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*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

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country have been primarily along ethnic and religious, rather than economic or "class," lines.

Beginning in the early 1960s, research by such "new pluralists" as Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer at Harvard, Lee Benson at Iowa, and Andrew Greeley at the University of Chicago, has indicated that the main points about the melting pot are: that it did not happen; that ethnic groups have always comprised a series of sub-societies; that this persistent diversity is necessary and healthy; that ethnic diversity continues to play a vital part in party politics. Even the fourth and fifth generations of some mid-19th century immigrants—Dutch, German, and Scandinavian—have yet to be fully assimilated.

Some major historical studies in the field are already underway. (The federal Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, begun in 1972, provides some of the research funds.) The Philadelphia Social History Project has been compiling data on the social characteristics of local blacks, Germans, and Irish between 1850 and 1880. Swierenga himself is studying the impact of migration on 17,500 America-bound 19th-century Dutch families. Nevertheless, he concludes, the new ethnic consciousness "has clearly caught [most] sociologists and social historians off guard."

RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

*The District Heat
Alternative*

"Prospects for District Heating in the United States" by J. Karkheck, J. Powell, and E. Beardsworth, in *Science* (Mar. 11, 1977), 1515 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

The use of waste heat (50°–100°C) from electric plants and other sources for space and water heating could be an efficient energy alternative for colder, urbanized areas of the United States. (Space and water heat now account for about 19 percent of U.S. energy needs.) Such "district heating" has been used with success in almost all European countries, report the authors, members of the Fusion Technology Group at Brookhaven National Laboratory. With this system, Denmark serves 32 percent of its people and Sweden 25 percent. The authors believe the district heating approach could provide more than half of the U.S. population with "cost-competitive" heat and hot water, reduce American reliance on foreign fuel, and promote the principle of "total energy use."

Other technologies, the authors contend, do not match district heating in terms of cost or efficiency. Coal gasification consumes a "finite resource." Solar heating must rely on conventional back-up systems. And nuclear power creates more waste heat. After the substantial initial capital investment, the authors add, annual expendi-