

Nice theory, says Cohen, a historian at Carnegie Mellon University, but that is not what happened, at least not in Chicago.

During the 1920s, the city's working-class Italians, Poles, Slavs, and Irish made the new mass culture conform to their own way of life. True, they loved the new movies coming out of Hollywood. But they watched them in neighborhood theaters—with nicknames like "The Garlic Opera



No sale: During the 1920s, Chicago's Marshall Field department store sold its stylish wares only to the affluent, not to the working class.

House"—where Buster Keaton's hilarious adventures were punctuated by local amateur acts and impromptu film criticism. "The old Italians used to go to these movies," recalled one patron, "and when the good guys were chasing the bad guys... they'd say [in Italian]—Getem—catch them—out loud in the theater." Local radio broadcasts (e.g., "The Irish Hour") were usually tuned in at neighborhood social clubs and were likewise subjected to community comment.

Chicago's workers bypassed the impersonal A&P supermarkets and Walgreen drugstores. "Go to A&P they ain't going to give you credit like I give you credit here," warned one grocer in Little Sicily. The workers were still buying sugar from barrels when the housewives of Evanston were stocking their pantries with Del Monte canned goods and other national brands.

Only blacks, Cohen notes, wholeheartedly accepted the new American mass culture—and promptly made it serve their own interests. Lacking local black-owned shops, they flocked to chain stores. Black consumer boycotts—"Don't spend where you can't work"—forced the chains to hire black workers. And the new mass media enabled "Fats" Waller and other black jazzmen to reach a national audience.

As the decade ended, "mass culture" made greater inroads. But Cohen is not convinced that Chicago's workers were swept into the Great American Mixmaster. It may be, she says, that "mass culture did more to create an integrated working-class culture than a classless American one."

Child Abuse

"The Child Abuse 'Crisis': Forgotten Facts and Hidden Agendas" by Bryce Christensen in *The Family in America* (February 1989), P.O. Box 416, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054.

Last year's trial in New York of attorney Joel Steinberg for fatally beating his adopted daughter Lisa raised new alarms about a nationwide plague of child abuse. "Child abuse has been allowed to remain the hidden tragedy of too many middle-class families," warned a writer in *Ladies'*

Home Journal, echoing an increasingly common view.

Nonsense, says Christensen, editor of *The Family in America*. Child abuse is not nearly as widespread in America as it is said to be. "Of the 2.1 million children who were reported to state authorities in

1986 as abused or neglected," Christensen notes, "only about 30 percent had been physically abused and only about 10 percent of these children (3 percent of the total) had suffered injury serious enough to require professional attention."

Alarming as these reduced estimates are, they do not bear out the charge that the middle-class family is a chamber of horrors. In fact, they are the result of the *breakdown* of the traditional family.

Single-parent families receiving public assistance, a tiny fraction of the total population, account for 30 percent of all battered children, according to Douglas Besharov, former director of the National Center on Child Abuse. A 1985 McMaster University study found that preschoolers living in families with a stepparent are 40 times more likely to become victims than are kids who live with their natural parents. By contrast, a report by the National Institute for Mental Health shows that violence against children "appears to be de-

creasing in America's intact families."

Christensen thinks that the "crisis" is largely the creation of certain feminists, academics, and social workers with a hidden anti-family agenda. The very "solutions" they advocate—more intrusive investigations, sex-abuse education in the schools—would further erode parental authority and undermine the family. Claudia Pap Mangel, a Washington, D.C. attorney, has gone so far as to advocate government licensing of parents.

The welfare state "deserves credit for shielding some children from abuse," says Christensen, "and blame for persistently undermining the moral purpose and family commitment that prevent such abuse in the first place." As it is, 65 percent of all parents accused of child abuse are cleared, but only after long and devastating investigations. Today's vague laws need to be reformed, he concludes, to make it harder for social workers and others to intervene in the family.

PRESS & TELEVISION

The End of Time?

"The Newsweeklies: Is the Species Doomed?" by Bruce Porter, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 1989), 200 Alton Place, Marion, Ohio 43302.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

Since Henry Luce founded *Time* in 1923, newsweeklies have been a mainstay of the nation's news media. Now they—or one or two of them—could be nearing extinction. Circulation (a combined total of 10 million for *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Newsweek*) has been virtually flat since 1970; ad pages have slipped by around 20 percent during the last decade.

"Where once the newsmagazines were the general public's only source of news about special areas such as the law [and] medicine," writes Porter, who teaches at Columbia's School of Journalism, "today all the large dailies [have] specialists dealing in these subjects." And Americans even in the hinterlands can now get the *New York Times* or *USA Today*, not to mention all kinds of television news. "You

have to ask yourself," says Roger Rosenblatt, editor of *U.S. News*, "why a reader needs us if he gets told a fact on Monday and you tell him the same fact a week from Monday."

He doesn't, and in order to survive the newsmagazines are changing. *Time* has resorted to splashy color graphics to ensure that "readers get a fast idea of what a story says without having to undergo the inconvenience of actually reading it." Yet, it has also hired well-known essayists, such as the *New Republic's* Michael Kinsley, to write weighty opinion pieces.

U.S. News emphasizes "news you can use": articles on personal finance, health, nutrition, and education. At *Newsweek*, soft-edged "stories are pitched to a slightly hipper, more urban set of readers, people in their thirties and forties." Cultural edi-