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Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth

I think that this attitude toward women is universal. What we want is to make easier the life of our housewives.
—VICE PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON, 1959

IN 1959, when the baby boom and the cold war were both at their peak, Vice President Richard M. Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union to engage in what would become one of the most noted verbal sparring matches of the century. In a lengthy and often heated debate with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, Nixon extolled the virtues of the American way of life, while his opponent promoted the Communist system. What was remarkable about this exchange was its focus. The two leaders did not discuss missiles, bombs, or even modes of government. Rather, they argued over the relative merits of American and Soviet washing machines, televisions, and electric ranges—in what came to be known as the "kitchen debate" (See Figure 3).

For Nixon, American superiority rested on the ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members. He proclaimed that the "model" home, with a male breadwinner and a full-time female homemaker, adorned with a wide array of consumer goods, represented the essence of American freedom:

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Figure 3 Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev spar verbally at the American Exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Here they engage in the "kitchen debate" as they fight the cold war over the commodity gap rather than the missile gap. (Wide World Photo.)

> To us, diversity, the right to choose, . . . is the most important thing. We don't have one decision made at the top by one government official. . . . We have many different manufacturers and many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewives have a choice. . . . Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than in the strength of rockets?[1]

Nixon's focus on household appliances was not accidental. After all, arguments over the strength of rockets would only point out the vulnerability of the United States in the event of a nuclear war between the superpowers; debates over consumer goods would provide a reassuring vision of the good life available in the atomic age. So Nixon insisted that American superiority in the cold war rested not on weapons, but on the secure, abundant family life of

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modern suburban homes. In these structures, adorned and worshipped by their inhabitants, women would achieve their glory and men would display their success. Consumerism was not an end in itself; it was the means for achieving individuality, leisure, and upward mobility.

The American National Exhibition was a showcase of American consumer goods and leisure-time equipment. But the main attraction, which the two leaders toured, was the full-scale "model" six-room ranch-style house. This model home, filled with labor-saving devices and presumably available to Americans of all classes, was tangible proof, Nixon believed, of the superiority of free enterprise over communism.

In the model kitchen in the model home, Nixon and Khrushchev revealed some basic assumptions of their two systems. Nixon called attention to a built-in panel-controlled washing machine. "In America," he said, "these [washing machines] are designed to make things easier for our women." Khrushchev countered Nixon's boast of comfortable American housewives with pride in productive Soviet female workers: in his country they did not have that "capitalist attitude toward women." Nixon clearly did not understand that the Communist system had no use for full-time housewives, for he replied, "I think that this attitude toward women is universal. What we want is to make easier the life of our housewives." Nixon's knock-out punch in his verbal bout with the Soviet Premier was his articulation of the American postwar domestic dream: successful breadwinners supporting attractive homemakers in affluent suburban homes.

Although the two leaders did not agree on the proper social roles for women, they clearly shared a common view that female sexuality was a central part of the good life that both systems claimed to espouse. Noting that Nixon admired the young women modeling American bathing suits and sports clothes, the Soviet leader said with a wink, "You are for the girls, too." Later in the day, when the two leaders faltered over a toast in which Khrushchev proposed to drink to the removal of foreign bases and Nixon would drink only to the more general hope of "peace," Khrushchev smoothed over the impending confrontation by gesturing to a nearby waitress and suggesting, "Let's drink to the ladies." Relieved, Nixon chimed in, "We can all drink to the ladies."

American journalists who were present, however, viewed the appearance and situation of Soviet women as anything but femi-

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nine. An article in *U.S. News and World Report,* noted for its anticommunism and cold war militance, suggested that Soviet women, as workers and political activists, desexualized themselves. It described Moscow as "a city of women—hard-working women who show few of the physical charms of women in the West. Most Moscow women seem unconcerned about their looks. . . . Young couples stroll together in the parks after dark, but you see many more young women [stride] along the streets purposefully, as though marching to a Communist Party meeting."[2] The implied contrast was clear. American women, unlike their "purposeful" and unfeminine Russian counterparts, did not have to be "hard working," thanks to the wonders of American household appliances. Nor did they busy themselves with the affairs of men, such as politics. Rather, they cultivated their looks and their physical charms, to become sexually attractive housewives and consumers under the American capitalist system.

These assumptions about Soviet women workers versus sexually attractive American housewives were widespread. More than a decade before Nixon's trip to Moscow, for example, Eric Johnston, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, wrote contemptuously of the claim that Soviet women were emancipated because they held jobs. He argued, "Russian women, like women in all undeveloped countries, have always done the . . . hardest work." He labeled as "simply Communist propaganda" the claim that Soviet women were "emancipated from housework," and noted sarcastically that they were "permitted the glory of drudgery in industry" in the Soviet Union. Like Nixon, he pointed to the home, where breadwinners supported their housewives, as the place where American freedom was most apparent.[3] The implication, of course, was that self-supporting women were in some way un-American. Accordingly, anticommunist crusaders viewed women who did not conform to the domestic ideal with suspicion.

With such sentiments about gender and politics widely shared, Nixon's visit was hailed as a major political triumph. Popular journals extolled his diplomatic skills in the face-to-face confrontation with Khrushchev. Many observers credit this trip with establishing Nixon's political future. Clearly, Americans did not find the kitchen debate trivial. The appliance-laden ranch-style home epitomized the expansive, secure lifestyle that postwar Americans wanted. Within the protective walls of the modern home, worrisome developments like sexual liberalism, women's emancipation, and afflu-

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ence would lead not to decadence but to a wholesome family life. Sex would enhance marriage, emancipated women would professionalize homemaking, and affluence would put an end to material deprivation. Suburbia would serve as a bulwark against communism and class conflict, for according to the widely shared belief articulated by Nixon, it offered a piece of the American dream for everyone. Although Nixon vastly exaggerated the availability of the suburban home, he described a type of domestic life that had become a reality for many Americans—and a viable aspiration for many more.

The momentum began to build toward this ideal long before it became widely available. Those who came of age during and after World War II were the most marrying generation on record: 96.4 percent of the women and 94.1 percent of the men (See Table 6). These aggregate statistics hide another significant fact: Americans behaved in striking conformity to each other during these years. In other words, not only did the average age at marriage drop, almost everyone was married by his or her mid-twenties. And not only did the average family size increase, most couples had two to four children, born sooner after marriage and spaced closer together than in previous years.[4] At a time when the availability of contraceptive devices enabled couples to delay, space, and limit the arrival of offspring to suit their particular needs, this rising birthrate resulted from deliberate choices. Nixon could, therefore, speak with some conviction when he placed the home at the center of postwar ideals.

What gave rise to the widespread endorsement of this familial consensus in the cold war era? The depression of the 1930s and World War II laid the foundation for a commitment to a stable home life, but they also opened the way for a radical restructuring of the family. The yearning for family stability gained momentum after the war, but the potential for restructuring the family withered as the powerful ideology of domesticity was imprinted on everyday life. Ironically, traditional gender roles became a central feature of the "modern" middle-class home.

Since the 1960s, much attention has been paid to the plight of women in the 1950s. But at that time, critical observers of middle-class life considered homemakers to be emancipated and men to be oppressed. Much of the most insightful writing examined the dehumanizing situation that forced middle-class men, at least in their public roles, to be other-directed "organization men," caught in a

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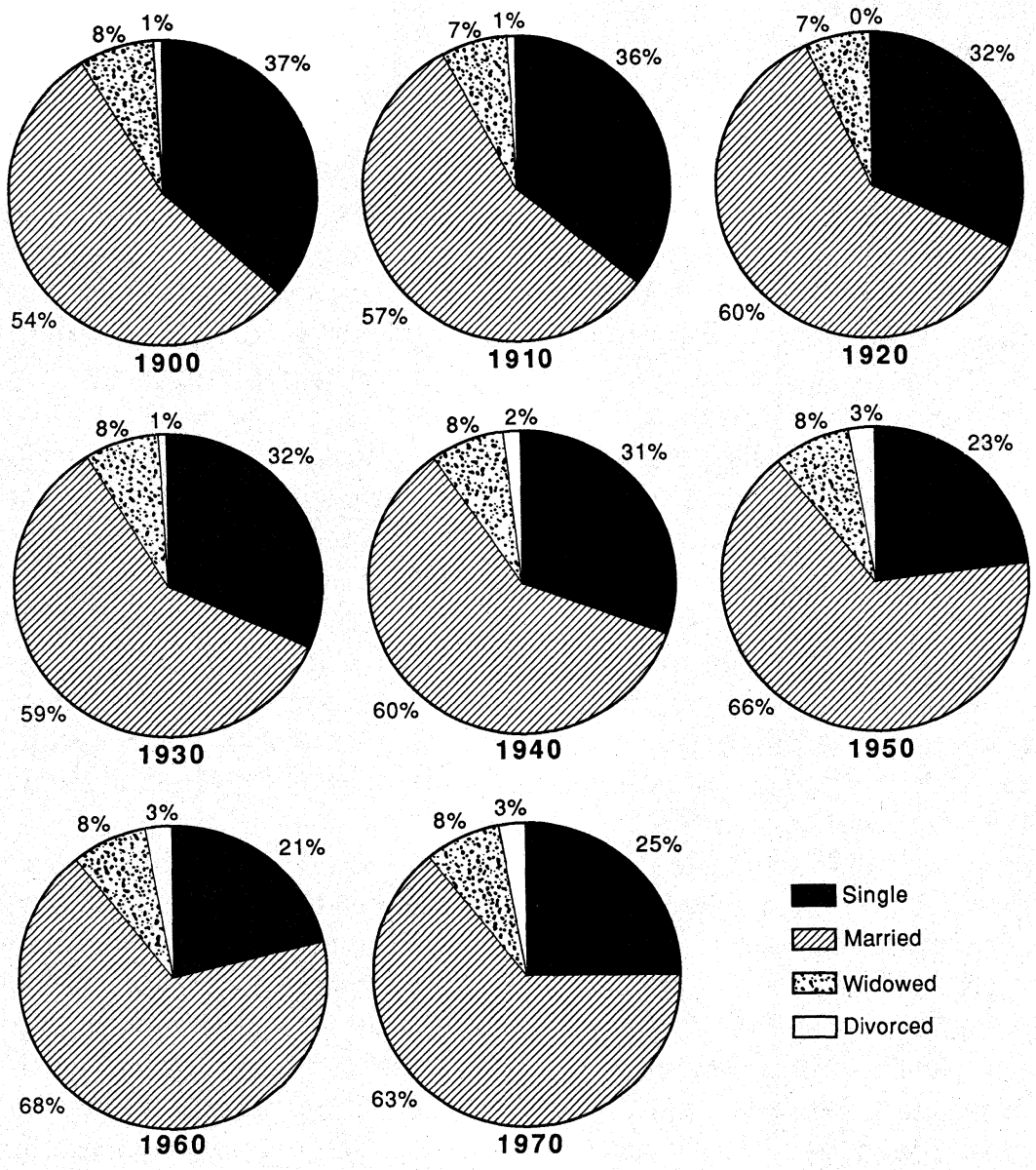
TABLE 6
Marital Status of the Population



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), Part I, pp. 4, 9, 54, 55, 64.

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mass, impersonal white-collar world. The loss of autonomy was real. As large corporations grew, swallowing smaller enterprises, the number of self-employed men in small businesses shrank dramatically. David Riesman recognized that the corporate structure forced middle-class men into deadening, highly structured peer interactions; he argued that only in the intimate aspects of life could a man truly be free. Industrial laborers were even less likely to derive intrinsic satisfactions from their jobs. Thus, blue-collar and white-collar employees shared a sense of alienation and subordination in the postwar corporate work force. Both Riesman and William Whyte saw the suburbs as extensions of the corporate world, with their emphasis on conformity. Yet, they perceived that suburban homes and consumer goods offered material compensations for organized work life.[5]

Employed women, whose numbers continued to increase, held jobs that were even more menial and subordinate than those of men. Surveys of full-time homemakers indicated that they appreciated their independence from supervision and control over their work; they had no desire to give up their autonomy in the home for wage labor. Educated middle-class women, whose career opportunities were severely limited, hoped that the home would become not a confining place of drudgery, but a liberating arena of fulfillment through professionalized homemaking, meaningful childrearing, and satisfying sexuality.[6]

While the home seemed to offer the best hope for freedom, it also appeared to be a fragile institution, subject to forces beyond its control. Economic hardship had torn families asunder, and war had scattered men far from home and drawn women into the public world of work. The postwar years did little to alleviate fears that similar disruptions might occur again. In spite of widespread affluence, many believed that the reconversion to a peacetime economy would lead to another depression. Even peace was problematic, since international tensions were palpable. The explosion of the first atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked not only the end of World War II but the beginning of the cold war. At any moment, the cold war could turn hot. The policy of containment abroad faced its first major challenge in 1949, with the Chinese revolution. In the same year, the USSR exploded its first atomic bomb. The nation was again jolted out of its sense of fragile security when the Korean War broke out in 1950. Many shared President Truman's belief that World War III was at hand.[7]

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Insightful analysts of the nuclear age have explored the psychic impact of the atomic bomb. Paul Boyer's study of the first five years after Hiroshima showed that American responses went through dramatic shifts. Initial reactions juxtaposed the thrill of atomic empowerment with the terror of annihilation. The atomic scientists were among the first to organize against the bomb, calling for international control of atomic energy, and others soon followed suit. By the end of the 1940s, however, opposition had given way to proclamations of faith in the bomb as the protector of American security. As support grew for more and bigger bombs, arguments for international control waned, and the country prepared for the possibility of a nuclear war by instituting new civil defense strategies. Psychologists were strangely silent on the issue of the fear of atomic weapons, and by the early fifties, the nation seemed to be apathetic. Boyer echoed Robert J. Lifton in suggesting that denial and silence may have reflected deep-seated horror rather than complacency; indeed, in 1959, two out of three Americans listed the possibility of nuclear war as the nation's most urgent problem.

Lifton argued that the atomic bomb forced people to question one of their most deeply held beliefs: that scientific discoveries would yield progress. Atomic energy presented a fundamental contradiction: science had developed the potential for total technological mastery as well as for total technological devastation. Lifton attributed "nuclear numbing" to the powerful psychic hold that the fear of nuclear annihilation had on the nation's subconscious. He pointed to unrealistic but reassuring civil defense strategies as the efforts of governmental officials to tame or "domesticate" the fear.[8]

Americans were well poised to embrace domesticity in the midst of the terrors of the atomic age. A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation. Children would also be a connection to the future and a means of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths. Although baby-boom parents were not likely to express conscious desires to repopulate the country, the devastation of thousands of deaths could not have been far below the surface of the postwar consciousness. The view of childbearing as a duty was painfully true for Jewish parents, after six million of their kin were snuffed out in Europe. But they were not alone. As one Jewish woman recalled of her decision to bear four children, "After the Holocaust, we felt obligated to have lots of babies. But it was easy because everyone was doing it—non-Jews, too."[9]

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In secure postwar homes with plenty of children, American women and men might be able to ward off their nightmares and live out their dreams. The family seemed to be the one place where people could control their destinies and perhaps even shape the future. Of course, nobody actually argued that stable family life could prevent nuclear annihilation. But the home represented a source of meaning and security in a world run amok. Marrying young and having lots of babies were ways for Americans to thumb their noses at doomsday predictions. Commenting on the trend toward young marriages, one observer noted, "Youngsters want to grasp what little security they can in a world gone frighteningly insecure. The youngsters feel they will cultivate the one security that's possible—their own gardens, their own . . . home and families."[10]

Thoughts of the family rooted in time-honored traditions may have allayed fears of vulnerability. Nevertheless, much of what had provided family security in the past became unhinged. For many Americans, the postwar years brought rootlessness. Those who moved from farms to cities lost a familiar way of life that was rooted in the land. Children of immigrants moved from ethnic neighborhoods with extended kin and community ties to homogeneous suburbs, where they formed nuclear families and invested them with high hopes. Suburban homes offered freedom from kinship obligations, along with material comforts that had not been available on the farm or in the ethnic urban ghetto. As Whyte noted about the promoters of the Illinois suburb he studied, "At first they had advertised Park Forest as housing. Now they began advertising happiness." But consumer goods would not replace community, and young mobile nuclear families could easily find themselves adrift. Newcomers devoted themselves to creating communities out of neighborhoods composed largely of transients. As Whyte noted, "In suburbia, organization man is trying, quite consciously, to develop a new kind of roots to replace what he left behind."[11]

Young adults aged 25 to 35 were among the most mobile members of the society, constituting 12.4 percent of all migrants but only 7.5 percent of the population. Higher education also prompted mobility; fully 45.5 percent of those who had one year of college or more lived outside their home states, compared to 27.3 percent of high school graduates. Overwhelmingly, these young educated migrants worked for large organizations: three-fourths of all clients of long-distance movers worked for corporations, the government, or

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the armed services, with corporate employees the most numerous. In their new communities, they immediately endeavored to forge ties with other young transients that would be as rewarding and secure as the ones they left behind, but free of the restraints of the old neighborhood.[12]

Postwar Americans struggled with this transition. The popular culture was filled with stories about young adults who shifted their allegiances from the old ethnic ties to the new nuclear family ideal. When situation comedies shifted from radio to television, working-class ethnic kin networks and multigenerational households faded as the stories increasingly revolved around the middle-class nuclear family.[13] One of the most popular films of the 1950s was *Marty*, winner of the Academy Award for Best Motion Picture in 1955, and first produced as a television play in 1953. In the film, Marty, a young man living with his mother, has a deep commitment to the ethnic family in which he was reared. The sympathy of the audience stays with him as he first demonstrates his family loyalty by allowing his mother to bring her cranky aging sister to live with them and doing his duty as the good son. As the story unfolds, Marty falls in love and, to the horror of his mother and his aunt, decides to marry his sweetheart and move away from the old neighborhood. Far from his family and their obligations, the young couple can embark on a new life freed from the constraints of the older generation. By the film's end, the audience has made the transition, along with the main character, from loyalty to the community of ethnic kinship to the suburban ideal of the emancipated nuclear family.[14]

Whyte called the suburbs the "new melting pot," where migrants from ethnic working-class neighborhoods in the cities moved into the middle class. Kin and ethnic ties were often forsaken as suburban residents formed new communities grounded in shared experiences of homeownership and childrearing, and conformity to the modern consumer-oriented way of life. Young suburbanites were great joiners, forging new ties and creating new institutions to replace the old. One such suburban community, Park Forest, Illinois, had sixty-six adult organizations, making it a "hotbed" of participation. Churches and synagogues, whose membership reached new heights in the postwar years, expanded their functions from prayer and charity to recreation, youth programs, and social events. Church membership rose from 64.5 million in 1940 to 114.5 million in 1960—from 50 percent to 63 percent of the population (100 years

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earlier only 20 percent of all Americans belonged to churches). Religious affiliation became associated with the "American way of life." Although many observers have commented on the superficiality and lack of spiritual depth in much of this religious activity, there is no question that churches and synagogues provided social arenas for suburbanites, replacing, to some extent, the communal life previously supplied by kin or neighborhood.[15]

Still, these were tenuous alliances among uprooted people. With so much mobility and with success associated with moving on to something better, middle-class nuclear families could not depend on the stability of their communities. As much as they tried to form ties with their neighbors and conform to each other's lifestyles, they were still largely on their own. The new vision of home life, therefore, depended heavily on the staunch commitment of individual family members. Neither the world nor the newly forged suburban community could be trusted to provide security. What mattered was that family members remained bound to each other—and to the modern, emancipated home they intended to create.

The wisdom of earlier generations would be of little help to postwar Americans who were looking toward a radically new vision of family life and trying self-consciously to avoid the paths of their parents. Thus, young people embraced the advice of experts in the rapidly expanding fields of social science, medicine, and psychology. After all, science was changing the world. Was it not reasonable to expect it to change the home as well?

Postwar America was the era of the expert. Armed with scientific techniques and presumably inhabiting a world that was beyond popular passions, the experts had brought us into the atomic age. Physicists developed the bomb, strategists created the cold war, and scientific managers built the military-industrial complex. It was now up to the experts to make the unmanageable manageable. As the readers of *Look* magazine were assured, there was no reason to worry about radioactivity, for if ever the time arrived when you would need to understand its dangers, "the experts will be ready to tell you." Science and technology seemed to have invaded virtually every aspect of life, from the most public to the most private. Americans were looking to professionals to tell them how to manage their lives. The tremendous popularity of Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* reflects a reluctance to trust the shared wisdom of kin and community. Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* provided readers with religiously inspired scientific formulas for

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success. Both these best-selling books stressed the centrality of the family in their prescriptions for a better future.[16]

The popularity of these kinds of books attests to the faith in expertise that prevailed at the time. One retrospective study of the attitudes and habits of over 4,000 Americans in 1957 found that the reliance on expertise was one of the most striking developments of the postwar years. Long-term individual therapy, for example, reached unprecedented popularity in the mid-1950s. The authors concluded:

> Experts took over the role of psychic healer, but they also assumed a much broader and more important role in directing the behavior, goals, and ideals of normal people. They became the teachers and norm setters who would tell people how to approach and live life. . . . They would provide advice and counsel about raising and responding to children, how to behave in marriage, and what to see in that relationship. . . . Science moved in because people needed and wanted guidance.[17]

The Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS) confirmed these findings. By the mid-fifties, one out of six respondents had consulted a professional for marital or emotional problems; yet fewer than one-third that number considered their personal problems to be severe.[18] It seems evident, then, that people were quick to seek professional help. When the experts spoke, postwar Americans listened.

Despite the public's perceptions of scientific mastery and objectivity, professionals groped for appropriate ways to conceptualize and resolve the uncertainties of the times. Like other Americans, they feared the possibility of social disintegration during this period. As participants in the cold war consensus, they offered solutions to the difficulties of the age that would not disrupt the status quo. In the process, they helped focus and formulate the domestic ideology. For these experts, public dangers merged with private ones, and the family appeared besieged as never before. The noted anthropologist Margaret Mead articulated this problem in a 1949 article addressed to social workers. The methods of the past, she wrote, offered "an inadequate model on which to build procedures in the atomic age." Children were now born into a world unfamiliar even to their parents, "a world suddenly shrunk into one unit, in which radio and television and comics and the threat of the atomic bomb are everyday realities." The task for helping professionals—psychologists, psychiatrists, family counselors, and social workers—would be

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especially complicated because conditions had changed so drastically. Each adult faced "the task of trying to keep a world he ⟨sic⟩ never knew and never dreamed steady until we can rear a generation at home in it."[19]

According to the experts, political activism was not likely to keep the world steady. They advocated adaptation rather than resistance as a means of feeling "at home." The modern home would make the inherited values of the past relevant for the uncertain present and future, but it had to be fortified largely from within. Married couples were determined to strengthen the nuclear family through "togetherness." With the help of experts to guide them, successful breadwinners would provide economic support for professionalized homemakers, and together they would create the home of their dreams.

The respondents to the 1955 KLS survey articulated that fervent commitment. These white middle-class Americans were among the first to establish families according to the new domestic ideology. Relatively affluent, more highly educated than the average, they were among those Americans who were best able to take advantage of the postwar prosperity (See Appendix I). They looked toward the home, rather than the public world, for personal fulfillment. No wonder that when they were asked what they thought they had sacrificed by marrying and raising a family, an overwhelming majority of them replied, "Nothing."

One of the striking characteristics of the KLS respondents was their apparent willingness to give up autonomy and independence for the sake of marriage and a family. Although the 1950s marked the beginning of the glamorization of bachelorhood, most of the men expressed a remarkable lack of nostalgia for the unencumbered freedom of a single life. Typical responses to the question, "What did you have to sacrifice or give up because of your marriage?" were "nothing but bad habits" and "the empty, aimless, lonely life of a bachelor." One who gave up only "a few fishing and hunting trips" claimed that "the time was better . . . spent at home." Many of these men had been married for over a decade and had their share of troubles. The comment of one man was especially poignant. Although he described his wife as addicted to alcohol and "sexually frigid," he claimed that "aside from the natural adjustment, I have given up only some of my personal independence. But I have gained so much more: children, home, etc. that I ought to answer . . . 'nothing at all.' "[20]

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Women were equally quick to dismiss any sacrifices they may have made when they married. Few expressed regrets for devoting themselves to the homemaker role—a choice that effectively ruled out other life-long occupational avenues. Although 13 percent mentioned a "career" as something sacrificed, most claimed that they gained rather than lost in the bargain. One wife indicated how her early marriage affected the development of her adult identity: "Marriage has opened up far more avenues of interest than I ever would have had without it . . . I was at a very young and formative age when we were married and I think I have changed greatly over the years. . . . I cannot conceive of life without him."[21]

Many wives who said they abandoned a career were quick to minimize its importance and to state that they "preferred marriage," which suggests that the pursuit of both was not viable. Many defined their domestic role as a career in itself. One woman defended her decision to give up her career: "I think I have probably contributed more to the world in the life I have lived." Another mentioned her sacrifices of "financial independence [and] freedom to choose a career. However, these have been replaced by the experience of being a mother and a help to other parents and children. Therefore the new career is equally as good or better than the old." Both men and women mentioned the responsibilities of married life as sources of personal fulfillment rather than sacrifice.[22]

Further evidence of the enormous commitment to family life appears in responses to the question, "What has marriage brought you that you could not have gained without your marriage?" Although the most common answers of men and women included family, children, love, and companionship, other typical answers were a sense of purpose, success, and security. It is interesting to note that respondents claimed that these elements of life would not have been possible without marriage. Women indicated that marriage gave them "a sense of responsibility I wouldn't have had had I remained single" or a feeling of "usefulness . . . for others dear to me." One said marriage gave her a "happy, full, complete life; children; a feeling of serving some purpose in life other than making money." Another remarked, "I'm not the 'career girl' type. I like being home and having a family. . . . Working with my husband for our home and family brings a satisfaction that working alone could not."[23]

Men were equally emphatic about the satisfactions brought about by family responsibility. Nearly one-fourth claimed that marriage

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gave them a sense of purpose in life and a reason for striving. Aside from love and children, no other single reward of marriage was mentioned by so many of the husbands. Included in the gains they listed were "the incentive to succeed and save for the future of my family," "a purpose in the scheme of life," and "a motivation for intensive effort that would otherwise have been lacking." One man confessed, "Being somewhat lazy to begin with, the family and my wife's ambition have made me more eager to succeed businesswise and financially." A contented husband wrote of the "million treasures" contained in his family; another said that marriage offered "freedom from the boredom and futility of bachelorhood."

Others linked family life to civic virtues by claiming that marriage strengthened their patriotism and morals, instilling them with "responsibility, community spirit, respect for children and family life, reverence for a Supreme Being, humility, love of country." Summing up the feelings of many in his generation, one husband said that marriage

> . . . increased my horizons, defined my goals and purposes in life, strengthened my convictions, raised my intellectual standards and stimulated my incentive to provide moral, spiritual, and material support; it has rewarded me with a realistic sense of family and security I never experienced during the first 24 years of my life.[24]

The respondents expressed a strong commitment to a new and expanded vision of family life, focused inwardly on parents and children and bolstered by affluence and sex. They claimed to have found their personal identities and achieved their individual goals largely through their families. Yet, the superlatives ring hollow, as if these women and men were trying to convince themselves that the families they had created fulfilled all their deepest wishes. For as their extensive responses to other questions in the survey will show, they experienced disappointments, dashed hopes, and lowered expectations. Many who gave their marriages high ratings had actually resigned themselves to a great deal of misery. As postwar Americans endeavored to live in tune with the prevailing domestic ideology, they found that the dividends required a heavy investment of self. For some, the costs were well worth the benefits; for others, the costs were too high.

Ida and George Butler were among those who felt the costs of marriage were worth the benefits. After more than a decade to-

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gether, they both claimed that they were satisfied with the life they had built. When they first embarked on married life, they brought high hopes to their union. Ida wrote that George "very nearly measures up to my ideal Prince Charming." George, in turn, noted Ida's attractiveness, common sense, and similar ideas on home life and sex. He was glad she was not the "high stepping" type, but had "experience in cooking and housekeeping." For this down-to-earth couple, the home contained their sexuality, her career ambitions, his drive for success, and their desires for material and emotional comforts.

Yet, like all things worth a struggle, it did not come easy. Ida's choices reflect the constraints that faced postwar women. She sacrificed her plans for "a professional career—I would [have] liked to have been a doctor—but we both agreed that I should finish college, which I did." Following her marriage, there were "obstacles" to her continuing to pursue a career in medicine. It was difficult to combine a professional life with a family. For one thing, the children were primarily her responsibility. She explained:

> My husband works very hard in his business and has many hobbies and friends. The care and problems of children seem to overwhelm him and he admits being an "only" child ill prepared him for the pull and tug of family life. We work closely together on discipline and policies, but he is serious minded and great joy and fun with the children [are] lacking.

If Prince Charming's shining armor tarnished a bit with the years, Ida was not one to complain. She had reasons for feeling contented with the family she helped build:

> I think a *stability* which runs through my life is important. I cannot recall any divorce or separation in my immediate family. We are a rural close-to-the-soil group and I was brought up to take the "bitter with the sweet"–"you made your own bed, now lie in it" philosophy, so it would not occur to me to "run home to mother."

Although marriage was not Ida's first career choice, it eventually became her central occupation: "Marriage is my career. I chose it and now it is up to me to see that I do the job successfully in spite of the stresses and strains of life." She felt that the sacrifices she made were outweighed by the gains—"children, a nice home, companionship, sex, many friends." George also claimed to be "completely

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satisfied" with the marriage. He wrote that it brought him an "understanding of other people's problems, 'give and take,' love and devotion." He felt that he sacrificed "nothing but so-called personal freedom." Her medical career and his so-called personal freedom seemed to be small prices to pay for the stable family life they created together.[25]

For couples like the Butlers, the gains were worth the sacrifices. But their claims of satisfaction carried a note of resignation. Combining a profession with a family seemed an unrealistic goal for Ida; combining personal freedom with the role of provider seemed equally out of reach for George. They both thought they faced an either/or situation and they opted for their family roles. At first glance, this case appears unremarkable: two people who made a commitment to marriage and made the best of it. But the Butlers' choices and priorities take on a larger significance because they were typical of their generation, which was unique in its commitment to family life. The costs and benefits articulated by the Butlers —and their willingness to settle for less than they bargained for— were conditions they shared with their middle-class peers.

Unlike the Butlers, Joseph and Emily Burns emphasized the costs of family life. Haunted by the legacy of the Great Depression and World War II, Joseph expected marriage to yield the "model home" described by Nixon, where affluence, intimacy, and security would prevail. But the worrisome state of the world was inescapable for him, even in the family. Nevertheless, he articulated the way in which the world situation contributed to the intense familism of the postwar years.

At the time of his engagement, Joseph Burns had high expectations for his future marriage. He had chosen his fiancee because he could trust and respect her, her "past life has been admirable," she did not drink or smoke, and "she is pleasing to the eye." If anything made him uneasy about their prospects for future happiness, it was the fear of another depression: "If the stock market takes another drop . . . business will be all shot." The depression had already made him wary, but his disillusionment would be complete by the end of World War II.

Looking back over his life from the vantage point of the 1950s, Joseph Burns reflected:

> As I review the thoughts that were mine at the time of my marriage and as they are now, I would like to give an explanation that should be

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considered . . . A young couple, much in love, are looking forward to a happy life in a world that has been held up to them by elders as a beautiful world. Children are brought up by their parents to love God and other children, honesty is a must, obedience to the Ten Commandments and to the golden rule is necessary.

With such training, I started out my life only to find out the whole thing is a farce. Blundering politicians lusting for power and self-glory have defiled what is clean and right, honesty is just a word in the dictionary, love of God—who really believes in God? Love of neighbor . . . get him before he gets you.

I agree it does sound cynical, but let us face the facts. Mankind has been slowly degenerating, especially since 1914, and today, what do we have to look forward to? Civil defense tests, compulsory military training, cold wars, fear of the atomic bomb, the diseases that plague man, the mental case outlook? . . . I submit these things to show how a marriage can be vitally affected as was ours and, therefore, many of my ideals, desires, and, most of all, my goal.

Joseph's cynicism toward the wider world made him place even higher hopes on the family to be a buffer. When world events intruded into that private world, he was devastated: "On December 7, 1941, the question burned in my mind, How can so-called Christian nations tear each other apart again?" Joseph resolved his personal anguish in a unique manner: he became a Jehovah's Witness. But he continued to cling to the family as security in a chaotic world. Although he claimed that the world situation had dashed his ideals, he still rated his marriage happier than average and said it gave him "the opportunity to think and reason." As far as what he sacrificed for his marriage, he wrote, "Whatever [I gave] up, which probably would have been material possessions, has been offset by the things [I] gained." Joseph's rage at the world was tempered by the benefits of having a family. He believed that the family provided him with security and satisfaction, and fulfilled at least some of the hopes he originally brought to it.

Emily Burns had a different view of their marriage, and found little comfort in her life with Joseph. Although his religious conversion was at the center of her dissatisfaction, her responses raise other issues as well. Emily complained about her husband's pessimism, coldness, aloofness, and lack of a love of beauty. She emphasized that her husband's change of religion had affected his whole life—"[his] attitude toward wife, children, home, friends,

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and world. Unless I become absorbed in [his religion], we [will come] to a parting of the ways, since I'm an outsider in my own home."

In addition to the major rift over her husband's conversion, Emily enumerated her sacrifices as follows:

1. A way of life (an easy one).
2. All friends of long duration; close relationships.
3. Independence and personal freedom.
4. What seemed to contribute to my personality.
5. Financial independence.
6. Goals in this life.
7. Idea as to size of family.
8. Personal achievements—type changed.
9. Close relationship with brother and mother and grandmother.

Her complaints add up to much more than religious incompatibility. They suggest some of the costs of adhering to the domestic ideology of the postwar era: an emphasis on the nuclear family at the expense of other relatives and friends, loss of personal freedom, financial independence, "goals" and "personal achievements." For Emily, like Ida Butler and others of their generation, marriage and family life led to a narrowing of options and activities. But it was a bargain she accepted because it appeared to be the best route toward achieving other goals in life. Although she would not have married the same person if she had to do it over again, she never considered divorce. The benefits she gained in marriage offset her discontent with her spouse. Her list of benefits reveals why she chose the domestic path:

1. The desire to give up all for the love of one.
2. The placing of self last.
3. A harmonious relationship until religion . . . changed this.
4. Two ideal children even though the boy is cold and indifferent like his father. (They have strong religious ties in common.)
5. A comfortable home independent of others.
6. Personal satisfaction if all turns out well.
7. Personal satisfaction in establishing a home.

In this list, Emily mentioned practically all the major subjective compensations that made marriage such an important commitment

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for so many women at the time. Yet, it was a qualified list. Her dissatisfaction was obvious even in her enumeration of her gains. So she struggled to improve her situation as best she could. While her husband used the last space in the questionnaire to brood over the world situation and explain his turn toward religion, Emily used it to reaffirm her faith in the potential for happiness in marriage. She wrote to Kelly and his research team: "Honestly wish this survey will help future generations to maintain happiness throughout marriage and that your book will become more than cold facts and figures. We have enough such now!"

Emily revealed a submerged feminist impulse that also surfaced in numerous testimonies of her peers. To help her formulate these ideas and influence her husband, she turned to experts:

> Have tried to arouse interest in the woman's point of view by reading parts of Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes' works pertaining to marriage, to my husband. He says, "Oh, she is just a woman, what does she know about it?" and "How can such things (marriage relationship) be learned from a book?" I have ideas on marriage and when I see the same ideas expressed in print by a person of authority, at least I can see that I am not the only woman or person who thinks "such and such."

Recognizing that her husband was not sympathetic to her rebellion against female subordination, she predicted, "Because of a developing hard, slightly independent attitude on my part, I believe my husband's report on me will be anything but favorable."

Joseph and Emily Burns, in spite of their numerous complaints, stayed together. Through all their disillusionment and anger, they never waivered in their commitment to their imperfect relationship and insisted that their marriage was worth the struggle. Emily chafed against the limits to her freedom and turned to experts to bolster her status within the family. Joseph turned to the home to provide solace from the miseries that surrounded him in the public world. Both had invested a great deal of their personal identities in their domestic roles and were not willing to abandon them. Even if the home did not fulfill their dreams of an emancipated, fulfilling life, it still provided more satisfaction and security than they were likely to find elsewhere. For all their struggles and strains, Joseph and Emily Burns had created something together that met their needs. In 1980, they were still married to each other.[26]

Like the Butlers, the Burnses demonstrate the powerful determi-

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nation and the considerable sacrifice that went into the creation of the postwar family. Even if the result did not fully live up to their expectations, these husbands and wives never seriously considered bailing out. It is important to consider the limited options and alternatives that these men and women faced. It was not a perfect life, but it was secure and predictable. Forging an independent life outside marriage carried enormous risks of emotional and economic bankruptcy, along with social ostracism. As these couples sealed the psychological boundaries around the family, they also sealed their fates within it.

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