

THE WAY WE NEVER WERE

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- Prior to the 1920s, a divorced father didn't even have a legal child-support obligation to evade.
- Drug abuse was more widespread at the end of the 1890s than at the end of the 1990s and the rate of alcohol consumption was almost three times higher in the early nineteenth century than it is currently.
- Although the murder rate declined by 20 percent between 1990 and 1998, the number of murders covered by network news broadcasts increased by 600 percent.
- In 1900, the percentage of unmarried women 18 and older was 20.4 percent, virtually identical to today's rate of singlehood.
- Some historians seemed more shocked that the author of the Declaration of Independence had sex with Sally Hemmings than by the fact that he owned her.
- Our teenage birth rate is geometrically higher than that of other industrial nations.
- People born in the twentieth century are much more likely to live near their birthplace than were people born in the nineteenth century.
- Divorce has become a functional substitute for death in the modern world. A couple marrying today is more likely to celebrate a fortieth wedding anniversary than were couples around the turn of the century.
- The legendary family of the 1950s was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of traditional family life with deep roots in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life
- For the first time, men as well as women were encouraged to root their identity and self-image in familial and parental roles.
- The 1950s expectations encouraged early marriage, early childbearing, expansion of consumer debt, and residential patterns that required long commutes to work - all patterns that would become highly problematic by the 1970s.
- After the war, women were not permanently expelled from the labor force but were merely downgraded to lower-paid, female jobs
- Psychiatrists in the 1950s regarded the battered woman as a masochist who provoked her husband into beating her.
- Not even the four "b's" (booze, bowling, bridge and boredom) could conceal the discontents of the 1950s.
- Women who played dumb to catch a man, as 40 percent of Barnard College women admitted to doing, sometimes despised their husbands for not living up to the fiction of male superiority they had worked so hard to promote.
- Prior to the 1950s it would not have occurred to us to have our wives support us through graduate school.
- For many centuries the notion of family referred to authority relations rather than love ones.
- The sentimentalization of family life and female nurturing was historically and functionally linked to the emergence of competitive individualism and formal egalitarianism for men
- The Anglo-American notion that dependence on others is immature, weak, shameful, or uniquely feminine is foreign to most cultures. In the worldview of these societies, independence is antisocial; expressing one's neediness, even codifying it, is the route to social harmony and personal satisfaction for both men and women.
- In ancient Greece, overweening confidence in the individuals' ability to shape his or her own fate was the sin of hubris, and it brought the protagonists of many Greek tragedies to bitter ends.
- In precapitalist societies, definitions of self were always contextual, because the self did not pick and choose relations with others; it emerged out of these relations and remained dependent on them. Independence was feared, not cherished.

- The notion that love was, or should be, a purely personal relationship between two individuals, and the primary source of sustained commitments, was equally foreign to most precapitalist cultures.
- Rights language offers a rich vernacular for the claims an individual may make on or against the collectivity, but it is relatively impoverished as a means of expressing individuals' needs for the collectivity.
- The cult of the Self-Made Man required the cult of the True Woman.
- By the nineteenth century, the family was widely regarded as the one place where interdependence, noncalculative reciprocity, and gift giving prevailed, the arena in which people learned to temper public ambition or competition with private regard for others.
- Gender obligations, family affections, and romantic love, then, became the ultimate bulwark against the tendency of contractual individualism to slide into a total denial of obligation and interdependence.
- Many modern Americans are ready to discard the myth that nuclear families ever have been or should be emotionally self-sufficient, especially if that self-sufficiency has to be constructed on rigid gender roles.
- The fact is that depending on support beyond the family has been the rule rather than the exception in American history, despite recurring myths about individual achievement and family enterprise.
- It was not a colonial value to avoid being beholden to others, even among the non-poor. Being under obligation to others and having favors owed was the mark of a successful person.
- The first half of the nineteenth century is usually called not the age of the family but the age of association.
- Among Catholic populations, godparenting was one way of institutionalizing such obligations beyond the family.
- Frontier families and 1950s suburban families have had more of their advantages paid for by minorities and the lower class and tie for the honor of being the most heavily subsidized in American history.
- Prairie farmers and other pioneer families owed their existence to massive federal land grants, government-funded military mobilizations that disposed hundreds of Native Americans and confiscated half of Mexico and state-sponsored economic investment in the new lands.
- It would be hard to find a Western family today whose land rights, transportation options, economic existence, and even access to water were not dependent on federal funds
- Mutuality and suppression of self-centered behavior, not rugged individualism are what created successful settlements as America moved West.
- Before WWII, banks often required a 50% down payment on homes and normally issued mortgages for only five to ten years. In the postwar period, the FHA supplemented by the GI Bill put the federal government in the business of insuring and regulating private loans
- It was not family savings or individual enterprise, but federal housing loans and education payments that enabled so many 1950s American families to achieve the independence of home ownership.
- There is thus no intrinsic tendency of government subsidies per se to induce dependence, undermine self-esteem, or break down family ties, even though these charges are almost invariably leveled against one kind of subsidy: welfare for the poor.
- As long as we pretend that only poor or abnormal families need outside assistance, we will shortchange poor families overcompensate rich ones, and fail to come up with effective policies for helping families in the middle.
- American Council on Education reported that the number of college students who believed financial affluence to be essential had increased from 45% in 1967 to more than 70% in 1987, while the proportion who considered it important to develop a meaningful philosophy of life fell from 84% to 40%. By 1989, a national poll found that only 24% of young Americans considered improving their community an important goal; 72% said that their main purpose in life was "being successful in job or career."
- The notion that enhancing private family morality could substitute for forging public values and societal bonds developed comparatively late in American history. Far from being a source of social commitment and responsibility, such a notion helped erode those traits.
- The Gilded Age of the mid 1870s to mid 1890s resembles the period since the mid-1970s. After the intense idealism of the 1860s most middle-class individuals entered a phase of political disengagement and economic

reorientation that required them to disavow old alliance and beliefs. Turning away from social activism, many people focused on their personal lives and material ambitions.

- We have a wealth of names for individual needs and desires and a powerful set of symbols for abstract unity such as the flag or the Founding Fathers. What Americans have found much harder to come by are clear ways in which to talk about the common bonds and responsibilities of public life.
- We do not have concrete ways of exploring what should be expected of the policemen, school teachers, garbage collectors, etc. If we are not owed something as a right in the public world or offered it out of love in the private world, most of us are stymied.
- We also have few ways to condemn political or social failures, except to label them a breakdown of love. When family relations become our only model for defining what emotional real relationships are like, we can empathize and interact only with people whom we can imagine as potential lovers or family members. The choice becomes a personal relationship or none, a familial intimacy or complete alienation.
- We focus on private vices because we cannot agree on the definition of a public vice. P. 118
- When obligation and reciprocity were banished from public life and confined to the nuclear family, their continued existence became very problematic, especially when the same-sex networks and community association that formerly defused the tensions of family life began to disintegrate.
- Every man, woman or child in Indian communities is allowed to enter any one's lodge, even that of the chief of the nation, and eat when they are hungry.
- In 1745, the Massachusetts Assembly ordered that any child older than six who did not know the alphabet was to be removed to another family. P. 126
- By the 1840s the apprentice system had ceased to supplement the family in training and socializing children from all walks of life and had become a device for the recruitment and exploitation of young paupers.
- Ironically, although legislators and courts cannot make a married couple finance their child's college education, they can make a divorced parent do so.
- At least one radical feminist argues that women were not given custody rights until children ceased to be an economic asset and began to be an economic burden.
- Mothers' Day was originally a vehicle for organized social and political action by all mothers, not for celebrating the private services of one's own particular mother. They wished to celebrate mothers' social roles as community organizers, honoring women who acted on behalf of the entire future generation rather than simply putting their own children first.
- Many women who began their families in the 1940s and 50s associated their mothers' employment during the 1930s with economic hardship and family failure. They looked forward to establishing a different pattern in their own marriages.
- By the end of the 1950s, 40% of all women over the age of sixteen held a job. Women's behavior as both wives and workers, changed prior to the rise in feminism.
- The American citizen's first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen but that of consumer. P. 170
- An emphasis on hard work and self-support can go hand in hand with an isolating preoccupation with the self. The problem is not so much the presence or absence of a work ethic as the meaning of work and the ways it links or fails to link, individuals to one another.
- The private family values generally thought of as traditional have a built-in tendency to degenerate into me-first individualism because they ignore the fact that work is a moral relationship between people, a relationship that can support family life only if it extends beyond any particular family and forges bonds throughout the community as a whole. P. 178
- Marriage is no longer the major transition into adulthood. More than three-quarters of today's eighteen to twenty-four year olds have never married, and the majority of young adults today leave their parental homes and establish themselves in jobs well before marriage.
- In 1990, a quarter of all new births were out of wedlock; in half of them, there was no identified father.
- More than half of American children will live in a single-parent household for some period during their childhood.

- The percentage of women aged fifteen to nineteen who had had sexual intercourse at least once increased by one-third between 1971 and 1979.
- Most Americans move in and out of a variety of family types over the course of their lives.
- Today's diversity of family forms, rates of premarital pregnancy, productive labor of wives and prevalence of blended families, for example, would all look much more familiar to colonial Americans than would 1950s patterns. The age of marriage today is no higher than it was in the 1870s and the proportion of never-married people is lower than it was at the turn of the century.
- In Concord, MA, one-third of all children born during the twenty years prior to the American Revolution were conceived out of wedlock.
- Both marriage and childrearing occupy a smaller proportion of adults' lives than they did at any time in American history.
- At age twenty-nine, nearly 40% of American men have not yet settled into a stable long-term job.
- In 1990, more than half of 18 to 24 year olds were living with their parents,
- The median age in America today is slightly over 32, approximately twice the median age of the population at the time of the American Revolution.
- In 1900 the proportion of the population aged sixty-five or over was only 4%, and though elders had more children than today to share the burden of their support, their poverty rates were the highest in the nation.
- If the total years families devote to childrearing have declined over the past half century, the total years they devote to elder care have increased significantly.
- Corporations report that elder-care problems are at least as great a cause of absenteeism and employee stress as are child-care ones.
- The courtship structure was almost completely dismantled. It was replaced by the dating system, which moved courtship out of the home and into the public world, replacing family surveillance with peer supervision in an increasingly age-specific youth culture.
- We allow more sex and violence on afternoon television than do most European countries, but we are less forthright than they about nudity, sex education, and birth control.
- The highest rate of teenage childbearing in 20th century America was in 1957, when more than 97 out of every 1000 women aged fifteen to nineteen gave birth. America has a dramatically higher incidence of teen pregnancy than does any other contemporary industrial democracy.
- Children are resilient enough to adapt to many different innovations in family patterns: when they cannot adapt, this is caused more often by the economic and social context in which those innovations take place than by their parents' wrong turns away from traditional family patterns
- 99% of kidnapers and the large majority of physical and sexual abusers of children are their parents.
- Few societies in the past have shared our insistence on the unique role of the nuclear family, especially the mother, in raising healthy children.
- In the absence of reliable birth control, both infanticide and abandonment were common until recent times.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau put all five of his own infants in a foundling hospital.
- It is the location, not the existence of maternal work and non-maternal child care that is new: Throughout most of human history, mothers have devoted more time to other duties than to child care and have delegated substantial portions of childrearing to others.
- For children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and for girls in general, maternal employment correlates with higher intelligence test scores. Sons of middle-class employed mothers, on the average, turn in somewhat lower academic performances than do sons of middle-class at-home mothers.
- When researchers studied families with fathers who were active in childrearing the IQ deficits for boys with employed mothers disappeared.
- Mothers whose work is complex and challenging tend to create more enriching environments for their children than do mothers whose work is boring.
- Maternal employment has negative effects when a woman's working conditions are demeaning, her husband's attitude hostile, or her child-care arrangements inadequate; otherwise, maternal employment seems to offer many advantages to family relations and for the lives of children.

- Upper class students, including those who are admittedly poor students, are simply not allowed to fail academically or personally. This gives them striking advantages over children of other classes.
- Research on severely at risk children who succeed demonstrates that the intervention of just one caring person from outside the nuclear family, not necessarily a relative, can put a child on the path to success.
- The debate over whether one parent can raise a child alone, diverts attention from the fact that good childrearing has always required more than two parents.
- Unless we learn to care for all the children of the tribe, then no family, whatever its form, can be secure.
- By 1986 the average black high school dropout earned 61% less than he had in 1973.
- Rates of substance abuse are slightly higher for white women than for nonwhite women, even though the latter are ten times as likely as white women to be reported for such abuse.
- Blacks who let themselves off the hook by admitting the obstacles posed by racism are better able to maintain work and educational commitment in the face of reverses than those who believe in the ethic of individual achievement.
- Strong black family ties hamper individual economic mobility. Individuals use their money to support family members.
- In 1950s, it took 15% of average 30 year olds income to pay the principal and interest on a median priced home. By 1973 it took 20% and by 1983 it took more than 40%. A college education lowers this percentage, but college tuition now requires 40% of family income, up from 29% in 1970.
- Almost 50% of women work in occupations that are more than 80% female. 71% of men still work in jobs that are more than 80% male.
- Public and private spending on preschool, primary, and secondary education in America is lower than that in most of the industrialized world.
- One in eight American children is hungry. 26% of pregnant women have no insurance coverage in the early months of their pregnancy.
- Homeowners do not normally initiate violence (like gangs), yet they fight their own bitter turf battles and exhibit the same kind of calculative self-interest in their “not in my back yard” movements.
- The increased visibility of economic and social inequities, and the refusal of politicians to address them, cannot help but create cynicism and self interested behavior.
- America needs more than a revival of obligation within the family. It desperately needs an economy based upon notions of mutual obligation and reciprocity.
- Very few people can sustain values at a personal level when they are continually contradicted at work, at the store, in the government and on television.
- The crisis of the family in late 20th C America is in many ways a larger crisis of social reproduction: a major upheaval in the way we produce, reproduce, and distribute goods, services, power, economic rewards, and social roles, including those of class and gender.
- To handle social obligations and interdependency in the 21st C, we must abandon any illusion that we can or should revive some largely mythical traditional family.
- The privatism that relies on nuclear biological bonds to ensure the well-being of children is an obstacle to solving the problem of childhood poverty so that demographic and economic changes have redistributed income away from families that have children or other dependents.
- Today only 28% of the adult population has children in school.
- The major barrier to social involvement is not people’s commitment to a purely individualistic way of life but their feeling of helplessness, the fear that they are the only people who feel this way, and their pessimism about the cravings of human nature. P. 284
- At risk children are helped by caring adult, mentor or surrogate parent and a second chance (education, community groups, etc.)
- Families have been most successful wherever they have built meaningful, solid networks and commitments beyond their own boundaries. The best thing we may do for our own families is to get involved in community or political action to help others.