

# RESEARCH REPORTS

*Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions*

## **"Poverty, Joblessness, and Family Structure in the Inner City: A Comparative Perspective."**

Paper delivered at Chicago Urban Poverty and Family Life Conf., sponsored by the Univ. of Chicago's Grad. School of Public Policy and the Social Science Research Council, Oct. 1991.

Author: *William Julius Wilson*

In his much-noted 1987 book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson pinned on the economy much of the blame for the troubling rise in mother-only families among black Americans. Today, 51.1 percent of black children live in such families. In roughly half of those families the parents were never wed. Joblessness among black males, Wilson argued, meant that young black women faced "a shrinking pool of 'marriageable' (i.e. economically stable) men." Now, however, after examining the contrasting patterns of behavior of poor inner-city African Americans and Mexican Americans, Wilson concludes that changed attitudes among blacks toward sex, marriage, and family have also contributed to the problem.

Mexicans (and non-Hispanic whites) in the same inner-city environments, survey data indicate, are much more likely than blacks to marry after the birth of their first child. In Chicago, for example, that likeli-

hood is 180 percent greater. (Puerto Rican fathers, however, have the same postpartum marriage rates as blacks.)

There remains a strong connection between male employment and marriage, Wilson contends. If a black man has a job, the likelihood of marriage after a child is conceived increases by more than 50 percent. But, he says, it now appears that "[the] stronger the norms against premarital sex, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and single parenthood, the less that economic considerations affect decisions to marry."

Mexican Americans take a traditional perspective on the family, Wilson notes. Although extramarital affairs by men are tolerated, there is great anguish when an unmarried woman becomes pregnant—and relatives on both sides press the couple to marry.

That is not what happens in inner-city black neighborhoods, Wilson observes. Young single fathers, who usually regard matrimony as a constraint to be avoided, feel

little pressure to wed. The women's expectations of getting married are usually low.

This was not always true of the black community. "In both inner-city Chicago and at the national level," Wilson's colleague, Mark Testa, has written, "black men born during or just after World War II were more than 2.5 times more likely to marry after their child's conception, regardless of economic and educational status, than men born during the late 1950s who became fathers at a similar age." The likelihood was even greater when the comparison was with men born in the '60s. In the Chicago inner city today, only about 30 percent of black single fathers ultimately marry the mother of their child.

What has happened to the black family in the inner-city, Wilson says, is but "an extreme version" of what has been happening to the American family—and of what is likely to happen among Mexican immigrants "the longer they remain in the United States."

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## **"The Tax Decade: How Taxes Came to Dominate the Public Agenda."**

Urban Inst., 4270-A Boston Way, Lanham, Md. 20706. 239 pp. \$45 (cloth), \$18.50 (paper)

Author: *C. Eugene Steuerle*

Campaign '92 is haunted by the tax reforms of the 1980s, especially the Reagan "supply side" tax cuts of 1981, which, conventional wisdom has it, are largely responsible for today's massive federal budget deficits.

The 1980s did bring unprecedented tax changes, declares Steuerle, a Senior Fellow at

the Urban Institute, but their role in today's budget crisis is not what it appears. The 1980s, after all, was also a decade of unprecedented tax increases. In 1990, federal tax receipts—from income, social security, and other levies—neared 19 percent of gross national product (GNP), up from 17.4 per-

cent in 1976 and, for that matter, 17.3 percent two decades before that. The personal income tax claimed 7.94 percent of GNP in 1976, yet never fell below 8.05 percent of GNP during the Reagan years.

In any event, Steuerle believes that tax cuts of Reaganesque dimensions

(which reduced federal receipts by \$323 billion in fiscal 1990, not counting the offsetting tax hikes) were inevitable. Washington had been feeding off inflation-driven "bracket creep" and other invisible revenue-raisers for years; Washington eventually would have had to give much of the gains back. As Steuerle notes, "*the entire revenue loss due to individual provisions in 1981 could have been achieved by nothing more than indexing the tax code for inflation from about 1979 onward.*"

In fact, Steuerle argues, the

true (and then largely unrecognized) revolution wrought in 1981 was indexing future tax brackets to inflation. This deprived Washington of most of the automatic revenue increases that helped fuel government expansion after World War II. The end of "the Easy Financing Era" meant that every increase in outlays would require concrete decisions about taxes.

Steuerle has much to say about subsequent tax increases and especially the "revenue neutral" tax reform of 1986 (of which he, as a U.S. Treasury

Department official, was a principal architect). Looking back, he marvels at how much the decade was dominated by tax measures and how little was accomplished on the spending side. This, he suggests, was not just a matter of politics, but of government organization. Control over taxes is concentrated, especially in the House and Senate tax-writing committees, while authority over spending is diffuse. Getting the budget deficit under control, he says, likewise will be as much a problem of organization as politics.

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### "The Population of North Korea."

Ctr. for Korean Studies, Inst. of East Asian Studies, Univ. of Calif., Berkeley, Calif. 94720.  
145 pp. \$12

Authors: *Nicholas Eberstadt and Judith Banister*

In 1963, North Korea's communist regime began to impose an almost total blackout on release of demographic data to the outside world. The move coincided with the government's *chuch'e* campaign, which fashioned a cult of personality around North Korean leader Kim Il Sung and his son (and designated heir), Kim Jong Il, and stressed national self-reliance. In 1989, however, in order to qualify for assistance from the United Nations Population Fund, the regime lifted the curtain a little. For the first time in decades, researchers got a statistical glimpse at one of the world's most tightly closed societies.

North Korea has a population of about 21.4 million (as of mid-1990) and under communism has traveled far in the transition from a rural agricultural society. Sixty percent of the populace now lives in cit-

ies, and only one-quarter of civilians 16 and older are engaged in farming. Education for children ages 6-15 is compulsory, and more than 500,000 people were enrolled in institutions of higher education in 1987.

North Koreans had a projected 1990 life expectancy of 69 years, and infant mortality was relatively low. Fertility dropped steadily in the 1970s and the "total fertility rate" in 1987 was only 2.5 births per woman. This may indicate a hidden antinatalist policy, say Eberstadt, a researcher at the American Enterprise Institute, and Banister, chief of the Census Bureau's China branch.

The most important finding, the authors say, is that, as of 1987, an estimated 1.25 million men—six percent of North Korea's entire population—were in the military. That made North Korea "the

most militarized country in the world in terms of proportion of population in the armed forces." No more than five other nations—the Soviet Union, China, the United States, India, and Vietnam—had armed forces of 1.25 million or more in 1987, and the smallest of those countries, Vietnam, had a population three times as large as North Korea's. Eberstadt and Banister's estimates buttress scholarly reports of an extraordinary military buildup during the 1970s and '80s.

They project that the number of 16-28-year-olds will fall from 3.26 million in 1990 to 2.78 million in the year 2000. That, they point out, may force hard choices on North Korea's leaders. A military of such huge proportions will not be sustainable if North Korea is to expand its labor force and its economy.

## COMMENTARY

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*We welcome timely letters from readers, especially those who wish to amplify or correct information published in the Quarterly and/or react to the views expressed in our essays. The writer's telephone number and address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.*

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### *Genetic Warnings*

In his superb article, "Controlling the Genetic Arsenal" [WQ, Spring '92], Dan Kevles addresses a critical question: Could our increased genetic knowledge lead to a "new eugenics?" He suggests that the democratic nature of social institutions and awareness of the historical abuses of eugenics safeguard us against repetition, that eugenic programs are more likely in authoritarian states than in nations with a robust political democracy. I want to suggest, however, that certain beliefs, revealed in contemporary American popular culture, are conducive to a new eugenics with elements that *can* flourish in a society stressed by racial tensions and dwindling economic resources. My study of genetic themes in popular culture lays bare these beliefs.

I have found, for example, many explicit statements that "the poor breed more," that welfare subsidies encourage poor people ("welfare mothers") to reproduce, while employment opportunities discourage affluent and educated women from having children. Those preoccupied with such trends believe that traits such as intelligence, productivity, and violence are genetic attributes, so that differential reproduction will "water down" the gene pool.

Some popular literature blames social problems on the reproductive practices of certain groups. The "slippage" in American productivity, the high costs of social services, the state of the environment, and urban violence have all been blamed on the rising birthrate among the poor or among immigrants from poor countries.

The language of crisis, catastrophe, and survival used to describe such problems is striking. One environmental magazine advocates mandatory sterilization, tax penalties for children, and programs to control "the right to breed." Some writers, struggling to define a new understanding of the right to reproduce, have suggested an obligation to pass on "good genes." The idea that bearing an abnormal child is "wrong" can be a powerful form of social control. In addition, many mainstream journalists have been sympathetic to suggestions to limit subsidies to mothers on welfare, or to provide bonuses for using Norplant. Fiscal responsibility is thus linked to reproductive responsibility.

Finally, neo-Nazi and other hate groups with ex-

plicitly eugenic programs have emerged from obscurity in recent years, spreading racist messages in the gentrified contexts of college campuses and even mainstream politics. They have built on the racial tensions in the United States, revealed in the tragic consequences of the Rodney King verdict.

The increased visibility of racism coincides with the popular interest in scientific innovations that increasingly define human differences in genetic terms. The "gene" has a ubiquitous presence in contemporary popular culture and is used to account for an extraordinary range of traits that are assumed to be "hard-wired" and controlling. Such understanding contributes to the increased acceptability of medical control of the human genetic constitution. Earlier forms of eugenics are not likely to be duplicated—they reflected specific historical situations. But in an era of declining resources and racial tensions, we cannot be complacent when scientific advances converge with popular ideas that have redefined humans as genetic products with biological obligations to society. For that is the essence of eugenics.

*Dorothy Nelkin  
Dept. of Sociology  
New York Univ.*

Your collection of pieces on "The Fateful Code: Genes and Human Destiny" is intriguing as a group for the very reason implied by the title. None, however, really comes to grips with the projection of human controlled genetic change into the future.

What was missing from your essays was a feeling for the consequences of irreversible genetic decisions and their implications for future generations. This absence is particularly telling for applications of genetic selection that preclude the survival of de-selected species or that favor those deemed to represent greater human benefit (e.g., newly created herbicide-resistant hybrid tomatoes). Many of the decisions to forgo propagation of some genotypes in favor of others, or to create novel transgenic types of animals, may forever change the face of the biosphere.

The substitution of human judgment over natural selection is a major frame shift in the evolution of species on the planet. While domestication and agricultural practices achieved a modicum of such changes in the past, the present rate of substituted

species and genotypes has no precedent. Since August Weismann's seminal essays in the 1890s on the "Continuity of the Germplasm," two principles of genetic control have been paramount. One is the relative invulnerability of the genotype (as contrasted to the phenotype) to environmental or external influence. The other is the slow, lock-step-like cadence by which chunks of genetic material have been projected into the future as the result of sexual recombination and reproduction.

These historical realities are being challenged by the newest developments in genetic engineering. Scientific entrepreneurs are pre-emptively selecting new genotypes before they are winnowed by natural selection and short-cutting sexual recombination by clonal selection, propagation, and gametic selection. Agricultural activities and politically motivated human practices (such as the eugenic program in Singapore or sex-selection practices in India and Pakistan) are already selecting genotypes to ensure that certain descendants and not others populate the Earth.

Americans may also wish to weigh the head-in-the-sand attitude that holds genetic determination to be a non sequitur in favor of the conviction that "interactions" with the environment and "human will" are the major forces that shape development. While interaction is important, no amount of earnest effort will overcome certain genetic deficits like Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, nor will complex human attributes like aggression, intelligence, emotionality, and creativity be any less hereditary tomorrow than they are today (e.g., four generations of the Bach family) just because we do not like or know how to handle strong genetic determination. What is needed is a thoughtful projection of genetic concepts to the human sphere before the advent of the new avalanche of genetic knowledge. To say the genome is not going to tell us anything about what it means to be human is to miss the picture entirely: The genome of any species is the ultimate arbiter of evolutionary options. To think it will prove any less so for humans is foolhardy.

*Marc Lappé, Ph.D.*

*Dept. of Health Policy and Ethics  
Univ. of Ill. College of Medicine*

### ***Adding Up the Sound Bites***

Ah the Media! The Monster that inspires a hundred St. Georges. I'm afraid your dragon slayer Daniel Hallin ["Sound Bite Democracy," *WQ*, Spring '92] has galloped off in the wrong direction. Let's talk about sound bites. When the bean counters solemnly add up the seconds of network news coverage in the 1960s and the '90s, what exactly are they

proving? That people were more informed in the supposed good old days? Does the research design take into account Nightline, McNeil-Lehrer, CNN, C-Span, and all the other changes and, yes, improvements in TV news since the 1960s? And what of newspapers, magazines, radio, books? The American electorate does not lack for information—it is there, if people look, read, reach, work for it. Such "research" treats Rather-Brokaw-Jennings as if they were the only important news outlet when, the fact is, they are just easy for communications professors to study on their VCRs.

*Edwin Diamond  
New York Magazine*

Richard Nixon already has enough trouble searching for his place in history. He shouldn't be identified as the barrier blocking presidential debates with Hubert Humphrey during the 1968 campaign, as Robert J. Donovan and Ray Scherer assert in their otherwise splendid article ["Politics Transformed," *WQ*, Spring '92].

Whether Nixon (or Humphrey) welcomed or avoided broadcast debates is largely irrelevant, since they could not be arranged under the then-existing interpretation by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) of the Communications Act of 1934.

Section 315(a) of that statute embodies the "equal time" rules for political candidates. It requires a broadcast licensee to afford precisely equal opportunities to all legally qualified candidates—federal, state, or local—if it permits any candidate for such office a "use" of the station. As a general rule, any use, however slight, of broadcast facilities by a legally qualified candidate triggers the equal-time obligation.

Despite the severity of the basic provision, the law does specify four instances in which equal time is not required, even though a use has occurred. These exemptions are: a candidate's appearance in a bona fide newscast; a candidate's participation in a bona fide news interview; a bona fide news documentary, if the appearance of the candidate is incidental to the presentation of the subject; and on-the-spot coverage of bona fide news events.

Since broadcast debates did not qualify for these exemptions under long-standing FCC interpretation, the equal-time rule would have applied. Faced with the possibility of dozens of minor-party presidential candidates demanding equal air time, broadcasters shied away from controversy (and lost revenue) by pre-emptively closing the door on any type of Nixon-Humphrey debate.

No doubt some confusion arises since in 1960, a series of historic broadcast debates between John

Kennedy and Richard Nixon took place, as the authors describe in rich detail. This was because Congress, on a one-time only basis, passed a joint resolution suspending the application of mandatory free equal time to candidates for president and vice president.

That 1960 action clearly demonstrated that the suspension of the equal-time requirement reduces the inhibition of broadcasters against granting free air time. Kennedy and Nixon received nearly 40 hours of free network air time during the campaign. In contrast, Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater received less than five hours of comparable air time in 1964, when the equal-time requirement was again in full force.

It was not until 1975 that the FCC decided to reverse course, extending the exemption for bona fide news events to cover live debates between qualified political candidates initiated by non-broadcast entities, such as the League of Women Voters, in non-studio settings. This ruling, while narrow, was enough to provide broadcasters with sufficient comfort to air the Ford-Carter debates, again the stuff of American political history.

As the above explanation suggests, the FCC has had an enormous, albeit often overlooked, influence on how presidential campaigns are presented on radio and television. Richard Nixon, who distrusted the electronic media, recognized this symbiotic relationship all too well. One of his first appointments after taking office in 1969 was that of Dean Burch to serve as chairman of the FCC. Burch had previously been chairman of the Republican National Committee.

*Stuart N. Brotman*  
*Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy*  
*Tufts Univ.*

Your cluster of articles, "The Media Make The Campaign," for all its emphasis on presidential imagery, failed to address the central question of the last six presidential elections, the collective concern again reflected in this campaign: Do Americans want the status quo, or do they want change?

Since the bellwether campaign of 1960, presidential elections have been evenly divided on this question. Election outcomes from '60, '68, '76, and '80 have called for change. Those of '64, '72, '84 and '88 affirmed the status quo. Regardless of the wizardry of the principal candidates' media manipulators, it becomes more and more apparent with each passing day that the '92 presidential election will ultimately be about change.

This election mimics more than others those of '68 and '80. Both the '68 and '80 campaigns turned out the incumbent party, and both featured signifi-

cant contributions by a populist third party candidate. Both also reflected great unhappiness among the masses. In '68, national discontent resulted from war, political assassinations, and civil upheaval. In '80, it was due to bad economic times, inability to deal effectively with the world oil cartel, and concern over hostages in Iran.

The '92 election will doubtless be a national referendum on the matters most dear to the hearts of middle- and working-class Americans: continuing unemployment and recession, a federal government more attentive to special interests than constituent needs, disenchantment with elected officials' behavior, redirecting the peace dividend, and managing dangers intrinsic to the burgeoning federal budget deficit.

Using history as a guide, one would conclude that incumbent president George Bush, who is perceived as either unwilling or unable to engineer these changes, will be turned out of office.

*Larry VanDeSande*  
*Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council*  
*Lansing, Mich.*

### *The Rest of Reality*

In "Mapping the New Reality" [WQ, Spring '92], Sven Birkerts says that we are in a new, bleak era and that fiction writers have a duty somehow to represent the pervasive melancholy. What is the root of our despair? Actually, the answer to the question is the same answer to all new, bleak eras: technology. In other words, the world is changing. And some people fear the change.

Mr. Birkerts claims that writers must clarify his vision of "our growing sense of social and political inconsequence." Of course, he then goes on to show all the unsavory aspects of contemporary technological change: nuking our food in the microwave; staring into our TVs; our growing dependence on the impersonal communication of the telephone and answering machine.

But, like a novel half-finished, Mr. Birkerts tells only one side of the story of contemporary life. Perhaps a great writer may also show the exciting developments of technology, such as when scientists—using the power of computer modeling—cure diseases; when brave revolutionaries use fax machines and computers to topple communist governments and help spread democracy; or even when computer programmers create applications, such as word processors, which allow more people to write.

*Tom C. Taulli*  
*Monrovia, Calif.*

### A Few Words of Praise

As an inveterate reader of periodicals—*Harvard Magazine*, *Smithsonian*, the *London Times Literary Supplement*, et al.—I must tell you that your Winter 1992 issue is the best single publication I have ever read. The contents were stimulating and rewarding to this reader. I particularly liked your lead article on “Small Towns.” The article by Seymour Martin Lipset was excellent, “Pacific Prospects” painted a fine picture of that part of the world, and Watson on ideology was well done. Your reviews and reports were up to your usual standards. All in all, it was a fine performance.

I am of the opinion that the *Wilson Quarterly* is just about the best journal in the United States today. Please keep up the good work.

Jack H. Mower  
Washington, D.C.

### Corrections

Due to a typographical error, some lines of text were dropped from the Spring '92 issue. On page 31, in the article “Politics Transformed,” the sentence at the bottom of the left-hand column should have read, “Republican veterans created television commercials and photo opportunities on emotional subjects such as blue-collar crime, prisons, patriotism, and the welfare state. The Republicans effectively branded Dukakis a 1960s-style liberal and, *ipso facto*, soft on crime, committed to heavy civilian public spending, and niggardly on defense appropriations.” On page 119, in the article “Impoverished Children: A Survey of Recent Articles,” the last sentence should have read, “But mutual recrimination does little to help children.”

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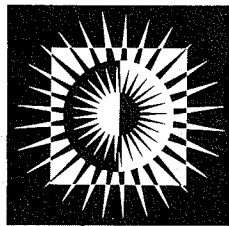
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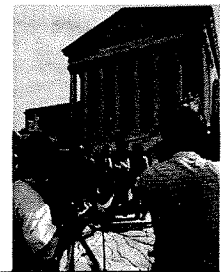
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