

JUNE 1990

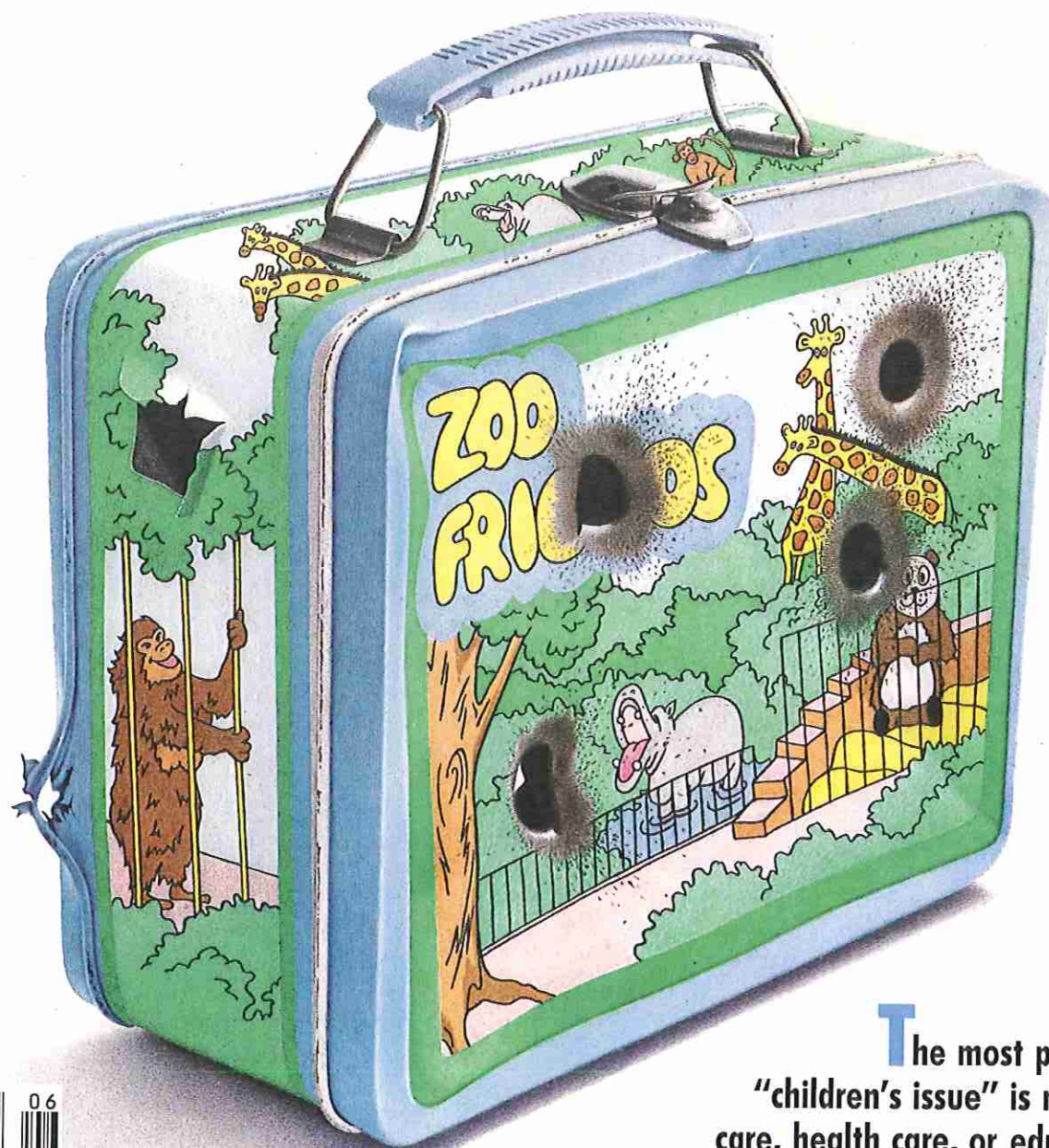
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A DISSENT ON THE SOVIET ECONOMY / FICTION BY ROY BLOUNT, JR.

GROWING UP SCARED

by Karl Zinsmeister



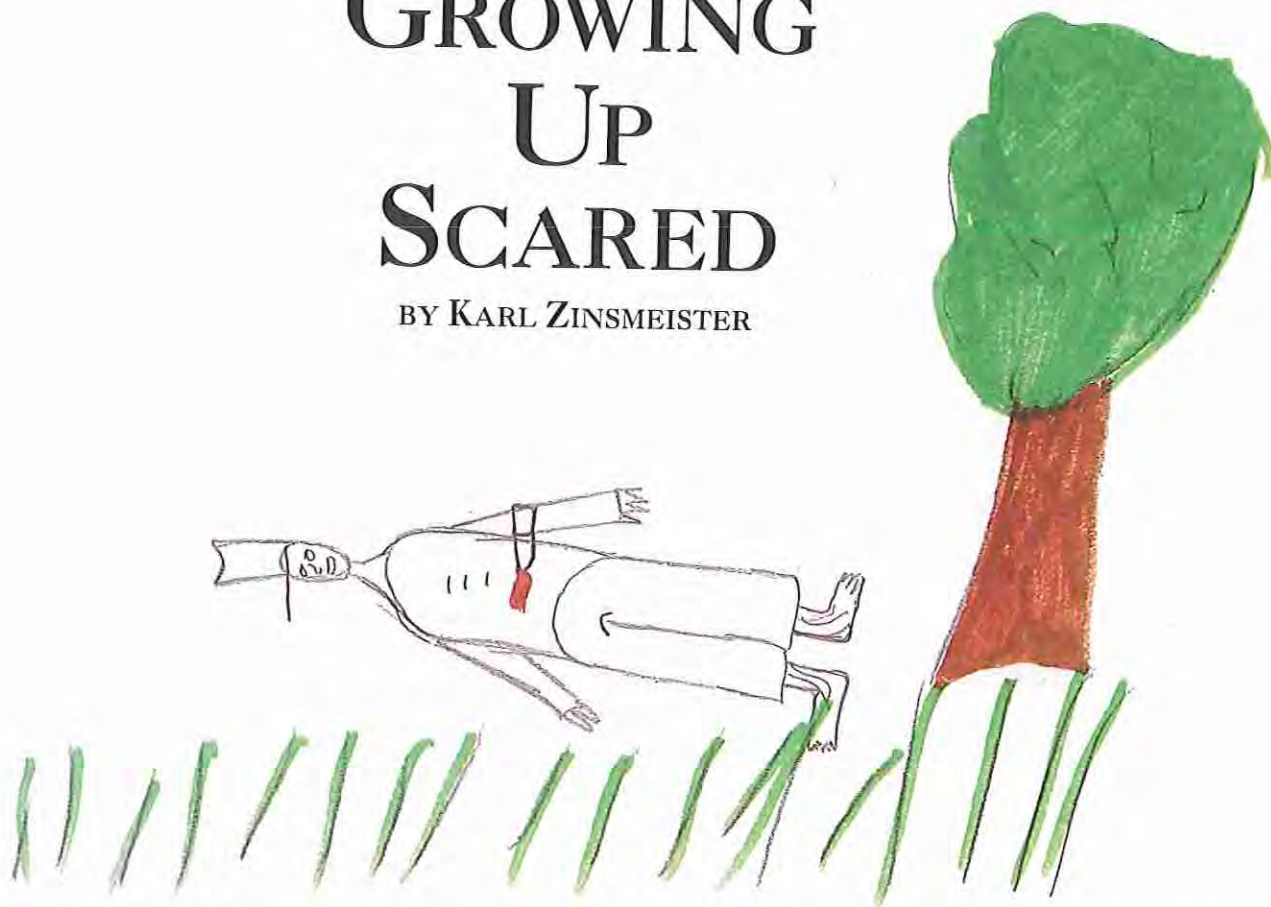
The most pressing
"children's issue" is not day
care, health care, or education.
It is the control of violent crime.



Spurred on by family instability, violent crime now touches millions of young lives. The control of crime in the streets, in the schools, and in the home ought to be the pre-eminent "children's issue"

GROWING UP SCARED

BY KARL ZINSMEISTER



CRIME DOES NOT WASH OVER ALL AMERICANS equally. It especially terrorizes the weakest and most vulnerable among us. Three quarters of America's 64 million children live in metropolitan areas, a fifth live in low-income households, at least a tenth come home after school to a house containing no adult, and all are physically immature and incompletely formed in character. These are the people who suffer most when law and order decay. Children need order. Aside from love and sustenance, there is nothing they need more than order.

Law enforcement is often presented as a conservative issue, but today there is a powerful bleeding-heart justification for getting tough on crime: to protect child welfare. Physical safety and psychological security are the foundations—the essential preconditions—for a child's health, education, and overall development. A good school, an accessible doctor, a rich library, a 15 percent increase in the Head Start budget—these are of little use to a child sharing an

apartment with his mother's abusive, violent, drug-selling boyfriend, or to a child who fears the very sidewalks, or to one who cannot find a safe haven even in the classroom. In failing to insulate our children from criminal activity, we are jeopardizing the future of millions of American youngsters.

Yet none of the established children's-defense organizations has emphasized public order as an issue of supreme importance to the young. Why have those who claim to speak in behalf of children made no outcry for tougher laws, no-nonsense sentencing, more police officers, more prisons, safer schools, and less drugs? Why have they initiated no campaign for putting the full weight of public protection on the side of babies and schoolchildren, instead of on the side of mothers who poison their own offspring with crack, and gang members who bring guns into classrooms?

The present state of affairs is intolerable. It is time to compile a new list of "children's issues," and to put crime reduction at the top.

Drawings of their neighborhoods by children from the Boston and Washington, D.C., areas. Drawing above by JEMEAL, age 10

Is It Really That Bad?

IN MAY OF 1987 THE MAYOR OF WASHINGTON, D.C., visited an eighth-grade science class for gifted students at a public school in a poor neighborhood. The mayor posed a question. "How many of you know somebody who's been killed?" There were nineteen students in the class. Fourteen hands went up. The mayor went around the room: How were they killed? The answers began like this: "Shot." "Stabbing." "Shot." "Shot." "Drugs." "Shot." These were thirteen-year-old children. Given that they were in the gifted class, one can assume that they were from more privileged backgrounds than most of their schoolmates.

"I hear shooting at night mostly."

Quotation above:
LANCE, age 7

Art below (clockwise from bottom left):

VICTOR, age 8

TANYA, age 10

KIMBERLY, age 8

MIGUEL, age 9

MELVIN, age 9

Over a four-month period in Detroit at about the same time, 102 youngsters age sixteen or under were shot, nearly all of them by other children. There was so much violence in the public schools that the whole system had to be shut down for two days. In October of 1987 *The Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page story that chronicled three months in the life of a twelve-year-old Chicago boy named Lafayette Walton. That life included almost daily gun and

submachine-gun battles in his housing project, beatings and maimings of relatives and friends, rapes, gang recruiting, cocaine-running by a nine-year-old female cousin, and several murders.

Our failure to curb such mayhem must be blamed on tolerance, not ignorance. Anecdotes like the ones above have been piling up for years. There is no shortage of quantitative evidence either. Researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, in Baltimore, recently completed a study of 168 teenagers who visited an inner-city clinic for routine medical care. The teenagers were questioned about their exposure to various kinds of violence. A stunning 24 percent had witnessed a murder; 72 percent knew someone who had been shot. These teenagers had themselves been victims of some type of violence an average of one and a half times each and had witnessed an average of more than five serious criminal episodes. One out of five had had their lives threatened, and almost one out of eleven had been raped. The doctors who collected the information point out that because of the nature of the clinic population, some 80 percent of the respondents were female. Among a sample of adolescent males many of these measures of exposure to violence would be higher.

"What I think is going on in the inner city is warfare—social warfare," one psychologist in Boston says. Lawrence Gary, the director of the Institute for Urban Affairs and Research at Howard University, says, "This kind of violence is a new phenomenon in America. We've always had murder and violence, but not like this. We don't know what the long-term impact is going to be."

Young people are not only increasingly exposed to vio-



lence; they are also increasingly the perpetrators of violence. In the most troubling cases we are seeing a pattern of extreme remorselessness. The Central Park "wilding" attack is an infamous example; those accused of raping and nearly killing a young jogger in 1989 said afterward that "it was fun." In an earlier case, in Washington, D.C., a group of youths robbed, raped, and brutally murdered a middle-aged mother named Catherine Fuller while singing and joking. In another instance in Washington an eighteen-year-old shot a cab driver in the head because he "wanted to try out a gun." In another, two teenagers killed a third who passed them on the street because they wanted his "boom box."

"I had a kid who shot a guy twenty-seven times," one juvenile-court supervisor reports. "What kind of anger is that?" Even the murder victim's girlfriend, he says, showed no emotion when informed of the crime. In Brooklyn three teenagers methodically set fire to a homeless couple in 1987. When rubbing alcohol wouldn't ignite the pair, the youths went to a local service station for gasoline, which worked. Hundreds of similarly disturbing cases exist. Investigators say that juveniles are often found laughing and playing at homicide scenes.

From 1983 to 1988 the number of minors arrested for murder increased by a startling 31 percent (to 1,765), even though the number of people age twelve to seventeen actually decreased by eight percent over those five years. The jump in murder arrests of children age fourteen or younger (up 28 percent, to a total of 201 over that same period) is especially troubling. Victor Herbert, the executive director of New York City's Division of High Schools, says a new breed of young people "who are very

reckless, very carefree, and, we believe, very dangerous" has arrived on the scene. "There's real fear among young people about each other," he reports.

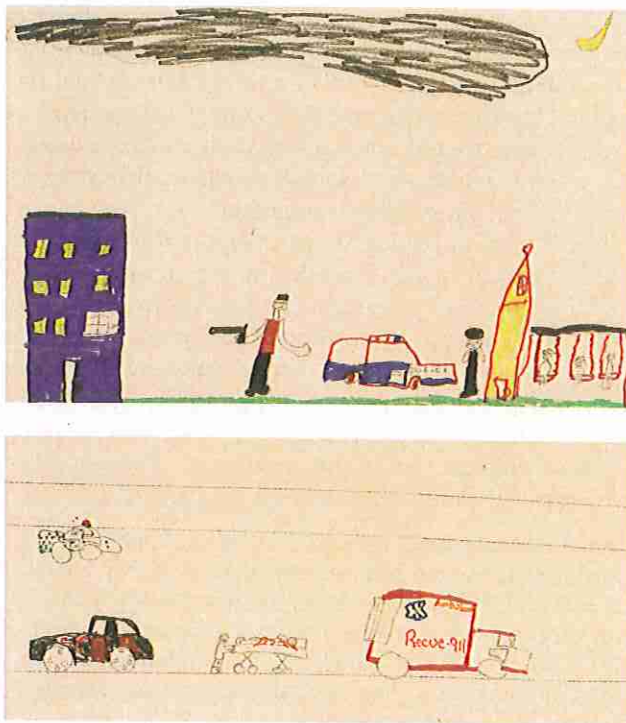
Homicide is now the leading cause of death among children in many American inner cities, and about half the assailants are other youths. Extrapolations from death-certificate and FBI statistics show that approximately 2,000 minors were murdered in 1988—twice the number killed in 1965, when there were 6.5 million more people under age eighteen in the country. Among blacks the destruction is particularly disturbing. More than 1,000 black children fell victim to homicide in 1988, a 50 percent increase over the toll in 1985. The murder and drug epidemics sweeping black communities are now so serious as to have actually reduced the average black life-span. From 1970 to 1984 steadily improving medical technology and diet, rising income, and other factors pushed black life expectancy up from 64.1 years to 69.7 years. The progress stopped right there. While white longevity has continued to rise, the average black life-span has decreased since 1984 by nearly four months—a development without parallel in the postwar period.

The Roots of the Problem

THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF VIOLENCE BY and among children is family breakdown. More than 60 percent of all children born today will spend at least some time in a single-parent household before reaching age eighteen. That kind of collapse of family structure is historically unprecedented in the United States and possibly in the world.



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For many black teenagers, according to a report by one child-welfare organization, marriage is "now an almost forgotten institution."

There is a great difference of opinion over the cause of this family decay. On one side is, let us say, the Charles Murray school, which argues that perverse government policies lie behind the collapse of family responsibility. In opposition is what we might call the Daniel Patrick Moynihan school, which argues that the causes are a mystery (but probably involve culture) and that government intervention offers the best hope for a solution. But despite the deep split over causes and solutions, there is broad agreement—at last—that family disintegration is at the root of many of the social and economic problems that worry us most.

To say that family structure is now the principal conduit of class structure is not to deny that plenty of children in intact families have problems, or that many youngsters from single-parent homes will grow up to be happy and successful. There are children being raised in Beirut today who will turn out fine too; nonetheless, growing up in Beirut is not to be recommended. The point is, having only one parent's time, energy, and earning and teaching power is a serious blow from which a child recovers only with effort. Lack of male direction is an additional problem for many such children.

That is not personal prejudice. A major study of children from one-parent families, conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, has found that 30 percent of the two-parent elementary school students surveyed ranked as high achievers, compared with only 17 percent of the one-parent children. At the other end of the scale, 23 percent of the two-parent children were low achievers—versus 38 percent of the one-parent children. There were more clinic visits among one-parent students, and their rate of absence from school ran higher. One-parent students were consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action. One-parent children were found to be more than twice as likely to drop out of school altogether.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported not long ago that 70 percent of the juveniles in state reform institutions grew up in single-parent or no-parent families. One recent study of seventy-two adolescent murderers found that three quarters came from single-parent homes. Most street-gang members, it has been shown, come from broken homes.

These findings should not surprise us. Fully twenty-five years ago Daniel Patrick Moynihan observed:

From the wild Irish slums of the 19th-century Eastern seaboard to the riot-torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men (and women) to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority . . . that community asks for and gets chaos.

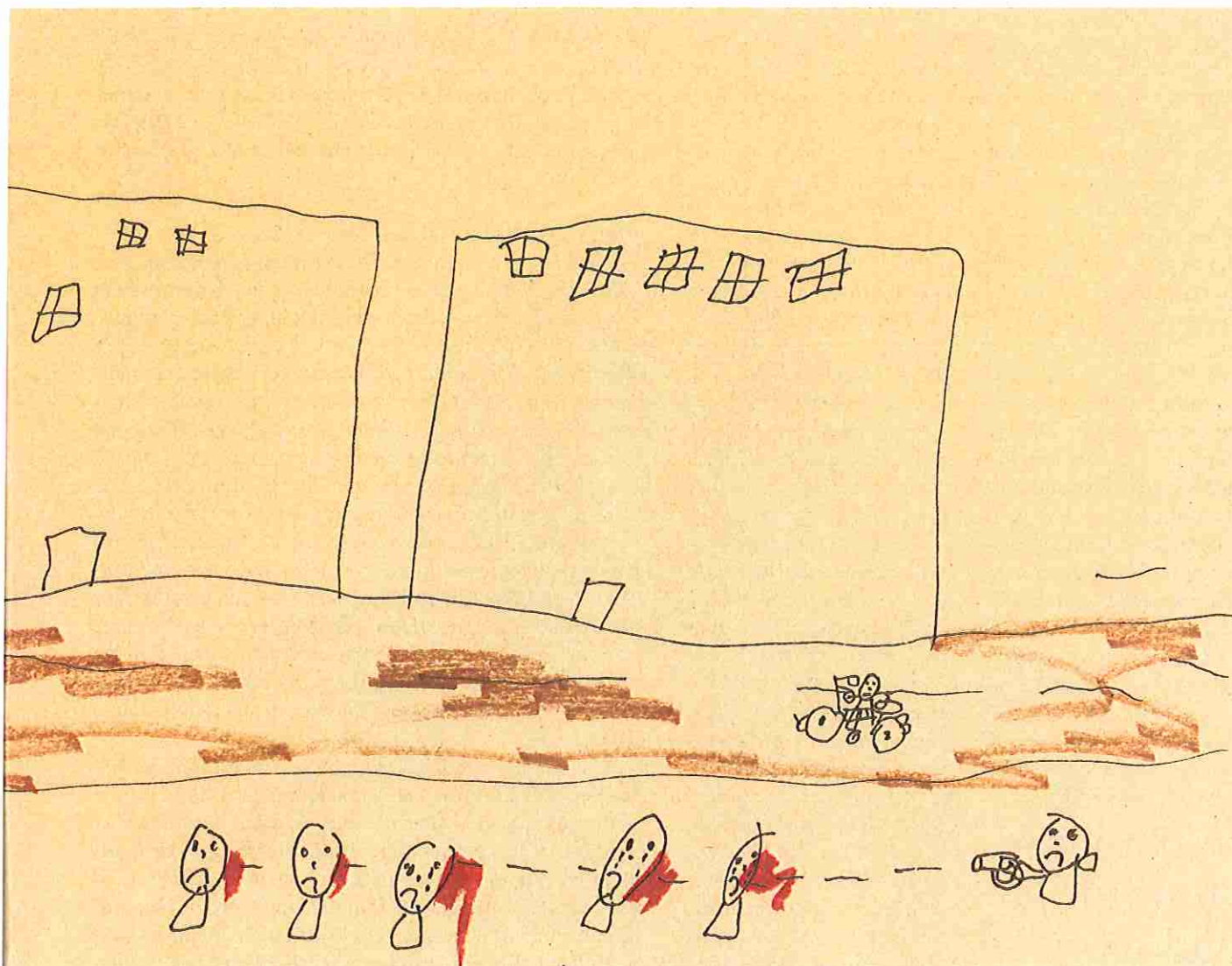
**"I was
scared of
the gun
and the
man."**

Quotation and art:
DONALD, age 8

One of the depressing lessons we have learned in the past quarter century is how unamenable the problems of the broken family are to monetary solutions. It is not that we haven't tried to make compensation for the withering of the nuclear unit. Two thirds of all people in female-headed families with children under eighteen now get benefits from a welfare program (Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, food stamps, rent assistance), the Census Bureau tells us. Of all never-married mothers, more than 80 percent are receiving some kind of government check. The federal government spends more than \$100 billion every year on means-tested assistance to families. Yet this aid has not even come close to providing those households with the kind of existential security that most intact families enjoy.

Given family integrity's essential importance, one might have expected society-wide efforts to support and encourage two-parent families when signs of rot were first detected, in the 1960s. That didn't happen. For the past quarter century American public policy has shied away from the idea that certain family forms are more desirable than others. There is no attempt to promote child-bearing within wedlock. There is little penalty attached to child abandonment. There is scant recognition of the social benefits of marriage, or of the social contributions of those who devote themselves to conscientious child-rearing. There is no reward from our public programs for standing by kith and kin.





The most tragic aspect of this lack of nerve among American elites in defending the integrity of the nuclear family is that it misled and left badly exposed precisely those groups that had the fewest other assets to fall back on. The rich can perhaps afford a splintered family; though it may bring heartache, it is usually not incapacitating. But the ill-educated, the poor, the historically discriminated against—strong families were in many cases the only thing such people had going for them. Once enticed out of the safe harbor of family solidarity, people in these groups often cannot recover.

Bolstering Families

THERE IS NO FULLY ADEQUATE SUBSTITUTE, public or private, for intact families. How, then, do we foster them? To begin with, there is a very substantive role for simple public rhetoric. Despite a quarter century of heartbreaking experience, the establishment message often continues to be

that family structure is just a choice, and that a preference for one form over another is a kind of prejudice. A typical expression of the sentiment was made by the writer Toni Morrison in a *Time* magazine interview last year: "I don't think a female running a house is a problem, a broken family," she said. "The little nuclear family is a paradigm that just doesn't work. It doesn't work for white people or for black people. Why we are hanging onto it, I don't know." So long as thinking like this prevails, there will be no brake on our slide toward family forms that are economically, socially, and emotionally less tenable for children—and that perpetuate themselves over generations. To point out just one of many weaknesses invisible to Morrison, single-mother families have a poverty rate, after government transfers, of 38 percent; the comparable figure for husband-wife families is six percent. The nuclear family is not a perfect institution, but it is a necessary one. It is one of the very few institutions found in societies of every ethnic, political, and cultural stripe. While it would hardly be sufficient to

solve the problem by itself, a broad public effort to document the human damage that results from widespread family meltdown, and to encourage marriage as the appropriate locus of childbearing, could eventually help curb family abandonment and neglect.

In addition to rhetorical measures to reinforce two-parent families, we need to help mothers and fathers by giving them more choice, more independence, and more responsibility. Parents are likelier to shoulder obligations to their children if they believe that their interventions can make a difference. Poor parents in particular need new incentives and new tools. Rhode Island is now formulating a \$10 million plan that, beginning next year, will allow the state to make its 10,000 third-graders and their parents an offer: children who pass their courses every year from now on, obey the law, avoid pregnancy, and do not use drugs will receive special academic help, plus one-on-one guidance from a trained volunteer "mentor," throughout their elementary and high school years. Any student who fulfills the compact and is accepted into college or a job-training program after graduation will have his education or training paid for. Measures like this, which try to forestall self-injuring behavior rather than just salving its effects with public funds, have a decent prospect of success. Trading substantial assistance for cooperative self-reform is also respectful of individual

autonomy and free will, and thus is less likely to dispirit the low-income recipient. There is another advantage: payments conditioned on two-sided compacts have a much better chance of inspiring enthusiasm and generosity among taxpayers, who are understandably cynical about traditional welfare transfers.

To avoid the corrosive effects of patron-client welfare custodialism, parents ought to be offered transportable

resources—vouchers, say—and real choice in the selection of schools and housing. Yes, plenty of guardians would ignore a chance to transfer their child to a better school, and some would just discard a housing voucher. But an increased ability to act with effect would startle some parents into new interest in their child's welfare.

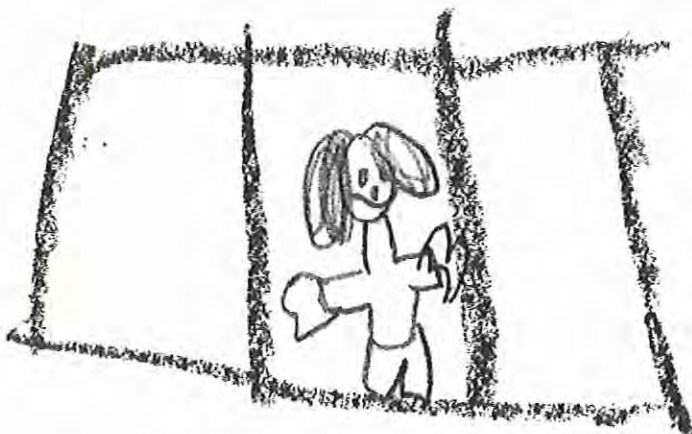
THE HOUSING AREA OFFERS A POWERFUL JUSTIFICATION for a rapid move toward a voucher strategy. A given house or apartment is not just a shelter; it is also an assignment to a physical neighborhood, a milieu, a social class. Homes are the locus of family life, and specific homes in specific places can exert powerful influences on the personalities and experiences of the occupants. Traditional public-housing complexes tend to be giant conglomerations of the troubled—isolated reservations where dysfunction is not the exception but the norm. Housing projects are petri dishes for family disintegration. All the role models, all the financial incentives—the entire world view—are an encouragement to other-than-intact families. It would be much healthier for low-income families if households receiving housing assistance were dispersed broadly through a more normal cross-section of neighbors. The best way to promote dispersion is to assign people means rather than a place.

Other attempts to break the physical segregation of dysfunctional families are also needed. The typical single mother on public assistance lives in stark withdrawal—closeted in an apartment to avoid the dangers beyond, doing no outside work, having no civic attachments or other means of integration into the larger world. Her universe is defined by a small circle of people living similarly. A check slips through her mail slot every two weeks. To break this isolation, welfare recipients ought to be required to satisfy certain requirements for activity during their period of dependency: completing high school or a high-school-equivalency program within a given number of years, getting a part-time job, taking classes in child-rearing or household management—whatever. Failure should mean loss of benefits. The emphasis must be on making measurable efforts toward self-improvement.

More generally, helping America's lower classes reclaim a solid family structure will require sharp changes in the way we transfer income in this country. Significant welfare reform is a grail that has eluded legions of crusaders over several generations, but some progress has at least been made in agreeing on what we ought to be disgusted with. Most observers now believe that our welfare programs ought to be made strictly transitional, phasing out entirely after a limited period of reciprocity, rather than serving as a long-term source of income (as they currently do for many). Support is growing for refundable tax credits for poor people with earned income—and for putting heavier reliance on the tax system to transfer

"My aunt told a lie in court and had to go to jail."

Quotation and art:
ALONNA, age 7



money to people without earned income—instead of fishing checks to welfare recipients through multiple layers of social workers. There is a growing consensus that the presence of children, rather than the mere fact of low income, ought to be the trigger for assistance. And sentiment is growing in some quarters for discrimination in favor of intact families in public-housing, tax, and entitlement policy.

Public policy ought to aim to weave parents and children together in webs of mutual responsibility and obligation. With respect to child support, the state should set itself up as a kind of bondsman—enforcer of private obligations first, gap-filler second—stepping into the breach only when payments cannot be collected from an absentee parent. Only 37 percent of mothers with absent spouses received payments from those spouses in 1985; the average annual amount was just \$2,220, down 25 percent in constant dollars from the level of seven years earlier. Tracking down irresponsible fathers will not always be cost-effective; many of them have no earnings. (A variety of evidence suggests that up to half of inner-city young men have not worked a single day in the past year.) Nonetheless, the effort of establishing a paternity decree is worthwhile, if only to force wider recognition of the parental obligations that are being defaulted on.

One fatal mistake to be avoided in government efforts to promote healthier families is undertaking measures that supersede or substitute for parental efforts. If you house the child, and feed him his hot meals, and provide all his intellectual and moral instruction at school, you run the risk of persuading marginally involved parents that they are superfluous.

Interventions must operate through and with parents, not around them. Day-care programs, for instance, ought to require classroom participation by each parent on a rotating basis. Child counseling should include parents. Unless undertaken cautiously, well-intentioned public efforts to compensate for parental remoteness can have the inadvertent effect of apologizing for, and increasing, such remoteness.

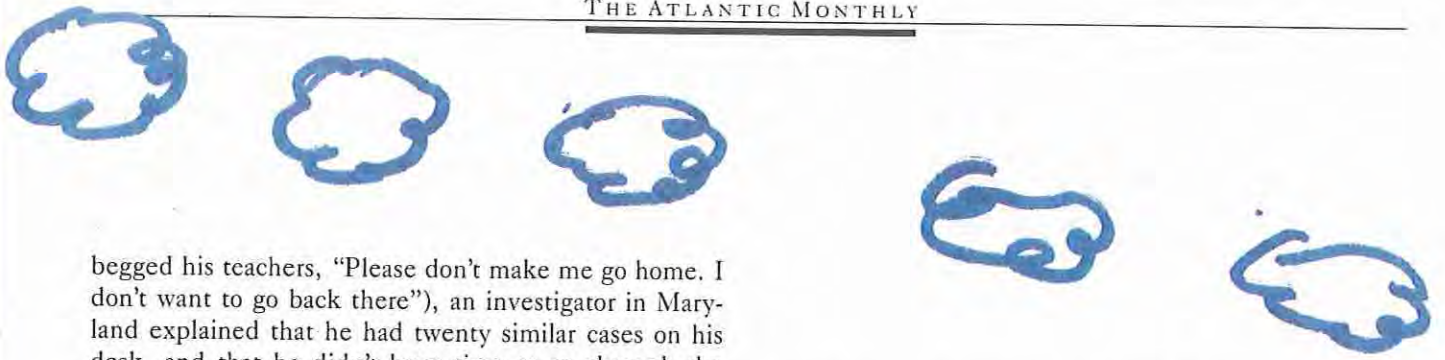
Confronting Bad Parents

PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. They need to be *held* responsible. We already have limited laws holding parents to account for truancy and early school dropout by children. There is growing agreement that keeping control of one's children ought to be a condition for residence in public housing—twenty-nine states have won a federal waiver to evict families from projects if a child is found to be using or selling drugs. Florida has just passed legislation that punishes parents and other adults who let their guns fall into the hands of children. In Wisconsin and Hawaii parents can be forced to support offspring of their unmarried teenage children.

Real sanctions should be meted out against uncooperative mothers and fathers when juveniles repeatedly violate youth curfews in those cities where they exist. Some cities are considering giving family courts new powers to force parents to participate in court-ordered counseling along with their delinquent juveniles. The California legislature passed an anti-youth-gang law in 1988 that allows parents to be arrested for failure to "exercise reasonable care, supervision, protection, and control over their minor child." Under its provisions derelict parents can be directed into various forms of treatment and counseling, with criminal penalties of up to a year in jail and a \$2,500 fine if they refuse. (British authorities recently proposed the adoption of a similar statute.) Though growing in number, parent-accountability statutes are not yet enforced nearly as often, or as effectively, as they should be. In Los Angeles, which has been making active use of the California statute, thirty to forty cases are being processed every month. These include instances where parents have openly tolerated guns and gang insignia in the home, where friends of the parents have tried to recruit their children into prostitution, where drug-addicted parents have simply stopped providing and caring for their children. Egregious negligence of this kind justifies public intrusion into certain parent-child relationships.

In instances where parents prove unwilling or unable to provide their children with the care and oversight they need, our child-protection services must have the resources and will to act. Currently they don't: our standards of child protection have fallen to scandalously low levels in recent years. Many child-protection agencies are now doing little more than preventing murder, and sometimes they fail even to do that. In the state of Washington, for instance—where conditions are better than they are in most other places—seventeen children who were on state case rolls for protection have died from abuse or neglect in the past three years. (Another twenty-eight not previously known to the authorities also died of neglect or abuse.) In Washington, D.C., where reporters last summer discovered that the backlog of child-endangerment cases yet to be investigated numbered 771, one social worker says, "Prevention" is not a word that exists in our agency anymore." He goes on: "When we define tragedy, it is not a child's failure to thrive. It is either they are maimed . . . or they are dead." Asked why he hadn't acted to remove a six-year-old boy from a known crack house run by the child's mother (the boy regularly





begged his teachers, "Please don't make me go home. I don't want to go back there"), an investigator in Maryland explained that he had twenty similar cases on his desk, and that he didn't have time to go through the time-consuming process of taking a child from a parent unless there was "imminent danger." Such a minimal standard of child welfare verges on the barbaric.

Making child-protection agencies more attentive will be particularly important if we intend to continue the standard practice of erring on the side of risk—that is, keeping children with previously abusive parents and hoping for the best. Family courts are generally unwilling to terminate parental rights these days unless there is a threat of immediate physical harm. The increased levels of violence and drug addiction that we are now seeing have, strangely, done little to change this pattern.

Some jurisdictions have won so-called "findings of abuse" against drug-using parents in the juvenile and family courts. These findings have no criminal ramifications, but they allow the

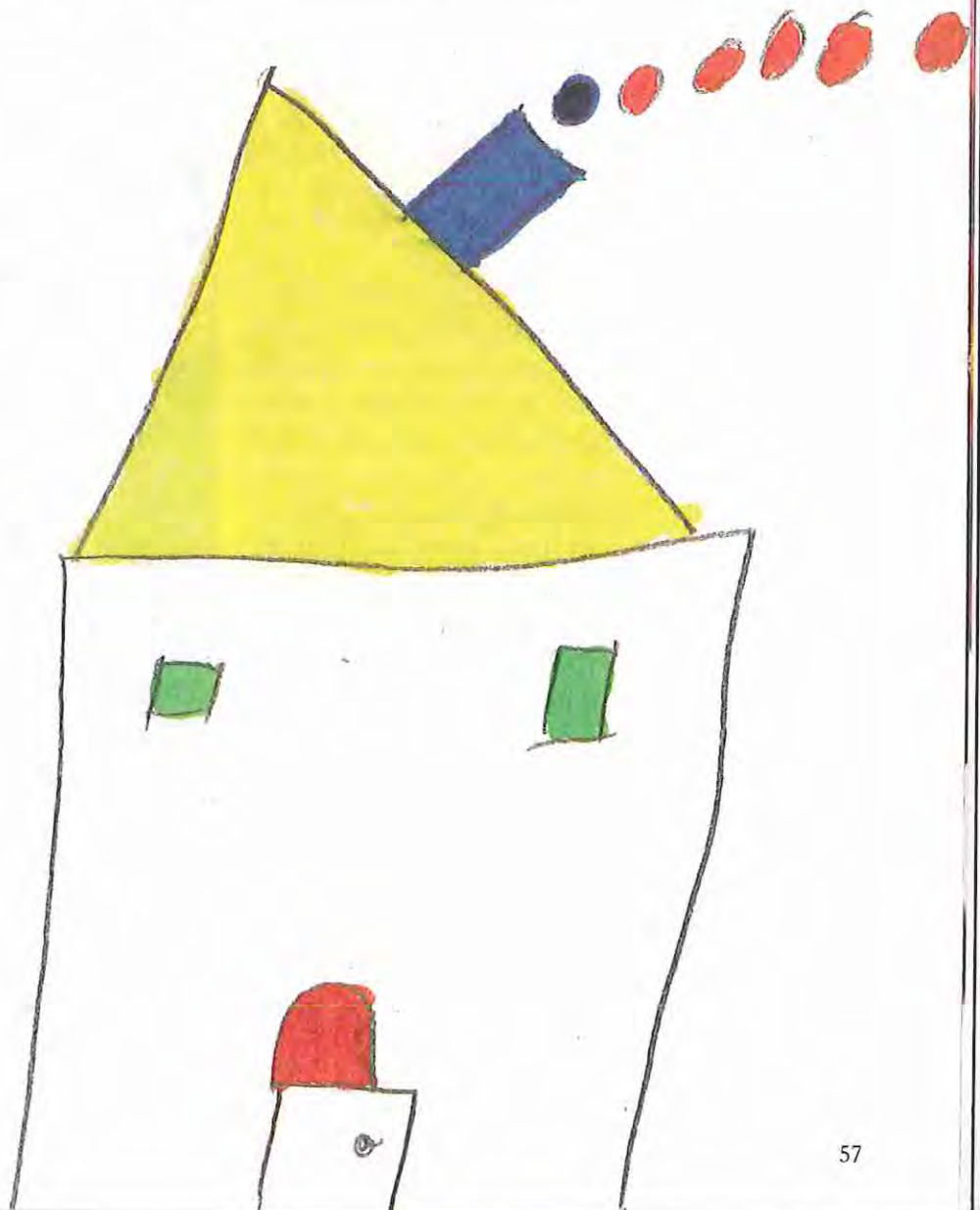
court to enter mandatory orders of protection in the child's behalf (for instance, forcing a parent to enter a treatment program) and to take custody of a child if a parent undertakes no constructive change. "We don't want newborns going home with drug addicts," says Paul Logli, the state's attorney in Winnebago County, Illinois. "To me, those places where babies are handed to mothers regardless are examples of a collapsing system. If prosecutors and social workers can't work out something better than that, then we ought to just close up shop."

Unfortunately, most cities and counties are unwilling

"I saw this man go around my way and kill people. I ran in the house and got down on the floor."

Quotation:
T'KIA, age 7

Art:
BISMAL, age 8





to intervene. Keeping children with problem parents is the pattern even in notably extreme instances. One example came to light in Philadelphia last year. In June a child named Michaela Robinson was born addicted to cocaine, after a pregnancy in which her mother had sought no prenatal care. The addicted infant underwent withdrawal and then boarded for a period at Temple University Hospital. Social workers, meanwhile, were having difficulty making contact with the mother, and when they did, she was "very unaccommodating." The woman had been under investigation by the city's Department of Human Services since 1988, because of tips that she was caring improperly for her other three children. Nonetheless, the mother was persuaded to take Michaela home.

The mother was uncooperative in her dealings with social workers in the months that followed. When investigators were able to get into the residence, they noted that the baby was very small and unclean. "We saw evidence of neglect," one DHS worker said, but not what would have been considered enough to have the child removed. Finally, on December 23, paramedics found the emaciated body of the six-month-old dead in an infant seat. According to authorities, cocaine poisoning was the cause of death; crack smoke blown into the baby's face and mouth in an attempt to pacify her was possibly the source of the fatal intoxication. The medical examiner reports that ten other infants, ranging in age from twenty-eight days to

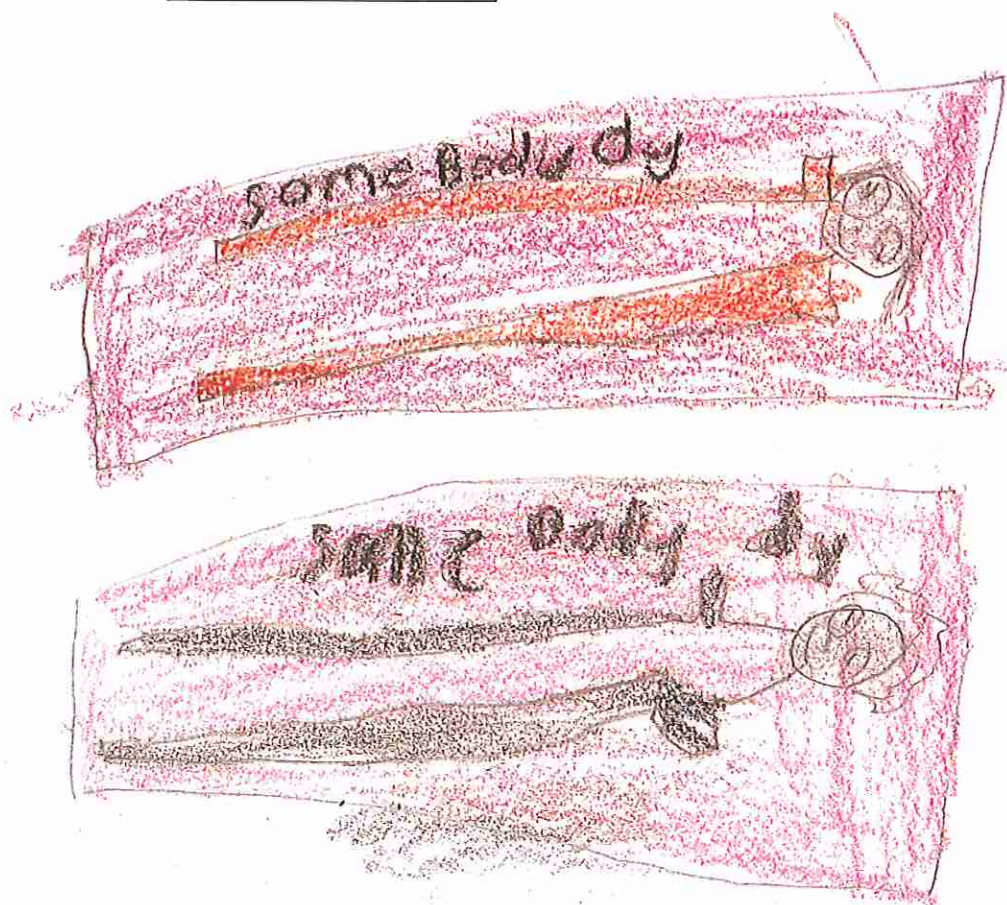


ten months, have died in Philadelphia over the past three years after inhaling crack fumes.

A strong case can be made that mothers giving birth to drug-addicted babies should lose them, unequivocally and permanently, unless they submit to immediate treatment. Yet in Washington and other cities legal strictures and anesthetized agencies often impede custody transfers, even for abandoned infants. Of course, many of these children, because of their damaged brains and unhealthy bodies, will eventually become a public responsibility anyway.

Besides new standards for action and increased efficiency at child-protection agencies, we also need safe havens for youngsters who have been pulled out of danger. In particular, we need a big push to support and improve adoption in this country—a market with bulges at both the supply and demand ends but with a host of bureaucratic interferences in between, which prevent congenial matches.

Referring to the drug-affected babies living in his institution, Haynes Rice, the director of the Howard University Hospital, says, "A lot of people really want to adopt these babies, but there have been social-services cutbacks, and city authorities and the judicial system don't have a speedy process for handling the proceedings." Some small, specific changes—for instance, ending prohibitions where they exist on adoptions by foster parents, reducing strictures where they exist against cross-race



adoptions, cutting enormous adoption fees, strengthening legal protections for adoptive parents, and restoring some confidentiality to the adoption process—could ease the placement of thousands of youngsters into supportive and loving homes.

Bringing Schools to Order

SCHOOLS ARE THE PRIMARY PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN the lives of children. If dangerous disorder is allowed to exist there, children will get a powerfully negative impression of society's interest in protecting them. Schools must be sanctuaries, where at a minimum physical safety is guaranteed. "If we can't ensure at least inside a school building or a schoolyard that there is still safety from the chaos of the streets," says Sandra Feldman, the president of New York City's teachers' union, "then I fear for the future of our whole society." Unfortunately, we are not now even close to providing such a guarantee. We seem to have decided that the level of violence in our schools today is something we can live with—indeed, that it is virtually normal.

There is nothing normal, however, about the present situation. Some 3 million incidents of attempted or completed street crime (assault, rape, robbery, theft) take place inside schools or on school property annually. Nearly 300,000 high school students are physically attacked each month. One teacher in twenty is assaulted every

year. Twelve percent of all teachers hesitate to confront misbehaving students for fear of reprisal. The results of the National Adolescent Student Health Survey, which queried 11,000 eighth- and tenth-grade students in twenty states in 1987, indicate that nearly two percent of all students (that would amount to 338,000 students nationwide) carried a handgun to school at least once that year. A third of those students packed a pistol *daily*. About eight times as many students carry knives as guns.

There is no way to justify bringing a weapon to school. Brandishing a firearm there challenges every civilized norm, and until the possibility of such conduct is eliminated, there can be no fine-tuning, or even functioning, in our classrooms. Hectoring against television violence, doling out food and health care, and pressing children to "respect themselves" and practice "self-esteem" are ludicrous—and hypocritical—

Somebody pulled my cousin out of the car and shot him in the heart two weeks ago."

Quotation and art above:
DANA, age 7

Art on far left:
JARRAL, age 7

Art in center:
DIONDRA, age 9



"The man was selling drugs and he got locked up."

Quotation:
MAURICE, age 8

Art:
ANDREA, age 9

support that someone threatened to hurt them in school, and 13 percent report actually having been attacked on the premises or on a school bus at least once during the past year. As one would expect, the meekest suffer most. Klaus Bornemann, a Bronx schoolteacher, says that in his violence-plagued junior high, "The kid who demonstrates fear

measures under conditions where responsible authorities do not even secure life and limb. The individual improvement and social training that are a school's mission cannot credibly take place in an atmosphere of terror.

And terror is not too strong a word. Eight percent of urban junior and senior high school students miss at least one day of school a month because they are afraid to go. More than a

third of these students report that someone threatened to hurt them in school, and 13 percent report actually having been attacked on the premises or on a school bus at least once during the past year. As one would expect, the meekest suffer most. Klaus Bornemann, a Bronx schoolteacher, says that in his violence-plagued junior high, "The kid who demonstrates fear

is raw meat." It is not only the meek, however, who feel exposed. Nearly half of all students in New York City's public high schools stayed home from school on Halloween last year, out of fear that there would be trouble on what has in recent years often been a violent occasion.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS who exert discipline at the schoolhouse level will be needed to dissipate this climate of fear. And some educators will have to be prodded. Only one teacher out of the 63,000 in New York City's public school system was fired in 1988, and only one principal (a convicted drug user) has been fired in the past eleven years—not exactly evidence of public revulsion against the anarchy in New York classrooms. Beating down gangsterism takes strict policies and determined personnel. It will require making suspensions and expulsions stick, and establishing more alternative schools for chronic miscreants. In some places metal detectors, more guards, ID cards, occasional locker searches, and similar steps will be necessary. Squeamishness about such measures often reflects the public-relations worries of administrators more than

anything else. Whether we choose to admit it or not, violence has entered our schools. To pretend otherwise is unconscionable.

Fortunately, even in the meanest schools it is usually a limited number of youths who cause most of the turmoil. Klaus Bornemann estimates that most of the danger in his school originates with just 10 percent of the students. Toughness with this group can make a difference. In 1988 New York City finally began a weapons-detection program in five high schools, and nine more high schools and one middle school were added this school year. A security team with metal detectors visits three of the fifteen schools on a random basis every day. Principals and students report that even this modest step (there are 119 high schools in the New York system) has improved school safety. A federal "schoolyard drug law" is now on the books, stipulating heavier penalties when a drug-trafficking offense takes place within 1,000 feet of any campus, but overworked federal prosecutors rarely invoke it. Taking matters into their own hands, some states have recently begun to levy heavier sentences for certain offenses when they take place on school grounds.

An example that should *not* be followed was set last year by California's First District Court of Appeals. In 1982 California voters added a "Victim's Bill of Rights" to the state constitution. Part of it reads: "All students and staff of public primary, elementary, junior high and senior high schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure, and peaceful." In a 1986 lawsuit Constance Hosemann and her son Stephen, a student in Oakland who had been repeatedly bullied, beaten, and robbed at school, charged that their school district had failed to protect Stephen's right to a safe classroom. The Alameda County Superior Court judge in the case ruled in the Hosemanns' favor, holding that they could seek monetary damages, and ordering the school district to develop a safe-schools plan. In May of last year a three-judge panel in the First District Court of Appeals overturned that decision, arguing that while the California constitution does provide students with a "general right" to security, it "imposes no express duty on anyone to make schools safe"—a perfect rationalization of the inertness that has so damaged the serenity of American childhood in the past twenty-five years.

Giving Criminals No Quarter

NOT JUST AROUND SCHOOLS BUT ACROSS SOCIETY we need to crack down on personal crime. There are those who will say we are now in the midst of just such a cleanup. They are wrong. Figures produced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that only 18 percent of people arrested for violent felonies are convicted and sentenced to at least a year in prison. For those arrested for drug felonies, the figure is 10 percent. Among people arrested for homicide, only 49

percent are sentenced to a year or more behind bars. For rapists, the figure is just 29 percent. A typical inmate getting out of lockup these days has spent seventeen months there. That is 45 percent of the average original court-ordered sentence. In other words, there is relatively little chance that criminals will go to jail even if arrested, and when they do go, they usually spend less than a year and a half in confinement. That's our war on crime?

It is no wonder, then, that four out of five state-prison inmates today are repeat offenders. Almost half of them are serving at least their fourth sentence. These people are making crime a career, in which occasional short prison terms are just a cost of doing business. Along the way, many of them are recruiting the young as criminal accomplices.

There is little motive today for criminals to avoid further illegal activity. This is particularly true for juveniles, who can expect especially light treatment. Judge Reggie Walton, a black jurist who saw thousands of juvenile offenders while sitting on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for eight years (before becoming the nation's assistant "drug czar"), says, "Many of the young people [who get] involved in the illegal drug trade do so because the risk of prosecution does not act as a deterrent. Knowing that a conviction in juvenile court will in all probability result in little or no punishment, the benefits . . . outweigh the risks. . . . We must not permit this situation to continue." Walton points out that if the young men who attacked the Central Park jogger last year had committed their assault in the District of Columbia, they would have been jailed for at most two years before being released back into the community, if their behavior was good.

In California, our "leading indicator" state, rates of arrest for burglary, theft, car theft, arson, and robbery are now higher among juveniles than among adults. Using the underaged to sell drugs and carry out shootings is a common gang practice nationwide, and thwarting it will require expanding the list of crimes for which a juvenile is automatically certified to stand trial as an adult. Increased juvenile accountability in general would be a good idea. Little things like revoking the driver's licenses of youngsters convicted of certain crimes—as some states now do—would communicate an appropriate message, linking civic privileges to minimum standards of behavior. The aim of tough juvenile programs is not so much to punish as to startle, to communicate resolute concern. In an earlier era, when the sentiment that there are "no bad boys, only bad societies" prevailed, the usefulness of firm responses to individual antisocial acts was often ignored. Today we are beginning to remember. The truth is, children and adolescents hunger for clear limits, caring authority, even the occasional boundary-delineating confrontation.

The way we have been using the criminal-justice system to protect children's interests is perverse at both

ends of the age spectrum. The very young, as we have seen, suffer from grossly insufficient protection. Meanwhile, the older young—teenagers who in many societies would be accorded full adult responsibilities—are over-protected and excused from accountability for even the foulest offenses. A lack of nerve and an indulgent passivity characterize both responses.

The only way to reverse the flow toward criminal experimentation by the young is to reverse the incentives facing criminals generally. That means building more prisons and boot camps and work farms and military schools and electronic house-arrest monitoring systems and whatever else works, and then making sentences stick. Genuine compassion demands that we forgo the comfortable, and ever so much easier, responses of softness.

Creative thinking in the area of corrections is desperately needed, particularly for juveniles. In 1984 Oklahoma instituted a program called RID (for "regimented inmate discipline"), which it uses to segregate and try to reclaim young offenders. RID inmates face a structured environment, including physical conditioning, rigid dress codes, and limits on personal property. (If you imagine that those are things all prison inmates face, you are mistaken.) They receive military-style haircuts every two weeks. Rooms must be neat. For many RID inmates this is a first encounter with discipline. Intense classroom training and homework are required, and inmates are tested. Stays are short—about three or four months—and when probationary releases occur, intensive supervision is provided for a minimum of three months afterward. This seems to help.

WITHOUT DENYING THAT CARROTS ARE GENERALLY far more important than sticks in keeping a society on track, it nonetheless seems clear that government priorities have recently been unduly skewed away from directly defensive responses to personal violence. Governments currently spend seventeen times as much on income transfers, education, and social aid as they do on law and order. This is not to say we ought to do without social programs or measures to promote employment. The point, rather, is simply this: the way to fight crime is to fight crime. Public policies that operate on the premise that brutality is merely an effect of limited economic means are both inaccurate (right through

the recent murder wave in Washington, D.C., the unemployment rate for people age sixteen and over was less than three percent in the metropolitan area, and between four and five percent within the District itself) and unfair to the large majority of low-income Americans who conduct themselves peaceably.

Besides, there is a hierarchy of social dysfunction, and first things must be secured first. A child who comes of age under a haze of fear will never know the early assurance that is the only reliable basis for adult competence. Later he will discover that schools dominated by outlaws are no place to acquire job skills. If he is afraid to wait at a bus stop in the evening, he will be no candidate for steady employment. And economic opportunity will never come to him in his neighborhood so long as shops are vandalized and potential customers must fear for their safety. Peacekeeping and aid-sprinkling are complementary, not mutually exclusive, undertakings. Yet while we've tried a lot of the latter over the past quarter century, we've neglected the former.

A final point: The origins and effects of childhood disturbance are obviously of interest to public-policy makers. If we can identify children at risk of being caught up in the turmoil swirling around them, then possibly some of the turmoil can be avoided. But once a particular juvenile has committed a serious crime, the "whys" and "how comes" can no longer be a central issue. At that point justice must be pursued—for the sake of the aggrieved, and to maintain the essential proposition that crime brings on punishment. If you injure another human being, your liberties will be suspended: that is a message that can be comprehended by adult and juvenile citizens alike, and behind which a society can justly stand. Too often today we become paralyzed trying to decide whether the juvenile criminal is a victim or a victimizer. That leads to very dangerous territory.

If we are to have any chance of preventing young criminals from infecting a class of successors, and from stalking an innocent public, then we must see with clear eyes what they have become: sad cases, but now unambiguously part of the problem. Unless this new crop of teenage marauders is incapacitated, the vicious cycle of youths preyed upon and then preying on others may become unbreakable in our cities. And blameless children, never having known the protections and sanctuaries that are civilization's original justification, will be hurt most. □

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