view that the government should dictate or legislate family behavior.

Most Americans fall somewhere in between these poles. They believe that in a free society, government should not unduly extend its reach into the private affairs of the family. Moreover, they pride themselves on their tolerance of diversity and their reluctance to judge others harshly. At the same time, most Americans believe that some child-rearing environments are better for children than others.

All this suggests a broad middle ground, a place where a working consensus can be forged on family values. Indeed, before family values became such a polarizing issue in the '92 campaign, a consensus between liberals and conservatives was slowly taking shape.

There is, for example, broad agreement that government must require fathers to bear financial responsibility for their children. There is growing agreement that two-parent families offer children the best chance for economic and emotional security, a view strongly endorsed in last year's report of the bipartisan National Commission on Children, chaired by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.). And advocates of welfare reform across the political spectrum now agree that marriage provides the strongest underpinning for families and the most reliable route out of poverty.

This consensus has led to a number of specific policy proposals: raising the personal tax exemption for children; eliminating the disincentives for marriage in welfare programs; federalizing the collection of child support payments and punishing offenders in the same way as tax evaders; registering the father's Social Security number on birth certificates; instituting a cooling-off period before couples with children can get divorced.

Some of these proposals are controversial, but they all reflect recent thinking on the need to strengthen the married, two-parent family and to hold both parents responsible for the care and support of their children.

Now this potential consensus has been threatened by the phony family-values debate of 1992.

The phony debate focuses much of its attention on women's roles in the family. Is the true American woman a stay-at-home mother or a working mother? Does she bake chocolate-chip cookies or bring home fast food?

This is a false dichotomy — one designed to foster "us vs. them" divisions among families and, more importantly, one that does not reflect the dynamic, changing character of women's lives today. The majority of today's mothers will work outside the home during much of their lifetime, and many working mothers also will spend some time at home raising children, either full time or part time. Most Americans would agree that these private choices, which are based on economic necessity as much as personal preference, are not an area that warrants government intervention or lecturing from public officials.

Other so-called "family-values" issues we have heard in the '92 campaign — gay marriage, for example, and homosexuals in military service — may involve significant policy questions, but they have little to do with the traumas that today's children are experiencing. These issues, too, have been used mainly to sow division and inflame prejudice.

It's important that we recognize the difference between the politics of family values and the genuine debate over family values. One asks, how can we exploit family values for political gain? The other asks, how can we change the culture to strengthen families and improve life for children? One divides us; the other brings us together. One is aimed at boosting the short-term advantage of politicians; the other is aimed at enhancing the long-term well-being of children.

The stakes in this debate are high. Quite simply, it is not possible to have a strong nation with a large number of weak and failing families. It will be a bitter irony, indeed, if the phony debate about family values discredits or derails the effort to meet the real challenge before us: how to increase the number of children who grow up with two married parents in supportive communities.

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THE WASHINGTON POST WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1992

*William Raspberry*

# For the Sake of The Children

The papers themselves are interesting, written by an impressive array of scholars and researchers who have spent serious time thinking about family. I'll want to reread them, reflect on them, possibly write about some of them.

But for now I'm interested in the set of propositions that prompted the papers. The eight propositions—prepared by David Popenoe and Jean Bethke Elshtain for the Council on Families in America—are part history, part theory, part deeply held belief. They do not so much point to a solution to the problems facing American families as provide a working definition for the debate on "family values."

The first two propositions won't launch much political brawling:

(1) "In order to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally, a child requires a strong, warm, lasting and loving attachment with at least one and preferably two or more adults who are deeply committed to that child's well being," and

(2) "The basic social purpose of marriage and the family in our time is to raise children to become adults who are happy, self-confident, socially responsible and capable of attachment and trust."

The next two propositions start to get at what ails (and divides) us:

(3) "As social institutions, marriage and the family have changed continuously throughout history. The main trend has been twofold. First, the family has lost functions to other institutions. Second, the nuclear family has become increasingly detached from larger kinship groups. *Much of this trend is associated with the salutary growth of individual freedom* [italics supplied]" and

(4) Recent changes amount to "a crisis that goes well beyond prior evolutionary change." Not only the extended family, but the nuclear two-parent family is disintegrating. Marriage, in effect, has become "deinstitutionalized," and married partners are more likely to look to how well marriage serves their individual interests rather than how much it increases the likelihood of successful outcomes for children.

Children, perhaps sensing their loss of centrality, become easier prey to social pathologies that include crime, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression and suicide. The result: The current generation of young people is likely to be "the first in our nation's history to be less well-off—psychologically, socially and economically—than their parents were at the same age."

The next two propositions—which some would see as contradictory—are at the heart of the current debate.

(5) The family form that was the American ideal from the early 1800s to the early 1960s—the traditional nuclear family headed by a father as the principal breadwinner and a mother as homemaker—is "no longer desirable or possible on a society-wide scale," but

(6) "The model of the two-biological-parent, nuclear family, based on a lasting, monogamous marriage, is both possible and desirable. Considering all the alternatives to both marriage and the nuclear family that are available today, this family form is by far the most efficacious one for child rearing and long-term individual and societal well-being."

Question: Isn't it possible—even probable—that the "lasting, monogamous marriage" was, at least in part, a creature of the wife's dependency on, and subordination to, a breadwinning husband? If the old relationship of Proposition 5 is "no longer desirable or possible," is the outcome of Proposition 6 mostly wishful thinking?

The final two propositions are, like the first two, unlikely to spark serious disagreement except, perhaps, as to whether and how they might be achieved:

(7) The ideal environment for child rearing is an enduring nuclear family that cultivates its own routines, traditions and stories, and provides plenty of child-adult family interaction. Such families, in which children have "no pervasive fear that their parents will break up," provide the subculture in which the universally honored values—honesty, responsibility, commitment etc.—can be internalized.

(8) "Therefore, a major cultural and policy imperative for our time is to reinstitutionalize marriage in order to increase the number of children who grow up with their two, married parents, in supportive communities, and to decrease the number of children who do not."

None of these propositions is of much help in telling us how to produce the committed, permanent, child-centered families that the overworked phrase "family values" is calculated to invoke. But they might be useful in helping us to agree on what the American family has become and what, with luck and serious attention, it might yet be.

And that's not a bad place to start.

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Des Moines Sunday Register SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1992

# Finding ways to strengthen families, save children

**Tangible evidence** of the deterioration of families is the rising number of children living in poverty.

By BETSY RUBINER
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Once a week, Becky Melberg takes time out from her family in Urbandale and her job as an engineering consultant for The Aetna Casualty & Surety Co. to work with 16 young, low-income mothers.

Most had children when they were teen-agers. Many are on public assistance. By helping them, Melberg hopes to help their children.

"To strengthen the family unit, you have to build up the self-esteem of these young women," she said. "If you can show them there's a way out, that they are good people with talents and abilities, you teach them to build their children's self-esteem."

Many Iowans are making a personal effort to strengthen families and improve the lives of children. For Melberg, volunteering to lead a support group at the Young Women's Resource Center in Des Moines was a logical choice. She had her only child when she was 20 and was divorced soon after.

"I have undergone a lot of severe financial frustrations and can empathize with these young women," said Melberg, whose son is now 21. "Sometimes the real world can be very cruel."

Part of the dilemma is defining the problems facing families, the causes and hands-on solutions. These days, it's as hard to define family issues as it is to define a family.

Definitions may be shaped by political leanings, cultural biases and religious beliefs.

And family issues can be molded into divisive weapons used to bash political opponents.

Yet there is a growing consensus that American family life has deteriorated and that this jeopardizes not only children's well-being but the country's economic viability and future.

"Families are under increasing economic stress and have less time available because they're working more," said Charles Bruner, director of the Child and Family Policy Center, a Des Moines research group.

The most tangible evidence of family deterioration is the rising number of children living in poverty. Many are raised without support from their fathers. With poverty and abandonment often comes infant mortality, child abuse, teen pregnancy and juvenile delinquency.

"We see a lot of people who are living on the edge, which has a very negative impact on the family," said Diana Lewis, director of the Family Counseling Center in Des Moines.

Also struggling are middle-class, two-parent families trying to meet work and family obligations. Two-income families seek understanding from employers — parental leave to care for a sick child, help finding child care, a flexible work schedule. Stay-at-home mothers want recognition for their work and more government support such as tax breaks.

Beyond this is a less tangible but widespread concern: Are children getting a proper grounding in values and morals? Do they learn right from wrong?

"Parents today have less time available to provide the type of example and transmission of values than they did in the past," said Larry Breheny, director of Catholic Social Service in Des Moines. "Sometimes the children are simply left on their own to develop and grow without proper guidance."

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Voters seeking help for families through the ballot box have two very different choices at the presidential level, according to David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a family policy group in New York.

Bill Clinton's presidential campaign wants to strengthen the family through economic and public policy. It focuses on how government can help families mitigate some consequences of bad trends in family life, such as single parenthood.

At their Houston convention, the Republicans kicked off a controversial discussion of the family in terms of values and the state of American culture. The Bush campaign talks about moral behavior and ethical standards, about such topics as single parenthood, homosexuality, abortion, school prayer and women's family obligations.

> **"It would be a big mistake for family values to become the plaything of campaign managers and political handlers. . . ."**
>
> — David Blankenhorn, *family values advocate*

To Blankenhorn, neither approach gets to the problem's heart. He said the Democrats address the consequences of bad trends and the Republicans dwell on fringe issues not easily regulated by government.

The goal should be to reverse bad trends in family life, argues Blankenhorn. But this isn't easy and could require politicians to support controversial proposals, he said.

For example, to reverse the "bad" cultural trend of single parenthood, policy makers could encourage marriage through such measures as changing no-fault divorce laws or giving preference for public housing to married couples. Neither idea is an easy sell.

Republicans reportedly have backed away somewhat from their family values appeal and tried to talk more about policies to help families.

But Blankenhorn worries that their early emphasis on family values could jeopardize recent bipartisan progress that has been made in shaping policy that improves family life.

"It would be a big mistake for family values to become the plaything of campaign managers and political handlers," he said. "The subject can become so deprived of genuine meaning that most people would become cynical . . . and say this is just rhetoric."

Many other national and state politicians express concern for families

(cont.)

and promote policies as different as guaranteed parental leave, restricted abortion and bigger tax credits for families.

Even those who agree on certain imperatives — such as the need for welfare reform — offer wildly different ideas. Some say families should get higher welfare payments. Others say payments should be lowered, to discourage dependency.

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Because the issue has gotten so fuzzy, partisan and charged on the political front, one of the most concrete ways for people to try to strengthen families is by volunteering and contributing financially to social service and advocacy groups.

"Working one on one, family to family, community to community, is just as effective as the political process. But you need both," noted Breheny of Catholic Social Service.

To some, the work begins at home, with parents trying to find ways to spend more time with their children, grandchildren and spouses.

"Everybody's running 10 different directions," said J.D. Hall, director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa. "Some of the old traditions slip by the wayside. The consistent discipline is not there. You don't have two or three meals together as a family. That sense of family, of belonging, is not as strong."

To others, the work extends beyond one's home — a businesswoman who mentors an underprivileged child; a retired person who cares for children after school so they aren't alone and unattended.

Adults can offer the most by being a regular part of a child's life, said Marisue Hartung, executive director of Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Greater Des Moines. "It's not the one big splashy event but the commitment and consistency that really makes the impact," she said.

Last April, as part of the ambitious Family Futures Project run by Mid-Iowa Community Action in Marshalltown, 7,000 people in the five-county area surrounding Marshalltown met in about 800 different locations to discuss how to help at-risk children and families.

About 1,500 people now serve on task forces and plan to present a community plan by January. The effort represents "major citizen involvement in changing and improving the life of children," said project director Janet Carl.

**Joan Discher, executive director of Coalition for Family and Children's Services of Iowa, argues that it is in all people's interest to support families.**

Other Iowans, like Sherry Cobb of West Des Moines and her 11-year-old daughter, Lindsay, found a way to both strengthen their family ties and help other families. This summer, the Cobbs volunteered at a child care center for children from troubled homes.

Sherry Cobb "wasn't spending as much time with Lindsay" as she wanted because of the birth of a new child. Plus she wanted to teach her daughter "to give back to society," said Cobb. "She learned to be more giving . . . and to appreciate what she's got."

The Cobbs hope their work will have an impact. "Lindsay and I both feel that the way children turn out and contribute to society starts in the home and it starts really young," she said.

Joan Discher, executive director of Coalition for Family and Children's Services of Iowa, argues that it is in all people's interest to support families.

"It's my concern that my neighbor's children do well because I'm going to have to count on them . . . so that the world I live in as I retire is a good world, a good community," she said.

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Sun-Sentinel

Sunday, September 27, 1992

# 'Family values' stirs emotions, political debate

By DEBORAH P. WORK
and BERTA DELGADO
Staff Writers

The dictionary definitions seem so simple:

■ Family — a social unit consisting especially of a man and woman and their offspring.

■ Value — a standard or principle regarded as desirable or worthwhile.

But whose family? Whose values?

Those of President Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle?

Or those of Democratic challengers Bill Clinton and Al Gore Jr.?

Or today's hodgepodge of American households, ranging from the traditional mom-pop-and-the-kids-next-door to the gay couple down the way raising an orphaned infant who has AIDS?

This is the first time in the nation's history that Americans are being asked to vote for president based on competing definitions of the ideal American family and its value system.

"I believe children should have the benefit of being born into families with a mother and a father who will give them love and care and attention all their lives," Bush has said.

"I want an America . . . that includes every family," Clinton has countered. "Every traditional family and every extended family. Every two-parent family and every single-parent family, and every foster family. Every family."

Statistics say Clinton's concept of the American family is closer to reality in the 1990s, when:

■ More than half of marriages end in divorce.

■ Two of three children will spend part of their lives in a broken home.

■ At least one of every four children is born to an unwed mother.

Yet Bush's sense of family life stirs millions of voters who long for the kinder and gentler 1950s, when most American families mirrored television's Ozzie and Harriet — when dad trudged off to work each day, leaving mom to clean house and bake cookies for the children, and when everyone felt sorry for the boy from the wrong side of the tracks whose mom was divorced.

But other Americans see the issue as a gambit to avoid more troublesome political problems: poverty, health care, drugs and the nation's decaying infrastructure.

"It's a rhetorical balloon buffeted by hot air of one kind or another," said David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a New York think tank for behavioral scientists.

"Which candidate has the best wife, who makes the best chocolate chip cookies, who likes or dislikes Woody Allen? Honestly, some of this becomes almost comical."

Politicians in both parties, Blankenhorn says, "should ask themselves how they can change our society to strengthen family and improve the well-being of children."

Better that, Blankenhorn says, than: "How can we cause family values to bloody our political opponents and improve the well-being of politicians?"

Said Bill Wagonseller, a family expert at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas: "We're dealing with *Murphy Brown* and talking about *Roseanne* and not dealing with the problem."

What bothers Wagonseller is that neither Bush nor Clinton has come up with specific programs to combat the increase in divorce, unwed mothers and impoverished single-parent homes.

"When we were in the Gulf, we had a plan to win the war," Wagonseller said.

Family values became a political issue in May when Quayle attacked television character Murphy Brown for having a baby out of wedlock.

Three months later, the issue reached a political zenith with "family values night" at the Republican National Convention.

Republican delegates roared approval as televangelist Pat Robertson proclaimed: "When Bill Clinton talks about family values, he is not talking about either families or values. He is talking about a radical plan to

[OVER]

destroy the traditional family and transfer its functions to the federal government."

Later, Bush slammed the Democrats' platform for having "left out three simple letters: G-O-D."

Clinton responded: "The implication that somehow the Democrats are godless is deeply offensive to . . . a lot of us who cherish our religious convictions but also respect America's tradition of religious diversity.

"Frankly, I'm fed up with politicians in Washington lecturing the rest of us about family values. Our families have values. But our government doesn't."

Barbara Bush has been the only national political figure to clearly tell voters her definition of family values: "integrity, strength, responsibility, courage, sharing, love of God and pride in being American."

Bush and Clinton grew up in families as divergent as their politics:

Bush was the second of five children of a wealthy Connecticut investment banker and his socialite wife.

Clinton grew up in a single-parent family after his father was killed in a car accident three months before he was born. His mother, a nurse, eventually remarried. His stepfather, a car salesman and alcoholic, abused his mother.

Many see family values as a political euphemism created to mask the growing power of theological conservatives in the Republican Party.

Forty percent of the delegates at the GOP convention identified themselves as born-again religious activists, according to the Christian Coalition, an organization of fundamentalist Christian Republicans.

The GOP convention was opened with a prayer by the Rev. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale. He is a nationally known televangelist and spokesman for the Christian right.

Kennedy is quick to say his understanding of Republican family values — for fidelity, integrity, abstinence, honesty; against gay sex and abortion — can be traced to the Bible.

"Family values is a term used almost interchangeably with others, such as traditional, American values, and probably even biblical values," Kennedy said. "And politicians should preach them because, as goes the family, goes the nation."

**"Over the past 30 years, this country has tried to turn its back on God, his work and prayer. We thought we could do it without consequence. Now we're finding out we've been very foolish."**
— Rev. James Kennedy

The downfall of great civilizations, such as Rome and Greece, can be traced to the disintegration of the family, Kennedy said. He thinks America faces a similar fate.

"Over the past 30 years, this country has tried to turn its back on God, his work and prayer. We thought we could do it without consequence. Now we're finding out we've been very foolish."

Voters such as Robert Moorman of Fort Lauderdale agree.

Moorman knows his family is the kind Bush and Quayle hope to reach with their values platform.

To Moorman, family values means eating together as a family seven nights a week, saying grace beforehand and praying together in church on Sunday.

Moorman also thinks family values demand a strong stand against abortion.

"Abortion is the most important, decisive issue in this election," Moorman said. "If you kill babies, you can kill my parents because they are too old, you can destroy my children because they don't learn fast enough.

"This election comes down to a vote between life and death. And it's all very frightening because the man [Clinton] has no respect for life."

For Moorman's wife, Barbara, family values reflect in the care she gives her husband and sons.

"I care about my husband and I want he and my kids to be happy," she said. "I work hard for them, but I'm happy."

But she also realizes that family means different things to different people.

"Teaching Sunday school, I see children from all kinds of situations — with the dad gone, or living with an uncle, or with several cousins. It may not always be ideal," she said.

"But these children are loved. There are all kinds of families, and they are all worthy. Being a single parent is definitely not the world's worst situation."

The Rev. Mack King Carter of Mount Olive Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale thinks both presidential candidates should leave the teaching of family values to home and the church.

"The issue must be stripped of all the political shenanigans," Carter said. "Politicians are doing nothing but playing games."

Said Blankenhorn, of the Institute for American Values: "You could say, in a sense, that 'family values' is getting a bad name. There's a difference between family values and the *politics* of family values."

By making the family a political issue, he said, both parties have forced millions of Americans to take sides and defend their own lifestyles.

Seven years old and too young to vote, Jeffrey Stillman of Coral Springs could not care less about family values as a political issue.

Nor does he think his family is less than ideal.

"I don't need a daddy. I have my mommy and my Zees," Jeffrey said, using his special name for his aunt, Sharon Stillman.

Jeffrey's mother, Barbara Stillman, and her sister bought a house together after moving from New Jersey more than three years ago to be near their parents in Delray Beach.

"We decided to create a two-parent family for him," says Barbara Stillman, manager of an animal hospital in Coral Springs. "[Sharon] is kind of like mom No. 2. We felt it would create a more cohesive environment for him."

The sisters say politicians should not knock families who don't fit the traditional mold.

"We can do as much for Jeffrey as any married couple could," Barbara says.

Recently, a child moved in next door and began asking questions about the grown-ups in Jeffrey's home.

So Jeffrey went right to the point: "This is my mom and this is my aunt. And I don't have a dad and that's all right."

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THE NEW YORK TIMES **EDITORIALS/LETTERS** TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1992

# Does Our Society Have No Value Higher Than Tolerance?

To the Editor:

"Teaching About Gays and Tolerance" (editorial, Sept. 27) defends the effort by New York City public schools to celebrate life style diversity and eliminate any stigma attached to nontraditional family forms. But you avoid the difficult issues.

You remind us that tolerance is an important social value. Yes, but you also imply that tolerance is a synonym for approval. As a nonsmoker, I tolerate smoking. But I do not approve of it. Even less do I believe that the public school system should teach my child that smoking and nonsmoking are equally praiseworthy.

Tolerance is not the only important value in life. Other values, such as the value of a child receiving the love of both a mother and a father, are also important. You reduce the issue to a false polarization: accept all possible family forms as morally equivalent or incur the accusation of intolerance.

Is tolerance always our society's highest-order value? Is there any circumstance in which society might have a legitimate stake in promoting certain behaviors while discouraging other behaviors? Your reflections on tolerance come across as simplistic moralizing. DAVID BLANKENHORN

President, Inst. for American Values

New York, Oct. 2, 1992

Institute For American Values
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# Family values debate burns GOP, then fades

## Campaign focus should be on economy, critics say

By Ben Winton
THE PHOENIX GAZETTE

Vice President Dan Quayle gazed at the chaos of the Los Angeles riots in May and reached a conclusion: America's family values are disintegrating.

More and more children born out of wedlock. Absent fathers. And that Murphy Brown character — prime-time television's single career mom. Quayle complained: How could she call having an illegitimate baby just another "lifestyle choice"?

It was enough to raise from the riot's ashes a fiery debate over "family values." It burned all summer. By August it flared when Republicans condemned abortion and homosexual marriages.

While they were at it, they railed against pornography, draft dodging, and the lack of God in schools and government. Now, at summer's end, the family values debate has flamed out.

Some say it could have more aptly been called a debate over phony values.

The big losers were the ones who started it: Republicans. Respondents to a Gannett News Service/Lou Harris poll two weeks ago said Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton better represented family values.

Clinton supports gay and abortion rights. He says he does not blame single moms for the lawlessness in Los Angeles.

Quayle has said he was misunderstood. Hollywood should present better role models and emphasize the need for fathers to be responsible for their children, he said later.

Other polls show the issue has lost credibility. Americans are concerned about the family, but would rather hear about the economy, education, health and day care — issues they believe can help families, polls suggest.

The polls also indicate this: Who cares whether it's a single mom, a gay couple or an Ozzie-and-Harriet family?

### Kitchen-table worries

If anything, Americans were offended that Republicans would trivialize such deeply personal issues for the sake of votes, sociologists and campaign experts say.

"It got to the point of whose wife was better, who baked cookies, do you endorse Woody Allen's lifestyle, what about homosexuality, are you patriotic?" said David Blankenhorn, president of the non-partisan Institute for American Values, a New York-based family policy research and education organization.

"It just got unhinged from the daily kitchen-table concerns of millions of parents who are trying to do a good job of raising their kids in an increasingly unfriendly environment," Blankenhorn said. "The real issue is that."

Will Americans remember the flap over Murphy Brown, and sneer every time politicians now talk about single moms?

For those who can't remember, Quayle said: "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown — a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman — mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice.' "

For the sake of children, Blankenhorn hopes Americans will forget the Quayle quote.

Politicians also used family values to shield them from tough issues such as the economy, said Arizona State University political scientist John Geer.

"I don't think the public was ever interested in family values" as a political issue, said Geer, who studies election

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campaigns. "It was an effort by the Bush people to change the debate. They were clearly trying to shore up their base, trying to get away from the economy."

## The '90s model family

Right-wing Republicans pressed for a return to 1950s America: Wouldn't it be nice if the wife stayed home with children and the husband brought home the bread?

There is a problem: Times have changed. The 1950s-style family could not survive in the complex world of the 1990s, said C. Margaret Hall, a Georgetown University sociology professor.

"It's not even an ideal model anymore. I think people who have means, the upper class, can afford to look backward to the past," she said. "But values are changing. We must adapt."

Only 15 percent of American families live on a single income, Hall said.

And new research suggests that the traditional family may not have worked as well as everyone thought.

In the 1950s model, men became overly macho and women got depressed, Hall said.

Sure, the divorce rate was low in the 1950s, Hall said. But it began to climb as couples bailed out in the 1960s, she said.

"We were trying to convince ourselves that the nuclear family was working. But it wasn't," she said.

The divorce rate, although now equal to half of all marriages, leveled off in the late 1980s, she said. That suggests that Americans may be creating different family forms that work, Hall said.

More important than the traditional family are family ties, Hall said.

Connection to relatives — grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins — is vital to family stability, she said. With such ties, children can thrive as well in a single-parent family as in a two-parent family, she said.

Even two-parent families may falter without ties to relatives.

But in a nation where the economy forces families to move across the continent for jobs, family ties are being lost, Hall said.

## Shifting the focus

Those are some reasons why the GOP family values issue hit a raw nerve with the public, analysts say.

Since the convention, the Bush-Quayle campaign has toned down its family values rhetoric. But the president remains committed to it as a political theme, said Jeremy Shane, deputy issues adviser for the campaign. He said the campaign is shifting focus.

In family values, Bush sees a way to address a whole range of issues — from education, to crime, to the economy.

For example, families can be helped by education tax breaks, tax incentives to employers who provide family leave, promotion of community policing activities, and more jobs, Shane said.

What Bush is backing away from is the inference that alternative families are bad.

"No one is questioning that single moms can do a great job. But let's help them some. Let's help send them to school with scholarships, better health care through tax credits," and so on, Shane said.

Bush has distanced himself from the abortion part of the Republican platform, as well. For example, he has said he would support a daughter's choice to have an abortion.

One value judgment remains: Bush opposes preferential rights for homosexuals, including legalizing gay marriages.

Clinton's family values theme is absent moralistic talk. But otherwise it nearly mirrors that of the Republicans.

He says that boosting the nation's economy, reducing welfare dependency and increasing educational opportunities will help families.

But Clinton does not want a return to 1950s-style family values, said press secretary Dee Myers.

To Blankenhorn, it is all political rhetoric. Americans are not obsessed with establishing a moral code on the subject, he said.

And that is another reason why Quayle's remark about Murphy Brown offended so many Americans, Blankenhorn said.

"It was saying we have to change the definition of the family. Americans are not haters. They just observe the simple truth that the ideal family is a two-parent home. They do not ostracize," he said.

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# The Controversial Truth: Two-Parent Families Are Better

By David Popenoe

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.

Consider the Great Family Debate of 1965.

That June, in a speech at Howard University, President Lyndon B. Johnson called "the breakdown of the Negro family structure" the chief threat to the well-being of black Americans. He based that argument on a report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action."

The response was overwhelming. Mr. Moynihan was widely denounced as a racist. The alarm over black family structure was dismissed as "blaming the victim."

As a motivating factor for the War on Poverty, the issue quickly evaporated. Serious debate on the subject became all but impossible.

Now consider the Great Family Debate of 1992. And ponder this fact: the white family structure today is astonishingly similar to the black family structure in 1965.

For example, in 1965, 51 percent of black teen-age mothers were single; in 1990, among white teen-age mothers, 55 percent were single. In 1965, 26 percent of black babies were born out of wedlock; in 1990, 19 percent of white babies were born to unwed mothers.

But today, as in 1965, anyone who brings up the issue of family structure is ridiculed and dismissed. Apparently we are still to believe that the two-parent family is simply one of several options.

We are warned against "blaming" single mothers. And we are to speak not of "the family" but of "families," thus implicitly validating all family forms.

In a front-page article this fall, The Washington Post reported that, according to "a searching re-evaluation by social scientists," the "conventional two-parent household may be far less critical to the healthy development of children than previously believed."

In a recent book review in the prestigious Journal of Marriage and the Family, an author was taken to task for perpetuating "the misguided belief that children will receive better parenting in intact families."

Wait a minute. While recognizing that two-parent families may not always be possible, that many are dysfunctional and that many nontraditional families are successful, are we not at least able to say that two-parent families are generally best for children? Certainly that is what generations of Americans have always believed and what most Americans, including virtually all children, still believe today.

Look at the evidence.

The article in The Washington Post cited a few studies that played down the differences for children between two-parent and other families. But dozens of other studies that reached the opposite conclusion could have been mentioned.

The 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health, for example, found that "young people from single-parent families or stepfamilies were two to three times more likely to have had emotional or behavioral problems than those who had both of their biological parents present in the home."

Of course, social science research is almost never conclusive. There are always methodological difficulties and stones left unturned.

Yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent families and stepfamilies.

If our prevailing views on family structure hinged solely on scholarly evidence, the current debate would never have arisen in the first place.

But today, as in 1965, this debate hinges less on scholarly evidence than on cultural values. After all the data are tabulated, we must still wrestle with an essentially normative question: How do we assess the family trends of recent decades?

As an institution, the family has been in a steep decline, by most statistical measures.

In the past 30 years, the divorce rate has tripled. So has the percentage of children living in single-parent families. Out-of-wedlock births have quadrupled. Fertility has dropped nearly 50 percent.

Studies have shown that parents spend increasingly less time with their children. There is strong scholarly agreement that underlying this trend has been a profound shift in cultural values away from family commitments and toward self-fulfillment.

But is this trend positive or negative? The positive view says that adults today are more able to achieve full individual development.

As one influential book, "Brave New Families" by Judith Stacey, recently concluded: "The 'family' is not here to stay. Nor should we wish it were. On the contrary, I believe that all democratic people, whatever their kinship preferences, should work to hasten its demise."

What is wrong with the family? It distorts and devalues "the diverse means by which people organize their intimate relationships," Ms. Stacey writes.

The negative view is that self-gratification has surpassed self-sacrifice and that Americans are much less willing to invest time and energy in family life. The value placed on children has dropped. And it is not even clear that most adults have become more personally fulfilled.

I believe that the weight of the evidence is on the negative side. Delinquency, teen-age suicide, child abuse and other problems are demonstrably worse in families without a mother and a father.

Several commissions have compiled evidence showing that we may have the first generation of children in history who are worse off in important behavioral and psychological respects than their parents were at the same stage of life.

These facts lie behind a growing belief that America is suffering not only from an economic recession but from a social recession as well — a decline in social order and civic virtue and a rise in psychological impairment.

Sure, nontraditional families can be successful, and they deserve our sympathy and support.

But here is what social scientists call a confirmed empirical generalization: these families are not as successful as conventional two-parent families.

Want further confirmation? Ask any child which kind of family he or she prefers. □

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# Seen, Heard, Even Worried About

By PETER STEINFELS

IN Washington and Little Rock, as on the campaign trail earlier, the talk has mainly been about economic recovery, productivity, the deficit, investment and international competition. But churning below the surface of these often technical discussions is a larger unease about social decline, and in particular an anxiety about the next generation of Americans.

For many people, the country's economic difficulties are a sign that its seedbed institutions, the families, schools and religious bodies that nurture character, competence, trust and civic responsibility, are coming unraveled.

Talk about productivity, human investment and international competition, for example, translates into questions about the skills of those entering the labor market. Worry about the deficit reflects guilt about saddling children and grandchildren with an unmanageable debt. Plans for renewing cities confront the reality of crime and drug abuse among the young.

Is the nation bequeathing that next generation a formidable accumulation of problems while denying the young the capacity to shoulder the burden? Has a society that always prided itself on youth and the future in fact slighted or stunted the upbringing of its children? And can the needs of children inspire a moral and political agenda that will override the nation's divisions?

Especially at this time of year, children are our images of innocence and hope. In crime-ridden neighborhoods no less than in war-torn or famine-struck lands, children are the most haunting victims.

But increasingly, children and teen-agers also provide images of brutal behavior, wasted lives and social disarray: drug dealers, crack babies, drive-by shootings, dropouts, predatory sex. Adolescent music is as likely to be about rioting and racial clashes as about romance, and not even sophisticated newspapers would print many of the sexual lyrics.

## The Old Alarms

Is this all a matter of perception? After all, in the 1950's public anxiety focused on juvenile delinquency and whether students were keeping up with the Russians. In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an Assistant Secretary of Labor, warned that the rising rate of fatherless families among black Americans might soon create a new obstacle to racial progress.

Despite an endorsement by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Moynihan warning was decried as racist. Liberals shied away from questions of family structure for two decades. Baby boomers had other things on their minds — at least until they had their own children. Weren't alarms about a breakdown in child-rearing only the perennial bursts of nostalgia for a Golden Age of clear-cut sexual mores, intact marriages and bright-eyed, studious darlings?

Increasingly, the answer is "no." Just last week an equally blunt conclusion came from the Council on Families in America, a group of 17 scholars and family experts — sociologists, economists, lawyers, psychologists, journalists, historians and religious leaders — who span the ideological spectrum.

"The evidence is strong and growing," they wrote, "that the current generation of children and youth is the first in our nation's history to be less well-off — psychologically, socially, economically and morally — than their parents were at the same age."

A fifth of the nation's children are poor, as are almost a fourth of its preschoolers and almost half of its black children. In 1970, 10 percent of the nation's children lived in one-parent households; the figure has more than doubled since then. In 1960, one in 25 children was born to an unmarried mother; now it is one in four.

Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased by 40 percent since 1985. Since 1960, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have dropped; juvenile crime has more than doubled; rates of teen-age suicide and death by homicide have more than tripled.

In the face of these findings, many are convinced that Americans can be rallied behind the cause of child welfare. They see reinforcement in the longstanding devotion of Hillary Clinton to the Children's Defense Fund (even the name suggests siege and alarm) and its passionately articulate leader, Marian Wright Edelman.

> The young are still poor, but they have political attention now.

Hopes for a national effort spanning ideological camps also sprang from an emerging consensus that neither the traditional liberal emphasis on government programs nor the traditional conservative emphasis on family stability and moral discipline will do the job alone. Health, education and anti-poverty programs would have to go hand in hand with frank endorsement of sexual and parental responsibility.

This bridging of the gap between child advocates stressing economic deprivation and other groups stressing family structure and cultural factors began with "Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families," the 1991 report of the bipartisan National Commission on Children, headed by Senator Jay Rockefeller, Democrat of West Virginia. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops also yoked the two emphases in "Putting Children and Families First," a pastoral letter released a year ago.

But the fragility of the consensus was revealed when Vice President Quayle and the Republican Party tried to seize upon "family values" as a campaign issue. Democrats renewed their suspicion that "family values" was only a slogan to divert attention from economic problems. Republicans found new proof that Democrats reflexively thought government spending was the key to everything.

So the new Administration begins straddling two schools of thought about child welfare. Both back economic measures like a family leave bill and tax reforms to aid the working poor and families with young children. Both favor expanded child health care and preschool education and vigorous efforts to collect child support from absent fathers. Both oppose strict division of family roles along gender lines.

But one school of thought insists that economic problems, and economic reforms, are only half the story. Family structure and stability, these advocates argue, are independent factors, shaped by cultural forces as well as economics and, indeed, just as likely to be the cause of economic well-being or deprivation.

"The best antipoverty program for children is a stable, intact family," Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston write in "Mandate for Change" (Berkeley, 1992), the handbook of recommendations issued by the Progressive Policy Institute, the research arm of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, which was once headed by Mr. Clinton.

In this view, a child welfare campaign requires a frank commitment to the goal of sustaining the two-parent family, using Presidential influence on initiatives to combat teen-age pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births, to slow divorce rates and protect children in divorce settlements and to press for media responsibility in influencing children and adolescents.

The other school of thought does not dispute that a stable, two-parent family is beneficial. But it inclines toward the view that other family structures might do roughly as well, given equal economic advantage, and it questions the data suggesting that family structure itself puts children at greater risk for everything from criminal behavior and teen-age pregnancy to mental illness and educational failure.

In this view, issues of family structure are best set aside as amorphous, personal and beyond the scope of government. Focusing on sexual conduct and parental responsibility, these advocates add, only rationalizes unwillingness to pay for necessary government programs.

And what society is willing to pay is unknown. "Mandate for Change" proposes giving parents an $800 tax credit (equivalent to a $5,330 exemption for the average family) for each preschool child and then phasing it down to the equivalent of the current exemption when the child is 11. They also propose an earned income tax credit that would supplement the wages of the working poor and could affect more than

Continued on page 12

THE NEW YORK TIMES Sunday, December 27, 1992

(over)

# AMERICA'S FAMILY PROBLEM

## *By David Popenoe*

Throughout our nation's history, we have depended heavily on the family to provide both social order and economic success. Families have provided for the survival and development of children, for the emotional and physical health of adults, for the special care of the sick, injured, handicapped, and elderly, and for reinforcing society's values. Today, America's families face growing problems in each of these areas and by many measures are functioning less well than ever before—less well, in fact, than in other advanced, industrialized nations.

The most serious problem concerns children. There is evidence that today's generation of children is the first in our nation's history to be less well-off psychologically, socially, and economically than their parents were at the same age.[1]

As the first social institution in human history, the family probably arose because of the need for adults to devote a great deal of time to childrearing. Coming into the world totally dependent, human infants must, for a larger portion of their lives than for any other species, be cared for and taught by adults. To a unique degree, humans nurture, protect, and educate their offspring. It is hard to conceive of a successful society, therefore, that does not have reasonably strong families—multigenerational groups of kinfolk that effectively carry out their socially assigned task of raising children to become adults who are able to love and to work, who are committed to such social values as honesty, respect, and responsibility, and who pass these values on to the next generation.

Infants and children need, at minimum, one adult to care for them. Yet given the complexities of the task, childrearing in all societies until recent years has been shared by many adults. The institutional bond of marriage between biological parents, with the essential function of tying the father to the mother and child, is found in virtually every society; in no society has nonmarital childbirth, or the single parent, been the cultural norm. In all societies the biological father is identified, and in almost all societies he plays an important role in his children's upbringing, even though his primary role is often that of protector and breadwinner.

### Family History

Over the past thirty years, the United States (along with other modern societies) has witnessed a major family transformation—the beginning of the end of the traditional nuclear family.[2] Three important changes have occurred: 1) The divorce rate increased sharply (to a level currently exceeding 50%), and some mothers decided to forego marriage, with the consequence that a sizable number of children are being raised in single-parent households, apart from other relatives; 2) married women in large numbers left the role of full-time mother and housewife to go into the labor market, and the activities of their former role have not fully been replaced; 3) the focus of many families shifted away from childrearing to the psychological well-being and self-development of their adult members. One indication of this latter focus is that parents increasingly break up—even when they have young children to raise—if their psychological and self-fulfillment needs are unmet in the marriage relationship.

We can never return to the era of the traditional nuclear family, even if we wanted to—and many women and men emphatically do not. The conditions of life that generated that family form have changed. Yet one thing that has not changed through all the years and all the family transformations is the need for children to be raised by mothers and fathers. Indeed, in modern, complex societies, in which children need an enormous amount of education and psychological security in order to succeed, active and nurturing relationships with adults may be more critical for children than ever.

Unfortunately, the amount of time children spend with adults, especially their parents, has been dropping dramatically.[3] Absent fathers, working mothers, distant grandparents, anonymous schools, and transient communities have become hallmarks of our era. There has been an associated weakening in many families, and in society as a whole, of the fundamental assumption that children are to be loved and valued at the highest level of priority. The recent decline of the family may be the single most important factor accounting for the record high, and in many cases increasing, rates among juveniles and adolescents of delinquency, suicide, depression, obesity and anorexia, drug abuse, and nonmarital pregnancies.[4] Although especially prominent in America's inner cities, high rates of personal and social problems such as these are now found at all class levels and among all sectors of our population.

### The Individualism Trend

To understand fully what has happened to the family, we must look at the broader cultural changes that have occurred, especially changes in the values and norms that condition everyday choices. Over recent centuries in industrialized and industrializing societies, there has been a gradual shift from a "collectivist" culture (a term I use with a cultural and not a political meaning) toward an individualistic culture. In the former, group goals take precedence over individual ones. "Doing one's duty," for example, is more important than "self-fulfillment," and "social bonds" are more important than "personal choice." In individualistic cultures, the welfare of the group is secondary to the importance of such personal goals as self-expression, independence, and competitiveness.[5]

Not surprisingly, individualistic societies rank higher than collectivist societies in political democracy and individual development. But the shift from collectivism to individualism involves social costs as well as personal gains—especially when it proceeds too far. Along with political democracy and individual development, individualistic societies tend to have high rates of individual deviance, juvenile delinquency and crime, loneliness, depression, suicide, and social alienation. In short, these societies have more free and independent citizens, but less social order and probably a lower level of psychological well-being.

The United States has long been known as the world's most individualistic society. Certainly, we place a high value on this aspect of our society, and it is a major reason why so many people from other countries want to come here. Yet for most of our history, this individualism has been balanced, or tempered, by a strong belief in the sanctity of accepted social organizations and institutions, such as the family, religion, voluntary associations, local communities, and even the nation as a whole. While individualistic in spirit, people's identities were rooted in these social units, and their lives were directed toward the social goals which they represented. Thus, the United States has been marked for much of its history, not by a pure form of individualism, but by what could be termed a "communitarian" or balanced individualism.

As the individualism trend has advanced, however, a more radical or "expressive" individualism has emerged, one that is largely devoted to "self-indulgence" or "self-fulfillment" at the expense of the group.[6] Today, we see a large number of people who are narcissistic or self-oriented, and who show concern for social institutions only when these directly affect their own well-being. Unfortunately, these people have a tendency to distance themselves from the social and community groupings that have long been the basis for personal security and social order. Since the 1950s, there has been a decline in people being married, visiting informally with others, and belonging to voluntary associations, and there has been an increase in the number of people living alone.[7]

The highly disturbing actions of inner-city residents evident, for example, in last spring's riots in Los Angeles could be considered less a departure from everyday American cultural reality than a gross intensification of it. Very few social and cultural trends found in the inner city are not also present in the rest of the nation. Indeed, with respect to the family, the characteristics of the black family pronounced by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 to be in a state of "breakdown" are very similar to the family characteristics of America as a whole in 1992!

In summary, for the good of both the individual and the society, the individualism trend in the United States has advanced too far. The family holds the key. People need strong families to provide them with the identity, belonging, discipline, and values that are essential for full individual development,. The social institutions of the surrounding community depend on strong families to teach those "civic" values—honesty, trust, self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, respect for others—by which they can thrive. But let us not forget that strong families depend heavily on cultural and social supports. Family life in an unsupportive community is always precarious, and the social stresses can be overwhelming.

### Not to Forget the Gains

While I have presented a fairly grim picture in describing these cultural changes, it is important to add that not every aspect of our society has deteriorated. In several key areas, this nation has seen significant social progress. For instance, we are a much more inclusive society today—segregation and racism have diminished, and we now accept more African-Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups into the mainstream. The legal, sexual, and financial emancipation of women has become a reality as never before in history. With advances in medicine, we have greater longevity and, on the whole, better physical health. And our average material standard of living, especially in the possession of consumer durables, has increased significantly.

### The Nuclear Family And Marriage

Given our nation's past ability to accept positive social change, we can have some confidence in our capacity to solve the problem of family decline. In seeking solutions, we should first consider what family structure is best able to raise children who are autonomous and socially responsible, and also able to meet adult needs for intimacy and personal attachment. Based on the available evidence, as well as the lessons of recent human experience, the family structure that unquestionably works best is the nuclear family. I am not referring to the traditional nuclear family, but rather to the nuclear family that consists of a male and female who marry and live together and share responsibility for their children and for each other.

How are the single-parent families doing? Accumulating evidence concerning the personal and social consequences of this family type paints a grim picture. A 1988 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics found, for example, that children from single-parent families are two to three times more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems than children from intact families, and reduced family income is by no means the only factor involved.[8] Many other studies could be cited.

### Toward Solutions

Of course, many people have no other choice than to live in step- and single-parent families. These families can be successful, and their members deserve our continuing support. Nevertheless, the benefits that strong nuclear families bring to a high-achieving, individualistic, and democratic society are absolutely clear. A committed marriage, for example, which is the basis of the strong nuclear family, brings enormous benefits to adults. It is ironic in this age of self-fulfillment, when people are being pulled away from marriage, that a happy marriage seems to provide the best source of self-fulfill-

ment. By virtually every measure, married individuals are better off than single individuals; quite clearly, a good marriage provides the basis for physical and mental health.

Another reason for supporting strong nuclear families is that society gains enormously when a high percentage of men are married. In general, every society must be wary of the unattached male, for he is universally the cause of numerous social ills. Healthy societies are heavily dependent on men being attached to a strong moral order, which is centered in families, both to discipline sexual behavior and to reduce competitive aggression. Men need the moral and emotional instruction of women more than vice versa. Family life, especially having children, is for men a civilizing force of no mean proportions.

It should be a source of serious concern, therefore, that men currently spend more time living apart from families than at probably any other time in American history. About a quarter of all men ages 25-34 live in nonfamily households, either alone or with an unrelated individual. In 1960, average Americans spent 62% of their adult lives with spouse and children, which was the highest in our history. By 1980, they spent 43%, the lowest in our history.[9] This trend alone may help to account for the high and rising crime rates over the past three decades. During this period, the number of reported violent crimes per capita, largely committed by unattached males, increased by 355%.

Today, a growing portion of American men are highly involved in childcare, providing more help with the children than their own fathers did. But a large number of men, because they did not stay with or marry the mothers of their children, or because of divorce, have abandoned their children entirely. In general, childrearing women have become increasingly isolated from men. This is one of the main reasons why nothing might benefit the nation more than a national drive to promote strong marriages.

**The New Familism: A Hopeful Trend**

One bright spot in this picture is what some of us have called "the new familism," a growing realization in America that, "yes, the family really is in trouble and needs help."[10] As reported elsewhere in this issue, public opinion polls indicate that nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that "family values have gotten weaker in the United States" and a majority of adults in both political parties think that "political candidates should talk about family values."

There are two groups primarily involved in this cultural mini-shift: the maturing baby boomers, now at the family stage of their life cycle, and the "babyboom echo" children of the divorce revolution. The middle-aged baby boomers, spurred by growing evidence that children have been hurt by recent family changes, have been instrumental in shifting the media in a profamily direction. And the echo children of the 1970s, even with their troubled childhoods, are coming into adulthood with a strong resolve not to repeat their parents' mistakes. They tend to put a high premium on marital permanence, perhaps because they have been unable to take the family for granted as many of their parents—the children of the familistic 1950s—did. These two groups may help the nation in the 1990s to turn away from the values of radical individualism and more fully embrace the ideals of family and other social bonds.

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# Why Have All the Fathers Gone —and Will They Come Back?

*David Blankenhorn is president of the Institute for American Values, a New York think tank devoted to networking scholars from various disciplines who study family issues. Here he discusses fatherhood with Lynn Musgrave Criner, Life editor of* THE WORLD & I.

**FAMILY ISSUES EXPERT DAVID BLANKENHORN TALKS ABOUT THE CRISIS IN AMERICAN FATHERHOOD.**

**THE WORLD & I:** ***Let's begin by talking about the state of American fatherhood.***

**David Blankenhorn:** There is a crisis of fatherhood in America today. In fact, I believe that the most socially consequential family trend of our time is fatherlessness, that is, male absence from family life. We are in a situation where one-third of the children in this country are living apart from their fathers—and if the patterns we are seeing continue, roughly half of all the American children alive today will spend a significant part of their childhoods living apart from their fathers. Thus, living without a father is approaching a rough parity with having a father as an experience of childhood.

We spent the 1970s and '80s in the family debate focusing mostly on the roles of women and the condition of children, almost as if men were secondary. And yet a lot of what is driving our social problems is men leaving their children and the mothers of their children—that is the big dynamic.

**W&I:** ***What factors do you think have allowed the problem to reach these proportions?***

**Blankenhorn:** I have asked myself, "Have there been changes in American culture that have disproportionately affected men?" And I think there have been.

ALL PHOTOS BY JOHN HARRINGTON / THE WORLD & I

DAVID BLANKENHORN TALKS WITH HIS WIFE, RAINA.

Culture typically tells men—and this has been true throughout human history—that what they are supposed to do is to be good family men. The main way that culture harnesses maleness to a social purpose is to tell men that they should be good husbands and fathers.

But when a culture does not do that, men tend to become isolated and therefore more prone to violence. Conservatives such as James Q. Wilson and liberals such as Myriam Miedzian remind us that poorly socialized males constitute the essential source of violence and crime in all societies. Margaret Mead has suggested that the supreme cultural imperative is the challenge of socializing men.

So OK, our culture today increasingly does not encourage men to be good husbands and fathers. The culture tells them that there are many possible options. They may choose to be good family men, but they may also choose not to be. There are many competing norms of masculinity out there, and family norms for men are getting weaker.

So—just to be concrete about it—a guy sitting in his office thirty years ago thinking that his wife was getting older and that his secretary was young and pretty and that maybe he should have an affair lived in a culture that was pretty hostile to that possible course of action on his part. Today there is still some disapproval, but much less.

**W&I:** ***Certainly culture affects everyone in a society, though.***

**Blankenhorn:** Of course the culture affects both men and women, but very rarely do women abandon their children, although crack does do that to some mothers.

**W&I:** ***So men are more in need of culture to link them to***

***their children?***

**Blankenhorn:** Yes, I think so. It appears that the attachment of men to their families is more culturally defined. But when men are separated from women and children, which is increasingly the case today, they do things like die a lot earlier and fill up the jails. They don't eat well, get depressed, and especially as they grow older, become narcissistic. In other words, many of them just self-destruct.

**W&I:** ***So you think our culture is at the root of the declining number of two-parent families?***

**Blankenhorn:** I do not believe that changes in the economy can fully explain the changes in the American man's relationship to the family. I do not believe that bad policies of the government are determinative here either, although welfare rules certainly work against family formation for some.

Of course economics and policies play an important role. But what I believe is that we as a society have simply changed our minds over the past three decades about the value of the family. There's been a values shift, a change of philosophy. We have changed our minds in the direction of expressive individualism, and that is the philosophy that dominates our culture, especially elite culture.

The story that we're increasingly telling is that our principal responsibility is to ourselves. The key concepts are independence, autonomy, self-realization, self-actualization, self-expression. These go to the fore. What gets displaced is loyalty to any purpose larger than the self. And that's the shift.

The clear losers have been the children (who are dependent on other people). Neither Democrats nor Republicans nor social scientists nor anyone else disputes that the key indicators of child well-being are declining.

**W&I:** ***But many of the values embodied in the "new" culture have been around for quite a while.***

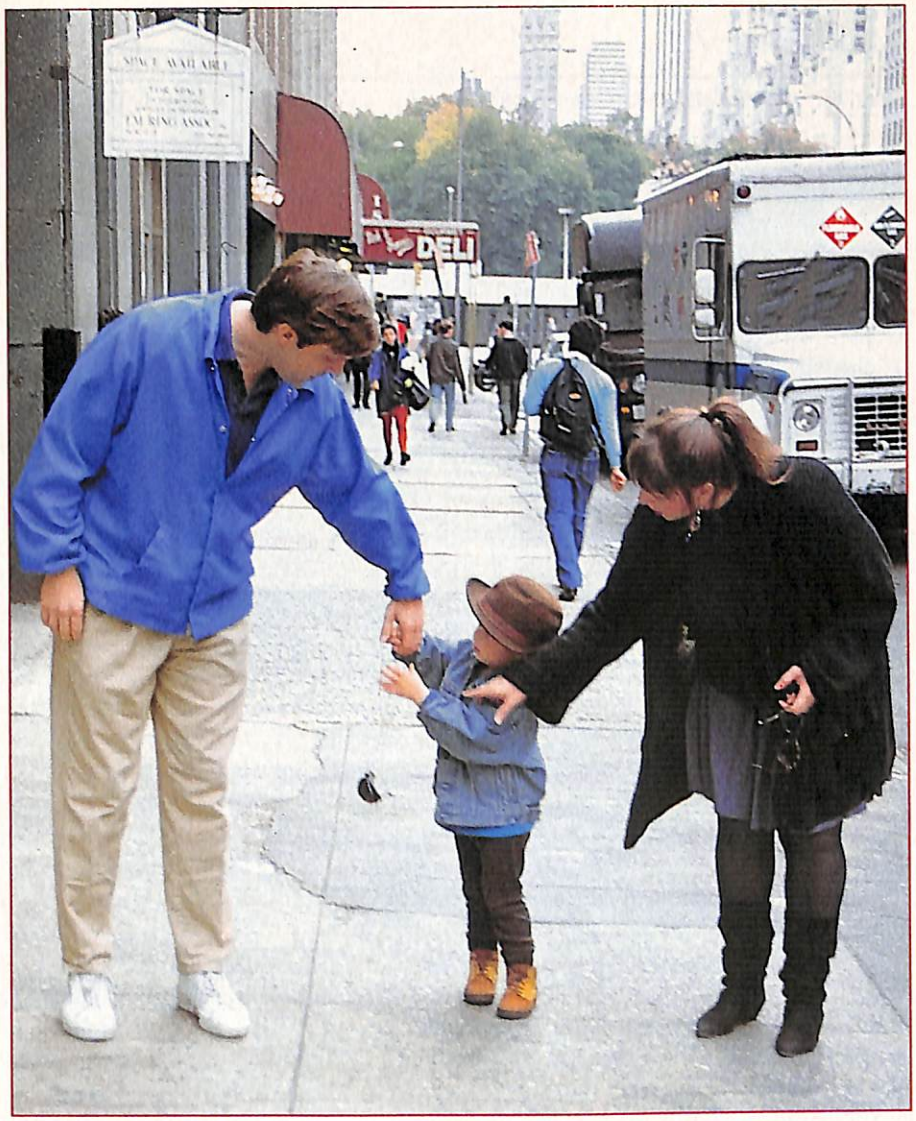
**Blankenhorn:** Yes, you know we have always had the male hero who was a male individualist, the one who cannot achieve what he must achieve to be a hero if he is tangled up with a wife and children. But now the whole culture has shifted so that the family is seen as an obstacle rather than the pathway to self-fulfillment, a drag on personal freedom. Historically, that has been the viewpoint of adolescent males. Now grown men are culturally supported to tell their wives and children "Bye" and quit their jobs. I don't think that makes men feel happy about their manhood, and I don't think families stay together as well under these circumstances. In fact, the situation is becoming an unmitigated disaster, especially from the child's viewpoint.

**W&I:** ***Could you describe some aspects of the "disaster," as you put it?***

**Blankenhorn:** Sure. Growing up in a single-parent household increases the likelihood that a child will be raised in poverty. According to Wade Horn, commissioner of children, youth, and families at Health and Human Services, between 70 and 75 percent of the kids in these homes are poor for some time in their childhoods, whereas only about 20 percent of the children in two-parent families experience poverty.

And kids without fathers have more problems in school. Cornell family studies professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, for example, finds that children growing up without their fathers have more behavioral problems. (This remains true even when differences in income are taken into account.) They exhibit more extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal, lack of attentiveness in school, and poor academic achievement. As teenagers, they more often smoke, drink, engage in early and frequent sexual experiences, and, in more extreme cases, use drugs, commit suicide, and become involved in vandalism, violence, and criminal acts. The most important predictor of crime among juveniles is fatherlessness. Fatherlessness predicts crime in a way that race and income do not. Boys engaging in sexual violence against women also tracks pretty closely with father absence.

An important predictor of a young woman having a child outside of marriage is that she grew up without a father. Studies of the




THE BLANKENHORNS OUT WALKING IN NEW YORK CITY'S STREETS WITH THEIR SON, RAYMOND.

intergenerational consequences of fatherless homes show that among white families, daughters of single mothers are 53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers, 111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers, 164 percent more likely to have premarital births, and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages. Clinicians tell us that girls learn about men in large part through their fathers. They learn from fathers what they want in their own partners. If they don't have fathers, problems are more likely to develop.

For boys, a father is the gateway into manhood. What does it mean to be a man? Clinical studies show that for most boys, there is a period of separation from their mothers during which boys become very interested in what it means to be a male. They draw away from their mothers and seek to pattern themselves after their fathers because they are searching for the meaning of their maleness. They cannot find that answer through their mothers. So if there is no father there, the boy has a problem.

**W&I:** ***So let's change the focus and talk about what makes fathers stay with their families and what makes a good father good.***

**Blankenhorn:** Well, many of the most important family values are shared equally by fathers and mothers. Families prosper when the parents put their families ahead of themselves. For these parents their family bonds are not contingent on fluctuations in their feelings and is less a calculation than a faith. They love their children at the highest level of priority and willingly sacrifice for them.

Traditionally, a good father protects his family. A practical question to test this idea: The family is asleep upstairs. An intruder is heard, apparently breaking in. Everyone is scared. Who goes downstairs?

A good father works to provide for the family's material needs; that is, he works not as an alternative to family life but as an expression of his commitment to it. Along with the mother, he de-

BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD, A SCHOLAR ASSOCIATED WITH THE INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES, MEETS WITH DAVID BLANKENHORN.

votes himself to the moral education of his children, and represents his family's interests in the larger world. While both parents contribute to the competence and character of their children, fathers, I believe, are more focused on the children's performance in the world outside the home.

**W&I:** ***Are there other ways that fathers are thought to function that are different from mothers?***

**Blankenhorn:** Studies show that fathers spend proportionately more time playing with their infant sons and daughters than mothers do. Moreover, fathers engage in more physically vigorous, rough-and-tumble play. Mothers are more often a special source of comfort and soothing. A father's play with his infant foreshadows his later role with his child, which is less symbiotic and more dissonant than his wife's. Some have argued that fathers thus help their children feel more comfortable in strange situations.

**W&I:** ***Why do you think families used to stay together more?***

**Blankenhorn:** Well, we just recently went to the fiftieth wedding anniversary of some relatives, and I heard a story that I think says a lot about that. About a hundred people gathered to have a big party, and it was very moving. A lot of tears, a lot of happiness, a lot of memories. I told the husband, "You're really an inspiration to me. Some people don't think an anniversary like this is a big deal. Well, let me tell you, it's a big deal." And he said, "You know, my mother, an immigrant, she told me fifty years ago when I was about to get married (she told me in Yiddish, but the rough translation is): 'You're going to do this thing? That's it!'" Final. Case closed. If you've decided to do this, it's permanent. Don't tell me you've changed your mind. I won't discuss it with you. He is in his seventies now and he said, "You know, if I hadn't believed that—you know, it's hard. There may be some people for whom every day is perfect. They're madly in love every day, year in and year out. They have few problems. But for most people, it's hard. But we decided, and that was it." Today in our culture, we don't think like that so much anymore.

**W&I:** ***What do you think could be done to encourage more men to become family men?***

**Blankenhorn:** In Washington, D.C., a lot of people's eyes just glaze over and they think you are blowing smoke at them when you tell them that what is required is that we have to change our minds again. We have to agree on the importance of men being good fathers, and there is no political or economic shortcut. Shifting the culture, changing our minds, is what is required. Now how you get people to change their views in a democratic, free society? For one thing, by making a good argument.

But in the area of policy and economics, there are some things we can do. I'm a member of the National Commission on America's Urban Families, and we have been traveling around the country studying urban families. Where we have been recently, in South

Central Los Angeles, black community and church leaders and people in the neighborhood testify against the current welfare system. They say that it is "slavery" because it is pushing the male away from the family. A mother generally cannot qualify for welfare unless she is unemployed and is not married to an employed man. So even if a father wants to live with his family and be a father to his children, the incentive is skewed in the other direction. I hope we will find a way to help people, not harm them.

People often ask for policy recommendations, and I am writing a book together with some colleagues here at the Institute for American Values that makes suggestions. I would like us to change the tax code and enhance the marriage deduction, for example.

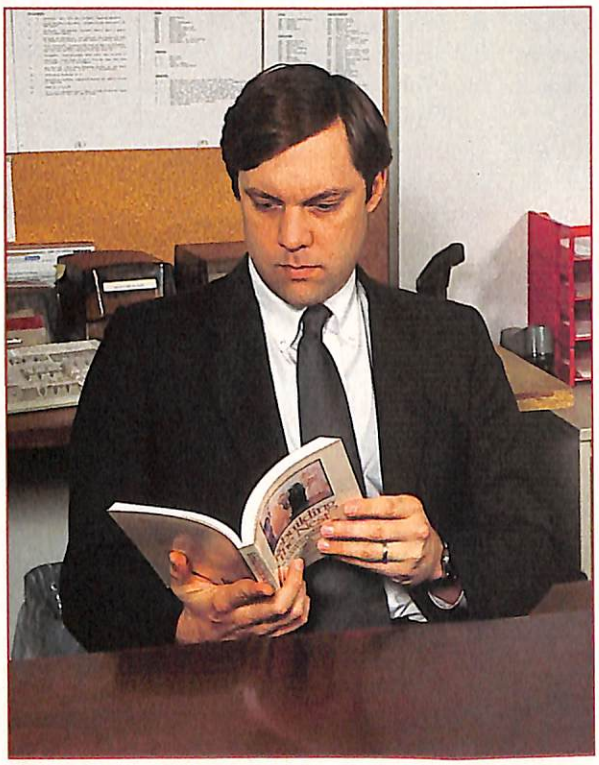
**W&I:** ***How about influencing the role models shown to kids on television and in the movies?***

**Blankenhorn:** The commission met out in Los Angeles with TV writers and movie producers. The writers and producers feel that they are telling stories based on good moral ideas with high-level content. I disagree. On the one hand, they say that they have great influence when it comes to such messages as environmental concern. But when it comes to what amounts to a teenage boy's version of sexual fantasy pumped into people's homes twenty-four hours a day in ever more explicit terms, their view is that what they do has no influence on anyone. Parents believe the opposite. There is a gulf between the epistemology of the creative people and the parents. At every critical point there is a divergent opinion. And the creative people are far too certain of their own creative, aesthetic, and moral superiority to be persuaded by the parents.

**W&I:** ***Tell me about the Institute for American Values?***

**Blankenhorn:** I began a few years ago by meeting with scholars who study the family—people like David Popenoe at Rutgers and Mary Ann Glendon at Harvard. And rather quickly it was clear that there was a niche that the institute could fill because, while there were scholars already working on the family, there weren't many opportunities for them to work together. A big buzzword for us is interdisciplinary deliberation—that is, we can bring people together from a variety of different disciplines. A typical conference of ours has a lawyer next to a theologian next to a psychologist next to a sociologist next to a philosopher next to a historian. And this is wonderful from their point of view, because what they care about is family issues but they are frequently too segregated in their departments.

We are a big table in terms of the partisan aspects of the topic. When it comes to family and medical leave legislation, for example, some of us think one thing and some of us think another. But there is still what one of our colleagues calls the "shock of mutual recognition." All of a sudden you are part of something where there is a basis for conversation. You can understand the language that is being used, and there is a com-



BLANKENHORN CHECKS A PASSAGE IN *REBUILDING THE NEST*, A STUDY OF AMERICAN FAMILIES PRODUCED BY THE INSTITUTE.

BLANKENHORN HOLDS HIS SON, RAYMOND, WHO IS SPARRING WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

mon interest in an inquiry. So our niche is bringing people together from various disciplines who may be liberal or conservative but are committed to inquiry.

One of the things that the institute was saying early on—I can show you some of the very early articles—was that family issues were going to emerge as an important national topic. So one of the things that we predicted turned out to be accurate. Another thing that makes me feel good is that when journalists do stories on the family, they often interview the scholars who work on our programs.

**W&I:** ***Where do you see things going from here?***

**Blankenhorn:** I believe that one of the big achievements of the family debate in the last several years has been the emergence of a fragile bipartisan consensus that, other things being equal, children do best when they grow up with both of their parents. This idea was for years a very contested idea, but following the National Commission on Children chaired by Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, a new level of consensus was forged.

So this issue that had been fought through in the academic world in the seventies and eighties and emerged in the late eighties and early nineties as a fragile consensus reflected in many publications, such as *Fortune* magazine or the Communitarian journal, *The Responsive Community*, which is an important new intellectual initiative.

What has happened in the last six months is that that consensus has been challenged, and we are now seeing the emergence of a counteroffensive or backlash against the idea. I think this is a result of people's cynicism about the way the family issue has been used in the political campaigns. There may be other reasons. In any case, this most important intellectual achievement of the last five years is now being assaulted.

I would offer as evidence a front page story the *Washington Post* ran in September asserting that a "searching reevaluation by social scientists" was revealing that the consequences of father absence were "far less critical to the healthy development of children than had been previously believed." Maybe it was just a coincidence that this front page article ran on the same day as the first episode of this season's *Murphy Brown*, which was surrounded by an amazing amount of hype. In the *New York Times*, there has been a drumbeat of stories celebrating life-style diversity coupled with an assault on the notion that there is anything particularly good about the two-parent family.

Thus I am concerned that the academic findings to the contrary will be swept away or redefined as a partisan position. I had thought we could move on to some more interesting arguments because this part of the debate was over. But

now it seems we're just going to have to keep on working on this seemingly simple point.

The *Washington Post* article was wrong. The newspaper was not revealing the latest trend in scholarship, which is, in fact, in exactly the opposite direction. The idea that family structure does not matter and that what really matters are other things such as family process or income and educational achievement—this set of ideas was very popular in the seventies, and the main scholarly trend since then has moved strongly in the opposite direction. Current studies are mixed, of course, and one can go through them on a point-by-point basis. But once you have done that—once you have gone through all the studies—you are clear that the preponderance of the scientific evidence currently available supports the need for the two-parent home. I find it astonishing that the *Washington Post* would put such a blatantly inaccurate story on the front page.

Now it will be necessary for scholars to produce more surveys of the literature and to carefully go through the process once again of publicizing the studies that have been done. More objective, careful, bipartisan reports on the literature must be made. Of course, in the final analysis, you cannot prove anything about causation using only the tools of social science. Anytime anybody makes a point, it is always possible to make a different point. But that said, the scholarly debate on the two-parent home is one of the most one-sided areas within the social sciences.

**W&I:** ***But surely other things are happening that will impact on the future of fatherhood.***

**Blankenhorn:** Yes. One effort I'm involved in is releasing a new report. After interviewing urban families all over the country about their concerns, the National Commission on America's Urban Families is making recommendations that will hopefully help to strengthen marital bonds and parent-child relationships and improve community support for families. There is more consensus about these issues at the grass roots than in the rarified precincts of elite discourse. Especially in the black community, people have spoken with conviction and a sense of urgency about bringing fathers back into the lives of children.

Gang violence and teen pregnancy are sometimes presented as the whole story regarding the black community, and black fathers don't get much media attention. The good guys raising their children and keeping their families together are succeeding against the grain of things. Stress and breakup of the family unit are things they see around them every day, and they often have less of an economic cushion to soften the blows.

Single parents are generally the most vocal critics of single parenthood. It takes a lot of work for one person to do the work of two, especially in a situation in which there is stress and economic deprivation. The idea that single parents celebrate single parenthood as some kind of desirable lifestyle is simply not true for most of them. They may be proud of their kids and doing the best they can under the circumstances. But they have no illusion that theirs is some sort of optimal arrangement. If you want a realistic understanding of the difficulties involved in single parenting, just ask people who are doing it.

**W&I:** ***What kind of people are on the commission?***

**Blankenhorn:** It's a bipartisan commission, though we were all appointed by President Bush. It consists of people from all sorts of backgrounds and political persuasions. It is headed by John Ashcroft, governor of Missouri and recent chairman of the National Governor's Association. The cochair is Annette Strauss, the former mayor of Dallas. The mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee, Victor Ashe, is a member, and so is Irene Johnson, an important tenants leader from Chicago. I myself come from a background that includes some academic study, but also a history as a community organizer working in poor communities. At the time I began the institute, I wanted to create a think tank that would provide an ideological framework for the community-organizing movement. It was gradual immersion in literature on the family that led me to a more academic pursuit of family issues.■

# Lost in transition: A gem on the value of the American family

The Philadelphia Inquirer **Commentary** Sunday, March 14, 1993

By **DONALD KIMELMAN**

On Jan. 14 the National Commission on America's Urban Families, after months of hearings, discussions, focus groups and the like, reported its findings to the President. Its timing could hardly have been worse.

Six days later, George Bush, who had ordered this bipartisan examination of the declining state of the American family, left office. The commission's work and its intriguing conclusion were ignored.

That's unfortunate because the commission, co-chaired by Missouri Gov. John Ashcroft and former Dallas Mayor Annette Strauss, took an unblinking look at the dismal trend in family fragmentation and showed how it relates to the problems of crime, delinquency, poverty, drug abuse, educational failure and mental illness.

What's more, it pointed up the central flaw of existing social programs — including some like Head Start that President Clinton is trying to expand: They treat the consequences of family failure, but don't do anything to help reverse the trend.

And unless the trend is reversed — unless the rates of divorce and illegitimate birth start going *down* — society itself will continue to deteriorate.

The commission proposes an "overarching national goal" that is simple in concept, yet hard to achieve: "To increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents in supportive communities and to decrease the proportion who don't."

To some that may sound like unwelcome government moralizing. But the report is a far cry from the ideological harping on "family values" that turned off so many voters last year.

Rather, it is a solid and even inspiring discourse on the *value of family* — its centrality to our health as a society. And it is full of ways that policymakers can act to strengthen the family, rather than just futilely trying to pick up the pieces.

David Blankenhorn, a leading expert on family policy who sat on the commission, says that traditional policymakers generally see the staggering levels of divorce and out-of-wedlock births as a given, something beyond the reach of government. Their focus is on ameliorating the consequences.

Marian Wright Edelman, Hillary Rodham Clinton's mentor and head of the Children's Defense Fund, fits that mold. Just last Thursday she was railing at how "we," meaning society, "failed pregnant women and children in the 1980s." Her antidote: "a national health-care system that puts pregnant women and children first." No mention of fathers and their obligations.

Blankenhorn, while generally supportive of efforts to do more for those in need, argues that the strategies that liberal activists like Edelman favor "don't offer a credible way to reverse the current trend in child well-being." The only credible way, he says, is to reverse family decline.

While Edelman has her adherents in the new administration, so does Blankenhorn. William Galston, a former University of Maryland professor whose views on the primacy of strong families are quoted favorably in the commission report, is now a top domestic adviser in the Clinton White House.

So there are the makings of a healthy debate, which is all the more reason that the commission's report should get some attention.

The grim statistics are, by now, well known. Out-of-wedlock births have climbed steadily since the 1950s to the point where one out of every four children is now born to an unmarried woman. In a big city like Philadelphia the ratio is a staggering three out of five.

After soaring during the 1960s and 1970s, divorce rates leveled off in the 1980s — but at historically high levels.

A white child born today has roughly a one in two chance of living with both parents until the age of 18. For a black child the odds are 1 in 12.

Noting how the trend in family breakdown has affected all levels of society — nearly one in five *rural* children now live in single-parent homes — the commission stressed that "America's family problem is not a problem of 'them.' It is a problem of 'us.'"

Obviously, plenty of single mothers do a great job in raising healthy kids and plenty of two-parent families do a miserable job. But broader studies show that children from intact, two-parent families generally do much better on every indicator that counts. In its public hearings, the commission received its most ringing endorsements of two-parent families from single mothers.

All of us intrinsically understand the value of families to individual children, but the commission sought to define the value of families to society as a whole: "The family is the principal institution in society that teaches what has been called 'obedience to the unenforceable,': The basic societal and civic values of trustworthiness, civility and compassion, which cannot be enforced by laws but which are essential underpinnings of both personal happiness and societal success.

"If children do not acquire these basic traits of character and competence in the home, it is quite possible they will never acquire them fully. In this sense, families are society's irreplaceable schools for citizenship and civic responsibility."

But what do we do if these "irreplaceable schools" are failing their pupils? We can't exactly fire the principals or offer the kids greater choice.

**The commission is not deterred: While acknowledging that much of change has to occur within the culture itself, it offers a welter of ways that government can reinforce families.**

They range from providing bigger tax breaks for parents to changing the rules for public housing to actually encourage, rather than tacitly discourage, tenants to marry.

Blankenhorn puts primary emphasis on three major shifts:

- Change divorce laws to eliminate easy, "no-fault" divorce where children are involved and to require mandatory counseling before a couple with children can formally dissolve their marriage.
- Allow parents to spend more time with their children. That includes government-sponsored family leave laws as well as workplace changes that permit more flexible hours and arrangements.
- Rewrite the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program, the main welfare law, to place a two-year limit on receiving assistance, after which recipients would be required to work.

"AFDC is the only program that provides direct payments to people on the sole condition that they have children out of marriage," Blankenhorn says. "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that's wrong."

All of these changes are well within the realm of possibility. The commission's welfare reform proposal comes right out of the Clinton playbook. The question is whether they can actually make a difference, particularly in the face of economic instability that only increases the stress on families.

But that sort of handwringing misses the point of the commission's report.

We don't really have a choice here. If Americans don't reverse the trend in family decline, we're sunk.

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Donald Kimelman is deputy editor of the Editorial Page.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 1993

## *Quayle Watch*

We, too, are impressed with the extraordinary article on the state of the American family by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead in the current issue of the Atlantic magazine. One can't but notice the striking cover, "Dan Quayle Was Right." This got our editor's pen to twitching, and it moved across the Atlantic cover to write: Dan Quayle *Is* Right. Right, Murphy?

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The Washington Post

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 1993

*David S. Broder*

# Quayle: Right on the Family

In a week when the future of Russia is hanging in the balance and the fate of President Clinton's first budget is being debated, it may seem frivolous to write about anything else. But believe me, the topic of this column is not frivolous.

It is the American family, whose condition, according to three reports that appeared within days of each other, is alarming.

William J. Bennett, the always provocative former secretary of education and drug czar, now working at the Hudson Institute, introduced an "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators" at a Heritage Foundation press conference. The 19 indicators, he said, show that "over the last three decades, we have experienced substantial social regression," particularly in matters related to families and children.

Since 1960, he reported, "there has been a 560 percent increase in violent crime; more than a 400 percent increase in illegitimate births; a quadrupling of divorce rates; a tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent homes; more than a 200 percent increase in the teen-age suicide rate; and a drop of almost 80 points in the SAT [pre-college scholastic aptitude test] scores."

No sooner had that bleak message been absorbed than I picked up the latest issue of the Aspen Institute Quarterly, also devoted to children and families. David Gergen, the estimable editor-at-large of U.S. News & World Report, wrote the introductory essay for a volume based on papers prepared for an Aspen "domestic strategy group," co-chaired by conservative Bennett and liberal Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.).

According to Gergen, an Aspen seminar last summer brought together a variety of experts, among them both strong advocates and sharp critics of past government welfare programs and found "interesting convergences" of views; no unanimity, but "more common ground here than is often supposed."

*The condition of the American family, according to three reports that appeared within days of each other, is alarming.*

The main points of agreement are that "our children are in worse shape than generally thought," and that they have been victimized by cultural trends (particularly the rise in divorce and illegitimacy), the abandonment of traditional values and the worsening economic conditions of many poor and middle-class parents.

Whatever their particular agenda, Gergen said, the participants agreed that "the best anti-poverty program for children is a stable, intact family." The person whose words Gergen is quoting is William A. Galston, a University of Maryland political analyst who has been brought onto the White House staff by President Clinton specifically to work on family policy.

In his essay, Galston acknowledges the relevance of both economic and cultural factors. He says that "the two most important forces affecting children for the worse in the past generation have been declining economic prospects for young, poorly educated male workers and the accelerated movement toward single-parent households."

Reflecting on what government can and cannot do, Galston says, "Returning to a higher-wage, higher-productivity growth track is not just an issue for the American economy, but for America's children and families as well. Reversing the trends of the past generation toward non-marriage and divorce poses even more complex challenges, but I am pessimistic that we can do more than scratch the surface of our social ills without real movement in that direction."

The policy debate is not new. Rival advocacy groups such as the liberal Children's Defense Fund and the conservative Family Research Council have been arguing for their favorite policies for years. But it is significant, I think, that conservatives now embrace some government economic policies, like the earned income tax credit or higher personal exemptions for dependents, while liberals now acknowledge the centrality of values like family stability, personal responsibility and work.

That is why the third of the week's reports is so significant. In last year's campaign, what could have been an important debate on family policy took a disastrous turn when a speech writer for Dan Quayle inserted into a serious and sensible speech on that subject a paragraph criticizing television character Murphy Brown for her single motherhood.

The press went crazy, and thereafter, any real discussion was buried in hoo-haws over Quayle and Murphy Brown.

Now, Atlantic magazine has taken almost half its April issue to bring the topic back into serious public debate in an article by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead summarizing much of the current research on the topic. But the real value is its cover, which will be seen on newsstands by millions of non-subscribers. In billboard-size type, it says:

"DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT. After decades of public dispute about so-called family diversity, the evidence from social-science research is coming in: The dissolution of two-parent families, though it may benefit the adults involved, is harmful to many children, and dramatically undermines our society."

That's the point.

Institute For American Values
1841 Broadway Suite 211
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*Policymakers are beginning to realize the dangers of the decline in the traditional, two-parent household.*

The Atlanta Journal / The Atlanta Constitution Sunday, March 28, 1993

# National effort can ward off bleak future for America's children

**By David Blankenhorn**

New York — The central domestic policy challenge of our era is to reverse the trend of decline in the well-being of children.

The only feasible strategy for achieving that goal is to reverse the trend of family fragmentation. To do that, we have to increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents and decrease the proportion who do not.

This conclusion is now bipartisan.

Earlier this year, the National Commission on America's Urban Families, a bipartisan presidential panel on which I served, warned that "no domestic trend is more threatening to the well-being of our children and to our long-term national security" than "the steady disintegration of the mother-father child-raising unit."

As my colleague Barbara Dafoe Whitehead concluded in her review of the evidence in the April issue of The Atlantic Monthly: "If we fail to come to terms with the relationship between family structure and declining child well-being, then it will be increasingly difficult to improve children's life prospects, no matter how many new programs the federal government funds."

We need a credible national agenda for reversing the trend of family fragmentation. Here are some ideas:

## Suggestions from the National Commission on Children

The National Commission on Children, whose members included then-Gov. Bill Clinton, spent 2 1/2 years studying the nation's children. The panel will officially go out of business next week, after convening child advocates from around the country and leaving hundreds of pages of conclusions and recommendations behind.

**CONCLUSION**

The condition of children's lives and their future prospects largely reflect the well-being of their families. When families are strong, stable and loving, children have a sound basis for becoming caring and competent adults. When families are unable to give children the affection and attention they need and to provide for their material needs, children are far less likely to achieve their full potential.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That individuals and society reaffirm their commitment to forming and supporting strong, stable families as the best environment for raising children.
- That parents share responsibility for planning their families, delaying pregnancy until they are financially and emotionally capable of assuming the obligations of parenthood. Public support for family planning services should be sustained to ensure that all families, regardless of income, can plan responsibly.
- That government and private employers establish family-oriented policies — including family and medical leave policies, flexible work scheduling alternatives and career sequencing.
- That federal, state and local governments, in partnership with private and community organizations, develop and expand community-based family support programs.
- That government at all levels, communities and employers continue to improve the availability, affordability and quality of child care services.

▶ Reform marriage laws to put the emphasis on the social importance of enduring marriages. In cases of divorce, establish "children first" legislation to protect, first and foremost, the needs of children and custodial parents.

To help remove child custody as a bargaining chip for divorcing couples, legislatures should adopt the "primary caretaker" rule: a rebuttable presumption in favor of granting custody to the parent who is already providing most day-to-day child care. Legislatures also should consider moving away from easy, no-fault divorce when the divorce is contested and when minor children are involved.

▶ Discourage unwed parenthood and offer marital incentives. Parents, religious leaders, educators, legislators, entertainers, sports stars and others should convey the clear message that unwed parenthood is socially destructive. In recent decades, our society has changed its mind toward acceptance of out-of-wedlock childbirth. Today, 27 percent of all births occur to unmarried mothers. It is time to change our minds again.

Increase the incentive for marriage in the federal tax code by raising the standard marriage deduction to twice the level of the single-earner deduction. And restore income splitting for couples to lower overall tax bills.

▶ Replace the current welfare system. Welfare undermines marriage by subsidizing unwed parenthood and penalizing responsible fatherhood. Over a five-year period, phase out Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Replace it with an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, which helps low-wage workers. Provide a guaranteed opportunity for employment for all in need — if necessary, through public works projects and community service. While AFDC is being phased out, benefits should be tied to promoting parental responsibility such as assuring that children attend school and visit doctors.

▶ Favor married couples in public housing. Many of the problems in public housing — crime, drugs, gangs and violence — stem from the virtual absence of married couples, especially husbands. We should change rent and other regulations explicitly to encourage the re-entry in public housing of married couples.

▶ Identify the father of every child born in the United States. In about three of every four cases of out-of-wedlock childbirth, the father is never legally identified. No mothers should receive public assistance without identifying the fathers of their children.

Enforce the obligations of fathers to support their children financially.

▶ Refocus education. Increasingly, school curricula refrain from emphasizing the value of marriage and two-parent families, and instead stress the value of family "diversity." We help no one by deceiving children, or ourselves, about the conditions that are best for children.

Each year, the president should report to the nation on the well-being of America's families. The report should seek to stimulate national debate and reflection regarding current trends in family and child well-being.

I do not pretend that this list is exhaustive or definitive. Others could add more, and maybe even better, ideas. But I do insist that the real issue is not that we don't know what to do. The issue is whether we want to do it.

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*David Blankenhorn is president of the Institute for American Values, a New York-based research organization concerned with family issues.*

The Washington Post

MONDAY, APRIL 5, 1993

*William Raspberry*

# Courage to Say the Obvious

I was groping for an analogy to explain why so many servicemen insist that they have served with (and admired) men they believe to be homosexual while at the same time objecting to a policy that would welcome avowed gays into the military. Here's what I said:

"I know hundreds of single mothers—some divorced or widowed, some never married. Many have earned my admiration for the way they have managed to raise strong, decent children with solid values. I would be appalled if anyone suggested withholding from these admirable women any opportunity or privilege based solely on their status as single mothers.

"And yet I'd worry about any policy that seemed likely to produce very many more single mothers—not because I don't like single mothers but because I have serious concerns for a society that does not see the importance of encouraging two-parent families."

I repeat the flawed analogy not to re-open the discussion of gays in the military, or to debate whether anyone can be influenced into being gay—only to demonstrate how difficult it is to talk about the problem of single-parent families. Listen to one woman's reaction, and you'll see what I mean:

"I am constantly exposed to people who look down upon single parenting as if it's some type of disease. And now I'm confronted with the comparison to homosexuality. It's just too much. There is nothing abnormal about struggling alone to raise your family. What's unacceptable is the number of fathers that are missing and are not taking their rightful places in the family. What's unacceptable is people like you who instead of congratulating and offering some sense of support to a single female head of household instead compare our struggle to homosexuals.

"I wish we did live in a perfect environment where every child is wanted, loved and cared for in a household with mother and father . . . But we don't. Until things change to bring fathers back, and single caring males back to our communities to take responsibility for our children, we single parents will continue to do the job of two. Please apologize to the single parent. You owe us that."

This exchange took place in mid-February. What calls it to mind now is the suddenly sensible talk about the importance of families—much of it sparked by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's cover story in the April issue of Atlantic magazine: "Dan Quayle Was Right."

Most of what Whitehead says in her long piece is common sense. Children of two-parent homes tend to be better off on almost every count: less likely to be poor or economically insecure, more likely to do well in school, less likely to become dependent adults, more likely to go to college, less likely to be involved in crime.

We know all these things but hesitate to say them lest we appear to "look down upon single parents as if it's some type of disease."

Amazingly, we seem unable to find a way to say two noncontradictory things: (1) Single parents need help, not condemnation, in their excruciatingly difficult job—and that help must come from family, community and government. (2) It is not in our interest to make policies that lead to more single-parent families.

*Kids having a mom and a dad is more important to society than recycling aluminum cans.*

It's not the first time we've run into this particular dilemma. We still haven't figured out how to rescue pregnant teenagers—to treat them with tenderness and respect while helping them to complete their education—without giving other teens the impression we think there's nothing wrong with adolescent sex.

The point is not that there's anything wrong with particular single mothers or that they owe it to society to grab and marry the first available man. The point is to help the young not-yet parents understand what we know very well: that their children will be better off if mom and dad are both there, committed, full time. And we need to remind ourselves that the increase in the proportion of single-parent households—or, as I prefer to think of it, fatherless families—is already changing our society in disturbing ways, with the clear prospect of worse to come.

We know these things, and we need to find the courage to say them.

Chester Finn, former assistant secretary of education, had it right three years ago. To acknowledge the clear advantages of two-parent families is not enough, he said. "We need to teach it, preach it, to persuade people of it. It's a whole lot more important to the society's future than stopping smoking or lowering cholesterol levels or recycling aluminum cans."

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# Two-parent advantage is for real

By **BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD**

I hardly thought I would need to say more on the subject of family breakdown than I have already said in my lengthy cover story in this month's Atlantic magazine. However, I must respond to Rick Nichols' careless, distorted description of my argument that appeared in The Inquirer on April 1.

My main point is simple. Increasing numbers of American children now face a relatively new form of childhood disadvantage called family disruption. Current social science research is quite clear on this matter: The trends of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing are damaging to children.

Especially when accompanied by the more classic forms of childhood disadvantage — such as poverty, bad schools, inadequate health care and lack of economic opportunity — the disadvantage of growing up without two parents is a powerful generator of poor outcomes for children.

As I make clear, family breakdown is the result of both economic and cultural factors. In responding to the problem, therefore, both factors must be taken into account. For example, many young men need greater access to good education and good jobs if they are to be responsible providers for their children. Call that economics. At the same time, men who father children must understand that a good man, whatever his circumstances, does not ignore his obligation to his child. Call that culture.

Take another example. There are many government programs that help children. Yet while public spending on children has never been higher, child well-being in our society continues to decline. Why? Because our public investment in children has been far outweighed by our private disinvestment — particularly the parental (especially paternal) disinvestments of time and money that inevitably accompany family breakup.

Thus, government programs that help children cannot keep pace with parental behavior that hurts them. From these facts, I conclude that the only realistic response is to focus not simply on more government programs that help children, but also, and especially, on ways to encourage family formation and family stability. Nichols seems unable to grasp this idea.

Instead, he wants to polarize. To him, there are two kinds of people: those who "preach at people" and those who "act to help them." If you do one, you cannot do the other.

If you say that family disruption matters a lot, you must believe that nothing else matters at all. If you care about cultural solutions, you must be hostile to economic and public policy solutions. Conveniently, he overlooks the specific public policy proposals I offer in my article.

These proposals, intended in large part to give children the economic advantage of two parents, include a federalized system of child support collection, jobs programs for young inner-city men, an expanded earned-income tax credit and reform of no-fault divorce laws.

*Public spending on children has never been higher, yet child well-being continues to decline.*

For The Inquirer / JOHN OVERMYER

Nichols misunderstands my argument because, in my view, he clings to an obsolete understanding of our policy debate. Lapsing into the stale terms of horserace journalism, he portrays today's family debate as between moralists and realists: the ideological, judgmental proponents of "family values" versus the nuts-and-bolts pragmatists who advocate new public policies.

Given only these two choices, defined as mutually exclusive, it is not hard to imagine which one, in Nichols' estimation, comes out ahead. Public programs over private conduct. Spending over preaching. Savvy Lisbeth Schorr over dopey Dan Quayle. The only trouble is that most people are now abandoning this simplistic way of thinking about the family.

Popular opinion on this matter, for example, is remarkably sensible and unconfused. According to numerous polls, most Americans believe that both public policies *and* private behaviors must be changed if we are to strengthen families and improve the well-being of children.

Great advantage awaits the political party willing to deal with both of these dimensions of family decline — willing, in short, to stand for cultural change without appealing to divisiveness or intolerance and to stand for economic and public policy change without pretending that cultural concerns are irrelevant or worse.

There is hope. Increasingly, our policy debate is beginning to reflect a new bipartisan consensus on the need to address both the economic and behavioral sources of declining child well-being. For example, two recent bipartisan commissions — the National Commission on Children, chaired by Democrat Sen. Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, and the National Commission on America's Urban Families, led by a Republican, former Missouri Gov. John Ashcroft — each conclude that family disruption is a principal source of problems facing children today.

Both endorse efforts to empower families economically to support their children. Both conclude that the stable, two-parent family is the best environment for children. Both recommend policies aimed at increasing the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents. A recent wave of editorial opinion, including views expressed on the editorial pages of The Inquirer, support this new consensus.

If Nichols had carefully read the Aspen Institute Report he so admires, he might have detected signs of this consensus. He might have noticed that the social policy thinker who believes that "the best anti-poverty program is a stable, intact family" is none other than William Galston, a University of Maryland political philosopher who now works in the White House on President Clinton's Domestic Policy Council.

In the Aspen report, Galston writes that the two most important forces affecting the poor are "the declining economic prospects for young, poorly educated male workers and the accelerated movement toward single-parent households." In Galston's view, the task is to develop policies that create jobs and discourage single-parent households.

Exactly. If Nichols finds thse two ideas hard to hold in his head at the same time, I suggest that he commit to memory and repeat this simple slogan: "A job for every parent, two parents for every child."

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead is a research associate at the Institute for American Values, a New York-based research organization concerned with family issues.

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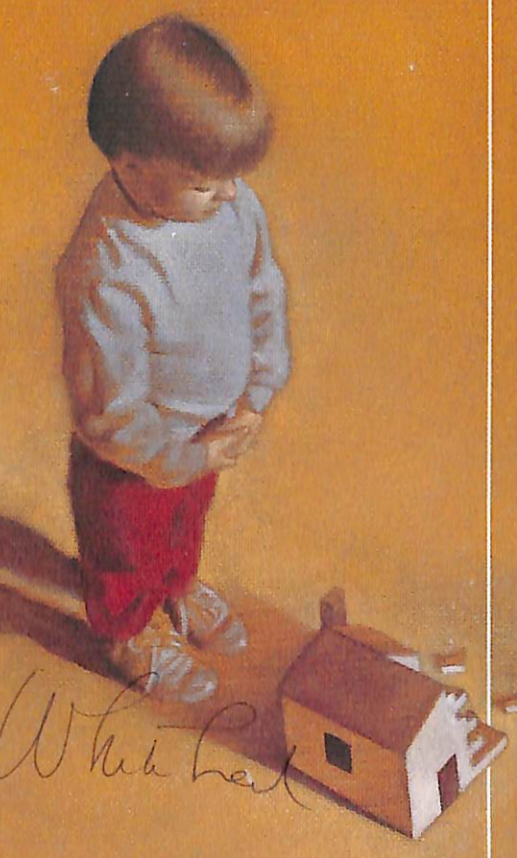
# The Atlantic

## DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT

After decades of public dispute about so-called family diversity, the evidence from social-science research is coming in: The dissolution of two-parent families, though it may benefit the adults involved, is harmful to many children, and dramatically undermines our society ■



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AS THE OLDEST of eight children, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, the author of this month's cover article, could not help developing expertise in the small civilization that is the family. Since both her parents worked, Barbara had to look after her numerous younger siblings. That management challenge might have prepared her to run one of the busier railroads in the upper Midwest; instead, she chose to pursue academic degrees, to marry, and to raise three children of her own.

Whitehead majored in history at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She was there in the early 1960s, which she remembers as an Edenic era of intense political activity surrounding issues like the Vietnam War and civil rights. Her younger brothers and sisters came to Madison later, after the counterculture had hit, and they had a vastly different time of it. The demons of what R. D. Laing called "the politics of experience"—the anxious search for personal fulfillment as the goal of life—had been loosed, eclipsing the civic orientation of her class of 1966. America was changing in many ways, not all of them apparent at the time. "Dan Quayle Was Right," her article in this issue, deals with one phenomenon whose roots lie in that time: rates of family breakup unprecedented in our history. The demons live, and threaten to eat our children.

Whitehead merits a footnote in any history of the 1992 presidential campaign. A research associate at the Institute for American Values, a nonpartisan Manhattan-based research organization devoted to issues of family and civic well-being, Whitehead last May—on Mother's Day—published a provocative article in the Outlook section of *The Washington Post* about a celebrated unwed mother. Among its readers was Marilyn Quayle. The article was passed on to one of her husband's speechwriters, and the *Murphy Brown* controversy was born.

The Republicans, of course, went on to use "family values" as a code for anti-feminist and anti-gay positions. Bill Clinton in his campaign spoke in favor of both greater family responsibility and welfare reform, though during her confirmation hearing Donna Shalala, Clinton's choice to head the Department of Health and Human Services, sounded a jarringly different note. Yet the crisis of America's families demands some kind of governmental response, even as it eludes a purely governmental solution. Whitehead strongly hopes that Clinton will keep his campaign promise to move—to lead—on the issue. —THE EDITORS

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*The social-science evidence is in: though it may benefit the adults involved, the dissolution of intact two-parent families is harmful to large numbers of children. Moreover, the author argues, family diversity in the form of increasing numbers of single-parent and stepparent families does not strengthen the social fabric but, rather, dramatically weakens and undermines society*

# DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT

BY BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD

DIVORCE AND OUT-OF-WEDLOCK CHILDBIRTH ARE TRANSFORMING THE LIVES of American children. In the postwar generation more than 80 percent of children grew up in a family with two biological parents who were married to each other. By 1980 only 50 percent could expect to spend their entire childhood in an intact family. If current trends continue, less than half of all children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood. Most American children will spend several years in a single-mother family. Some will eventually live in stepparent families, but because stepfamilies are more likely to break up than intact (by which I mean two-biological-parent) families, an increasing number of children will experience family breakup two or even three times during childhood.

According to a growing body of social-scientific evidence, children in families disrupted by divorce and out-of-wedlock birth do worse than children in intact families on several measures of well-being. Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor. They are also likely to stay poor longer. Twenty-two percent of children in one-parent families will experience poverty during childhood for seven years or more, as compared with only two percent of children in two-parent families. A 1988 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics found that children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems. They are also more likely to drop out of high school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs, and to be in trouble with the law. Compared with children in intact families, children from disrupted families are at a much higher risk for physical or sexual abuse.

Contrary to popular belief, many children do not "bounce back" after divorce or remarriage. Difficulties that are associated with family breakup often persist into adulthood. Children who grow up in single-parent or stepparent families are less successful as adults, particularly in the two domains of life—love and work—that are most essential to happiness. Needless to say, not all children experience such negative effects. However, research shows that many children from disrupted families have a harder time achieving intimacy in a relationship, forming a stable marriage, or even holding a steady job.

Despite this growing body of evidence, it is nearly impossible to discuss changes in family structure without provoking angry protest. Many people see the discussion as no more than an attack on struggling single mothers and their children: Why blame single mothers when they are doing the very best they can? After all, the decision to end a marriage or a relationship is wrenching, and few parents are indifferent to the painful burden this decision imposes on their children. Many take the perilous step toward single parenthood as a last resort, after their best efforts to hold a marriage together have failed. Consequently, it can seem particularly cruel and unfeeling to remind parents of the hardships their children might suffer as a result of family breakup. Other people believe that the dramatic changes in family structure, though regrettable, are impossible to reverse. Family breakup is an inevitable feature of American life, and anyone who thinks otherwise is indulging in nostalgia or trying to turn back the clock. Since these new family forms are here to stay, the reasoning goes, we must accord respect to single parents, not criticize them. Typical is the view expressed by a Brooklyn woman in a recent letter to *The New York Times*: "Let's stop moralizing or blaming single parents

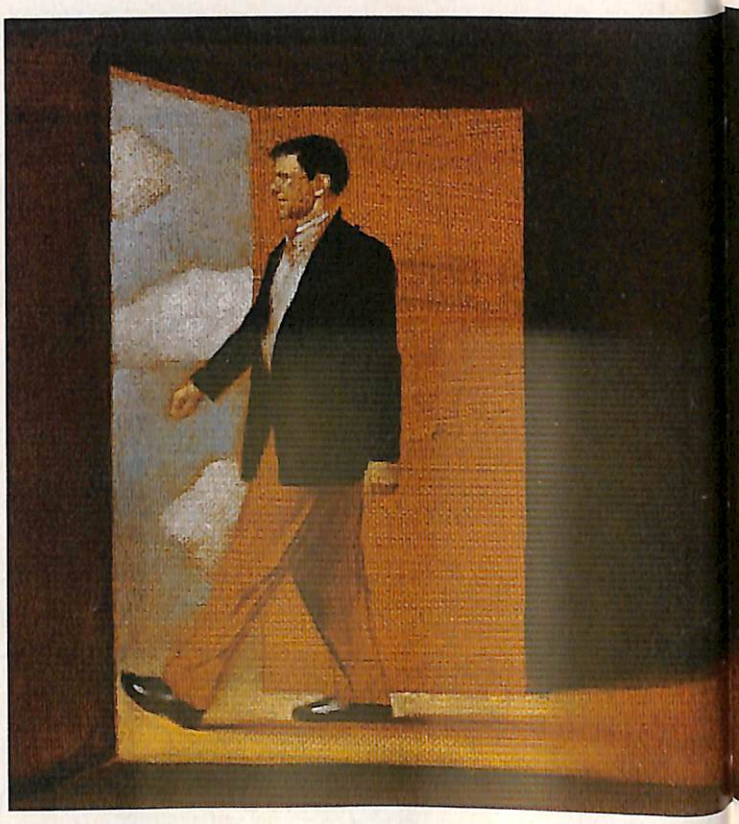
ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRUCE SHARP

and unwed mothers, and give them the respect they have earned and the support they deserve."

Such views are not to be dismissed. Indeed, they help to explain why family structure is such an explosive issue for Americans. The debate about it is not simply about the social-scientific evidence, although that is surely an important part of the discussion. It is also a debate over deeply held and often conflicting values. How do we begin to reconcile our long-standing belief in equality and diversity with an impressive body of evidence that suggests that not all family structures produce equal outcomes for children? How can we square traditional notions of public support for dependent women and children with a belief in women's right to pursue autonomy and independence in childbearing and child-rearing? How do we uphold the freedom of adults to pursue individual happiness in their private relationships and at the same time respond to the needs of children for stability, security, and permanence in their family lives? What do we do when the interests of adults and children conflict? These are the difficult issues at stake in the debate over family structure.

In the past these issues have turned out to be too difficult and too politically risky for debate. In the mid-1960s Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an assistant secretary of labor, was denounced as a racist for calling attention to the relationship between the prevalence of black single-mother families and the lower socioeconomic standing of black children. For nearly twenty years the policy and research communities backed away from the entire issue. In 1980 the Carter Administration convened a historic White House Conference on Families, designed to address the growing problems of children and families in America. The result was a prolonged, publicly subsidized quarrel over the definition of "family." No President since has tried to hold a national family conference. Last year, at a time when the rate of out-of-wedlock births had reached a historic high, Vice President Dan Quayle was ridiculed for criticizing Murphy Brown. In short, every time the issue of family structure has been raised, the response has been first controversy, then retreat, and finally silence.

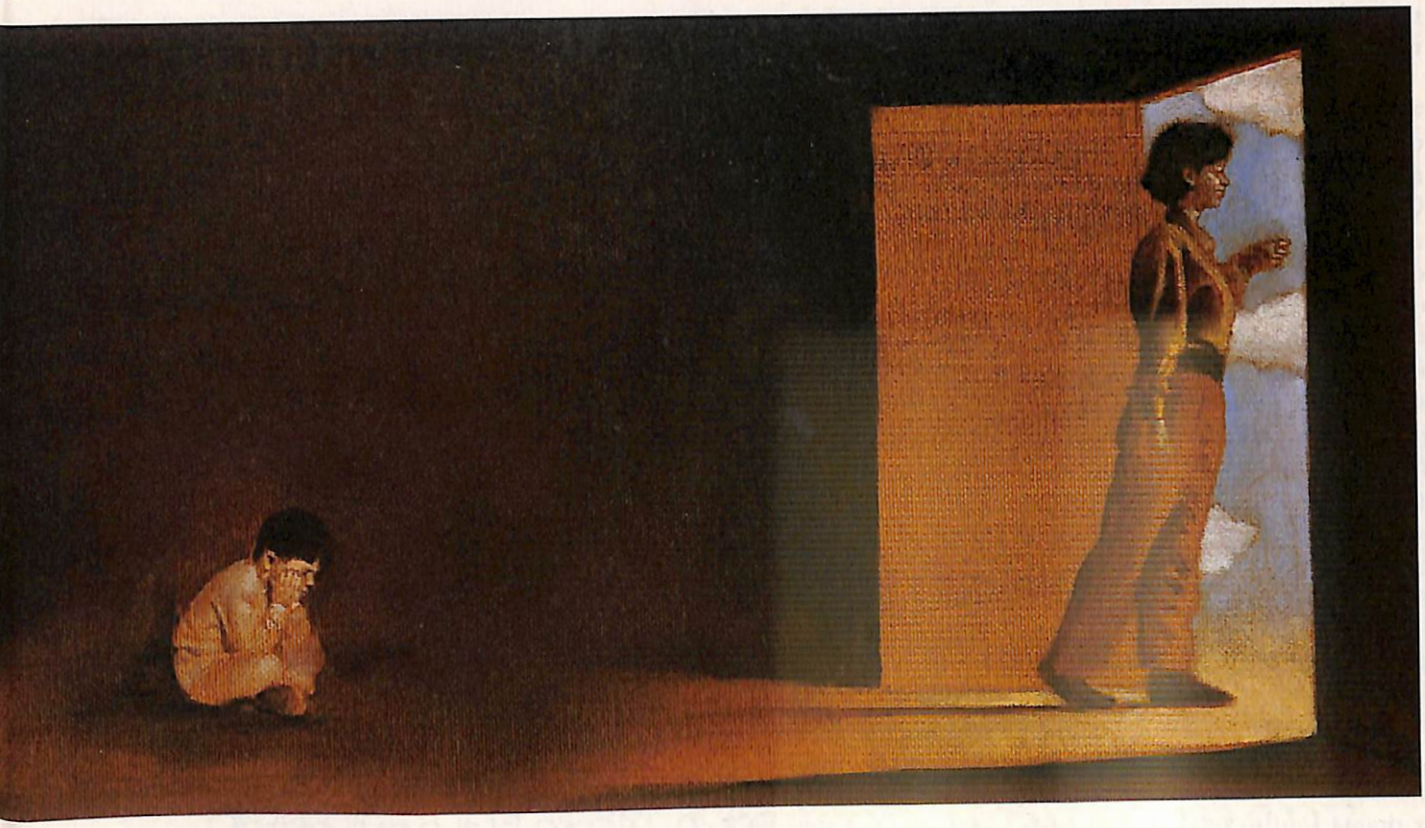
Yet it is also risky to ignore the issue of changing family structure. In recent years the problems associated with family disruption have grown. Overall child well-being has declined, despite a decrease in the number of children per family, an increase in the educational level of parents, and historically high levels of public spending. After dropping in the 1960s and 1970s, the proportion of children in poverty has increased dramatically, from 15 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1990, while the percentage of adult Americans in poverty has remained roughly constant. The teen suicide rate has more than tripled. Juvenile crime has increased and become more violent. School performance has continued to decline. There are no signs that these trends are about to reverse themselves.



If we fail to come to terms with the relationship between family structure and declining child well-being, then it will be increasingly difficult to improve children's life prospects, no matter how many new programs the federal government funds. Nor will we be able to make progress in bettering school performance or reducing crime or improving the quality of the nation's future work force—all domestic problems closely connected to family breakup. Worse, we may contribute to the problem by pursuing policies that actually increase family instability and breakup.

## From Death to Divorce

ACROSS TIME AND ACROSS CULTURES, FAMILY DISruption has been regarded as an event that threatens a child's well-being and even survival. This view is rooted in a fundamental biological fact: unlike the young of almost any other species, the human child is born in an abjectly helpless and immature state. Years of nurture and protection are needed before the child can achieve physical independence. Similarly, it takes years of interaction with at least one but ideally two or more adults for a child to develop into a socially competent adult. Children raised in virtual isolation from human beings, though physically intact, display few recognizably human behaviors. The social arrangement that has proved most successful in ensuring the physical survival and promoting the social development of the child is the family unit of the biological mother and father. Consequently,



any event that permanently denies a child the presence and protection of a parent jeopardizes the life of the child.

The classic form of family disruption is the death of a parent. Throughout history this has been one of the risks of childhood. Mothers frequently died in childbirth, and it was not unusual for both parents to die before the child was grown. As recently as the early decades of this century children commonly suffered the death of at least one parent. Almost a quarter of the children born in this country in 1900 lost one parent by the time they were fifteen years old. Many of these children lived with their widowed parent, often in a household with other close relatives. Others grew up in orphanages and foster homes.

The meaning of parental death, as it has been transmitted over time and faithfully recorded in world literature and lore, is unambiguous and essentially unchanging. It is universally regarded as an untimely and tragic event. Death permanently severs the parent-child bond, disrupting forever one of the child's earliest and deepest human attachments. It also deprives a child of the presence and protection of an adult who has a biological stake in, as well as an emotional commitment to, the child's survival and well-being. In short, the death of a parent is the most extreme and severe loss a child can suffer.

Because a child is so vulnerable in a parent's absence, there has been a common cultural response to the death of a parent: an outpouring of support from family, friends, and strangers alike. The surviving parent and child are united in their grief as well as their loss. Relatives and friends share in the loss and provide valuable emotional and financial assistance to the bereaved family. Other members of the community show sympathy for the child, and public assistance is available for those who need it. This cultural understanding of parental death has formed the basis for a tradition of public support to widows and their children. Indeed, as recently as the beginning of this century widows were the only mothers eligible for pensions in many states, and today widows with children receive more-generous welfare benefits from Survivors Insurance than do other single mothers with children who depend on Aid to Families With Dependent Children.

It has taken thousands upon thousands of years to reduce the threat of parental death. Not until the middle of the twentieth century did parental death cease to be a commonplace event for children in the United States. By then advances in medicine had dramatically reduced mortality rates for men and women.

At the same time, other forms of family disruption—separation, divorce, out-of-wedlock birth—were held in check by powerful religious, social, and legal sanctions. Divorce was widely regarded both as a deviant behavior, especially threatening to mothers and children, and as a personal lapse: "Divorce is the public acknowledgment of failure," a 1940s sociology textbook noted. Out-of-wedlock birth was stigmatized, and stigmatization is a powerful means of regulating behavior, as any smoker or overeater will testify. Sanctions against nonmarital childbirth discouraged behavior that hurt children and exacted compensatory behavior that helped them. Shotgun marriages and adoption, two common responses to nonmari-

tal birth, carried a strong message about the risks of premarital sex and created an intact family for the child.

Consequently, children did not have to worry much about losing a parent through divorce or never having had one because of nonmarital birth. After a surge in divorces following the Second World War, the rate leveled off. Only 11 percent of children born in the 1950s would by the time they turned eighteen see their parents separate or divorce. Out-of-wedlock childbirth barely figured as a cause of family disruption. In the 1950s and early 1960s, five percent of the nation's births were out of wedlock. Blacks were more likely than whites to bear children outside marriage, but the majority of black children born in the twenty years after the Second World War were born to married couples. The rate of family disruption reached a historic low point during those years.

A new standard of family security and stability was established in postwar America. For the first time in history the vast majority of the nation's children could expect to live with married biological parents throughout childhood. Children might still suffer other forms of adversity —poverty, racial discrimination, lack of educational opportunity—but only a few would be deprived of the nurture and protection of a mother and a father. No longer did children have to be haunted by the classic fears vividly dramatized in folklore and fable—that their parents would die, that they would have to live with a stepparent and stepsiblings, or that they would be abandoned. These were the years when the nation confidently boarded up orphanages and closed foundling hospitals, certain that such institutions would never again be needed. In movie theaters across the country parents and children could watch the drama of parental separation and death in the great Disney classics, secure in the knowledge that such nightmare visions as the death of Bambi's mother and the wrenching separation of Dumbo from his mother were only make-believe.

In the 1960s the rate of family disruption suddenly began to rise. After inching up over the course of a century, the divorce rate soared. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s the divorce rate held steady at fewer than ten divorces a year per 1,000 married couples. Then, beginning in about 1965, the rate increased sharply, peaking at twenty-three divorces per 1,000 marriages by 1979. (In 1974 divorce passed death as the leading cause of family breakup.) The rate has leveled off at about twenty-one divorces per 1,000 marriages—the figure for 1991. The out-of-wedlock birth rate also jumped. It went from five percent in 1960 to 27 percent in 1990. In 1990 close to 57 percent of births among black mothers were nonmarital, and about 17 percent among white mothers. Altogether, about one out of every four women who had a child in 1990 was not married. With rates of divorce and nonmarital birth so high, family disruption is at its peak. Never before have so many children experienced family breakup caused by events other than death. Each year a million children go through divorce or separation and almost as many more are born out of wedlock.

Half of all marriages now end in divorce. Following divorce, many people enter new relationships. Some begin living together. Nearly half of all cohabiting couples have children in the household. Fifteen percent have new children together. Many cohabiting couples eventually get married. However, both cohabiting and remarried couples are more likely to break up than couples in first marriages. Even social scientists find it hard to keep pace with the complexity and velocity of such patterns. In the revised edition (1992) of his book *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, the sociologist Andrew Cherlin ruefully comments: "If there were a truth-in-labeling law for books, the title of this edition should be something long and unwieldy like *Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, More Cohabitation, and Probably Remarriage.*"

Under such conditions growing up can be a turbulent experience. In many single-parent families children must come to terms with the parent's love life and romantic partners. Some children live with cohabiting couples, either their own unmarried parents or a biological parent and a live-in partner. Some children born to cohabiting parents see their parents break up. Others see their parents marry, but 56 percent of them (as compared with 31 percent of the children born to married parents) later see their parents' marriages fall apart. All told, about three quarters of children born to cohabiting couples will live in a single-parent home at least briefly. One of every four children growing up in the 1990s will eventually enter a stepfamily. According to one survey, nearly half of all children in stepparent families will see their parents divorce again by the time they reach their late teens. Since 80 percent of divorced fathers remarry, things get even more complicated when the romantic or marital history of the noncustodial parent, usually the father, is taken into account. Consequently, as it affects a significant number of children, family disruption is best understood not as a single event but as a string of disruptive events: separation, divorce, life in a single-parent family, life with a parent and live-in lover, the remarriage of one or both parents, life in one stepparent family combined with visits to another stepparent family; the breakup of one or both stepparent families. And so on. This is one reason why public schools have a hard time knowing whom to call in an emergency.

Given its dramatic impact on children's lives, one might reasonably expect that this historic level of family disruption would be viewed with alarm, even regarded as a national crisis. Yet this has not been the case. In recent years some people have argued that these trends pose a serious threat to children and to the nation as a whole, but they are dismissed as declinists, pessimists, or nostalgists, unwilling or unable to accept the new facts of life. The dominant view is that the changes in family structure are, on balance, positive.

## A Shift in the Social Metric

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY THIS IS SO, but the fundamental reason is that at some point in the 1970s Americans changed their minds about the meaning of these disruptive behaviors. What had once been regarded as hostile to children's best interests was now considered essential to adults' happiness. In the 1950s most Americans believed that parents should stay in an unhappy marriage for the sake of the children. The assumption was that a divorce would damage the children, and the prospect of such damage gave divorce its meaning. By the mid-1970s a majority of Americans rejected that view. Popular advice literature reflected the shift. A book on divorce published in the mid-1940s tersely asserted: "Children are entitled to the affection and *association* of two parents, not one." Thirty years later another popular divorce book proclaimed just the opposite: "A two-parent home is not the only emotional structure within which a child can be happy and healthy. . . . The parents who take care of themselves will be best able to take care of their children." At about the same time, the long-standing taboo against out-of-wedlock childbirth also collapsed. By the mid-1970s three fourths of Americans said that it was not morally wrong for a woman to have a child outside marriage.

Once the social metric shifts from child well-being to adult well-being, it is hard to see divorce and nonmarital birth in anything but a positive light. However distressing and difficult they may be, both of these behaviors can hold out the promise of greater adult choice, freedom, and happiness. For unhappy spouses, divorce offers a way to escape a troubled or even abusive relationship and make a fresh start. For single parents, remarriage is a second try at marital happiness as well as a chance for relief from the stress, loneliness, and economic hardship of raising a child alone. For some unmarried women, nonmarital birth is a way to beat the biological clock, avoid marrying the wrong man, and experience the pleasures of motherhood. Moreover, divorce and out-of-wedlock birth involve a measure of agency and choice; they are man- and woman-made events. To be sure, not everyone exercises choice in divorce or nonmarital birth. Men leave wives for younger women, teenage girls get pregnant accidentally—yet even these unhappy events reflect the expansion of the boundaries of freedom and choice.

This cultural shift helps explain what otherwise would be inexplicable: the failure to see the rise in family disruption as a severe and troubling national problem. It explains why there is virtually no widespread public sentiment for restigmatizing either of these classically disruptive behaviors and no sense—no public consensus—that they can or should be avoided in the future. On the contrary, the prevailing opinion is that we should accept the changes in family structure as inevitable and devise new forms of public and private support for single-parent families.

## The View From Hollywood

WITH ITS AFFIRMATION OF THE LIBERATING effects of divorce and nonmarital childbirth, this opinion is a fixture of American popular culture today. Madison Avenue and Hollywood did not invent these behaviors, as their highly paid publicists are quick to point out, but they have played an influential role in defending and even celebrating divorce and unwed motherhood. More precisely, they have taken the raw material of demography and fashioned it into a powerful fantasy of individual renewal and rebirth. Consider, for example, the teaser for *People* magazine's cover story on Joan Lunden's divorce: "After the painful end of her 13-year marriage, the *Good Morning America* cohost is discovering a new life as a single mother—and as her own woman." *People* does not dwell on the anguish Lunden and her children might have experienced over the breakup of their family, or the difficulties of single motherhood, even for celebrity mothers. Instead, it celebrates Joan Lunden's steps toward independence and a better life. *People*, characteristically, focuses on her shopping: in the first weeks after her breakup Lunden leased "a brand-new six-bedroom, 8,000 square foot" house and then went to Bloomingdale's, where she scooped up sheets, pillows, a toaster, dishes, seven televisions, and roomfuls of fun furniture that was "totally unlike the serious traditional pieces she was giving up."

This is not just the view taken in supermarket magazines. Even the conservative bastion of the greeting-card industry, Hallmark, offers a line of cards commemorating divorce as liberation. "Think of your former marriage as a record album," says one Contemporary card. "It was full of music—both happy and sad. But what's important now is . . . YOU! the recently released HOT, NEW, SINGLE! You're going to be at the TOP OF THE CHARTS!" Another card reads: "Getting divorced can be very healthy! Watch how it improves your circulation! Best of luck! . . ." Hallmark's hip Shoebox Greetings division depicts two female praying mantises. Mantis One: "It's tough being a single parent." Mantis Two: "Yeah . . . Maybe we shouldn't have eaten our husbands."

Divorce is a tired convention in Hollywood, but unwed parenthood is very much in fashion: in the past year or so babies were born to Warren Beatty and Annette Bening, Jack Nicholson and Rebecca Broussard, and Eddie Murphy and Nicole Mitchell. *Vanity Fair* celebrated Jack Nicholson's fatherhood with a cover story (April, 1992) called "Happy Jack." What made Jack happy, it turned out, was no-fault fatherhood. He and Broussard, the twenty-nine-year-old mother of his children, lived in separate houses. Nicholson said, "It's an unusual arrangement, but the last twenty-five years or so have shown me that I'm not good at cohabitation. . . . I see Rebecca as much as any other person who is cohabiting. And *she* prefers it. I think

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most people would in a more honest and truthful world." As for more-permanent commitments, the man who is not good at cohabitation said: "I don't discuss marriage much with Rebecca. Those discussions are the very thing I'm trying to avoid. I'm after this immediate real thing. That's all I believe in." (Perhaps Nicholson should have had the discussion. Not long after the story appeared, Broussard broke off the relationship.)

As this story shows, unwed parenthood is thought of not only as a way to find happiness but also as a way to exhibit such virtues as honesty and courage. A similar argument was offered in defense of Murphy Brown's unwed motherhood. Many of Murphy's fans were quick to point out that Murphy suffered over her decision to bear a child out of wedlock. Faced with an accidental pregnancy and a faithless lover, she agonized over her plight and, after much mental anguish, bravely decided to go ahead. In short, having a baby without a husband represented a higher level of maternal devotion and sacrifice than having a baby with a husband. Murphy was not just exercising her rights as a woman; she was exhibiting true moral heroism.

On the night Murphy Brown became an unwed mother, 34 million Americans tuned in, and CBS posted a 35 percent share of the audience. The show did not stir significant protest at the grass roots and lost none of its advertisers. The actress Candice Bergen subsequently appeared on the cover of nearly every women's and news magazine in the country and received an honorary degree at the University of Pennsylvania as well as an Emmy award. The show's creator, Diane English, popped up in Hanes stocking ads. Judged by conventional measures of approval, Murphy Brown's motherhood was a hit at the box office.

Increasingly, the media depicts the married two-parent family as a source of pathology. According to a spate of celebrity memoirs and interviews, the married-parent family harbors terrible secrets of abuse, violence, and incest. A bumper sticker I saw in Amherst, Massachusetts, read UNSPOKEN TRADITIONAL FAMILY VALUES: ABUSE, ALCOHOLISM, INCEST. The pop therapist John Bradshaw explains away this generation's problems with the dictum that 96 percent of families are dysfunctional, made that way by the addicted society we live in. David Lynch creates a new aesthetic of creepiness by juxtaposing scenes of traditional family life with images of seduction and perversion. A Boston-area museum puts on an exhibit called "Goodbye to Apple Pie," featuring several artists' visions of child abuse, including one mixed-media piece with knives poking through a little girl's skirt. The piece is titled *Father Knows Best.*

No one would claim that two-parent families are free from conflict, violence, or abuse. However, the attempt to discredit the two-parent family can be understood as part of what Daniel Patrick Moynihan has described as a larger effort to accommodate higher levels of social deviance. "The amount of deviant behavior in American society has increased beyond the levels the community can 'afford to recognize,'" Moynihan argues. One response has been to normalize what was once considered deviant behavior, such as out-of-wedlock birth. An accompanying response has been to detect deviance in what once stood as a social norm, such as the married-couple family. Together these responses reduce the acknowledged levels of deviance by eroding earlier distinctions between the normal and the deviant.

Several recent studies describe family life in its postwar heyday as the seedbed of alcoholism and abuse. According to Stephanie Coontz, the author of the book *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, family life for married mothers in the 1950s consisted of "booze, bowling, bridge, and boredom." Coontz writes: "Few would have guessed that radiant Marilyn Van Derbur, crowned Miss America in 1958, had been sexually violated by her wealthy, respectable father from the time she was five until she was eighteen, when she moved away to college." Even the budget-stretching casserole comes under attack as a sign of culinary dysfunction. According to one food writer, this homely staple of postwar family life brings back images of "the good mother of the 50's . . . locked in Ozzie and Harriet land, unable to move past the canvas of a Corning Ware dish, the palette of a can of Campbell's soup, the mushy dominion of which she was queen."

> Research shows that many children from disrupted families have a harder time achieving intimacy in a relationship, forming a stable marriage, or even holding a steady job ■

Nevertheless, the popular portrait of family life does not simply reflect the views of a cultural elite, as some have argued. There is strong support at the grass roots for much of this view of family change. Survey after survey

shows that Americans are less inclined than they were a generation ago to value sexual fidelity, lifelong marriage, and parenthood as worthwhile personal goals. Motherhood no longer defines adult womanhood, as everyone knows; equally important is the fact that fatherhood has declined as a norm for men. In 1976 less than half as many fathers as in 1957 said that providing for children was a life goal. The proportion of working men who found marriage and children burdensome and restrictive more than doubled in the same period. Fewer than half of all adult Americans today regard the idea of sacrifice for others as a positive moral virtue.

## Dinosaurs Divorce

IT IS TRUE THAT MANY ADULTS BENEFIT FROM DIvorce or remarriage. According to one study, nearly 80 percent of divorced women and 50 percent of divorced men say they are better off out of the marriage. Half of divorced adults in the same study report greater happiness. A competent self-help book called *Divorce and New Beginnings* notes the advantages of single parenthood: single parents can "develop their own interests, fulfill their own needs, choose their own friends and engage in social activities of their choice. Money, even if limited, can be spent as they see fit." Apparently, some women appreciate the opportunity to have children out of wedlock. "The real world, however, does not always allow women who are dedicated to their careers to devote the time and energy it takes to find—or be found by—the perfect husband and father wanna-be," one woman said in a letter to *The Washington Post.* A mother and chiropractor from Avon, Connecticut, explained her unwed maternity to an interviewer this way: "It is selfish, but this was something I needed to do for me."

There is very little in contemporary popular culture to contradict this optimistic view. But in a few small places another perspective may be found. Several racks down from its divorce cards, Hallmark offers a line of cards for children—To Kids With Love. These cards come six to a pack. Each card in the pack has a slightly different message. According to the package, the "thinking of you" messages will let a special kid "know how much you care." Though Hallmark doesn't quite say so, it's clear these cards are aimed at divorced parents. "I'm sorry I'm not always there when you need me but I hope you know I'm always just a phone call away." Another card reads: "Even though your dad and I don't live together anymore, I know he's still a very special part of your life. And as much as I miss you when you're not with me, I'm still happy that you two can spend time together."

Hallmark's messages are grounded in a substantial body of well-funded market research. Therefore it is worth reflecting on the divergence in sentiment between the divorce cards for adults and the divorce cards for kids. For grown-ups, divorce heralds new beginnings (A HOT NEW SINGLE). For children, divorce brings separation and loss ("I'm sorry I'm not always there when you need me").

An even more telling glimpse into the meaning of family disruption can be found in the growing children's literature on family dissolution. Take, for example, the popular children's book *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families* (1986), by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. This is a picture book, written for very young children. The book begins with a short glossary of "divorce words" and encourages children to "see if you can find them" in the story. The words include "family counselor," "separation agreement," "alimony," and "child custody." The book is illustrated with cartoonish drawings of green dinosaur parents who fight, drink too much, and break up. One panel shows the father dinosaur, suitcase in hand, getting into a yellow car.

The dinosaur children are offered simple, straightforward advice on what to do about the divorce. *On custody decisions:* "When parents can't agree, lawyers and judges decide. Try to be honest if they ask you questions; it will help them make better decisions." *On selling the house:* "If you move, you may have to say good-bye to friends and familiar places. But soon your new home will feel like the place you really belong." *On the economic impact of divorce:* "Living with one parent almost always means there will be less money. Be prepared to give up some things." *On holidays:* "Divorce may mean twice as much celebrating at holiday times, but you may feel pulled apart." *On parents' new lovers:* "You may sometimes feel jealous and want your parent to yourself. Be polite to your parents' new friends, even if you don't like them at first." *On parents' remarriage:* "Not everyone loves his or her stepparents, but showing them respect is important."

These cards and books point to an uncomfortable and generally unacknowledged fact: what contributes to a parent's happiness may detract from a child's happiness. All too often the adult quest for freedom, independence, and choice in family relationships conflicts with a child's developmental needs for stability, constancy, harmony, and permanence in family life. In short, family disruption creates a deep division between parents' interests and the interests of children.

One of the worst consequences of these divided interests is a withdrawal of parental investment in children's well-being. As the Stanford economist Victor Fuchs has pointed out, the main source of social investment in children is private. The investment comes from the children's parents. But parents in disrupted families have less time, attention, and money to devote to their children. The single most important source of disinvestment has been the widespread withdrawal of financial support and involvement by fathers. Maternal investment, too, has declined, as women try to raise families on their own and work outside the home. Moreover, both mothers and fathers commonly respond to family breakup by investing more heavily in themselves and in their own personal and romantic lives.

Sometimes the tables are completely turned. Children are called upon to invest in the emotional well-being of their parents. Indeed, this seems to be the larger message of many of the children's books on divorce and remarriage. *Dinosaurs Divorce* asks children to be sympathetic, understanding, respectful, and polite to confused, unhappy parents. The sacrifice comes from the children: "Be prepared to give up some things." In the world of divorcing dinosaurs, the children rather than the grown-ups are the exemplars of patience, restraint, and good sense.

## Three Seventies Assumptions

AS IT FIRST TOOK SHAPE IN THE 1970S, THE OPTIMistic view of family change rested on three bold new assumptions. At that time, because the emergence of the changes in family life was so recent, there was little hard evidence to confirm or dispute these assumptions. But this was an expansive moment in American life.

The first assumption was an economic one: that a woman could now afford to be a mother without also being a wife. There were ample grounds for believing this. Women's work-force participation had been gradually increasing in the postwar period, and by the beginning of the 1970s women were a strong presence in the workplace. What's more, even though there was still a substantial wage gap between men and women, women had made considerable progress in a relatively short time toward better-paying jobs and greater employment opportunities. More women than ever before could aspire to serious careers as business executives, doctors, lawyers, airline pilots, and politicians. This circumstance, combined with the increased availability of child care, meant that women could take on the responsibilities of a breadwinner, perhaps even a sole breadwinner. This was particularly true for middle-class women. According to a highly regarded 1977 study by the Carnegie Council on Children, "The greater availability of jobs for women means that more middle-class children today survive their parents' divorce without a catastrophic plunge into poverty."

Feminists, who had long argued that the path to greater equality for women lay in the world of work outside the home, endorsed this assumption. In fact, for many, economic independence was a stepping-stone toward freedom from both men and marriage. As women began to earn their own money, they were less dependent on men or marriage, and marriage diminished in importance. In Gloria Steinem's memorable words, "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle."

This assumption also gained momentum as the meaning of work changed for women. Increasingly, work had an expressive as well as an economic dimension: being a working mother not only gave you an income but also made you more interesting and fulfilled than a stay-at-home mother. Consequently, the optimistic economic scenario was driven by a cultural imperative. Women would achieve financial independence because, culturally as well as economically, it was the right thing to do.

The second assumption was that family disruption would not cause lasting harm to children and could actually enrich their lives. *Creative Divorce: A New Opportunity for Personal Growth*, a popular book of the seventies, spoke confidently to this point: "Children can survive any family crisis without permanent damage—and grow as human beings in the process. . . ." Moreover, single-parent and stepparent families created a more extensive kinship network than the nuclear family. This network would envelop children in a web of warm and supportive relationships. "Belonging to a stepfamily means there are more people in your life," a children's book published in 1982 notes. "More sisters and brothers, including the step ones. More people you think of as grandparents and aunts and uncles. More cousins. More neighbors and friends. . . . Getting to know and like so many people (and having them like you) is one of the best parts of what being in a stepfamily . . . is all about."

The third assumption was that the new diversity in family structure would make America a better place. Just as the nation has been strengthened by the diversity of its ethnic and racial groups, so it would be strengthened by diverse family forms. The emergence of these brave new families was but the latest chapter in the saga of American pluralism.

Another version of the diversity argument stated that the real problem was not family disruption itself but the stigma still attached to these emergent family forms. This lingering stigma placed children at psychological risk, making them feel ashamed or different; as the ranks of single-parent and stepparent families grew, children would feel normal and good about themselves.

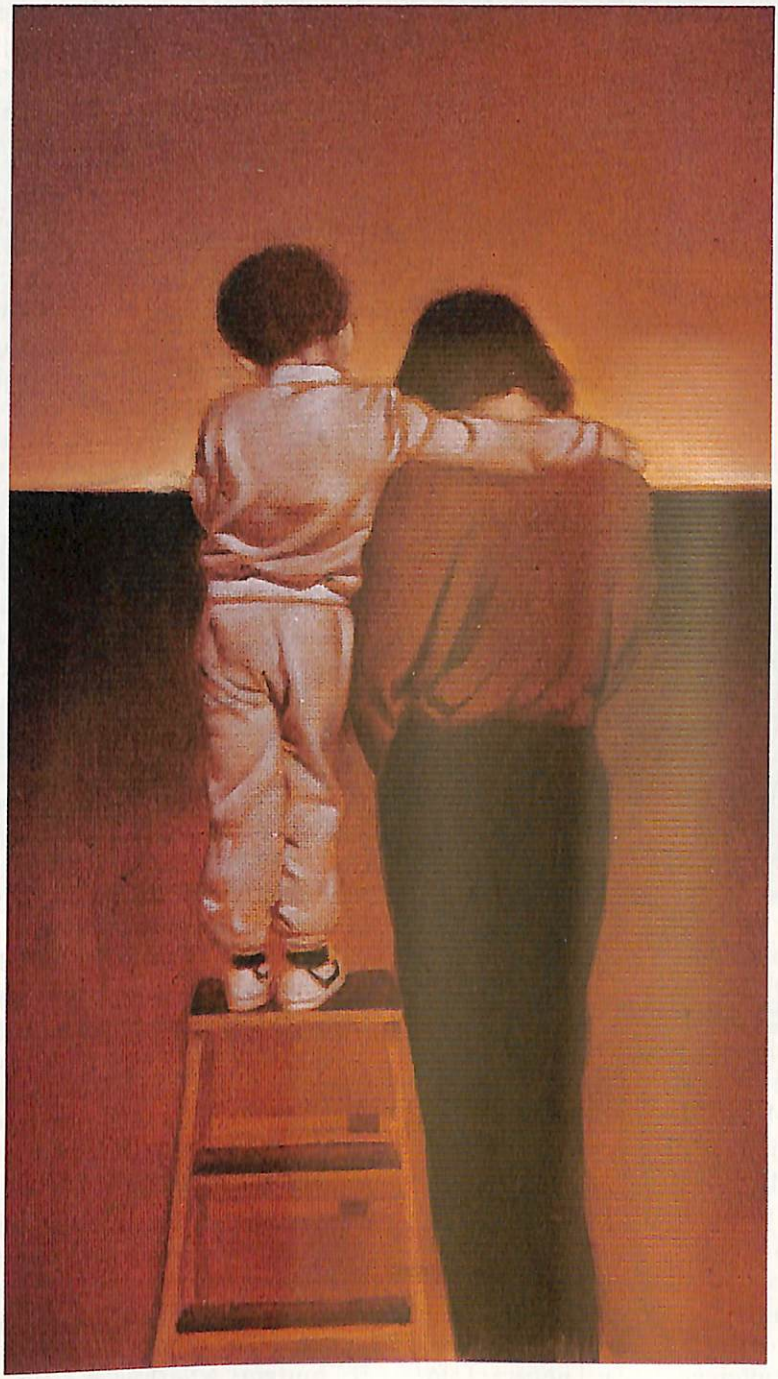
These assumptions continue to be appealing, because they accord with strongly held American beliefs in social progress. Americans see progress in the expansion of individual opportunities for choice, freedom, and self-expression. Moreover, Americans identify progress with growing tolerance of diversity. Over the past half century, the pollster Daniel Yankelovich writes, the United States has steadily grown more open-minded and accepting of groups that were previously perceived as alien, untrustworthy, or unsuitable for public leadership or social esteem. One such group is the burgeoning number of single-parent and stepparent families.

## The Education of Sara McLanahan

IN 1981 SARA MCLANAHAN, NOW A SOCIOLOGIST AT Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, read a three-part series by Ken Auletta in *The New Yorker*. Later published as a book titled *The Underclass*, the series presented a vivid portrait of the drug addicts, welfare mothers, and school dropouts who took part

in an education-and-training program in New York City. Many were the children of single mothers, and it was Auletta's clear implication that single-mother families were contributing to the growth of an underclass. McLanahan was taken aback by this notion. "It struck me as strange that he would be viewing single mothers at that level of pathology."

"I'd gone to graduate school in the days when the politically correct argument was that single-parent families were just another alternative family form, and it was fine," McLanahan explains, as she recalls the state of social-scientific thinking in the 1970s. Several empirical studies that were then current supported an optimistic view of family change. (They used tiny samples, however, and did not track the well-being of children over time.)



One, *All Our Kin*, by Carol Stack, was required reading for thousands of university students. It said that single mothers had strengths that had gone undetected and unappreciated by earlier researchers. The single-mother family, it suggested, is an economically resourceful and socially embedded institution. In the late 1970s McLanahan wrote a similar study that looked at a small sample of white single mothers and how they coped. "So I was very much of that tradition."

By the early 1980s, however, nearly two decades had passed since the changes in family life had begun. During the intervening years a fuller body of empirical research had emerged: studies that used large samples, or followed families through time, or did both. Moreover, several of the studies offered a child's-eye view of family disruption. The National Survey on Children, conducted by the psychologist Nicholas Zill, had set out in 1976 to track a large sample of children aged seven to eleven. It also interviewed the children's parents and teachers. It surveyed its subjects again in 1981 and 1987. By the time of its third round of interviews the eleven-year-olds of 1976 were the twenty-two-year-olds of 1987. The California Children of Divorce Study, directed by Judith Wallerstein, a clinical psychologist, had also been going on for a decade. E. Mavis Hetherington, of the University of Virginia, was conducting a similar study of children from both intact and divorced families. For the first time it was possible to test the optimistic view against a large and longitudinal body of evidence.

It was to this body of evidence that Sara McLanahan turned. When she did, she found little to support the optimistic view of single motherhood. On the contrary. When she published her findings with Irwin Garfinkel in a 1986 book, *Single Mothers and Their Children*, her portrait of single motherhood proved to be as troubling in its own way as Auletta's.

One of the leading assumptions of the time was that single motherhood was economically viable. Even if single mothers did face economic trials, they wouldn't face them for long, it was argued, because they wouldn't remain single for long: single motherhood would be a brief phase of three to five years, followed by marriage. Single mothers would be economically resilient: if they experienced setbacks, they would recover quickly. It was also said that single mothers would be supported by informal networks of family, friends, neighbors, and other single

mothers. As McLanahan shows in her study, the evidence demolishes all these claims.

For the vast majority of single mothers, the economic spectrum turns out to be narrow, running between precarious and desperate. Half the single mothers in the United States live below the poverty line. (Currently, one out of ten married couples with children is poor.) Many others live on the edge of poverty. Even single mothers who are far from poor are likely to experience persistent economic insecurity. Divorce almost always brings a decline in the standard of living for the mother and children.

Moreover, the poverty experienced by single mothers is no more brief than it is mild. A significant number of all single mothers never marry or remarry. Those who do, do so only after spending roughly six years, on average, as single parents. For black mothers the duration is much longer. Only 33 percent of African-American mothers had remarried within ten years of separation. Consequently, single motherhood is hardly a fleeting event for the mother, and it is likely to occupy a third of the child's childhood. Even the notion that single mothers are knit together in economically supportive networks is not borne out by the evidence. On the contrary, single parenthood forces many women to be on the move, in search of cheaper housing and better jobs. This need-driven restless mobility makes it more difficult for them to sustain supportive ties to family and friends, let alone other single mothers.

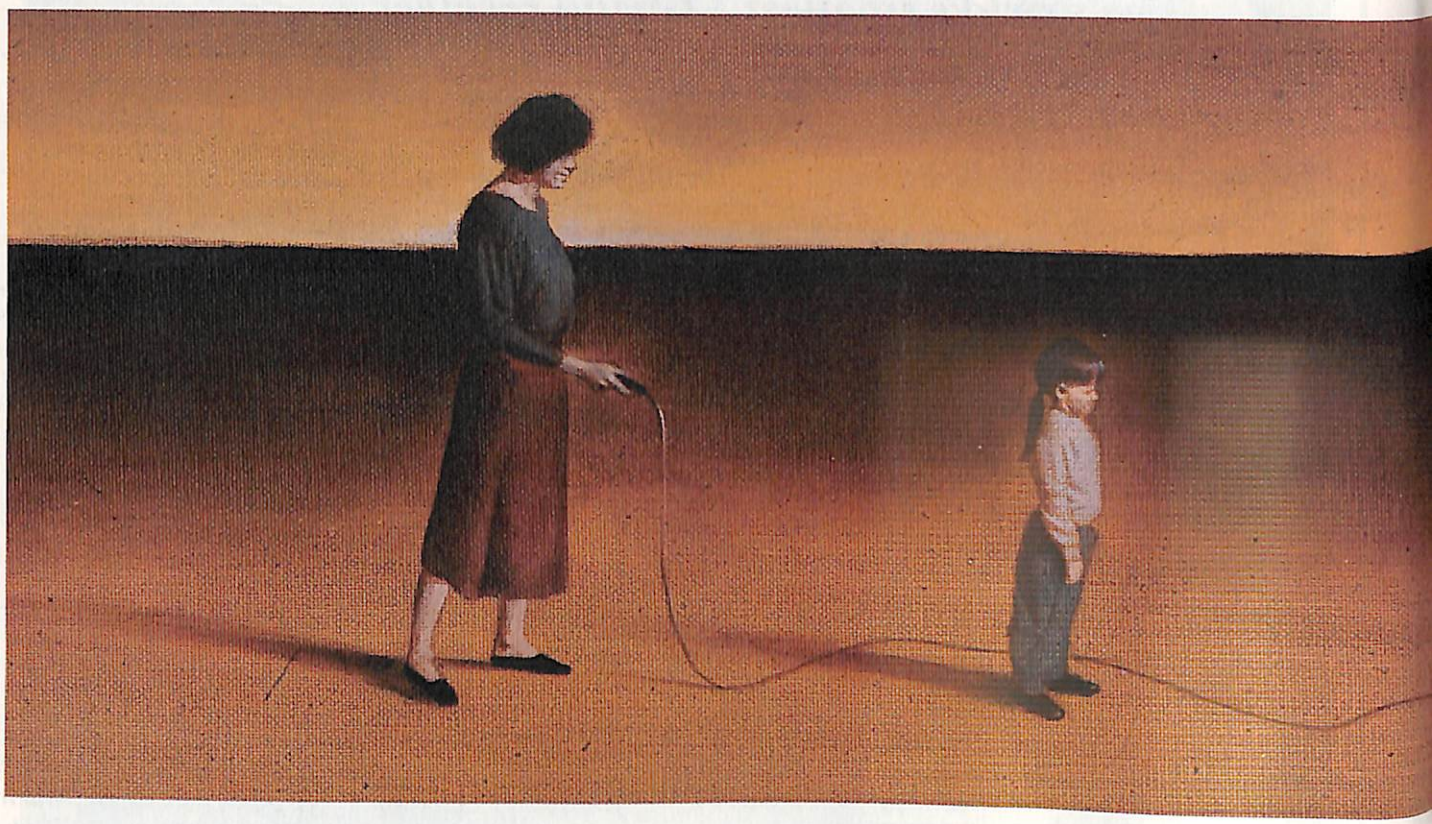
Single-mother families are vulnerable not just to poverty but to a particularly debilitating form of poverty: welfare dependency. The dependency takes two forms: First, single mothers, particularly unwed mothers, stay on welfare longer than other welfare recipients. Of those never-married mothers who receive welfare benefits, almost 40 percent remain on the rolls for ten years or longer. Second, welfare dependency tends to be passed on from one generation to the next. McLanahan says, "Evidence on intergenerational poverty indicates that, indeed, offspring from [single-mother] families are far more likely to be poor and to form mother-only families than are offspring who live with two parents most of their pre-adult life." Nor is the intergenerational impact of single motherhood limited to African-Americans, as many people seem to believe. Among white families, daughters of single parents are 53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers, 111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers, 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth, and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages. All these intergenerational consequences of single motherhood increase the likelihood of chronic welfare dependency.

McLanahan cites three reasons why single-mother families are so vulnerable economically. For one thing, their earnings are low. Second, unless the mothers are widowed, they don't receive public subsidies large enough to lift them out of poverty. And finally, they do not get much support from family members—especially the fathers of their children. In 1982 single white mothers received an average of $1,246 in alimony and child support, black mothers an average of $322. Such payments accounted for about 10 percent of the income of single white mothers and for about 3.5 percent of the income of single black mothers. These amounts were dramatically smaller than the income of the father in a two-parent family and also smaller than the income from a second earner in a two-parent family. Roughly 60 percent of single white mothers and 80 percent of single black mothers received no support at all.

Until the mid-1980s, when stricter standards were put in place, child-support awards were only about half to two-thirds what the current guidelines require. Accordingly, there is often a big difference in the living standards of divorced fathers and of divorced mothers with children. After divorce the average annual income of mothers and children is $13,500 for whites and $9,000 for nonwhites, as compared with $25,000 for white nonresident fathers and $13,600 for nonwhite nonresident fathers. Moreover, since child-support awards account for a smaller portion of the income of a high-earning father, the drop in living standards can be especially sharp for mothers who were married to upper-level managers and professionals.

Unwed mothers are unlikely to be awarded any child support at all, partly because the paternity of their children may not have been established. According to one recent study, only 20 percent of unmarried mothers receive child support.

Even if single mothers escape poverty, economic uncertainty remains a condition of life. Divorce brings a reduction in income and standard of living for the vast majority of single mothers. One study, for example, found that income for mothers and children declines on average about 30 percent, while fathers experience a 10 to 15 percent increase in income in the year following a separation. Things get even more difficult when fathers fail to meet their child-support obligations. As a result, many divorced mothers experience a wearing uncertainty about the family budget: whether the check will come in or not; whether new sneakers can be bought this month or not; whether the electric bill will be paid on time or not. Uncertainty about money triggers other kinds of uncertainty. Mothers and children often have to move to cheaper housing after a divorce. One study shows that about 38 percent of divorced mothers and their children move during the first year after a divorce. Even several years later the rate of moves for single mothers is about a third higher than the rate for two-parent families. It is also common for a mother to change her job or increase her working hours or both following a divorce. Even the composition of the household is likely to change, with other adults, such as boyfriends or babysitters, moving in and out.



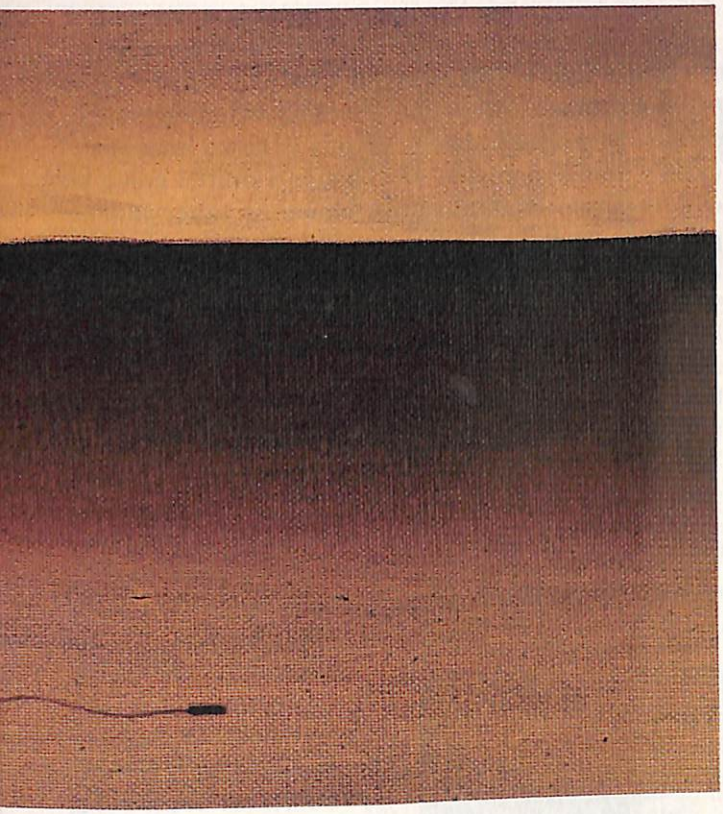
All this uncertainty can be devastating to children. Anyone who knows children knows that they are deeply conservative creatures. They like things to stay the same. So pronounced is this tendency that certain children have been known to request the same peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich for lunch for years on end. Children are particularly set in their ways when it comes to family, friends, neighborhoods, and schools. Yet when a family breaks up, all these things may change. The novelist Pat Conroy has observed that "each divorce is the death of a small civilization." No one feels this more acutely than children.

Sara McLanahan's investigation and others like it have helped to establish a broad consensus on the economic impact of family disruption on children. Most social scientists now agree that single motherhood is an important and growing cause of poverty, and that children suffer as a result. (They continue to argue, however, about the relationship between family structure and such economic factors as income inequality, the loss of jobs in the inner city, and the growth of low-wage jobs.) By the mid-1980s, however, it was clear that the problem of family disruption was not confined to the urban underclass, nor was its sole impact economic. Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbirth were affecting middle- and upper-class children, and these more privileged children were suffering negative consequences as well. It appeared that the problems associated with family breakup were far deeper and far more widespread than anyone had previously imagined.

## The Missing Father

JUDITH WALLERSTEIN IS ONE OF THE PIONEERS IN RESEARCH on the long-term psychological impact of family disruption on children. The California Children of Divorce Study, which she directs, remains the most enduring study of the long-term effects of divorce on children and their parents. Moreover, it represents the best-known effort to look at the impact of divorce on middle-class children. The California children entered the study without pathological family histories. Before divorce they lived in stable, protected homes. And although some of the children did experience economic insecurity as the result of divorce, they were generally free from the most severe forms of poverty associated with family breakup. Thus the study and the resulting book (which Wallerstein wrote with Sandra Blakeslee), *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (1989), provide new insight into the consequences of divorce which are not associated with extreme forms of economic or emotional deprivation.

When, in 1971, Wallerstein and her colleagues set out to conduct clinical interviews with 131 children from the San Francisco area, they thought they were embarking on a short-term study. Most experts believed that divorce was like a bad cold. There was a phase of acute discomfort, and then a short recovery phase. According to the conventional wisdom, kids would be back on their feet in no time at all. Yet when Wallerstein met these children for a second interview more than a year later, she was



amazed to discover that there had been no miraculous recovery. In fact, the children seemed to be doing worse.

The news that children did not "get over" divorce was not particularly welcome at the time. Wallerstein recalls, "We got angry letters from therapists, parents, and lawyers saying we were undoubtedly wrong. They said children are really much better off being released from an unhappy marriage. Divorce, they said, is a liberating experience." One of the main results of the California study was to overturn this optimistic view. In Wallerstein's cautionary words, "Divorce is deceptive. Legally it is a single event, but psychologically it is a chain—sometimes a never-ending chain—of events, relocations, and radically shifting relationships strung through time, a process that forever changes the lives of the people involved."

Five years after divorce more than a third of the children experienced moderate or severe depression. At ten years a significant number of the now young men and women appeared to be troubled, drifting, and underachieving. At fifteen years many of the thirtyish adults were struggling to establish strong love relationships of their own. In short, far from recovering from their parents' divorce, a significant percentage of these grownups were still suffering from its effects. In fact, according to Wallerstein, the long-term effects of divorce emerge at a time when young adults are trying to make their own decisions about love, marriage, and family. Not all children in the study suffered negative consequences. But Wallerstein's research presents a sobering picture of divorce. "The child of divorce faces many additional psychological burdens in addition to the normative tasks of growing up," she says.

Divorce not only makes it more difficult for young adults to establish new relationships. It also weakens the oldest primary relationship: that between parent and child. According to Wallerstein, "Parent-child relationships are permanently altered by divorce in ways that our society has not anticipated." Not only do children experience a loss of parental attention at the onset of divorce, but they soon find that at every stage of their development their parents are not available in the same way they once were. "In a reasonably happy intact family," Wallerstein observes, "the child gravitates first to one parent and then to the other, using skills and attributes from each in climbing the developmental ladder." In a divorced family, children find it "harder to find the needed parent at needed times." This may help explain why very young children suffer the most as the result of family disruption. Their opportunities to engage in this kind of ongoing process are the most truncated and compromised.

The father-child bond is severely, often irreparably, damaged in disrupted families. In a situation without historical precedent, an astonishing and disheartening number of American fathers are failing to provide financial support to their children. Often, more than the father's support check is missing. Increasingly, children are bereft of any contact with their fathers. According to the National Survey of Children, in disrupted families only one child in six, on average, saw his or her father as often as once a week in the past year. Close to half did not see their father at all in the past year. As time goes on, contact becomes even more infrequent. Ten years after a marriage breaks up, more than two thirds of children report not having seen their father for a year. Not surprisingly, when asked to name the "adults you look up to and admire," only 20 percent of children in single-parent families named their father, as compared with 52 percent of children in two-parent families. A favorite complaint among Baby Boom Americans is that their fathers were emotionally remote guys who worked hard, came home at night to eat supper, and didn't have much to say to or do with the kids. But the current generation has a far worse father problem: many of their fathers are vanishing entirely.

Even for fathers who maintain regular contact, the pattern of father-child relationships changes. The sociologists Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenberg, who have studied broken families, write that the fathers behave more like other relatives than like parents. Rather than helping with homework or carrying out a project with their children, nonresidential fathers are likely to take the kids shopping, to the movies, or out to dinner. Instead of providing steady advice and guidance, divorced fathers become "treat" dads.

Apparently—and paradoxically—it is the visiting relationship itself, rather than the frequency of visits, that is the real source of the problem. According to Wallerstein, the few children in the California study who reported visiting with their fathers once or twice a week over a ten-year period still felt rejected. The need to schedule a special time to be with the child, the repeated leave-takings, and the lack of connection to the child's regular, daily schedule leaves many fathers adrift, frustrated, and confused. Wallerstein calls the visiting father a parent without portfolio.

The deterioration in father-child bonds is most severe among children who experience divorce at an early age, according to a recent study. Nearly three quarters of the respondents, now young men and women, report having poor relationships with their fathers. Close to half have received psychological help, nearly a third have dropped out of high school, and about a quarter report having experienced high levels of problem behavior or emotional distress by the time they became young adults.

Survey after survey shows that Americans are less inclined than they were a generation ago to value sexual fidelity, lifelong marriage, and parenthood as worthwhile personal goals ■

### Long-Term Effects

SINCE MOST CHILDREN LIVE WITH THEIR MOTHERS after divorce, one might expect that the mother-child bond would remain unaltered and might even be strengthened. Yet research shows that the mother-child bond is also weakened as the result of divorce. Only half of the children who were close to their mothers before a divorce remained equally close after the divorce. Boys, particularly, had difficulties with their mothers. Moreover, mother-child relationships deteriorated over time. Whereas teenagers in disrupted families were no more likely than teenagers in intact families to report poor relationships with their mothers, 30 percent of young adults from disrupted families have poor relationships with their mothers, as compared with 16 percent of young adults from intact families. Mother-daughter relationships often deteriorate as the daughter reaches young adulthood. The only group in society that derives any benefit from these weakened parent-child ties is the therapeutic community. Young adults from disrupted families are nearly twice as likely as those from intact families to receive psychological help.

Some social scientists have criticized Judith Wallerstein's research because her study is based on a small clinical sample and does not include a control group of children from intact families. However, other studies generally support and strengthen her findings. Nicholas Zill has found similar long-term effects on children of divorce, reporting that "effects of marital discord and family disruption are visible twelve to twenty-two years later in poor relationships with parents, high levels of problem behavior, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of high school and receiving psychological help." Moreover, Zill's research also found signs of distress in young women who seemed relatively well adjusted in middle childhood and adolescence. Girls in single-parent families are also at much greater risk for precocious sexuality, teenage marriage, teenage pregnancy, nonmarital birth, and divorce than are girls in two-parent families.

Zill's research shows that family disruption strongly affects school achievement as well. Children in disrupted families are nearly twice as likely as those in intact families to drop out of high school; among children who do drop out, those from disrupted families are less likely eventually to earn a diploma or a GED. Boys are at greater risk for dropping out than girls, and are also more likely to exhibit aggressive, acting-out behaviors. Other research confirms these findings. According to a study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 33 percent of two-parent elementary school students are ranked as high achievers, as compared with 17 percent of single-parent students. The children in single-parent families are also more likely to be truant or late or to have disciplinary action taken against them. Even after controlling for race, income, and religion, scholars find significant differences in educational attainment between children who grow up in intact families and children who do not. In his 1992 study *America's Smallest School: The Family*, Paul Barton shows that the proportion of two-parent families varies widely from state to state and is related to variations in academic achievement. North Dakota, for example, scores highest on the math-proficiency test and second highest on the two-parent-family scale. The District of Columbia is second lowest on the math test and lowest in the nation on the two-parent-family scale.

Zill notes that "while coming from a disrupted family

significantly increases a young adult's risks of experiencing social, emotional or academic difficulties, it does not foreordain such difficulties. The majority of young people from disrupted families have successfully completed high school, do *not* currently display high levels of emotional distress or problem behavior, and enjoy reasonable relationships with their mothers." Nevertheless, a majority of these young adults do show maladjustment in their relationships with their fathers.

These findings underscore the importance of both a mother and a father in fostering the emotional well-being of children. Obviously, not all children in two-parent families are free from emotional turmoil, but few are burdened with the troubles that accompany family breakup. Moreover, as the sociologist Amitai Etzioni explains in a new book, *The Spirit of Community*, two parents in an intact family make up what might be called a mutually supportive education coalition. When both parents are present, they can play different, even contradictory, roles. One parent may goad the child to achieve, while the other may encourage the child to take time out to daydream or toss a football around. One may emphasize taking intellectual risks, while the other may insist on following the teacher's guidelines. At the same time, the parents regularly exchange information about the child's school problems and achievements, and have a sense of the overall educational mission. However, Etzioni writes,

> The sequence of divorce followed by a succession of boy or girlfriends, a second marriage, and frequently another divorce and another turnover of partners often means a repeatedly disrupted educational coalition. Each change in participants involves a change in the educational agenda for the child. Each new partner cannot be expected to pick up the previous one's educational post and program. . . . As a result, changes in parenting partners mean, at best, a deep disruption in a child's education, though of course several disruptions cut deeper into the effectiveness of the educational coalition than just one.

# The Family and Public Policy

A NUMBER OF NEW PROPOSALS address the problem of family disruption. Generally speaking, they have a single objective: to ensure that children have the support and commitment of both biological parents.

• The Family Support Act of 1988, which represents the culmination of a fifteen-year trend toward stricter child-support enforcement, has enabled states to impose legal child-support obligations on a greater number of absent fathers and to increase the percentage of absent fathers who actually meet their obligations.

For example, the Family Support Act contains the strongest legislation to date on paternal identification, the essential first step toward making a legally binding child-support award. In the cases of about three out of every four children born to unwed mothers, fathers have not been legally identified. Similarly, in the cases of the great majority of mothers receiving AFDC benefits, the father is never identified or known to public agencies or officials. In the past many people reasoned that it was better to ignore the father—he was probably unable to support the child anyway, and might cause more trouble if he were around than if he remained absent. The 1988 legislation requires states to get the Social Security numbers of both parents when a birth certificate is issued. If paternity is in doubt or contested, the federal government will pay for 90 percent of the cost of genetic testing. Irwin Garfinkel, who has written a study of child support, estimates that this approach will establish paternity for half of the nation's nonmarital births by the turn of the century.

• The most comprehensive and most controversial proposal is one for a child-support-assurance program—a universal, non-means-tested entitlement plan akin to Survivors Insurance for widows. Child-support assurance would guarantee a standard level of child support—some propose $2,500 a year for the first child in a family, and $1,000, $1,000, and $500 for the second, third, and fourth children—to all single parents whose children live with them. The federal government would serve as a collection agency for the support payments, withholding income from the nonresidential parent and mailing a monthly check to the parent with the children. In cases where the parent failed to meet the full support obligation, taxpayers would make up the difference. According to its advocates, the child-support-assurance plan would reduce the welfare burden in three ways: it would prevent some mothers from going on welfare, since they would be assured of regular support; it would reduce AFDC benefits dollar for dollar as support was collected from the father; and it would provide various incentives for mothers on welfare to get off it. For example, unlike a mother receiving AFDC, a working mother would be able to keep the full child-support benefit in addition to her working income. Consequently, child-support-assurance benefits would boost a family's income only if the mother went out and got a job. Moreover, this plan would create incentives for establishing legal paternity, since doing so would be necessary to qualify for benefits. And, the plan's advocates say, it would provide a nonstigmatizing, regularized system of guaranteed child support for all single parents. However, critics say that a plan of guaran-

## The Bad News About Stepparents

PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING, AND POTENTIALLY disturbing, new research has to do with children in stepparent families. Until quite recently the optimistic assumption was that children saw their lives improve when they became part of a stepfamily. When Nicholas Zill and his colleagues began to study the effects of remarriage on children, their working hypothesis was that stepparent families would make up for the shortcomings of the single-parent family. Clearly, most children are better off economically when they are able to share in the income of two adults. When a second adult joins the household, there may be a reduction in the time and work pressures on the single parent.

The research overturns this optimistic assumption, however. In general the evidence suggests that remarriage neither reproduces nor restores the intact family structure, even when it brings more income and a second adult into the household. Quite the contrary. Indeed, children living with stepparents appear to be even more disadvantaged than children living in a stable single-parent family. Other difficulties seem to offset the advantages of extra income and an extra pair of hands. However much our modern sympathies reject the fairy-tale portrait of stepparents, the latest research confirms that the old stories are anthropologically quite accurate. Stepfamilies disrupt established loyalties, create new uncertainties, provoke deep anxieties, and sometimes threaten a child's physical safety as well as emotional security.

Parents and children have dramatically different interests in and expectations for a new marriage. For a single parent, remarriage brings new commitments, the hope of enduring love and happiness, and relief from stress and loneliness. For a child, the same event often provokes confused feelings of sadness, anger, and rejection. Nearly half the children in Wallerstein's study said they felt left out in their stepfamilies. The National Commission on Children, a bipartisan group headed by Senator John D. Rockefeller, of West Virginia, reported that children

teed child support would do nothing to reduce nonmarital births or to reinforce the principle of ultimate parental responsibility.

• In the meantime, several states have revived stigma as part of a larger effort to improve child-support collection. Massachusetts, a state with some experience in the public shaming of criminals, has replaced stocks on the common with posters of "deadbeat dads" on the six o'clock news.

• Changes in divorce law, too, can help children. Mary Ann Glendon, a professor at Harvard Law School, has proposed a "children first" principle in divorce proceedings. Under this rule, judges in litigated divorce cases would determine the best possible package of benefits, income, and services for the children. Only then would the judge turn to other issues, such as the division of remaining marital assets.

• Policy experts offer several proposals to reduce the likelihood of divorce for parents in low-conflict situations. One is to introduce a two-tier system of divorce law. Marriages between adults without minor children would be easy to dissolve, but marriages between adults with children would not. Another idea is to reintroduce some measure of fault in divorce, or to allow no-fault divorce but establish marital fault in awarding alimony or dividing marital property.

• Economic forces significantly affect marriage-related behavior. With the loss of high-paying jobs for high school graduates and the disappearance of good jobs from many inner-city neighborhoods, the ability of young men to provide for a family has been declining. Improving job opportunities for young men would enhance their ability and presumably their willingness to form lasting marriages. Expanding the earned-income tax credit would also strengthen many families economically. According to one recent estimate, an expanded tax credit would lift a million full-time working families out of poverty. Still other proposals include raising the personal exemption for young children in lower- and middle-income families and increasing the value of the marriage deduction in the tax code by allowing married couples to split their incomes.

• Changing the welfare system to eliminate its disincentives to marry would help reduce out-of-wedlock motherhood, many experts suggest. New Jersey, for example, has proposed a plan to encourage marriage by continuing AFDC benefits to children if their natural parents marry and live together in the home, as long as their income does not exceed state eligibility standards. Another idea, not yet tried in any state, is to provide a large one-time bonus to any woman who marries, leaves the AFDC rolls, and stays off for an extended period. Many people, including President Clinton, have called for the imposition of strict two-year time limits for AFDC.

• At least as important as changes in the law and public policy are efforts to change the cultural climate, particularly the media's messages about divorce and nonmarital childbirth. Parents consistently cite television, with its increasing use of sex, violence, or the two combined, as one of their strongest adversaries. One way to improve television programming would be to fully implement the provisions of the 1990 Children's Television Act, including the establishment of the National Endowment for Children's Educational Television. It would also be valuable to enlist the support of leaders in the entertainment industry—particularly sports and movie stars—in conveying to children that making babies out of wedlock is as stupid as doing drugs or dropping out of school. This might, of course, await more exemplary behavior by some of those stars.

from stepfamilies were more likely to say they often felt lonely or blue than children from either single-parent or intact families. Children in stepfamilies were the most likely to report that they wanted more time with their mothers. When mothers remarry, daughters tend to have a harder time adjusting than sons. Evidently, boys often respond positively to a male presence in the household, while girls who have established close ties to their mother in a single-parent family often see the stepfather as a rival and an intruder. According to one study, boys in remarried families are less likely to drop out of school than boys in single-parent families, while the opposite is true for girls.

A large percentage of children do not even consider stepparents to be part of their families, according to the National Survey on Children. The NSC asked children, "When you think of your family, who do you include?" Only 10 percent of the children failed to mention a biological parent, but a third left out a stepparent. Even children who rarely saw their noncustodial parents almost always named them as family members. The weak sense of attachment is mutual. When parents were asked the same question, only one percent failed to mention a biological child, while 15 percent left out a stepchild. In the same study stepparents with both natural children and stepchildren said that it was harder for them to love their stepchildren than their biological children and that their children would have been better off if they had grown up with two biological parents.

One of the most severe risks associated with stepparent-child ties is the risk of sexual abuse. As Judith Wallerstein explains, "The presence of a stepfather can raise the difficult issue of a thinner incest barrier." The incest taboo is strongly reinforced, Wallerstein says, by knowledge of paternity and by the experience of caring for a child since birth. A stepfather enters the family without either credential and plays a sexual role as the mother's husband. As a result, stepfathers can pose a sexual risk to the children, especially to daughters. According to a study by the Canadian researchers Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, preschool children in stepfamilies are forty times as likely as children in intact families to suffer physical or sexual abuse. (Most of the sexual abuse was committed by a third party, such as a neighbor, a stepfather's male friend, or another nonrelative.) Stepfathers discriminate in their abuse: they are far more likely to assault nonbiological children than their own natural children.

Sexual abuse represents the most extreme threat to children's well-being. Stepfamilies also seem less likely to make the kind of ordinary investments in the children that other families do. Although it is true that the stepfamily household has a higher income than the single-parent household, it does not follow that the additional income is reliably available to the children. To begin with, children's claim on stepparents' resources is shaky. Stepparents are not legally required to support stepchildren, so their financial support of these children is entirely voluntary. Moreover, since stepfamilies are far more likely to break up than intact families, particularly in the first five years, there is always the risk—far greater than the risk of unemployment in an intact family—that the second income will vanish with another divorce. The financial commitment to a child's education appears weaker in stepparent families, perhaps because the stepparent believes that the responsibility for educating the child rests with the biological parent.

Similarly, studies suggest that even though they may have the time, the parents in stepfamilies do not invest as much of it in their children as the parents in intact families or even single parents do. A 1991 survey by the National Commission on Children showed that the parents in stepfamilies were less likely to be involved in a child's school life, including involvement in extracurricular activities, than either intact-family parents or single parents. They were the least likely to report being involved in such time-consuming activities as coaching a child's team, accompanying class trips, or helping with school projects. According to McLanahan's research, children in stepparent families report lower educational aspirations on the part of their parents and lower levels of parental involvement with schoolwork. In short, it appears that family income and the number of adults in the household are not the only factors affecting children's well-being.

## Diminishing Investments

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THIS DIMINished interest and investment. In the law, as in the children's eyes, stepparents are shadowy figures. According to the legal scholar David Chambers, family law has pretty much ignored stepparents. Chambers writes, "In the substantial majority of states, stepparents, even when they live with a child, have no legal obligation to contribute to the child's support; nor does a stepparent's presence in the home alter the support obligations of a noncustodial parent. The stepparent also has . . . no authority to approve emergency medical treatment or even to sign a permission slip. . . ." When a marriage breaks up, the stepparent has no continuing obligation to provide for a stepchild, no matter how long or how much he or she has been contributing to the support of the child. In short, Chambers says, stepparent relationships are based wholly on consent, subject to the inclinations of the adult and the child. The only way a stepparent can acquire the legal status of a parent is through adoption. Some researchers also point to the cultural ambiguity of the stepparent's role as a source of diminished interest, while others insist that it is the absence of a blood tie that weakens the bond between stepparent and child.

Whatever its causes, the diminished investment in children in both single-parent and stepparent families has

a significant impact on their life chances. Take parental help with college costs. The parents in intact families are far more likely to contribute to children's college costs than are those in disrupted families. Moreover, they are usually able to arrive at a shared understanding of which children will go to college, where they will go, how much the parents will contribute, and how much the children will contribute. But when families break up, these informal understandings can vanish. The issue of college tuition remains one of the most contested areas of parental support, especially for higher-income parents.

The law does not step in even when familial understandings break down. In the 1980s many states lowered the age covered by child-support agreements from twenty-one to eighteen, thus eliminating college as a cost associated with support for a minor child. Consequently, the question of college tuition is typically not addressed in child-custody agreements. Even in states where the courts do require parents to contribute to college costs, the requirement may be in jeopardy. In a recent decision in Pennsylvania the court overturned an earlier decision ordering divorced parents to contribute to college tuition. This decision is likely to inspire challenges in other states where courts have required parents to pay for college. Increasingly, help in paying for college is entirely voluntary.

Judith Wallerstein has been analyzing the educational decisions of the college-age men and women in her study. She reports that "a full 42 percent of these men and women from middle class families appeared to have ended their educations without attempting college or had left college before achieving a degree at either the two-year or the four-year level." A significant percentage of these young people have the ability to attend college. Typical of this group are Nick and Terry, sons of a college professor. They had been close to their father before the divorce, but their father remarried soon after the divorce and saw his sons only occasionally, even though he lived nearby. At age nineteen Nick had completed a few junior-college courses and was earning a living as a salesman. Terry, twenty-one, who had been tested as a gifted student, was doing blue-collar work irregularly.

Sixty-seven percent of the college-age students from disrupted families attended college, as compared with 85 percent of other students who attended the same high schools. Of those attending college, several had fathers who were financially capable of contributing to college costs but did not.

The withdrawal of support for college suggests that other customary forms of parental help-giving, too, may decline as the result of family breakup. For example, nearly a quarter of first-home purchases since 1980 have involved help from relatives, usually parents. The median amount of help is $5,000. It is hard to imagine that parents who refuse to contribute to college costs will offer help in buying first homes, or help in buying cars or health insurance for young adult family members. And although it is too soon to tell, family disruption may affect the generational transmission of wealth. Baby Boomers will inherit their parents' estates, some substantial, accumulated over a lifetime by parents who lived and saved together. To be sure, the postwar generation benefited from an expanding economy and a rising standard of living, but its ability to accumulate wealth also owed something to family stability. The lifetime assets, like the marriage itself, remained intact. It is unlikely that the children of disrupted families will be in so favorable a position.

> Even if single mothers escape poverty, economic uncertainty remains a defining condition of life. And uncertainty about money triggers other kinds of uncertainty ■

Moreover, children from disrupted families may be less likely to help their aging parents. The sociologist Alice Rossi, who has studied intergenerational patterns of help-giving, says that adult obligation has its roots in early-childhood experience. Children who grow up in intact families experience higher levels of obligation to kin than children from broken families. Children's sense of obligation to a nonresidential father is particularly weak. Among adults with both parents living, those separated from their father during childhood are less likely than others to see the father regularly. Half of them see their father more than once a year, as compared with nine out of ten of those whose parents are still married. Apparently a kind of bitter justice is at work here. Fathers who do not support or see their young children may not be able to count on their adult children's support when they are old and need money, love, and attention.

In short, as Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenburg put it, "Through divorce and remarriage, individuals are related to more and more people, to each of whom they

owe less and less." Moreover, as Nicholas Zill argues, weaker parent-child attachments leave many children more strongly exposed to influences outside the family, such as peers, boyfriends or girlfriends, and the media. Although these outside forces can sometimes be helpful, common sense and research opinion argue against putting too much faith in peer groups or the media as surrogates for Mom and Dad.

## Poverty, Crime, Education

FAMILY DISRUPTION WOULD BE A SERIOUS PROBlem even if it affected only individual children and families. But its impact is far broader. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to characterize it as a central cause of many of our most vexing social problems. Consider three problems that most Americans believe rank among the nation's pressing concerns: poverty, crime, and declining school performance.

More than half of the increase in child poverty in the 1980s is attributable to changes in family structure, according to David Eggebeen and Daniel Lichter, of Pennsylvania State University. In fact, if family structure in the United States had remained relatively constant since 1960, the rate of child poverty would be a third lower than it is today. This does not bode well for the future. With more than half of today's children likely to live in single-parent families, poverty and associated welfare costs threaten to become even heavier burdens on the nation.

Crime in American cities has increased dramatically and grown more violent over recent decades. Much of this can be attributed to the rise in disrupted families. Nationally, more than 70 percent of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. A number of scholarly studies find that even after the groups of subjects are controlled for income, boys from single-mother homes are significantly more likely than others to commit crimes and to wind up in the juvenile justice, court, and penitentiary systems. One such study summarizes the relationship between crime and one-parent families in this way: "The relationship is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and again in the literature." The nation's mayors, as well as police officers, social workers, probation officers, and court officials, consistently point to family breakup as the most important source of rising rates of crime.

Terrible as poverty and crime are, they tend to be concentrated in inner cities and isolated from the everyday experience of many Americans. The same cannot be said of the problem of declining school performance. Nowhere has the impact of family breakup been more profound or widespread than in the nation's public schools. There is a strong consensus that the schools are failing in their historic mission to prepare every American child to be a good worker and a good citizen. And nearly everyone agrees that the schools must undergo dramatic reform in order to reach that goal. In pursuit of that goal, moreover, we have suffered no shortage of bright ideas or pilot projects or bold experiments in school reform. But there is little evidence that measures such as curricular reform, school-based management, and school choice will address, let alone solve, the biggest problem schools face: the rising number of children who come from disrupted families.

The great educational tragedy of our time is that many American children are failing in school not because they are intellectually or physically impaired but because they are emotionally incapacitated. In schools across the nation principals report a dramatic rise in the aggressive, acting-out behavior characteristic of children, especially boys, who are living in single-parent families. The discipline problems in today's suburban schools—assaults on teachers, unprovoked attacks on other students, screaming outbursts in class—outstrip the problems that were evident in the toughest city schools a generation ago. Moreover, teachers find many children emotionally distracted, so upset and preoccupied by the explosive drama of their own family lives that they are unable to concentrate on such mundane matters as multiplication tables.

In response, many schools have turned to therapeutic remediation. A growing proportion of many school budgets is devoted to counseling and other psychological services. The curriculum is becoming more therapeutic: children are taking courses in self-esteem, conflict resolution, and aggression management. Parental advisory groups are conscientiously debating alternative approaches to traditional school discipline, ranging from teacher training in mediation to the introduction of metal detectors and security guards in the schools. Schools are increasingly becoming emergency rooms of the emotions, devoted not only to developing minds but also to repairing hearts. As a result, the mission of the school, along with the culture of the classroom, is slowly changing. What we are seeing, largely as a result of the new burdens of family disruption, is the psychologization of American education.

Taken together, the research presents a powerful challenge to the prevailing view of family change as social progress. Not a single one of the assumptions underlying that view can be sustained against the empirical evidence. Single-parent families are not able to do well economically on a mother's income. In fact, most teeter on the economic brink, and many fall into poverty and welfare dependency. Growing up in a disrupted family does not enrich a child's life or expand the number of adults committed to the child's well-being. In fact, disrupted families threaten the psychological well-being of children and diminish the investment of adult time and money in them. Family diversity in the form of increasing numbers of single-parent and stepparent families

does not strengthen the social fabric. It dramatically weakens and undermines society, placing new burdens on schools, courts, prisons, and the welfare system. These new families are not an improvement on the nuclear family, nor are they even just as good, whether you look at outcomes for children or outcomes for society as a whole. In short, far from representing social progress, family change represents a stunning example of social regress.

## The Two-Parent Advantage

ALL THIS EVIDENCE GIVES RISE TO AN OBVIOUS CONclusion: growing up in an intact two-parent family is an important source of advantage for American children. Though far from perfect as a social institution, the intact family offers children greater security and better outcomes than its fast-growing alternatives: single-parent and stepparent families. Not only does the intact family protect the child from poverty and economic insecurity; it also provides greater noneconomic investments of parental time, attention, and emotional support over the entire life course. This does not mean that all two-parent families are better for children than all single-parent families. But in the face of the evidence it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the proposition that all family structures produce equally good outcomes for children.

> The debate about family structure is not simply about the social-scientific evidence, although that is important. It is also a debate over deeply held and often conflicting values ■

Curiously, many in the research community are hesitant to say that two-parent families generally promote better outcomes for children than single-parent families. Some argue that we need finer measures of the extent of the family-structure effect. As one scholar has noted, it is possible, by disaggregating the data in certain ways, to make family structure "go away" as an independent variable. Other researchers point to studies that show that children suffer psychological effects as a result of family conflict preceding family breakup. Consequently, they reason, it is the conflict rather than the structure of the family that is responsible for many of the problems associated with family disruption. Others, including Judith Wallerstein, caution against treating children in divorced families and children in intact families as separate populations, because doing so tends to exaggerate the differences between the two groups. "We have to take this family by family," Wallerstein says.

Some of the caution among researchers can also be attributed to ideological pressures. Privately, social scientists worry that their research may serve ideological causes that they themselves do not support, or that their work may be misinterpreted as an attempt to "tell people what to do." Some are fearful that they will be attacked by feminist colleagues, or, more generally, that their comments will be regarded as an effort to turn back the clock to the 1950s—a goal that has almost no constituency in the academy. Even more fundamental, it has become risky for anyone—scholar, politician, religious leader—to make normative statements today. This reflects not only the persistent drive toward "value neutrality" in the professions but also a deep confusion about the purposes of public discourse. The dominant view appears to be that social criticism, like criticism of individuals, is psychologically damaging. The worst thing you can do is to make people feel guilty or bad about themselves.

When one sets aside these constraints, however, the case against the two-parent family is remarkably weak. It is true that disaggregating data can make family structure less significant as a factor, just as disaggregating Hurricane Andrew into wind, rain, and tides can make it disappear as a meteorological phenomenon. Nonetheless, research opinion as well as common sense suggests that the effects of changes in family structure are great enough to cause concern. Nicholas Zill argues that many of the risk factors for children are doubled or more than doubled as the result of family disruption. "In epidemiological terms," he writes, "the doubling of a hazard is a substantial increase. . . . the increase in risk that dietary cholesterol poses for cardiovascular disease, for example, is far less than double, yet millions of Americans have altered their diets because of the perceived hazard."

The argument that family conflict, rather than the breakup of parents, is the cause of children's psychological distress is persuasive on its face. Children who grow up in high-conflict families, whether the families stay together or eventually split up, are undoubtedly at great psychological risk. And surely no one would dispute that there must be societal measures available, including divorce, to remove children from families where they are in

danger. Yet only a minority of divorces grow out of pathological situations; much more common are divorces in families unscarred by physical assault. Moreover, an equally compelling hypothesis is that family breakup generates its own conflict. Certainly, many families exhibit more conflictual and even violent behavior as a consequence of divorce than they did before divorce.

Finally, it is important to note that clinical insights are different from sociological findings. Clinicians work with individual families, who cannot and should not be defined by statistical aggregates. Appropriate to a clinical approach, moreover, is a focus on the internal dynamics of family functioning and on the immense variability in human behavior. Nevertheless, there is enough empirical evidence to justify sociological statements about the causes of declining child well-being and to demonstrate that despite the plasticity of human response, there are some useful rules of thumb to guide our thinking about and policies affecting the family.

For example, Sara McLanahan says, three structural constants are commonly associated with intact families, even intact families who would not win any "Family of the Year" awards. The first is economic. In intact families, children share in the income of two adults. Indeed, as a number of analysts have pointed out, the two-parent family is becoming more rather than less necessary, because more and more families need two incomes to sustain a middle-class standard of living.

McLanahan believes that most intact families also provide a stable authority structure. Family breakup commonly upsets the established boundaries of authority in a family. Children are often required to make decisions or accept responsibilities once considered the province of parents. Moreover, children, even very young children, are often expected to behave like mature adults, so that the grown-ups in the family can be free to deal with the emotional fallout of the failed relationship. In some instances family disruption creates a complete vacuum in authority; everyone invents his or her own rules. With lines of authority disrupted or absent, children find it much more difficult to engage in the normal kinds of testing behavior, the trial and error, the failing and succeeding, that define the developmental pathway toward character and competence. McLanahan says, "Children need to be the ones to challenge the rules. The parents need to set the boundaries and let the kids push the boundaries. The children shouldn't have to walk the straight and narrow at all times."

Finally, McLanahan holds that children in intact families benefit from stability in what she neutrally terms "household personnel." Family disruption frequently brings new adults into the family, including stepparents, live-in boyfriends or girlfriends, and casual sexual partners. Like stepfathers, boyfriends can present a real threat to children's, particularly to daughters', security and well-being. But physical or sexual abuse represents only the most extreme such threat. Even the very best of boyfriends can disrupt and undermine a child's sense of peace and security, McLanahan says. "It's not as though you're going from an unhappy marriage to peacefulness. There can be a constant changing until the mother finds a suitable partner."

McLanahan's argument helps explain why children of widows tend to do better than children of divorced or unmarried mothers. Widows differ from other single mothers in all three respects. They are economically more secure, because they receive more public assistance through Survivors Insurance, and possibly private insurance or other kinds of support from family members. Thus widows are less likely to leave the neighborhood in search of a new or better job and a cheaper house or apartment. Moreover, the death of a father is not likely to disrupt the authority structure radically. When a father dies, he is no longer physically present, but his death does not dethrone him as an authority figure in the child's life. On the contrary, his authority may be magnified through death. The mother can draw on the powerful memory of the departed father as a way of intensifying her parental authority: "Your father would have wanted it this way." Finally, since widows tend to be older than divorced mothers, their love life may be less distracting.

Regarding the two-parent family, the sociologist David Popenoe, who has devoted much of his career to the study of families, both in the United States and in Scandinavia, makes this straightforward assertion:

> Social science research is almost never conclusive. There are always methodological difficulties and stones left unturned. Yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and stepfamilies.

## The Regime Effect

THE RISE IN FAMILY DISRUPTION IS NOT UNIQUE to American society. It is evident in virtually all advanced nations, including Japan, where it is also shaped by the growing participation of women in the work force. Yet the United States has made divorce easier and quicker than in any other Western nation with the sole exception of Sweden—and the trend toward solo motherhood has also been more pronounced in America. (Sweden has an equally high rate of out-of-wedlock birth, but the majority of such births are to cohabiting couples, a long-established pattern in Swedish society.) More to the point, nowhere has family breakup been greeted by a more triumphant rhetoric of renewal than in America.

What is striking about this rhetoric is how deeply it reflects classic themes in American public life. It draws its language and imagery from the nation's founding myth.

It depicts family breakup as a drama of revolution and rebirth. The nuclear family represents the corrupt past, an institution guilty of the abuse of power and the suppression of individual freedom. Breaking up the family is like breaking away from Old World tyranny. Liberated from the bonds of the family, the individual can achieve independence and experience a new beginning, a fresh start, a new birth of freedom. In short, family breakup recapitulates the American experience.

This rhetoric is an example of what the University of Maryland political philosopher William Galston has called the "regime effect." The founding of the United States set in motion a new political order based to an unprecedented degree on individual rights, personal choice, and egalitarian relationships. Since then these values have spread beyond their original domain of political relationships to define social relationships as well. During the past twenty-five years these values have had a particularly profound impact on the family.

Increasingly, political principles of individual rights and choice shape our understanding of family commitment and solidarity. Family relationships are viewed not as permanent or binding but as voluntary and easily terminable. Moreover, under the sway of the regime effect the family loses its central importance as an institution in the civil society, accomplishing certain social goals such as raising children and caring for its members, and becomes a means to achieving greater individual happiness—a lifestyle choice. Thus, Galston says, what is happening to the American family reflects the "unfolding logic of authoritative, deeply American moral-political principles."

One benefit of the regime effect is to create greater equality in adult family relationships. Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, enjoy relationships far more egalitarian than past relationships were, and most Americans prefer it that way. But the political principles of the regime effect can threaten another kind of family relationship—that between parent and child. Owing to their biological and developmental immaturity, children are needy dependents. They are not able to express their choices according to limited, easily terminable, voluntary agreements. They are not able to act as negotiators in family decisions, even those that most affect their own interests. As one writer has put it, "a newborn does not make a good 'partner.'" Correspondingly, the parental role is antithetical to the spirit of the regime. Parental investment in children involves a diminished investment in self, a willing deference to the needs and claims of the dependent child. Perhaps more than any other family relationship, the parent-child relationship—shaped as it is by patterns of dependency and deference—can be undermined and weakened by the principles of the regime.

More than a century and a half ago Alexis de Tocqueville made the striking observation that an individualistic society depends on a communitarian institution like the family for its continued existence. The family cannot be constituted like the liberal state, nor can it be governed entirely by that state's principles. Yet the family serves as the seedbed for the virtues required by a liberal state. The family is responsible for teaching lessons of independence, self-restraint, responsibility, and right conduct, which are essential to a free, democratic society. If the family fails in these tasks, then the entire experiment in democratic self-rule is jeopardized.

To take one example: independence is basic to successful functioning in American life. We assume that most people in America will be able to work, care for themselves and their families, think for themselves, and inculcate the same traits of independence and initiative in their children. We depend on families to teach people to do these things. The erosion of the two-parent family undermines the capacity of families to impart this knowledge; children of long-term welfare-dependent single parents are far more likely than others to be dependent themselves. Similarly, the children in disrupted families have a harder time forging bonds of trust with others and giving and getting help across the generations. This, too, may lead to greater dependency on the resources of the state.

Over the past two and a half decades Americans have been conducting what is tantamount to a vast natural experiment in family life. Many would argue that this experiment was necessary, worthwhile, and long overdue. The results of the experiment are coming in, and they are clear. Adults have benefited from the changes in family life in important ways, but the same cannot be said for children. Indeed, this is the first generation in the nation's history to do worse psychologically, socially, and economically than its parents. Most poignantly, in survey after survey the children of broken families confess deep longings for an intact family.

Nonetheless, as Galston is quick to point out, the regime effect is not an irresistible undertow that will carry away the family. It is more like a swift current, against which it is possible to swim. People learn; societies can change, particularly when it becomes apparent that certain behaviors damage the social ecology, threaten the public order, and impose new burdens on core institutions. Whether Americans will act to overcome the legacy of family disruption is a crucial but as yet unanswered question. □

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VIEWPOINT

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# DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT

## The evidence is coming in on family diversity: The breakup of two-parent families harms many children and dramatically undermines our society.

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By BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD

Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbirth are transforming the lives of American children. In the postwar generation more than 80 percent of children grew up in a family with two biological parents who were married to each other. By 1980 only 50 percent could expect to spend their entire childhood in an intact family. If current trends continue, less than half of all children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood. Most American children will spend several years in a single-mother family. Some will eventually live in stepparent families, but because stepfamilies are more likely to break up than stay intact (by which I mean two-biological-parent) families, an increasing number of children will experience family breakup two or even three times during childhood.

According to a growing body of social-scientific evidence, children in families disrupted by divorce and out-of-wedlock birth do worse than children in intact families on several measures of well-being. Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor. They are also likely to stay poor longer. Twenty-two percent of children in one-parent families will experience poverty during childhood for seven years or more, as compared with only two percent of children in two-parent families. A 1988 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics found that children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems. They are also more likely to drop out of high school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs and to be in trouble with the law. Compared with children in intact families, children from disrupted families are at a much higher risk for physical or sexual abuse.

Contrary to popular belief, many children do not "bounce back" after divorce or remarriage. Difficulties that are associated with family breakup often persist into adulthood. Children who grow up in single-parent or stepparent families are less successful as adults, particularly in the two domains of life — love and work — that are most essential to happiness. Needless to say, not all children experience such negative effects. However, research shows that many children from disrupted families have a harder time achieving intimacy in a relationship, forming a stable marriage or even holding a steady job.

Despite this growing body of evidence, it is nearly impossible to discuss changes in family structure without provoking angry protest. Many people see the discussion as no more than an attack on struggling single mothers and their children: Why blame single mothers when they are doing the very best they can? Other people believe that the dramatic changes in family structure, though regrettable, are impossible to reverse. Family breakup is an inevitable feature of American life, and anyone who thinks otherwise is indulging in nostalgia or trying to turn back the clock.

Such views are not to be dismissed. Indeed, they help to explain why family structure is such an explosive issue for Americans. The debate about it is not simply about the social-scientific evidence, although that is surely an important part of the discussion. It is also a debate over deeply held and often conflicting values. How do we begin to reconcile our long-standing belief in equality and diversity with an impressive body of evidence that suggests that not all family structures produce equal outcomes for children?

In the past these issues have turned out to be too difficult and too politically risky for debate. In the mid-1960s Daniel Patrick Moy-

*PLEASE SEE* **FAMILIES, 4M**

nihan, then an assistant secretary of labor, was denounced as a racist for calling attention to the relationship between the prevalence of black single-mother families and the lower socioeconomic standing of black children. For nearly 20 years the policy and research communities backed away from the entire issue.

Whitehead

In 1980 the Carter administration convened a historic White House Conference on Families, designed to address the growing problems of children and families in America. The result was a prolonged, publicly subsidized quarrel over the definition of "family." No president since has tried to hold a national family conference. Last year, at a time when the rate of out-of-wedlock births had reached a historic high, Vice President Dan Quayle was ridiculed for criticizing Murphy Brown. In short, every time the issue of family structure has been raised, the response has been first controversy, then retreat, and finally silence.

## LOOKING BACK

### *The golden age of family stability*

A new standard of family security and stability was established in postwar America. For the first time in history the vast majority of the nation's children could expect to live with married biological parents throughout childhood. Children might still suffer other forms of adversity — poverty, racial discrimination, lack of educational opportunity — but only a few would be deprived of the nurture and protection of a mother and a father. No longer did children have to be haunted by the classic fears vividly dramatized in folklore and fable — that their parents would die, that they would have to live with a stepparent and stepsiblings, or that they would be abandoned. These were the years when the nation confidently boarded up orphanages and closed foundling hospitals, certain that such institutions would never again be needed.

In the 1960s the rate of family disruption suddenly began to rise. After inching up over the course of a century, the divorce rate soared.

Half of all marriages now end in divorce. Following divorce, many people enter new relationships. Some begin living together. Nearly half of all cohabiting couples have children in the household. Fifteen percent have new children together. Many cohabiting couples eventually get married. However, both cohabiting and remarried couples are more likely to break up than couples in first marriages. Even social scientists find it hard to keep pace with the complexity and velocity of such patterns.

Given its dramatic impact on children's lives, one might reasonably expect that this historic level of family disruption would be viewed with alarm, even regarded as a national crisis. Yet this has not been the case. In recent years some people have argued that these trends pose a serious threat to children and to the nation as a whole, but they are dismissed as declinists, pessimists or nostalgists, unwilling or unable to accept the new facts of life. The dominant view is that the changes in family structure are, on balance, positive.

There are several reasons why this is so, but the fundamental reason is that at some point in the 1970s Americans changed their minds about the meaning of these disruptive behaviors. What had once been regarded as hostile to children's best interests was now considered essential to adults' happiness. In the 1950s most Americans believed that parents should stay in an unhappy marriage for the sake of the children. The assumption was that a divorce would damage the children, and the prospect of such damage gave divorce its meaning. By the mid-1970s a majority of Americans rejected that view. At about the same time, the longstanding taboo against out-of-wedlock childbirth also collapsed. By the mid-1970s three-fourths of Americans said that it was not morally wrong for a woman to have a child outside marriage.

## CONFLICTING VALUES

### *Child well-being vs. adult happiness*

Once the social metric shifts from child well-being to adult well-being, it is hard to see divorce and nonmarital birth in anything but a positive light. However distressing and difficult they may be, both of these behaviors can hold out the promise of greater adult choice, freedom and happiness.

This cultural shift helps explain what otherwise would be inexplicable: the failure to see the rise in family disruption as a severe and troubling national problem. It explains why there is virtually no widespread public sentiment for restigmatizing either of these classically disruptive behaviors and no sense — no public consensus — that they can or should be avoided in the future. On the contrary, the prevailing opinion is that we should accept the changes in family structure as inevitable and devise new forms of public and private support for single-parent families.

All too often the adult quest for freedom, independence and choice in family relationships conflicts with a child's developmental needs for stability, constancy, harmony and permanence in family life. In short, family disruption creates a deep division between parents' interests and the interests of children.

One of the worst consequences of these divided interests is a withdrawal of parental investment in children's well-being. As the Stanford economist Victor

Fuchs has pointed out, the main source of social investment in children is private. The investment comes from the children's parents. But parents in disrupted families have less time, attention and money to devote to their children. The single most important source of disinvestment has been the widespread withdrawal of financial support and involvement by fathers. Maternal investment, too, has declined, as women try to raise families on their own and work outside the home. Moreover, both mothers and fathers commonly respond to family breakup by investing more heavily in themselves and in their own personal and romantic lives.

Sometimes the tables are completely turned. Children are called upon to invest in the emotional well-being of their parents. Indeed, this seems to be the larger message of many of the children's books on divorce and remarriage. *Dinosaurs Divorce* asks children to be sympathetic, understanding, respectful and polite to confused, unhappy parents. The sacrifice comes from the children: "Be prepared to give up some things." In the world of divorcing dinosaurs, the children rather than the grown-ups are the exemplars of patience, restraint and good sense.

## CHECKING THE EVIDENCE

### *Research verifies costs of disruption*

By the early 1980s, nearly two decades had passed since the changes in family life had begun. During the intervening years a body of empirical research had emerged: studies that used large samples, or followed families through time, or did both. Moreover, several of the studies offered a child's-eye view of family disruption. The National Survey on Children, conducted by the psychologist Nicholas Zill, had set out in 1976 to track a large sample of children aged 7 to 11. It also interviewed the children's parents and teachers. It surveyed its subjects again in 1981 and 1987. By the time of its third round of interviews the 11-year-olds of 1976 were the 22-year-olds of 1987. The California Children of Divorce Study, directed by Judith Wallerstein, a clinical psychologist, had also been going on for a decade. E. Mavis Hetherington, of the University of Virginia, was conducting a similar study of children from both intact and divorced families. For the first time it was possible to test the optimistic view against a large and longitudinal body of evidence.

It was to this body of evidence that Sara McLanahan, now a sociologist at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, turned. When she did, she found little to support the optimistic view of single motherhood. On the contrary. When she published her findings with Irwin Garfinkel in a 1986 book, *Single Mothers and Their Children*, her portrait of single motherhood proved to be troubling.

One of the leading assumptions of the time was that single motherhood was economically viable. Even if single mothers did face economic trials, they wouldn't face them for long, it was argued, because they wouldn't remain single for long: single motherhood would be a brief phase of three to five years, followed by marriage. Single mothers would be economically resilient: If they experienced setbacks, they would recover quickly. It was also said that single mothers would be supported by informal networks of family, friends, neighbors and other single mothers. As McLanahan shows in her study, the evidence demolishes all these claims.

For the vast majority of single mothers, the economic spectrum turns out to be narrow, running between precarious and desperate. Half the single mothers in the United States live below the poverty line. (Currently, one out of 10 married couples with children is poor.) Many others live on the edge of poverty. Even single mothers who are far from poor are likely to experience persistent economic insecurity. Divorce almost always brings a decline in the standard of living for the mother and children.

Moreover, the poverty experienced by single mothers is no more brief than it is mild. A significant number of all single mothers never marry or remarry. Those who do, do so only after spending roughly six years, on average, as single parents. For black mothers the duration is much longer. Only 33 percent of African-American mothers had remarried within 10 years of separation. Consequently, single motherhood is hardly a fleeting event for the mother, and it is likely to occupy a third of the child's childhood. Even the notion that single mothers are knit together in economically supportive networks is not borne out by the evidence. On the contrary, single parenthood forces many women to be on the move, in search of cheaper housing and better jobs. This need-driven restless mobility makes it more difficult for them to sustain supportive ties to family and friends, let alone other single mothers.

Single-mother families are vulnerable not just to poverty but to a particularly debilitating form of poverty: welfare dependency. The dependency takes two forms: First, single mothers, particularly unwed mothers, stay on welfare longer than other welfare recipients. Of those never-married mothers who receive welfare benefits, almost 40 percent remain on the rolls for 10 years or longer. Second, welfare dependency tends to be passed on from one generation to the next. Nor is the intergenerational impact of single motherhood limited to African-Americans, as many people seem to believe. Among white families, daughters of single parents are 53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers,

111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers, 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages. All these intergenerational consequences of single motherhood increase the likelihood of chronic welfare dependency.

Even if single mothers escape poverty, economic uncertainty remains a condition of life. Divorce brings a reduction in income and standard of living for the vast majority of single mothers. One study, for example, found that income for mothers and children declines on average about 30 percent, while fathers experience a 10 to 15 percent increase in income in the year following a separation. Things get even more difficult when fathers fail to meet their child-support obligations. As a result, many divorced mothers experience a wearing uncertainty about the family budget. Uncertainty about money triggers other kinds of uncertainty. Mothers and children often have to move to cheaper housing after a divorce. One study shows that about 38 percent of divorced mothers and their children move during the first year after a divorce. Even several years later the rate of moves for single mothers is about a third higher than the rate for two-parent families. It is also common for a mother to change her job or increase her working hours or both following a divorce. Even the composition of the household is likely to change, with other adults, such as boyfriends or babysitters, moving in and out.

All this uncertainty can be devastating to children. Anyone who knows children knows that they are deeply conservative creatures. They like things to stay the same. So pronounced is this tendency that certain children have been known to request the same peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich for lunch for years on end. Children are particularly set in their ways when it comes to family, friends, neighborhoods and schools. Yet when a family breaks up, all these things may change. The novelist Pat Conroy has observed that "each divorce is the death of a small civilization." No one feels this more acutely than children.

Divorce not only makes it more difficult for young adults to establish new relationships. It also weakens the oldest primary relationship: that between parent and child. According to Wallerstein, "Parent-child relationships are permanently altered by divorce in ways that our society has not anticipated." Not only do children experience a loss of parental attention at the onset of divorce, but they soon find that at every stage of their development their parents are not available in the same way they once were. "In a reasonably happy intact family," Wallerstein observes, "the child gravitates first to one parent and then to the other, using skills and attributes from each in climbing the developmental ladder." In a divorced family, children find it "harder to find the needed parent at needed times." This may help explain why very young children suffer the most as the result of family disruption. Their opportunities to engage in this kind of ongoing process are the most truncated and compromised.

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

### *The bad news about stepparents*

Perhaps the most striking, and potentially disturbing, new research has to do with children in stepparent families. Until quite recently the optimistic assumption was that children saw their lives improve when they became part of a stepfamily. When Nicholas Zill and his colleagues began to study the effects of remarriage on children, their working hypothesis was that stepparent families would make up for the shortcomings of the single-parent family. Clearly, most children are better off economically when they are able to share in the income of two adults. When a second adult joins the household, there may be a reduction in the time and work pressures on the single parent.

The research overturns this optimistic assumption, however. In general the evidence suggests that remarriage neither reproduces nor restores the intact family structure, even when it brings more income and a second adult into the household. Quite the contrary. Indeed, children living with stepparents appear to be even more disadvantaged than children living in a stable single-parent family. Other difficulties seem to offset the advantages of extra income and an extra pair of hands. However much our modern sympathies reject the fairy-tale portrait of stepparents, the latest research confirms that the old stories are anthropologically quite accurate. Stepfamilies disrupt established loyalties, create new uncertainties, provoke deep anxieties and sometimes threaten a child's physical safety as well as emotional security.

## THE BROADER IMPACT

### *Poverty, crime and educational failure*

Family disruption would be a serious problem even if it affected only individual children and families. But its impact is far broader. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to characterize it as a central cause of many of our most vexing social problems. Consider three problems that most Americans believe rank among the nation's pressing concerns: poverty, crime and declining school performance.

More than half of the increase in child poverty in the 1980s is attributable to changes in family structure, according to David Eggebeen and Daniel Lichter, of Pennsylvania State University. In fact, if family structure in the United States had remained relatively constant since 1960, the rate of child poverty would be a third lower than it is today. This does not bode well for the future. With more than half of today's children likely to live in single-parent families, poverty and associated welfare costs threaten to become even heavier burdens on the nation.

Crime in American cities has increased dramatically and grown more violent over recent decades. Much of this can be attributed to the rise in disrupted families. Nationally, more than 70 percent of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. A number of scholarly studies find that even after the groups of subjects are controlled for income, boys from single-mother homes are significantly more likely than others to commit crimes and to wind up in the juvenile justice, court and penitentiary systems. One such study summarizes the relationship between crime and one-parent families in this way: "The relationship is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and again in the literature." The nation's mayors, as well as police officers, social workers, probation officers and court officials consistently point to family breakup as the most important source of rising rates of crime.

Terrible as poverty and crime are, they tend to be concentrated in inner cities and isolated from the everyday experience of many Americans. The same cannot be said of the problem of declining school performance.

The great educational tragedy of our time is that many American children are failing in school not because they are intellectually or physically impaired but because they are emotionally incapacitated. In schools across the nation principals report a dramatic rise in the aggressive, acting-out behavior characteristic of children, especially boys, who are living in single-parent families. The discipline problems in today's suburban schools — assaults on teachers, unprovoked attacks on other students, screaming outbursts in class — outstrip the problems that were evident in the toughest city schools a generation ago. Moreover, teachers find many children emotionally distracted, so upset and preoccupied by the explosive drama of their own family lives that they are unable to concentrate on such mundane matters as multiplication tables.

In response, many schools have turned to therapeutic remediation. A growing proportion of many school budgets is devoted to counseling and other psychological services. The curriculum is becoming more therapeutic: children are taking courses in self-esteem, conflict resolution and aggression management.

Taken together, the research presents a powerful challenge to the prevailing view of family change as social progress. Not a single one of the assumptions underlying that view can be sustained against the empirical evidence. □

All this evidence gives rise to an obvious conclusion: growing up in an intact two-parent family is an important source of advantage for American children. Though far from perfect as a social institution, the intact family offers children greater security and better outcomes than its fast-growing alternatives: single-parent and stepparent families. Not only does the intact family protect the child from poverty and economic insecurity; it also provides greater noneconomic investments of parental time, attention and emotional support over the entire life course. This does not mean that all two-parent families are better for children than all single-parent families. But in the face of the evidence it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the proposition that all family structures produce equally good outcomes for children.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## DAN QUAYLE WAS RIGHT

Re Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's important article ("Dan Quayle Was Right," April *Atlantic*) about the value to children of growing up in an intact two-parent family: I am the author of the "children's book [*What Am I Doing in a Stepfamily?*] published in 1982" from which she quotes, a book that concludes with the thought that "getting to know and like so many people" in both first and remarried households can be one of the positive results of living in a stepfamily.

The book, however, does not promote the remarried household as the family of choice. My purpose was to address the issues that are important to many children who are about to enter a stepfamily: What if my stepparent has children? Do I have to do what my stepparent tells me? I don't live with my stepfamily. What will happen when I visit? To my young readers, the book offers candor and, I hope, hope. Most important, it encourages children to talk about these issues with their parents and stepparents.

A more recent book of mine, *A Hole in My Heart: Adult Children of Divorce Speak Out*, says, "Divorce is not good for children. Furthermore, its painful effects are long-lasting." After having interviewed many men and women, ages twenty-four to sixty-seven, who grew up as children of divorce, I concluded that "we must accept the fact that many of the difficulties that children of divorce face are, in one way or another, attributable to the loss of the intact family. There is just no getting around it." And "the best plan for a child (if it is at all achievable) is to grow up safely in a family with both parents in residence."

CLAIRE BERMAN
*New York, N.Y.*

It is disingenuous of Barbara Whitehead to recycle forty years of conventional wisdom about two-parent families as if it were some controversial new discovery. I'm one of the authorities cited as criticizing the 1950s family, but I do not "discredit" two-parent families, nor do I claim that all family changes have been positive. Child welfare *has* declined, but, as Whitehead admits, most of that decline is in comparison with the late 1960s and early 1970s, the height of the "Great Society," not in comparison with "the postwar heyday of the family," when 30 percent of U.S. children and 50 percent of black two-parent families were poor, and high school completion rates were much lower than they are today.

Whitehead's chronological sleight of hand reveals the underlying problem with identifying family change and parental failure, rather than economic reverses and social fragmentation, as the "central cause" of poverty, educational setbacks, crime, and personal dysfunction. The political implication is that marriage is a substitute for anti-poverty programs and high-paying jobs; if parents were more committed, we wouldn't have to reorganize our workplaces and social institutions to meet twenty-first-century realities. The personal implication is that a mother who can't get married or hold on to her man has doomed her kids to failure.

Consider the double bind for a divorced or never-married mom. After reading Whitehead's eight pages on the supposedly disastrous effects of a father's absence, she may well be persuaded to run out and find a husband. But, as Whitehead then points out, children from stepfamilies do even worse! This is hardly a helpful use of data. Fortunately, it's also not a very accurate use of data. Researchers are for good reason reluctant to make the blanket judgments she demands.

All families have areas of vulnerability and strength. Adults in single-parent families spend less time supervising homework than those in two-parent families, but more time talking with

their children. Stepfamilies run into difficulty when they try to replicate "traditional" parent-child expectations, but frequently have more-supportive relationships than the original family once they develop new guidelines and values. Families that work well in one socioeconomic setting may explode in a different one. History shows that the best predictor of a family's success in rearing children is not its form but its access to social support networks beyond the family. Let's figure out constructive ways to build on the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of all American families.

STEPHANIE COONTZ
*Olympia, Wash.*

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead correctly points out that in the past twenty years or so the social metric in America has shifted from child well-being to adult well-being, and she argues persuasively that this change and related ones have substantially harmed children and hampered their development. A question she does not attempt to answer is whether this change has enhanced the average well-being of adults.

The answer to this question, I am convinced, is no. Most indicators of adult psychological well-being in America, including people's reports of how happy they are, have neither increased nor decreased more than slightly in the past two or three decades, *in spite* of several trends—including improvements in health—that should have tended to increase happiness, satisfaction, and other positive feelings. Family changes during this period have almost certainly tended to diminish adult well-being. Persons in marriages they deem "very happy" are, by a substantial margin, happier and better satisfied than divorced, widowed, never-married, or less-than-happily married adults, and the first category has declined from about half of all adults twenty years ago to just over a third today.

As Whitehead says, many adults benefit from divorce and remarriage, and one might think that the legal and cultural changes that have facilitated the ending of bad marriages would have had an unambiguously positive effect on adult well-being. One must consider, however, that the changes that make it easier to escape unsatisfactory marriages also increase the probability that marriages will become unsatisfactory. One spouse's freedom to leave the marriage at will is the other spouse's insecurity, and that insecurity can lead to wariness and reluctance to commit fully to the marriage and to make the investments—of time, energy, and so forth—necessary to make the marriage satisfactory.

In many specific instances adults pursue their own interests to the detriment of their children's well-being, but in a broader sense the interests of children and adults are not in conflict. The same values, norms, and adult behavior patterns that contribute to children's well-being also contribute, in the aggregate and in the long run, to adults' well-being.

NORVAL D. GLENN
*University of Texas*
*Austin, Texas*

The oxymoronic title of Barbara Whitehead's article notwithstanding, I agree with many of the points that Whitehead made (particularly with regard to the devastating effect of post-divorce poverty and the problems associated with stepparenting). Nonetheless, I believe that many of the studies she cited contain a fundamental scientific flaw. These studies consistently showed that by virtually any measure children from divorced families fare worse than those from intact families. An association between two things, however, does not establish a causal relationship.

Whitehead compares the performance of children in intact families with those in divorced families, and attributes the differences to the divorce itself. A necessary assumption in making such a comparison is that the two types of families were not fundamentally different before the divorce occurred. Common sense—and epidemiological considerations—suggest that this assumption is a highly questionable one.

Suppose, for example, that certain personal characteristics increase the likelihood that a person will get a divorce (for example, inability to stick it out when things get tough, laziness, hostility, rigidity, selfishness, lack of strong religious beliefs). That certainly seems plausible. Then suppose that the children of people with these characteristics, through genetic and environmental influences, tend to be more likely to have the same characteristics. That also seems plausible. Then suppose that many of the very same characteristics that predispose a person to divorce also impair the ability of a child to perform well in society (resulting in poor school performance, for example). Again plausible.

It is not surprising that the appropriate methodology has not been used in these studies; the effects of divorce can't be measured without interfering with the results (the social-science equivalent of the Heisenberg principle). Theoretically, in order to tease out the effect of the *divorce itself* on children, one would need a large number of couples who had made the decision to divorce. Then one would randomly allocate half the couples to Group A, where the divorce would proceed without interference, and half to Group B, where the couple would be forced to live together until the children were grown. The two groups of children could then be compared. This study, of course, will never be done: couples can't be forced to stay together against their will, and the construct would be artificial even if they could.

The effect of divorce on children is complex, and its analysis is not well served by exaggeration and oversimplification. Understanding it will take a lot more time than getting Murphy Brown off the air.

PHILIP D. HANSTEN
*Bainbridge Island, Wash.*

Barbara Whitehead effectively obscures the basic reason for poor performance in school, single-parent homes, and the rise in crime and desperation: the gap between the rich minority and the escalating poor sections of our society. If she is sincere in her campaign for better family values, she should be in Washington lobbying for two things: a full-employment program and a national health plan like Canada's, to alleviate the tensions that tear families apart.

BERNARD FORER
*Sarasota, Fla.*

Nothing starts a more vicious argument than someone willing to speak the truth. Thanks for publishing Barbara Whitehead's insightful but poorly titled work.

PHILLIP H. HARRIS
*Alexandria, Va.*

Much of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's article is a beautiful elaboration of a point I have long thought essential to make to introductory social-science students: the purpose of legitimacy rules, found in all cultures, is to make it as sure as possible that every child has a stable pair of related adults assigned as caregivers; there are no accepted substitutes, except in adapting to emergencies such as the loss of a parent by death.

But why give Dan Quayle special credit for being right? Surely some of the laughter over his Murphy Brown remarks was due not to public toleration of single motherhood but to the former Vice President's history of using simplistic slogans to deal with complex issues. Perhaps his comments even caused a bit of delay in the dawning of light about the real importance of intact families.

LeRoy Martinson
*Valparaiso, Ind.*

Although childbearing is a natural function, it is not, especially given present medical technology, inevitable, like death and taxes, or even necessary, like eating. What needs to occur is not a return to procrustean taboos but rather support for the concept of family planning. No longer is it misanthropic to view having children as a privilege, not a right, requiring that both partners take responsibility for the life and development of each child. Global survival depends on limiting births and taking care of the children we have.

After twenty years in law enforcement—on the street, in corrections, and in academe—working for and with many agencies, I have never met anyone, regardless of race, belief, or socioeconomic condition, who celebrates parental separation as a triumph of diversity. To the contrary, "study after study" shows the tragic effect of family breakup on children and adults, too. It is fatuous to state otherwise.

Sandy Bryson
*Markleeville, Calif.*

To claim as "nuclear family" a two-parent heterosexual unit with children is to read a politico-economic agenda into the reality of nuclear families. And that agenda is requisite to the survival of patriarchal thought. Also, I believe that your April cover presentation must be added to the list of Susan Faludi's examples of backlash in the United States which hurts women and children. Whitehead's article is an irresponsible and violent use of data against single parents, stepparents, blended families, and the children in these families who are daily facing the pejorative stereotypes perpetuated in the article. As well, it is irresponsible to publish only one understanding of the data when equal sets of data show the destruction of children in two-parent heterosexual homes.

Rev. Lea Elisabeth Austen
*Gaithersburg, Md.*

The idea that couples get divorced only to make *their* lives happier, without ever considering the psychological and financial impact on their children, is ludicrous and cruel. In the "good old days" of Dan Quayle a significant number of women and their children incurred unspeakable abuse behind the white picket fences of apparently intact families, keeping their problems out of sight. "Families" stayed together enduring incest, verbal and physical beatings, and other forms of abuse. Responsible family psychologists believe that the catalyst for becoming a dysfunctional adult presents itself way, way before the parents finally decide to divorce, and children suffer far more when their two-parent home rivals the Tet offensive.

D. Jean Hannon
*South Dartmouth, Mass.*

Open eyes and hearts will verify that children have suffered from the upheaval of recent decades. But Barbara Whitehead focuses so exhaustively on attitudes—"regime effects," "normalized deviance," and so on—that she neglects the key role of laissez-faire economics in weakening both families and the communities in which they're embedded.

Consider the ideal modern employee: infinitely "flexible," willing to work seventy-hour weeks and to retrench, retrain, or relocate anywhere, anytime—in short, clearly not an ideal family member. Consider the minimum wage, a meager standard in its own right which also permits employers to deny family-supporting wages to jobs higher on the scale. Finally, consider how unchecked capital mobility—a tenet of "family values" guy Dan Quayle and other conservatives—can decimate entire towns in the name of competitiveness. This is critical, because stable families *require* stable communities, require the support (and occasional reproof) provided by kin networks and neighborhoods, churches, and PTAs.

Stephen Kane
*Portland, Oreg.*

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead maintains that children who grow up under the same roof with both biological parents are not only better adjusted girls and boys but also better able to establish and maintain intimate relationships as grown women and men. Yet the very parents she indicts for divorcing, cohabiting, and remarrying at such unprecedented rates can only be—no social research here, just simple math—the children of the largely "intact" homes of the fifties and sixties.

This obvious departure from logic is flanked by a variety of others. Perhaps the most glaring is Whitehead's assumption that "the evidence is in," once and for all. She implies that studies over twenty years of social transition are final in their results and absolutely predictive of the future. She rules out—without ever examining them—the ways in which our society might constructively respond to diversity in family structure.

It is easy to detect at least one reason, however, for her narrowness of vision. Whitehead's concept of social reality is crippled by her awe of patriarchal authority. When Whitehead asserts, for instance, that widows are more successful among single parents because of their skill at invoking the authority of the dead father, how can any rational reader take her seriously?

Sarah Gardner
*Millbrook, N.Y.*

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead made some interesting although misleading statements. I believe that the thrust of her analysis of the well-being of children from intact families versus the well-being of children from disrupted families is strongly linked to income level. Additionally, I believe she missed the boat in her selection of samples for comparison. Children belong to one of three groups: children of good marriages, children of bad marriages, and children from disrupted families.

Divorce is the consequence of a poor

marriage and not of a good marriage. Therefore, the meaningful level of analysis would seem to be the relative well-being of children raised in poor marriages versus the well-being of children raised in broken marriages. Clearly, the children from good marriages, with probably two incomes contributing toward one household, and an environment of stability and love, should fare on average better than children from the other two groups.

Whitehead implies that divorce necessarily leads to instability. In many cases the reverse is true, and one or both parents chose to retrieve stability in their lives by dissolving their dysfunctional spousal relationship in an attempt to gain peace at home. Again, if more attention were paid to the relative impact on children of keeping together a lousy marriage versus opting for divorce, while controlling for differences in income, we would have some meaningful statistics.

Finally, if the majority of our current adult population was reared in predominantly intact families, and a large percentage have opted for divorce, could it be that those intact families were not as ideal as the article suggests?

KATHRYN M. VERREAULT
*Mont Vernon, N.H.*

*Barbara Dafoe Whitehead replies:*

Two alternative arguments to my thesis are raised in these letters. My thesis, simply put, is that family disruption harms children and undermines society. One alternative argument is that economic decline, rather than family disruption, is harmful to children. Call this the "money-deficit" thesis. The second argument is that parental unhappiness, not family breakup itself, is detrimental to children. Call this the "happiness-deficit" thesis. I believe that both these counterarguments are flawed. Let me explain why.

Stephanie Coontz and Bernard Forer claim that economic forces such as declining wages, rising unemployment, and income inequality are more responsible for children's problems than family disruption. Yes, economic problems do harm many children. In particular, the loss of well-paying blue-collar jobs makes it harder for many parents to be economic providers for their children. Careful readers will note that I address this issue in the public-policy section of the article.

But if these writers are concerned about the economic well-being of children, why are they silent about the economic harm to children caused by nonmarriage and divorce? If low wages are an economic problem, what about disappearing dads? If unemployment creates economic difficulties, what about the economic impact of divorce on children? If slow job growth means less money for children, what about the steady growth of unwed childbearing? Both kinds of phenomena, it seems to me, have damaging economic consequences for children. Both are forms of economic injustice. From a child's standpoint, the loss of a father's financial support as a result of family disruption is probably more devastating and certainly more permanent than the loss of a father's financial support through unemployment.

Bernard Forer suggests that I should go to Washington to lobby for full employment and a national health plan. Perhaps he will be comforted to know that, like most Americans, I favor both. Full employment would indeed offset some of the economic damage caused by the loss of blue-collar jobs. But the fact remains: even the higher levels of public investment that Forer calls for would not compensate for the diminished parental investment of time and money in children which stems from family disruption. Forer and other people who are committed to improving the lives of children should lobby for intact families.

We must also work to create a more supportive ecology for families. As Stephen Kane correctly points out, families deserve and require more-hospitable local environments if children are to do well.

This brings me to the happiness-deficit thesis. Despite a growing body of evidence about the negative and long-term effects of divorce on children's emotional well-being (and Claire Berman adds yet more corroborating evidence), a number of readers find the evidence unconvincing. Philip Hansten claims that many studies exaggerate the harmful effects of divorce on children's psychological well-being by comparing kids in intact families and kids in disrupted families. A better approach, he contends, would be to divide the universe of intact families into happy families and unhappy families. Such a study might actually reveal little difference in emotional health between children in families where unhappy parents stay together and children in families where unhappy parents break up.

Hansten may have a point—but, I hasten to add, it is a small point. Let's say he is right. His point does nothing to overturn the evidence about the harmful effects of family disruption on children. Nor does it mean that the divorce itself does not trigger new conflicts and problems. Let us recall what happens from the child's standpoint when divorce occurs. Divorce brings about the physical separation of a child and a parent, usually the father. Divorce commonly reduces the child's family income and sometimes erodes family assets, particularly in contested child-custody cases. Divorce often brings about residential instability. Divorce introduces new adults—stepmothers or stepfathers, boyfriends or girlfriends—into the child's family. Divorce increases the chances that there will be a succession of family disruptions. Divorce can even trigger violence against the children (such as parental kidnapping). And, after all that, divorce does not even reliably reduce conflict and tension between the unhappy parents.

Nor is marital happiness clearly the chief determinant of child well-being. After all, in some families where the parents are wildly happy with each other—a recently remarried couple, for example—the children may remain deeply troubled and unhappy. Conversely, though parents may be disaffected or emotionally estranged from each other, their children may be reasonably happy.

In my opinion, Norval Glenn's commentary offers a far more compelling way of thinking about the happiness question. In a high-divorce society, more unhappy marriages end in divorce, and more marriages are likely to be unhappy. But divorce does little to advance long-term adult happiness, even as it diminishes children's happiness. Glenn proposes a different metric of happiness: pursue the well-being of children, and the well-being of adults will increase as well. This social metric is consistent with historical and moral traditions in the United States which teach us that mothers and fathers should act in the best interests of their children.

# Commentary

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## The Family-Values Debate
James Q. Wilson

## A Statement on the Peace Process
Norman Podhoretz

**Hiss: Guilty as Charged**
Sam Tanenhaus

**Jewish Voters & the Democrats**
Jay P. Lefkowitz

**Grandfathers—A Memoir**
Christopher Clausen

**Tennis, Anyone?**
Richard Stern

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Irwin M. Stelzer / Edward N. Luttwak / Suzanne Garment / Peter L. Berger / Daniel Pipes

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# The Family-Values Debate

*James Q. Wilson*

THERE are two views about the contemporary American family, one held by the public and the other by policy elites. In his presidential campaign, Bill Clinton appeared to endorse the public's view. It remains to be seen which view President Clinton will support.

The public's view is this: the family is the place in which the most basic values are instilled in children. In recent years, however, these values have become less secure, in part because the family has become weaker and in part because rivals for its influence—notably television and movies—have gotten stronger. One way the family has become weaker is that more and more children are being raised in one-parent families, and often that one parent is a teenage girl. Another way is that parents, whether in one- or two-parent families, are spending less time with their children and are providing poorer discipline. Because family values are so important, political candidates should talk about them, though it is not clear that the government can do much about them. Overwhelmingly, Americans think that it is better for children if one parent stays home and does not work, even if that means having less money.[1]

No such consensus is found among scholars or policy-makers. That in itself is revealing. Beliefs about families that most people regard as virtually self-evident are hotly disputed among people whose job it is to study or support families.

A good example of the elite argument began last fall on the front page of the *Washington Post*, where a reporter quoted certain social scientists as saying that the conventional two-parent family was not as important for the healthy development of children as was once supposed. This prompted David Popenoe, a professor at Rutgers who has written extensively on family issues, to publish in the *New York Times* an op-ed piece challenging the scholars cited in the *Post*. Popenoe asserted that "dozens" of studies had come to the opposite conclusion, and that the weight of the evidence "decisively" supported the view that two-parent families are better than single-parent families.

Decisively to him, perhaps, but not to others. Judith Stacey, another professor of sociology, responded in a letter to the *Times* that the value of a two-parent family was merely a "widely shared prejudice" not confirmed by empirical studies; Popenoe, she said, was trying to convert "misguided nostalgia for 'Ozzie-and-Harriet'-land into social-scientific truth." Arlene and Jerome Skolnick, two more professors, acknowledged that although Popenoe might be correct, saying so publicly would "needlessly stigmatize children raised in families that don't meet the 'Ozzie-and-Harriet' model." After all, the Skolnicks observed, a man raised outside that model had just been elected President of the United States.

THE views of Stacey and the Skolnicks are by no means unrepresentative of academic thinking on this subject. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead recently surveyed the most prominent textbooks on marriage and the family. Here is my paraphrase of her summary of what she found:

> The life course is full of exciting options. These include living in a commune, having a group marriage, being a single parent, or living together. Marriage is one life-style choice, but before choosing it people weigh its costs and benefits against other options. Divorce is a part of the normal family cycle and is neither deviant nor tragic. Rather, it can serve as a foundation for individual renewal and new beginnings. Marriage itself should not be regarded as a special, privileged institution; on the contrary, it must catch up with the diverse, pluralistic society in which we live. For example, same-sex marriages often involve more sharing and equality than do heterosexual relationships. But even in the conventional family, the relationships between husband and wife need to be defined after carefully negotiating agreements that protect each person's separate interests and rights.[2]

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[1] Evidence for these beliefs can be found in the poll data gathered in the *American Enterprise*, September/October 1992, pp. 85-86.

[2] Paraphrased from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Expert's Story of Marriage*, Institute for American Values, Publication No. WP14 (August 1992), pp. 11-12. Whitehead supplies references to the texts she summarizes. She does not endorse—just the opposite!—the views she has compiled.

Many politicians and reporters echo these sentiments and carry the argument one step further. Not only do poor Ozzie and Harriet (surely the most maligned figures in the history of television) stand for nostalgic prejudice and stigmatizing error, they represent a kind of family that in fact scarcely exists. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder has been quoted as saying that only about 7 percent of all American families fit the Ozzie-and-Harriet model. Our daily newspapers frequently assert that most children will not grow up in a two-parent family. The message is clear: not only is the two-parent family not especially good for children, but fortunately it is also fast disappearing.

Yet whether or not the two-parent family is good for children, it is plainly false that this kind of family has become a historical relic. For while there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of children, especially black children, who will spend some or even most of their youth in single-parent families, the vast majority of children—nationally, about 73 percent—live in a home with married parents. Today, the mothers in those families are more likely to work than once was the case, though most do not work full time. (I am old enough to remember that even Harriet worked, at least in real life. She was a singer.)

The proponents of the relic theory fail to use statistics accurately. The way they arrive at the discovery that only 7 percent of all families fit the Ozzie-and-Harriet model is by calculating what proportion of all families consists *exactly* of a father, mother, and two (not three or four) children and in which the mother never works, not even for two weeks during the year helping out with the Christmas rush at the post office.

THE language in which the debate over two-parent families is carried on suggests that something more than scholarly uncertainty is at stake. If all we cared about were the effects of one- versus two-parent families on the lives of children, there would still be a debate, but it would not be conducted on op-ed pages in tones of barely controlled anger. Nor would it be couched in slogans about television characters or supported by misleading statistics.

What is at stake, of course, is the role of women. To defend the two-parent family is to defend, the critics worry, an institution in which the woman is subordinated to her husband, confined to domestic chores with no opportunity to pursue a career, and taught to indoctrinate her children with a belief in the rightness of this arrangement. To some critics, the woman here is not simply constrained, she is abused. The traditional family, in this view, is an arena in which men are free to hit, rape, and exploit women. To defend the traditional family is to defend sexism. And since single-parent families are disproportionately headed by black women, criticizing such families is not only sexist but racist.

Perhaps the most influential book on this subject to appear during the 1970's was *The Future of Marriage* by Jessie Bernard, a distinguished scholar. Widely reviewed, its central message was that the first order of business for marriage must be "mitigating its hazards for women."

Unlike more radical writers, Bernard thought that the future of marriage was assured, but this would be the case only because marriage would now take many forms. Traditional marriages would persist but other forms would gain (indeed, had already gained) favor—communes, group marriages, the *ménage à trois*, marital "swinging," unmarried cohabitation, and limited-commitment marriages. (She did not discuss mother-only families as one of these "options." Nor did she discuss race.) In principle, no one form was better than another because "there is nothing in human nature that favors one kind of marriage over another." In practice, the forms that were best were those that were best for the woman. What might be best for children was not discussed. Children, it would seem, were incidental to marriage, except insofar as their care imposed strains on their parents, especially their mothers.

The main theme of much of the writing about marriage and families during the 1970's and 1980's was that of individual rights. Just as polities were only legitimate when they respected individual rights, so also marriages were worthy of respect only when they were based on a recognition of rights.

This view impressed itself on many who were not scholars, as is evident from an essay published in 1973 in the *Harvard Educational Review.* It urged that the "legal status of infancy . . . be abolished" so that a child would be endowed with all the rights of an adult. Even more, any law that classified people as children and treated them differently from adults "should be considered suspect." As a result, the state "would no longer be able to assume the rationality of regulations based on age." The author of this essay was Hillary Rodham.

A RIGHTS-BASED, individualistic view of marriage is questionable in its own terms, but these theoretical questions would become insuperable objections if it could be shown that children are harmed by growing up in mother-only, or communal, or swinging, or divorced households. The academic study of families during the 1970's, however, did not produce an unchallenged body of evidence demonstrating that this was the case. There were several studies that attempted to measure the impact of mother-only families on their children's school attainment, job success, and personal conduct,

but many discovered either no effects or ones that were ambiguous or equivocal.

I first became aware of this in the early 1980's when Richard J. Herrnstein and I were writing *Crime and Human Nature.* One of my tasks was to prepare the first draft of the chapter on the effects on crime rates of what were then called broken homes. I fully expected to find a raft of studies showing that growing up in a mother-only home put the child, especially the boy, at risk for criminality.

I did not find what I had expected to find. To be sure, I ran across the familiar fact that men in prison tended disproportionately to come from broken homes, but men in prison also tended to have parents who were themselves criminal and to come from poor, minority backgrounds. Since these factors—class, race, parental criminality, and family status—tended to co-vary, it was not clear that family background had any effect independent of temperament or circumstance. Similarly, Elizabeth Herzog and Cecelia Sudia reviewed eighteen studies of female-headed families carried out between 1950 and 1970. They found that in seven there was more delinquency in father-absent homes, in four there was less, and in seven the results were mixed. Some studies showed boys in father-absent homes failing to develop an appropriate masculine identity and others uncovered no such effect. (There was—and is—ample evidence that children from cold, discordant homes are likely to have plenty of problems, but there are lots of cold, discordant *two*-parent families.)

Since I wrote that chapter, though, the evidence that single-parent families are bad for children has mounted. There will never be anything like conclusive proof of this proposition unless we randomly assign babies at birth to single- and two-parent families of various economic and ethnic circumstances and then watch them grow up. Happily the laws and customs of this country make such an experiment unlikely. Short of that, the best evidence comes from longitudinal studies that follow children as they grow up in whatever kind of family nature has provided.

One example: when the 5,000 children born in the United Kingdom during the first week of March 1946 were followed for three decades, those raised in families broken by divorce or desertion were more likely than those living in two-parent families to become delinquent.[3]

A second example: for many years, Sheppard Kellam and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University followed several hundred poor, black, first-grade children in a depressed neighborhood in Chicago. Each child lived in one of several different family types, depending on how many and what kinds of adults were present. In about one-third of families the mother was the only adult present; in another third there was both a mother and a father. (Only a tiny fraction was headed by a father with no mother present.) The remainder was made up of various combinations of mothers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, adult brothers and sisters, and various unrelated adults. By the time the children entered the third grade, those who lived with their mothers alone were the worst off in terms of their socialization. After ten years, the boys who had grown up in mother-only families (which by then made up about half the total) reported more delinquencies, regardless of family income, than those who had grown up in families with multiple adults, especially a father.[4]

By 1986, when Rolf and Magda Loeber of the University of Pittsburgh reviewed 23 studies assessing the relationship of parental absence (usually, father absence) to juvenile delinquency, they found an effect, though smaller than the one caused by discord within a two-parent family.[5] One problem with their overall conclusion was that they lumped together families where the biological father had never been present with those in which he left, as a result of separation, divorce, or death, while the child was growing up. Inspecting their data suggests that if the latter cases are omitted, the connection between family status and criminality is strengthened a bit: fathers never present create greater hazards than fathers who depart (owing to death or divorce) later in the child's life. The greatest hazard of all is found in families where the parents have the greatest number of problems—they are absent, discordant, rejecting, incompetent, and criminal.

THE most recent important study of family structure was done in 1988 by the Department of Health and Human Services. It surveyed the family arrangements of more than 60,000 children living in households all over the country. Interviews were conducted in order to identify any childhood problems in health, schoolwork, and personal conduct. These results were tabulated according to the age, sex, and ethnicity of the child and the income and marital status of the parents.

The results were striking. At every income level save the very highest (over $50,000 per year), for both sexes and for whites, blacks, and Hispanics

[3] M.E.J. Wadsworth, *Roots of Delinquency*, Barnes & Noble (1979).

[4] Sheppard Kellam *et al.*, "The Long-Term Evolution of the Family Structure of Teenage and Older Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 44 (1982), pp. 539-554; Kellam *et al.*, "Family Structure and the Mental Health of Children," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 34 (1977), pp. 1012-1022; Margaret Ensminger *et al.*, "School and Family Origins of Delinquency: Comparisons By Sex," in Katherine T. Van Dusen and Sarnoff A. Mednick, eds., *Prospective Studies of Crime and Delinquency*, Kluwer-Nijhoff (1983).

[5] "Family Factors as Correlates and Predictors of Juvenile Conduct Problems and Delinquency," in Michael Tonry and Norval Morris, eds., *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, University of Chicago Press (1986), pp. 29-149.

alike, children living with a never-married or a divorced mother were substantially worse off than those living in two-parent families. Compared to children living with both biological parents, children in single-parent families were twice as likely to have been expelled or suspended from school, to display emotional or behavioral problems, and to have problems with their peers; they were also much more likely to engage in antisocial behavior. These differences were about as wide in households earning over $35,000 a year as they were in those making less than $10,000.[6]

Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute has been looking at the people whose lives have been followed by the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) since they were in high school (they are now in their late twenties or early thirties). The NLSY not only keeps careful records of the schooling, jobs, and income of these young adults, it also looks at the home environment in which they are raising any children they may have. These home observations rate emotional quality, parental involvement in child care, style of discipline, and the like. The homes, thus observed, can be ranked from best to worst.

Murray has compared the home environments with the economic status of the parents and the legal status of the child. The odds of the children living in the worst home environments were powerfully affected by two things: whether the parents were married when they had the baby and whether they were regular welfare recipients. The child of an unmarried woman who was a chronic welfare recipient had one chance in six of growing up in the worst—that is, emotionally the worst—environment. The child of a married woman who never went on welfare had only one chance in 42.[7]

Being poor hurts children. Living in a rotten neighborhood hurts them. Having cold or neglectful parents certainly hurts them. But so also does being illegitimate and living on welfare. This is generally true for whites as well as blacks.

And so also does being a teenage mother. For many years, Frank Furstenberg of the University of Pennsylvania and his colleagues have been following 300 teenage mothers living in Baltimore. What they have found supports the public's view. Teenage girls who have babies fare much worse than ones who postpone child-bearing, and this is true even among girls of the same socioeconomic background and academic aptitude. They are more likely to go on welfare, and less likely to enter into a stable marriage. The children of teenage mothers, compared with those of older ones, tend to have more trouble in school, to be more aggressive, and to have less self-control. This is especially true of boys.[8]

We have always had teenage mothers, and in some less-developed societies that is the norm. What is new and troubling about the present situation is the vast increase in the number of teenage mothers and their concentration in the same neighborhoods. A girl with a baby presents one kind of problem when she is either a rarity or is embedded in an extended family that provides guidance and assistance from older women living with her. She presents a very different and much more serious problem when she is one of thousands of similarly situated youngsters living in the same neighborhood or public-housing project, trying to maintain an independent household on welfare.

A lot more light will be shed on these issues when Sara McLanahan at Princeton and Gary Sandefur at the University of Wisconsin publish their careful analysis of the best available longitudinal data bases.[9] There are at least four of these files—the already-mentioned National Longitudinal Study of Youth; the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; the High School and Beyond Study; and the National Survey of Families and Households. McLanahan and Sandefur are looking at the effect of family structure, after controlling for income, race, and education, on such things as a child's chances of graduating from high school, a girl's chances of becoming a teenage mother, and a boy's chances of being idle (that is, neither working nor in school). Their results so far suggest that children who grow up in single-parent families do less well than those who grow up in intact families, and that this is true whether they are white or black, rich or poor, boys or girls. These other factors make a difference—it is better to be white than black, rich than poor—but so does family status.

I THINK that the American people are right in their view of families. When they look at the dramatic increase in divorce, single-parent families, and illegitimate children that has taken place over the last 30 years, they see families in decline. They do not need studies to tell them that these outcomes are generally bad, because they have had these outcomes happen to them or to people they know. Divorce may sometimes be the right and necessary remedy for fundamentally flawed marriages and for the conditions created by an abusive or neglectful spouse, but in general divorce makes people worse off: the woman becomes poorer and the children more distressed. Properly raising a child

[6] Deborah A. Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health: United States, 1988," *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 10, No. 178 (June 1991).

[7] "Reducing Poverty and Reducing the Underclass: Different Problems, Different Solutions," paper presented to the Conference on Reducing Poverty in America, January 15, 1993, at the Anderson Graduate School of Management, UCLA.

[8] Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, "Teenage Pregnancy and Childbearing," *American Psychologist*, vol. 44 (1989), pp. 313-320.

[9] *Uncertain Childhood, Uncertain Future* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

is an enormous responsibility that often taxes the efforts and energies of two parents; one parent is likely to be overwhelmed. Children born out of wedlock are in the great majority of cases children born into poverty. Millions of people are living testimony to these bleak facts. If scholars say that the evidence is not conclusive, so much the worse for scholars. But now, I believe, scholars are starting to find hard facts to support popular impressions.

The debate over the effects of family structure continues, albeit with some prospect of a consensus emerging some time in the near future. But there is not even a glimmer of such an accord with respect to the other hot topic in family studies—day care. The dominant view among child psychologists is that day care is not harmful. For a long time Professor Jay Belsky of Pennsylvania State University shared that view. When he changed his mind, he was excoriated. He is now of the opinion that day care, especially in the first year of life, is harmful in some respects to some children.

In a widely-reported 1988 article, Belsky reviewed all the studies measuring the effect of nonmaternal care on attachment and social development and concluded that, subject to many caveats,

> entry into [day] care in the first year of life for twenty hours or more per week is a "risk factor" for the development of insecure attachment in infancy and heightened aggressiveness, noncompliance, and withdrawal in the preschool and early school years.[10]

By "risk factor" Belsky meant that the child in day care was somewhat more likely to experience these adverse outcomes than would a similar child under parental care, especially if the day care was not of high quality.

Some critics argued with Belsky on scientific grounds, saying that the evidence was less clear-cut than he suggested, that the measure of emotional well-being he used (observing how a child reacts after it is separated from its mother) was flawed, that children turn out well in cultures where nonparental care is commonplace, and that whatever ill effects exist (if any) do not last.

But many attacked him politically, and even the scholarly critiques had a sharp edge to them. As with family structure, what is at stake in this controversy are not just facts and interpretations but philosophy and policy: if day care has bad effects, then women ought to care for their children in their own homes. And that is a politically-incorrect conclusion. Many scholars feel, I believe, that to support the claim of family decline is to give aid and comfort to conservative politicians and religious leaders who bemoan that decline and call for the reassertion of "traditional values." In short, what is at stake is Murphy Brown.

## The Changing Culture

BOTH teenage pregnancies and single-parent families have increased dramatically since the 1950's. Changes in the economy and in the provision of welfare benefits explain some of this growth but not all or even most of it. There are no doubt some features peculiar to American society that explain some of it, but since the decline of the family—that is, in lasting marriages and legitimate births—has happened in many nations, it cannot be entirely the result of American policies or peculiarities.

We are witnessing a profound, worldwide, long-term change in the family that is likely to continue for a long time. The causes of that change are not entirely understood, but probably involve two main forces: a shift in the family's economic function and a shift in the culture in which it is embedded. The family no longer is the unit that manages economic production, as it was when agriculture was the dominant form of production, nor is it any longer the principal provider of support for the elderly or education for the young.

At the same time, the family no longer exercises as much control over its members as it once did, and broader kinship groupings (clans, tribes, and extended families) no longer exercise as much control over nuclear families. Since the Enlightenment, the dominant tendency in legal and philosophical thought has been to emancipate the individual from all forms of tutelage—the state, revealed religion, ancient custom—including the tutelage of kin. This emancipation has proceeded episodically and unevenly, but relentlessly. Liberal political theory has celebrated the individual and constrained the state, but it has been silent about the family.

What is remarkable is how well the family has survived this process. Were the family the mere social convention that some scholars imagine, it would long since have gone the way of cottage industries and the owner-occupied farm, the inevitable victim of the individualizing and rationalizing tendencies of modern life. But, of course, the family is not a human contrivance invented to accomplish some goal and capable of being reinvented or reformulated to achieve different goals.

Family—and kinship generally—are the fundamental organizing facts of all human societies, primitive or advanced, and have been such for tens of thousands of years. The family is the product of evolutionary processes that have selected against people who are inclined to abandon their offspring and for people who are prepared to care for them, and to provide this caring within

[10] "The 'Effects' of Infant Day Care Reconsidered," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, vol. 3 (1988), pp. 235-272. For a response, see Tiffany Field, *Infancy*, Harvard University Press (1990), pp. 90-93.

kinship systems defined primarily along genetic lines. If kinship were a cultural artifact, we could as easily define it on the basis of height, athletic skill, or political status, and children would be raised in all manner of collectives, ranging from state-run orphanages to market-supplied foster homes. Orphanages and foster homes do of course exist, but only as matters of last resort designed (with great public anxiety) to provide care when the biological family does not exist or cannot function.

If the family were merely a convenience and if it responded entirely to economic circumstances, the current debate over family policy would be far less rancorous than it is. Liberals would urge that we professionalize child-rearing through day care; conservatives would urge that we subsidize it through earned-income tax credits. Liberals would define the welfare problem as entirely a matter of poverty and recommend more generous benefits as the solution; conservatives would define it as entirely a matter of dependency and recommend slashing benefits as the solution. Liberals would assume that the problem is that families have too little money, conservatives that families get such money as they have from the state. There would still be a battle, but in the end it would come down to some negotiated compromise involving trade-offs among benefit levels, eligibility rules, and the public-private mix of child-care providers.

But once one conceives of the family problem as involving to a significant degree the conflict between a universal feature of human society and a profound cultural challenge to the power of that institution, the issue takes on a different character. To the extent that one believes in the cultural challenge—that is, in individual emancipation and individual choice—one tends to question the legitimacy and influence of the family. To the extent that one believes in the family, one is led to question some or all parts of the cultural challenge.

That is why the debate over "family values" has been so strident. On both sides people feel that it is the central battle in the culture war that now grips Americans (or at least American elites). They are absolutely right. To many liberals, family values means a reassertion of male authority, a reduction in the hard-earned rights of women, and a license for abusive or neglectful parents to mistreat their children free of prompt and decisive social intervention. For some liberals, family values means something even more troubling: that human nature is less malleable than is implied by the doctrine of environmental determinism and cultural relativism—that it is to some significant degree fixed, immutable. To many conservatives, family values is the main line of resistance against homosexual marriages, bureaucratized child care, and compulsory sex education in the schools. For some conservatives, the family means a defense against the very idea of a planned society.

Now, reasonable people—say, the typical mother or father—will take a less stark view of the alternatives. They will agree with conservatives that the family is the central institution of society, incapable of being replaced or even much modified without disastrous consequences. They will be troubled by same-sex marriages, upset by teenage girls becoming mothers, angered by public subsidies for illegitimate births, and outraged by the distribution of condoms and explicit sex-education manuals to elementary-school children. But they will agree with many liberals that we ought not to confine women to domestic roles or make them subservient to male power and that we ought to recognize and cope with the financial hardships that young couples have today when they try to live on one income in a big city.

On one issue most parents will squarely identify with the conservative side, and it is, in my view, the central issue. They will want our leaders, the media, television programs, and motion pictures to take their side in the war over what the family is. It is not one of several alternative lifestyles; it is not an arena in which rights are negotiated; it is not an old-fashioned and reactionary barrier to a promiscuous sex life; it is not a set of cost-benefit calculations. *It is a commitment.*

It is a commitment required for child-rearing and thus for any realistic prospect of human happiness. It is a commitment that may be entered into after romantic experimentation and with some misgivings about lost freedoms, but once entered into it is a commitment that persists for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse. It is a commitment for which there is no feasible substitute, and hence no child ought lightly to be brought into a world where that commitment—from both parents—is absent. It is a commitment that often is joyfully enlivened by mutual love and deepening friendship, but it is a commitment even when these things are absent.

There is no way to prepare for the commitment other than to make it. The idea that a man and a woman can live together without a commitment in order to see if they would like each other after they make the commitment is preposterous. Living together may inform you as to whether your partner snores or is an alcoholic or sleeps late; it may be fun and exciting; it may even be the best you can manage in an imperfect world. But it is not a way of finding out how married life will be, because married life is shaped by the fact that the couple has made a solemn vow before their family and friends that this is for keeps and that any children will be their joint and permanent responsibility. It changes everything.

Despite high divorce rates and a good deal of sleeping around, most people understand this. Certainly women understand it, since one of their most common complaints about the men they know is that they will not make a commitment. You bet they won't, not if they can get sex, cooking, and companionship on a trial basis, all the while keeping their eyes peeled for a better opportunity elsewhere. Marriage is in large measure a device for reining in the predatory sexuality of males. It works quite imperfectly, as is evident from the fact that men are more likely than women to have extramarital affairs and to abandon their spouses because a younger or more exciting possibility has presented herself. But it works better than anything else mankind has been able to invent.

Because most people understand this, the pressures, economic and cultural, on the modern family have not destroyed it. And this is remarkable, considering the spread of no-fault divorce laws. The legal system has, in effect, said, "Marriage is not a commitment; it is a convenience. If you feel yours is inconvenient, we will make it easy for you to get out of it." This radical transformation of family law occurred, as Mary Ann Glendon of the Harvard Law School has shown, in many industrialized countries at about the same time. It may or may not have caused the rise in the divorce rate, but it certainly did nothing to slow it down.

The legal system has also altered child-custody rules so that, instead of being automatically assigned to the father (as was the case in the 19th century, when the father was thought to "own" all the family's property including the child), the child is now assigned by the judge on the basis of its "best interests." In the vast majority of cases, that means with the mother. I sometimes wonder what would happen to family stability if every father knew for certain that, should the marriage end, he would have to take custody of the children. My guess is: more committed fathers.

These cultural and legal changes, all aimed at individualizing and empowering family members, have had an effect. In 1951, 51 percent of all Americans agreed with the statement that "parents who don't get along should not stay together because there are children in the family." By 1985, 86 percent agreed.[11] Still, these changes have not devastated modern families. The shopping malls, baseball stadiums, and movie theaters are filled with them doing what families have always done. That fact is a measure of the innate power of the family bond.

Yet the capacity for resisting these changes is unequally distributed in society. Christopher Jencks of Northwestern University puts it this way:

> Now that the mass media, the schools, and even the churches have begun to treat single parenthood as a regrettable but inescapable part of modern life, we can hardly expect the respectable poor to carry on the struggle against illegitimacy and desertion with their old fervor. They still deplore such behavior, but they cannot make it morally taboo. Once the two-parent norm loses its moral sanctity, the selfish considerations that always pulled poor parents apart often become overwhelming.[12]

## Culture and Politics

THE central issue in family policy is whether or not it will be animated entirely by an economic view of family functions and consist entirely of economic solutions to family needs. The principal source of domestic social-policy advice to Bill Clinton during his presidential campaign was the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), and in particular Elaine Kamarck and William Galston. "The best antipoverty program for children is a stable, intact family," they wrote in their report, *Mandate for Change*. Though not neglecting economic measures, such as a tax credit for each child and an earned-income tax credit to supplement the wages of the working poor, the PPI urged that the divorce laws be changed to protect children better, that efforts be intensified to promote parental responsibility for child care, that pregnant women who use drugs be required to undergo periodic drug testing, and that the earnings of absent parents be taxed to pay for their children. And the report called for the President to use his bully pulpit to reinforce the importance of intact and caring families.

As of this writing, only Galston of all those connected with the PPI has been appointed to even a moderately significant position in the Clinton administration (he joined the White House domestic-policy staff). Clinton's Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, had virtually nothing to say about these matters in her confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee. There will in time be a debate on welfare policy; Clinton has promised to appoint a task force to make recommendations. Perhaps something will happen, though the history of past efforts at welfare reform suggests that few in Congress have the stomach for it and few scholars expect that such reforms as pass will make much of a difference.

The truth of the matter is that the most important features of family life are beyond the reach of policy. The recently passed family-leave bill in large measure merely ratifies opportunities that large firms have been granting to their em-

[11] David Popenoe, "The Family Condition of America," paper prepared for a Brookings Institution seminar on values and public policy (March 1992), citing a study by Norval Glenn.

[12] "Deadly Neighborhoods," the *New Republic*, June 13, 1988, pp. 23-32.

ployees for some time; it will make things a bit easier for middle-class mothers but will do little for poor, teenage ones. The far more contentious issue of welfare reform will not be so easily resolved, but it is hard to imagine any feasible change in the existing rules that will make much of a difference in the chances of a child being born out of wedlock. Expanding the earned-income tax credit may help poor working parents, but do we really want single mothers of two-year-old children to work? Tightening the divorce laws may be a good idea, but it will not make much difference to parents who never got married in the first place. Improving the system for collecting child-support payments is a good idea, but many fathers who desert their children have little money to be collected and, in any event, this is not likely to convert uncommitted impregnators into committed fathers.

I suspect that the culture of the family will have to be rebuilt from the bottom up. Certainly Robert Woodson, head of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, thinks so. He and his associates have been energetically pursuing this goal by supporting local church-related groups that try to encourage men to take responsibility for their children. There are many other local efforts to get men to marry their pregnant lovers and to sign the birth certificates of their children.

But these efforts proceed against the cultural grain, or at least against the grain of the high culture. When the people who deliver mocking attacks on "traditional family values" are the same ones who endorse condom distribution among elementary-school children, the average parent is led to wonder whether he or she is being a sucker for trying to stay together and raise the kids. Most Americans, I would guess, understand very clearly the difference between a traditional family and an oppressive one; they want the former but not the latter. Most women, I would guess, can distinguish very easily between the rights they have won and the obligations they retain; they cherish both and see no fundamental conflict between them, except the inescapable problem that there is not enough time for everything and so everyone must make choices.

It is extraordinary how well most husbands and wives have held up in the face of constant taunts comparing them to Ozzie and Harriet. The family life that most Americans want is regarded by the eminences of the media and the academy as a cartoon life, fit only for ridicule and rejection. When the history of our times is written, this raging cultural war will deserve careful attention, for it is far more consequential than any of the other cleavages that divide us.

Many Americans hope that President Clinton will stand up for "traditional family values," by which they mean, not male supremacy, spouse abuse, or docile wives, but the overriding importance of two-parent families that make child care their central responsibility. Clinton wants to stay in touch with the people at town meetings; fine, but let him say at those meetings that nobody should conceive a child that he and she are not emotionally ready to care for. The best, albeit an imperfect, sign of that readiness is the marriage vow. Let him say that it is wrong—not just imprudent, but wrong—to bear children out of wedlock. Let him meet with local ministers and neighborhood groups that are trying to encourage marriage and discourage predatory male sexuality. Such statements may earn Clinton dismayed groans from sitcom producers and ideological accusations from sociology professors, but at least the people would know that he is on their side.

*William Raspberry*

# Bringing Up Fathers

*Becoming husbands and fathers is the universal prescription of human societies for the socialization of the male. It is how societies link male aggression, energy, purpose—maleness—to a pro-social purpose.*

David Blankenhorn, whose words those are, isn't the first to see marriage as not merely the means for protecting children but also for civilizing men. Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, said much the same thing, as did George Gilder, the economist. (Gilder is convinced that men are naturally unreliable sexual exploiters until they are "tamed" by women, much as you train a pet by granting or withholding food.)

But Blankenhorn's emphasis is on the importance of men in their special role as fathers—a role he believes is being diminished in America, to the peril of us all.

"Now, I don't think any one single thing explains *all* our social problems," he said in a speech to the Minneapolis-based Center of the American Experiment back in January. "But, having said that, let me suggest that one single thing explains all our social problems."

He then proceeded to list the problems: poverty, incivility, domestic violence against women, child abuse and, of course, crime—primarily a problem of young males. All of these problems, he contends, are made far worse by father absence.

"The most important predictor of criminal behavior," he said, "is not race, not income, not religious affiliation. It's father absence. It's boys who don't grow up with their fathers." That's not a figment of the fevered head of the Institute for American Values, which Blankenhorn founded in New York a half-dozen years ago. Other researchers looking at the longitudinal evidence have reached a similar conclusion. The Progressive Policy Institute says that "controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime."

The social ills we worry about, says Blankenhorn, are not separate issues. They are linked—by the erosion of mother-father households as the child-rearing unit. Nor, he says, is this only a problem for specific children of particular families.

"Apart from this discrete list of social problems, the trend of fatherlessness contributes to and is an important driving force behind what might be called a 'social recession.' It is the widely shared sense among many Americans that we are in not an economic recession but a social recession, or a cultural regression. It's a sense that there is a declining sense of civic obligation, a lowering of trust in social institutions, a diminution of caring for one another in society, along with the increase of a range of personal pathologies, emblemized most vividly by an increase in violent crime, but also including a range of personal problems, including eating disorders, unipolar depression, teenage suicide, declining mental health and so on."

I do not doubt that these are the issues—far more than the economy, about which we constantly complain—that trouble and frighten Americans. We are afraid that America is losing something far more vital than the economic leadership of the world. But does Blankenhorn overstate the case when he links it all to father absence? (It was his colleague at the Institute for American Values, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, who wrote that blockbuster cover story "Dan Quayle Was Right" in the Atlantic Monthly.) Is the institute going overboard?

I don't think so. The two-parent household as the ideal arrangement for rearing children has been universal across both time and geography. Men have been linked, through marriage, to their children and the mothers of their children.

There have always been single parents, of course. Some never married. Others have divorced. Still others have been separated by death, whether resulting from illness, accident, folly or heroism. But the model has been universal. Not only has the primacy of motherhood never been questioned; we also have never doubted that children need fathers.

Until now.

Oh, we still get indignant about "dead-beat dads," but only as a matter of money. We pay little attention to fathers as fathers, even less to the fact that many of the men absent from their children's lives have been shoved aside, not just by the mothers of those children but by the courts and the social agencies, buttressed by the growing cultural notion of the superfluous father.

Is it possible to reconnect fathers to their children? To reverse the societal trends that produced the separation in the first place? To fashion government policies and reshape social attitudes regarding fathers? To change the attitudes of fathers themselves?

Probably. But not until we reconvince ourselves of what used to be common sense: Children need their fathers.

THE WASHINGTON POST · WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 1993 A19

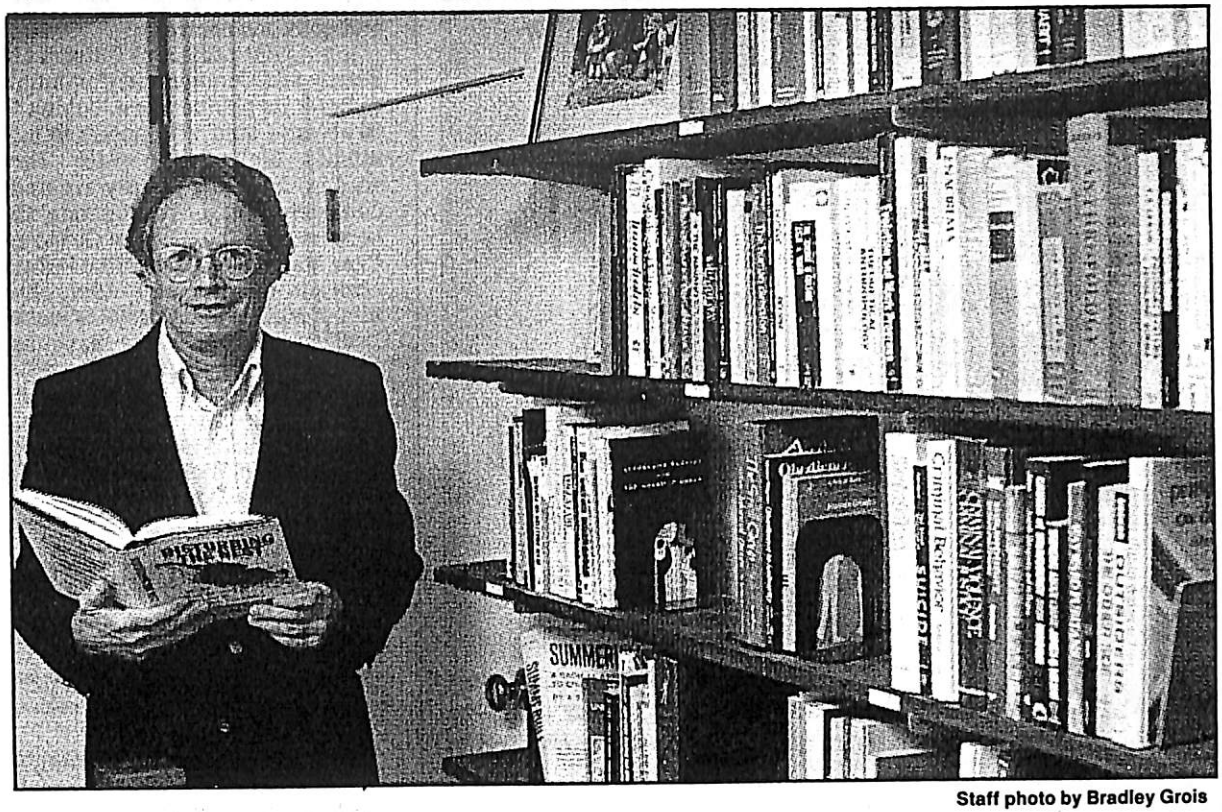
Trenton (NJ) Times
p. 1



# Bringing back the family

## Concern for kids drives reformers

By DEBORAH KOVACH
Staff Writer



Staff photo by Bradley Grois

David Popenoe, an associate dean of social and behavioral sciences at Rutgers University and a proponent of the "New Familism," holds a copy of his book in the library of his Princeton Borough home.

**PRINCETON BOROUGH** — David Popenoe fell in love with Sweden while doing research there in the 1970s. Yet the more time he spent in Sweden, the more Popenoe sensed gloom in the eyes of all those blue-eyed towheads. Their parents were either divorcing or never marrying.

"The traditional structures that hold people together were rapidly coming apart, notably the family," said Popenoe, a Princeton Borough resident who is an associate dean of social and behavioral sciences at Rutgers University.

Popenoe believes Americans are following Swedes — who have the highest divorce rate in Europe — down a path toward ambivalence about marriage and family. A year ago he founded the Council on Families in America with 16 other academics and family experts to figure out how to stop the trend.

These experts, part of a movement called the "New Familism," say society should find ways to encourage parents to stay married and women to stay home with small children. The council supports welfare reform, family leave, tax breaks for families, making divorce less automatic and chasing deadbeat dads. Last month group members put together a "Parental Bill of Rights" they intend to circulate this fall that would give government-sponsored education to parents who take time off to raise children and then re-enter the workforce.

These views are gaining attention. The April Atlantic Monthly cover story, entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right," featured New Familism theory. A member of the Council on Families in America, Bill Galston, was named to the White House Domestic Policy Council. Other members include Sylvia Ann Hewlett, author of "When the Bough Breaks: The Social Costs of Neglecting Our Children"; Judith Martin, author of the "Miss Manners" syndicated column; religion historian Martin Marty; and Washington Post columnist William Raspberry.

The Council on Families is not the first pro-family group. But it is the first to bill itself as politically moderate in a constellation of

• see **FAMILIES**, A17

high-profile, conservative pro-family groups that approach the topic from a religious standpoint. They include James Dobson's Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Gary Bauer's Family Research Council in Washington and the Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association in Tupelo, Miss.

What all these groups share is alarm at the plight of children, particularly those who live with one parent. According to a 1988 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics, children in single-parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, get pregnant as teenagers and abuse drugs. A 1991 study found that after divorce, the percentage of children in poverty doubles from 19 percent to 38 percent. Half of all single mothers live below the poverty line. Two weeks ago, the census bureau reported that nearly a quarter of the nation's never-married women became mothers, an increase of almost 60 percent in the last decade.

"So many modern trends have undermined family and kinship, yet that is the primordial basis of human and moral social life," Popenoe said in an interview in his book-lined living room. "The question is how far can you go. There are those who feel that children can just as well be raised by strangers as parents, that marriage break-up isn't a big thing. But in the last 30 years, things really have gotten worse for children."

AMONG the factors behind family breakdown are television, violence, the sexual revolution, the decline of religion, materialism, individualism, urban life, anti-family business policies and feminism, according to Popenoe.

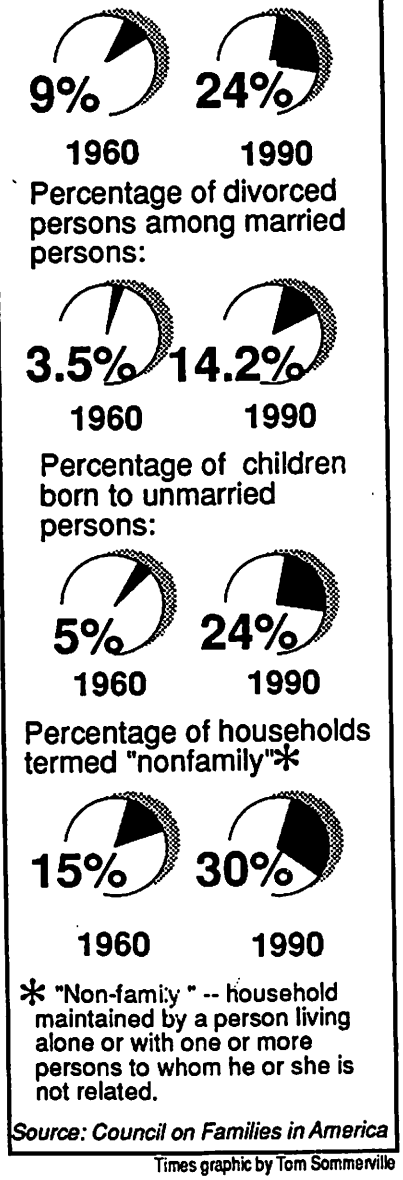
He acknowledged that blaming feminism is not easy for members of the Council on Families in America, most of whom strongly favor women's rights. But Popenoe and others say women must acknowledge that their liberation has not always been good for children.

"Feminism in its modern form has focused on breaking down the traditional nuclear family — getting women out of the role of full-time housewife and into the labor force," he said. "On the other hand, none of us is interested in going back to the earlier era when husbands had license to beat their wives and women were restricted to the home."

This issue brings the group criticism.

"Women are so guilt-tripped by this ideology," said Judith Stacey, professor of sociology and women's studies at the University of California at Davis. "The conditions under which women are trying to do everything have become unbearable, so I think a lot of people are open to simple ideas about what's wrong."

## THE CHANGING AMERICAN FAMILY




Times graphic by Tom Sommerville

STACEY contends the Council on Families in America distorts sociological evidence to reach its conclusions. For instance, if you compare children whose parents are divorced with children of intact families, on average the children of two-parent families are better off.

But Stacey said the fact that the parents are married isn't necessarily the reason. It could be because two-parent families have more money.

She said she is annoyed by what she calls the "fetishism" about motherhood embedded in the pro-family movement, whose proponents don't acknowledge that in the past, working-class women worked and upper-class women had nannies. It was only with the rise of the middle class that motherhood and home became women's domain.

Stacey said people who care about children should deal with the real problem: rising poverty.

"They make family structure the problem, and I say it's family and social and economic relationships and resources that are the problem," she said. "You need quality relations, access to decent jobs, a decent place to live and decent schools to bring up that kid safely.

"The family structure from my point of view is occasionally a factor, but far from the most significant factor."

Stacey advocates reforming divorce laws so that children's interests are given prime consideration; paying parents a government subsidy for having children; and paying a supplement to single-parent families.

But conservatives say the issue is morals, not money.

"There is a cultural struggle going on in society," said Paul Hetrick, vice president of Focus on the Family, one of the conservative pro-family groups. "The children are the price for that struggle.

"There are those who aggressively reject any hint of tradition or religion and who want a society that is based on secular values, and they are increasingly overt in their attempt to try to achieve that society. The other side, which we include ourselves in, would be inclined to defend the family without trying to redefine what a family is."

(continued)

'So many modern trends have undermined family and kinship, yet that is the primordial basis of human and moral social life. The question is how far can you go. There are those who feel that children can just as well be raised by strangers as parents, that marriage break-up isn't a big thing. But in the last 30 years, things really have gotten worse for children.'

— David Popenoe

Hetrick said he believes the Council on Families in America has good ideas about taking more responsibility for children and trying to prevent divorce. But his group does not believe in more government programs to help families. Hetrick said more taxes have hurt families because women are forced to work.

DURING THE 1970s, when women entered the workforce in great numbers and the divorce rate climbed, Princeton University sociologist Sara McLanahan was in graduate school. It was a time when scholars said single-parent families were merely another family form.

"That was the lore. It was very self-serving," she said. "People were getting divorced all over the place. It was a way of legitimating what was happening."

Then, in the mid-1980s, McLanahan did her own research on the effects of divorce on children.

"I went into it thinking I would be able to show there wasn't an effect," she said. "But it's very clear there are negative costs. So to people who are going around saying there are no problems and all families are equally viable — I say that's just baloney."

The single most important problem for children of divorce is low income, McLanahan said.

"When divorce occurs, women keep the children and men abandon them," she said. "I think we have to have laws that parents support their children. If you have a child, you have to support the child until age 18."

McLanahan favors withholding money from a parent's paycheck if the parent doesn't voluntarily support the child; government-sponsored health care and child care for children whose parents can't afford it; and earned income tax breaks for poor children. Mostly, she favors encouraging people to stay married and to pay attention to their children's needs.

Author Sylvia Ann Hewlett believes people are beginning to agree. During a recent lecture tour on her pro-family views, she said she got standing ovations in two cities — for the first time.

"I see a triangular partnership," she said. "We have to have government go along with workplace policies, which goes along with better decision-making by individuals. I do feel that for couples with children, we have to create a system that slows divorce down.

"But if that becomes inevitable, we should make the child's rights center-stage. What we have right now is a disaster for children."

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**Washington's new consensus.**

# FAMILY-MONGERS

*By Ruth Shalit*

If you thought "family values" had been buried by George Bush's disastrous campaign, you're not a Washington policy wonk. George Washington University professor Amitai Etzioni and seven other "communitarian" leaders recently issued a twenty-six-page rhetorical call to President Clinton, urging him to "reclaim family values" as a theme for his administration. On July 30, Vice President Al Gore, tasked with leading the president's National Performance Review, will host a conference on "Reinventing Family Policy." Yuppie neocons William Kristol and Jay Lefkowitz, charged with rethinking conservatism for the "Bradley Project on the '90s," believe the "family" holds the key to GOP success. But the Aspen Institute may offer the strongest proof of where Washington's new center lies. The topic of their recent Domestic Strategy Group? "Children and Families." The moderator? David Gergen.

The bipartisan convergence on the family will likely result in more spin than substance. New Democrats hope to weave family issues into a seamless web of social reform that includes the intractable—and politically divisive—issue of the urban underclass. So far, though, they have seemed more interested in middle-class anxiety than underclass collapse. And conservatives, desperate to win back the yuppie wanderers who abandoned them last November, appear eager merely to pander to suburban angst.

Clinton's family make-over began last year at the Democratic convention, where he and Gore accepted the nomination surrounded by their adoring children. "Government doesn't raise children," Clinton said in his acceptance speech. "People do." Clinton's campaign tract, *Putting People First*, cribbed a line (and a title) from the 1990 monograph "Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the '90s," published by the centrist Progressive Policy Institute: "The best anti-poverty policy ... is a stable, intact family."

A year later the authors of the PPI monograph, William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, are in second-tier White House jobs (Galston is assistant to the president for domestic policy; Kamarck is an aide to Gore). "There's now a vital and energized center on issues of family policy," says Galston. "We have the makings of a broad consensus."

Bolstered by research into the harmful social and cultural effects of family disintegration, they argue that government policy and social mores ought to reflect the view that children are best off in two-parent families. Demographic changes give political salience to a theme once thought too politically risky for Democrats to broach. A majority of baby boomers—roughly 45 million—are now parents themselves. According to a poll conducted last year by Daniel Yankelovich, most of this generation sees the breakdown of the family at the heart of our social problems. "The baby boomers' quest for self-expression and personal liberation is yielding to values of family," says Will Marshall, president of the PPI. "This is having a major impact on our politics."

Even some liberal Democrats are joining the crusade. "This problem of family disruption in our society is a real thing," says David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values in New York. To combat these problems, Blankenhorn and his colleague Barbara Whitehead have joined Galston, Kamarck and communitarians such as Etzioni in calling for federal day care and family-leave policies, an increase in the standard income-tax deduction for families with children and "braking" mechanisms that require parents contemplating divorce to think again.

Yet divorce rates, which peaked in the '70s and '80s, have actually slowed over the past few years. Today the most obvious instances of family instability and breakdown are in the (mainly black) urban underclass, where the problem is not divorce, but the failure of families to form or remain intact. Two out of three black children and one out of five white children are currently born out of wedlock. Appeals to family-friendly workplaces and quality time can't mitigate the consequences of this kind of social chasm.

But the neo-familists seem unwilling to acknowledge the crucial distinction between the middle class and

the underclass. "I've resisted the idea that this is really about *them*," says Blankenhorn. "These are things that are happening to all of us." Etzioni says he's worried about the problem of family dissolution, as if all families dissolve in the same way. "We have an interesting new device for that," he says. "Supervows. People will voluntarily make a premarriage contract to indicate that they take their marriage more seriously than the law requires. If one wants counseling, the other agrees. If one partner yells, 'Divorce,' the other says, 'Wait six months.' I hope there comes a day when people go up to each other at cocktail parties and say, 'I have a supervow. Do you have one?'"

Galston and Kamarck also seem unduly focused on bourgeois failure. "While the scarcity of intact families in the ghetto is well known," they write in "Putting Children First," "these problems are not the primary focus of this paper." In fact, they're not the focus of any Galston/Kamarck paper. After detailing a host of specific policy measures in *Mandate for Change* to help meet the needs of middle-class families, the two offer the poorest of the poor only "early family preservation strategies" and the comfort of "scores of state and local programs already in existence."

Indeed, it's not at all clear that the new tide of pro-family sentiment will deliver even the modest policy changes Galston and his New Democrat colleagues envision. Although they successfully fought for expanding the earned income tax credit, aimed specifically at providing relief for the working poor, increasing the standard income tax deduction for all families with children has always been at the top of their agenda. "Our cry was picked up by Bill Clinton, who promised tax relief for working families," says Marshall. "That's one promise we hope he'll keep."

He might not. "Am I still for this? Yes," says a top Clinton domestic policy aide. "Will the macroeconomics of the situation permit it? Probably not. The president did speak about it as a promise delayed rather than denied. That turned out not to be the case."

These divisions within the administration make it difficult for Clinton to present a coherent policy. "How much better would the Joycelyn Elders nomination go down with the electorate if it were coupled with a real crusade to resurrect social sanctions against out-of-wedlock births?" laments a Clinton adviser. "It's not an issue he's made a centerpiece in the White House, because in the end it points to a real fault line in the Democratic coalition. And his wife is on the other side of the debate."

Among the Republicans, the new consensus masks equally troubling rifts. Bleeding-heart conservatives such as Jack Kemp and Bill Bennett want to appeal to yuppies' concern over social breakdown without alienating moderate suburban supporters or hectoring single mothers, à la Dan Quayle. Right-wing theocrats such as Pat Buchanan and the Family Research Council's Gary Bauer want to co-opt the same angst for an onslaught against liberal "lifestyles." Meanwhile, neocon intellectuals such as Kristol and Lefkowitz are trying to elide the conflict completely.

Bauer and Buchanan view "family values" in the Reaganite way: as a chance to assert themselves as the moral guardians of the past, a world of two-parent families and heterosexuality. Not so Kemp and Bennett. They soft-pedal the ideological nature of family values, celebrating "parents rights" issues such as school choice. Once seen as a flaky libertarian crusade, school choice is rising to the top of the family values litany for conservatives who lack the stomach for the culture war. The two are fighting for a California school-choice ballot initiative. Last week Kemp raised $600,000 for the measure. Bennett's already been to California twice. "Kemp and Bennett are trying to help connect the issue of family values with specific, concrete, tangible policy proposals, so that it doesn't look like it's just Republicans forcing morality on people," argues Joel Rosenberg of Empower America, the GOP holding tank from which both Kemp and Bennett are plotting their '96 presidential bids. The group is holding another conference on "School Choice and Families" in Los Angeles on September 24. "That'll be another big media hit," predicts Rosenberg. In case it's not, Bennett stands ready with his "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators," a Perot-style fever chart of declining values.

Meanwhile, Republicans of all spots are mesmerized by the recent New York school board elections, which centered around a controversial multicultural curriculum that included material on homosexuality. "The liberal establishment, corrupting and polluting innocent consciousnesses," moans Terry Jeffries, executive director of Buchanan's American Cause. Conservative organizations swarmed District 24 in Queens, blanketing the houses of 500,000 residents with pamphlets and

"voters' guides." In the end, more than half of the 130 candidates who identified themselves as "pro-family" won. Conservatives were elated. "There seems to be an emerging consensus on the very basic issue that families matter," says Bauer. "What this shows is that black and Hispanic parents no more want their kids being taught that homosexuality is O.K. than anyone else wants these things being done to them." Bauer is working with others to replicate the Queens victories in other states.

Like the frustrated Democratic activists, Republican family-values aficionados complain of their party leadership's skittishness on the issue. Among official Washington "there's fear and trembling in the presence of family values," says Kristol—a curious statement, given the frenetic activity on both sides of the political divide. But Bauer insists he's had no help from the GOP. "In one of my first meetings with [Republican National Committee Chair] Haley Barbour," he recalls, "I brought up this issue in Queens. And he had no idea what I was talking about. He gave me a quizzical look and said, 'What controversy in Queens?'" (In his defense, Barbour says: "When I was elected chairman, I promised to focus on the issues that would unite all of us. Taxes. The economy.")

Even worse than being cut adrift by the party leadership, Bauer might now be in danger of losing the support of some of his strongest allies. In the August issue of the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*, Ralph Reed, the Christian Coalition's executive director, shelved demands for a Buchananite culture war in favor of a more Kemp-like agenda: school choice, welfare reform, an increase in the standard tax deduction for families with children. Abortion and gay rights "are not enough," he writes. "The cluster of pro-family issues must now be expanded to include a majority of voters." Bauer is indignant. "Ralph's trying to be more mainstream," he sighs. "Ralph's got his own demons to wrestle with." He's not the only one. •

The Washington Post

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1993 A23

*William Raspberry*

# The Trouble With Fatherless Households

A friend of mine got married the other day, and as an integral part of the wedding ceremony, her new husband embraced—and specifically vowed to love and care for—her two young sons.

If it was, for me, one of the most moving parts of the ritual, perhaps it's because circumstances had conspired to put the centrality of children (and the importance of two-parent families) on my mind.

A chance mention during a Congressional Black Caucus breakfast had our table talking about the need for husbands and wives to find ways to put children first—ahead even of maximizing income and individual careers.

A day later, I was in a discussion (not initiated by me) on the deadly effects of father-absence on everything from school failure to crime.

And on Sunday, Sen. Pat Moynihan (we were both guests on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press") was touting the importance *to civilization* of two-parent families and trying to figure out how we can reverse the trend away from that tradition.

So when my friend's new husband publicly committed himself to her sons, I wanted to jump up and shout *Yes!* I knew something truly important was taking place. I still know it. What brings me back to earth is something else I know: that the likelihood of such a scene being repeated—the likelihood that any given youngster will grow up with two parents—grows less every day.

There are two overlapping sets of reasons for this projection. The first is the one we talk about: the fact that two-thirds of the black babies born in America are born out of wedlock—a still higher proportion of those born to mothers who are young, poor *and* black. These are the young mothers we think of when we discuss the "welfare problem" and the problem of haphazardly raised children. These are the babies we mean when we speak of "at-risk" children. These are the families most likely of all Americans to be poor...

We talk about them as single-parent households, though my preference is to call them what they most significantly are: *fatherless* households. It is not the presence of the single mothers but the absence of fathers that makes the children of these homes supremely vulnerable to that range of pathologies we have in mind when we say "underclass."

But the young women in this group are not the only ones who have come to reject the importance of fathers in the child-rearing enterprise. The phenomenon now embraces the "Murphy Browns"—unmarried middle-class women, more or less accidentally pregnant, who decide to raise their children alone; women who would prefer marriage but who won't let the absence of a marriage partner stand between them and motherhood; women who, apparently giving little thought to marriage, "use" men—lovers, friends, even near-strangers—for their sperm and then have done with them.

What has caused this era of what David Blankenhorn has called the "superfluous father"? For poor women, particularly teenagers, the cause may be the inner-city joblessness that makes young men poor marriage prospects. The young women they impregnate prefer to "marry" a more reliable provider: the welfare system.

For middle-class women, I hazard two guesses. The first is a matter of limited options: a dearth of professionally, economically and chronologically eligible men and the inexorable ticking of the biological clock. The second is a growing unhappiness with what they see as the unfairness of marriage—that its advantages seem to flow only to men and subservient wives, not to strong, career-oriented professional women.

All these things make sense. But so does the primacy of children. Children *need* both parents—not just two breadwinners but two parental roles. Two-parent homes are a protection not merely against poverty but also against a variety of emotional insecurities.

This is not to suggest that the children of any particular one-parent family are doomed. There have always been widowed and divorced and never-married parents who managed to raise wonderful children. What concerns me more is the growing existence of entire neighborhoods where a fully functioning two-parent household is the exception, together with a trend that says fathers don't count for much.

They do. *We* do. Restoring fatherhood might do more than the 20 next-best things we could think of to give our children the chance they deserve—the chance they must have if we are to arrest the disastrous slide of recent years.

How do we start? By doing what my friends did last Sunday: putting our children at the center of things. There may be a better device than two-parent families for raising children, but I wouldn't bet on it.

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NEW YORK NEWSDAY, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1993

# Liberals Take Up Family Values

Washington — Yes, Dan Quayle was right. American children are better off when they grow up in two-parent families. They are happier, healthier, wealthier and less likely to shoot each other down in the streets.

The statistics are undeniable: A child whose parents are married and have high school educations has only an 8 percent chance of living in poverty. For a child of a single, high school dropout the likelihood of poverty is 80 percent.

But, oh, was Dan Quayle unforgivably wrong for trying to make family values a partisan political issue last year, as though only conservative Republicans understand morality. At the 1992 Republican convention, Pat Buchanan was even worse. He made family values sound like a chapter out of "Mein Kampf."

Inevitably, knee-jerk liberals — yes, me too — produced our jerky response. Because Quayle was such a dweeb and Buchanan such a storm-trooper, whatever they said about morality had to be hooted down with scorn.

Lars-Erik Nelson

Then, out from President Bill Clinton's White House yesterday popped William Galston, a professor on leave from the University of Maryland, to report that the Clinton administration is in fact hard at work on the moral agenda that Quayle and Buchanan butchered: Encouraging two-parent families; trying to discourage teenage pregnancy; even pressuring Hollywood and the media to reconsider the impact of glorified sex and violence.

You might expect liberals to feel a little defensive about discussing issues like values and morality. The cultural history of this century — dating back to Sigmund Freud's initial surge of popularity — has pitted urban liberals, intellectuals, the cultural elite against the restraints of "bourgeois morality."

Yet here, at a U.S. Capitol gathering sponsored by the Communitarian Network, was Prof. Amitai Etzioni of George Washington University bluntly telling psychiatrists to clean up their act: Stop telling American wives they need to seek fulfillment as individuals rather than as marriage partners.

"Let's look at [TV's married] Huxtables as a model, not Murphy Brown," Etzioni said. "We have always had nuclear families [father, mother, children]. When we have children killing children and not even showing remorse, we must re-examine our experiments and go back to parenting."

And here was Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services David Ellwood, a Harvard professor on leave, warning that the current welfare system is a failure because it contradicts basic American values. It discourages work, discourages responsibility and offers no opportunity and no dignity.

"Our first step should be to empower both parents to provide a home for their children," Ellwood said. "We've got to change the signals so that we do not say to people, 'The way you get support from government is by becoming a single parent.'"

And here was Prof. Galston, Clinton's deputy domestic policy adviser, warning that the combination of single-parent families and a 50 percent divorce rate mean that the average American child will grow up, at least part of the time, in a single-parent family.

Galston outlined Clinton's domestic accomplishments thus far: The passage of the Family Leave Act; enactment of the Earned Income Tax Credits to lift working families above the poverty line; Clinton's community service programs.

But Clinton is planning a moral crusade as well. "Teen pregnancy is the gateway to long-term welfare dependency," he said. "That means you have to talk much more aggressively about preventing teen pregnancy. . . if we can't solve that problem, we can't reform welfare or solve the other problems."

Government alone will not achieve much, Galston admitted. "We don't have enough carrots and sticks as incentives. If people don't do right because they believe that it's right, we cannot solve any of our problems. Our most important line of defense is the family."

In all this morning of liberal talk about the need to rebuild America's moral values, I am happy to report there was not a single word blaming Ronald Reagan, Dan Quayle, George Bush or even Pat Buchanan. This was nonpartisan, business-like moral fervor with no villains. Etzioni, founder of the Communitarian Network, explained why:

"People have been too afraid to talk about values. Some of these ideas come from the conservative column and some from the liberal. Let's not let those kind of distinctions stop us any more."

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