is associated with a three percent increase in wage rates and a 10 percent increase in earnings.

Highly educated women delay childbirth longer than those without as much schooling, Buckles writes, and face greater wage losses if they don't. National surveys show that skilled women who give birth before age 26 experience a "wage penalty" (compared with women who bear children later) of almost 19 percent in the first four years after the birth, 33 percent in years five through nine, and 62 percent 18 years later.

A separate study of male and female Harvard and Radcliffe graduates during three periods, roughly around 1970, 1980, and 1990, shows that women increasingly delayed marriage as the decades progressed, and nearly 40 percent of women in all three groups never had children at all.

> Highly educated women delay having children longer than those without as much schooling, and face greater wage losses if they don't.

The first cohort married earlier than the others (average age 27, compared with age 30 for the most recent), but put off having children until they were 31 or 32 years old—the same age as the more recent graduates. The 1970- and 1980-era female graduates took about a year off during the first 15 years after graduation if they had one child. The younger, 1990-era mothers settled for only nine months. The percentage of women who did not work outside the home stayed roughly the same—9 percent among the 1970-era grads, 10.5 percent among the 1980-era group, and 10.1 percent in the 1990-era cohorts.

Recent speculation that women graduating from elite universities are "wasting resources by dropping out of the labor force" does not appear supported by the data, write Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, both Harvard economists. What is true, they write, is that there is a wage gap. The median income of fully employed Harvard-educated women in 2005 was $112,500, of men, $187,500. Even when education (economics majors tend to be the best paid), time out of work, and occupation (business produces the most astronomical salaries) are accounted for, Goldin and Katz conclude that there is still a "gap of substantial magnitude."

SOCIETY

E Pluribus Cacophony

THE SOURCE: "The Myth of Multitasking" by Christine Rosen, in ***The New Atlantis***, Spring 2008.

Anyone who has cowered in the back of a taxi as the driver simultaneously talked on a cell phone, made change, tore off a paper receipt, and tried to pull into a busy street can attest: Multitasking is a bad idea.

Multitasking no longer defines the brilliant leader or the precocious overachiever, writes Christine Rosen, senior editor of *The New Atlantis*. In reality, multitasking means paying incomplete attention to two or more tasks at once. Extreme multitasking costs the American economy $650 billion a year in lost productivity, according to one survey. It takes workers distracted by e-mails and phone calls an average of 25 minutes to get back on task after each interruption, another study says.

The proportion of people who almost simultaneously watch television, surf the Web, play video games, text-message, talk on the phone, and e-mail rose from 16 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in 2005, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported two years ago. Media multitasking has spawned a new condition called attention deficit trait, whose symptoms are similar to those of attention deficit disorder, according to a Massachusetts psychiatrist.

Trying to do too many things at once adversely affects learning. Information taken in by multitaskers goes into the striatum, a "new learning" area of the brain,

Exploding the multitasker myth: This cell-phoning, coffee-sipping, text-messaging driver is a menace.

instead of the hippocampus, a region that stores and facilitates the recall of information. Widespread multitasking may produce a generation of very quick but very shallow thinkers, according to Jane Healy, an educational psychologist.

William James, the Harvard psychologist, wrote in the late 19th century that the youthful mind is characterized by an "extreme mobility of the attention," and that the transition from youthful distraction to mature concentration is a matter of discipline and character. Some people, James said, never move beyond getting their work done only in the "interstices of their mind-wandering."

Rosen reasons that multitaskers may simply adjust to constant stimulation and block it out like airplane noise overhead. But given the evidence so far, she writes, "intentional self-distraction could well be profoundly detrimental to individual and cultural well-being." When people conduct business only in the "interstices of their mind-wandering," the world may gain information, but at the expense of wisdom.

SOCIETY

In Praise of Renting

THE SOURCE: "Cleaning House" by Joshua Rosner, in ***The New Republic***, May 7, 2008.

Too many Americans own their own home, writes Joshua Rosner, managing director of a research consultancy. Lots of them would be better off if they had never drunk the Kool-Aid of near-universal homeownership. And so would the public. The federal government made the mistake of allowing the housing and financial services industries to suck risky buyers into the housing market with such novel instruments as no-money-down mortgages and repayment schedules that ballooned years later. Buyers were encouraged to purchase homes they couldn't afford, had no equity in, and had little incentive to maintain.

Now that they've created this mess, politicians shouldn't be propping up borrowers and lenders with tax credits that encourage more spending, Rosner argues. And they shouldn't be pouring taxpayers' money down a rathole by trying to keep families in unaffordable dwellings. Many troubled borrowers should just mail back their keys and sign over title to their overpriced house to avoid foreclosure. Most lenders would be better off too, because they wouldn't have to pay the costs of foreclosing on somebody who has lost all motivation to keep up the property. The former debtors could rent, and save for something affordable.

Real estate prices have risen faster than wages for most of the last 40 years, so families thought they had to get their foot on the ladder before the first rung rose completely out of reach. Ownership jumped from its usual level of between 62 and 64 percent to almost 70 percent, Rosner says, but the market's natural equilibrium was disturbed by the government's attempts at social engineering.

Americans created an "economic mirage" by allowing the appreciation in home values to substitute for the return on labor in estimating their personal wealth, Rosner argues. Instead of artificially stimulating home buying, federal officials should focus on policies that increase real, not illusory, prosperity. They should concentrate on supporting wage growth. They should spend public money on "strengthen-