

But Bush's Chief Domestic Policy Adviser Says, 'So What?'

Meltdown of Nuclear Family Threatens Society

BY DON FEDER

The meltdown of the nuclear family threatens to irradiate society. While environmentalists fret about global warming, devastation to the social ecology rates only an occasional news story and a shrug from President George Bush's chief domestic policy adviser.

Data from the 2000 census, released last week, documents the further erosion of civilization's foundation.

During the 1990s, the number of unmarried couples increased from 3.2 million to 5.5 million. Households consisting of married couples with their children are now at their lowest level—falling from 45% of all households in 1960 to just 25.6% last year.

While the total number of married couples with children grew by only 7% in the past decade, families headed by single mothers increased 25%. Allan Carlson of the Howard Center for the Family observes, "We are moving toward a post-family society."

"The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators 2001," compiled by former Education Secretary William Bennett, discloses that between 1960 and 1999, the rate of out-of-wedlock births soared 523%. Due to divorce and other factors, by 1996, 43% of American children spent at least part of their childhood in a single-parent family.

Margaret LaMontagne, Single Parent Sound Asleep

On C-Span's "Washington Journal," an interviewer asked Margaret LaMontagne, White House domestic policy adviser, how Bush would respond to these baleful trends. LaMontagne: "I guess I would respond to say, you know, 'So what?'"

The aide who helps formulate the President's domestic agenda is insouciant about the family's disappearance. She's also a single parent, LaMontagne informed us. Still, regardless of our circumstances, "all of us care about issues that are important, like public education, like safe communities, the economy."

But do we all understand the impact of divorce, illegitimacy, cohabitation and childlessness by choice on these issues? Someone with LaMontagne's mentality advising the President on social issues makes as much sense as putting the head of Earth First in charge of his energy program.

LaMontagne is concerned about "safe communities." But over 60% of state prison inmates come from broken homes, about which she is blasé. Studies show children who grow up without fathers or mothers are more likely to use drugs, drop out of school and engage in adolescent sex than those from intact families.

In 1960, the nuclear family reigned supreme. Human nature hasn't evolved in the past four decades. It's the culture that's changed. Hollywood, Madison Avenue, the news media and public education have consistently inculcated certain attitudes: Singleness is swell; sex can be separated from marriage; a woman without a career is pathetic; career—measured by power and money—is all impor-

tant; personal gratification is life's highest goal.

Television illustrates the indoctrination. Traditional families have practically disappeared from prime time. "Everybody Loves Raymond" is the exception. "Friends," "Ally McBeal," "Seinfeld" and "Sex and the City" are the rule.

A 1999 study showed that of 102 prime-time network shows, only 15 had fathers as central characters. The lesson—that par-

ents aren't prime players in life's drama—is absorbed by children, who watch an average of 1,500 hours of TV each year.

Not so very long ago, marriage and family were regarded as an integral part of existence. Along with faith, family was seen as an ultimate source of contentment. Children were a commitment to the past and a pledge to the future, who centered us in the universe.

Toward the end of a long and eventful

life—rancher, war hero, author and President—Theodore Roosevelt commented: "There are many kinds of success in life worth having. . . . But for unflinching interest and enjoyment, a household of children . . . makes all other forms of success and achievement lose their importance by comparison."

Fractured homes and broken spirits go together. In March, at a high school in Santee, Calif., a 15-year-old brought a gun to school and pumped round after round into his classmates, killing two and wounding 13. From age five, Charles Williams grew up without a mother.

But, hey, families come in all shapes and sizes. Mom and Dad are optional. So says the President's domestic policy adviser. ■

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