

The State vs. The Family



Brian O'Neel

Sometime before the end of September, the California State Legislature will pass and send to the governor's desk a number of bills that, if signed into law, will undermine the family like few laws before them. The bills would mandate that certain employers provide benefits for partners of employees involved in "domestic partnerships," what in a less politically correct age we would call "shacking up." Since little else separates civil marriage from today's common law arrangements, this troublesome legislation would amount to official de-recognition by the state of the family as a unique, necessary, beneficial institution. That is, it would force all of us to participate in a tacit lie. Domestic partnerships are *not* equal to matrimony. Pretending they are delivers a blow to families and, thus, society, which depends on strong families to remain healthy.

Proponents say such legislation is simply a matter of fairness and enabling loved ones to take care of each other in times of need. Where seniors are concerned, they say domestic partner legislation would help them maintain their standard of living. After all, if two seniors living off of Social Security marry, their benefits are reduced. But on this level, domestic partnership legislation is a state remedy to a federal problem that, in any event, can be addressed without diluting society's understanding of what a family is or of

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the central importance of families' role in holding together the social fabric. The same point holds for the argument that homosexuals in "committed relationships" need this legislation to take care of their "significant other." If the state wants to provide financial subsidies for homosexual couples, let it do so, being straightforward about what it is doing, not by confusing them with families and at the expense of the family institution upon which so much depends.

A third reason proponents give is that many heterosexual couples never intend to marry or don't intend to marry just yet. Still, they want to provide for one another, particularly in times of crisis. But domestic partnerships are particularly harmful when it comes to heterosexual couples who partake in them. This will come as a surprise to those who oppose such arrangements primarily because of moral objections to homosexual behavior. But homosexuals are only 4 percent of the general population, and even in places like San Francisco, where they make up 26.66 percent of the population, only 3 percent have registered as domestic partners.

Heterosexual cohabitants, however, are far more numerous. One study revealed that 50 percent of people 25-40 years old have lived with a "significant other" outside of marriage. Compare that to the 1930s and '40s when more than 90 percent of all newlywed women were either virgins or whose sole sexual partners were their future husbands. The more people who decide to live together, the more acceptable this becomes. Already, 60-plus percent of high schoolers think couples should live together before marriage.

This is not good. As Rutgers University's National Marriage Project stated in its recent report, *The State of Our Unions*, "Marriage is a fundamental social institution. It is central to the nurturing and raising of children. It is the 'social glue' that reliably attaches fa-



thers to children. It contributes to the physical, emotional, and economic health of men, women, and children, and thus to the nation as a whole.”

Yet the same report shows that the marriage rate in the last 50 years has dropped by 43 percent. Marriage is at its weakest point in the history of our nation. Indeed, it is hard to point to a major society where it has ever been weaker. And this has consequences.

Even when couples don't marry, they still procreate. For example, the percentage of never-married women 18-44 years old who have children jumped from 15 percent to 24 percent between 1982 and 1992. It is not just poor women who are having babies. With Murphy Brown-types, it jumped from 3 to 8 percent. If 50 percent of those 25-40 have lived together, it is reasonable to surmise that a many of today's illegitimate children are being born to domestic partners.

Some may ask, so what? After all, couples living together provide a modicum of stability, right?

Wrong. Marriage rates for couples that live together have dropped precipitously. In the last decade, the proportion of cohabiting mothers who eventually go on to marry the child's father declined from 57 percent to 44 percent. Furthermore, 45 percent of those who do marry will eventually divorce. Researchers believe the reason is that cohabitation — particularly serial cohabitation — tends to weaken one's respect for commitment. We are thus creating a situation where more and more children will be raised in single parent households or in homes where the male is not the biological father.

What will this mean to our children? According to the National Marriage Project, living together outside of marriage increases the risk of domestic violence for women. Studies show that children who grow up around domestic violence are more likely to abuse or to be abused as adults.

The risk of physical and sexual abuse for children also goes up. If the mother's partner is not the child's father, that child stands a 33 percent greater chance of suffering physical abuse. And many children living in cohabiting situations live not with their biological father but their mother's subsequent boyfriends.

But the effect goes beyond abuse. Divorce reduces family incomes by 42 percent, and nearly 50 percent of those families fall into poverty. Furthermore, children from broken homes are more likely to have chil-

dren out of wedlock, which is a prime factor in continued poverty. And they are two times as likely to cohabit themselves, which is a prime contributor to divorce. The financial situation is even worse with mothers who have not married. For blacks and whites alike, the median income of these never-married single-mothers were lower by 40 percent or more.

Children born in wedlock whose parents stayed married received AFDC only 3 percent of the time since birth. Conversely, AFDC receipt is 1,700 percent more frequent among illegitimate children of never married mothers than among legitimate children raised by intact married couples.

In one study, teachers report that boys living in households where there were male-authority figures who were not their biological fathers were more aggressive than those living with their biological fathers. Boys in households with a mother and at least a male authority figure were much less likely to be considered aggressive by teachers than their peers in mother-alone families. In an exhaustive 1998 *Society* magazine article, Nicholas Eberstadt wrote, “In the modern United States, the relationship between family breakdown and crime is not just strong; it is very strong.”

It cannot be stated more succinctly: Growing up in a married, two-parent family is objectively the best situation for our children and our society. Yet, as sociologist Barbara Dafoe Whitehead says, “Society wide ... the growth of cohabitation [*i.e.*, domestic partnerships] will tend to further weaken marriages as an institution.”

Domestic partnership legislation will only help this trend grow. In the words of the National Marriage Project's study, “The recognition and support of unmarried cohabitation unfortunately casts marriage as merely one of several alternative lifestyle choices. As the alternatives to it are strengthened, the institution of marriage is bound to weaken. After all, if those who cohabit have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples, why bother to marry?”

Why bother, indeed? If domestic partnership legislation passes, there will be virtually no discernible legal difference between cohabitation and marriage. History teaches that approval equals incentive. Passing this legislation, therefore, is wrong because it will only encourage the very things the state should work to prevent. And through the state's encouragement, the pathologies that fester upon our culture like a cancer will only multiply. Is this what we want? CFR

Political Warrior Strikes Back



DAVID HOROWITZ

**I AM NOT A CYNIC,
I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN RONALD REAGAN,
AND
IT'S STILL THE POLITICS, STUPID!**

CPR's July/August cover article, "Ronald Who?", by CPR Editor John Kurzweil was, in part, a rejoinder to *The Art of Political War*, a pamphlet by David Horowitz. Mr. Kurzweil criticized the pamphlet as betraying America's first principles and undermining the GOP cause by countenancing lying. Mr. Horowitz responds here; further responses follow on page 22. Mr. Kurzweil responds to his respondents on page 27.

I WROTE *The Art of Political War* to answer a puzzle: Why can Democrats run every two or four years on Republican programs and ideas — balanced budgets, welfare reform, tough attitudes towards crime, family values — and win, while Republicans who have been promoting these same principles for decades and not just during election season, lose? How is it that Democrats who have controlled every public school system in every major American city for 70 years, and are responsible for everything wrong with them, can claim education as their issue while

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Republicans cannot? Why did California Democrat Gray Davis beat Republican Dan Lungren by 20 points in the 1998 governor's race, the same calendar year that an underfunded anti-bilingual education initiative denounced as "nativist" and "racist" and opposed by every Democrat, every liberal, every editorialist, every media pundit, and even Dan Lungren and the state chair of the Republican Party win by the same margin — 20 points?

The answer I gave in *The Art of Political War* is that Republicans do not understand (as Democrats do) that politics is war conducted by other means, that it is a war of position, and that only by linking your agendas to the interests of women, children, minorities, working Americans, and the poor can you win. In a democracy the position you want is the side of the underdog, which is how most Americans identify themselves (whether they are really underdogs or not). Proposition 227, which opposed bilingual education, won because it was positioned as a measure that would give Hispanic youngsters the opportunity to learn English, to get into the economy and to climb the ladder of success. The electorate viewed it as a proposition for the underdog. This