

Eschewed Priorities

Sometime in the past century, there began a shift in the way Americans view their lives and what is considered normal. Not that long ago, there were clearly defined roles people were expected to fill. The goal was to get married, buy a home, and raise your children. The father would work. The mother stayed home, and respect and responsibility were instilled in the children.

These times weren't perfect, as much as hindsight may suggest. People who broke with this norm were ostracized. Unwed mothers had to hide their pregnancies. Women were not given many freedoms. They were discouraged from working and had little say in the decisions that impacted their lives. Victims of domestic violence had few options. All that changed with World War II. Women were needed to fill jobs once held by the men called away in service to their country. Birth control gave women greater control over when or if they started a family. The women rights movement was in full swing, and before long, things were very different. A woman was no longer restricted to the roles of wife and mother. She could be anything.

As with most movements that start out with the best intentions, people began to forget what they were fighting for. In the effort to give women the choice to be and do whatever they wanted with their lives, somehow women lost the choice to be a mom and wife. Women who decided to stay home with their children were considered somehow inferior to their career minded sisters. Society adjusted to these changes. Today, the cost of living is such that even women who would wish to stay home with their children are unable to, due to financial concerns. While we once had no choice but to be a mother, we are now given every choice but motherhood. Often, working women find themselves forced to work right up to their delivery date, at great risk to their health and that of their children, and are forced to return to work after a short six weeks, with no regard to their need to care for and bond with their child or even to breastfeed uninterrupted, should they so desire. As the number of women who give birth to premature babies continues to rise, everyone asks "why," but few hazard any real explanation. The truth is, with stress of work and finances a greater influence on pregnant women than ever before, it is little wonder more and more babies are born early. During my own pregnancy, I was punished at work for having morning sickness. My supervisor told me how lucky she was to only need four weeks off after one of her pregnancies. I was pressured to work through sickness, fatigue and pain, as any day I missed would be subtracted from my paid maternity leave, and I was told I needed to work substantial overtime at 34 weeks pregnant, 1 week before I went into premature labor. After I returned to work, I was discouraged from pumping at work, told to use a bathroom instead of an empty office. When I expressed how upset I was to be away from my baby, an unsympathetic co-worker simply said, "You'll get over it."

Two working parents with children in day care and school from six months old up has become the norm. Though I doubt few would claim it is a bad thing women have the choice to work, what about the choice to be a mother? Today's woman is often caught between guilt for not being around her children or guilt for staying home and being a

financial burden. What's even worse is that children are now viewed by many to be a luxury. Once, having children with the person you loved was considered a beautiful, sacred act. It was spiritual, something people dreamed of and looked forward to, the ultimate bonding experience between lovers. Now people who chose to have multiple children are often looked at with scorn and confusion. They are considered a burden to their employers and society as a whole. Children go their entire lives without really knowing either parent. Their daycares and schools raise them, teaching them what some bureaucrat thinks they should learn. They are not taught by a loving parent who takes pride and joy in every new syllable they learn to speak or move they learn to do. They are now raised by people who see it as a job, a paycheck. And with each generation that passes, we begin to forget that it was not always this way. Once, the birth of a child was looked upon as a blessed event, not a six week leave from work. It was a responsibility, a joy, a miracle. Now we are steeped in cold clinical rationale and terminology. Just because a woman is physically able to work after six weeks does not mean she should leave her child then. Birth is not a purely physical act. It should not be treated as a surgery or other medical procedure. A life is created and must be nurtured. There are emotional and psychological connections that should not be ignored. What of that child who does not understand why his mommy is not longer around after six weeks? He is left to imprint on his new caregiver, his new teacher, as his parents are forced to squeeze in time on nights and weekends, trying to get a week's worth of experiences into a few short hours.

We wonder why no one learns to take personal responsibility for his or her actions, why schools now take the lead in teaching sensitive issues, such as sex and drugs. There have been many shifts in the past few decades, and many are not for the best. Yes, a woman should have equal rights as a man, but this has been taken too far. A woman has the right to be a firefighter or soldier, if and only if, she can meet the requirements. Equal opportunity does not mean jobs should be made easier to make a gender or racial quota. If a woman can do the work, fine. If a man can do it better, let him. A person should progress through strength of skill alone, not affirmative action or misguided feminism. And most importantly, we should remember that motherhood is also a viable and perfectly acceptable choice for one's life. By taking that option away, we lose one of the fundamental parts of what it means to be a woman and a human being. We lose ourselves and we leave our children to suffer. That hurts everyone.

The loss of motherhood as a priority is just the first step in a process to undermine all our freedoms. Now there are people in government who would force us to limit the number of children we have by forced contraception. Unwed mothers would have their children taken from them. We would become property of the state, where even our most basic rights are gone. How could this happen without a great outpouring of outrage? Well, after decades of undermining the family instinct, of separating mothers from their children through careers and other social obligations, people hardly notice what's going on. What do they care if they are limited to one child if that is all they want to have? Class warfare is also at work. Everyone is taught to hate the welfare mom who stays at home having many children at the taxpayer's expense. They think, "Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if we could control the procreation of those people," never realizing the same standard would

be applied to everyone. But instead of buying in to the common practice of blame, blame, blame, why not simply stop paying for welfare moms? They exist because we make it advantageous for them to do so. There is no incentive or motivation to be responsible if there is always someone holding a net. Instead of inhibiting freedoms and regulating natural biological issues, just work to reform social assistance programs. Make them temporary instead of lifelong entitlements. Let people fail. Without the freedom to fail we lose the freedom to succeed. And most importantly, stop being led to hate and blame and subdivide our country, fighting amongst ourselves instead of standing unified for freedom. We are being manipulated. We are being used. That should make everyone angry. Those in power consider us little more than pawns to do with as they please on the road to more power. It is time we stand up and begin to think for ourselves once more. Otherwise, there are plenty of people willing to do the thinking for us.