

David Blankenhorn likes to 'stir the pot'

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helped inspire the National Fatherhood Initiative, a non-partisan group promoting responsible fatherhood. For 20 years, he has focused on the fallout of what he sees as a breakdown in the family.

He bristles when people call his think tank conservative; he wants to look deeply at America's core values, and he sees the Manhattan-based Institute for American Val-

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ues, founded in 1987, as a catalyst for analysis and debate among those with differing views.

Its budget of some \$1.5 million largely comes from foundations, corporations and individual donations, which support studies, conferences and publications.

"People who say we're a conservative organization are just trying to call us names because they think it'll stigmatize us," he says, clearly rankled that his motives are so often misunderstood.

But as much as his passion for families impresses those who know his work, his blunt outspokenness can be off-putting to people on both sides of the political spectrum. He even criticizes the marriage movement, of which he is considered one of the founders, saying it has "stagnated."

"It's one of the reasons I wrote the book," he says. "I want to stir the pot as much as I can."

Colleagues praise him

"My impression of this guy is he's really devoted his life to family issues and would probably do that if no one paid him at all," says Jonathan Rauch, a senior writer at *National Journal* magazine and guest scholar at the Brookings Institution who's been on opposite sides of the podium with Blankenhorn.

"David has a lot of respect for ideas," says Maggie Gallagher, a former affiliate scholar with Blankenhorn's institute and a strong opponent of same-sex marriage. "He pulled together top scholars from a variety of disciplines concerned about family fragmentation who were not part of the Religious Right, and he gave them a home."

Sociology professor Judith Stacey of New York University says some in the family field view Blankenhorn as a "right-wing political advocate." But "I see him as more complicated than that."

So does William Galston, a domestic policy adviser in the Clinton

administration and a senior fellow at Brookings.

"My impression is on matters of civil rights and economics and social justice, he's the same warm-hearted Southern liberal he was when he started," he says. "It might be more accurate to say a strand of thinking about the family and the culture that in contemporary circumstances is regarded as conservative is something that's become a stronger part of his thinking."

Some academics, including Stacey, suggest the institute lacks objectivity because its work is not subject to scholarly peer review.

Blankenhorn rebuffs such claims.

"Almost all our work is done in teams of people. We review each other's work constantly," he says. Says Stacey: "I'm one of his favorite targets. Not only do we disagree about policies, but we disagree about what the research says."

Theodora Ooms, a consultant on family policy who has known Blankenhorn since the mid-1980s, calls him "relentless. ... He says he is open-minded, but I find him rather rigid and close-minded."

Blankenhorn admits he has a

"pushy" side. "I've had fallings-out over differing opinions about what was best to do about what we were working on at the time — not too many of them, though," he says.

"If he really disagrees with something, you'll know it," says Galston. "I've never had a problem with it, but I suspect others may."

Blankenhorn originally planned a think tank for community organizers but became frustrated about making social change and decided he could impact civil society and the family. Now, the institute has broadened its scope to include projects on Islam's relationships with the West and an examination of thrift as an American core value.

Growing up in the South

Blankenhorn says he avoided the topic of gay marriage for years. He has been clear about other family issues: Marriage is good for kids. Voluntary single motherhood isn't. Neither is divorce.

His book also cites a new analysis he did on 35 nations from the 2002 International Social Survey Programme, which shows marriage is

weakest in nations where support for gay marriage is strongest.

"I'm not saying one causes the other. I'm just saying they go together," he says.

Again, Stacey disagrees. She says there is no clear research about effects of parents' gender.

But, following a systematic review of 76 studies, Stacey suggests that the number of parents matters more to children than parents' gender, sexuality, marital status or biological connection. Based on that research, a yet-unpublished paper co-authored by Stacey says the review finds that "strengths typically associated with married mother-father families appear at least to the same extent in families with two mothers, and likely also in those with two fathers."

Blankenhorn grew up with both parents and a younger brother in Jackson, Miss., in a family that emphasized family and church. Both parents were Presbyterian deacons

and elders. Blankenhorn played sports and was president of his freshman class and of his church youth group.

Racial prejudice and public school desegregation had a profound impact on him, causing him to try to bridge racial rifts at age 15 by recruiting black and white high school students to tutor elementary school kids. He re-created the idea in Salem, Va., where his family moved during his junior year of high school.

Blankenhorn hadn't planned to go out of state for college, but he happened to run into a former student who urged him to apply to Harvard.

That student, Carey Ramos, now a New York attorney who has represented the recording industry in online copyright cases, says Blankenhorn impressed him.

"He was clearly very bright and articulate," Ramos says. "What struck me was how determined he was and how he had the qualities of a leader. I thought he would wind up doing interesting things."



Blankenhorn file

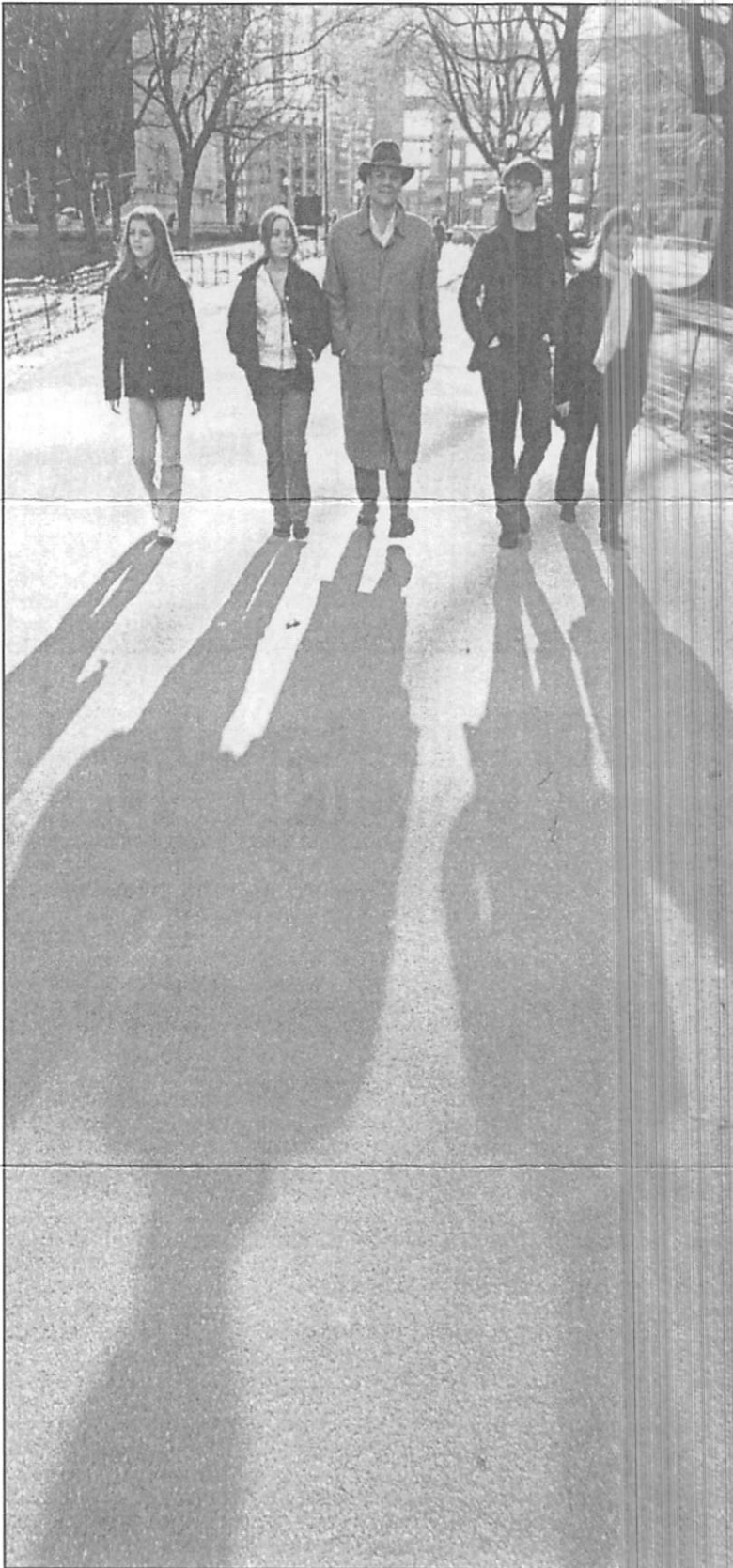
Career: David Blankenhorn, 51, is founder and president of the Institute for American Values in New York.

Education: Bachelor's degree in social studies, Harvard University, 1977. Earned a fellowship to study in England; focused on British labor unions. Received his master's degree in comparative social history from University of Warwick in Coventry.

Family: Wife Raina, 52, is director of special projects at the institute. Son Raymond, 17, is a high school senior who plans to enter Oxford University in the fall; twin daughters Sophia and Alexandra are 10.



For fun: Blankenhorn makes a point of bringing a child along on business trips to see what he does for a living. A few months ago, the family rented a car (they don't own one), went to the tip of Manhattan, drove up Broadway and spent the day winding along one of the country's longest streets and stopping to take pictures and talk about the sights.



Photos by Todd Pitt, USA TODAY

Positive unit: David Blankenhorn with twin daughters Alexandra, left, and Sophia, 10, son Raymond, 17, and wife Raina in New York's Central Park.

Family guy with a cause

Stance: Gay marriage not good for children

By Sharon Jayson
USA TODAY

David Blankenhorn may be best known as an advocate for the importance of fathers. But the think-tank founder and author, 51, is about to step onto the firing line with a much more controversial issue: gay marriage.

The Harvard-educated Mississippi native is a former community organizer who has made a career of thinking about big issues and telling others what he believes. He has written scores of op-ed pieces and essays, co-edited eight books and written two: 1995's *Fatherless America*, which attributes many of society's ills to the lack of father involvement, and now *The Future of Marriage*. In it, he argues that children need both a mother and a father, and because same-sex marriage can't provide that, it's bad for society and children.

"We're either going to go in the direction of viewing marriage as a purely private relationship between two people that's defined by those people, or we're going to try to strengthen and maintain marriage as our society's most pro-child institution," he says.

He may sound like a conservative Christian, but Blankenhorn says he's a liberal Democrat. "I'm not condemning homosexuality. I'm not condemning committed gay relationships," he says. But "the best institutional friend children have is marriage, and if grown-ups make a mess of it, the children are going to suffer."

Blankenhorn's attempts to raise consciousness about the importance of fathers

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