
SOCIETY
*Day Care
as Cure-all*

"Pied Piper Politics and the Child-Care Debate" by Suzanne H. Woolsey, in *Daedalus* (Spring 1977), 165 Allandale St., Jamaica Plain Station, Boston, Mass. 02130.

The decade-old debate over proposals for massive federal aid for new child-care centers has produced more heat than light from those ideological "pied pipers" who variously see such centers as the answer to "oppression of women, a thoroughly unworkable welfare system, emotional disturbance, and school failure."

So argues Woolsey, associate director for Human and Community Affairs at the White House's Office of Management and Budget. Analyzing child-care data, she finds that most working mothers employ—and prefer to employ—relatives or friends to take care of their young children. Much-touted high-quality day-care centers are costly to operate—up to \$5,000 annually per child—and surveys show no urgent demand by parents for more of them. (In 1976, various federal child-care subsidies totaled roughly \$1.5 billion, excluding tax breaks for working parents' child-care expenses.) Even experimental free centers for welfare mothers got "few takers"; the same was true of centers set up for employees by corporations. Moreover, day-care centers are not crucial to a mother's ability to work outside the home. What matters is "the existence of a job"; children get taken care of somehow. Indeed, one 1973 South Carolina study showed that low-income women managed to keep their jobs even after their day-care centers shut down.

Although they sometimes prove useful, Woolsey concludes, formal federally funded child-care centers constitute a "secondary issue." In the debate, parochial upper-middle-class advocates (and their foes) have diverted attention from the real wants and needs of black, Puerto Rican, and blue-collar white parents, not to mention their children.

*Beyond the
Melting Pot*

"Ethnicity in Perspective" by Robert P. Swierenga, in *Social Science* (Winter 1977), 1719 Ames St., Winfield, Kans. 67156.

Despite growing dismay among some ethnic groups over "forced Americanization," the "melting pot" ideology remains deeply entrenched in American institutions and the minds of the public. Engrained in the philosophy of the public school, and justified by the "evolutionary" social models of such theorists as Weber and Durkheim, assimilationist assumptions left many scholars with little interest in the interplay of ethnic groups.

But while U.S. ethnic groups may be "legally invisible," says Swierenga, a Kent State University historian, a growing school of social scientists suggests that the political and social cleavages in this