

Outsourcing Parenthood

Thou Hast Conquered, O Boomer

by Beverly Eakman

Two categories of parents emerged in the 1970's: those who wanted to rear children and those who merely wanted to have them. I first became aware of the distinction in 1972, about the time the feminist revolution was beginning its *blitzkrieg* through university campuses. I had been married about four years, and the stark differences in outlook between the two factions had a profound effect not only on the way I viewed starting a family but on my approach to teaching—my chosen career before escaping the profession for more satisfying pursuits.

My husband and I were among the first wave of baby boomers, born in 1946, at the end of World War II. Thus, we wound up oscillating, intellectually and emotionally, between the pre-war belief system and the advancing era of antiauthoritarianism. For me, the former attitude was summed up in the popular lyrics to the theme song of a 1963 film, *Wives and Lovers*:

Hey, little girl, comb your hair, fix your makeup;
Soon he will open the door.
Don't think because there's a ring on your finger,
You needn't try anymore.
For wives should always be lovers, too.
Run to his arms the moment he comes home to you
I'm warning you.

Day after day, there are girls at the office
And men will always be men
Don't send him off with your hair still in curlers;
You may not see him again.

Translation: Real women don't wear jeans—blue, stone-washed, or otherwise!

I can still remember the words to every verse, though I never saw the actual movie. At 16, the lyrics alone made a huge impression on me. So, unsurprisingly, as a young wife, I sequestered myself in another room if I was going to do my hair; never left anything as crass as a razor on the ledge of the bathtub; and tried, even when I was working, to have dinner fixed, the table set with candles, and to look presentable, no matter how tired I might have been. Some 60's-era wives were literally terrified of "losing their looks" to pregnancy.

But a different view was emerging. I was aware that, at other colleges, girls were throwing away their curlers along with their brassieres, wearing torn blue jeans, and eschewing makeup. A few even called guys for dates. Most had not quite reached the stage where they did not welcome flowers and an opened door.

Nevertheless, there were powerful pressures to buck con-

vention. A youth-obsessed media was catering to, and actively spurring, rebellion against parents and societal norms. Whereas, in the 1950's, teen magazines and children's literature fed a young girl's desire to be "grown up" like Mommy—to wear high heels, maybe sneak a cigarette, dress up for dinner-dances, receive corsages, become proficient at something, marry, and rear children—by the 1970's, these notions had been stood on their head. The goals had changed for both sexes—to dressing like a bum; resisting formal attire for every occasion; drinking until one threw up; sleeping around; and indulging in as much idleness as possible while still living off the largess of one's parents.

That lasted until boomers became parents themselves, at which point their own elders smiled and said, "*Sayonara.*" What nobody counted on (except Pope Paul VI, who has more than been vindicated) was that the new attitude, combined with practicable contraception, would change the face of parenthood and family, and not for the better.

About the time my husband and I had been treated to the umpteenth display of childbirth films and breast-feeding from now-grown school chums and coworkers' wives—all of whom, it seemed, wound up divorced within five years—we realized a trend was afoot that would challenge our lifestyle and threaten our privacy. It may have been the Age of Aquarius, but the philosophical divide that resulted was neither free nor victimless. Sex came to be viewed as a recreational sport, and any babies became virtual trophies announcing an active sex life.

Exactly when we traditionalists, at first dubbed naive and impractical by cynical professors and the media, morphed into "repressive, paternalistic reactionaries" is unclear, but these pejoratives seemed to peak with the Vietnam War.

Couples who wanted to rear children were (and still are) interested in watching their offspring discover an exciting and bountiful world; seeing them take their first tentative steps, and not only in a physical sense; and passing on the values, culture, customs, and traditions that compose what is often referred to as the "extended family" experience.

Couples who sought merely to have children were (and still are) interested in proving their sexual attractiveness. No matter what celebrities of this faction said to the contrary, they were, in reality, advocating outsourced parenthood. Such couples either gave no thought to childrearing, or they adopted the socialist belief that "parenting" (as it came to be called) is best left to professionals. After the initial hullabaloo of giving birth wore off, they inevitably carried on with endeavors more appealing than changing diapers and wiping runny noses. The "extended family" was just one more thing to get away from—unless, of course, one wound up down-and-out with no better alternatives.

In the late 1970's, the more well-to-do went further in their justification, explaining that youngsters were inevitably having

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more fun with their peers than with adults, thereby institutionalizing what the media had already manufactured as the “generation gap.” These “free-thinking” mothers felt they had done their job; they had “proved” their sexuality by enduring pregnancy and childbirth (and had carefully recorded these private moments on film for public display).

By 1978, daycare was big business, and, by the mid-1980’s, child experts were aggressively encouraging parents to enroll their children in “early childhood” programs so that the youngsters would be “socialized” and “ready to learn.”

But a strange thing happened. Not only were the offspring of the boomers *not* “socialized”—in the sense of becoming gregarious, well mannered, tactful, polite, fun, or even able to carry on a conversation—they were nervous, uptight, anxious, and torn by the mixed messages emanating from their various pre-occupied guardians. They cried more, threw more temper-tantrums, fell ill when separated from their parents or peers, and were plagued with learning “disabilities.” The more obnoxious they were, the less their parents wanted them.

I remember a particularly enlightening experience when we invited a couple from my husband’s office to a barbecue at our home in 1978. As was customary (we thought), we invited the whole family. The wife asked, very tentatively: “Are you *sure* you want us to bring the *children*?” There were three of them, aged five to nine. I did not see a problem. “Well,” the wife demurred, “they *can* be a little rowdy and inconsiderate.”

Oh, c’mon, I thought. *I teach ninth-graders. How bad can it be?*

After they arrived, one child immediately set about opening all the cola bottles he found stored in our closet. The other young man kicked the coffee table repeatedly, right in front of his parents. The four-year-old girl interrupted and carried on continually; she finally settled for the company of our two dogs and, captivated, did not give us, or the dogs, any trouble. The couple spent the entire afternoon disciplining, or attempting to. We adults could barely communicate, much less channel the children into various activities.

“Good Lord,” we said almost simultaneously after our guests had left. Is this what we have to look forward to as parents?

As a teacher, I was already beginning to have misgivings, but I chalked them up to having been an only child myself. When I was little, if a child merely cried in a restaurant, parents automatically took the youngster elsewhere so as not to disturb other customers. I could remember being four, trying to get my mother’s attention on a bus while she was in conversation with another rider. Frustrated, I finally yelled at the top of my voice. I was summarily yanked off the bus and spanked right there on the sidewalk. Embarrassed and chastened, I decided such behavior was not a winner. Today, my mother would be arrested for child abuse, and my behavior undoubtedly would have escalated to more audacious acts of defiance.

By the mid-1990’s, long after I had left teaching, the other shoe dropped. Teachers and care givers could not stand these kids, either. Adults were being kicked, bitten, and spat upon by children as young as three. Teachers complained that six-year-olds came to first grade unable to count to ten, name the colors, or recite the alphabet, much less use scissors or sit still for ten minutes—yet most had been “socialized” in nursery programs aimed at making sure youngsters were “ready to learn.”

At that point, the couples who had, all these years, actually *coveted* the company of their children were suddenly looked

upon with suspicion. “Doing something for children” was supposed to mean donating money or volunteering. In an era when most parents stopped attending even the open-house rituals promoted by schools, the notion of actually *teaching* one’s children at home was, well, just weird.

Traditionalist women were particularly weird. Homemakers (much less *homeschoolers*) “didn’t have a life.” Increasingly, such mothers were viewed as living *through* their children, not rearing them. Virtually no one, not even traditionalists themselves, foresaw the ramifications of this worldview. Then there was the “sexy” issue. Traditional women (even those who did not “pump gas”) were not sexy. They were “desperate housewives,” without the money.

By 2000, the established view was that parenthood was too much for a mere parent, married or otherwise—unless he had advanced degrees in behavioral psychology.

Few parents were aware of a thousand-plus-page landmark treatise in 1969 entitled the Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project (BSTEP), compiled by Michigan State University, one of the government’s official research centers for teacher training. BSTEP’s purpose was to determine what kind of future world teachers should be preparing. The document predicted that, by the 21st century, drugs would be available to control behavior, alter mood, and even raise intelligence. It forecast that teachers would be “clinicians” and that education would be “based in the behavioral sciences.”

Government quietly began taking steps to ensure this outcome—from its treatment of parents in the courts, to the content of tests and surveys in the classroom, to the placement of psychologists in every public school (*via* the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). Within 30 years of BSTEP, every quirky conduct, and a few that could not even qualify as idiosyncratic, was remediable with “professional counseling” and a psychotropic drug. All a behavior needed to be was inconvenient or bothersome.

However, there was a catch. The parent who refused such treatments could be cited for “medical neglect.” To child “protection” agencies and the family courts, this was no different from denying insulin to a diabetic on religious grounds. In effect, parents no longer had legal standing.

Montgomery County gained distinction earlier this year for revisions to its eighth-through-tenth-grade sex-education curriculum, which included a video of a young female demonstrating how to fit a condom onto a cucumber and warned of the dangers of unprotected sex and cheap condoms that break. It also taught that “sex play with friends of the same gender is not uncommon during early adolescence” and, of course, that homosexuality is not a chosen lifestyle but a “given.” Through the ensuing protests, the Montgomery County School Board insisted that parents still had plenty of time to provide input, yet no opinion contrary to the board’s was considered. Although established policy actually encouraged parents to visit classrooms, it was trumped by newer state and federal codes that view parents essentially as breeders and feeders. As of this writing, public outrage has resulted in the curriculum being shelved for one year—after which the usual suspects will no doubt try another tactic to exhaust opponents, emotionally and financially.

Clueless boomer parents made their bed; today, all parents must lie in it. Boomers wanted to prove themselves as sexy breeders; 30 years later, these goods are being delivered. Once the boomers started outsourcing parenthood, government did what government does best: It took the whole nine yards. <C>

The Imperial Trajectory

by Jerry Woodruff

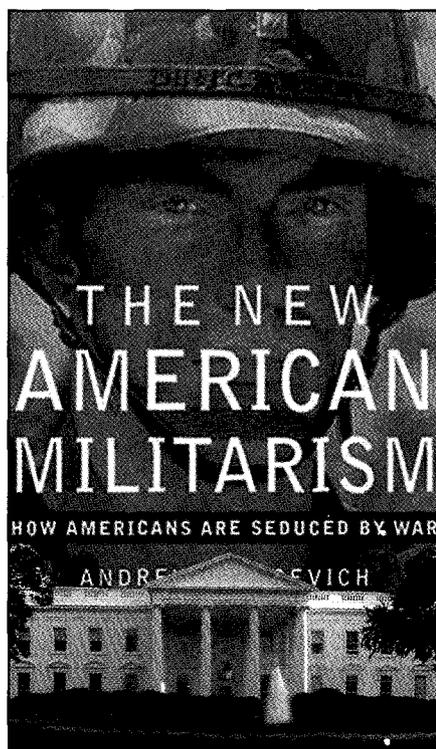
"We oppose militarism. It means conquest abroad and intimidation and oppression at home. It means the strong arm which has ever been fatal to free institutions. It is what millions of our citizens have fled from Europe."

—Democratic National Platform, 1900

**The New American Militarism:
How Americans Are Seduced by War**
by Andrew J. Bacevich
New York: Oxford University Press;
270 pp., \$28.00

Mention militarism, and names that come to mind probably include men on horseback such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte, not such desk-bound keyboard jockeys as Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol. Yet these and other neoconservative writers have helped foster an intellectual climate conducive to the emergence of what Andrew J. Bacevich calls "a peculiarly American variant of militarism" in the post-Cold War era. Bacevich's new book features no villains or conspiracies, however—only a fortuitous convergence of social, political, geographic, and economic forces that has produced "the new militarism." The neoconservative intellectual network is presented as merely a single contingent that, in combination with the military establishment's "never again" reaction to America's ignominious rout in Vietnam, created a post-Cold War faith in all things military, leading not just to the invasion of Iraq but to a sprawling projection of American power

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across the globe.

Bacevich, a West Point graduate, self-described conservative, and critic of the Iraq war, explicitly rejects the notion that responsibility for the phenomenon lies with any particular president or his advisors. That explanation, he argues, "lets too many others off the hook and allows society at large to abdicate responsibility for what has come to pass." Nonetheless, Bacevich insists that his intent is not "to deprive George W. Bush or his advisors of whatever credit or blame they may deserve" for America's increasing reliance on military prowess to achieve foreign-policy goals. Instead, he wants to show that "a military predisposition was already in place both in official circles and among Americans more generally," well

before the neocon-directed global "War on Terror."

Bacevich's argument is a formidable one, backed by an impressive array of supporting evidence that shows the author in masterful command of his subject. One of the virtues of *The New American Militarism* is that it is more analysis than polemic. Those conservatives, however, who take a longer view of America's empire-building and the role the military has played in the project may find the book's analysis incomplete. For, in Bacevich's view, the "new American militarism" did not sprout from the grand conquests of World War II and the resulting global projection of American military power (which seems never to have receded at war's end) but as a reaction to the defeat in Vietnam and the accompanying social upheavals of the 1960's.

That paradoxical outcome is partly the result of the efforts of a post-Vietnam officer corps whose members aligned themselves intellectually with what Bacevich describes as America's "forces of reaction" in an effort to refurbish the image of the American military establishment and to resist the radical social changes under way in what they feared amounted to the cultural Weimarization of the United States. Their primary motivations were to reassert their professional autonomy, so thoroughly undermined by the Department of Defense's civilian handlers during the war, and to rehabilitate the