



## A Girls' School in Baltimore

by Tom Bethell

**T**he Laurence G. Paquin High School for Expectant Teenage Mothers is a bleak brick fortress in a desolate section of east Baltimore; a squiggle-painted, cinder-block, boarded-up-row-house, upside-down-sofas-on-the-sidewalk kind of a neighborhood, with drug lookouts wearing woolsox headgear posted at nearby corners. Paquin's student body is composed entirely of expectant mothers or teenagers who already have given birth, some of them twice. Almost all are black. Paquin has been in the news lately because Norplant will soon be dispensed free at the school's clinic. This is a new form of contraception, consisting of six capsules that are inserted under the skin on the underside of the upper arm. They release a hormone called progesterin which blocks ovulation for up to five years. With the implant, a teenager doesn't have to worry about forgetting to take the pill.

The Paquin School is ghetto-proofed, a sign outside proclaiming it to be a Drug-Free School Zone. There are no windows at all on the ground floor, mere slits upstairs, and stadium lights suspended from the four corners of the building's roof. A phone outside the front and only entrance allows visitors to identify themselves and to be buzzed in if considered friendly. Inside, there were bright lights and Christmas tree decorations, wall slogans ("At the End of Broken Dreams You Need Someone, Us—the Paquin Family"), plaques, and a display case showing a satin-finished christening set for twins, made in the school's garment-making shop. There were framed letters from George and Barbara Bush and other dignitaries. "The play outfits for the grands [grandchildren] are just perfect," Mrs. Bush wrote, "and they will love

them. ShonTae Farrare has done a wonderful job personalizing them." Girls in the inner city, and their offspring, have names like that now: ShonTae, Taniqua, Shaquira, Tamika, Tallisha, Tayesha.

Babies were crying softly in the background and young women wearing slacks and loose outfits were walking in the hall. Two or three were carrying plastic bassinets with babies. They have a whole Toddler Center, with cots and cribs and baby rattles and multicolored wall alphabets—Paquin University, it is called, with "an infant stimulation/learning program designed to promote an adaptive cognitive style." It can handle up to thirty infants and children, aged six weeks to six years. They were just finishing lunch, which the students and their babies have together in the cafeteria. The sign on the cafeteria wall read: "You Are the Apple of Our Eye. . . . So Hang On . . . Don't Drop Out." About 300 girls attend the school each semester, but I gather that few stay for more than a year.

**A**s I waited to talk to the principal, Dr. Rosetta Stith, I copied down a cheerless message framed on the office wall: "Our school must be dedicated to being a change agent through activities that offer young school-age mothers a measure of stability, hope, and a sense of reality to deal with a world that is constantly torn between uncertainty, unrest, and violence."

The principal, Dr. Stith, fortyish with upswept silvery hair, was happy to talk and she mentioned all the media attention of the past two weeks—AP, UPI, *Newsweek*, Bettina Gregory of ABC News. Norplant is "just another form of birth control, like having another car to drive," Stith told me. She wanted me to know right off that the students are well warned that the implant does not protect against venereal and viral disease. But

this they already know. When Karen de Witt of the *New York Times* visited a classroom of thirty pregnant girls at the school, and Stith asked them what did give protection, they chanted in unison: "Condom, condom, condom." A note of mockery here? They have been told over and over about birth control and condoms, they're all pregnant anyway, and now a new item has been added to the contraceptive menu.

The assumption underlying this latest weapon in the arsenal of the therapeutic state is that conception among inner-city blacks is largely accidental. *Washington Post* reporter Leon Dash questioned this in his 1989 book, *When Children Want Children*, based on months of research in the Washington ghetto. One 16-year-old, Tauscha Vaughn, said to him: "Mr. Dash, will you please stop asking me about birth control? Girls out here know all about birth control. There's too many birth control pills out here. All of them know about it. Even when they twelve, they know what it is. Girls out here get pregnant because they want to have babies."

Later in the book Dash claimed that the four pregnant teenagers in one family he interviewed "wanted children for a variety of reasons—to achieve something tangible, to prove something to their peers, to be considered an adult, to get their mother's attention, and to keep up with an older brother or sister." Another 16-year-old girl he met baited her virginal 18-year-old cousin as "barren" because she had not yet had a child.

**S**ith would have none of this wanted-child argument. She took at face value what the girls tell her in school—"You don't think it's going to happen to you, then one day you find you're pregnant," and so on. "It's not deliberate," Stith reassured me. She did

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express some exasperation, though. "You have to have a driver's permit to drive, a voter's card to vote, but you don't have to have anything to be a parent." How about a marriage license, or an end to welfare? She does not accept that teenagers make cost/welfare-benefit analyses of child-bearing, because the babies keep coming while the "public assistance grants have been decreasing." (Yet, according to the *New York Times*, she does believe that the welfare state fosters dependency, and that as a result young women in her school do not have to think about the consequences of pregnancy.)

She showed me around parts of the school. Everything was surprisingly quiet; it seemed to be an almost wholly female environment. There's a staff of forty—the school is a honey pot for social-service providers. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, the annual cost per pupil is over \$9,000 per year, about double the cost of regular public schools in the city. Once a month there's a "workshop" for the fathers-to-be. I peered through a glass aperture into one classroom, and teenagers with infants on their laps were sitting around a conference table. But Stith kept me away from them.

She did take me to see the Paquin Entrepreneur Program. "Entre-pre-neur: a person who organizes, manages and assumes responsibility for a business or other enterprise," said the sign on the wall. The young mothers—two of whom were in the room, stitching away silently—learn how to use sewing machines and to make baby clothes. These can be for their own children or for a toddler line called Young Sensations (available at four area malls, Stith said). "This is an elective for them."

Like that of Washington, D.C., the population of Baltimore (735,000) has declined 25 percent from its 1950 peak. The city is now about 60 percent black. One in ten Baltimore girls aged 15 to 17 gave birth in 1990, and teenagers account for 23 percent of the city's births in 1991. Teenagers can become eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children when they have children themselves. About 112,000 mothers in Baltimore received AFDC in September 1992—86 percent of them black. The great majority also receive Food Stamps, and of course Medicaid.

It is probably true that in deciding

whether to have further children, the young women do not make marginal calculations about AFDC payments. This merely means that incremental change in the welfare system—which is all that we are going to see in the current political climate—will make no difference. The liberal assumption that government aid "helps" people in proportion to the amount given is still largely intact. If this view prevails in policy debates, life in the inner city will deteriorate further.

The great problem at present is that unwed mothers on welfare, and the young men who impregnate them, are indirectly told that they do not have to be responsible for their behavior. Mothers on AFDC are called the "underclass" but they also constitute a privileged class—unloved but still privileged. The overall effect of the welfare state is less devastating to them than to the fathers. True there are not enough weddings and too many funerals, and the mothers live in chaotic extended families, but there are babies and in-laws, showers and christening parties, and the material essentials are provided for them. The young men are "deprived" at a more fundamental level, however. Their provider role is usurped by the state. Embittered, many take to a life of crime on the streets.

Here and there, liberals are showing signs of recognizing that all is not well in the cities, and Norplant is apparently their latest riposte. Unless I am mistaken, it is not going to make much of a dent. There is also a considerable irony here. Shortly after Norplant was approved by the FDA, in December 1990, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* stirred up controversy by publishing an editorial—"Poverty and Norplant: Can Contraception Reduce the Underclass?"—which suggested that welfare mothers should be offered incentives to use the device. This was immediately denounced as racist by both black and white members of the paper's news staff. In a letter to the editor, the president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists attacked the editorial as a "tacit endorsement of slow genocide." A second, apologetic editorial followed, and the editorial page editor, David Boldt, said he "deeply regretted" the way the earlier editorial had linked race, poverty, and birth control. (He also complained to the *New York Times* about the

"summons from the thought police for violating the no-right-turn rule.")

Since then, however, the offensive editorial's recommendation has been quietly implemented. The implant is now covered by Medicaid in all fifty states. "In what some see as a troubling paradox," a writer noted in a recent unbylined *New York Times* news story, "truly poor women can get Norplant more easily than those who have modest incomes." This in turn "is stirring profound and troubling questions about personal rights and public policy." The paper, doubly troubled, failed to note what was so "troubling." No doubt it was that inner city women on Medicaid—black women, overwhelmingly—now really do have an incentive to use Norplant, whereas the working poor do not. A Norplant kit costs \$365, and a private doctor may charge \$500 to insert it. This is a lot more than the zero cost encountered by those on Medicaid.

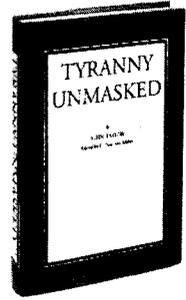
"The thinking has changed," the author of the *Inquirer* editorial told me, referring to the new acceptability of Norplant incentives. The potential for controversy "depends on who says it, and who does it."

Early indications are that the inner cities are not about to be depopulated soon. About 500,000 women now use Norplant (up from 100,000 a year ago), but 61 percent of sales are to doctors in private practice. Foundations are also making them available to women not covered by Medicaid. According to the *Washington Post*, Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington has found teenagers in the capital "reluctant to use Norplant because it is more complicated to reverse than other contraceptives and because it is visible under the skin." "I've heard it can give you cancer," Paquin student Quadrine Kelly, six months pregnant, told Karen de Witt.

The Paquin students go home at 3:00 p.m. I watched about a hundred of them filing out of the front door, many of them boarding a Baltimore mass transit bus outside. Sad to say, for most of the young women the bloom was already off the rose. Many were overweight, and they looked older than one might have expected. Down the road, on North Avenue, young men in army surplus jackets were filing out of the Eastside District Court just as their sisters were leaving the school. □

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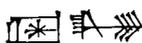
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## Brickbats and Broomsticks

*Welcoming remarks from our Master of Ceremonies, delivered before 400 writers, readers, and supporters at Washington's Capital Hilton on December 2, 1992.*

**W**e are here tonight to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of *The American Spectator*—the magazine, the men and women, the way of life.

But we are also here to celebrate something else—our return to political opposition. Let's be honest with ourselves. What a relief to be on the attack again. No more gentle sparring with the Administration. No more striking with the flat of our sword. No more firing blanks. Ladies and gentlemen, we have game in our sights. Clinton may be a disaster for the rest of the nation, but he is meat on our table.

What a joy to be able to turn to the helmsman of our good ship *Spectator* and say, "Captain Bob, bring the guns down to deck level and load with grapeshot."

So stand warned, Boy Clinton . . . Mr. Bill . . . Wet Willie . . . You and your "Presidential Partner" . . . President Clinton and First Person Hillary . . . Pudge and Ruffles. (If the Fathers of the Christian church had known these two, divorce would not only be permitted, it would be a sacrament.) Anyway, stand warned the pair of you. We're going to laugh you out of office. We did it to the Carters and we'll do it to you.

So we're here tonight not just to congratulate ourselves for writing and reading and founding and editing and—most important—contributing lots of money to *The American Spectator*. We are also



here to work ourselves into a delicious battle frenzy. Let us take our text from that great paean to individual rights, *Animal House*. I quote the ultimate paleo-conservative hero, Bluto, as played by John Belushi: "Take no prisoners!"

**Y**ou know, some people think we lost this election. *We* didn't lose it. Some people we know . . . people we like personally . . . people whose politics we can just barely tolerate . . . *They* lost this election. We've been in opposition for four years already. And opposition is where we belong. Being opposed to government is what defines true conservatism. We know that government doesn't work even when the most brilliant people in the world—us—run it. We know government is an ineffective and morally unacceptable means of delivering life's benefits.

Clinton doesn't know this. Clinton thinks Americans can vote themselves richer, vote themselves smarter, vote themselves taller. He probably thinks

some inches can be voted off his own waistline.

We know people have free will and responsibility for their own actions. Clinton thinks people are victims. Victims of a Republican Administration—you remember how George Bush liked to sneak out of the White House at night and sell crack and get teenage girls pregnant.

We believe in God. Clinton believes in going to church. And Clinton's staff believes that 12-step programs are the only way that God manifests himself in the modern world.

We believe in freedom and we know that there is no freedom without economic liberty. Clinton has never had a real job in his life. And won't have another after 1996.

**T**he Clinton people like to say that they are "non-ideological." Let me translate. It means that they don't know right from wrong. The Clinton people claim to be "pragmatists." And I agree. Because pragmatism is a fancy term for "don't know *can't* from *shouldn't*."

Well, the American voters elected Clinton. But one of the many good things about being conservatives is that we never have to feel betrayed by the common people. Sure, they voted for Clinton—that's what made them so common.

Another great advantage of conservatism is that we don't have to fill this