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Family Tree by Norman Rockwell, 1959. The smiling Baby-Boom youngster at the top has an even chance of getting divorced during his lifetime. If his views reflect those of the 1,529 Americans polled by the Gallup organization in March 1980, he holds the family in high esteem but believes family life has deteriorated markedly during the past 15 years.

The American Family

When *WQ* took its first look at studies of “the changing family” three years ago, the editors contrasted the “upheaval” in family patterns with the “trickle” of scholarly research exploring the phenomenon. The trickle has since become a torrent; the upheaval, in the eyes of many, a full-blown crisis. The high incidence of divorce and out-of-wedlock pregnancies, the growing number of one-parent families, the costly pathology of family instability—all of these persist as America moves into the 1980s, and the experts don’t really know why. Meanwhile, political discussion has become increasingly shrill, as if views on “the family” were a litmus test for assigning people among competing ideologies. Is a little “benign neglect” by activists in order? Here, psychologist Arlene Skolnick looks at the family in American history; sociologist Graham Spanier provides an overview of the latest academic research into family matters; and specialists Mary Jo Bane, Lee Rainwater, and Martin Rein examine the evolving government-family “partnership.”



THE PARADOX OF PERFECTION

by Arlene Skolnick

The American Family, as even readers of *Popular Mechanics* must know by now, is in what Sean O’Casey would have called “a terrible state of chassis.” Yet, there are certain ironies about the much-publicized crisis that give one pause.

True, the statistics seem alarming. The U.S. divorce rate, though it has reached something of a plateau in recent years, remains the highest in American history. The number of births out-of-wedlock among all races and ethnic groups continues to climb. The plight of many elderly Americans subsisting on low fixed incomes is well known.

What puzzles me is an ambiguity, not in the facts, but in what we are asked to make of them. A series of opinion polls conducted in 1978 by Yankelovich, Skelley, and White, for example, found that 38 percent of those surveyed had recently witnessed one or more "destructive activities" (e.g., a divorce, a separation, a custody battle) within their own families or those of their parents or siblings. At the same time, 92 percent of the respondents said the family was highly important to them as a "personal value."

Can the family be at once a cherished "value" and a troubled institution? I am inclined to think, in fact, that they go hand in hand. A recent "Talk of the Town" report in *The New Yorker* illustrates what I mean:

A few months ago word was heard from Billy Gray, who used to play brother Bud in "Father Knows Best," the 1950s television show about the nice Anderson family who lived in the white frame house on a side street in some mythical Springfield—the house at which the father arrived each night swinging open the front door and singing out "Margaret, I'm home!" Gray said he felt "ashamed" that he had ever had anything to do with the show. It was all "totally false," he said, and had caused many Americans to feel inadequate, because they thought that was the way life was supposed to be and that their own lives failed to measure up.

As Susan Sontag has noted in *On Photography*, mass-produced images have "extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality." The family is especially vulnerable to confusion between truth and illusion. What, after all, is "normal"? All of us have a backstairs view of our own families, but we know The Family, in the aggregate, only vicariously.

Like politics or athletics, the family has become a media event. Television offers nightly portrayals of lump-in-the-throat family "normalcy" ("The Waltons," "Little House on the Prairie") and, nowadays, even humorous "deviance" ("One Day at a Time," "The Odd Couple"). Family advisers sally forth in syndicated newspaper columns to uphold standards, mend rela-

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Teenage Parents Always Have Homework!



Premarital pregnancies were frequent in colonial America, but today's unwed mothers are younger and less likely to give up their children or marry for appearance's sake. Day-care centers for students' children are being established in U.S. urban high schools, including those in Washington, D.C.

Courtesy of Creative Media Group.

tionships, suggest counseling, and otherwise lead their readers back to the True Path. For commercial purposes, advertisers spend millions of dollars to create stirring vignettes of glamorous-but-ordinary families, the kind of family most 11-year-olds wish they had.

All Americans do not, of course, live in such a family, but most share an intuitive sense of what the "ideal" family should be—reflected in the precepts of religion, the conventions of etiquette, and the assumptions of law. And, characteristically, Americans tend to project the ideal back into the past, the time when virtues of all sorts are thought to have flourished.

We do not come off well by comparison with that golden age, nor could we, for it is as elusive and mythical as Brigadoon. If Billy Gray shames too easily, he has a valid point: While Americans view the family as the proper context for their own lives—9 out of 10 people live in one—they have no realistic context in which to view the family. Family history, until recently, was as neglected in academe as it still is in the press. This summer's White House Conference on Families is "policy-oriented," which means present-minded. The familiar, depressing charts of "leading family indicators"—marriage, divorce, illegitimacy—in newspapers and newsmagazines rarely survey the trends before World War II. The discussion, in short, lacks ballast.

Let us go back to before the American Revolution.

Perhaps what distinguishes the modern family most from its colonial counterpart is its newfound privacy. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, well over 90 percent of the American population lived in small rural communities. Unusual behavior rarely went unnoticed, and neighbors often intervened directly in a family's affairs, to help or to chastise.

The most dramatic example was the rural "charivari," prevalent in both Europe and the United States until the early 19th century. The purpose of these noisy gatherings was to censure community members for familial transgressions—unusual sexual behavior, marriages between persons of grossly discrepant ages, or "household disorder," to name but a few. As historian Edward Shorter describes it in *The Making of the Modern Family*:

Sometimes the demonstration would consist of masked individuals circling somebody's house at night, screaming, beating on pans, and blowing cow horns on other occasions, the offender would be seized and marched through the streets, seated perhaps backwards on a donkey or forced to wear a placard describing his sins.

The state itself had no qualms about intruding into a family's affairs by statute, if necessary. Consider 17th-century New England's "stubborn child" laws that, though never actually enforced, sanctioned the death penalty for chronic disobedience to one's parents.

If the boundaries between home and society seem blurred during the colonial era, it is because they were. People were neither very emotional nor very self-conscious about family life, and, as historian John Demos points out, family and community were "joined in a relation of profound reciprocity." In his *Of Domesticall Duties*, William Gouge, a 17th-century Puritan preacher, called the family "a little community." The home, like the larger community, was as much an economic as a social unit; all members of the family worked, be it on the farm, or in a shop, or in the home.

There was not much to idealize. Love was not considered the basis for marriage but one possible result of it. According to historian Carl Degler, it was easier to obtain a divorce in colonial New England than anywhere else in the Western world, and the divorce rate climbed steadily throughout the 18th century, though it remained low by contemporary standards. Romantic images to the contrary, it was rare for more than two genera-

tions (parents and children) to share a household, for the simple reason that very few people lived beyond the age of 60. It is ironic that our nostalgia for the extended family—including grandparents and grandchildren—comes at a time when, thanks to improvements in health care, its existence is less threatened than ever before.

Infant mortality was high in colonial days, though not as high as we are accustomed to believe, since food was plentiful and epidemics, owing to generally low population density, were few. In the mid-1700s, the average age of marriage was about 24 for men, 21 for women—not much different from what it is now. Households, on average, were larger, but not startlingly so: A typical household in 1790 included about 5.6 members, versus about 3.5 today. Illegitimacy was widespread. Premarital pregnancies reached a high in 18th-century America (10 percent of all first births) that was not equalled until the 1950s.

Form Follows Function

In simple demographic terms, then, the differences between the American family in colonial times and today are not all that stark; the similarities are sometimes striking.

The chief contrast is psychological. While Western societies have always idealized the family to some degree, the *most vivid* literary portrayals of family life before the 19th century were negative or, at best, ambivalent. In what might be called the “high tragic” tradition—including Sophocles, Shakespeare, and the Bible, as well as fairy tales and novels—the family was portrayed as a high-voltage emotional setting, laden with dark passions, sibling rivalries, and violence. There was also the “low comic” tradition—the world of hen-pecked husbands and tyrannical mothers-in-law.

It is unlikely that our 18th-century ancestors ever left the Book of Genesis or *Tom Jones* with the feeling that their own family lives were seriously flawed.

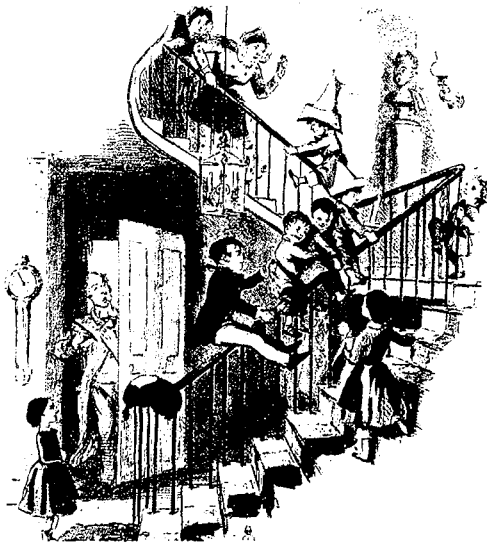
By the time of the Civil War, however, American attitudes toward the family had changed profoundly. The early decades of the 19th century marked the beginnings of America’s gradual transformation into an urban, industrial society. In 1820, less than 8 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities; by 1860, the urban concentration approached 20 percent, and by 1900 that proportion had doubled.

Structurally, the American family did not immediately undergo a comparable transformation. Despite the large families of many immigrants and farmers, the size of the *average*

family declined—slowly but steadily—as it had been doing since the 17th century. Infant mortality remained about the same, and may even have increased somewhat, owing to poor sanitation in crowded cities. Legal divorces were easier to obtain than they had been in colonial times. Indeed, the rise in the divorce rate was a matter of some concern during the 19th century, though death, not divorce, was the prime cause of one-parent families, as it was up to 1965.

Functionally, however, America's industrial revolution had a lasting effect on the family. No longer was the household typically a group of interdependent workers. Now, men went to offices and factories and became breadwinners; wives stayed home to mind the hearth; children went off to the new public schools. The home was set apart from the dog-eat-dog arena of economic life; it came to be viewed as a utopian retreat or, in historian Christopher Lasch's phrase, a "haven in a heartless world." Marriage was now valued primarily for its emotional attractions. Above all, the family became something to worry about.

The earliest and most saccharine "sentimental model" of the family appeared in the new mass media that proliferated during the second quarter of the 19th century. Novels, tracts, newspaper articles, and ladies' magazines—there were variations for each class of society—elaborated a "Cult of True



New York Public Library.
Courtesy American Heritage Publishing Co.

With the idealization of family life in the 19th century came an appreciation of "childhood" as a distinct—and fragile—stage of development, paving the way for the mass marketing of "how to" childrearing manuals.

Womanhood" in which piety, submissiveness, and domesticity dominated the pantheon of desirable feminine qualities. This quotation from *The Ladies Book* (1830) is typical:

See, she sits, she walks, she speaks, she looks—
unutterable things! Inspiration springs up in her very
paths—it follows her footsteps. A halo of glory encircles
her, and illuminates her whole orbit. With her, man not
only feels safe, but actually renovated.

In the late 1800s, science came into the picture. The "professionalization" of the housewife took two different forms. One involved motherhood and childrearing, according to the latest scientific understanding of children's special physical and emotional needs. (It is no accident that the publishing of children's books became a major industry during this period.) The other was the domestic science movement—"home economics," basically—which focused on the woman as full-time homemaker, applying "scientific" and "industrial" rationality to shopping, making meals, and housework.

The new ideal of the family prompted a cultural split that has endured, one that Tocqueville had glimpsed (and rather liked) in 1835. Society was divided more sharply into man's sphere and woman's sphere. Toughness, competition, and practicality were the masculine values that ruled the outside world. The softer values—affection, tranquility, piety—were worshiped in the home and the church. In contrast to the colonial view, the ideology of the "modern" family implied a critique of everything beyond the front door.

What is striking as one looks at the writings of the 19th-century "experts"—the physicians, clergymen, phrenologists, and "scribbling ladies"—is how little their essential message differs from that of the sociologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, and women's magazine writers of the 20th century, particularly since World War II.

Instead of men's and women's spheres, of course, sociologists speak of "instrumental" and "expressive" roles. The notion of the family as a retreat from the harsh realities of the outside world crops up as "functional differentiation." And, like the 19th-century utopians who believed society could be regenerated through the perfection of family life, 20th-century social scientists have looked at the failed family as the source of most American social problems.

None of those who promoted the sentimental model of the family—neither the popular writers nor the academics—

considered the paradox of perfectionism: the ironic possibility that it would lead to trouble. Yet it has. The image of the perfect, happy family makes ordinary families seem like failures. Small problems loom as big problems if the "normal" family is thought to be one where there are no real problems at all.

One sees this phenomenon at work on the generation of Americans born and reared during the late 19th century, the first generation reared on the mother's milk of sentimental imagery. Between 1900 and 1920, the U.S. divorce rate doubled, from four to eight divorces annually per 1,000 married couples. The jump—comparable to the 100 percent increase in the divorce rate between 1960 and 1980—is not attributable to changes in divorce laws, which were not greatly liberalized. Rather, it would appear that, as historian Thomas O'Neill believes, Americans were simply more willing to dissolve marriages that did not conform to their ideal of domestic bliss—and perhaps try again.

A "Fun" Morality

If anything, family standards became even more demanding as the 20th century progressed. The new fields of psychology and sociology opened up whole new definitions of familial perfection. "Feelings"—fun, love, warmth, good orgasm—acquired heightened popular significance as the invisible glue of successful families.

Psychologist Martha Wolfenstein, in an analysis of several decades of government-sponsored infant care manuals, has documented the emergence of a "fun morality." In former days, being a good parent meant carrying out certain tasks with punctilio; if your child was clean and reasonably obedient, you had no cause to probe his psyche. Now, we are told, parents must commune with their own feelings and those of their children—an edict which has seeped into the ethos of education as well. The distinction is rather like that between religions of deed and religions of faith. It is one thing to make your child brush his teeth; it is quite another to transform the whole process into a joyous "learning experience."

The task of 20th-century parents has been further complicated by the advice offered them. The experts disagree with each other and often contradict themselves. The kindly Dr. Benjamin Spock, for example, is full of contradictions. In a detailed analysis of *Baby and Child Care*, historian Michael Zuckerman observes that Spock tells mothers to relax ("trust yourself") yet warns them that they have an "ominous power" to destroy their

children's innocence and make them discontented "for years" or even "forever."

As we enter the 1980s, both family images and family realities are in a state of transition. After a century and a half, the web of attitudes and nostrums comprising the "sentimental model" is beginning to unravel. Since the mid-1960s, there has been a youth rebellion of sorts, a new "sexual revolution," a revival of feminism, and the emergence of the two-worker family. The huge postwar Baby-Boom generation is pairing off, accounting in part for the upsurge in the divorce rate (half of all divorces occur within seven years of a first marriage). Media images of the family have become more "realistic," reflecting new patterns of family life that are emerging (and old patterns that are re-emerging).

Among social scientists, "realism" is becoming something of an ideal in itself. For some of them, realism translates as pluralism: All forms of the family, by virtue of the fact that they happen to exist, are equally acceptable—from communes and cohabitation to one-parent households, homosexual marriages, and, come to think of it, the nuclear family. What was once labeled "deviant" is now merely "variant." In some college texts, "the family" has been replaced by "family systems." Yet, this new approach does not seem to have squelched perfectionist standards. Indeed, a palpable strain of perfectionism runs through the pop literature on "alternative" family lifestyles.

For the majority of scholars, realism means a more down-to-earth view of the American household. Rather than seeing the family as a haven of peace and tranquility, they have begun to recognize that even "normal" families are less than ideal, that intimate relations of any sort inevitably involve antagonism as well as love. Conflict and change are inherent in social life. If the family is now in a state of flux, such is the nature of resilient institutions; if it is beset by problems, so is life. The family will survive.



OUTSIDERS LOOKING IN

by Graham B. Spanier

As with all of the social sciences, the study of marriage and the family began long before it was distilled into an academic specialty. Socrates mused about the family, and Plato, in what was perhaps man's first venture into "family policy," argued that the family would have to disappear as the price for establishing his *Republic*. Plutarch, Chaucer, Milton, Marx, and Freud each spoke his piece on the subject.

It was not until the 1920s, however, that, thanks largely to the pioneering efforts of men like Ernest Burgess and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, family research emerged as a serious academic endeavor. Even then, it was generally conducted by sociologists who saw "the family" as merely one specialization among several that they had, the way some realtors also handle insurance or some lawyers do tax returns.

Much has changed. Today, virtually every U.S. college and university has family specialists on its faculty. There are dozens of scholarly journals and newsletters devoted to the family—from *Demography* to the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. Professional associations of family researchers such as the National Council on Family Relations have a collective membership in the tens of thousands.

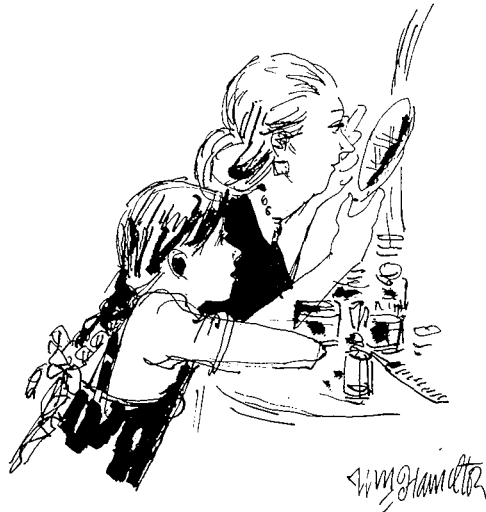
The stigma is gone, but the enterprise is not yet a truly "hard" science, nor, given the subject, will it ever be. In matters ranging from divorce to premarital pregnancy to homosexuality, establishing the facts of the case and relating cause to effect remain a murky business. Scholarly hypotheses sometimes set sail, drift, founder, and sink, possibly to be salvaged and refitted years later. Words like "inconclusive" and "ambiguous" pepper the more serious authors' concluding comments in journal essays. It is a frustrating profession.

For all their uncertainty, the best family researchers can offer some insights into *what* is happening, if not always into *why* it is happening or what it all means for America as a whole.

Let us begin with unwed cohabitation (or "living together," née, "living in sin"), a development fostered, so it is said, by the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey point to a steady increase in the

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"Mummy, when will I be old enough to get divorced?" was the caption on this cartoon by William Hamilton. For women, the average age of first divorce is now 27.



Reprinted from The Anti-Social Register, by William Hamilton. Published by Chronicle Books, 1974.

number of persons living together. The figure more than doubled between 1970 and 1978, to more than 1.1 million couples. Between 1977 and 1978 alone, there was a 19 percent increase.

Such living arrangements are popularly thought to be a lasting alternative to marriage, one more bit of evidence that the nuclear family is in a state of decay. In fact, cohabitation is rarely permanent. About two-fifths of those who now live together are never-married young adults, most of whom will eventually marry someone—if not necessarily the person they currently live with. Another 55 percent are divorced individuals, most of whom will eventually remarry. A few are elderly. Of all never-married persons living together outside of marriage, about 85 percent are under age 35, 8 percent are between 35 and 54 years of age, and 7 percent are 55 or older.*

Paul Glick of the Census Bureau and I have recently published data showing that cohabiting couples generally live in large suburbs or cities. They have, on average, relatively low incomes and experience high unemployment, although the women among them are more likely to be employed than are married women. Couples living together who are young and have never been married also tend to be better educated than either their married or previously married counterparts. Blacks

*Corresponding percentages differ for persons living together who have been previously married. Approximately 38 percent of such individuals are under age 35, 30 percent are aged 35 to 54, and 32 percent are 55 or older.

account for a disproportionate share of the number of couples living together, but the vast majority of all cohabiting couples are, in fact, white.

What most of these people have in common—perhaps the only thing—is that they have chosen this lifestyle as a temporary convenience, one made possible by effective birth-control techniques and perpetuated to a great extent both by changing mores and, especially among the young, by an increase in the number of career-minded women. “Living together” rarely constitutes an *ideological* rejection of marriage. Indeed, one of the greatest problems for such couples comes when one of them is ready to marry and the other is not.

Marriage is still the norm in our society, and, I suspect, it will remain so. In 1979 alone, more than 4.5 million persons got married; 9 out of 10 Americans eventually march down the aisle. Today's young adults seem to be as committed to the idea of marriage as were previous generations, but there is one difference: They are not in as much of a hurry. The median age at first marriage is now 24 for men and about 22 for women—an increase of nearly two full years each since the 1950s. Among women aged 25 to 29, one in five has never been married, versus one out of ten in 1960.

Why the delay? Demographer Kingsley Davis has cited, among other reasons, the lackluster state of the U.S. economy. Some young couples, he suggests, lack the financial security to launch a family, as happened during the Depression when the average age of first marriage was roughly as high as it is today. Unfortunately, the role of economics is one variable that family researchers have trouble documenting. Even when common sense points to it as a factor, it is difficult to “disaggregate” economics from other underlying variables, such as race, class, and education.

More persuasive explanations of the rising age of first marriage center around changing social values. Most men and women are now sexually experienced before the conclusion of adolescence; they don't need to get married simply to enjoy sex. Effective contraception, if employed, virtually eliminates the

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chance of an unwanted pregnancy, a fear (or reality) which in the past encouraged (or forced) some early marriages. For some youths, living together may make marriage seem less urgent, at least for a while. Moreover, a higher average age of marriage has historically been associated with higher educational levels, and the U.S. population, in particular the young population, is more educated than ever before. Finally, as I have already noted, the increasing number of ambitious young women looking first to their careers may also help shift the average age of marriage upwards.*

Divorce

Despite the impression often left by the media, the proportion of teen-age marriages has *declined* over the past decade. Those who do marry in their teens, however, are most likely to get divorced. Women who marry at ages 14 to 17 are twice as likely to get divorced as women who marry at ages 18 or 19, who in turn are one and one-half times as likely to get divorced as women who marry in their early twenties, for whom divorce rates are high to begin with. Men who marry in their teens are about twice as likely to get divorced as men who marry in their twenties. Interrupted education, poor job prospects, lack of money, basic immaturity, parental opposition, early (if not premarital) pregnancy—the factors behind the failure rate are clear to everyone except, perhaps, the teen-agers involved.

Teen-age married couples may be especially divorce-prone, but divorce, of course, is not just a teen-age phenomenon. There are now more than 1 million divorces in America each year, involving more than 2 million adults and 1 million children. (There are some 48 million married couples in the United States.) While the upsurge in divorce during the past two decades is finally slowing—the rate had more than doubled since 1960 from about 9 to more than 20 divorces annually per 1,000 married couples—there is nothing to suggest that the rate will actually decline. At best it will level off.

Divorce hits all social groups, but not equally. Divorce rates are considerably higher for blacks than for whites. Although divorce can strike couples of any age and circumstance, those who get a divorce tend to do so relatively early in their marriages. (Paradoxically, many couples who remain married say

*Some of the delay is also accounted for by a demographic wrinkle called the "marriage squeeze." On average, women marry men a few years older than themselves. When the first wave of Baby-Boom women (those born after 1945) hit marrying age in the late 1960s, the pool of older, "eligible" bachelors (men born *before* the Baby Boom) was relatively small.

that their happiest years were those statistically vulnerable early ones.) Generally speaking, the lower the educational level, the higher the divorce rate.

What weight to assign various economic factors—e.g., job stability, income level, welfare availability—is still a matter of dispute. Consider the controversial proposition that “welfare breaks up marriages”—a seemingly plausible hypothesis given that welfare benefits for an intact family are lower than they are for a female-headed family. Dozens of researchers have tested this notion. They have variously found that: the proposition is true; is false; is true for blacks but not whites; is true for whites but not blacks. Some contend that welfare has no effect on divorce rates but *does* delay remarriage; others suggest that some ineffable “third variable” may account for going on welfare *and* getting divorced.*

Who Stays Married?

What is the profile of the couple *least* likely to divorce? The wife would have married in her late twenties and would have a B.A. degree, but no more. (Women with graduate degrees have a disproportionately high divorce rate, perhaps owing to a greater sense of economic security and social independence.) The husband would also have a B.A. and would likewise have married in his late twenties. Both would be white and upper-middle-class, and would eventually become the parents of two boys or a boy and a girl (not two girls), with the eldest child born a couple of years after the wedding. Their chances of divorce would be lessened further if they lived in the countryside, were of the same religion, and went to church regularly.

Whatever the roots of marital success or failure, if one assumes that the divorce rate will remain relatively constant over the next couple of decades, then between one-third and two-fifths of all *first* marriages formed during the late 1970s are destined to end in divorce. Considering the whole potential cycle of divorce, remarriage, and redivorce, it is probable that between 40 and 50 percent of *all* marriages formed by today's young adults will not remain intact.

If there is a silver lining, it is that approximately half of those who get divorced do so relatively early in their marriages, often before they have children. The spouses, moreover, are rejecting an *unsuccessful relationship*; they are usually not rejecting the *idea of marriage or family per se*. Many of them, in fact,

*For a concise overview of the debate, see “The Effects of Welfare on Marital Stability and Remarriage” by Stephen J. Bahr, in *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (August 1979).

look forward to a "traditional" family life the next time around. The data on remarriage speak volumes. Approximately 25 percent of divorced persons remarry within a year following termination of a first marriage; 50 percent do so within three years; 80 percent of them do so ultimately. Samuel Johnson once called second marriages "the triumph of hope over experience." It would appear that many Americans are more hopeful about the family than some of the experts.

In any event, divorce may not be the worst of evils, at least for the adults involved. We do not have much hard data on the subject, but a reading of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or James's *Ambassadors* recalls the tragedy of some 19th-century marriages that obdurately remained intact. There is no evidence that the quality of U.S. marriages has declined (or improved) during the past century—only that Americans have become more willing and able to seek a divorce if a marriage fails to meet expectations.

... And the Children?

Much of our basic uneasiness about family instability stems from legitimate concern about what happens to the children—and, as a result, to society as a whole. Three in five divorcing couples have at least one child under 18 years of age. During the late 1970s, an average of two children were involved in every divorce in which there were any children at all under age 18. The impact of family disruption on children cannot be ignored, even when the divorce is amicable, and the custodial arrangement problem-free. Psychologist Mavis E. Hetherington has catalogued the problems that children sometimes experience following divorce: psychological stress, promiscuity, drug abuse, suicidal tendencies, guilt. Divorce may be especially hard on an only child.

Yet, Hetherington and others argue that it is far better for a child to grow up in a loving home with one parent than in a domestic battleground with two. Moreover, children are remarkably resilient, often evincing an uncanny ability to roll with the punches. Although no one suggests that divorce is actually *good* for children, just how much impact marital instability has on a child's emotional development and on his development as a young adult is one of those issues that divides scholars. But no one denies that a financial trauma attends most divorce actions, since divorced mothers who retain custody of their children usually experience economic hardship.

The number of households with children maintained by a man or (usually) a woman with no spouse present increased

THE BLACK FAMILY'S SPECIAL PLIGHT

Early in 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued his controversial report on *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Looking at three warning signs—nearly a quarter of urban black marriages were dissolved; nearly a quarter of black families were headed by females; nearly a quarter of black births were illegitimate—he concluded that “the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling.”

That general prediction has proven correct: During the past 15 years, those three rates have almost doubled (see charts on p. 128).

The black family was not always in such bad shape. Although Moynihan argued that the horrors of American slavery had broken the black family, historian Herbert Gutman has since found in the black family of the late 19th and early 20th centuries a stability comparable to that of white families. In New York City in 1925, for example, two parents were present in 85 percent of all black homes.

What went wrong, and when? Theories vary. There are no conclusive answers. Gutman blames the great 1940–70 exodus from the rural South to the cities, and high urban unemployment. But this popular “urbanization thesis” has yet to be tested by a sociological comparison of the effects of migration on poor whites and blacks.

Researchers such as the Urban League’s Robert Hill point to continuing economic pressures as the prime villain. In 1969, black households had a median income of \$6,063, or 61 percent of the median white income. Nine years later the figure for black families was \$10,879, or 59 percent of white income.

Yet, when economic factors are held constant, black families are still less stable than white families. Of all white households living on

from 3.2 to 5.7 million during the 1970s, thanks both to divorce and to the escalating number of births outside of marriage, particularly to women in their teens.* Black women are three times as likely as white women to head up a single-parent household. Households maintained by a married couple declined slightly

*Some 600,000 children are born to U.S. teen-agers every year, and more than 40 percent of them are illegitimate. Blacks are far more likely than whites to have a premarital pregnancy, but whites are more likely than blacks to have an abortion or rush into marriage as a result. (Approximately 75 percent of white children and 94 percent of black children born out of wedlock are kept by their mothers.) One Urban Institute study, *Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy and Childbearing*, has found that “mothers whose first child was born out of wedlock are more likely to receive welfare” than their married counterparts. On the other hand, the authors note that there is no evidence to support the frequent charge that the availability of welfare encourages premarital teen-age pregnancies. Nor does the availability of “family planning services”—i.e., contraceptive advice—foster promiscuity. Not surprisingly, the use of contraception does correlate with a lower incidence of teen-age pregnancy.

less than \$5,000 a year in 1977, one-third were headed by a single parent. For blacks, the rate was two-thirds. And even among middle-class blacks, single-parent families occurred at triple the rate for whites (13.7 percent versus 4.6 percent).

Black family breakups, argue some sociologists, are caused by persistent racism. Yet, by most measures, blacks have made gains in access to voting, education, jobs, and government aid since 1965—even as the black family's stability has worsened.

Contrasting the general socioeconomic success of black West Indian immigrants with the continuing "underclass" status of many native-born blacks, UCLA's Thomas Sowell concludes that racism *alone* cannot explain the disparities between blacks and whites. He suggests that a culture of "regimented dependence," inherited from Southern slavery and reinforced by the welfare state, is to blame. But that, again, is more of a guess than an answer. So is the "culture of poverty" explanation, which does little more than slap a label on the depressing statistics.

To call the black family "pathological," some critics say, is to impose "white values." Evidence of cultural differences does exist. A wide-ranging "kinship system" would explain why 15 percent of all black children are taken in by siblings, aunts, uncles, or grandparents; but the "extended black family" is probably more an adaptation to difficulty than an inherent strength.

Serious public discussion of the black family's special plight—and the implications for general black advancement—has not been widespread since the Moynihan report. Involving both race and family, the topic is a touchy one. Yet, as several scholars have noted, the statistics clearly indicate that the black family's future is too important a matter to be left to polemicists.

during the 1970s, to 72 percent of all households.

There is no lack of statistics about America's children that give cause for alarm, quite apart from the effects of divorce. Poverty and malnutrition afflict millions of children. So do abuse and neglect: It has been estimated that between 1.4 and 1.9 million American children are victims of one or the other annually. New York State last year spent \$42 million investigating some 52,000 reports of maltreatment of children—85 percent of them neglect cases. The two biggest apparent causes of simple neglect: the rising number of single-parent families, and the increasing entry of mothers into the labor force.

The fact of the matter is that the upbringing of children is often a secondary consideration, even in many intact families. A 1978 Yankelovich poll found that 51 percent of the parents sur-

PARENTS' COSTS OF REARING A CHILD, 1961-78

(estimates for a middle-class child raised in a city in the North Central states)

Age	Food	Clothing	Housing	Medical	Education ^a	Other ^{**}	Total
1-5	\$1,442	\$545	\$2,861	\$389	—	\$2,391	\$7,628
6	306	155	463	75	35	433	1,467
7	380	163	482	79	37	450	1,591
8	399	173	513	85	38	469	1,677
9	420	180	550	90	40	490	1,770
10	504	186	575	96	42	513	1,916
11	525	190	598	99	43	523	1,978
12	631	284	647	103	44	573	2,282
13	794	305	722	112	47	629	2,609
14	860	319	800	126	51	687	2,843
15	883	330	849	138	53	742	2,995
16	1,037	478	941	151	56	866	3,529
17	1,143	495	1,005	164	70	948	3,825
Total	9,324	3,803	11,006	1,707	556	9,714	\$36,110

^aincludes fees, books, and supplies^{**}includes transportation, recreation, reading, and other miscellaneous expenses

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This chart assumes both that the child has no more than four siblings and that he attends public schools.

Three major expenses are not depicted above. One, the cost of having a baby in the hospital, estimated to have been \$1,050 in 1961. Two, the follow-up cost of a college education: In 1979, when this child would have matriculated, one year at a state university cost \$5,000. Three, the potential income a woman forfeits by bearing and rearing a child. The average "lost opportunity" cost of a *first* child is normally about equal to the direct maintenance cost, in this case, \$36,110.

Taxpayers today shoulder much of the burden of rearing some American children. The offspring of teen-agers, for example, often become recipients of government aid. Researchers at SRI International, a California "think tank," estimate that each of the 442,000 first children born to teen-agers in 1979 alone will during his first 20 years of life require an average of \$18,710 extra in public welfare and health expenditures. This adds up to a total tax-supported outlay of \$8.3 billion, just for this "Class of '79."

veyed felt it was all right to send their children to day-care centers in order to give themselves more leisure time. Other polls of the 1970s suggest that many married couples today have a stronger commitment to each other or to their careers than to their children. To what extent such new attitudes may have contributed to the schools' growing problems of drug abuse, indiscipline, and classroom inattention since 1965 remains a matter of conjecture.

What "threats" do the much publicized "alternative" lifestyles pose to the future of the family? It is hard to argue that any alternative arrangement is likely to replace the family as we know it. Such alternatives have always existed, but they have never attracted large numbers of people. (Witness, in the United States, the early communes of the Shakers, Hutterites, Moravians, and the Oneida Community.) Most contemporary communes are short-lived, unless they have a strong ideological basis—or economic base. Even then they are often unstable.

There is certainly greater tolerance of alternatives today than ever before, particularly in the press and, I must add, among family scholars. Most of us have relatives and acquaintances who have never been married, or who are separated, divorced, or remarried, or who are living together outside of marriage. Without too wide a search, one can turn up group marriages, homosexual couples, and single-parent adoptions. Yet those variations that are by far the most common (remarriage, for example) actually build upon the structure and function of the family as we usually define it. The more unusual arrangements remain exceedingly rare.

Blue-Chip Stocks

What topics are likely to command the greatest interest among researchers in the decade to come? Another way of asking the question is: What are the most pressing family problems, and what research is most likely to be funded?

Family violence: This is a matter we still know little about. During the past few years, researchers such as sociologist Murray Straus and his colleagues Richard Gelles and Suzanne Steinmetz have attended to such questions as: What kind of person is most likely to abuse his spouse or child? What kind of child is most likely to become a victim? Do abused children become child abusers in turn? Should violent families be broken up? In 1974, Congress created the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, with an appropriation in 1978 of \$19 million. And in December of 1979, the House passed a bill authoriz-

ing \$65 million over a two-year period to aid victims of domestic violence. (The Senate is expected to support the bill.) During the 1980s, we can expect some major studies of family violence.

The *quality of marital relationships* has long been the "blue chip" stock in family studies. This will continue. Some of the important questions: What factors make for a happy marriage? Is *when* one marries more important than *whom* one marries? What is the relationship between marital quality and marital/extramarital sexual behavior? What kinds of marital and family therapies work best?

Room for Humility

The *reciprocal influences between parents and children* will stir one of the up-and-coming theoretical debates. Researchers have generally paid more attention to the impact of parents on children than vice versa. Penn State sociologist Richard Lerner and his colleagues have begun examining the other side of the coin; they are likely to be joined by a growing number of developmental psychologists and family sociologists.

Divorce and all its ramifications are the greatest "institutional" problems facing the American family and its relation to the larger society. This is already a major focus of research—and of chronic debate among radical feminists, "pro-family" advocates, and others. The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health recently issued a request for proposals for projects that would examine the effects of divorce on children. The Institute was willing, the announcement said, to provide \$1 million to fund perhaps seven projects. No less than 136 proposals came in. Related topics such as *remarriage* and *stepparenthood*, which have not been studied extensively, will also get the spotlight.

Reproduction and *fertility* have been growth areas for research during the past two decades. Adolescent sexuality increased dramatically during the 1970s. So did adolescent contraceptive use, but not as fast as sexual activity. No one knows exactly why, but there is plenty of speculative research. The consequences are clear: adolescent pregnancy, abortion, and/or parenthood. These and other issues are being studied in a continuing survey of young American women conducted by Melvin Zelnik and John Kantner at Johns Hopkins University. Another study, the comprehensive National Survey of Family Growth, created in HEW (now the Department of Health and Human Services), is looking into the fertility of American women throughout their reproductive years. We don't know much about the social determinants and consequences of pregnancy or

the impact that number and spacing of children has on a family. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is supporting inquiries in all of these areas.

We can also expect to see a growing body of research pertaining to *dual earner families* and the increase in the proportion of *working wives and mothers* in the labor force. Psychologist Lois Hoffman and others have begun work on government-sponsored projects to investigate a variety of issues: What is the relationship between fertility and employment? Do children, in fact, suffer when both parents work? Is a working wife more prone to divorce?

Finally, there has been an explosion of interest in *family demography*, in statistical trends affecting the family—marriage, divorce, remarriage, family economics, and household living arrangements as they vary by race, income, locale, age. One reason is that Congress relies increasingly on just this kind of information when it formulates legislation; bureaucrats use it to draft regulations and “target” financial assistance to the needy; scholars depend on it to identify areas of interest and put narrowly focused research into context. Paul Glick, senior demographer at the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the founding father of family demography, will preside as researchers this summer begin to pick over the results of the 1980 Census.

In short, aside from the highly useful Census “facts,” we can look forward to a bumper crop of research on the causes and effects of family trends during the next few years. How comprehensive—or useful—these analyses will be is another question. Scholars may already be producing more studies than anyone could ever hope to assimilate: A healthy portion of all scholarly articles published on the family every year are actually comprehensive reviews of existing research to help the experts stay abreast of the latest developments.

Moreover, insofar as serious family research may be helpful to Washington policymakers—and much of it is not—there is a considerable lag between academic discoveries and political action. Legislation rarely reflects the *latest* findings. Even if it did, how long would those findings remain valid?

There is, in sum, much room for humility as we continue to explore the dynamics of the American family.



FILLING THE CRACKS

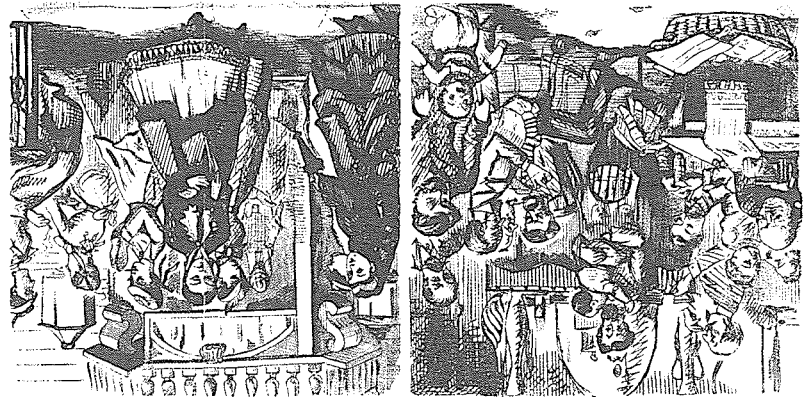
by Mary Jo Bane,
Lee Rainwater, and Martin Rein

On a summer day four years ago, presidential candidate Jimmy Carter promised a strongly "pro-family" White House. "There can be no more urgent priority," he told New Hampshire voters, "than to see that every decision our government takes is designed to honor and support and strengthen the American family." One way Carter proposed to strengthen the family was by requiring all plans for new federal programs—from housing to tax reform—to contain "family impact statements" similar to the "environmental impact statements" demanded by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Little has come of that campaign pledge, largely because no one knows how precisely to measure the effects on families of *current* federal programs, let alone those that do not yet exist. Moreover, the idea of a family "EPA," with all the bureaucracy it would entail, did not sit well with many politicians or their constituents. Still, Carter had a point. Since the 1930s, the federal government—and state and local agencies—have increasingly shouldered such "traditional" family responsibilities as child support, child care, child nutrition, and housing and financial support for the elderly.

Government aid to families in the United States has not gone as far as it has in France or Canada, where the state provides an allowance to parents (originally designed to encourage higher birth rates) for each child in the household. Washington has not sought to match the Soviet Union's much publicized state day-care centers, which enroll 41 percent of Soviet preschoolers. Still absent from the U.S. scene is any counterpart to Sweden's ubiquitous network of social workers who monitor family nutrition, child abuse, and the wants of the elderly. Nor does Washington imitate Scandinavian laws subsidizing "paternity" leaves for fathers of the newborn.

But, by chance or intention, Congress has created a myriad of programs that affect American families as never before. Two years ago, George Washington University's Family Impact Seminar reviewed 1,044 programs listed in the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* for fiscal year 1976. It found 268 pro-



From Harper's Weekly, 1868. Reprinted by permission.

"How it would be if some ladies had their own way" was the title of this 1868 Harper's Weekly cartoon. Now that women increasingly have their own way, Washington has had to assume new responsibility for child care.

grams, costing \$180.6 billion and administered by 17 different federal agencies, that had at least "potential" impact on families. Of these, 63 (together worth \$66.0 billion) affected families directly; they ranged from sweeping programs costing billions of dollars (e.g., \$6.9 billion for food stamps) to less costly, but more precisely targeted efforts: \$12 million for family health centers, \$15 million for child welfare research.*

By focusing solely on federal financial assistance, the Seminar excluded numerous other government actions that impinge on American families. The federal income tax code, for example, contains not only deductions for dependents but also what is often called the "marriage penalty." As Isabel Sawhill, then director of the National Commission on Manpower Policy, noted in 1975, "If a man earning \$10,000 a year marries a woman who also earns \$10,000, they will pay an extra \$340 in taxes." Regulatory agency decisions, such as the controversial Federal Trade Commission's proposed 1978 guidelines for television advertising aimed at children, presumably affect families. So, more clearly, do decisions by state courts to grant divorces, place children in foster homes, or commit people to mental hospitals. To the dismay of conservatives, Washington's spending on social insurance and public assistance—e.g., the National School Lunch Program, Medicare, Social Security—has risen

*Toward an Inventory of Federal Programs with Direct Impact on Families, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University Institute for Educational Leadership, 1978.

dramatically since Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society of the 1960s. Total federal, state, and local government social welfare expenditures climbed seven-fold between 1960 and 1977, from \$52 billion to \$362 billion. As a percentage of GNP, these expenditures nearly doubled from 10.5 to 19.7 percent.

While some contend that the government, with its vast outlays for social programs, is usurping family functions, it is more likely that Washington is stepping into a vacuum. American society, after all, is changing. Not every family today can provide the wide range of services performed by families in historian Peter Laslett's long-ago "world we have lost."

Federal aid to families did not emerge, like Minerva, fully grown from the Great Society. Indeed, Washington began giving substantial support to American families as early as 1935, when the Social Security Act was passed. Since then, government benefits for senior citizens have grown dramatically. Of the \$500 billion in the federal budget for fiscal year 1979, over \$150 billion was spent in various ways to help senior citizens.

As the American population becomes proportionately older, federal outlays for the elderly are almost certain to increase. In 1976, 10.7 percent of the U.S. population was at least 65 years old; by the year 2000, the Census Bureau estimates, the figure will be between 11.3 and 12.9 percent, and will continue to grow as the post-World War II Baby-Boom generation ages.

Social Security provided about one-third of the income of Americans over 65 years old in 1976. Forty percent of their income, however, came from their own earnings or that of others in their household. And it is clear that when assets and pensions are added in, over half the income of the elderly comes from private sources. Our own surveys by the MIT/Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies indicate that financial contributions from children are rare and, when they do occur, very small.

Seldom do the elderly share a household with their children. In 1979, only 8.6 percent of men and 20.3 percent of

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A MATTER OF POLITICS

"Family," says presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, is the first of "five short words" forming the heart of his campaign message. (The others: "work, neighborhood, freedom, peace.") Meanwhile, long-time feminist Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*) announces in the *New York Times Magazine* that the women's liberation movement must advance to "a new frontier: the family." Obviously, the family can no longer be taken for granted as a Fourth of July cliché. It is now a "buzzword," variously interpreted and linked to some of the most emotionally charged issues in current American politics, notably abortion, busing, welfare, classroom prayer, day care, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the rights of homosexuals.

Born of a 1976 Jimmy Carter campaign pledge, this summer's White House Conference on Families and its preliminaries have provided a battleground for groups active on those issues on both Left and Right. A number of "New Right" groups—among them, the National Christian Action Coalition, Family America, and FLAG (Family, Life, America, God)—saw an unholy alliance shaping up among government bureaucrats, social workers, and groups ranging from the National Organization for Women to the National Gay Task Force. So, in August 1979, they formed the "Pro-Family Coalition." Its leader, Connaught Marshner, dismissed as ingenuous the White House claim that the Conference would make the government more sensitive to the family. Rather, she contended, its true purpose was to create "the illusion of a national consensus" on family issues, along moderate-liberal lines.

The battle was joined in late 1979, when state conferences were held to select delegates for the three national meetings scheduled for this summer. In Virginia, last November, the New Right captured 22 of 24 seats. Soon thereafter they swept up all 8 of Oklahoma's delegates. When the governors of Indiana and Alabama withdrew their states from the Conference (Alabama's Forrest H. James said it conflicted with "traditional Judeo-Christian values"), President Carter's aides began to worry about a big Left-Right brawl on TV just before the Democratic national convention. White House control of the Conference perceptibly tightened. Late last spring, the "pro-family" forces estimated that they ultimately won fewer than 30 percent of the slots for the national meetings in Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles.

The White House was not, however, happy about the unexpected family feud. "We wish the whole thing would go away," one staffer told the *Wall Street Journal*. "It's been a nightmare." But many on the New Right think the uproar is just beginning. One of them is *Conservative Digest* columnist Paul Weyrich, who predicts that "the family will be to the decade of the 1980s . . . what the Vietnam war was to the 1960s."

A LEGAL MAZE

The American family has been legally regulated at least since 1636, when Puritan authorities ruled that all single persons in the Massachusetts Bay Colony had to live with families. Nearly 350 years later, a maze of federal, state, and local laws—and courts—exist to regulate conflicts between individuals within a household while safeguarding a family's right to privacy.

As early as 1888, the Supreme Court recognized the importance of marriage, which it described as "having more to do with the morals and civilization of a people than any other institution." But it was not until 1978, in *Zablocki v. Redhail*, that the Court declared that Americans have a fundamental right to marry.

The right to have children has been recognized by the Court since 1942. In 1965, this principle was broadened to include the right *not* to have children when the Court invalidated a Connecticut law prohibiting the use of contraceptives by married couples. And in 1973, in *Roe v. Wade*—the decision that declared unconstitutional a Texas law prohibiting nontherapeutic abortions—the Court concluded that the right to procreate was "broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."

Federal and state courts have largely given parents free rein in raising their children. Education, religion, and moral upbringing are all viewed as domains into which government should not tread. Last December, a Michigan district court judge ruled that a mother who had withheld her children from a public school for religious reasons was entitled to instruct them at home even though she had no state certification as a teacher.

Parental authority is not unlimited, however. Parents cannot keep their "mature minor" children from having abortions or using contraceptives. States are increasingly concerned with child abuse and neglect. Wisconsin, for example, provides that persons who report parents for possible child abuse may not be sued even if their "good faith" reports prove to be unwarranted.

Divorce and child custody—traditionally the major concerns of family law—have been undergoing major transformations as legislatures and courts try to purge laws of sexual bias. Only Illinois, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota still require proof that one spouse is at fault for a divorce to be granted. Most state legislatures allow judges to divide property between divorcing spouses, but laws are increasingly being changed to help ensure "equitable," if not "equal," distribution. Forty states have enacted laws that, in some way, preclude gender as a basis for awarding child custody.

More changes may come as legal authorities conclude that the general courtroom is the wrong place for settling household disputes. One expert's suggestion: creation of separate family courts staffed by specialists.

of their children aged 3 to 13. Even among families with mothers who worked full-time, more than 40 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds and over 50 percent of 6-to-13-year-olds were cared for by their parents, usually the mother.

Parents are helped by a wide variety of paid and unpaid caretakers, including both relatives and friends. Most of these are informal baby-sitting arrangements: Fewer than 10 percent of preschoolers are in formal day-care centers (not including nursery schools) either full- or part-time. Indeed, some surveys have indicated that even when free, organized day care was available to working women, they preferred to make their own informal arrangements.

What Next?

The 1980s may bring a greater shift toward outside arrangements for the care of children. If high divorce rates persist, this trend obviously could be reinforced. In any event, women in their twenties increasingly enter the labor force. By 1990, 70 to 80 percent of women in their twenties through forties may work outside the home. They seem to be showing a greater commitment to their careers, and less to personal childrearing. These women are marrying late, postponing childbirth, and planning to have very small families.

But a shift toward outside-the-home child care, if it happens, does not necessarily mean that family values will be undermined. We don't know what such a shift will do. Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn, of the Columbia University School of Social Work, argue:

It has yet to be shown that family values have been eroded anywhere by child-care arrangements, whether in nursery schools, centers, or in family-day-care homes. And the parents themselves, insofar as we have information, are overwhelmingly positive about group programs.*

The federal government spent more than \$2.2 billion on a variety of child-care programs in fiscal year 1977, including \$448 million on Head Start, \$500 million on tax credits for work-related child-care expenses, and \$809 million in grants to help states provide day-care centers for children from low- and moderate-income families. Only a small percentage of American

*"The Day-Care Debate: A Wider View" by Kamerman and Kahn, in *The Public Interest* (Winter 1979), p. 81. A more critical analysis is "Parental Evaluation of Child Care Alternatives" by Laura Lein, in *The Urban and Social Change Review* (Winter 1979).

children were served by these programs.

Thus, a national day-care program for preschoolers, long advocated by congressional liberals, would be extremely expensive, but there is a possibility of some trade-offs. If "welfare mothers" now receiving AFDC payments could put their children in public day-care centers, they might be able to work full-time, thus reducing their need for food stamps and other subsidies. But again, estimates vary, and the debate continues.

Government income supplements for one-parent families will almost certainly continue, of course, as will income guarantees for the elderly. Responsibilities for caring for the oldest and youngest members of our society—particularly the poor—will continue to be shared. Civilization means, in part, that people are not allowed to starve or live in dire need. The United States, through financial assistance programs, has dedicated itself to collectively filling in the cracks when individual responsibility—or capability—fails.

It is certainly possible for government to do more to *enhance* the family's ability to survive. It could provide more income security for poor *two*-parent families with children. Tax laws could be rewritten to remove "marriage penalties." The school day could be lengthened to eight hours, as it is in many countries, to keep children productively occupied while parents are at work. Adoptions could be subsidized to help foster parents make their foster children into full family members. And welfare laws could be revised. Despite two decades of attempted reform, 26 states—including Alaska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Virginia—still deny welfare to mothers with young children unless the father has left home; "in effect," says Sidney Johnson, director of the Family Impact Seminar, "families are encouraged *not* to stay together."

Recent history has shown that government—through Social Security, AFDC, food stamps—can take over the task, at least in part, of financial support for the elderly and for needy children without destroying family ties and responsibilities. Government and families have formed a partnership to care for American society's neediest members. The challenge for the future is to make that partnership work.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Ever since Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for its abolition in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), the family has been the subject (sometimes, the target) of scholars, reformers, and ideologues.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884; International, 1972, paper), Engels contends that the family evolved from communal group marriages in prehistoric times to the competitive (read capitalist) male-headed households of the 19th century.

French historian Phillipe Ariès emphasizes personal rather than economic relations in his influential *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Knopf, 1962, cloth; Vintage, 1965, paper). Drawing on such clues as 16th-century aristocrats' family portraits and 17th-century middle-class clothing, he finds that the concept of "childhood" is a relatively recent one.

In the medieval world, children worked and played with adults. The introduction of day schools in the 15th century took children out of apprenticeships and returned them to the home. There they became the hub of new self-contained households consisting solely of two generations—the parents and their offspring. These "nuclear" families were, by the 18th century, commonplace among the bourgeoisie of northern Europe. Change came later to the lower classes.

The exploitation of child labor during the Industrial Revolution was, suggests Ariès, an anachronistic continuation of medieval practice.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Carl Degler picks up the story in the mid-18th century, where Ariès leaves off, and brings it to this side of the Atlantic in *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford, 1980).

Caught up in the ferment of the colonial Revolution, and emboldened by the responsibilities they shouldered while their husbands were away at war, American women began to demand a greater voice. During the 19th century, their efforts took the form of "social feminism" (e.g., the Women's Christian Temperance Union); in the 20th century, militant females first launched the women's suffrage movement and then the recent women's liberation movement, with its calls for absolute equality of the sexes.

This evolution has not, however, weakened the family, Degler argues. With both parents relieved of the need to provide the services now offered by teachers, bakers, doctors, and tailors, the family, he says, is able to concentrate on what it can do best—fostering affection between husband and wife and raising children in an atmosphere of love.

Not all scholars are so optimistic. In *All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure* (Harcourt, 1977, cloth; Harvest, 1978, paper), MIT psychologist Kenneth Keniston and the Carnegie Council on Children survey the troubles that undercut some contemporary American families. Extreme poverty increases by two-thirds the odds of a baby dying during its first year; the aver-

age American child spends more time watching television than he does with either his parents or teachers; one in 20 teenagers has a "drinking problem." Keniston proposes strong government programs to remedy unemployment, redistribute wealth, and expand family health and legal services.

Some social critics see Keniston's solutions as part of the problem. University of Rochester historian Christopher Lasch is one. He maintains, in **Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged** (Basic, 1977, cloth; paper, 1979), that the state and the "helping professions" have usurped families' authority. Psychiatrists tell mothers how to care for babies; educators raise and train children, and social workers advise on just about everything else. The result, says Lasch, is parents unable to direct their own lives or those of their children.

French sociologist Jacques Donzelot provides a variation on Lasch's theme in **The Policing of Families** (Pantheon, 1980, cloth & paper). After the post-medieval family withdrew its children into the home, he relates, modern society followed it in off the street. The result: a compromise. The family was charged, via legislation concerning everything from child labor to unsanitary housing, with civic duties (e.g., to raise healthy, obedient citizens), and society was made familial (providing centers for schooling and health care).

Not all family problems are mediated (or complicated) by legislation. Boring work and low pay for breadwinners place heavy strains on today's blue-collar family, reports Berkeley sociologist Lillian Breslow Rubin. Her **Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family** (Basic,

1976, cloth; 1977, paper) summarizes interviews with 50 white San Francisco-area working-class families and with 25 middle-class families. Many working-class parents who married as teenagers age quickly; "when I was young" is a refrain repeatedly heard from mothers and fathers in their twenties.

Equally direct is **Trying Out the Dream: A Year in the Life of an American Family** (Lippincott, 1975). Sympathetic but unsentimental, author Paul Wilkes finds that the "Neumeyers," a statistically average suburban family, do not conform to the widely-held "Ozzie and Harriet" image of wholesome tranquility. The parents deplore their offspring's freedom and use of marijuana; the children feel like strangers in their own home; and everybody fights at Christmas.

Journalist Susan Sheehan crisply portrays the life of **A Welfare Mother** (Houghton, 1976, cloth; New American Library, 1977, paper) as "a series of accidents, both happy and unhappy." Despite the crime and squalor surrounding her, this promiscuous Puerto Rican mother seems to Sheehan as content as a suburban housewife. More than 700 letters, reports, and forms fill her New York City Department of Social Services file; she sometimes finds complying with welfare regulations as arduous as a full-time job.

Legal regulations are a manifestation of "the persisting tension between family and public values," maintains one Harvard professor of education. In **Here to Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century** (Basic, 1976, cloth; 1978, paper), Mary Jo Bane discusses how society's interests (e.g., the prevention of child abuse) come into conflict with family privacy.

Pointing to the debates over day care, abortion, and divorce reform, Bane contends that the chief family-related issue facing Americans is reconciling women's liberation with family stability. It will be best resolved, she suggests, if the government sticks to enforcing women's rights in the marketplace and leaves the resulting shifts in family roles (such as "provider" and "head of family") to be worked out privately.

Europeans see the family somewhat differently. In **Family Policy: Government and Families in Fourteen Countries** (Columbia, 1978, cloth & paper), editors Sheila Kamerman and Alfred Kahn of Columbia University's School of Social Work report that distrust of government invasion of family privacy is not much of a problem in Scandinavia or in Germany and France: Since child subsidy programs are usually applied universally, there is no need for governments to monitor eligibility or ferret out fraud.

The last decade has brought noteworthy changes in Eastern European views on the family. Until the liberalization of the early 1970s, Polish authorities assumed that the family—like all of society's burdens—would eventually disappear in the socialist world. Now communist academics and bureaucrats have come to believe that the family is here to stay, and that its problems must be dealt with: Nurseries are

being expanded; working mothers are now given maternity and child-care leave.

European families who immigrated to the United States underwent a gradual assimilation spanning several generations. Their story is told in **Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations** (Elsevier, 1976, cloth & paper), edited by Charles Mindel and Robert Habenstein. One of the most obvious changes among immigrants has been in family size. In 1910, for example, when all white American women had families averaging 3.4 children, Polish-American mothers averaged 5.9. Two generations later the Polish-American average was 2.8, a figure close to the national mean.

Thus third- and fourth-generation ethnic families come to resemble the American norm: "Small, mobile, and independent," writes Rudy Ray Seward. In **The American Family: A Demographic History**, (Sage, 1978, cloth & paper), the North Texas State University sociologist looks at U.S. census records and finds the American family a remarkably sturdy institution. Despite all the cries of crisis in the family, Seward concludes that, in terms of size and organization, the American family of 1970 was not much different from the American family of 100 years earlier. This year's census will tell us whether the same can be said of America's families in 1980.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some of the titles in this essay were suggested by Arlene Skolnick and Wilson Center Fellow Laura Nader.