
SOCIETY

What 'Cultural Diversity' Means

"A World View of Cultural Diversity" by Thomas Sowell, in *Society* (Nov.-Dec. 1991), Rutgers—The State Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

"Cultural diversity" is frequently invoked today as a shining ideal. Some of its crusading advocates, notes Sowell, a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, "seem to want to preserve cultures in their purity, almost like butterflies . . . in amber." That, he points out, is not the way in which, over the centuries, cultures and civilizations and indeed the whole human race have advanced. The long history of "cultural diversity," Sowell observes, presents "not a static picture of differentness but a dynamic picture of competition in which what serves human purposes more effectively survives while what does not tends to decline or disappear."

Paper and printing—which originated in China and yet today are integral parts of Western civilization—are but two examples of how cultural advances have been transferred from one group to another and from one civilization to another. Such transfers have marked the entire history of the human race, and they signify much more than just cultural diversity, Sowell argues. They imply that some cultural features were *better* than others.

"The very fact that people—all people, whether Europeans, Africans, Asians, or others—have repeatedly chosen to abandon some feature of their own culture in order to replace it with something from another culture implies that the replacement served their purposes more effectively," he says. For example, Arabic numerals (which actually originated among the Hindus of India) are better than, not

just different from, Roman ones. "This is shown by their replacing Roman numerals in many countries whose own cultures derived from Rome, as well as in other countries whose respective numbering systems were likewise superseded by so-called Arabic numerals." Roman numerals today may be fine for numbering kings and Super Bowls, but they can hardly match the efficiency of Arabic numerals in most mathematical operations.

Some contemporary champions of diversity acknowledge the fact of cultural change but insist that such change should come about only through collective or political decisions. This, Sowell says, "is not how cultures have arrived where they are." Decisions about change are made rather by individuals in the course of their daily lives. "In this way, cultures have enriched each other in all the great civilizations of the world."

No culture has grown great in isolation, Sowell says. Intellectuals who, in the name of "cultural diversity," promote "a multiplicity of segregated ethnic enclaves" are not doing the people in those enclaves any favor, he maintains. "However they live socially, [those people] are going to have to compete economically for a livelihood. Even if they were not disadvantaged before, they will be" if they are confined to what exists in their immediate subculture. The advances made in behalf of the human race belong to all people, and "all people need to claim that legacy, not seal themselves off in a dead-end of tribalism or in an emotional orgy of cultural vanity."

The Incredible Expanding Workweek

"Work and Leisure: On the Reporting of Poll Results" by Richard F. Hamilton, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1991), Inst. for Social Research, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

In a 1989 cover story on "The Rat Race," *Time* magazine declared that "America Is Running Itself Ragged" and cited surveys

by pollster Louis Harris to prove the point. The median workweek increased from 40.6 hours in 1973 to 48.8 hours in 1985,

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the Harris polls found, before dipping slightly two years later. Meanwhile, the amount of leisure available to Americans shrank from 26.2 hours a week to only 17.7 in 1985 (and 16.6 two years later). Reporting the 1973–85 survey results in his book, *Inside America* (1987), Harris said they pointed to “the fact that *time* has become a premium in the kind of society emerging in America.” Publications from the *New York Times* to *Psychology Today* took up the theme. In a recent, much-publicized book, *The Overworked American* (1991), Harvard economist Juliet B. Schor, despite certain reservations, cited the Har-

ris data to support her contention that Americans have suffered a decline in leisure. Ohio State University political scientist Hamilton, however, after closely examining the Harris findings, says that they are fatally flawed. “There was no dramatic increase in ‘work’ between 1973 and 1985,” he asserts, “nor was there a dramatic decrease in leisure.”

Harris’s striking findings, Hamilton contends, were apparently caused by significant changes in the methodology used in his surveys. In the 1973 survey, the key question was: “About how many hours a week does your job or occupation take, in-

Impoverished Children

A Survey of Recent Articles

There are roughly 64 million children in the United States, about the same number as three decades ago. Meanwhile, the adult (under 65) population has increased by more than half, from 100 million to 152 million, and the number of elderly Americans has risen from 17 to 31 million. That should have been good for the well-being of children, note Victor R. Fuchs and Diane M. Reklis of the National Bureau of Economic Research in *Science* (Jan. 3, 1992). Instead, the lot of American kids generally has grown worse.

One indicator is child poverty, which dropped sharply (along with adult poverty) during the 1960s but has been on the rise since the 1970s. By 1988, 20.3 percent of all American children were living in poverty. Adult poverty, on the other hand, remained largely unchanged at 11 percent.

Writing in *American Sociological Review* (Dec. 1991), Pennsylvania State University’s David J. Eggebeen and Daniel T. Lichter highlight the profound impact that changes in the composition of families during the 1980s—chiefly, the rise in the proportion of female-headed families, produced by divorce and illegitimacy—have had on the economic status of children. In 1987, more than 20 percent of all American children lived with only their mothers, up from eight percent in 1960. If the patterns of family structure in 1988 had been the same as they were in 1960, according to

Eggebeen and Lichter’s analysis of Census Bureau data, the overall child poverty rate would have been 13.8 percent, not 20.3 percent. Indeed, if even the patterns of 1980 had held steady thereafter, the rate in 1988 would have been lower—18 percent. Half of the 1980s increase was due to the breakdown of the family.

It is well known that black children have fared much worse than white children. By 1988, nearly half (45.6 percent) of all black children were poor, as opposed to 15.4 percent of white children. The rapid rise in black female-headed families explains much of the difference. By 1988, half of all black children (compared with 16 percent of white children) lived only with their mothers. If black family breakdown had not increased since 1960, “only” 28.4 percent of black children would have lived in poverty in 1988.

The deterioration of the family cannot be blamed for all of the increase in poverty among black children, Eggebeen and Lichter say, but it “clearly *exacerbated* long-standing racial differences in child poverty. Indeed, if the black family had not deteriorated faster than the white family, the 1960–1988 period would have brought substantial *convergence* in racial differences” in child poverty. The poverty rate declined throughout those decades for black children living with both parents (from 61.2 percent in 1960 to 17 percent in 1988); the rates fell even during the 1980s when the pov-

cluding travel time?" Interviewers were instructed to include students and housewives among their respondents. In the 1980 survey, the question was different: "First, we would like to know approximately how many hours a week you spend at your job or occupation, and that includes keeping house or going to school as well as work for pay or profit. How many hours would you estimate you spend at work, housekeeping, or studies, including any travel time to and from the job or school?" Just this change in wording alone, Hamilton comments, "could easily have generated the 'dramatic' result. It

certainly invites a more generous reading of 'work' than [did] the original question."

Moreover, Harris's findings conflict with data from other sources. The National Opinion Research Center's General Social Surveys (whose question—"How many hours did you work last week, at all jobs?"—has not varied) indicate little change: 39.9 hours of work per week in 1973 and 41.2 hours in '85. Even Schor (whose book Hamilton does not mention) bases her case less on a longer workweek than on an increased number of weeks worked per year. The U.S. Labor Department's *Current Employment Statistics*,

erty rates among corresponding white children were increasing (from 7.3 percent in 1980 to nine percent in 1988).

Of course, remaining above the poverty line does not necessarily mean living well. For some children, black and white, the escape from poverty carried a price: Both parents had to work. Overall, poverty for children in intact families was 10.1 percent in 1988, and it would have been more than one-fifth higher had more and more mothers not taken jobs.

Whether they were poor or not, children by 1988 were likely to enjoy less parental care than children had received only a few decades ago. As Fuchs and Reklis note, the proportion of children under age six whose married mothers worked outside the home went from a mere 18.6 percent in 1960 to a stunning 57.1 percent in 1988. This undoubtedly affected what economists dryly call the "nonmarket production" of goods and services for children. By 1986, Fuchs and Reklis calculate, white parents had about 10 fewer hours per week to spend with their children than they had in 1960, and black parents had about 12 fewer hours.

What can be done? Conservative analysts contend that only a return to the traditional family and to traditional values can provide America's children with the combination of care and discipline that they need. Some have urged more stringent divorce laws or holding parents responsible for the crimes or antisocial acts of their children. But fashioning public policies to try to reverse the cultural changes of recent decades is not easy, Fuchs and Reklis note, in the face of resistance to tighten divorce

laws or other limits on "what many claim are fundamental individual rights." Most children's advocates instead focus on improving children's material well-being, through new or expanded government programs in such areas as education, health, and child care.

Harvard's Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, writing in *Harvard Business Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1991), note that providing some sort of "children's allowance" to the family of every child is "a practice common in virtually every industrialized trading partner of the United States." There is, to be sure, a U.S. personal tax exemption for children, but its value has been dramatically eroded by inflation over the years. Lately, support for tax credits or larger exemptions for families with children has come from conservatives as well as liberals. The National Commission on Children, created in 1987 by Congress and President Reagan, last year recommended replacing the current exemption with a refundable tax credit of \$1,000 per child. That, Bane and Ellwood observe, is a "children's allowance by another name." What it would require, they add, is "raising the taxes of those without children and of those with very high incomes."

Beyond that, however, there remains a fundamental disagreement between liberals and conservatives about the causes of the plight of children today. "There seems to be some truth to both conservative critiques of the cultural changes that were launched in the 1960s as well as liberal complaints about the uneven prosperity of the 1980s," Fuchs and Reklis point out. "But mutual recrimination does little

based on employer reports from a national sample of firms, indicate the average workweek for production workers even *declined*, from 36.9 hours in 1973 to 34.9 hours in 1985. The Census Bureau's *Current Population Surveys* of households, however, which pick up data missed in the employer reports, show virtually no

change over recent decades in the length of the American workweek.

"No change," Hamilton says, is the best single conclusion to draw about what has happened to the American workweek in recent decades. That may be so, but it is not a finding likely to inspire any magazine cover stories.

The Mother of Mother's Day

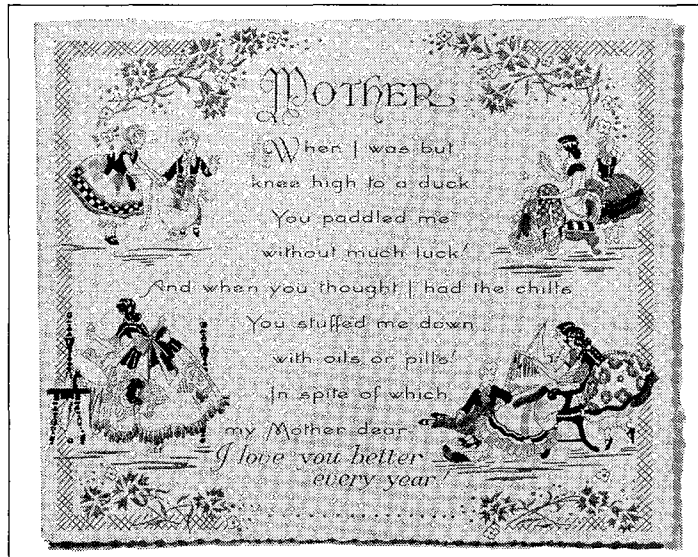
"The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption, 1870-1930" by Leigh Eric Schmidt, in *The Journal of American History* (Dec. 1991), Organization of American Historians, 112 N. Bryan St., Bloomington, Ind. 47408-4199.

Cynics might assume that Mother's Day was invented by the florist and greeting-card industries. Not exactly, says Schmidt, a Drew University historian. The popular holiday (celebrated on May 10 this year) was actually the brainchild of Anna Jarvis. A schoolteacher who lived in Grafton, W. Va., with her mother (also named Anna) until she was 27, Jarvis was devastated by her death in 1905. "To Jarvis, her mother's life had been one of sacrifice and much suffering," writes Schmidt. Seven of her eleven children died in early childhood, and she had forgone a college education in

order to raise her family.

In 1907, Jarvis began a vigorous letter-writing campaign to promote her cause, sending impassioned missives to newspaper editors, politicians, and church leaders. On the second Sunday in May 1908, the first Mother's Day was officially observed in a number of towns and cities. Jarvis kept up her efforts, and in 1914 they were crowned with success: President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed Mother's Day a national holiday. Yet by then the celebration already had begun to depart from what Jarvis originally had in mind.

She had urged people to observe the first Mother's Day in 1908 by wearing a single white carnation, her mother's favorite flower. That, notes Schmidt, provided "the opening wedge" for the florist industry. First it recommended wearing a bright flower if one's mother were still alive and a white one as a memorial. Then it urged that churches, homes, Sunday schools, and cemeteries be decorated with flowers. Mother herself, the trade suggested, deserved nothing less than a full bouquet. "All the other holidays of the year have features that are taken advantage of by various lines of business,"



"Every mother should receive a card with just the right sentiment," advised *Greeting Cards: When and How to Use Them* (1926).