

The red-state baby boom

There is a little-known movement sweeping across the United States. The movement is "natalism."

All across the industrialized world, birth rates are falling — in Western Europe, in Canada and in many regions of the United States. People are marrying later and

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having fewer kids. But spread around this country, and concentrated in certain areas, the natalists defy these trends. They are having three, four or more kids. Their personal identity is defined by parenthood. They are more spiritually, emotionally and physically invested in their homes than in any other sphere of life, having concluded that parenthood is the most enriching and elevating thing they can do. Very often they have sacrificed pleasures like sophisticated movies, restaurant dining and foreign travel, let alone competitive careers and disposable income, for the sake of their parental calling.

In a world that often makes it hard to raise large families, many are willing to move to find places that are congenial to natalist values. The fastest-growing regions of the country tend to have the highest concentrations of children. Young families move away from what they perceive as disorder, vulgarity and danger and move to places like Douglas County in Colorado (which is the fastest-growing county in the country and has one of the highest concentrations of kids). Some people see these exurbs as sprawling, materialistic wastelands, but many natalists see them as clean, orderly and af-

fordable places where they can nurture children.

If you wanted a one-sentence explanation for the explosive growth of far-flung suburbs, it would be that when people get money, one of the first things they do is use it to try to protect their children from bad influences.

So there are significant fertility inequalities across regions. People on the Great Plains and in the Southwest are much more fertile than people in New England or on the Pacific coast.

You can see surprising political correlations. As Steve Sailer pointed out in *The American Conservative*, George Bush carried the 19 states with the highest white fertility rates, and 25 out of the top 26. John Kerry got the 16 states with the lowest rates.

In *The New Republic Online*, Joel Kotkin and William Frey observe, "Democrats swept the largely childless cities — true blue locales like San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Boston and Manhattan have the lowest percentages of children in the nation — but generally had poor showings in those places where families are settling down, notably the Sun Belt cities, exurbs and outer suburbs of older metropolitan areas."

Politicians will try to pander to this group. They should know this is a spiritual movement, not a political one. The people who are having big families are explicitly rejecting materialistic incentives and hyperindividualism. It costs a middle-class family upward of \$200,000 to raise a child. These people are saying money and ambition will not be their gods.

Natalists resist the declining fertility trends not because of income, education or other socioeconomic characteristics.

It's attitudes. People with larger families tend to attend religious services more often, and tend to have more traditional gender roles.

I draw attention to natalists because they're an important feature of our national life. Because of them, the United States stands out in all sorts of demographic and cultural categories. But I do it also because when we talk about the divide on values in this country, caricatured in the red and blue maps, it's important that we understand the true motive forces behind it.

Natalists are associated with red America, but they're not launching a *jihad*. The differences between them and people on the other side of the cultural or political divide are differences of degree, not kind. Like most Americans, but perhaps more anxiously, they try to shepherd their kids through supermarket checkouts lined with screaming *Cosmo* or *Maxim* cover lines. Like most Americans, but maybe more so, they suspect that we won't solve our social problems or see improvements in our schools as long as many kids are growing up in barely functioning families.

Like most Americans, and maybe more so because they tend to marry earlier, they find themselves confronting the consequences of divorce. Like most Americans, they wonder how we can be tolerant of diverse lifestyles while still preserving the family institutions that are under threat.

What they cherish, like most Americans, is the self-sacrificial love of parents. People who have enough kids for a basketball team are too busy to fight a culture war.

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