

Bennett sees ruin in U.S. behavior

By Carol Innerst
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A growing number of "morally stunted, morally disabled young people" is contributing to an already precipitous decline in American life, former Education Secretary and "drug czar" William J. Bennett warned yesterday.

Americans are behaving badly, and "the reality is, that may bring this country to ruin," he said.

Just how low society has sunk is chronicled in "The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators," a 139-page book released yesterday in which Mr. Bennett plumbs the state of society the same way the Commerce Department's "Index of Leading Economic Indicators" analyzes economic trends.

From sharp increases in violent crime to "catastrophic" increases in illegitimate births, key cultural indicators reveal more than 30 years of "dramatic social decline driven by social, familial decomposition," Mr. Bennett said at a news conference at the Heritage Foundation, where he is a Distinguished Fellow in Cultural Policy Studies.

The statistics about families and children are connected to crime, he said.

Building on a 22-page cultural in-

Control of self, not guns, urged

dicators report he issued 11 months ago, Mr. Bennett's latest book cites these benchmarks as evidence of a society in decline:

- The number of violent crimes increased more than 550 percent since 1960, while population increased 41 percent.

- Since 1965, the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes tripled, making children the fastest-growing segment of the criminal population.

- The expected prison sentence for serious crimes decreased more than 60 percent since 1954 to about 8 days, and three out of every four convicted criminals are not incarcerated.

- Since 1960, illegitimate births increased more than 400 percent to 21.8 percent of all white births and 67.9 percent of all black births. Detroit has the highest rate of illegitimacy — 71 percent for all races in 1991. The District claims second place with 66.3 percent of all births being illegitimate.

- Federal expenditures on welfare programs rose more than 700 percent, from \$29 billion in 1960 to \$212 billion in 1990.

- The rate of unmarried teen-

agers getting pregnant has nearly doubled since 1972 to 99.2 per 1,000 in 1990. About 40 percent, or 400,000, teen-age pregnancies a year are terminated by abortion.

- Scholastic Aptitude Test scores dropped 73 points from 1960 to 1993.

- The average teen-ager spends 1.8 hours a week reading, 5.6 hours a week on homework and 21 hours a week watching television.

"The decline in education can be attributed in part to what we've done to the schools, but also to what comes into the schools," Mr. Bennett said. "Achievement is impervious to improvement with money only."

Little of what's needed in the way of solutions can be translated to public policy, he said.

"What's needed is more virtue, more individual responsibility," said Mr. Bennett, author of the current nonfiction best seller, "The Book of Virtues."

"We need programs that encourage abstinence," he said. "Welfare rewards pregnancy...."

"I believe we should pull the plug on welfare."

Guns, he said, aren't the problem or the reason for the crime wave.

"Get serious about the penalties. It's less gun control and more self-control," Mr. Bennett said.

"If these trends continue, it will mean the ruin of American society," he said. "If crime continues to rise and there's 60 percent illegitimacy, society will simply collapse. I am worried we will face social chaos or a total police state. Unless we take steps now, we'll be looking for someone on horseback — or a tank — to restore order."

"There's hardly any problem in the book that can't be remedied by an active, engaged parent," he added.

Mr. Bennett, responding to a question, said there are some signs of hope for pulling out of the present "period of moral discontent" and one of the signs is "the president's rhetoric on values."

"The president should talk about values," he said. "I'm glad he is talking about them. However, he must discover how to live by them. I don't mean that sarcastically, but that's part of the obligation. You talk it and then you walk it."

Mr. Bennett is currently co-director with Jack Kemp and Jeane Kirkpatrick of Empower America, an organization that promotes conservative principles.

THE CONDITION OF SOCIETY

Some key indicators reveal a culture in decline, says former Education Secretary William J. Bennett, who yesterday released new facts and figures about the state of American society.

Violent crimes (Murders, rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults)

	Number
1960	288,460
1992	1,932,274
	Rate per 10,000
1960	16.1
1992	75.8

Source: FBI

Average prison sentence

	Number of days
1954	22.5
1990	8

Source: National Center for Policy Analysis

Illegitimate births

	Percentage of all births
1960	5.3
1991	29.5
	Whites
1960	2.3
1991	21.8
	Blacks
1960	23
1991	67.9

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

Single-parent families

As a percentage of all families with children

1960	9.1
1991	28.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Children on Welfare

Percentage of children on Aid to Families with Dependent Children

1960	3.5
1991	12.9

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. House of Representatives

Unmarried teen-age pregnancies

Pregnancies per 100,000 unmarried teens

1972	494
1990	992

Sources: National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Alan Guttmacher Institute

SAT scores

Score out of 1600

1960	975
1993	902

Source: College Board

Television viewing

Average hours per day

1960	5.1
1992	7

Source: Nielsen Television Research