

bemused and pleasantly surprised by the phenomenal international success of *The Lord of the Rings*, and he never came to terms with the fame it brought him. In retirement he shied away from the publicity that the bestseller status of his books brought him, guarding his and his wife's privacy from the encroachments of fandom.

In 1969, when Tolkien was 77 years old and living in sedate retirement on England's south coast, he received a letter from his publisher's daughter asking him, as part of a school project, "What is the purpose of life?" His reply serves to illustrate that his priorities in life were a faithful reflection of the priorities that are all-pervasive in his books. In his life, as in his work, the most important things were "fundamentally religious and Catholic":

So it may be said that the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the 'Gloria in Excelsis': *Laudamus te, benedicamus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.* We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour.

And in moments of exaltation we may call on all created things to join in our chorus, speaking on their behalf, as is done in Psalm 148, and in The Song of the Three Children in Daniel II. PRAISE THE LORD ... all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing. ■

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BOOKS

[*The American Way: Family and Community in the Shaping of the American Identity*, Allan Carlson, ISI Books, 211 pages]

From the Hearth

By John Zmirak

WHERE DID AMERICA go wrong? How did our country fall under the sway of social mores and patterns of life that would have been unrecognizable to our grandparents and sickening to the Founders? Different answers arise depending on your diagnosis of what exactly was special about the country in the first place. Is the problem the rise of big government? The displacement of European culture as the dominant social force? The suicide of the WASPs? The new "culture of death" that subordinates altruism to hedonism, discarding the moral norms essential to any sustainable society?

To Reagan conservatives, libertarians, and most members of the Old Right, America's wrong turn occurred somewhere in the New Deal, with its unprecedented expansion of government involvement in the everyday conduct of American life. Southern conservatives trace the decline of American liberty to the fall of the Confederacy, arguing that the destruction of real local power to resist the federal government made inevitable the Leviathan state and the degradation of public life into squabbles over the spoils of massive, unjust taxation. (Samuel Francis aptly dubs the outcome "anarcho-tyranny," a situation in which the federal government mandates smoke-free public schools and equal athletic spending for the sexes but dares not control its international borders.)

Catholic traditionalists, who attribute the dissipation of moral certainty to the

heritage of the Enlightenment and the Reformation, go back a little further—for instance, to 1761, which marked the British defeat of the French. And neoconservatives, of course, blame the 1960s, which saw the corruption of the Civil Rights movement as it retreated from its morally grounded demand for equal opportunities and became a permanent force for social revolution through activist government. However justified its original claims, that crusade served as the template for an endless succession of "liberation" movements conducted on the behalf of self-designated victim groups—first spoiled suburban women, then flagrant homosexuals, now illegal immigrants—against the interests and preferences of the normative culture.

There's truth in each of these diagnoses and a broad agreement to disagree once constituted the unspoken code of civility that made it possible for movement conservatism to flourish. The fissures within that coalition, as is well known, broke into schisms with the collapse of communism as a contrary force. Now that we have nothing in particular to oppose—unless you think we can unite the country by chasing the specter of "terrorism," or persecuting a billion-man world religion, Islam—around what rallying point can diversified, secularized Americans unite?

Similar questions have faced thoughtful Americans before, as Allan Carlson shows in *The American Way*—a concise, immensely readable book that examines important episodes in the search for an American self-definition since 1900. At that time, Carlson notes, the country still faced the immense challenge of assimilating tens of millions of immigrants who did not hail from the Northern European, Protestant countries that had settled the 13 colonies. The United States at one point during the Industrial Revolution needed strong backs and thick arms to tame and man a thinly populated continent. But the influx of Italian, Irish, Jewish, and other Eastern European migrants seemed to threaten the common mores that had united the nascent American Republic.

According to Carlson, even the presence of millions of thrifty, industrious Germans posed a problem to the Anglophone, low-church Protestant American consensus—particularly once Imperial Germany began to threaten British dominance in Europe.

With great affection, Carlson details the vast network of social, religious, and charitable organizations created by German immigrants across the U.S.

THE FAMILY BECAME THE CENTERPIECE OF AMERICA'S SELF-DEFINITION.

before 1900, associations that could serve as a model for anyone who prefers private, faith-based initiatives to statist bureaucracy as the means for addressing poverty and the displacements endemic to a market economy. Carlson relates how virtually all these organizations moved away from the narrow ethnic particularism that might have attended their creation to search for the common premises that their migrant members shared with native-born Americans. They located these shared values in the sanctity of the family—and in so doing laid the groundwork for a powerful ethic of domesticity, centered on a gainfully employed father, a prudent, strong, nurturing mother, and children reared close to the maternal bosom to love God, country, and family.

This domestic ethic, Carlson shows, became the common denominator on which most Americans could agree—repressing, at least for a time, the individualist dynamic promoted by American capitalism and encouraged by its religious and political heritage. To borrow Marx's cynical phrase, the "holy family," rather than the sovereign individual, became the centerpiece of America's self-definition; this institution crossed ethnic, political, and religious lines, providing for many decades the rationales for domestic and even foreign policy. For Carlson, collapse of this moral consensus, more than any other single factor, is responsible for America's current social pathologies.

Carlson follows the progress of what we might call this "ideology of the hearth" through the 20th century. He shows how it inspired Theodore Roosevelt—himself a passionate opponent of "hyphenated Americanism"—to reject the eugenic and racist views of "Anglo-Saxon" or "Nordicist" American nationalists. If arriving immigrants could sever their ties of political loyalty to foreign lands and keep their family

life to the same moral standard that animated upright Americans, Roosevelt found for them an equal place in the life of the nation. Rather than seeking to sterilize the poor, he urged the successful to have large families, to ensure their own heritage and avoid the moral decadence he associated with "sterility" and "selfishness."

In the chapter that will most surprise conservatives, Carlson explores the profoundly wholesome domestic agenda of the New Deal. He shows how the welfare and pension policies, labor regulations, and other social interventions enacted by Franklin Roosevelt were focused on a single, overriding goal: preserving and restoring the wage-

earning, intact, "patriarchal" family. Restrictions on women's and child labor, Carlson documents, were inspired and implemented largely by elite, high-minded women who had pioneered private charities organized to help impoverished immigrants assimilate. Their initiatives to "Americanize" immigrants gave first priority to eliminating social pathologies such as alcoholism, illegitimacy, domestic abuse, and childhood malnutrition. Their large-scale success helped empty the slums and create the American middle class. These benevolent ladies faced two sources of opposition in their time: the early "equity" feminists who sought to abolish any legal distinction in the status of the sexes, and business lobbyists such as the National Association of Manufacturers, who sought cheap labor at any social cost.

These mostly Protestant "maternalist" social thinkers found their views strongly echoed by the Catholic leaders of their day—who tried to infuse economic reforms with their Church's social teaching. Roosevelt's administration even responded to the concerns of the Agrarians, setting up pilot programs to re-settle the urban poor on subsistence farms and prevent the consolidation of agricultural land in the hands of the few. Most of these initiatives did not involve massive government meddling

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in people's everyday lives; the real growth of Leviathan came with the vast rearmament and bureaucratic mobilization brought on by America's intervention in World War II, made permanent by the demands of the Cold War. The needs of war trumped all.

For the first two decades of that protracted confrontation with communism, however, the vision of American domesticity still served as the locus of loyalty in the rhetoric of politicians and the calculations of policy-makers. Carlson offers a fascinating exploration of Henry Luce and his valiant attempt in the pages of *Life* magazine to create a visible embodiment of the virtuous, prosperous, enduring American family, even as its cohesiveness was slowly under erosion by the very consumerism and individualism encouraged by unprecedented wealth. Carlson unearths sober analyses by Cold War theorists who examined the implications for national security of threats to domestic harmony, such as "juvenile delinquency." How quaint a phrase that seems today, it is melancholy to reflect.

Poignantly, Carlson shows the legislative moment when the maternalist idea

and the pro-family policies it had supported were driven from the public square. By way of bitter irony, it was conservative Southerners who were responsible. In a last-ditch attempt to derail the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Carlson relates, die-hard legislators inserted language forbidding sex discrimination into the Act—thinking that they'd thereby made it so unpalatable it would sink from sight. Instead, the bill sailed through Congress and in a single stroke rendered illegal every attempt to provide a workingman with a "family wage" that would enable his wife to rear her children at home. Henceforth—with the industrious aid of a reborn feminist movement—the preservation of the family would no longer be the goal of government policy. Indeed, the very definition of "family" would decay into meaninglessness, to the point where today it can equally refer to single mothers, lesbians made parents by artificial insemination, and two-income suburban households along with their hired surrogate mother. While Carlson does not pretend that all these social changes flowed from a single law, or even from the actions of the government more broadly, he shows the profoundly corrosive influence of the raft of equality laws and court decisions following upon the 1964 Act, which collectively led the state to regard each citizen as an atom, a locus of taxation or subsidies buffeted by market forces and fluctuating values, spinning through a chaotic social void.

Our attempts to reconstruct society—sometimes, it seems, from scratch—must be informed by the history Carlson records. One obvious policy implication presents itself: if the successful absorption of millions of poor immigrants early in the last century was only made possible by a vigorous, popular, state-sanctioned movement to reinvigorate the patriarchal family, what on earth will assimilate them now? ■

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[*No Crueler Tyrannies: Accusation, False Witness, and Other Terrors of Our Times*, Dorothy Rabinowitz, *Wall Street Journal Books*, 239 pages]

An Inquisition for the Children

by Marian Kester Coombs

THIS BOOK HAS GONE to paper only one year after its publication by Wall Street Journal Books, a Simon & Schuster imprint. It recounts cases of judicial and prosecutorial misconduct so extreme as to defy belief. But what is judged believable or unbelievable lies at the heart of the whole matter. For elucidating and forever changing our beliefs about allegations of mass child abuse, author Dorothy Rabinowitz won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001.

Ms. Rabinowitz, a City College- and NYU-educated investigative journalist who has written for the *Wall Street Journal* since 1990, acts as a one-woman truth squad. But even the most piercing of whistles can use amplification, and it was not until Lewis Lapham of *Harper's* proved willing to print the first results of her investigation into the Amirault family case in Massachusetts that the fog of hysteria surrounding such cases began to clear.

It may seem easy to look at the day-care and nursery-school abuse scares that have scarred the American landscape from sea to sea and conclude that their cause is a combination of mass hysteria and bad conscience, i.e., unacknowledged parental guilt at abandoning their children to the care of strangers. But the hallmark of mass hysteria is that virtually everyone is caught up in it before there is time to reflect, and by then much damage has already been done. It also bears remembering that in the 1980s, when these scares began, the popular (and very PC) belief in the infallibility of a woman's or a child's claim to have been victimized

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