Volume 4, Issue 1 Winter 1993/94

The State of the Art 4
Beyond the Alarmed vs. Satisfied Debate
Amitai Etzioni

Part by Part

Political Institutions **Less Seems More: What to Do About Contemporary Political Corruption** 7
Norman J. Ornstein

We've been hoodwinked by the press and populists. They've set us on the right path—towards reform—but with the wrong tools.

In Schools **The Case for Moral Education** 23
Frederick P. Close

Two generations of educators have neglected a proven approach to restoring civility to our nation, for misguided reasons. What is to be done?

Public Opinion **The Return to Pragmatism** 30
Daniel Yankelovich

Changes in the economy and our families have shaken our expectations for the future, but there is hope where we least expect it.

Diversity **Minorities, Gender, Mythologies, and Moderation** 40
Janet Saltzman Chafetz

Thirty years after civil rights gains, we are at risk of losing our common ground. Here's the antidote: prescriptions for restoring a healthy dialogue.

continued ...

The Societal Whole

The Moral Condition — **The Decline and Fall: An Alarmed Perspective** 47
James Patterson and Peter Kim

American morality is crumbling before our eyes. The results of this corrosion of our linchpin.

From Religion to Sex — **The Myth of Moral Decline** 52
Everett C. Ladd

Those who lament our moral downfall suffer from myopia and selective memory. Here's recent history to put such claims in perspective.

American Dilemma — **Individualism: A Double-Edged Sword** 69
Jeffrey W. Hayes and Seymour Martin Lipset

This distinctively American trait is at the heart of both our failures and our triumphs. Can we redress the former without losing the latter?

Community Action 81
Saving Lives in Seattle: A Model for Civic Responsibility
Suzanne Goldsmith

An R.C. Document 91

Contributors 96

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Beyond the Alarmed vs. Satisfied Debate

AMITAI ETZIONI

There is more to the state of the union than the State of the Union. The economy, the health-care system, the government—these are all worthy concerns, but sound policy cannot rest on shaky moral foundations. The cornerstone of our society is a virtuous citizenry. Ultimately, only if people take virtue to heart will we have a society in which children are brought up to be decent, crime is rare, and civility prevails among individuals and among communities of diverse backgrounds.

We asked a list of keen observers of American society to evaluate the moral state of the union. Some sounded the alarms; others, while not outright sunshine boys, declared themselves satisfied overall. The term "satisficer" was coined by Nobel laureate Herbert Simon to indicate that people do not seek utopia. Once they find a satisfactory solution, they stop looking. Indeed, we observe that utopia has proven elusive, and humans can only rationally aspire to imperfection at best. Yet those who are alarmed keep our attention focused and our reforming energy properly honed. A well-functioning community may need both those who occasionally cry wolf even when there is only a threatening shadow, and those who keep their cool even as the first scores of lambs are carried off.

Both the alarmed and the satisficers are looking at the same societal conditions, but some are troubled by a glass half-empty while others celebrate that its contents reach all the way to the mid-point. Thus, some stress that 45 percent of children no longer live with their natural parents, while others see the 55 percent who do. Some see a decline in light drug use by the young; others, the rise in alcoholism.

Many argue that our values are in disarray and that we cannot reach a consensus by which to judge ourselves. However, Americans still subscribe to several core values—it's our behavior that doesn't measure up. Ninety-one percent of Americans believe that marital infidelity is "always wrong" or "almost always wrong," yet extramarital affairs are common. Eighty-one percent believe they will stay with their spouses for life, yet almost half of all marriages end in divorce. Seventy-eight percent of Americans believe that voting is an important obligation of citizenship, yet the 55 percent voter turnout in the 1992 presidential election marked a high point in recent American history. We are a society that enthusiastically gears up the Jane Fonda tapes, while settling down on the couch to stuff our faces with french fries. In other areas, people don't even pay lip-service to values anymore; students argue that cheating is the only way to survive, and some children shoot other children without even showing remorse.

The alarmist and the satisficed approaches *together* produce a balanced picture: American society is surely not going to hell in a handbasket, but it does have some very serious moral defects. Indeed, if our moral foundations had disintegrated, there would be little to build on. *The time to take stock of the situation and to act is when the foundations are eroding but have not yet crumbled, which, this issue of The Responsive Community suggests, is our current state.*

In evaluating our moral condition, our conclusions depend largely on what social scientists call the base-line: what we take as our point of comparison. Compared to the mid-1890s, the U.S., by many accounts, has made much moral progress. When we compare ourselves, on the other hand, to the mid-1950s, the picture becomes more complex. Americans may thus congratulate themselves on the long-run achievements yet be properly troubled by the recent wide-spread decay.

The argument that the U.S. is "cleaner" than most European societies, not to mention numerous others, or that we are generally more sensitive to moral concerns, does provide Americans with a reputation we should be proud to uphold. But one should hardly use this observation to dismiss concern about the violent crime and drug use that has sharply risen over the last decades. Even if by some

accounts crime rates have "stabilized" or experienced a slight recent decline, they are still intolerable. The city of Chicago alone loses roughly as many lives to violence as does all of Canada. And even if the use of illegal drugs has declined among high school seniors, it has risen among eighth graders. This may not be a "satisficing" state for most of us.

Particularly troubling is the notion that moral values change over time, and our moral yardstick should adjust to fit current mores. Viewed this way, pregnancies of twelve-year-old children will soon be shrugged off, and we will no longer be able to ask whether "outdated" notions, say of children waiting to mature and marry before they have children, are still virtuous. We've seen this "instant field goal" trick before—if you don't make it into the end zone, just bring the end zone to wherever you happen to have landed.

If we agree with one another that moral commitments must be shored up, it might be best to rely on heightened levels of moral sensibilities (as we have developed toward the environment, race relations, women, and the disadvantaged) rather than on vastly diluted standards. The societal role of moral values is to agitate against forces that undermine civility and the social order, not to make virtue out of vice.

Finally, we do not hold any one societal trend or belief system single-handedly accountable for our current state. The suggestion that communitarians blame all our contemporary problems on excessive individualism is simplistic. Clearly, the expressive individualism of the 1970s and the elevation of greed and Me-ism into moral principles in the 1980s together constitute one factor contributing to our condition. But no one could seriously consider it the only factor. The communitarian agenda of shoring up our moral, social, and political foundations is much more encompassing. It stresses, for instance, the need to limit the flow of private funds into the campaign chests of elected officials. And we are as concerned about handguns as we are about selfishness.

Suggestions on what should be done and how to proceed are particularly welcome. The essays assembled here, far from providing closure on the subject, seek to further the debate, to be extended in future issues of this journal: What is the moral state of the union and what is to be done?

Less Seems More: What to Do About Contemporary Political Corruption

NORMAN J. ORNSTEIN

One fact is unmistakable: To an overwhelming majority of Americans, our political process, especially in Washington and especially inside the first branch of government, Congress is morally bankrupt in a fashion worse than at any time in modern memory.

ABC News asked voters in mid-1992, "Do you think the overall level of ethics and honesty in politics has risen, fallen or stayed the same during the last ten years?" A full 60 percent said it had fallen; only 9 percent believed it had risen. Seventy-six percent of the electorate in the 1992 American National Election Study (NES) conducted by the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies agreed that "the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves" instead of for the benefit of all people. Only 55 percent agreed with the same statement in 1984—and only 29 percent agreed in 1964!

These survey findings are replicated and reinforced by dozens of others, all of which show a high level of public hostility toward Washington, Congress, and politicians in general. Finding a public consensus on any major issue of public policy these days is difficult, but there is a clear consensus that Washington has lost its moral moorings, that public corruption is endemic, that the system is not working as it is supposed to.

That the past quarter-century has seen real scandal, from Vietnam's "credibility gap" and Watergate, to Abscam, Iran/Contra, and the House post office, involving numerous prominent political figures and governing institutions, is clear. But it is nowhere near as clear that

we have witnessed the real deterioration in ethical standards or behavior in Washington that voters believe has occurred.

It is a curious paradox. Ask any veteran observer of politics in Washington about the old days, and he or she will regale you with stories of scandal and corruption—drinking, carousing and womanizing by lawmakers, money distributed quietly in briefcases with no one the wiser, machine politicians dominated and manipulated by bosses, lobbyists plying the halls with *quid pro quo*s, reporters winking at the goings-on or turning a blind eye.

But ask the same veterans about today, and almost to a person they will say that politics has *never been cleaner*. Fewer members of Congress or executive officials drink to excess, use drugs, or philander. There is distinctly less bribery and fewer illicit campaign contributions. If money is everywhere in politics today, it is far more limited than ever before in its influence, thanks to disclosure and limits on contributions by individuals and entities; there are no more $100,000 parcels passed in an office, or laundered through a foreign country.

Where have voters gotten their impression of endemic corruption and immorality in American politics and government? Some of it is grounded in reality; there have, after all, been real instances of lying, cheating, stealing, bribing, drug-taking, adultery, harassment, and other crimes and misdemeanors, committed both individually or institutionally. Then again, there have *always* been numerous instances of such behavior in Congress, the executive branch, and the Judiciary.

In addition, focusing on corruption, immorality and scandal is an American pastime, a time-honored tradition of the public, journalists, and political opponents. If we had scientific public opinion surveys for the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, chances are they would show that voters have always believed that corruption and venality had reached their peak during their lifetimes. "Negative campaigning," which is regularly practiced in American campaigns and regularly condemned in editorials, has been a staple of politicking for 200 years. A cultural predisposition toward muckraking and negative campaigning has always contributed to the public's contempt for politicians. So what makes today different?

DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE SIXTIES

Politics has changed in the past quarter-century, changing the relationship between the parties and reinforcing public disgust for politics and politicians. At the same time, political and societal dynamics have changed the politics of scandal—in the process, changing the press, interest groups, prosecutors, political figures, and public opinion toward the leaders of virtually all institutions in the society, from business to religion to sport. All these changes, ironically, have been reinforced by two decades of sweeping reform of the political process.

The changes came after an uncharacteristically placid and trusting period in American history. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s, despite considerable tumult in American society over issues like school desegregation, forces like McCarthyism, and scandals like that of Sherman Adams, the public showed high levels of trust and affection for Congress, the presidency, and other political institutions. The assassination of President Kennedy, followed by growing tension over Vietnam, the focus on a "credibility gap" in the White House, the Democratic Party convention in Chicago in 1968, and the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., turned trust into growing disillusionment and cynicism.

Then came Watergate. This massive institutional scandal changed American politics dramatically. It was a scandal of unprecedented proportion, which led to the resignation of a president (following the unrelated, scandal-driven resignation of his vice president.) Only Teapot Dome came close in its implications for the White House.

But unlike Teapot Dome, Watergate unfolded over months on national television, with saturation coverage that ranged from daytime viewing of the investigative hearings of the Senate Watergate Committee to prime-time viewing of the impeachment proceedings of the House Judiciary Committee. Tales of lying, money laundering, burglary, and venality in Washington, all with the highest stakes imaginable, were broadcast nightly in people's homes.

Watergate was also a landmark for press operations. Network news divisions focused on Washington as they never had before, devoting massive resources to the story; the same was true of

newspapers and newsmagazines. These news organizations did not fold up their tents and return to New York after Watergate ended; their consciousness raised, they increased their Washington presence. For example, *Newsweek*'s August 1965 masthead lists 17 reporters in its Washington bureau; in August 1975, the number was 25—a near-50 percent jump. The numbers fell back with budget constraints in the 1980s, and the number of Washington stories likewise declined. But the scandal-driven focus of the Watergate years has continued apace.

Of course, the real story of Watergate and the press was the story of Woodward and Bernstein. The *Washington Post*'s Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein became folk heroes in America, with a popular movie, *All the President's Men*, underscoring their roles as lowly metro reporters turned investigative journalists, doggedly pursuing the facts against the awesome power of the White House, ultimately bringing a president down. Investigative journalism developed a cachet much greater than before, shaping journalism awards and careers and altering the daily content of front pages and lead stories on evening news programs, but not always following the model of careful pursuit of facts, dual sources, and restrained language set by Woodward and Bernstein in Watergate.

Vietnam and Watergate also precipitated waves of political reforms from 1968 through 1977, in party presidential nominating processes, congressional power structures and deliberations, ethics, and campaign finance. The reforms implemented during that decade represent perhaps the greatest sustained body of political reforms in American history.

There were two primary thrusts to the reform movement: decentralization and democratization of political and governmental institutions, and more openness in political and governmental processes. The legitimacy of leaders was challenged, as power and resources were partitioned among citizen activists and rank-and-file members of Congress. Large campaign contributions were curtailed to limit the clout of major givers, and political action committees (PACs) were activated to organize larger numbers of small donors.

At the same time, party nominating caucuses, congressional committee hearings, bill markup sessions, and floor votes, along with

politicians' financial records, junkets and gifts, and campaign contributions for individuals and PACs, were made public, providing more information and openness to the political process than had ever existed before.

All the hallmarks of this era—more investigative reporting on Washington and scandal in Washington, weaker central leadership, more information available to show the inner workings of politics and government—proved to be a potent combination, but not always with the intended consequences. Reforms designed to clean up politics through the astringent of sunshine clearly reduced hidden wheeling and dealing and old-fashioned chicanery. But a more fluid and decentralized nomination process created an image of weak parties and weak presidential nominees; weaker leaders and more independent rank-and-file lawmakers reinforced the notion of a policymaking institution that couldn't get its act together. An aggressive and skeptical press used the openness of the process to uncover more hints of wrongdoing, conflicts of interest, and undue influence–peddling. The image—a combination of inadequate, rudderless institutions filled with venal individuals—accelerated the public's disillusionment.

DISCLOSURE'S SIDE-EFFECT

Disclosure is and always has been the most potent weapon for political reform. But disclosure also has its negative side-effects. Consider campaign finance. The reforms of the 1970s were designed to clean up the wheeling and dealing, to limit the role of large contributors, and to eliminate vote buying or cash flowing through political offices. All individual contributions exceeding $100, along with donations grouped through PACs, were disclosed to a new entity, the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the first permanent governmental body set up to regulate and oversee campaign finance.

By all accounts, the reforms had a sharp effect cleaning up some of the worst elements of the process. Disclosure became even more successful as the computer revolution made it easier to group, analyze, and disseminate the huge masses of information required for the tens of thousands of contributions to the hundreds of congressional campaigns, not to mention the presidential contest.

Before long, sedulous reporters, who previously had no hard information to use, were swimming in data. A few investigative reporters, like Brooks Jackson of the *Wall Street Journal*, became experts at analysis of the FEC data; other reporters and editorial writers relied on the regular organization and analysis of the FEC information conducted by Common Cause (all geared toward the organization's own agenda for further reform.)

The result was a continuous spate of stories on campaign contributions, usually tying contributions by "special-interest PACs" or fat cats to votes cast by lawmakers. Where stories in earlier generations hinted at illicit or immoral behavior, or more typically weren't written because there was no hard information or eyewitness accounts, stories in the past decade-and-a-half have offered chapter and verse of contributions from, say, steel industry executives to those lawmakers who voted for a tax break for the steel industry.

Dozens of contemporary scholars have tried every method of analysis to find a meaningful direct link between campaign contributions and congressional voting behavior, and have not been able to come up with serious evidence to support one. Votes by lawmakers in Congress are far more closely correlated with ideological predisposition, party, and direct constituency interest than they are with campaign contributions. And the level of contribution, in constant dollars or as a share of overall receipts or expenditures, from each "special interest" is almost certainly less since the strict limits on individual and PAC contributions.

But the incessant drumbeat in stories and editorials, using the information provided by the very disclosure that had in fact cleaned up the system, reinforced almost daily the public perception of pervasive corruption in a capital awash in special-interest money.

Several other factors over the past two decades have fueled public outrage at Washington, among them:

THE DOMINANCE OF DIVIDED GOVERNMENT

For most of American history, united government—one party in charge of both the presidency and Congress—was the norm; divided government, the exception. But for the past four decades, the oppo-

site has been true. Democrats have run the House of Representatives for four consecutive decades, while the Republicans have run the White House for 26 of the same 40 years. In previous eras, we would tend to have extended periods of one-party dominance in Washington, followed by realignments which might sweep the opposing party into an era of dominance; a GOP era from 1896 to 1932, for example, was followed, with the Depression, by a Democratic Party era led by Franklin Roosevelt. But the past four decades have been characterized by a *dealignment*, in which neither party has dominated American politics.

The competition for supremacy between the parties has increasingly expanded from the electoral battleground to the battleground between the branches—where a natural tension exists regardless of party—and it has grown increasingly sharp. Each party has used its base to lob grenades at the other party's stronghold and used its powers to undermine the opposition. Democratic leaders in Congress have attacked Republican presidencies; Republicans in the White House, joined by conservative allies outside, have engaged in a sustained assault on the very legitimacy of Congress over the past fifteen years. Extended congressional hearings on executive branch scandals like Iran/Contra or HUD, as well as confirmation hearings on nominees like John Tower, Robert Bork, and Clarence Thomas, often used to score partisan and ideological points, have all been televised on commercial networks; congressional "special orders" (open debating periods) focused on attacks on individual politicians and on their institutions have been televised on C-SPAN. All have sent a message to Americans of a system where people and parties cannot get along, and where corruption, malfeasance, and nonfeasance are endemic.

Divided government has also had an impact on policymaking. Conventional wisdom has suggested that divided government means fewer policy outputs—more "gridlock." But persuasive evidence compiled by David Mayhew shows otherwise—that the number and significance of policy outputs are nearly identical for periods of divided government as they are for periods of united government. But divided government has changed the *timing* of policy decisions. Unified party government gives the majority party the advantage of

controling the timing and framing of decisions so as to ballyhoo them and emphasize their importance.

Divided government, on the other hand, has tended to stretch out differences, encouraging politicians to play “end-game” strategies, delaying decisions to gain more leverage in final bargaining. The result has been long periods of inaction in Congress, followed by brief bursts of frenetic activity immediately before adjournment. Often, this has meant passage of several important pieces of legislation late at night which dilutes their impact, since few people end up aware of their passage, much less their importance. The impression of deadlock has thus exceeded the reality, but in the process has reinforced public frustration and cynicism.

In addition, the large and growing budget deficits of the 1980s, unresolved by partisan differences and magnified by press emphasis, have contributed to public disaffection with government. To whatever degree there were press reports of substantive policy in Washington, they were dominated by budget-policy stories. Policymakers were themselves embarrassed and obsessed with budget deficits, and the result was a national anxiety over a seemingly unstoppable deficit. Month after month, year after year, from 1982 to 1993, policymakers in both parties tried to eliminate deficits, through budget summits, extraordinary devices like Gramm/Rudman/Hollings I and II, and the 1990 and 1993 Budget Agreements. Each year, policymakers would counsel voters to judge them, and government, on their ability to deal with the deficits.

With no public consensus on how to reduce deficits, deep-seated tensions between Congress and the president, and end-game politics taken to their logical limits, the spectacle for voters was a government unable to get its act together, consistently promising results that it never delivered, because of ineptitude, special-interest domination, venality, cowardice, and partisanship. Even when Congress passed reasonably tough budget or tax plans, reducing the deficit substantially from what it otherwise would have been, the outcome looked weak and unimpressive. Politicians had asked to be judged by the standard of deficit reduction. Voters took them up on it—and, at least in the aggregate, they did not pass muster.

THE GINGRICHIZATION OF POLITICS

The arrival of Newt Gingrich (R.-Ga.) in Washington in 1978 changed both the atmosphere and the nature of political tactics in American politics. Unlike most lawmakers, and certainly unlike most freshmen, Gingrich arrived with an ideological vision and a strategic plan for himself and his party. Surveying the near-quarter century of Democratic hegemony in the House, with entrenched incumbents winning regardless of Republican success in the White House, Gingrich believed that the only way for Republicans to capture a majority in the House was to discredit the majority Democrats and the Congress they ran to such a large degree that the public would turn away from them in disgust, overcoming affection for individual incumbents to affect a wholesale institutional change.

In effect, Gingrich preached, and practiced, a kind of scorched-earth tactics, using personal attacks on prominent lawmakers to reinforce his theme of endemic institutional corruption. Although his approach was embraced by only a tiny minority of his minority party early in his House tenure, it began to build support as more young conservative House members became frustrated with their minority status, their treatment at the hands of the Democrats, and the more conciliatory approach of their senior Republican leaders. When Gingrich's sustained attack on the ethics of House Speaker Jim Wright precipitated a full-blown ethics investigation and Wright's eventual resignation—an unprecedented action in Congressional history—many Republicans saw his tactics as vindicated.

Gingrich was rewarded with a measure of national notoriety and ultimately a major leadership position as House Minority Whip. He was not the first partisan to use no-holds-barred tactics to polarize the House, and to achieve his ends. But Gingrich did raise the tactics to a different level, and his opponents did not demonstrate any moral superiority or righteousness in their response. Rather, Democrats met Gingrich with treatment in kind, focusing their personal attacks and vilification on the executive branch. Wright's forced departure, especially given Gingrich's rhetoric, enraged House Democrats and brought about reprisals.

Over the past few years, the conflict has escalated into a kind of War of the Roses, with members of both parties, joined by their ideological allies on the outside, intent not just on foiling but on destroying and discrediting their political opponents. The focus in the John Tower, Robert Bork, Clarence Thomas, and Lani Guinier confirmation processes on personal attacks, attributes, and motives, not just views, is one obvious example. Another is the whispering campaign of false and malicious gossip about Rep. Tom Foley's personal life (D.-Wash.), which surfaced when he was about to assume the House Speakership after Jim Wright's resignation and was clearly designed to discredit him or weaken his power as leader by smearing him. Each attack and counterattack, regardless of its veracity, has taken its toll on public views towards politics and politicians. When President Clinton's Deputy Counsel Vince Foster wrote just before his suicide, "Here ruining people is considered sport," it reflected a view of Washington that would be echoed by voters across the country.

The lengthy, sustained era of divided government, following on the heels of tension and distrust between the branches fueled by Vietnam and Watergate, combined with the bitter personal and partisan warfare of the past fifteen years, have in turn reinforced one other kind of behavior:

THE CRIMINALIZATION OF POLICY DIFFERENCES

From muckraking congressional investigations to the special-counsel law, deep-seated policy differences that have evolved into personal attacks have also increasingly been accompanied by criminal investigations. Real questions about violations of law or norms have been springboards for prosecutions designed more to punish transgressors for their ideological apostasy or arrogance than to investigate legal matters—from Hamilton Jordan to Theodore Olson to Elliot Abrams.

Prosecutorial zeal has accounted for a large part of this legal ferment. Between 1975 and 1989, the number of federal officials indicted on charges of public corruption increased by a staggering 1,211 percent, whereas the number of non-federal public officials indicted doubled in the same period. Contemporary federal prosecu-

tors, using their immense discretion and power, have decided for their own reasons to prosecute federal officials far more and for a much wider range of alleged offenses than ever before. Offenses that were not routinely prosecuted in previous decades, instead deemed acceptable or trivial, are now pushed relentlessly to indictment and trial, for several apparent reasons. There is an institutional reason: the reform-era creation of a Public Integrity Section in the Justice Department, which defines its success by the volume of prosecutions of public officials. More important, though, is that prosecutors are the equivalent of big-game hunters. And political figures, particularly federal ones, have become the prosecutorial equivalents of Siberian tigers or big horn sheep. Public acclaim, press attention, internal kudos—not to mention opportunities for career advancement—come to prosecutors who bag the big game.

Consider the indictment of Senator David Durenberger (R.-Minn.) which came two years after visible, painful, and tough ethics procedures and sanctions against the senator. The indictment against Durenberger alleges an immense conspiracy among three individuals, involving countless hours of time and complex transactions, all to connive a total of $3,825 from the equivalent of a padded expense account.

Consider also in this context the near decade-long travail of Rep. Harold Ford (D.-Tenn.) acquitted of financial chicanery; the interminable, ongoing, and highly public investigation into the finances and behavior of Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D.-Ill.) which was used directly as a springboard by U.S. Attorney Jay Stephens to pursue a bid for the Republican nomination for a Senate seat from Virginia; the lengthy investigation and grand jury proceedings against Sen. Chuck Robb (D.-Va.) alleging offenses that had rarely, if ever, resulted in prosecution of other, non-public officials (and that ended in a rare rebuke of the prosecutors by a grand jury.)

One key catalyst has brought all these other trends and factors together, encouraging and magnifying them:

THE TABLOIDIZATION OF THE PRESS

Faced with declining circulation and viewership, newspapers, newsmagazines, and network news divisions have taken the muck-

raking tradition of the American press to an extreme. The drive to emulate the *National Enquirer* and the *Star* has spread to the most respectable newspapers and magazines, while network news divisions have begun to compete with tabloids like "Inside Edition" and "Hard Copy" with their own tabloid shows like "PrimeTime Live" and "Dateline: NBC."

Stories or rumors of scandal, individual and institutional, have dominated news coverage of politics and politicians more than at any time in modern history, not just in column inches or broadcast minutes, but in emphasis.

Any story about a politician or public official in trouble becomes an automatic front-page story—a pattern very different from 20 or 30 years ago. When then-U.S. Senator Daniel Brewster, from Maryland, was indicted in 1969 and convicted on corruption charges, it was a middle-of-the-book story, meriting a few column inches at best and a grand total over two years of 170 seconds on network evening news shows. Imagine the play the story would receive if it happened today.

Today, rumors are printed on the front page without any corroboration or concern for truthfulness. Gennifer Flowers' allegations became prime-time and front-page news during the 1992 presidential campaign, without any attempt to investigate them or corroborate them. The false rumors about Speaker Foley ended up reported in major newspapers and on network news shows; a false report of an imminent indictment of Rep. William Gray, right before a House leadership vote, was highlighted on a network evening news broadcast.

Bashing institutions like Congress, always easy targets, has become even more pervasive in recent years, with the House bank story being the best recent example of sloppy, irresponsible, and destructive news coverage. At the height of the House bank controversy, one reporter—after I had patiently explained the procedures of the House bank, the nature of overdrafts, and other basic details—exclaimed, "This is a great story—I can't confuse it with facts!" A story of members of Congress who couldn't balance the nation's budget bouncing their own checks, even if wildly inaccurate, was too good to pass up or to write accurately—a pattern repeated all across journalism.

IMPLICATIONS

The high level of public anger at politics has had real effects. Ross Perot's rise as a major force in American politics, along with his movement, United We Stand, would not have been possible without it. Accompanying Perot has been a growing populist movement for political "reform," encouraged by Perot and other elites, including the libertarian movement, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, George F. Will, Rush Limbaugh, and Ralph Nader, who have tapped into a strong grassroots discontent. It is a movement fueled by hatred for Washington politics and a desire to institute mechanisms that bypass the corrupt and insensitive Washington institutions to bring supremacy to the people directly. Its means include term limits, enhancement of the discharge petition, elimination of foreign lobbying and strict limitations on other lobbying, slashing politicians' pay and perquisites, and a move toward "electronic democracy," or government by plebiscite.

These "reforms," designed to weaken governing institutions, are the antithesis of the kind of deliberative democracy that was the model of the framers of the American Constitution. But the high level of public distrust and disgust make their implementation much more likely.

Reforms to create a more ethical political process are possible and desirable, but only as long as they enhance the deliberative quality of American democracy. Here are some needed changes that can clean up the system and in the process preempt the destructive "anti-reforms" pursued by the Perot crowd:

> **Campaign Finance Reform**. Campaigns may be much less corrupt than Common Cause and editorial pages suggest, but serious, even dramatic change, is still in order. That change should focus first and foremost on making sure that enough money is available in the system for incumbents and challengers alike to get their messages across, to make most races for Congress far more competitive than they now are, and to reduce every participant's obsession with the money chase. Eliminating PACs, unfortunately, would only reduce the supply of money in the system without cutting the demand, increasing the temptation for corruption. In addition, it would greatly reduce the

positive impact of disclosure. Candidates would raise money from well-heeled interests, but by calling them up to solicit individual $1,000 contributions from them and their family members, in a fashion that would be more time-consuming, more corrupting, and more difficult to uncover and disclose.

Rather, the system should be changed to make other sources of funds far easier to obtain. A system based on full tax credits and public matching funds for small individual contributions to candidates (say, $200 or less) combined with a seed-money mechanism to encourage good candidates to enter campaigns for office, and reduced television, radio, and mailing costs, would remove some of the current system's worst flaws.

Executive branch reform. The "Reinventing Government" initiative of the Clinton administration taps into the public distrust of government, and offers some promise that management reforms and downsizing will improve the performance of the federal executive branch, and in turn bring a higher level of public confidence. As long as the administration does not exaggerate the resulting dollar savings and brings some measure of management change to its own operations, this is a well-considered step.

Congressional reform. Congress has many problems, but they are not the ones populists point out. Rather than being insulated from public opinion by the Beltway, lawmakers are hypersensitive to public opinion, constantly shuttling back to their districts to respond to every murmur from any constituent group back home. Rather than having rank-and-file members intimidated and cowed by senior barons and leaders, Congress—partly because virtually everything the institution does is now in public—has become excessively individualized, with little or no collective accountability. The consequence has been a public-policy process that is erratic, impulsive, and uncertain.

Reforms are needed in Congress to accomplish two goals: 1) to provide some institutional support for legislative action when the process and the public demand it, and 2) to restore the deliberative capacity of the legislature.

For the former, stronger party leadership—anathema to the populists—is key. That would mean more accountability, with greater ability to focus on an identifiable policy agenda and to make that agenda a reality. To be sure, leadership cannot be legislated; still, some structural reforms can help strengthen party leaders. To begin with, asserting their authority over committee chairmen through their party caucuses would give leaders more ability to shape, time, and frame the agenda; so would creating policy councils of committee and party leaders in a kind of congressional board of directors that would establish party priorities at the beginning of the year.

In the Senate, especially, rampant prima donna-ism has made it particularly difficult to maintain any schedule or discipline; a strengthened party leadership power must extend to more control over floor procedures. Strict limits on individual senators' "holds" over nominations and bills, combined with sharp changes in the practice and procedures of the filibuster—including returning to the classic practice of real, 24-hour-a-day, extended debate for issues of genuine importance and intense minority feeling, while curtailing filibusters on minor matters—are of particular importance. The public needs to see Congress set its priorities each year, and then move through them methodically.

An even more significant reform, though, is restoring some measure of deliberative capacity to Congress. Congress is not supposed to reflect public opinion, but to enlarge upon it—to craft a public *judgment*. Congress is supposed to cool the ardor of public emotion, taking its time to debate and consider alternatives and different viewpoints. Yet the considerable number of committee assignments and obligations fragments lawmakers' time and attention to major policy issues. A possible solution is to create a set of committees that are roughly equal in workload, importance, and responsibilities, while also restoring some significance to expertise among lawmakers. Regular Oxford Union-style debates in both houses would also help give the public a sense that Congress was grappling with weighty issues.

These systemic reforms will only provide significant relief, however, if politicians, prosecutors, and the press begin to change their own behaviors. The feuding parties should take steps toward restor-

ing civility in the House by providing some basic guarantees of minority rights for the Republicans—including guarantees of votes for GOP party alternatives on the House floor and one-third minority staffing on committees. A bipartisan coalition to amend the independent counsel and Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes could help curb prosecutorial zeal. Altering press behavior is more difficult; it must be done with peer pressure and sustained efforts of watchdogs outside journalism who will cry out shame when journalists cross the line.

These reforms, and others, would improve Congress's efficiency, and would eventually restore public confidence. Yet perhaps more significant, they may well help stave off the destructive changes promoted by the Perot-Nader populists.

Get Involved!

The Communitarian movement is looking for volunteers in all parts of the country and Washington, DC to work at all levels of the organization. If interested, please call David Brown at (202) 994-7997 or write The Communitarian Network, 714 Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, 20052.

The Case for Moral Education

FREDERICK P. CLOSE

Many observers trying to demonstrate the deplorable state of American education point to falling SAT scores, students' inability to locate the United States on a world map, or the simple illiteracy of so many high school graduates. Such indicators are certainly relevant to the problem, but they do not go to its heart. Our schools are failing us because they are not addressing what the received wisdom of the centuries has established as the essence of the educational enterprise: the development of character. The fundamental tragedy of American education today is not that we are turning out ignoramuses, but that we are turning out savages. Worse, while the failure to impart knowledge to students is the result of incompetence, the failure to transfer humankind's moral heritage is sanctioned by educational policy.

This is a harsh indictment. It rests on an older world view which is much out of favor today. It assumes there really is a moral heritage to be passed on, and that each person does not start fresh, choosing values like hairstyles. It assumes that children, if left alone, will not naturally become responsible and compassionate adults. It is leery of the worship of the "inner child" whose potential for evil seems underappreciated. This view understands the development of good character in the young to be a complicated but profoundly important process requiring unremitting diligence. It is a process in which all of society's institutions, but especially its educational ones, must play an active role.

Let us consider the frightening possibility that we are rearing a generation of sociopaths. Here are some sobering statistics from the FBI's latest Uniform Crime Report (1991): Between 1965 and 1990, the

murder arrest-rate for juveniles steadily increased, up 332 percent for the period. In just the last four years, the number of teens arrested for murder is up 85 percent. Since 1988, gunshot wounds have taken the lives of more American teenage boys than all natural causes combined. Even more frightening is the nature of these homicides. Murder used to be a crime of passion or associated with the commission of some other crime. It then became more random, as gangs fought for territory, with drive-by shootings, gangbangs, and trespass executions. Today, murder is committed for the fun of it. In Washington, D.C., a woman was shot to death driving home because a teenager felt like killing someone that day; elsewhere, three kids fired on a group watching an elementary school football game, killing a four-year-old girl. Between 1980 and 1990, the arrest rate for white juveniles for forcible rape jumped by 86 percent (compared to a 9 percent increase for African-Americans). In this same period, the arrest rate for aggravated assault for young people was up 59 percent for whites and 79 percent for African-Americans, while cocaine- and heroin-related crimes increased 2,373 percent for African-Americans and 251 percent for whites. Nothing suggests an end to these trends.

Many people may not be aware that the United States experienced a similar crime wave earlier in our history, in the early nineteenth century. The emotional reaction of most Americans then was much as it is now: revulsion at the carnage and disorder. The societal response, however, was strikingly different. Americans in the 1830s viewed criminal activity as the result of willful actions of individuals who lacked self-control and good character. The response, therefore, was to try to build character, especially in young people. Efforts were launched to reduce alcohol consumption, to proclaim the virtues of honest work and the evils of idleness, to provide familial associations for urban young people cut off from their rural roots, and to get them more involved in the practice of their religious faiths.

The common-schools movement was an important contribution to this effort. Its greatest proponent, Horace Mann, believed character education was essential to the life of the family, the school, and the country. "Moral education is a primal necessity of social existence. The unrestrained passions of men are not only homicidal, but sui-

cidal; and a community without a conscience would soon extinguish itself." Textbook authors like William McGuffey included moral lessons along with those on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

The notion that one important means by which a society can reduce criminal behavior is teaching self-discipline and good character, using sobriety pledges, YMCAs, and morality lessons in first-grade readers, may seem to us rather quaint, but the simple fact is that it worked. Their crime wave ended within two decades and remained in check for a century. Ours by contrast has not slowed in thirty years and relentlessly worsens.

What has happened to us? Why do so many educators and parents now view formal moral education in our public schools with suspicion? We are not talking about controversial programs like New York's Rainbow Curriculum: the objections there were quite plain. We mean basic character education: teaching our youth the value of self-control, of taking responsibility for one's actions, of treating others decently. Is there any parent who would object to schools' teaching children not to steal, lie, cheat, beat people up, use foul language, etc? If not, why are school boards reluctant to become involved in formal moral education, and why hasn't our society insisted on it?

One fundamental, but perhaps not obvious, answer is that many Americans are in the thrall of an unconsciously held and profoundly misguided ethical theory known as relativism. In the 1940s college students learned from anthropologists that all values were relative to one's culture. One generation later, as our own culture's concordance on what constituted right and wrong fell apart, relativism acquired a new twist. On many campuses where it became a dominant philosophy, college students in general, and our future educators in particular, came to believe that everyone is entitled to his or her own unique morality and that one cannot judge other people because what is right for oneself is not necessarily right for others.

Not only is this philosophy false, it has dangerous implications. Cultural relativists assume that in the realm of morality, cultures cannot be wrong. They can. It would be morally repugnant to say, "The Serbs believe Muslims have no worth, no moral rights, and deserve to die. Thus, the Serbian extermination of the Muslims is

justified by the values of Serbian culture, and we must not judge them according to our own standards." In recent court cases in the United States, men who had murdered their wives for "dishonoring" them made the defense in court that in their native cultures, such actions were morally sanctioned. The judges, hoodwinked by cultural relativism, wrongly lightened their sentences.

The theory that morality is relative to each individual is even more delusive. No society could function if people were free to choose which rules would govern personal behavior. Everyone would quickly decide that lying, stealing, etc. was "right for me," and no one (were the theory of personal relativism true) would have the right to condemn that decision. This is not how we properly understand morality.

Schools have paid the price for the ascendancy of relativism in our society. The disintegration of our moral consensus in the 1960s led to the pedagogy of values-clarification in the 1970s. Working under the assumption that traditional moral education was by definition indoctrination, theorists such as Sidney Simon of the University of Massachusetts taught children that whatever they valued (their stereo, blond hair, the answers on someone else's test) was OK, and they taught teachers to remain morally neutral and non-judgmental as they "clarified" these individually selected values. For good children, this is at best benign; for bad children, it is perverse. Teachers ought not to limit themselves to clarifying any inferior values their students may hold, but they should do their best to change them.

Under the influence of this benighted theory, our schools have become moral vacuums, at least as far as any formal character education is concerned. Indirectly, of course, educators constantly send moral messages by how they treat students and each other, how strictly they enforce the rules, etc. But such indirect education is not only rather subtle, it is often neutralized by students, especially teenagers, who tend to embrace thoughtlessly the vagaries of personal relativism. This is partly a sign of the times, but mostly a matter of being young. Children have a task—to become themselves. They want to be unique and special, and this natural desire often results in their rejecting authority. Relativism is attractive to them because it

not only allows, it requires, that everyone choose what will be uniquely right or wrong for him- or herself. Even more important for adolescents, relativists preach tolerance, and they provide a rationale for why no individual has the right to judge another. This is wonderful for kids trying to defend their actions against the better-grounded wisdom of parents and teachers.

Unfortunately, acceptance of this wrongheaded theory exacts a price: young people are prevented from creating a moral community. Relativism offers no basis for criticizing peers when they misbehave. The kid spray-painting the walls of the school is just a rebel with his own cause, and even though everyone is secretly sick of seeing his ubiquitous graffiti, they (mistakenly) think they have no right to ask him to stop or to ostracize him if he doesn't. So bad behaviors are allowed to pass through the wide gate of tolerance, and the defense against the criticisms of parents proves a barrier to the encouragement of goodness among friends.

To combat relativism, and install a positive philosophy in its place, character development can and should be taught in schools even though it is not an academic subject but more a kind of wisdom we all share. Learning how to treat other people justly and charitably, as we would like to be treated by them, is a process to which we devote our entire lives. Every time we face a temptation to act selfishly, every time we discuss an ethical problem with another person, we are involved in that learning process. Moral instruction in a classroom setting is simply an extension of this. Teachers do not need to major in philosophy to teach kids right from wrong any more than parents do. They simply must pass on to their students the wisdom they already possess.

To adopt this position is not to claim that all teachers have a firm and judicious grasp of every aspect of morality, no more than the claim that schools must teach literature means every English teacher is widely read and filled with critical insight. It also does not mean teachers will always agree with one another about what's right and wrong. Such disagreements, and the dialogue that flows from them, are an integral and important part of a pluralistic democracy that values the free exchange of ideas. Having said this, it is important to keep in mind that for many children, the wrongness of shoplifting is

debatable. For a few, whether violent assault or murder is a virtue or a vice is an open question.

The maturing process by which young people will eventually come to appreciate and accept the shared moral beliefs in terms of which every society must operate is possible only so long as adults provide a firm and consistent moral base upon which children can build their own characters. This requires more than discussing the issues of the day (such as abortion and capital punishment). It means conveying to students a sense of what behaviors through time have proven to be morally good (for example, honesty and compassion), and which morally bad (such as envy and racism). Children whose family structures have broken down are especially vulnerable to the confusions of their peers, and our schools must not abandon them. The message from students may appear paradoxical, as they seemingly demand moral leadership while rejecting authority. In sharing our moral heritage, teachers have to defend and hold firm their convictions in the face of this paradox.

It should be emphasized that the development of good character cannot be accomplished by parsing dilemmas or debating public policy. Becoming a morally better person only begins with understanding intellectually what one ought to do. One still must *do* it, which is to say that students must form the habit of acting morally. This is a matter of training and practice, role models, and proper emotions, as much as it is rational insight. A sound curriculum will address moral thinking, moral emotions, and moral behavior, and the integration of these capacities, abilities, and dispositions into a virtuous character.

John Dewey wrote, “The child’s moral character must develop in a natural, just, and social atmosphere. The school should provide this environment for its part in the child’s moral development.” In bad schools, the community of peers lionizes rule-breakers and ridicules rule-followers as toadies and cowards. Cheating becomes a way of life because everyone does it, and those who don’t fall behind. Dishonesty passes as being shrewd, bullying and sexual harassment pass for being manly, and nothing gets taught because students are too undisciplined to learn. Administrators, therefore, must support teachers by creating schools in which good behavior can flourish. They must ensure that academic performance is honest, grading is

fair, everyone associated with the school is treated with respect, community service projects are encouraged, and students participate in an honor system for which they themselves are responsible. Finally, and most important, the school must adopt or develop a program for the direct teaching of moral values for the development of character.

Some are uncomfortable with this vision. Not without some justification, they fear hidden religious or political agendas by educators. For this reason, they argue that parents alone ought to have the task of morally educating their children. It is true that parents have the *primary* responsibility in this area, but families are not islands. To be effective, families must be supported by schools, as well as churches and synagogues, communities, business, the media, government, etc. Otherwise their children are at risk the moment they leave the front door. We must see every citizen as a stakeholder in this enterprise; both in terms of duty and in terms of prudence, we all share the responsibility to grow good children into good adults. In the words of a Nigerian proverb: "It takes a whole village to rear a child."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. summed up the foundation of every school curriculum in human history when he said, "Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." Or, as it was once put more informally, "Education is what's left over after you've forgotten all the facts." It is important to understand that introducing character education into America's schools is not some new and radical idea. What is new and radical is the elimination of such instruction. From antiquity to our own century, schools have inevitably taught character. History leaves open to us only the question: Will we do it well?

> Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. Nothing is more important for the public weal than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue.
>
> *Benjamin Franklin*

PUBLIC OPINION

The Return to Pragmatism

DANIEL YANKELOVICH

Assessing the state of the nation is a deeply depressing project if you depend too heavily on the bad news of the day. A national study shows that half of all adults have trouble reading and writing. A normally cheerful college president observes that "racism, sexism, assaults, rape, suicide, alcohol abuse, anorexia, bulemia, theft, property damage and cheating are all on the increase on college campuses." Tourists are hunted and shot in Florida, children in our nation's cities routinely killed in drug-related cross-fire. Such developments as these have created in many of the nation's leaders a mood of gloom bordering on despair. The sober and obvious truth is that our society does have many serious problems: economic stagnation, erosion of the middle class, spiraling health-care costs, ineffective education, crumbling families, inadequate job security, racial tension, and a seemingly unstoppable wave of crime.

There are always troubles to report. The important question is how Americans are coping with these troubles. Indeed, it is this question that brings us hope. Certainly the challenges that America faces are grave, and yet the clear signs of the public's constructive adaptation to these concerns are cause for optimism.

Several studies of social trends show that the American public is adjusting to new realities in a more pragmatic manner than it has in the recent past. The public's mood is shifting away from head-in-the-sand denial. Gone are both the orgy of wishful thinking that marked the 1980s and the dark pessimism that characterized the months before the 1992 presidential election. Now there is a new readiness to confront difficult choices and tradeoffs. No balanced assessment of the state of the nation at the outset of 1994 would be complete without taking this return to practicality into account.

Since wishful thinking never yields to practicality as effortlessly as it should, this encouraging development is less self-evident than we'd like. Adapting to new circumstances takes years, and the process is inevitably full of set-backs and reversals. But the signs of greater realism are unmistakable. The nation appears to be returning to the healthy pragmatism that has served it so well in the past.

THE REAGAN YEARS: A NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Three key features characterized the Reagan 1980s: First, the popularly accepted thesis that our problems would all be solved if we got government "off our backs." Second, young people, and the yuppie generation in particular, boiled the Reagan economic message down to a "go-for-it" individualism that bespoke a fierce Social Darwinism—an assumption that economic success meant proof of fitness. The third characteristic was the ideologically tinged wishful thinking that held that government could simultaneously cut taxes, increase defense spending, and balance the federal budget.

The prolonged mental holiday of the 1980s came to an end with the recession of 1990-91, an economic slowdown from which the nation has not yet recovered. The factors that undermined economic performance had been festering since the mid-1970s, but average and elite Americans alike had preferred to close their eyes to economic reality and the causes of the erosion of our international competitiveness. The general reaction was, "If things are so bad, then how come they feel so good?"

By the time the election of 1992 rolled around, all three of the Reagan era fantasies were in full retreat. The contrast between the optimism of the 1980s and the almost distraught national mood in the year before the 1992 election could hardly have been more extreme. Between the Gulf War and the presidential election, pessimism pervaded the country. Eighty percent of the public believed the country was on the wrong track. Seventy-five percent believed that we were losing the competitive battle with Japan. Two-thirds believed their kids would grow up worse off financially than they had been themselves. Between seventy and eighty percent worried about their jobs, about the rising costs of health care and college tuition for their children's education, about their own retirement, and about an

allegedly unresponsive leadership in the White House and Congress. The optimism of the Reagan years was followed by a period of dark pessimism—a feeling that things had gone out of control, both with regard to the economic life of the nation and to their own individual families.

RETURNING TO REALITY

While the 1980s-mood of unreality left the public psychologically unprepared for the recession, people have now had time to adjust to the new economic conditions, and their sense of powerlessness is passing. No longer expecting things to improve quickly, they are gradually showing new determination to assert control both over government and over their individual lives. Increasingly, the public has adopted a pragmatic and hopeful outlook.

Four main features seem to characterize the public's current outlook. First is rejection of the notion that economic decline is inevitable. Second is the belief in a larger role for government. Although mistrust of government is still potent, the public has reconsidered President Reagan's wholesale rejection of government. Instead, it now believes that government is a necessary evil, one that we must reform to make more trustworthy and effective, particularly with respect to the economy. The third feature is the shift away from the ideological wishful thinking of the 1980s and toward results-oriented pragmatism. Questions of cost have become paramount to public discussion of policy (How much can we afford to spend on an 85-year-old Alzheimer patient on life-support? How much to build the self-esteem of children through bilingual education if bilingual education costs twice as much as conventional education?). The fourth feature is the emergence of a new social ethic, a shift in public values from entitlement to reciprocity. The new feeling is that in these hard times, one is not entitled to get something for nothing. Even yuppies are now concluding that winning for one's self isn't everything and that everyone needs to be a contributing part of a larger community.

TWO DECADES' CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

Given this new outlook, how are Americans coping with the difficult problems that confront us as a nation? During the past two

decades, the American family has undergone vast changes, particularly structural changes in family composition. The Bureau of the Census shows that in the 1950s, approximately 70 percent of American households consisted of a male breadwinner, a female homemaker, and two or more children under the age of 18 living at home. 'Family' still conjures up this image for most Americans. But today, a mere 8 percent of households fit this model. An additional 18 percent consist of dual-earner households with one or more children under 18 living at home. Thirty percent of families comprise married couples without children. Eight percent are single parents. Eleven percent are unmarried couples and others living together. And a whopping 25 percent (up from 17 percent in 1970) are people living alone.

This radical transformation in the structure of the American family has many causes, the principal one being the great shift in cultural values that incubated on the nation's campuses in the 1960s and then spread to the rest of the society during the 1970s and 1980s. The family is the main arena for the showdown between the new expressive values of seeking greater choice for the self and the more traditional claims of family bonds, commitments, sacrifices, and obligations.

A number of value changes stand out in importance. One is the transformation of attitudes towards married women working outside the home. This change is now so familiar that it is easy to forget how vast it is. According to a Gallup poll, Americans in 1938 disapproved of married women working outside the home by a ratio of almost four to one. By the late 1980s, the National Opinion Research Center reported that this pattern had totally reversed: almost four to one approved.

Another familiar value change is the blurring of marital roles, the marked shift away from traditional roles in marriage towards relationships based on equality. Between 1977 and 1990, the number of Americans who prefered the traditional marriage "where the husband provides for the family and the wife takes care of the house and children" declined from 43 percent to 37 percent, and the "shared responsibilities" model increased from 48 percent to 57 percent.

Yet another change is the growing social acceptability of remaining single and raising a child as a single parent. In the fifties being married and having children were universally accepted values, and having children out of wedlock was harshly stigmatized. Today, however, though Americans still have reservations about single parenthood, the stigma of the past has been so attenuated that it no longer exercises effective social control.

The most far-reaching change relates to reduced expectations of sacrifice. In the fifties, mothers and fathers were expected to sacrifice for their children automatically and without question, and children were expected to sacrifice for their families. But the emphasis on the rights of individuals in recent years has eroded the norms of automatic sacrifice and duty to others, and replaced them with the notion of duty to oneself and one's own needs.

ASSESSING THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY

Americans' responses to these changes have been profoundly ambivalent. The majority of Americans professes family values to be of paramount importance and pronounce themselves satisfied with their family lives, although they recognize that they will face difficulties that their parents did not. By 49 percent to 30 percent, they believe they will have more difficulty than their parents in finding the money to put kids through college, and by 41 percent to 32 percent they think owning a home will be more difficult. At the same time, 78 percent feel they are better off today than their parents were at a comparable stage in life. By nearly three to one margins (44 percent to 15 percent), they feel their family life has turned out better than they expected, and, looking ahead to the future, 81 percent expect eventually to lead more satisfactory lives than their parents did.

Yet the evidence is strong that Americans are worried about the state of families in general. By a ratio of more than four to one (62 percent to 14 percent), they believe that family values have grown weaker in recent years. Between the middle and the late 1980s, the number of Americans who believed that "the family is the place where most basic values are instilled" declined from 82 percent to 62 percent. When asked whether marriages have improved or deteriorated since the 1970s, by 45 percent to 35 percent, women said they

have deteriorated. (The ratio for men is similar—43 percent to 33 percent.) Asked whether they believe the divorce rate will get better or worse in the next ten years, by more than two to one (46 percent to 22 percent) Americans believe it will get worse. Asked about the future prospects for family life in America, only five percent felt they were excellent, in sharp contrast to a 59 percent majority who feel they are "only fair" (30 percent) or "poor" (29 percent).

What lies beneath this ambivalence and pessimism? The factor stressed above all others in surveys is that parents have less time to spend with their children. The top rated strategy for strengthening family values is for parents to spend more time with their families (55 percent). Also high on the list are improved efforts to teach family values in churches, synagogues, and schools, and better role models on television. At the bottom of the list are such policy proposals as asking businesses to offer work at home and more flexible work schedules, and providing day care for children of working parents. (Most people think in terms of personal responsibility rather than government policies.)

The harsher economic environment is another explanation: large majorities believe that it will be more difficult in the future to send children to college (89 percent), to afford to have children (88 percent), to save money (88 percent), to buy a house (87 percent), or to find a good job (75 percent).

Permissiveness is also a strong concern. When asked whether society at large or parents are to blame for parents' diminishing control over their children, by almost two to one (48 percent to 29 percent), the public blames the parents and not society.

How are people attempting to resolve their ambivalence in today's pragmatic climate? Our studies show the following patterns:

The stigma once attached to the single-parent household shows no sign of reasserting itself. At the same time, there is growing recognition of the difficulties of single parenthood and the severity of the problems it creates for parent and child alike. Questions regarding the advisability of single parents raising children are likely to grow increasingly urgent in the future.

Questions are also arising about child-rearing in households in which both parents work full-time outside the home. Many people, especially the grown children of dual-earner households, feel that the danger to the children is simply too great to tolerate.

The single life, once an object of derision and stigma, is increasingly acceptable, even desirable. Marriage and family life are still preferred by wide margins, but the idea of living alone is acknowledged to have its own integrity and special virtue.

The blurring of roles in marriage continues. Equality between spouses and shared responsibilities might be difficult to maintain compared to rigid divisions of roles, but millions of men and women find the former worth the effort. In addition, many men are seeking closer ties to their children and feeling less threatened by women who earn more money than they do.

Divorce is once again becoming less socially acceptable, especially where children are involved. Young people raised by divorced parents express great resentment at their baby-boomer parents who, they believe, have put their own concerns ahead of their children's needs.

The link between family and work is an intimate one. In the "go-for-it" climate of the 1980s, the baby boom generation tended to put the monetary and self-expressive opportunities of career ahead of family responsibility. Now that the career front seems more problematic, people are rediscovering the satisfactions of family life and modifying their life-styles to accommodate the new realities of the 1990s.

THE NEW AMERICAN ECONOMY

Like the family, the U.S. economy, the paramount issue for most American voters, has undergone long-term changes in the past 20 years. From 1948 to 1973, both hourly wages and salaries increased steadily, hourly wages at an annual rate of about 2.6 percent. The annual rate of productivity growth in the economy varied between 3 percent and 4 percent a year. That quarter-century of steady growth in workers' standards of living created the American middle class. It led to a 70 percent level of home ownership and shaped a national

mood of affluence so seemingly reliable that people began to take rising living standards for granted.

In the early 1970s, however, the situation changed. Unobtrusively and initially unnoticed by the public, the growth rate of American labor productivity took a nose dive and never fully recovered. In 1973, labor productivity growth fell to 1 percent and has hovered at or below that low level for the 20 long years since (except for the past two years when it has shot up again). For the general public, these economic statistics seem undramatic, but there has been nothing undramatic about their consequences.

The prolonged slowdown in labor-productivity growth rates has made the U.S. vulnerable to foreign competition. In addition, it severely threatens our social equilibrium since its effects are distributed so unevenly. The top quintile of the population, mainly college educated, has continued to prosper. On the other hand, the more than 50 percent of the nation's youth who are not college bound—the "forgotten half"—have seen their real living standards decline by as much as 30 percent. Nor has the pickup in the rate of labor-productivity growth in the last two years helped them. Automation and the availability of low-cost foreign labor have greatly reduced the demand for highly paid jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled Americans. With ever fewer exceptions, it is no longer possible to make a good living in the United States without a college education.

The American economy's inability to provide high-wage jobs to workers without college degrees has had far-reaching consequences. Not only is unemployment high, but millions of full-time jobs are now being converted into part-time jobs without benefits, creating a vast pool of contingent labor. For the majority of this work force, hourly wages have not even kept pace with inflation. Downward mobility, joblessness, economic insecurity, underemployment, and the demoralizing experience of losing ground have shaped the outlook of a generation of young Americans. Even for college graduates, economic life has grown more precarious. Corporate restructuring has eliminated hundreds of thousands of well-paying, previously secure, middle-management jobs.

Why didn't these developments cause more ripples while they unfolded during the 1980s? The answer is that the effects of the

decline in individual incomes were masked by several phenomena. First and foremost, single-income households became double-income households and so made up for the erosion in individual income. Families borrowed money and piled up debt. The country borrowed money and piled up debt. Using these stalling tactics, Americans avoided confronting the effects of slipping productivity-gains and individual earnings.

Now, however, there are no more masks to hide behind, and for average citizens, fixing the economy has become a specific and down-to-earth imperative. Fixing the economy means halting the erosion of middle-class living standards. It means increasing the number of good jobs available and restoring fairness to the economy so that people at all educational levels can share in those jobs.

LIVING WITH IT

These structural transformations in the economy affect the lives of almost everyone in the work force, and yet there isn't much individuals can do to change them. What they can do to is adapt to them in the best way possible, and this is just what the majority of Americans is beginning to do. It is striking that despite the seriousness of these changes, there is not a great wave of political instability or demagoguery, nor widespread gloom. Our research shows a variety of patterns of adaptation.

First, workers are demonstrating less commitment to their jobs. They no longer believe they will remain in the same position for life, nor do they believe in their employers' loyalty to them. They suspect that employers, especially large corporations, regard individual employees as dispensable. Instead of looking to their jobs for their prime source of satisfaction, workers now seek fulfillment in personal relationships, especially in family, but also in friends, ethnic groups, and local communities.

Second, the definition of success is shifting in the popular mind, with money becoming less important as a measure of self-worth and quality of life more important.

Third, workers are increasingly interested in working for small companies, where they believe they can contribute more and be more important components of their organizations.

Fourth, many professionals are seeking security though self-employment in work-at-home businesses or in small enterprises they can build themselves. People are eager to assume greater control over their destinies even if doing so entails pay cuts.

Fifth, consumers are learning to be smarter shoppers. With less money to spend, maintaining living standards requires getting more value for their money. Americans are honing their consumer skills aggressively and effectively. They have grown increasingly nervous about living on debt or having only thin cushions of savings. The financial habits of the 1980s are being reversed.

Finally, voters are increasingly viewing the president as personally responsible for fixing the economy. Bill Clinton was elected to address declining living standards and the other inequities in the structural economy. In all likelihood, he will be turned out of office if he fails—and returned to office if the economy prospers—a sure sign that the public views the presidential level as the only one at which these problems can be tackled.

The transition from the wishful thinking of the 1980s to the pragmatism of the 1990s remains shaky and incomplete, not only in relation to work and family but on other concerns as well. On issues like health care, for example, wishful thinking persists. Even with setbacks, however, the trend to greater pragmatism is unmistakable. As the new pragmatism gains strength, it should become increasingly possible to win public support for a better-balanced ethic of responsibility where the needs of the larger community will be given at least as much emphasis as enlarging the rights of the individuals it encompasses.

Writers Needed

The Responsive Community is looking for individuals willing to write "cases" for publication. Cases should be about a communitarian issue, be limited in scope (e.g., assisted suicide rather than health care), and cover all sides of the issue fairly rather than argue a point. Be sure to send us an outline before proceeding. If interested, call Benjamin Wittes at (202) 994-8142.

Minorities, Gender, Mythologies, and Moderation

JANET SALTZMAN CHAFETZ

Are women, African-Americans, homosexuals, and other minorities better off today than they were 30 years ago? To listen to many women and minority activists, who gain political capital precisely from the widespread perception of continuing inequity, the answer is a resounding "No!"

Feminists point to such facts as: the average full-time female employee earns only about two-thirds the salary of the average full-time male; the average working woman still toils in a pink-collar ghetto, doing gender-traditional as well as gender-segregated work; the proportion of poor families headed by a woman has increased; and sexual violence and harrassment are widespread.

African-American activists point to an unemployment rate among young African-American males that has reached 23 percent; to continuing rates of poverty far in excess of those of white families; to mortality rates among young African-American men that rival those of the poorest of Third World nations; to record high rates of incarceration. Minority activists of all stripes point to the conspicuous increase of overt bigotry on university campuses and of hate crimes in our cities. While these facts are certainly accurate, if we stop with them, we accept and reinforce a view that minorities are simply victims, and that nothing has changed except possibly to get worse.

An entirely different set of facts can be used to demonstrate that segments of most, if not all, of these groups are considerably better off today than 30 years ago. The African-American middle class has expanded dramatically: Today over fifty percent of African-Ameri-

can families have an income over $20,000, compared to less than one percent in 1960. Likewise, the proportion of women with their own, independent income has grown considerably, as has the number who have entered well-paid occupations that were once predominantly male. Almost all minority categories have expanded their access to credit, to elected and appointed political office, and to other societal opportunities. The very fact that the majority of the public and almost all political leaders express outrage at overt bigotry marks a substantial change in our nation. And although the laws may not be adequately enforced, the legal gains for minorities since 1960 are dramatic: It is illegal today to sexually harass women on the job, and to discriminate against most minority groups (except homosexuals) in hiring, pay, promotion, credit, and educational or housing opportunities.

The answer, then, to the question of whether minorities are better off today than 30 years ago lies in the eye of the beholder. If one thinks of averages as if they fully describe the lives of most members of a group, "reifying" the various social aggregates, minorities still appear as little other than victims, and the answer is an unqualified "no". Political advantage often accrues to those who take this tact with constituents of minority status, and it is this viewpoint that has dominated much of our national discussion of minority status.

Yet if one instead examines the diverse experiences of minority members, the answer is a qualified "yes, but...."

The reality of all of these statistical aggregates is that, with limited exceptions, in any dimension one wishes to examine—income, education, occupation, political and social attitudes, etc.—the range of difference within one race or gender group is almost as great as that between various groups. In other words, the differences between a female M.D. and a high-school drop-out, teenage mother, for instance, are far greater than those between some "average" woman and man.

This answer may not serve to mobilize a constituency, but it also does not perpetuate the damaging notion of minorities as powerless victims. The failure to perceive the real gains that have been made in recent decades has been highly demoralizing to many minorities,

especially to younger members, resulting in a level of frustration and anger that is no more helpful than complacency in the struggle to achieve full equity. After all, if your "group" has struggled for a quarter of a century or more with apparently nothing positive to show for its pains, what is the point of working to change the system? Withdrawal, revolution, and, perhaps most frequently, "ripping off the system" become defined as legitimate responses to such a perception of reality.

A NATION OF VICTIMS

Because of this tendency toward thinking in terms of static groups, the United States has become a nation of "victims," "survivors," and "minorities." In recent decades, substantial segments of our population have come to define themselves as victimized specifically on the basis of some categorical differences between themselves and a mythologized, dominant group of "white, heterosexual males." Politicians, the mass media, and much of mainstream social and behavioral science have aided and abetted advocacy and social movement organizations in reifying a host of social categories—from race and ethnicity to gender, sexual preference, and disability. By continually focusing on average differences between statistical groups, or "typical" descriptors of individuals within given categories, policymakers and the media perpetuate the harmful notion that our nation is composed of homogenous groups with the same interests and social determinants.

The trajectory of our path toward reification began with the American hallmark of individualism. Traditionally, our society has been individual-centered and has defined its problems in terms of individual inadequacy (laziness, vice, failure to plan ahead or save, etc.). In this way we were able, for a long time, to ignore the fact of discrimination against a variety of social groups. In the 1960s, however, these injustices came to light. We began a major cultural shift in the locus of analysis and blame for problems experienced individually but in fact generated socially. Many people came to view their problems as rooted in social structures and practices, reflected by such terms as "racism" and "sexism," and their solutions, likewise, as collective.

This shift in perception resulted largely from the work of social activists who were engaged in "raising the consciousness of" individuals whose social characteristics placed them in one or more categories that historically had been targets of discrimination. As a necessary part of the process of attempting to redress very real wrongs—prejudice and discrimination at both the individual and institutional levels—statistical aggregates were defined as homogenous "groups." Categorical membership and commonality of experience were stressed to the point of virtually ignoring variations within categories. Twenty-five years later, however, the pendulum appears to have swung too far in this direction, possibly threatening some of the very gains achieved by minorities in their struggles for equity.

HYPERSENSITIVITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF VICTIMIZATION

While overtly bigoted anti-minority statements may be on the rise in certain circles, public opinion surveys have demonstrated a long-term decline in the level of intolerance in our nation—or at least in people's willingness to admit prejudice. Unfortunately, this increased tolerance has been accompanied by a hypersensitivity that makes many people feel as if they are walking on eggshells when they speak about any social group that is neither their own nor "white, heterosexual males." Because this latter category has been reified as an all-powerful "oppressor," prejudice against it is not perceived as illegitimate by many supporters of minority rights. Proper category labels ("woman" not "girl," "African-American" not "black," "differently abled," not "disabled") have become for many an indicator of whether the speaker is a bigot. Jokes about any minority category are totally taboo except among members of that category. Policy and law make harassment a question of the victim's point of view, which is unproblematic for many behaviors, but highly so for jokes and other utterances.

Hypersensitive listeners can "hear" bigotry and harassment in statements and terminology that others would find innocuous. Ironically, under these circumstances it is often the less bigoted, the most well-meaning who are likely to fear offending and therefore experience considerable discomfort in interacting with minority members

whom they may inadvertently offend. One response under such conditions is withdrawal. For instance, fearful of appearing to offend, men may refrain from informal contact with women co-workers, especially subordinates; they may be less inclined to serve in a close mentor-protégé relationship. In short, societal hypersensitivity to discourse is becoming so acute that it may be functioning to separate people who feel increasingly fearful of being accused of impropriety, to the detriment of all.

Another response is backlash; the withdrawal of support for continued efforts to achieve a truly equitable society. Backlash can go beyond the withdrawal of support, to active opposition to continued efforts at achieving genuine equity. There appear to be increasing numbers of people who, despite substantial statistical evidence to the contrary, claim that it is now white males who are the recipients of widespread discrimination.

The language we have developed to talk about prejudice also blurs important distinctions. For example, the pejorative label "racist" or "sexist" is used to cover an array of different behaviors that range from the truly outrageous (denying a job or raise on the basis of category) to the trivial (an off-color joke). "Sexual harassment," for instance, can encompass sexual assault, a superior using coercion to seduce a subordinate, and the casual off-handed remark about a woman. Policies are then developed to combat "sexual harassment" as if all of these various acts really could or should be addressed by one policy. This gives critics ample room to sabotage gains made on the serious issues by focusing on the trivial, calling into question the entire policy. Moreover, when all manner of widely disparate acts are categorized as one type of abuse, it appears that the quantity of abuse is greater than it really is, reinforcing the self-perception of members minority groups as victims.

TOWARD MODERATION

We are living in a time of profound economic and social change, entailing substantial dislocation and insecurity for sizable segments of our population, regardless of color, gender, ethnicity, or other social characteristics. People have always scapegoated others when confronted with socioeconomic change and insecurity. In the past, it

was the dominant category that scapegoated poorer and weaker minorities. Today, however, scapegoating has become characteristic of all sorts of groups, which are in turn targets themselves. Each category shrilly decries its own victimization. In response to this, well-meaning organizational and educational leaders try to insure respect for "diversity" with detailed regulations about appropriate language and force-fed "sensitivity" training. To date, the primary result of these efforts at sensitivity appears to be cynicism and backlash, especially by the primary targets, white males.

If we, as a nation, are to avoid balkanization among socially diverse aggregates in the next century, we require a more balanced approach to "difference" from the leadership that has convinced us we are all minorities.

First, regardless of the color, gender, or ethnicity of leaders and their constituencies, they must present the public with a balanced view of various social categories. A description of the inequities that continue to exist needs to be balanced with a discussion of the progress to date. Diversity within categories must be addressed along with differences among them. Commonalities among groups must again be part of our public discourse, which currently highlights only diversity. We will not persist as a nation if we cease to believe that we have at least as much, and probably more, in common with one another than we have differences dividing us. To restore this sense of community in the absence of an external enemy, once provided by the "threat of communism," should be a major goal of our national leadership.

Second, specifically minority problems (sexual harassment and racial intolerance, to name two) must be defined in such a way that proposed solutions are focused on serious breaches of behavior. Organizational leaders must consistently and sternly punish those who violate reasonable policies. On the other hand, they should not cater to the hypersensitivity of some by allowing their definitions and interpretations of others' meanings and motives to become the official interpretation of inappropriate behavior.

Third, at every possible opportunity, leaders in all institutional contexts should talk about and develop policies in response to generic problems that in fact cut across social groups—poverty, single-parent

families, gang violence, unemployment, school drop-outs—emphasizing that they are problems that affect us all. While some groups clearly experience such problems at a higher rate than others, in no case do most of the people of that category participate in or experience the problem. Addressing problems generically will stop the false reification of groups and place policy emphasis where it belongs: on the problem, not on the category of people which experience the problem at a greater rate than others.

Drawing by Chuck Asay; © 1993 Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph

THE MORAL CONDITION

The Decline and Fall: An Alarmed Perspective

JAMES PATTERSON and PETER KIM

Americans have become increasingly alienated from family, church, calling, community, and nation. By the late 1980s, we were living our lives as isolated individuals, islands unto ourselves, detached and self-interested.

Social institutions to which individuals have traditionally looked for moral support and guidance—community, family, religion, workplace, public and political institutions, and our leadership—are less central to everyday American life than they once were.

COMMUNITY

The prospects for community—in both the moral and sociological sense—are in serious jeopardy. Seventy-two percent of Americans don't know their neighbors well; 66 percent have never worked with others trying to solve community problems; 65 percent refuse to donate any time to community activities; Americans rate their level of community activity a "3" on a scale of "1" to "10"; two-in-three cannot name their local member of Congress.

When asked what traits contemporary Americans are more likely to embody than Americans of the past, our respondents selected such negative adjectives as materialistic, greedy, selfish, criminal, phony, mean, devious, and skeptical. On the other hand, when asked to select

traits that Americans of 30 years ago were more likely to embody, they selected neighborliness, civic-mindedness, patriotism, volunteerism, religiousness, honesty, morality, hard work, compassion, and charity. In short, all of the traits we generally associate with community were associated with the past, while the traits we associate with selfishness, narcissism, calculation, and anti-social behavior are associated with the present.

FAMILY

The American family is crumbling. Over 50 percent of Americans assert that there is no need for people living together ever to marry; 60 percent of Americans who were married have considered divorce or been divorced; 39 percent of Americans believe that "till death do us part" is an outdated concept; 31 percent of currently married Americans have cheated on their spouses; 43 percent of married respondents aren't sure they would marry the same person if they had it to do over; 25 percent would abandon their families for $10 million.

RELIGION

Religion has little impact on the moral life of the majority of Americans. Most Americans aren't sure of their church's position on the great moral issues of the day—from school busing, capital punishment, book-banning, affirmative action, birth control, homosexuality, teaching creationism in the schools, pornography, and premarital sex to civil rights. Eighty-four percent of Americans report being willing to violate the teachings of their own faith if those teachings conflict with their own personal sense of right and wrong. And although we are a predominantly Christian nation, only 11 percent report believing in all 10 of the Ten Commandments (42 percent of African-Americans report believing in five or fewer).

WORK

The work ethic has given way to hedonism, and the spirit of capitalism has gone awry. Sixty-four percent of Americans confess to malingering, procrastinating, or abusing alcohol or drugs in the workplace; 33 percent conduct personal chores on company time;

fewer than one in four Americans report giving their maximum effort at work. Americans report goofing-off about 20 percent of the time while at work; only 24 percent of Americans report that they work in order to realize their full potential (the rest do it for the money); 13 percent regularly leave work early and 10 percent regularly arrive late.

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Our public institutions have lost much of their legitimacy. From 1973/74 to 1989, the proportion of Americans expressing a great deal of confidence in each of the institutions below declined by the amount shown:

- organized religion (-55 percent);
- organized labor (-50 percent);
- educational institutions (-39 percent);
- television (-39 percent);
- the press (-35 percent);
- the executive branch (-31 percent);
- the Congress (-26 percent);
- major companies (-23 percent).

LEADERSHIP

We face a serious crisis in leadership. Seventy-two percent of Americans do not think that any public figure provides moral leadership; 68 percent cannot name a single American leader they admire; 70 percent do not think America has any more heroes; 68 percent do not think there are any adequate role models in public life for their children to follow.

THE AGE OF MORAL AMBIGUITY

More and more, the isolated individual, disconnected from external moral reference points, has come to view himself/herself as the sole arbiter of moral life. In fact, 93 percent of all Americans report that they alone determine what is moral in their lives.

As a consequence of this lack of external structures of moral support, Americans are increasingly coming to view the great moral issues of the day as "gray" issues without a clear right and wrong. More than a third of Americans believes there is no clear right or wrong position when it comes to the following issues: affirmative action (54 percent); creationism in schools (52 percent); premarital sex (52 percent); the right to die (44 percent); school busing (44 percent); homosexuality (43 percent); flag burning (38 percent); pornography (38 percent); capital punishment (37 percent).

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN A POST-MORAL SOCIETY

One need no longer read Dostoevsky, Camus, or Genet to probe the significance of crime and punishment in everyday life. One is tempted to speculate that a decline of moral support-structures and the rise of the self have led to a society in which it is increasingly difficult to maintain social order. If individuals no longer believe in the moral legitimacy of the community, what is there to keep them from flouting its rules? We found that systematic rule-breaking was one such consequence.

Crime has become so rampant, as to be a part of everyday life: fully 60 percent of Americans have been the victim of at least one crime in their lifetimes, and fully 35 percent have been victimized more than once; 39 percent of Americans readily confess to having committed some kind of crime themselves.

Violence has become so commonplace as to have become "normalized" to an extent. Sixty-four percent of Americans believe the use of physical force is sometimes justified; 59 percent admit to having used physical force on another person; fewer than half (45 percent) of those who have used physical force regret it; 12 percent of Americans report having injured someone enough to send them to the hospital; 9 percent have threatened someone with a knife (6 percent used it); 9 percent have threatened someone with a gun (4 percent used it).

THE END OF CHILDHOOD

In our society, childhood has traditionally been a time of innocence. No one aspect stood for childhood innocence more than sexual innocence and naivete. Even Freud, who placed sexuality at the very

heart of his world view, attributed a period of "dormancy" to childhood sexuality. However, today, we are facing a radically new phenomenon: we are living in an age of sexually precocious children.

Discussions of the "sexual revolution" go back to the coming of age of baby boomers in the 1960s. Indeed, our data found that baby boomers were significantly less likely to have been virgins when they married (29 percent), than either their parents' generation (42 percent) or their grandparents (41 percent). Clearly, baby boomers had disconnected sex from marriage.

However, baby boomers do not report having started sexual activity at an earlier age than either their parents or grandparents. The baby boomers and their parents both became sexually active at about the same age; the only difference is that baby boomer's parents married younger. For both baby boomers and their parents, only a relative few had become sexually active by age 13 (less than 5 percent). What is so striking about those beween the ages of 18 and 24 is that more than one in five has lost their virginity by age 13 and almost two-thirds by age 16.

A THOUSAND POINTS OF DARKNESS: THE PRIVATIZATION OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

With the end of the 1980s, we found Americans retreating into an ever-more private and isolated existence, and are becoming less willing to confront the social issues and social problems of the day. Poverty and race are being redefined as private problems, more the fault of those "afflicted" than social problems that need to be addressed by society as a whole. Forty-two percent of Americans believe that the poor are poor because they are lazy or because of other faults of their own. And when it comes to race, Americans clearly believe that the problem lies with African-Americans and not with white America: two in three believe that African-Americans have the same opportunities as whites; 68 percent believe that some races are harder working than others.

FROM RELIGION TO SEX

The Myth of Moral Decline

EVERETT C. LADD

The moral state of the United States is the subject of enormous attention and concern. Although this has been a recurring theme throughout American history, there is some indication that concern has grown in our own time. Rushworth M. Kidder, President of the Institute for Global Ethics, recently noted in *The Public Perspective* that dozens of ethics organizations are springing up across the nation, hundreds of executive ethics seminars are conducted every year, and thousands of students are participating in character education at school. The press is now full of discussions of ethics issues. Kidder cites data showing, for example, that between 1969 and 1989 the number of stories found under "ethics" in the *New York Times* index increased four-fold.

Survey data also indicate that the proportion of the public troubled by what they perceive to be serious deficiencies in the moral state of the nation is not only large but expanding. True, throughout the span of our history for which we have survey data, large majorities have expressed dissatisfaction with such matters as the honesty and standards of behavior of their fellow citizens. Nonetheless, the proportions today are at the highest levels we have seen. For instance, in 1938, when asked if the "general morals" of young unmarried people were better or worse than they had been 10 years earlier, 42 percent of those interviewed by the Roper Organization said they were worse, compared to just 13 percent who said they were better. In 1987, 60 percent of those interviewed in a Yankelovich Clancy Shulman poll said teenagers were "less moral in their behavior at present than when [the respondents] were growing up," while only 11 percent described young people as more moral. Every time we

have located a pair of queries like this from the 1930s-50s span on the one hand, and from the 1980s-90s on the other, we have found the same pattern: Majorities always profess to see decline in moral standards, but the majority is larger in the contemporary period than earlier.

Again and again, polls show Americans expressing this kind of values nostalgia. But has there in fact been a deterioration in moral conduct in the United States, as compared to, say, the 1950s? Ethical norms and moral conduct are of great importance to the health of the American society and polity, and it certainly matters which way the great engines of contemporary society are pulling us with regard to them. Yet for all the importance of this question and the attention it has received, the data are not as clear as the polls might suggest.

THERE'S ALWAYS SO MUCH WRONG

One obstacle standing in the way of productive analysis involves the fact that at every point in time, in the view of many thoughtful people, ethical standards and moral conduct leave much to be desired. Michael Josephson and his colleagues have attempted empirical work on Americans' moral judgments and behavior which, they say, reveals that a "disturbingly high proportion of young people regularly engage in dishonest and irresponsible behavior." What an extraordinary way to put it! It is, after all, a little late in human history to present as a finding that a disturbingly high proportion of people variously err and sin. The Josephson study documents that many young people are struggling and stumbling ethically, but it tells us nothing about whether things are actually getting better or worse.

Is the contemporary U.S. beset with moral decline? If we had a "Morality Index," on which 100 was utopia and zero the modern equivalent of Sodom and Gomorrah, and found the U.S. standing at 50, that should be cause for national concern. But it would be one thing if we also found that the country's position on this mythic measure had been 80 in 1867, 70 in 1917, and 60 in 1957, quite another if we found that it had been hovering around 50 in each of those earlier years.

We don't have such an index, nor do we have the kind of imaginative and thorough data-gathering such a measure would

require. We only know that moral conduct today is "deficient." I have no intention of making light of this when I note that part of the reason we think today's problems are so pressing is that they are the ones we face. Since we can do absolutely nothing about previous sins, present problems are the "worst" in the sense that they are the ones that occupy us and require our efforts at remedy.

THE PERMANENT ANXIETY OF A CREEDAL NATION

Our contemporary ethical concerns are drawn, in part, from the recognition that a democratic polity cannot survive without a moral and virtuous citizenry. Calvin Coolidge told a throng assembled to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence that America's founders "were a people who came under the influence of a great spiritual development and acquired a great moral power." He went on to say that "unless we cling to that, all our material property, overwhelming though it may appear, will turn to a barren sceptre in our grasp.... We must cultivate the reverence which they had for things that are holy. We must follow the spiritual and moral leadership which they showed." In our own day, scholars such as James Q. Wilson and Irving Kristol have written persuasively on the relationship between a nation's moral health and the successful operations of its social and political institutions.

But the contemporary ethical concerns that occupy us are also grounded in a distinctive and recurring American sense of moral anxiety. James Bryce begins his monumental study of American life, *The American Commonwealth* (1889), by observing that throughout his travels across the country he, like other European visitors before him, was constantly greeted by the query, "What do you think of our institutions?" Why was it so prevalent? he wondered, considering that Europeans did not usually care what foreigners thought of their countries. Bryce's explanation of why this question came up so often in the U.S. was that American political ideas and institutions were something "invented" rather than "grown." They represent an elaborate, highly self-conscious experiment—one whose ultimate conclusion seemed to have importance beyond America's shores.

Bryce is surely right, so far as he goes, but probably something else was also at work. Americans worried and wondered about their

basic ideas and institutions in Bryce's day, and they do so today in a somewhat different but nonetheless intense fashion, because the American nation has no substantial existence apart from these ideas and institutions. The U.S. isn't, as most countries are, based on a particular ethnicity; rather, it is one erected upon and around a political philosophy. The French, Germans, English, *et al.*, have had debates aplenty about what political values and programs their nations should pursue; but no one has thought that the existence of France or Germany or England was predicated upon the validity of any one set of political or philosophical values. Yet America's national existence was, and to a considerable extent still is.

John Adams, the country's second president, wrote in 1818 that a new American nation had emerged long before the war with England. It sprang from a revolution, he argued, "in the minds and hearts of the people," one which involved a sweeping ideological transformation—of "the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections" of the inhabitants of the 13 colonies. A new American nation, rejecting aristocratic institutions and values and replacing them with an egalitarian and individualistic order, had emerged bit by bit over the century and a half following the first settlements in Massachusetts and Virginia. The Declaration of 1776 proclaimed the formal independence of a new nationality that had already been established philosophically.

Lincoln repeatedly made a similar argument in his great speeches from 1857 on. America was a nation built on political ideals, set forth most notably in the Declaration. This explains why he saw in slavery such an enormous threat. It was more than an odious institution that wreaked great harm on those subjected to it. National acceptance of the ideas underlying slavery—of the sort Chief Justice Roger Taney urged in his majority opinion in *Scott v. Sanford*—would entirely destroy the nation founded on the Declaration's ideals. American nationality was primarily a moral idea, not the result of a legal writ. And as Lincoln warned, quoting Scripture: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The English philosopher and writer G. K. Chesterton grasped the central importance of American values to American nationality itself in *What I Saw in America*. Following a visit to the U.S. in 1921,

Chesterton compared the American system to the Spanish Inquisition. At first glance, that was a dubious compliment—but Chesterton in fact intended it as a compliment. "The American Constitution," he wrote, "does resemble the Spanish Inquisition in this:"

> That it is founded on a creed. America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature.

It is, then, the large "constitutional" role that "American values" play in defining American nationality itself, I believe, that leaves so many of us so much of the time in a state of anxiety about the capacity of these values to endure. Chesterton wrote that "the experiment of a democracy of diverse races...has been compared to a melting pot." That implies, he went on, that the pot must be strong and durable. It must not melt. "The original shape was traced on the lines of Jeffersonian democracy; and it will remain in that shape until it becomes shapeless. America invites all men to become citizens; but it implies the dogma that there is such a thing as citizenship." The melting pot of American citizenship requires a public with considerable virtue. A decline in the moral standards would surely leave the American experiment in grave jeopardy. Little wonder that we're constantly worried about the possibility of a decline.

CHANGING STANDARDS AND PERCEPTIONS

Assessing the moral state of the union is made more difficult by the fact that our standards keep changing. Moreover, the institutions through which the public gains a sense of the moral state of the nation now tend to portray social and political institutions in a negative light.

As to changing standards, consider the area of race relations. Surely we have made enormous strides along this dimension of national moral conduct since the 1850s. We have ended slavery and, all too belatedly, we must acknowledge, eradicated the system of gross exclusion of African-Americans from various facilities and entitlements, known as "Jim Crow." Survey data on racial attitudes and various behavioral data alike attest to the spread and strengthening of public support for extending to African-Americans the

Declaration's lofty insistence that all people are created equal and possess inalienable rights.

But in assessing moral conduct, we seem largely to ignore this historical perspective. Is America now living in satisfactory accord with the norm set forth in the Declaration of Independence and in other statements of national ideals? Of course not. But today's shortcomings are the ones that now occupy us—even when we recognize marked gains from times past. *We expect more of ourselves in this area than we did 50 or 150 years ago—and we come up short.*

Media studies have for some time examined the issue of political negativism or cynicism, suggesting that press bias results not so much from political preferences as from professional outlook. The press often portrays various national institutions as seamy and even unworthy of support. Austin Ranney argues that there is not so much "a political bias in favor of liberalism or conservatism, as a structural bias..." which encourages a cynical and excessively manipulative view of politics. Michael Robinson's research has supported the view that the press fosters a pervasive cynicism:

> Events are frequently conveyed by television news through an inferential structure that often injects a negativistic, contentious, or anti-institutional bias. These biases, frequently dramatized by film portrayals of violence and aggression, evoke images of American politics and social life which are inordinately sinister and despairing.

In addition to America's historic sense of creedal anxiety, then, recent factors, such as changing standards of justice and press negativism, may be encouraging an even more pessimistic view. At the very least, all these factors suggest there is reason to doubt that the apparently widespread sense of moral decline is simply a reflection of the actual progression.

WHAT THE DATA ACTUALLY SHOW

The various factors sketched above present terrible difficulties for the literature which purports to provide thoughtful guidance on the matter of which way we are headed. As a result, analysts often seem to be led to the conclusion that deterioration is occurring, even when available information is inconclusive or flat-out says otherwise.

When we look at the status of religion in America and a number of moral norms, it is not at all clear America is in moral decline. The country's religious life, for instance, is often considered a moral barometer. A decade ago, I was asked to prepare a conference paper reviewing what surveys had to say about the religious beliefs and practices of the American people. As the Reverend Richard John Neuhaus observed at the New York Conference, the conventional wisdom had it that "America is or is rapidly becoming a secular society."

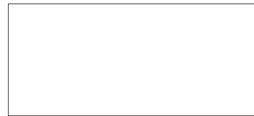
I began my paper by acknowledging that on this subject, as on so many, there are severe limits as to what polls can tell us. They are blunt instruments, unable to help us much with the searching, the ambiguity, the depth and subtlety that necessarily surround any basic set of human needs and values. Nevertheless, the story told by survey research was remarkably clear and unambiguous with regard to the general character and directions of Americans' religious life: namely, the U.S. is distinguished from most other advanced industrial democracies by the persisting strength of religious beliefs and of organized religious practice. As Seymour Martin Lipset argued in *The First New Nation*, published in 1963, "the one empirical generalization which does seem justified about American religion is that from the early nineteenth century down to the present, the United States has been among the most religious countries in the Christian world." Similarly, James Reichley concluded his examination of *Religion in American Life* with the assessment that "Americans remain, despite recent incursions of civil humanism among cultural elites and relentless promotion of egoism by advertising and entertainment media, overwhelmingly, in Justice [William O.] Douglas's words, 'a religious people.'"

My own assessments of available survey information have supported these observations. Americans continue, for example, in virtually unchanging proportions to describe religion as important in their own lives (Figure 1). The proportion describing themselves as members of a church or synagogue, while down just a bit from the levels of the 1930s-50s, has, on the whole, remained both high and constant. Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center have continued to find overwhelming majorities of the public

Figure 1
Americans Continue to Describe Religion as Important in Their Lives

Question: How important would you say religion is in your own life — very important, fairly important, or not very important?

Source: The Gallup Organization



describing the Bible as either "the actual word of God...to be taken literally, word for word," (the response of 33 percent in 1993); or as "the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word" (49 percent stating this). Only 15 percent categorized the Bible as "an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men." Also, prayer remains integral to Americans, even among young adults and high-income citizens (65 percent and 69 percent of whom, respectively, agreed with the statement that "prayer is an important part of my daily life").

Perhaps most striking is the extent to which the U.S. differs religiously from other advanced industrial democracies. In 1981, Gallup conducted a series of surveys cross-nationally which found 79 percent of Americans saying they gained strength from religion, compared to 46 percent in Britain, 44 percent of West Germans, and 37 percent of the French. Similarly, 84 percent of those interviewed in the U.S. said they believed in heaven, as against 57 percent in Britain, 31 percent in West Germany, 27 percent in France, and 26 percent in Sweden.

This isn't to say that there have been no changes in the structure of American religious life. We know, for example, that over the last 30 to 40 years, while the proportion of the population which is

"churched" has remained basically constant, the denominational mix has changed quite strikingly. Sociologist Benton Johnson notes that American religious groups have differed greatly in terms of membership gains and losses. He points out that evangelical churches have prospered even as main-line Protestant denominations have suffered serious membership losses during this period.

Taking a longer view of American religious experience from the eighteenth century to the present, we see many substantial shifts. Interesting enough, though, these shifts are more often than not in the opposite direction from those assumed in most commentary. That is, *the long movement over time in the U.S. seems clearly to be toward religion*, not away from it. Pointing to the decline of organized atheism and church membership gains in the nineteenth century, sociologist Theodore Caplow suggested:

> One concedes too much when one says we're just about as religious as we used to be. We may be a good deal more religious than we used to be.

Yet, while virtually all the scholars who have reviewed the systematic data which are available to us have reached the same conclusions on American religious experience, most of the group assembled at the New York conference strongly rejected the idea that American religious commitments are notably strong and enduring. For example, George Marsden, a leading student of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, dismissed most of the findings on religious belief as essentially meaningless because, as he saw it, they picked up only an insubstantial, superficial, essentially trivial commitment. "As you know," Marsden argued, "the common comment on fundamentalism is that it is just secularism in disguise. It is a way of endorsing a materialistic, self-centered lifestyle. And that's something that could be said about a lot of American Christianity."

Marsden brought up the often-cited remark which is attributed (perhaps entirely incorrectly, according to some historians) to Dwight Eisenhower. Ike is reputed to have said: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply religious faith—and I don't care what it [that faith] is." This hollow, instrumental approach to faith encapsulates, Marsden argued, what's wrong with religion in the U.S.

Political scientist Stanley Rothman had a perspective similar to Marsden's:

> In a public opinion survey people are asked, "Do you believe in hard work?" Sure, everyone may mouth that. But there's a difference between saying that and actually doing it.... And I would say the same thing about religious attitudes among the population as a whole. Modernization of the west has led to the erosion of the traditional structures and beliefs...now there is evidence that people no longer take religion so seriously, unless they redefine it in some ways. I think there has been a general redefinition, not among the whole population, but among substantial segments of the population, so as to fit religion into their own wishes and desires.... Unfortunately this cannot be proven with data.

And so it went. Most of the participants were convinced that in a deeper sense, whatever the numbers seem to show, religious belief is in precipitous decline in modern America.

Nor is religion the only area in which our perceptions of deterioration conflict with other measures of experience. While there are important areas where Americans are in deep disagreement about what constitutes the proper moral or ethical standards—the case of abortion is certainly a prime example—far more often than not the data point to broad agreement on the norm. As Figure 2 shows, norms condemning various forms of cheating, lying, and stealing seem firmly entrenched across most of the population. If we are going to hell in a handbasket, it's not because the preponderance of Americans have abandoned their attachment to many of the older verities.

But does this simply suggest that hypocrisy is on the rise—that we have become more inclined to act contrary to our professed standards? Not necessarily. Take the case of cheating. A lot of people, including many educators, seem to believe that cheating is on the rise—even though young Americans continue to condemn cheating. But many of the best survey data available to us say otherwise. The Gallup Youth Surveys, for example, show that many more young people describe cheating at their own schools as *more infrequent* now than three decades ago. The proportion saying that they themselves have cheated at some time or another, while high, seems to be decreasing (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Professed Norms Are Strong and Conventional

Tax Fraud

Question: Do you feel it is wrong if...a taxpayer does not report all of his income in order to pay less income taxes?

Wrong: 94 % Not Wrong: 4 %

Source: Survey by NORC for the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Feb.-April 1991.

Question: Have you ever cheated on your federal income taxes, or not?

No: 95% Yes: 4%

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, March 28-30, 1991.

Lying

Question: Do you think it is sometimes justified to lie to friends or to family members or do you think lying is never justified?

Never: 73% Depends: 10%

Justified: 18%

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, December 7-9, 1992.

Extramarital Affairs

Question: Do you think it is always wrong or sometimes okay for...a married person to have sex with someone other than his/her spouse?

Always Wrong: 87% Sometimes OK: 11 %

Source: Survey by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman for Time/CNN, June 4-5, 1991.

Question: (If ever married) Have you ever had sex with someone other than your husband or wife while you were married?

No: 83% Yes: 17%

Source: Survey by NORC-GSS, February-April 1993.

Stealing

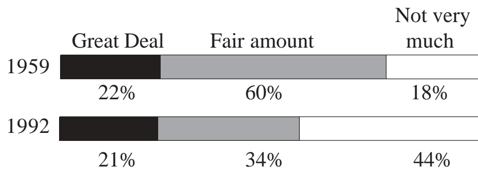
Question: The... eighth commandment is...Do not steal...Does the way you live these days completely satisfy...or not at all satisfy that commandment?

Completely: 86% Not at All: 2%

Source: Survey by Barna Research Group, January 1992.

Figure 3: Cheating in the Schools and Sex

Question: At your school.... would you say that there is a great deal [of cheating], a fair amount, or not very much cheating? Have you, yourself, ever cheated on a test or exam?



Percent saying "have cheated":

1978: 62% 1981: 66% 1986: 59% 1992: 46%

Question: ...Do you think it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage, or not?

	Wrong	Not Wrong
1991:	**40%**	**54%**
1969:	**68%**	**21%**

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, Gallup Youth Surveys, latest that of 1992.

We know that people often fail to live up to standards to which they express adherence. But we also know that norms matter—that is, they actually regulate conduct, if imperfectly—and that large changes in conduct rarely, if ever, take place without correspondingly large changes in professed norms. Consider, for example, premarital sexual relations. Behavior has clearly shifted mightily in the "sexual revolution" of the last several decades, but so too has the professed norm (Figure 3). When there is a problem, as in the latter area, the survey findings readily pick it up.

One of the things that seem to be bothering Americans most is the sense that the old-time standards-setting, which was centered around the institutions of family and church, is being replaced by new ones, centered in remote and morally vacuous institutions, such as popular music, TV, and movies. Data presented in Figure 4 demonstrate this concern clearly. But as we see in the figure, other data show that most of us say that, for us personally, the old order of standards-setting still holds. Furthermore, a Roper Organization survey for *Good Housekeeping* in 1991 found that 86 percent of women shared the values of their parents, 10 percent had somewhat different values, and only 4 percent

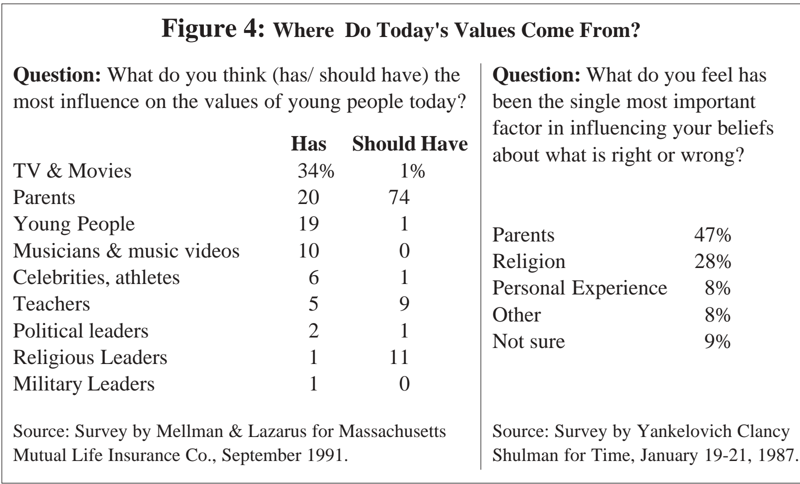


Figure 4: Where Do Today's Values Come From?

Question: What do you think (has/ should have) the most influence on the values of young people today?

	Has	Should Have
TV & Movies	34%	1%
Parents	20	74
Young People	19	1
Musicians & music videos	10	0
Celebrities, athletes	6	1
Teachers	5	9
Political leaders	2	1
Religious Leaders	1	11
Military Leaders	1	0

Source: Survey by Mellman & Lazarus for Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co., September 1991.

Question: What do you feel has been the single most important factor in influencing your beliefs about what is right or wrong?

Parents	47%
Religion	28%
Personal Experience	8%
Other	8%
Not sure	9%

Source: Survey by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman for Time, January 19-21, 1987.

had very different values. In the same survey, 85 percent of the women who were mothers thought their children would have the same values.

Once again, there is a striking tension between the perceived deterioration in moral norms and conduct nationally on the one hand, and the sense of strength and continuity drawn from personal experience on the other. We see this again and again across many areas. Thus 63 percent of respondents in a Gallup survey of November 1992 said that "religion as a whole" is losing its influence on American life, while only 27 percent described religion's influence as increasing. As we have seen, though, a great deal of the data indicates that religion in America continues to flourish.

INDIVIDUALISM: STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS?

The moral shortcomings of this society often grow out of the same elements that enhance national life. The positives and negatives are frequently but flip sides of a single structure of national values. As many analysts from Alexis de Tocqueville on down to the present have observed, the core of the sociopolitical ideology on which the U.S. was founded is a uniquely insistent and far-reaching individualism—a view of the individual person which gives unprecedented weight to his or her choices, interests, and claims. This distinctive individualism has always enriched the moral life of the country in important regards and posed serious challenges to it in yet others.

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* has seemed so rich and fruitful an account of the nation's social dynamic precisely because Tocqueville saw individualism as a two-edged sword. He saw, on the positive side, the strength in the U.S. of voluntary associations that had grown out of a self-confident individualism. Such perspectives incline one to give money to charities, to participate in all manner of voluntary service, and to join with others of like mind.

"The citizen of the United States," Tocqueville wrote, "is taught from infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he claims its assistance only when he is unable to do without it." Joining together with other like-minded persons to meet common needs and attack common problems expresses a sense of individual responsibility and self-confidence. In an especially memorable passage, Tocqueville wrote:

> If a stoppage occurs in a thoroughfare and the circulation of vehicles is hindered, the neighbors immediately form them-

selves into a deliberative body; and this extemporaneous assembly gives rise to an executive power which remedies the inconvenience before anybody has thought of recurring to a pre-existing authority superior to that of the persons immediately concerned.... In the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality, and religion. There is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society.

An abundance of data from our own time—see Figure 5—show that this dynamic sense of individual responsibility and capabilities has continued. Philanthropy has also increased dramatically: in 1955, individuals gave more than $5 billion to charity; this amount rose to

Figure 5: **Reported Involvement in Charitable and/or Social Service Activities**

Question: Do you...happen to be involved in any charity or social service activities, such as helping the poor, the sick, or the elderly?

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization.

$102 billion in 1990 (a rate of increase that outpaced inflation significantly). Surveys suggest that, in recent years, the proportion of the populace giving of its time for charitable and social service activities has actually been increasing. The moral life of the nation is thus strengthened.

Individualism has contributed much historically to the vitality of American family life and created a distinctively American type of family. Children, nineteenth century visitors often remarked, didn't occupy a subordinate place—"to be seen and not heard"—like their European counterparts, but were exuberant, vociferous, spoiled

participants. Similarly, visiting commentators often remarked on the effects of America's pervasive individualism on the status of women. Bryce, for example, saw women's rights more widely recognized in the U.S. than in Europe. This had resulted, he argued, because "the root idea of democracy cannot stop at defining men as male human beings, anymore than it could ultimately stop at defining them as white human beings.... Democracy is in America more respectful of the individual...than it has shown itself in Continental Europe, and this regard for the individual enured to the benefit of women."

But just as the country's demanding individualism has liberated individuals to achieve productive lives for themselves and contribute to a dynamic public life, so it has also been a source of distinctive problems. Many analysts have argued that these problems with the American ideology are evident not so much in the fact that these ideals are sometimes unachieved, as that their achievement may create terrible difficulties.

In the nineteenth century, for example, visitors to the U.S. often came away arguing that individualistic America was a place of stifling conformity. Tocqueville's description of "tyranny of the majority" is the most famous instance:

> I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America.... In America the majority raises formidable barriers around the liberty of opinion; within these barriers an author may write what he pleases, but woe to him if he goes beyond them. Not that he is in danger of an auto-da-fé, but he is exposed to continued obliquy and persecution.... Monarchs had, so to speak, materialized oppression; the democratic republics of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the mind as the will which it is intended to coerce.

Cut loose from secure social status anchored in the corporate institutions of traditional society, Americans were, Tocqueville thought, especially exposed to pressures to conform to majority standards.

Present-day critics of the "dark side" of individualist America charge that individualism has come to emphasize the gratification of the self over the needs of various important social institutions including, above all, the family. In *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Robert Bellah and colleagues grant that

"our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society in the world, are closely linked to our individualism." Moreover, America cannot abandon its individualism, for "that would mean for us to abandon our deepest identity."

Still, Bellah *et al.* insist, "some of our deepest problems both as individuals and as a society are also closely linked to our individualism." It has become far too unrestrained. Historically in the U.S., the natural tendencies within individualism toward narrow self-service were mitigated by the strength of religion and the ties of the local community. No longer. In their view, individualism has been transmogrified by a radical insistence upon individual autonomy, so profoundly corrosive of the family and other collective institutions that depend upon substantial subordination of individual claims for social goods.

The recent historical record suggests that neither the boosters nor the knockers of individualism quite have it right. On the positive side, factors like the continued strength of voluntarism in America signal the degree to which individualism strengthens moral conduct by stressing individual responsibility and encouraging the view that "what I do" can really matter. Also, the individualistic ethic in America has fueled important advances for women and African-Americans under the banner of the "inalienable rights" to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." On the other hand, that ethic constantly runs the risk of leaving the individual far too radically autonomous. It suggests that whatever serves a person's sense of his/her rights and entitlements is, miraculously, good for the society or, at the least, something which the society may not lightly challenge.

But the down-side of contemporary individualism does not quite play itself out in the way that recent arguments suggest. Individualism does not necessarily equal "selfishness." Rather, it seems to be that Americans are construing their own self-interest too narrowly. Hence, many of the men and women implicated in the rise in divorce and single-parent households—which has posed difficulties for many children and communities—would seem to have a "narrow" sense of self-interest, which is not serving them or their children very well. They need to be reminded, as Tocqueville argued, that self-interest is

only justified when it is "properly understood" in a communal context, which is to say that individuals can only flourish in robust communities.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that "society is a wave." He evoked this image to call attention to gain and loss often being parts of a single process. The wave breaks forward on the beach, and then at once forcefully draws away. In this fashion, we find societal developments which are widely seen enhancing a country's moral life at once delivering new challenges to it. So is it with individualism in the U.S.

Has there been a deterioration of moral conduct? Probably not. But we have been given ample proof that extending commitment to our national idea, which centers around a profound individualism, is by no means an unmixed blessing. As the U.S. has progressed in recognizing the worth and the claims of people previously excluded from the Declaration's promise, it has also encouraged tendencies which have destructive possibilities, liable to see the individual as too radically autonomous and leave him too narrowly self-serving. In seeking to improve the moral conduct of the nation, earlier generations of Americans have had to build on the positive elements of the country's individualist ethic, so as to curb its dark side. Ours is surely no exception.

Stern About Television

In a recent *Washington Post* interview, Howard Stern confided that even he exerts some control over what sort of television programming his children are allowed to watch. In fact, among the materials denied his children are his own television show, and his recently published book, *Private Parts*.

Says Stern, "That's not being a hypocrite, it's saying I'm parenting."

AMERICAN DILEMMA

Individualism: A Double-Edged Sword

JEFFREY W. HAYES
and SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET

The decline of contemporary morality in the United States has been heralded by no less of an authority than Pope John Paul II who, during his recent visit to Denver, warned of "a serious moral crisis…already affecting the lives of many young people, leaving them adrift, often without hope, and conditioned to look only for instant gratification." The Pope is certainly not alone in his admonitions. The contention that America's problem is fundamentally moral seems to capture a national mood, which hisorian Daniel Boorstin has recently called a "startling renaissance of the New England conscience." Those who argue that today's America is in the throes of moral decline cite a combination of rising crime rates, the dissolution of the traditional family, increased drug use, excessive litigiousness, and the spread of relativism to bolster their case. And their argument seems to be winning the day, for whether or not America's moral fabric is actually coming apart at the seams, there is no denying that the impression of moral decline is pervasive.

The most forceful attempts to explain America's moral decline have held excessive individualism responsible for the rending of the nation's social and political fabric and the corresponding decline of moral norms. And to be sure, individualism is a significant force in American culture, one with widespread impact on Americans' views of their social obligations. It seems intuitive, therefore, that if morality is actually decaying, this elemental aspect of American ideology must somehow be playing a role.

It would be a mistake, however, to accept the argument of moral decline without taking a second look. While these social trends are

disturbing and some of them recent, others have surprisingly long-standing roots in our society. Still others have been granted exaggerated importance in the quest to demonstrate our decay. Moreover, even if the case for such a decline were as strong as sometimes supposed, the connection between that decline and American individualism is far from evident.

In reality, American morality is quite complex, particularly because of paradoxes within our culture that permit pernicious and beneficial social phenomena to arise simultaneously from the same basic value. That is, American individualism is something of a double-edged sword: it fosters a high sense of personal responsibility, independent initiative and voluntarism, even as it encourages self-serving behavior, atomism, and a disregard for communal goods. More specifically, American individualism threatens traditional forms of community morality, and thus has historically promoted particularly virulent strains of social problems. At the same time, it represents a tremendous moral asset, encouraging the self-reflection necessary for responsible judgment and fostering the strength of voluntary communal and civic bonds. To argue, therefore, that individualism has caused systematic moral decline ignores the extent to which American morality itself is beholden to the strength of individualism.

Emphasizing moral individualism, however, should not imply that the individual is the historical starting point for either society or morality. Humans are not solitary creatures with no need for companionship or support, and their cooperation requires trust between actors that is only possible if everyone exercises a minimum of self-restraint and goodwill; morality is both the cause and effect of this trust. Still, the exercise of morality in the context of modern American society requires an account of the role of individualism as a moral force.

MORAL DECLINE OR MORE OF THE SAME?

To some extent, perceptions of American moral decline result from a persistent moralism within our culture that leads Americans to evaluate our nation and society according to pure ideals. No country could ever measure up to our standards. Flooded with reports of rapid social, economic, and political changes, we look for

an overarching explanation in the failure to live up to our moral ideals.

Though historically moralistic, America's egalitarian and meritocratic foundations tend to undercut just those institutions that sustain the values that so concern us. The U.S. was born out of a revolution that sharply weakened the hierarchically rooted community values of the European Old World, and enormously strengthened individualistic, egalitarian, and anti-statist ones. In the Old World, an aristocratic upper class dictated to the lower classes most social and economic norms. America, however, had no stable ruling class to promote such standards of moral conduct and fair play. Social problems have, therefore, always been ascribed to the lack of stable ethical standards. If the Pope stresses American social developments as evidence of an emerging crisis of ethics, he is not alone in American history.

THE MORALITY OF CRIME

Partisans of the so-called decline of morality cite rising crime rates as elemental to their argument. Between 1960 and 1989, homicides in America rose from 5.1 to 8.7 per 100,000 per year, while larcenies increased from 1,726 to 5,077. Sociologist Charles Derber posits the cyclical recurrence of periods of what he terms "wilding," in which lawlessness, disorder, and immorality threaten the stability of society. According to Derber, "Wilding is American individualism running amok." In recent years, Americans' perceptions of increasing lawlessness have fed fears that civil society is collapsing.

Crime is a problem to which distinctive American cultural traits (individualism among them) have certainly contributed. Before concluding simply that individualism causes crime, however, it is important to understand the relationship between crime, morality, and individualism in American life. In explaining lawlessness in American history, historian Robert Merton stresses that American society places a premium on economic success and upward mobility. "The *moral mandate* to achieve success," he argues, "thus exerts pressure to succeed, by fair means if possible and by foul means if necessary."

Describing the tendency to commit illegal acts for socioeconomic advancement as a "moral mandate" is seemingly oxymoronic. But

work and economic success in America are, as Max Weber emphasized, enshrined in the country's Protestant sectarian traditions. Higher crime rates may represent the underside of this work ethic: those without ready access to capital, education, and good jobs turn to "foul means" to make it.

DRUGS: NOT A NEW PROBLEM

Drug use is another societal problem many attribute to moral failure. Yet it too is nothing new. From widespread alcohol consumption in early America to, as J. Hector St. John Crèvecouer comments in his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, the adoption by the women of Nantucket of "the Asiatic custom of taking a dose of opium every morning," Americans have not historically been morally above the use of drugs. As technology gives modern society more sophisticated and different narcotics—from morphine during the Civil War to cocaine in the late nineteenth century to "free-base" cocaine in the 1980s—some Americans have always used them.

Of particular concern have been media reports of growing drug abuse in the nation's schools. But the proportion of youth who report using illicit drugs appears to be on a long-term decline. National survey data compiled by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan reveal that marijuana use has fallen since 1978, and the percentage of twelfth graders who claimed to have used any illicit drug steadily dropped from a peak of 66 percent in 1981 to 41 percent, the lowest level since the survey began. Alcohol consumption by minors has also dropped, daily drinking falling by one-half from its 1979 peak of 7 percent of respondents.

The common stereotype of our morally directionless youth is contradicted not only by the lower percentages trying drugs but also by the increased disapproval high-schoolers express toward virtually all types of drug use. These trends are even more striking because they shatter common misconceptions about race and drugs: by almost every measure (use of marijuana, cocaine, LSD, stimulants, barbiturates, crack, alcohol, and cigarettes), African-Americans are consistently less prone to use illicit substances than either whites or Hispanics.

AMERICANS HATE LAWYERS BUT LOVE SUING

Paradoxically, though various forms of illegality thrive in this country, America is a society profoundly rooted in law. A potent orientation toward individual rights continues to shape the attitudes of the population. The complaint that Americans go to court at the drop of a hat has become commonplace, and the American eagerness for legal settlements to our disputes has led many to question the morality of litigation as "our basic form of government." We have more lawyers per capita, more malpractice, and more environmental and occupational safety suits than anywhere else in the world. Is this excessive litigiousness indicative of our inability to deliberate and form amicable agreements amongst ourselves?

Again, however, if American legal habits represent a crisis of morality, it is one we have been experiencing for over 200 years. Tocqueville noted the contractual and litigious character of Americans in the 1830s, as have countless other observers throughout our history.

SEX, ADULTERY, AND FAMILY VALUES

The family has been regarded as a vital source of morality in traditional and modern societies alike. The United States, however, is exceptional in that its rates of divorce and single-parent families rank by far the highest among the advanced societies. This lead in family fragmentation, however, is not a recent development. Heightened divorce rates in the United States go back to the nineteenth century. "At the turn of the twentieth century," writes sociologist David Popenoe, "the United States' divorce rate was already more than twice that of France and England (and about six times the rate of Sweden)."

Not surprisingly, warnings of the extinction of the traditional family have been widespread. Yet the cherished, 1950s-style nuclear family is not as fragile as many believe. Reviewing the current literature on the American family in *The New Republic*, Ann Hulbert argues that alternatives to the traditional family have always existed but "have never beckoned for long as a competing ideal." Hulbert goes on to argue: "The two-parent nuclear family norm, alternately

revered and distrusted as a homogeneous standard, is not ready for replacement.... [T]he two-parent family continues to prevail, though neither widely nor simply."

Though voluminous and often confusing, the data support this assessment: 83 percent of white families and almost half of all African-American families are headed by married couples. Statistics on the state of the African-American family have been especially misleading. For instance, sociologist Christopher Jencks notes that while the growth of illegitimate births as a percentage of all African-American births has increased from one-fifth in the early 1960s to over three-fifths in the 1990s, this is not so much a function of a growth in births among the unmarried as a great decline among the married.

For both African-American and white America, the family structure remains relatively traditional. Compared to citizens of other developed countries, Americans are considerably more likely to marry at some point in their lives, tend to wed at earlier ages, have larger families, and are less likely to engage in non-marital cohabitation. Recent changes to the modern American family have not so much threatened its dissolution as shaped its internal dynamics, which are now defined by the fact that both parents now work outside the home. The nuclear family remains intact even as it undergoes fundamental and complex internal change.

Related to worries over the failure of the family as society's moral anchor are concerns regarding the loosening of sexual mores. Those who believe in the current moral decline view the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s as a nightmare of teen pregnancies and lascivious sexual practices. But this perception is exaggerated. In reviewing new research by the Kinsey Institute, sociologist Andrew Greeley cites surveys that argue against notions of waning American sexual morality. Three-quarters of respondents to a national poll believe that most Americans engage in extra-marital affairs, but nine out of ten say that they personally have been faithful. Greeley concludes that "Americans think that sexual behavior has in general turned permissive, even though they...generally engage in behavior which is in most respects not incompatible with traditional morality."

EVERYTHING'S RELATIVE

Perhaps the most bludgeoned symbol of the decline of morality in America is not a tangible social ill at all, but rather a philosophical trend. Relativism, which posits the ultimate indefensibility of any moral position and the inherent equality of all cultural forms, is widely blamed for the disintegration of societal standards of judgment and behavior. All of the social and economic problems discussed above have been attributed, at one point or another, to America's acceptance of relativism. But, as theorist Jacques Barzun points out, "No idea working alone has ever demoralized society, and there have been plenty of ideas simpler and more exciting than relativism."

Moreover, the evidence does not suggest that Americans view morality as somehow indeterminate or incommensurate. After examining survey results, polling authority Everett Carll Ladd maintains that "more often than not, the data indicate there is in fact considerable agreement on the norm. If we are going to hell in a handbasket, it is not because the preponderance of Americans have abandoned their attachment to some older verities." To the contrary, they are much more likely than Europeans or Canadians to believe in absolute morality. When asked in the 1990 World Values Survey whether absolute or circumstantial standards apply to moral dilemmas, the great majority of Europeans and Canadians replied that morality is circumstantial. Americans, in harmony with their sectarian traditions, are more likely to view morality as absolute. And, as can be documented, religious literalism, inerrantism, and belief in Biblical truths are stronger in America than in the rest of the industrialized world.

INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNAL MORALITIES

So far, we have examined the evidence employed to prove that America is experiencing a moral crisis and found it unconvincing. This is not to say that the country does not face contemporary moral challenges. Clearly it does. The communitarian perspective—represented by the writings of Robert Bellah, Philip Selznick, and Amitai

Etzioni—views the reinvigoration of community as the most promising means of confronting America's moral challenges. The American tradition seems, however, to look elsewhere—to a strategy we will call moral individualism, in which morality is an implementation of individual conscience, requiring self-awareness, active reasoning and engagement in civil society.

First of all, individual morality is an elemental component of the American polity. Political theorist James Rutherford notes: "The individual moral personality is, in fact, the basis of both our constitutional principles and democratic processes. The free and equal individual with moral responsibility is the basis of communal solidarity." This is an important assertion—that community in a democratic, pluralistic society is grounded in the individual as a thinking, moral actor. Individualism is thus not necessarily a force grinding against the bonds of morality; it is rather an integral part of morality in American society.

James Q. Wilson describes human "moral sense" as a set of instinctive responses based on duty or obligation. This argument implies that moral duty flows automatically from communal bonds. But communal morality by itself can be static and unreflective, precisely because it asks individuals to subdue their consciences to the calls of duty. Modern morality is not threatened so much by atomism or collectivism as by reflexivity. When people act unthinkingly, they are more likely to be selfish or cruel. In a world of mobility and pluralism where stability is rare, individuals need to be capable of retaining their moral engagements. A morality grounded in communal obligations cannot be as vitally flexible as one that contains a recognition of individual autonomy.

American classical liberalism seeks to cultivate more in the moral democratic individual than an instinctive sense of duty. Morality is not merely something that seeps out of social relations and infuses individual dispositions, but an active engagement of a changing environment. When faced with a situation calling for personal sacrifice, individuals weigh obligation and their own personal interests. This reasoning process is not a bad thing, for we would not want to live in a world of unreflective altruists or do-gooders willing to sacrifice their lives for anything. As political theorist George Kateb

observes, the democratic individual in America resists "immersion of self, loss of self, in thoughtless, unthinking endeavors." This liberal democratic individual, then, is more prone to engage in moral reflection before taking positions or actions.

The words "moral reflection" are not meant to imply that individuals consciously consider the morality of each act prior to carrying it out. More often than not, they don't. But the morality is rational in the sense that it can be characterized by reasoning, by weighing, by considering. Human behavior is not merely a rote regurgitation of a series of internalized norms, for humans are thinking, sentient beings. People may do unthinking things, but it is their capacity to reflect on such occasions that allows them to adjust their moral characters, learning from selfish acts as well as from benevolences.

INDIVIDUALS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Individualism's moral content is only meaningful insofar as it is expressed within a social context, and that context is civil society. Commentaries derived from Tocqueville on the importance of civil associations permeate liberal treatments of democratic life, which argue that an idealized individualism is more attractive and more readily attainable than any idealized collectivism.

Central to this conception of individualism is the importance of civil society and voluntary associations. Political scientist Zbigniew Rau comments: "Civil society is an association of rational agents who decide for themselves whether to join it and how to act in it.... Therefore, the creation of and participation in civil society are caused by and further promote the reassertion of its members as fully rational and moral agents." These associations—including churches, civic organizations, school boards, and philanthropic volunteer groups—are the lifelong training grounds of moral citizenship. They strengthen moral bonds as they encourage belief in liberal principles. They foster an ethos of civic engagement and understanding of democracy.

But taking part in civil society does not simply mean belonging to a collective entity and thereby embedding oneself within a particular social identity. Rather, it is a dynamic and sometimes problematic

process of engagement between the individual and the association. Nor is civil society a gentle, comfortable sphere of activity. It can be rough and challenging. From a critical perspective, Popenoe correctly analyzes this dimension of civil society: "Outside the moral realm of the family is the world of voluntary friendships, a sphere governed by a marketplace for acceptance. In this outside world, acceptance is a scarce commodity that is allocated through competition; it must be strived for, earned, and maintained, and, hence, is highly conditional." There is not the easy familiarity of community; rather there are relationships to be created and sustained through effort and concern.

Communitarian Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of civil society as "simply an arena in which individuals each pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life" hardly seems capable of providing a moral context for citizens. However, the evidence regarding contemporary America suggests that it is. Individuals continue to take an active role in their local religious communities and to volunteer in a range of secular philanthropic organizations. In 1990, five out of 10 Americans did volunteer work while seven out of 10 gave money to charity. Though the impression of a narcissistic and materialistic society has been promoted by many commentators, sociologist Aileen Ross's assessment that philanthropy is more expansive in America "than in any other part of the world" discounts such a view.

It is important to recognize that American individualism, on balance, strengthens the bonds of civil society rather than weakens them. In his book *Acts of Compassion*, Robert Wuthnow examines national survey data and finds,

> a slight *positive* relationship between... self-oriented values and placing importance on charitable activities. In other words, people who were the most individualistic were also the most likely to value doing things to help others.

Other students of American society have argued that individualism has been important in the continuing vitality of religion and religious organizations. The majority of the population has always belonged to churches, though religion has been a voluntary institution in the United States, not one imposed by the state. Since most Christian sects are congregational, not hierarchical, they have fos-

tered individualistic, egalitarian, and populist values. The emphasis on voluntary associations in America, which impressed Tocqueville and other foreign observers as distinctively American, is linked to this uniquely American system of "voluntary religion." Tocqueville concluded that voluntarism represents a large component of the success of organized religion in America.

And the strength of American religion shows no sign of diminishing. Polls by Gallup and others indicate that Americans are the most church-going in Protestantism and the most fundamentalist in Christendom. Commenting on the continuity of religious practice in America, public opinion expert William Mayer concludes: "When the late 1980s are compared with the late 1930s, church membership may have declined by about 5 percent, while church attendance may actually be *higher* today than it was 50 years ago."

Americans are active and willful civil joiners, genuine in their intentions to contribute to associative action. But since they don't join out of obligation but out of voluntarism, when Americans organize, the collectivity that results is no herd. Rather, it is an aggregate of strong individuals who consciously take responsibility for a fate outside the scope of their individual selves and yet integrally related to those selves as moral agents.

IN CONCLUSION

Though the positive, moral dimensions of individualism in American society have been neglected by many communitarian critics, there are few stark lines separating the liberal and communitarian positions. And communitarianism certainly does not represent a menace to American society, as some liberal commentators have suggested. It is difficult to see how calls for civility and responsibility threaten the integrity of the Constitution. However, such calls, made throughout American history, have usually emanated from associations within American civil society, from the private sphere. Moralizing is more welcome in one's local congregation than from a legislator or political analyst. The former is rooted in a slightly overbearing but well-intentioned concern, while the latter smacks of control.

Communitarians argue that norms of responsibility to the collective whole should somehow be “emphasized” in order to “counterbalance” the destructive tide of individualism and selfishness in modern America. But the scale is not out of whack. Social developments in America have always been wrought with complicated contradictions, successes and failures. The way to ensure that we avoid moral decay is not to alter the culture, but rather to illuminate the ways in which we can use the moral tools with which our individualistic culture provides us so that we can fix the social problems generated by the underside of individualism. Indeed, the problem which communitarians and liberals alike can agree upon is not community vs. individualism, but individualism vs. itself.

Drawing by Signe Wilkinson; © 1993 The Philadelphia Daily News

Saving Lives in Seattle: A Model for Civic Responsibility

SUZANNE GOLDSMITH

Marvin Oberg doesn't remember his death. One moment he was hooking a chain to a huge timber supporting a brick house he and his crew were moving from one site to another. Next thing he knew, he was heading home from the hospital—13 days later.

Oberg, now 69 years old, doesn't remember what happened on that day in August 1989 because he was not alive to experience it. His heart had stopped beating. It happened without warning; he wasn't even lifting anything at the time. "Sudden cardiac death," doctors call it.

Oberg was rescued by a friend and co-worker. For the critical minutes before paramedics could get to the construction site and jump-start Oberg's heart with electrical shocks, Patrick Brosnahan acted as an artificial life-support device, oxygenating Oberg's blood by breathing into his mouth and pumping it through his arteries by compressing his chest manually.

Two years later, it happened again: back on the job, Oberg suffered another heart attack and again Brosnahan saved him. "I guess Marvin's going to be mad," he remarked to Oberg's wife. "I think I broke some ribs this time."

SHOCK THERAPY

At age 65 and with a history of heart problems, Oberg was a prime candidate for cardiac arrest. Patrick Rotter was not. Thirty-one years old, healthy, married and the father of a seven-month-old girl, Rotter never gave his heart a second thought. But he too was rescued from

death through timely cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, administered by two laypeople who were nearby when heart attack struck.

Rotter is a service technician for sophisticated fire alarm and fire suppressor systems. One morning, thinking the circuit had been turned off, he reached into a conduit box at Washington Natural Gas to make a repair and was zapped with 277 volts of electricity.

Charles Bellinger, who was working in an office nearby, heard Rotter scream, and ran in to find him slumped on top of a filing cabinet. Bellinger pulled him to the floor and called for help. Someone else ran off and summoned Traci Jones, the company's corporate fitness instructor, who was teaching an aerobics class down the hall.

Jones had learned CPR as part of her professional training; Bellinger had learned it as preparation for his work as a volunteer firefighter. The two administered CPR together until the medic unit arrived and took over.

Today, Rotter is back on the job. "I'm glad there was somebody there who knew what to do," he said. "I feel a little safer now."

SEATTLE STORY

In many places, both Rotter's and Oberg's cardiac arrests would likely have resulted in death or permanent brain damage. Heart disease is the country's leading killer. Four hundred thousand Americans suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrest each year, and fewer than 3 percent live to be discharged from the hospital. In some cities, the statistics are even more depressing: Chicago has a survival rate of less than 2 percent.

But Rotter and Oberg were lucky; they both live and work in or near Seattle, Washington, where one in five of all cardiac arrest victims survive. Some medical authorities claim CPR's lifesaving record is vastly exaggerated, but one thing is clear: if the rest of the country matched Seattle's heart attack survival rate, as many as 68,000 lives, according to the American Heart Association, might be saved each year.

A number of factors contribute to the Seattle success story, but citizen education and participation are the keys. Residents of Seattle

and the surrounding King County know how to recognize cardiac arrest, they know what to do about it, and they are ready to do it. In 40 percent of cardiac arrests in King County, a citizen is on the scene performing CPR—cardiopulmonary resuscitation—when paramedics arrive. That's twice as high as the rate in other communities where such information is tracked.

This combination of skills, vigilance, and willingness to help is a striking example of a community mobilized for service. It could be instructive as we look for other ways to encourage civic responsibility, and to bind our fragmented cities and communities.

CITIZENS TO THE RESCUE

CPR doesn't usually start an arrested heart. Rather, it serves to keep blood oxygenated and pump it through the body until paramedics can get to the scene and return heart function with drugs or electrical shocks. Without CPR, brain damage sets in within four minutes, and in six minutes the patient can die. Immediate CPR doubles a victim's chance of survival.

But to ensure that the rescue system for cardiac arrest victims works, the public needs to be alert to the problem and willing to help out on every level.

In Seattle, they're willing. Residents voluntarily pay for emergency medical care through a special property tax levy. They donate money to a citizens' foundation that helps to run the popular paramedic service. When the Seattle City Council last year voted to charge a fee for ambulance service, public outrage caused them to scuttle the plan; residents were willing to pay through taxes to keep the medical-emergency safety net available to all.

Best of all, Seattle residents take the time to learn CPR. At least half the adult population of Seattle—and virtually all high school students—have learned the skill.

"Why has there been a receptive audience in Seattle?" muses Dr. Leonard Cobb, chief cardiologist at Harborview Hospital, medical director of Medic I, the city's paramedic corps, and founder and tireless booster of Medic II, the citizen CPR training program. "We're

not sure. It isn't as if this is the only place in the country involved in teaching CPR."

In fact, the need to learn CPR has been widely embraced across the country since the 1960s. The American Red Cross and the American Heart Association have been training people for decades—a total of 15 million people a year.

But in Seattle and King County, the training is part of a broader citizen education and mobilization initiative, one aimed not only at imparting a skill but at preparing people to take their role as potential rescuers seriously.

Conversations with Dr. Cobb, observers in other cities, Seattle CPR instructors, and residents indicate that there are three main factors contributing to the success of the Seattle program.

COMMUNITY PRIDE

The first is community pride and cohesion. "If you're going to have a heart attack, have it in Seattle," Seattle residents proudly told me, in interview after interview. They were quoting, 17 years after the fact, a line used by Morley Safer in a laudatory "60 Minutes" segment about the Seattle program that aired in 1976.

Since that report, Seattle has been a frequent destination and model for teams of doctors and public officials from around the world who want to learn how to start their own program. Seattle and King County are constant reference points in the medical literature on cardiac arrest and emergency medicine in general. *Hippocrates* magazine recently ran a cover story entitled "Seattle to the Rescue."

Consequently, even in this younger-than-average city, residents are motivated to be ready to help when heart attack strikes.

"They've advertised that this is a safe place, and you just want to be a part of it," said Seattle resident Annette Brent, age 60, interviewed at a CPR training class in a Seattle senior citizen center. Senior citizens are a prime (and often hard-to-reach) target for CPR training, because they tend to live with other senior citizens and are more likely to witness a heart attack than younger people. Brent and her husband

Al, 61, were taking the class together. “Everybody around here knows how to do it,” added Al. “We might need it for our grandchildren.”

“Our fire department is recognized as one of the top fire departments in the country,” said Alvin Hagen, who was also joined by his wife at the class. “You just want to help out.”

Does a city have to be the best to generate enough pride to mobilize Seattle’s level of citizen response? Not necessarily. In Lincoln, Nebraska, another city that emphasizes citizen response, 60 percent of the residents have received CPR training. But cities that are larger than Seattle, with higher poverty rates and greater numbers of non-English speakers will face greater challenges as they seek to increase community response.

“Seattle does have kind of a small-town, small-community attitude,” concedes Cobb. “We do not as yet have all the problems of the big city.”

But Seattle is no Mayberry, either. The population is around 800,000, with double that many people living in the greater metropolitan area. The ratio of homeless people to total population there is higher than New York’s, and problems of gangs, drugs, and crime are fast increasing.

The people of Seattle are proud not only of their citizen rescue rate but of their whole renowned emergency medical system. Dr. Cobb and his associates have been honing it for decades. Seattle’s first responders are among the nation’s fastest, and advanced care medics, the second responders, have twice as much training as in other major cities. Furthermore, all the city’s fire engines carry defibrillators—shock machines to start the heart—and the firefighters know how to use them. Such an investment in first responder equipment and training is extremely rare.

All this costs money—but because they are aware of their city’s reputation for excellence in emergency medical care, Seattle residents are willing to pay. Voters reauthorize a special tax levy to pay for emergency medical care every six years, by margins of up to 80 percent.

SPREADING THE WORD

A second component of Seattle's success is wide publicity, achieved with the cooperation of the fire department, local media outlets, and businesses.

To recruit students for the CPR classes, Cobb and his associates take advantage of every form of free advertising available to them. They provide the press with a constant flow of news stories about citizen rescues and about heroic Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), and the reports always mention where to call to learn CPR. A local grocery chain advertises the classes on paper bags, pharmacies pass out fliers, and the fire department gives away refrigerator magnets with the phone number to call and sign up for classes. Brochures are offered in Spanish and in other languages, and foreign-language speakers can take a class with an interpreter.

Recently all public utility vehicles have installed license plate frames announcing "CPR saves lives—call for free training." The license plate frames alone generate 90 calls a month to the office of Medic II, which coordinates the CPR training.

Businesses are encouraged to offer training to their employees, and classes are often given in offices and other places of business. A city ordinance requires taxicab drivers to know CPR. Last year, Medic II gave CPR training to 24,500 people; nearly 600,000 have taken the course since 1971.

Even more impressive, people return for brush-up classes. In a visit to two Seattle CPR classes recently, I found that the majority of the students were not taking the class for the first time.

"It's more complicated than making more courses available," says Dr. Lance Becker, director of research for emergency medicine at the University of Chicago. "It really has to be integrated into the community. You need to get them in their church, in their synagogue, in the ball fields where they play. In Seattle they really have integrated this concern about cardiac arrest into the community. They know about symptoms, and they are vigilant."

USER-FRIENDLY FORMAT

The third component of Seattle's success is easy-access, user-friendly training. When Cobb started the Medic II program in 1971, typical CPR training classes were 10 to twelve hours long. He and his colleagues whittled the curriculum down to three hours—a format that virtually everyone else has adopted—so that people could take the class after dinner on a work night. They also developed a 1.5-hour refresher class.

The classes are not only short, they're free. The cost to the county is two to three dollars per person trained and is underwritten by the United Way, the local Rotary Club, and other civic organizations.

The firefighters who teach the classes will go anywhere they are invited—churches, schools, community centers, offices, union halls, even people's living rooms. "If you can get together a group, we'll send out an instructor," says Cobb. All seventh graders in Seattle public schools receive the training.

Seattle's CPR classes offer a range of useful information. In addition to the CPR training, they include discussions on heart disease prevention, the Heimlich Maneuver for choking victims, and instruction on when and how to use the 911 emergency system.

"A lot of people are afraid to dial 911," says 25-year veteran fire fighter and CPR instructor Al Wakkuri. "But it's not like you're getting us up out of bed. That's what we're there for."

During a three-hour class at a community center located in an upscale residential neighborhood, Wakkuri joked and riffed and did all he could to make CPR less intimidating—and more compelling—for a class that consisted mainly of young professionals. He pointed out repeatedly that seven out of 10 cardiac arrests occur in the home. When students asked about catching germs, he noted that there is no evidence you can catch AIDS from performing CPR—and then gently reminded the class that chances are they won't be called upon to rescue someone they don't know.

"If you're ever gonna do this, it's probably going to be a loved one," Wakkuri said. "Maybe even your mother or your father."

The message? You should learn CPR not only because of some generalized sense of altruism but because someone you know and care about may need it. If everyone learns it, then everyone will be safer.

"It's like your neighborhood watch," said Wakkuri. "You think, if I know it, if he knows it, she knows it; the guy next door knows it, then if something happens, you'll be safe."

WHEN IN DOUBT, ACT

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is a complex and intimidating skill. There are numbers to remember: how many chest compressions a minute versus how many breaths; how to check the breathing passage; when to check the pulse. It's a lot to think about in seconds when a life hangs in the balance. The very idea of making a mistake can deter people from helping out, even if they've taken a class.

This fear can be fatal. Seattle Fire Lieutenant Donald E. Sharp, director of the Medic II program, described a situation in another city where a traveler suffered a cardiac arrest in a train station and the station officials roped him off and wouldn't let anyone touch him until the EMTs arrived. They were afraid that an unschooled or unskilled samaritan might make the situation worse. But by the time the emergency medical team arrived, it was too late to save the victim.

By contrast, Seattle CPR instructors put the emphasis on action. While most people do not remember the details of their CPR training a year after taking the course, studies suggest that even incorrectly administered CPR is often better than nothing.

"We're not at all sure how much training is necessary for it," said Cobb. "There used to be a sort of fetish about the number of chest compressions and so on. We feel that it's more important for large numbers of people to know a modest amount than for a few people to be expert."

"If there's no pulse, then the guy's already dead," Wakkuri told his class. "Nothing you can do is gonna make it worse. If it's someone you love, you'll be all emotional. You'll forget the numbers. But something is better than nothing."

NURTURING RESPONSIBILITY

Beyond the skills imparted in CPR classes, which are complex and often forgotten, the training confers another, perhaps more important benefit: the sense of one's power to help. That knowledge often brings with it a kind of moral imperative.

This is important, because even with training, performing CPR can be an intimidating task. Traci Jones looks back with mingled pride and horror on her experience helping Patrick Rotter. "There was slobber everywhere," she says. She remembers that she and Bellinger exchanged a fearful glance before going to work on the victim, who had turned blue. "But we knew what we had to do. In any situation, it's just horrible. But you really have no choice."

A number of the people I interviewed in Seattle at CPR classes and elsewhere speculated that the reason some people do *not* learn CPR is their fear of the responsibility that comes with the knowledge, combined with revulsion at the idea of performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a stranger and fear of catching an infectious disease.

"There's always the issue of AIDS and disease," says Jones, "and if you don't know CPR, you're safe, while if you do, you almost have to do it."

Which is, of course, the point. One doesn't really "have to do it." There is no law requiring bystanders trained in CPR to use their skills to save someone. But most of us have a sense of our own responsibility to help others, especially in life-or-death situations. And yet the impulse is fleeting, easily quashed when we sense any real or imagined risk to ourselves—especially if we are not certain our actions will be helpful. Citizen training in CPR, first aid, water safety, and the like not only impart skills; they bolster the individual's sense of efficacy and, as a result, reinforce one's natural sense of responsibility to help.

The effect can be contagious. In a study performed by psychologist Dr. Ervin Staub at the University of Massachusetts and described in a *New York Times* article ("Studying Pivotal Role of Bystanders," June 22, 1993), volunteers were paired with test administrators who pretended they were doing a personality study. Midway through the interview, a crash and loud groans (emanating from a tape recorder) were heard coming from the next room. Staub found that when the

administrator responded, “That probably has nothing to do with us,” only 25 percent of the volunteers investigated the troubling sounds, whereas when the administrator said, “That sounds pretty bad—I’ll go get the experimenter and maybe you should go check what’s happening next door,” all of the volunteers responded.

“It showed me the power of bystanders to define the meaning of events in a way that leads people to take responsibility,” Dr. Staub told the *Times*. “People don’t realize the power they have as bystanders to make a difference.”

The act of performing CPR on a person who has suffered cardiac arrest is, no doubt, an empowering experience, and one that can inspire others to take similar action when needed. But even the act of taking a CPR class and preparing oneself for such an emergency has a certain inspirational power, one that can ripple outward in an ever-widening circle of civic responsibility.

The lives saved by CPR in Seattle and elsewhere are no small achievement. But in the end, it might just be that the sense of responsibility, connectedness, and power the ability to save lives brings is the greatest benefit citizen education programs like Seattle’s can give. The classes force people to confront basic fears, like the fear of touching strangers—or the fear that they themselves could die alone with nobody to help. They make a commitment to do what they can to preserve life, and they come away feeling better about their neighbors’ willingness to preserve theirs.

The long-term commitment of Seattle’s medical and emergency response providers to fostering and perpetuating citizen preparedness has produced a payoff that in turn could fuel and inspire all kinds of civic participation.

Patrick Brosnahan, the friend who saved Marvin Oberg’s life, gave the experience his highest recommendation. “It made me feel a little closer to the guy upstairs.”

AN R.C. DOCUMENT

Following are three excerpts from Antioch College's new policy on sexual violence:

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

The statistics on the frequency of sexual violence on college campuses today are alarming. While we try to make Antioch a safe environment for everyone, we still have problems here. There is date and acquaintance rape, and stranger rape, and, while the majority of perpetrators are men and the majority of victims are women, there are also female perpetrators and male victims. There are also many students who have already experienced sexual violence before arriving at Antioch; healing from that experience may be an integral part of their personal, social and academic lives while they are here.

• • •

Antioch has two policies, a sexual harassment policy and a sexual offense policy, which have been designed to help deal with these problems when they occur on campus and/or when they involve an Antioch community member. Read these policies; you are held responsible for knowing them. Under the sexual offense policy:

—All sexual contact and conduct between any two people must be consensual;

—Consent must be obtained verbally before there is any sexual contact or conduct;

—If the level of sexual intimacy increases during an interaction (i.e., if two people move from kissing while fully clothed—which is one level—to undressing for direct physical contact, which is another level), the people involved need to express their clear verbal consent before moving to that new level;

—If one person wants to *initiate* moving to a higher level of sexual intimacy in an interaction, *that person is responsible for getting the verbal consent of the other person(s) involved before moving to that level;*

—If you have had a particular level of sexual intimacy before with someone, you must still ask each and every time;

—If you have a sexually transmitted disease, you must disclose it to a potential sexual partner;

• • •

CONSENT

1. For the purpose of this policy, "consent" shall be defined as follows: the act of willingly and verbally agreeing to engage in specific sexual contact or conduct.
2. If sexual contact and/or conduct is not mutually and simultaneously initiated, then the person who initiates sexual contact/conduct is responsible for getting the verbal consent of the other individual(s) involved.

3. Obtaining consent is an on-going process in any sexual interaction. Verbal consent should be obtained with each new level of physical and/or sexual contact/conduct in any given interaction, regardless of who initiates it. Asking "Do you want to have sex with me?" is not enough. The request for consent must be specific to each act.
4. The person with whom sexual contact/conduct is initiated is responsible to express verbally and/or physically her/his willingness or lack of willingness when reasonably possible.
5. If someone has initially consented but then stops consenting during a sexual interaction, she/he should communicate withdrawal verbally and/or through physical resistance. The other individual(s) must stop immediately.
6. To knowingly take advantage of someone who is under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and/or prescribed medication is not acceptable behavior in the Antioch community.

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