

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research by public agencies and private institutions

“Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma.”

The Urban Institute Press, 2100 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037. 198 pp. \$24.95.
Authors: Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan

In the United States, the number of single-parent households is increasing at an alarming rate.

Between 1960 and 1983, the proportion of all American children growing up in female-headed households increased from 8.2 to 20.5 percent. Today, 51 percent of black children in the United States are being raised in families without fathers. And half (five million) of all female-headed families are living in poverty.

What has caused the increase? Some liberal sociologists have blamed this “feminization of poverty” on feckless fathers and wage discrimination against female workers. Conservatives have argued that welfare programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have discouraged fathers and mothers from staying together, because the benefits provided to single mothers exceed what working husbands and wives could expect.

Garfinkel and McLanahan, professors at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, believe that both liberal and conservative explanations for the rise in single motherhood are insufficient; changing sexual mores also played a key role.

Single motherhood, the authors stress, is a self-perpetuating phenomenon: Single mothers are very often the children of single mothers. The phenomenon is not limited to blacks. White daughters of single parents, for example, are 53 percent more likely than their counterparts in two-parent families to marry as teenagers. They are 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth, and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages—if they marry. Single motherhood, as the authors put it, “mushroom[s] over time,” as the

daughters of single mothers come to outnumber their parents.

Single-mother households become poor and stay poor, the authors say, for three reasons. First, women earn less than men. Second, they get only “meager benefits” from welfare. Third, only 40 percent of white fathers and 19 percent of black fathers pay any child support. If every American father who should pay child support did so at the levels now set by the state of Wisconsin (ranging from 17 percent of the father’s income for one child to 34 percent for five or more children), the authors point out, the number of poor people would drop by 24 percent and the AFDC caseload by 25 percent.

Welfare programs, Garfinkel and McLanahan say, are not the primary cause of single parenthood, but they do contribute to its perpetuation. Citing negative income-tax experiments of the 1970s, the authors suggest that increases in welfare benefits were responsible for a nine to 14 percent rise in single motherhood from 1960 to 1975—whether brought about by the choice not to marry or through divorce. Changes in welfare spending, they say, “greatly affected both the economic well-being and the dependence of poor mother-only families, but had modest effects, at most, on their prevalence.”

Garfinkel and McLanahan conclude that strengthening child support enforcement would do more for poor single mothers than “workfare” or welfare reform. They also favor “child allowances,” a \$300 to \$400 annual grant for *every* American child under 18. Such subsidies, they say, “would diminish the discrimination in favor of [children living in single-parent homes] and perhaps reduce their prevalence.”

“The Swedish Economy.”

Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.
 324 pp. \$32.95.

Authors: Barry P. Bosworth, Gary Burtless, Robert J. Flanagan, Edward M. Gramlich, Robert Z. Lawrence, Alice M. Rivlin, and R. Kent Weaver

During the 1930s, American journalist Marquis Childs praised the Swedish welfare state, calling it the “middle way.” Here was, he believed, an ideal blend of socialism and capitalism, of compassion and productivity. During the 1970s, however, the Swedish economy, now afflicted by falling productivity and the highest tax rates in Western Europe, acquired a new nickname: “the Swedish disease.”

What went wrong?

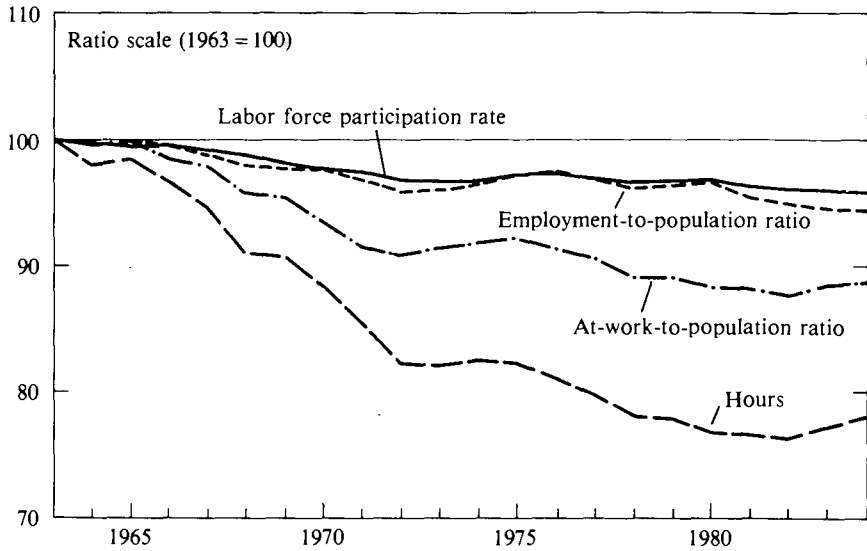
The authors, economists and political scientists at Stanford University, the University of Michigan, and the Brookings Institution, suggest that related political and economic factors caused the disease.

The Swedish welfare state was built on two stable, mutually supporting pillars: the Social Democratic Party and the *Landesorganisationen* (LO), the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions. At its peak in 1950,

some 80 percent of Swedish workers belonged to the LO, which supported the Social Democratic party and pressed its leadership for extensive social welfare benefits. Thanks in part to LO support, the Social Democrats stayed in power from 1932 to 1976.

During the 1970s, however, the pillars began to tremble, as the weight of government spending grew heavier. In 1960, Swedish taxes consumed 27 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product. By 1975, that figure had climbed to 44 percent (versus 30 percent in the United States). By the late 1970s, the average Swede paid 55 percent of his income in taxes (his U.S. counterpart paid about 27 percent).

As both tax rates and social benefits soared, many Swedes decided they were better off not working. Many retired early; others survived on generous unemploy-



Rising absenteeism has widened the gap between the average number of Swedish males on payrolls and the number actually on the job during a given week. Result: The total of man-hours worked has plunged.

ment payments. Brookings economist Gary Burtless calculates that, between 1963 and 1981, man-hours worked per capita rose by one percent in the United States, and fell 11 percent in Sweden.

Employers, meanwhile, found themselves burdened by high "solidaristic" wages and growing contributions to various social insurance schemes. The social security tax they had to pay equalled 37 percent of the employee's wage. Several export-oriented Swedish manufacturers could not easily pass on their rising costs to overseas customers, and, during the 1980s, closed down—notably the Uddevalla Varvet and Kockums shipyards.

In 1979, the Social Democrats (ousted in 1976 by conservatives) came back, but failed to make substantive reforms. To invigorate the economy, Swedish politicians must cut the \$54.5 billion budget and find

new sources of savings and investment. Social Democrat Ingvar Carlsson, prime minister since the death of Olof Palme in 1986, has trimmed some welfare benefits. He has let some inefficient, government-subsidized factories go under. But Brookings political scientist R. Kent Weaver believes that as long as labor can hold the Social Democrats hostage, the party will not be able to end the present doldrums.

To enact more productivity-oriented policies and reform existing bureaucracies, the Social Democrats, Weaver believes, will have to reach out to the more conservative Center and Liberal Parties—a strategy, he admits, that entails great political risks. "For the Social Democrats," he says, that shift "would mean surrendering the image that they are the only true defenders of the welfare state, an image that probably works to their electoral benefit."

"Japanese Education Today."

U.S. Dept. of Education, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.
95 pp. \$4.75.

Authors: Robert L. August, William K. Cummings, Betty George, Robert Leetsma, Lois Peak, Nobuo Shimahara, and Nevzer G. Stacey

Many American educators have observed that Japanese schools still enjoy what U.S. schools lost long ago: strict discipline, moral education, demanding classes and texts, and intense parental involvement. "Our American education ideals," say the authors, all associated with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, "may be better realized in Japan than in the United States."

Americans, the authors note, largely shaped the Japanese educational system after Tokyo's defeat in World War II through the creation of the United States Education Mission. This group restructured Japanese precollegiate education on the U.S. model, setting up six-year elementary schools, three-year junior high schools, and three-year high schools.

Within this structure, however, the Japanese took their own approach. They re-

jected what Americans favor most: local control and diversity, preferring centralization and conformity instead.

In Japan, the Ministry of Education, or Monbusho, today rules supreme. The Monbusho selects textbooks, sets national education standards and curricula, administers teacher colleges in Japan, and runs 74 schools overseas—including Japanese elementary and secondary schools in New York and Chicago.

The Japanese system, consequently, is far more uniform than its heterogeneous American counterpart. In most U.S. high schools, students may choose from a wide variety of electives (such as music and fine art). But in all Japanese towns and cities, the regime is nearly identical. English instruction, for example, increases from three hours per week in every junior high school to between six and eight hours per week in high school.

Unlike many Americans, Japanese educators believe that codes of conduct can be taught. Japanese students spend at least one hour a week on "moral education," learning self-control, harmony with nature, and what the Japanese call "the need for rational and scientific attitudes toward human life." Schoolwide activities reinforce rules taught in classes. Japanese ninth graders, for example, take an annual field trip to a distant city "to train [them] in public manners and group etiquette."

Japanese schools are also competitive. Students do a lot of homework. They spend up to four years studying for college entrance examinations. Acceptance into the right university (particularly Tokyo University, or *Todai*, the "Harvard of Japan") can ensure a successful job hunt. "Four hours pass, five hours fail," goes one student slogan—that is, you will fail if you sleep five hours a night. Many youths who fall behind in their studies attend one of many increasingly popular *juku*—private, profit-making prep schools.

In contrast to American students, however, Japanese youths tend to "ease off" in college. Because they are rarely flunked

out, Japanese undergraduates spend much of their time cutting classes and joining clubs. (Ahead lie the rigors of job and career.) "The squandering of four years at the college level on poor teaching and very little study," as Harvard's Edwin O. Reischauer has observed, "seems an incredible waste of time for a nation so passionately devoted to efficiency."

Like their American counterparts, Japanese educators believe that their system needs improvement. Japan's National Council on Educational Reform, which was appointed by Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1984, declared that Japanese education was in a "state of desolation," and called for decentralizing the bureaucracy and making Japanese public schools less regimented—and thus somewhat more American in style.

Even so, Americans, the authors suggest, can learn much from the Japanese. U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett, for example, has observed that Japanese public schools work well because they are "clear about their purposes" and because they are places where "expectations and standards matter."

"Reassessing Nuclear Power: The Fallout from Chernobyl."

Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

71 pp. \$4.00.

Author: Christopher Flavin

The April 1986 explosion of a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in the Soviet Ukraine killed 29 people and exposed from two to three hundred others to massive doses of radiation. The Chernobyl plant, however, did not confine its damage to the Ukraine or even to the Soviet Union. Indeed, it may have done its greatest damage to the scientist's dream of a world powered by nuclear energy.

Flavin, a senior researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, points out that nuclear power had been in decline long before the Chernobyl disaster. In the United States, power companies have canceled 55

planned nuclear power plants since 1980 without proposing any new ones. Mexico, in the past six years, has abandoned plans for 18 nuclear power plants. Several less populous nations—Australia, the Philippines, and Greece—have opted to abandon nuclear power entirely. "If Chernobyl is compared with a heart attack," Flavin observes, "it is clear that the ailment struck a patient already afflicted with cancer."

Economics, not politics, has brought the nuclear industry to its knees. Oil and coal prices have dropped in the past decade, making fossil fuel plants far more attractive financially than they were in the

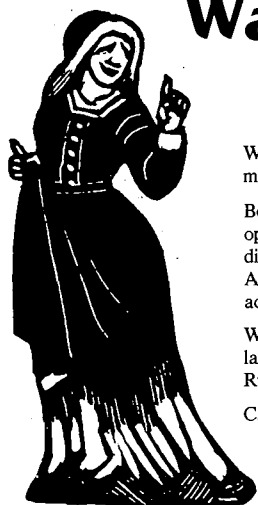
1970s. Nuclear reactors are not only more capital-intensive than their nonnuclear counterparts, but also more expensive to keep secure. "The threat of terrorism," Flavin writes, "has turned nuclear power complexes into modern fortresses."

Not surprisingly, state-owned corporations—which operate according to bureaucratic, not market, imperatives—have built most new nuclear power plants in the West. France's state-owned utility, Electricité de France (EDF), has enabled the nation to produce two-thirds of its electrical power with nuclear energy. And EDF has planned on building two to four new reactors by 1990—reactors that, Flavin contends, the country neither needs nor can afford. The utility is already \$32 billion in the red.

Most European countries, however, are less committed than France is to nuclear

power. The Netherlands has canceled plans for two plants, halving the Dutch nuclear energy effort. Plans for eight nuclear power plants in Yugoslavia have been put on hold, following some recent "protests in social republics." In Sweden, a government commission proposed advancing from 2010 to 1997 the date when all existing Swedish reactors will be dismantled. Austria ordered its only nuclear reactor, at Zwentendorf, shut down. Peter Jankowitsch, the Austrian foreign minister, explained the decision to the International Atomic Energy Agency: "The Faustian bargain of nuclear energy has been lost."

The Soviets have not changed any of their plans to build new nuclear reactors. But in the West, most governments seem to have come to the conclusion, Flavin says, that "the global nuclear endeavor is simply not working."



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