CONTESTING FAMILIES

The Meanings of Domestic Violence

BEA CAMPBELL • LINDA GORDON • SHERRI BRODER

also:

AIDS & CULTURE
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INTRODUCTION

In this issue we are publishing three articles, by British writer Beatrix Campbell and American social historians Sherri Broder and Linda Gordon, that deal with the abuse of children, family violence, and the larger context of the relationship between the family and the state. Despite much discussion of child abuse in the popular media, we are struck by what is missing. There has been no effort to place the abuse of children in a historical context, or delve into the changing responses by the state, the courts, social services, the medical profession, or the families themselves. No critique of the family has emerged; every situation of intra-family abuse is the exception to the “normal” family. In the notorious Steinberg case in New York, the experts are still trying to identify the individual pathology that drove this rich, white, successful attorney to regularly beat his girlfriend and ultimately kill his daughter. Not surprisingly, there is also little discussion of the role played by images of where child abuse occurs and what kind of person abuses in regulating children, women, families in poor communities or communities of color, alternative families, gay people and especially gay men.

Linda Gordon points out that feminism usually provides a context in which sexual abuse, especially by men within families, is “discovered,” and the social response is more child-
centered. In tracing the history of child abuse since its appearance as a modern phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, Gordon also demonstrates how the issue can “vanish” from public view or be reshaped against the interests of women and children during periods of political retrenchment.

Gordon, Campbell and Broder demonstrate that the abuse of children is always discussed in a highly contested framework of meanings, political, historical, social. In the current contest for definitions, the terrain is primarily controlled by the popular media and the social service/medical professionals charged with detection and treatment of abuse. In Massachusetts, the suspicion of day care centers and the obsession with missing children shares the media spotlight with the custody case of eight-year-old Nicole Lalonde, whose mother spent eight months in jail rather than reveal her whereabouts to a judge who wanted to return custody to the father. Nicole’s statement on the abuse she was subjected to, even during court-ordered “supervised” visits, is insufficient in the eyes of the court to honor her wishes not to see her father again.

A fourth article in this issue, by Simon Watney, raises “familialism” in a different context, the position of the gay and lesbian community in relation to the AIDS epidemic and the way family ideology is employed as an instrument of social power against the existence of gay people. Rather than a “uniquely threatened and vulnerable institution,” the family according to Watney, is the site of control and regulation for its members, and the instrument for marginalizing those who live outside its boundaries. The revelation by children of the danger they face within families, is deeply threatening, not as a reflection of social crisis, but as an assault on an agency of social control.

Watney’s analysis helps to explain the refusal to link sexual abuse with a critique of the family, yet that failure has resulted in focus on the stranger outside at the expense of examining the stranger within. As Beatrix Campbell indicates in her analysis of the “Cleveland case,” a recent massive child abuse scandal in England, neither the state nor the public are prepared to deal with the ramifications of abuse within families. The discovery of its existence, as in Cleveland, creates a dilemma for the “pro-family” state but the response usually belies interest in the protection of children. The attention to abuse that occurs outside the family results in a focus on the perpetrator; attention to abuse within families often results in scrutiny and treatment of the mother and child. The ideological commitment to “keeping families together” rests on the notion that families work, that “good” families have sufficient strengths to provide a healthy environment for children, that only bad families fail and require the disruption of removing the child. The image of the healthy family obscures and negates differences of race, culture, class and kinship structures making families outside the white, middle class norm more vulnerable to such disruption. At the same time, as Linda Gordon insists, the ideology of the “normal family” deepens the confusion, shame, and secrecy of those subject to abuse within it.

The public discussion of family sexual abuse has been primarily focused on cases like Lalonde, sexual abuse is linked to divorce, a custody battle or family upheaval. “Divorce incest” becomes a separate category representing the hurt and anger of spurned fathers. With notable exceptions, the image of the father, husband, uncle, long-term regular abuser, is absent. The exceptions primarily help reinforce the idea that abuse occurs more readily in poor families or families from communities of color. “Disorganized” or “multi-problem” families become the code words for the differences that permit abuse.

Yet as both Broder and Gordon point out, those families who are considered marginal also have historically had a voice in shaping the definition of abuse, on a continuum from neglectful to violent behavior. Entering nineteenth century Philadelphia working class neighborhoods, Broder suggests what some of the stakes were inside the communities in the contest over the definitions of abuse and proper families. She reveals how intimately class identity is bound up with social distinction, specifically how working class respectability depended less on identification with middle class ideals, than on separation from the “rough” elements of working class life and
culture. Read together, Broder and Gordon suggest how the burden of working class respectability, bound up as it was with issues of family and sexual morality, fell heavily on women. As Gordon indicates, women have approached social service agencies with their own ideas of good parenting and harmful environments for children, and with their own concrete demands for assistance. As both articles note, the response they received was often determined by class or race bias, attitudes toward women and children, ideas about families and availability of services. Even now, the hysteria surrounding child abuse is more often employed in strategies of detection than ideas about services that would meet real needs for children and women.

In the final analysis, sexual abuse and violence toward children represents their powerlessness, within families and within society. There has yet to be a social movement that conceives of alternatives for children. They are the property of their parents or the state, and have no autonomy in making decisions about their lives, where they want to live or with whom. The attack on day care has also been an attack on expanding the public space for children outside the home. In addition to maintaining the right of the father and the power of the family, the desire to lock children into families may also be related to the specter of childhood sexuality. What is it? Can any of us really remember or are we always working from fears and projections from the vantage point of adulthood? How is it different for boys and girls? Among peers? Does a gay male context really reshape the meaning of intergenerational sex? What is childhood sexuality for gay children and teenagers? We pose these questions to suggest that the unknown character of childhood (for adults), and particularly childhood sexuality, may be connected to why sexual abuse of children is such an elusive and politically difficult issue.

These articles are part of opening the discussion in new ways. Radical America hopes in a future Special Issue on the family to continue these discussions in their historical and contemporary political dimensions.

As we write, the Palestinian uprising, or “Intifada,” is in its seventh month. Operating in the midst of an “uncontrolled epidemic of violence by the [Israeli] army and police” (to borrow from the report of US Physicians for Human Rights), it shows no sign of abating. The uprising has disrupted the status quo in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and has put the Palestinian national question back on the international agenda. It has sent a strong message that recognition of Palestinian national rights has to be an integral part of any solution to the conflict. The equations “Palestinian = terrorist, Israeli = victim,” so persistently propagated by the US media before the uprising, have been totally discredited by the images and reports from the West Bank and Gaza. The adoption of the Arabic word “Intifada,” meaning “uprising,” by the US media can perhaps be viewed as a symbolic measure of the success of the uprising. Of no less importance, the uprising has sharpened the divisions of opinion about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within both Israel and the Jewish community around the world. There is little doubt that December 1987, the beginning of the uprising, marks the start of a new phase in Palestinian-Israeli relations.

Although the pace of change at the international level is very slow, and it is difficult to determine if a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is any closer, the scene in the occupied territories is rapidly changing. The central aim of the current uprising is to challenge and dismantle Israeli colonial rule in the occupied territories; this point has not been missed by the Israeli authorities. Defense minister Yitzhak Rabin has declared, “We will make it clear who is running the territories.” Salim Tamari’s article in this issue analyzes the construction and dynamics of Israeli colonial control in the occupied territories and the Palestinian challenges to it. The uprising has shifted the center of gravity of the Palestinian national movement to the occupied territories, where mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, community organizing and self-reliance have become the dominant forms of struggle, attracting increasing numbers of people from every section of the society to active resistance. As we attempt to understand the current events, the Palestinians in the occupied territories suggest, “the uprising is not an ‘event’ with an end point, but a new stage in the relations between
the occupier and the occupied.”

CORRECTION
The correct title of Juliet Schor’s article which appeared in Volume 21 Number 1 as “Warning—Military Spending May Not Be Bad For Your Economic Health: Some Thoughts On Conversion” should have been “Hostile Takeovers: The Political Economy of Military Spending.” The editors apologize to Ms. Schor and our readers for this error.

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THE COUNTRY'S CRYING OUT FOR CHANGE. VOTE LABOUR.
Signs of Crisis:
Child Sexual Abuse and the Pro-Family State in Britain

Beatrix Campbell

"Cleveland," the case of apparently widespread child sexual abuse uncovered by pediatricians in a Northern town, has mesmerized Britain for exactly a year now. The case is actually a kind of kaleidoscope that disperses and regroups issues around "private life," sex and the family with enormous implications for national political discourse in Britain. An issue that once belonged to the Right—"child molestation"—has reappeared in British political discourse and has completely destabilized the political alignments that historically have surrounded issues to do with children and sex.

Let us begin then with the Right, the Conservative Party in post-war Britain. The leadership of the Conservative Party after the Second World War was enlightened, deeply upper class but an upper class that had a sense of obligation—unlike in the 1930s when Conservatism was known for its careless and uncaring response to the terrible Depression and was notorious for its readiness to appease fascism. The postwar Conservative leadership had to establish its distance from that tradition. But also the leadership had, I believe, realized that the modern world in Britain meant a capitulation to the collective will and to collective provision of basic services. So, essentially what I’m saying is that British Conservatism became social democratic.
Thatcherism on the other hand is a very specific formation—i.e., an ideology distinct from the immediately previous eras of Conservatism. Thatcherism brings together an economic perspective—the economic, libertarian, free market ideology that’s familiar to you, and an anti-statist offensive designed to roll back the frontiers of socialism, since statism, the welfare state and everything else collective is associated with the socialist objective in Britain. Undermining collective provision in state form is very important for Thatcherism. Less recognized is Thatcherism’s crucial relationship to women, a constituency that has come out from the cold into the heart of Conservative practice and Conservative ideology. Within the whole of the post-war period, women constituted the “ideological mobsters” of British Conservatism. And there was always a tension between this historically subordinate but vital constituency and the leadership because it was the women within the Conservative tradition who invented the Party machine for a party that was never democratic, that never particularly understood the need to develop the machinery that would guarantee Conservatism’s place among the people. It was the women who historically did that work, they did the political work of vote harvesting, the work of developing Tory Party politics and Conservative ideology into the community. They were very obedient, very loyal, very passive in terms of political contest, but it was always clear to Conservative leaderships that they had to mollify, soothe, caress Conservative women. Otherwise, they would be in trouble.

The gender politics of “Law and Order”

Trouble erupted over the issue of law and order. Tory women consistently opposed all attempts to modernize the treatment of offenders and challenged the leadership who wanted to abolish corporal punishment and ultimately capital punishment. The clashes in Conservatism over law and order and the ways in which law and order became established as a classic Conservative agenda have to be read, then, as part of the Conservative leadership’s dialogue with its own female rank and file. One theme of my book Iron Ladies is that the discourses of law and order within Conservatism are entirely gendered. What’s important about this for British politics is that it was only Conservatism that understood the importance, if you like the vitality, of law and order for women voters, that in the discourse of law and order women’s fear as a sex was articulated. No party except the Conservatives comprehended that women experienced the world in a gendered way, that women were often afraid of men.

In the early debates on law and order, the women who speak out against judicial reform are speaking in the name of their daughters, it’s very explicit in their debates. They appeal to common sense: “We all know that men are beasts, and that marauding masculinity will lay its hands upon our daughters in dark village alleys.” In the 1950s this becomes revised to express another kind of panic, the creation of modern British cities as places where the working class is allowed to wander about the streets unmolested. By the 1970s and 1980s, “law and order” is united with a racist dimension that’s very important: racism and a female, sub-feminist paranoia nestle together and form the underbelly of Tory panic, unease, and sense of danger.

What I’ve been arguing is that the molestation of women and children was what animated the Tory concern for law and order. Women, historically were the bearers of that tradition, and the mandarins’ response was always to try to keep a lid on it. They saw the women’s wing of the Party as increasingly uppity and mad. It’s in this period that we see the representation of a kind of Hell’s Granny, a benign old lady with a shopping basket and a whip and noose: a dangerous old lady who’s a vigilante ready to wrap the vitals of any man who happens to stumble across her path. The debates on law and order resumed in the 1980’s because, despite Thatcher’s embrace of the mobsters, all Conservative Home Secretaries (the people who handle police, prisons and punishment), have had a bent toward progressivism. The vigilante, vengeful, punitive response to law and order is something Conservative Home Secretaries always retreat from and something that always provokes a debate in Conservative politics.
The Dangerous Stranger Inside the Home

The crisis over the Conservative law and order position is exacerbated because the whole ideology of sexual abuse and child molestation upon which they built their law and order strategy was based on panic in the face of the stranger; public spaces are unsafe, public spaces have to be policed, the poor have to be purged from public spaces; dirty old men have to be purged from public spaces. Against all that, the Conservatives had the sanctuary of the family. And it turns out that the opposite is the case: the family is the dangerous place for children, the neighborhood may be dangerous for children. In the face of child molestation within the family the Conservatives have nothing to say about an issue dear to their hearts.

Another major thing happening in Britain is inquiries into Social Services’ failure to protect children who have been tortured and murdered by their fathers. Interestingly, these have all been children from the ghettos, they’ve all been poor children, they’ve all been children from communities that are absolutely supervised and that live under constant surveillance by Social Services. The battering of children, quite wrongly, is seen to be a problem of poverty. The revelation of these terrible murders and tortures of children has rendered quite problematic for Conservatives the idea that the family is a place of safety. Furthermore, the response to these particular murders has been to demand that Social Services actively intervene in families to stop the death of these children at the hands of mad men, their fathers. This is happening at exactly the moment in which Thatcherism as an ideology and a political project is about rolling back the frontiers of Social Services. Social Services, like sociology, and polytechnic lecturers, and labor politicians, and journalists, I suppose—anything social—has become a target for victimization, but particularly social workers. Because social workers are not scientific, they’re not really skilled, they poke their noses into other people’s affairs. There’s a populist rhetoric surrounding this image of middle class raiders on working class communities.

So a very unstable situation unfolds. What animates Conservative law and order is the protection of women and children. What animates the Thatcherite project is the abolition of anything social—in the name of the autonomous, private, self-sustaining, and self-policing family. So they don’t know what to do in these situations in which children need protection inside the family.

Sex Crime

In the midst of all this, the issue of sex crime has been engaged dramatically in Britain from two sources in the 1980s. The women’s movement, over the 1970s and in the 1980s created an infrastructure to actually do what all this rhetoric is about—to protect women and children, and to provide services that are suitable for the victims of sexual crimes. And in Britain there has been a long, if fragile, dialogue between feminist agencies like rape crisis centers and the police to reform police practices in the treatment of rape survivors and
child sexual abuse. And in some areas feminists have had some success, creating special units and the like.

In addition, the Home Office was prompted to invite police forces to enable the victims of sexual crime to have women police officers and women doctors available to them if they've been raped. This was in response to a number of widely publicized rapes in 1983, a watershed year for these issues, in which the state did the wrong thing—either it didn't prosecute or it blamed the woman. An extraordinary television show, a fly-on-the-wall documentary showing the harassment by two police detectives of a woman alleging rape, occasioned a mass debate about the behavior of the police in relation to women. Thus the way in which sexual crime is thought about in Britain is changing, and that presents a terrible problem for Thatcherism because these feminist-inspired reforms, contrary to the usual punitive responses, were about doing something useful for the victims of men, primarily.

It was in this context that practices around child sexual abuse began to change. As soon as an infrastructure was created to deal with women, these agencies were immediately flooded with children. At the same time, pediatricians working on child battering were alerted to the problem of child sexual abuse and began to learn from the US, which was more sophisticated in this respect. Pediatricians, in one or two places, particularly in Leeds, the pioneering city in regard to this issue, began to address themselves to what the signs might be of sexual abuse in children. Remember, battering leaves signs. Battering leaves its legacy on the body. Even if the child can't speak, the body speaks, and the body is a metaphor for the social relationships the children have lived through. Most cases of sexual abuse of children don't leave any signs. They don't involve sexual acts that leave signs on the body. The deciphering of sexual abuse is very dependent on imaginative detective work of people who live and work with children, who will observe the signs of their distress, or the signs of their withdrawal, or the signs of their attempts to flee. They begin to have to learn to read the social behavior of children in a very different way. Linda Gordon's work on this is very insightful I think, in the way she plugs into the discourses of children's revolt, and the ways in which those have been misread, misinterpreted by the agencies responsible for children.³

Sexual Hieroglyphs

Leeds pediatricians had been alerted to different signs of sexual abuse by a forensic pathologist, who said you've got to look at anuses. In the forensic vocabulary anal sex is common in categories of what they call abusive sex ("abuse" in their language, by "abuse" they might mean gay sex). It's also quite common in rape, apparently. But the sign left on the body of a person who has been chronically, regularly anally penetrated, say over a period of years is the opposite of the sign left by anal penetration in rape.¹ What happens is that over time the body learns to receive the incoming object. The signs of this accommodation have been familiar for 100 years in forensic pathology textbooks, dating from the period in which the category homosexuality had buggery assigned to it as the typical sexual practice. So, in forensic literature, sodomy is associated with homosexuality, and the characteristics of the sodomized anus are very elaborately discussed in the literature.

What the pediatricians in Leeds did in this instance was to transport a very familiar diagnosis from a stable but discrete body of medicine to a different discourse. It was a very familiar part of police doctors' material, but not of pediatricians' until battering and sexual abuse became part of their concern. And what they begin to see is a remarkable velocity of anal signs—and vaginal signs—and the age profile was descending. And what they also found was a much higher proportion of boys than historically had been expected because all the retrospective evidence in which adults recall their memories of abuse as children show a very, very low ratio of boys. They've found that it is very difficult for boys to expose that they've been abused. There's something of a crisis for masculinity in this issue of sexual abuse and clearly it's not part of masculine culture to facilitate the disclosure of a humiliating child life. The Leeds pediatricians found that there's a peak of abuse below puber-
The sins of the fathers

IT WAS last summer, when child abuse was again turning the headlines, I was walking past a primary school, loo-
ing for the adult education department, I opened a wrong door and was met by the sus-
ception and hostility of a group of cleaning women, it's not pleasant to accept that, just by being a man, in the
eyes of others you are a "potential rapist or child
molest," said one in.

Alarming increase

WE BACK

DOCTOR

EXCLUSIVE

by CHRISTIAN WOLMAR

and DANNY GILLMAN

CHILD sexual abuse in London has reached
record levels, according to a survey by "The

In 11 out of the 17 boroughs which

Cleveland Coun-

try, children of both sexes are being abused and
there's a much higher level of anal abuse than
anybody had thought. Which prompts another
interesting thought—that everybody doesn't
tell the worst that happens. Even when children
are in a safe environment and have someone to
tell, they're least likely to tell the worst abuse.

"Cleveland"

That's the context in which the Cleveland
case erupts; these are some of the trajectories
that produced it. Pediatricians who had learned
from this research got appointed to a hospital in
Middlesborough in Cleveland county. Mid-
dlesborough is on the way to nowhere; nobody
goes there who doesn't have reason to. And, in
fact, there are very few reasons to go to Mid-
dlesborough. It's a proletarian, industrial com-
nunity with a very strong sense of class (60%
of the British population think they're working
class, whatever anybody else tells them). It is a
town typical of dying, masculinized, patriar-
chal communities. It's got an inert, conserva-
tive, passive political culture, dominated by
men's trade unions (shipbuilding and steel).
One of the great battles of the shipbuilding in-
dustry in this town was to make sure women
were not to be boilermakers and shipwrights.
It's a town with very conservative masculine in-
stitutions, loves football, etc. A town in
decline, terribly isolated, and part of a seam of
industrial decay. Unlike one or two of the
towns along this belt which are very dynamic
and roguish, this is a town where odd things
happen—like, a few years ago there was a riot
and nobody knew why. The police force in this
town is an old fashioned, heavy duty nail-the-
youth-to-the-floor kind of police force which
had the highest rate of arrest and prosecution.
of first time young offenders anywhere in Britain. That gives you an idea of how the moral panics that arrive in this town appear: it’s vandals, the youth, “clear the city center.”

A consultant pediatrician, Dr. Marietta Higgs, arrived from another area where some of this work had been done on child sexual abuse, and within a few months of arriving diagnosed a phenomenal number of children suspected of sexual abuse, on the basis of the sign of anal dilatation. When children arrived with often long-standing and unresolved medical complaints, the new doctor gave them a top-to-toe examination, examining their anus and genitals, just as she would look in their ears or eyes. Doctors hadn’t traditionally looked into the abdomens of children, they haven’t been trained to look at the genitals of children, they’d been trained to feel the genitals of adult sexual people, but they didn’t know what the hymen of a six-year-old looked like. Once pediatricians looked, what they began to see were abnormalities in the vaginas and vulvas of little girls and the dilating anus of both boys and girls. So, Dr. Marietta Higgs, on the basis of these signs, diagnosed cases of suspected abuse at a phenomenal rate.

In Britain, you’re obliged to refer such cases to Social Services and the police, and so she did. Social Services a year before had decided to make all forms of child abuse a number one priority. They allocated resources to it and appointed a special consultant, a woman. So the local authorities were poised to address the issue of child sexual abuse in a way that was quite unprecedented. An alliance was constructed between this doctor and the child abuse consultant, the beginnings of an infrastructure in the town. But, the rate of diagnosis produced a volume of children that none of the institutions in the county could accommodate, so immediately there was a resource crisis.

The Evidence of the Senses

But there was also a political crisis because the police whose job it is to investigate any allegation of sexual abuse or battering, refused to believe the diagnosis. Most importantly, the police doctors refused to believe it. Either they didn’t see the signs, or they didn’t believe the signs signified abuse. So, within a month the police doctor is saying we want second opinions. You can’t have this many children being sexually abused. It’s impossible. In fact, the police were faced with something quite new. They had to start their investigation with the physical signs of abuse. Historically, the physical signs would have been corroboration for all sorts of other evidence. Within a month, by the spring of 1987, the police management decided they would no longer photograph genital injuries on the children. And, in a fascinating moment, they refused to cooperate with the pediatrician, which is extremely significant in British culture. We don’t have the kind of litigious culture in relation to doctors that the US has. We don’t sue doctors, we believe them. So, if a doctor says, this is the diagnosis, we bow to that. In terms of medicine, we’ve got a very deferential culture, and that’s one more thing that makes this case so interesting.

In the Special Inquiry, the judge asked the police why they refused to cooperate. And they continually said, “there was no injury.” “We told the pediatrician that.” And the judge challenged them, asking whether it was their job to decide whether there was an injury, or rather if a pediatrician says there’s an injury, to proceed to gather evidence. The very status of evidence was contested here. The pediatrician and the police saw different things when they looked at the same thing. [The pediatrician wanted the photographs to preserve evidence, and the police when they looked at the photographs saw, what? I don’t know what repressed fantasies or fears they brought to those pictures. But clearly they were so dramatic that they enabled the police to confidently assert a complete boycott on the collection of evidence in this case.]

That left Social Services no alternative but to intervene. Ordinarily, there would have been an investigation by all the relevant child protection agencies, including the police; they’d have a discussion and make a plan agreed on by all the agencies to protect the child. Social Services had to go it alone in this case, and they took out protective orders, place-of-safety orders to remove the children from their homes—which provoked another moral panic, quite understandably. How can you make sense of taking 200 children into care within a space of
two months? (It actually turned out to be about 165 children.)

Cleveland, or rather Middlesborough, the town all this centered on, as I've indicated, is a Labor town. It's an area that's very class conscious, an area that loyally returned the Labor Party. The Labor Party in this town is fairly corrupt, fairly inert, but nevertheless is present in the culture in a way that is very important. This case split the Labor Party right down the middle. On the one hand, the Labor Party is in the process of being transformed by a growing presence of women, particularly feminists who are saying, "Well, maybe it's true." Women councillors find themselves hearing revelations from their own daughters. On the other hand, the local member of Parliament is saying, "Impossible."

The local M.P. was contacted by a number of the fathers who denied that they sexually abused their children. (Now nobody had ever accused them of anything, it should be said, except perhaps, occasionally, their children, certainly not the doctors.) A local vicar organized a parents' (not a fathers', but a parents') support group. Parents, in British ideology, at the moment are victims; they're victims of children, of the state, of busybody Social Services and social workers. These innocent parents found each other in the hospital wards and organized their revolt. In the House of Parliament in the context of parliamentary privilege which means you can libel someone and not get sued, the M.P. accused the two women involved of "conspiring and colluding." (There were two pediatricians, one man and one woman, but the man became invisible. It was the female pediatrician and the woman child abuse consultant who became the targets.) On the same day that the M.P. made his allegation, the police issued a public statement saying more or less the same thing, while the vicar was organizing the parents. So what you have in Cleveland county is a formidable, unassailable coalition of organizations, all of which have roots in the community. And against that were these witches, which is how they were constructed.

The swamp of denial that has surrounded this case has its origins not only in police resistance to Dr. Higgs, or the crunch faced by the Social Services. It also derives from the character of the parents involved. The class composition of these parents was broader than the parents involved in the notorious cases of
child torture. The policed poor, the rough and unrespectable, are encircled by social workers and snooper. ‘They’re the class the working class despise,’” a friend mused the other day. ‘The poor have no secrets.” But respectable people do. And respectable people think, quite correctly, that they’ve got rights. And so, there was a public inquiry.

When the Public Inquiry was called (a major Public Inquiry that cost four million pounds), the assumption was that the anal dilatation diagnosis would be proven wrong, but it wasn’t. As it happens, a consensus emerged, not only among pediatricians, but among police doctors, who had been the main agents of dissent locally, that the presence of these signs provides grounds for “strong suspicion” that abuse has taken place. So we have simultaneously the growing likelihood that the majority of the cases that this doctor diagnosed will be found to be abuse cases, and mass denial by all the political agencies. Yet, one of the constituencies that had put child sexual abuse on the political agenda, women, was completely absent from the public debate; the politics of the family was a non-conversation; the issue of power between men, women, and children, not on the agenda. So the whole inquiry was policed in a way that purged the very political constituencies and the politics that had put child sexual abuse on the political agenda in the first place. Instead, it became a completely medicalized discourse, centering around such questions as what the size of a normal hymen before puberty is. For anyone interested in women’s anatomy, there was a public drama of discovery involved here. We had a situation in which the body revealed a hieroglyphic, a coded message. I remember going to the House of Commons to hear a presentation by the Leeds pediatricians who showed the signs which are horrible. After a bit, you become aware that you’re looking only at bits of the body, the abdomen, and you’re not seeing faces, and you begin to wonder who they are. Watching all this, I began to think, “that’s my niece, that one.” And you realize how the whole procedure had depopulated the case of the children whose bodies provided the testimony.

What’s happening right now with the case?

The Inquiry is complete, and it will report next month and what it will probably say is that the diagnosis, which the Times in August of last year predicted would be discredited, is in fact sustained by medical opinion. The diagnosis itself will be vindicated, the majority of Dr. Higgs’ specific diagnoses will probably be vindicated. Social Services will be criticized for being brusque and rigid. Dr. Higgs will be criticized for being rigid for her insistence on making the diagnosis. And the police will be criticized for abstaining from professional relationships which they’re obliged to take responsibility for developing. In the conduct of the Inquiry so far, the police have been the only agency specifically and powerfully criticized by the judge. In the British media, it should be said, despite that, the police are the one agency that haven’t been investigated. Nobody has asked why did they behave like this?

Now I’d like to say one more thing about the diagnosis. Buggery, or sodomy was the sexual act essentially associated with homosexuals since the 1880s. It was part of the construction of gay identity, something that differentiated gay men from heterosexual men: buggery was something that heterosexual men didn’t do or receive. What is very destabilizing and disturbing about the Cleveland case is that it’s the paradigmatic heterosexual man, the father who buggers his own children.

What has happened to Dr. Higgs? Hasn’t she been transferred, and victimized by this whole process?

Dr. Higgs’ employers actually protected her. Dr. Higgs had no alliance built around her other than the professionals who worked with her. There was no movement among the constituency to support her. And I think it’s probably likely that Dr. Higgs wouldn’t have been able to function as a pediatrician in that hospital any longer not the least because even if mothers were prepared to take their kids to the hospital, fathers weren’t. So I think her position had become untenable, and there’s a sense in which she was rescued by being transferred.
Would you say more about the reaction in Cleveland of mothers, as opposed to fathers?

There were two reactions; one was mothers who believed the diagnosis; the other was mothers who were confused, unsupported, unconsulted by anybody really, who were faced with the terrible decision of believing the diagnosis or believing their kids or the man. And, there wasn’t any infrastructure to support them. It is demanded of women that they protect their children yet this case makes clear that no resources are available to them to do so. In the cases involving children whose parents were separated, with the abuse appearing to happen in the context of that separation, mothers were more able to believe the kids.

Even for the mothers involved who endorsed the diagnosis, they want to survive, and put their households back together, and they need to feel they can repossess themselves with some dignity. They feel very guilty that something happened to their kids and they didn’t see it.

Talking to women around the place, you get the feeling that households are divided, that men don’t believe it, and women do. There’s a kind of subterranean feeling among the women that has no political articulation at all that Dr. Higgs is probably right. “You know what men are like,” the kind of common sense view of women that has no political expression.

What kind of political intervention has there been on the national level?

In fact the only body that tried to intervene in that town was the Communist Party, that organized a public meeting addressed by the Rape Crisis Center and by women involved in work around sex crime. The Labor Party took nothing into the public domain. The local feminists were absolutely immobilized, and nationally that’s the case as well, the women’s movement doesn’t know what to do. Partly because the debate isn’t about “Does sexual abuse happen?” but “Did Social Services respond appropriately?” So there’s a real problem for feminists who have a critique of how state institutions operate, and of how in this case children were processed.

I think this is critical. The issue of incest, of intra-familial abuse of children, is an issue that quintessentially belongs to feminism, that has historically been raised by feminists, and that has depended on a feminist movement for its vitality. But once raised, it doesn’t remain in our possession. Nor, necessarily, do we know what to do with it once we’ve raised it. We know what we feel about it, and we have tried to create organizations for women to explore the hurt and to try to repair the damage. But that doesn’t necessarily describe a strategy. So, the problem we face lies in the tension between how we live and survive and take care of each other and how we take control of the issue of sexual oppression, not just of women, but of children.

It strikes me that Dr. Higgs was being asked to act the same way that a sexually abused child is supposed to act: keep quiet, take care of it yourself, and leave everything as it was.

That’s what she said. But I think she’s very wrong. She’s a grown-up for a start, not a child, and a very powerful grown-up at that. She’s a consultant pediatrician, ranking her in a prestigious half of one percent of the British population. It’s equivalent to being a professor. And yet she didn’t make sure, for instance, that the nurses in her own hospital knew what she was doing.

That hospital now has fifty beds for children in the pediatric ward; five years ago it had 152 beds. In fact, the male doctor associated with Dr. Higgs, Jeff Wyatt, had campaigned in the hospital against these cuts. The nurses on Ward 9, the children’s ward, had been through a winter in which the ward had been packed with children with respiratory diseases. By April, they were exhausted and expecting by May, life would return to normal. Instead, the wards are full of apparently healthy children. The nurses didn’t know how to talk to a sexually abused child, they didn’t know how to identify sexual abuse. They were frustrated and annoyed, and felt no-one was telling them anything that was going on, and there were no administrative procedures to help them deal with this. Dr. Higgs behaved toward them like bosses behave toward workers. If you’re going to win on an issue like child sexual abuse which the patriar-
chal world has tried to bury for thousands of years—it is that serious—if you’re going to win, you have to know both who your enemy is, and who your allies are, you have to prepare the ground so that the territory absolutely belongs to you. To not do that means that in the end you may lose an issue that is so delicate and so fragile that we barely know how to think about it, never mind what to do about it. I say that despite enormous affection and respect for Dr. Higgs. But this is an issue to do with political power. All the institutions of Britain are organized in a way that doesn’t take care of sexually abused children, and always have been. And suddenly, you’re demanding something else of them. That means that you’ve got to have a powerful strategic imagination.

Was it her solution to pull the kids immediately out of the homes? Is that what she wanted to happen? Or was it Social Services?

In Britain, you have to take protective action. If the police don’t cooperate in investigating, there are very few other alternatives left to you. What Dr. Higgs did was to take the children into the hospital. Which is an adequate short-term solution. Immediately, Social Services had no alternative but to remove the child if the perpetrator couldn’t be identified or if the perpetrator couldn’t be removed. One or the other has to be removed: the perpetrator or the child. If you can’t find the culprit what do you do? It tells us that we have no routes for children to travel that are alternatives to that. We haven’t provided places to run to that are good for them. In addition all of these agencies were dealing with procedures and administrative devices built from cases of child torture and child battering, so they were built on the assumption that a child’s life might be imperiled. They didn’t have guidelines or procedures designed for dealing with sexual abuse. A child isn’t going to die if it’s sexually abused. But society has got to make up its mind. Either you can have the current system with judges and police chiefs saying “Castrate people who abuse children,” in rhetoric. But we don’t have

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**THE CONSPIRACY**

By GORDON GREIG, JOHN WOODCOCK and ALAN QUALTROUGH

A HOSPITAL consultant and a woman social worker conspired to exclude police from child sex abuse investigations in Cleveland, an MP claimed yesterday.

Stuart Bell’s allegations against Dr Marietta Higgs and Mrs Sue Richardson were "mooted last night by the area’s Constable." The MP claimed he was "informed by reliable sources that the two were engaged in a conspiracy to cover up sex abuse cases in the area." The allegations were made in response to the Manchester police’s investigation into alleged child sex abuse at the Eyam Children’s Home.

Lord Lavington yesterday called for a full inquiry into the allegations, saying "it is unacceptable that any child should be put at risk by any action of an official body." He added that "the public must have confidence in the police force." However, the National Police Federation has said "there is no basis for this claim." The Federation claims that "the allegations are based on hearsay and are not supported by any evidence." The Federation has called for a "full and impartial inquiry" into the matter.

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"Dr Higgs and Mrs Richardson... conspired to keep police out of allegations of sexual abuse"

MP STUART BELL YESTERDAY

**The scandal the Mail revealed to the nation**

Mr Newton said that "the situation is under control and we have put in place measures to ensure that it does not happen again."

ACCUSED: Social worker Sue Richardson

ACCUSED: Consultant Dr Marietta Higgs

any alternatives, any institutions besides the family to provide for children.

What happened in Leeds? Has their response been different? Has there been cooperation between different agencies?

They moved from five confirmed cases of sexual abuse in 1983 to over 500 last year. That means that well over a thousand children have been treated by them. They now see more sexually abused children than battered children. Their average age is 7½. A third of the children are removed from their families, a third of their confirmed cases. Interestingly enough, the way they would put it, which I think is unfortunate, is that they are removed because their mothers are unable to protect their children. What’s apparently happening there is that women’s relationships to their children and men are in crisis, and there’s no social agency that intervenes to stabilize the crisis. There has been little aggravation in Leeds. The police tend to support the pediatricians, the police themselves were reconstructed in Leeds. After discovery in 1984 of a number of sex rings, the police set up child protection units and reeducated themselves, which never happened in Cleveland.

Where exactly is the Labor Party in all this? I understood you to have been saying that these sorts of issues have traditionally been the property of the Conservatives, under pressure from their female rank-and-file, but that the Conservatives are now paralyzed by the dilemma of how to reconcile the discovery of child sexual abuse inside the home with the sanctity of the family.

Yes. I don’t want to exaggerate, but the Labor Party in the 1980’s is a party under pressure from feminists. Labor went into the last election with two major differences in self-presentation. One was they went for the symbol of the rose. There were huge debates on the Left about whether it was soppy to have a rose. I personally thought it was wonderful to have a flower as a symbol of socialism rather than a fist. Also, it was a party that under pressure had made itself available to the feminization of its strategies. Because the Labor Party had noticed that women were hemorrhaging massively from the Conservative Party. Since 1979, the proportion of women voting Tory has declined, while there has been a historic shift of skilled working class men to Thatcherism. So there’s a gendered realignment happening in British politics. And it’s unclear which way it will go. Which way it does go is contingent on which Party claims it. For the Tories at the moment, there’s a big problem about how they relate to women voters, because women voters’ ambitions right now are quite different than those of traditional Tory women. Seventy percent of women my age work for money, and have expectations that the Tory Party can’t deliver on, expectations of equality, expectations of day care. They’ve got a problem there, so, you’d think law and order would still be a goer for the Right. But, there has been a profound feminist challenge within the Labor Party, and one of the most dramatic expressions of that was that in the last election Labor transformed their “law and order” approach, rebuilding all their propaganda based entirely and self-consciously on the experience of women. So, they came up with a strategy about street lighting, and about security on estates. They even talked about domestic violence. They began to see women’s fear as something that deserved attention, and they recognized that women have already built services for themselves, battered women’s shelters, rape crisis centers, so they plugged into that whole culture. And in the polls conducted after the election, it turned out that where voters had actually engaged with Party propaganda (because of course often voters don’t), Labor had the most impact and the law and order material had been most persuasive. Significantly, the Labor Party wasn’t appealing to women in class terms. They were appealing to women subjects as women, engaging with women’s experience as women. So women in Britain are on the lookout for a Party to represent them. The problem is that Laborism still in many women’s minds is a butch men’s Party, and the trade union movement is a butch men’s movement, which, of course, until recently, was true.

I remember last summer attending a party before the Labor Party conference, having just arrived down in Brighton from Cleveland
where I'd been working on the book. Immediately, when people found out what I'd been doing, when the word "Cleveland" surfaced, a huge row broke out. None of the men believed it and all the women did. The response among feminists has been completely split. Not only on the grounds of the state behaving in a way difficult to endorse. But also because psychoanalysis is an important feature of feminist life now in Britain. I remember three very distressing phone calls with long time feminists who said "Are you sure the children aren't fantasizing?" I thought "Wait a minute, we're talking in this case about children with anal dilatation, not fantasies, the children haven't said anything yet in most cases." Surely, I thought, we've gotten beyond the point where the Freudian discourse is used to disbelieve children, not in terms of a repudiation of psychoanalysis but a reform of it. So, I think there's a tremendous unease among feminists, both because of the problem of the state, and because feminists are adults, and, like anybody else, have a problem engaging with childhood. We're as estranged as anybody else from our own childhoods.

I wanted to pursue a little more with you your emphasis on the body that speaks, the signs written on the body, because your interpretation of the role of the doctors here seems to run counter to much critical writing about the role of doctors as investigators, detectives of the self?

What's inescapable in this instance, what's fascinating is that something that has to do with a social relationship and a politics is in a certain sense unspeakable, and there are many unsayable and invisible things, and competing interests that insure the invisibility and unspeakability. And in this case, the unspeaking body has this extraordinary sign, a dynamic sign. It's not just a bruise, it's something that opens and closes, and denotes a relationship because it's dynamic, so it's disturbing in every possible way.

Postscript: The week before publication of the Inquiry into the Cleveland crisis presided over by Lord Elizabeth Butler-Sloss (yes, a woman), British media generated a spooky and utterly confusing atmosphere. A quality liberal newspaper like the Guardian predicted "Cleveland doctors were wrong." On the contrary, the doctors' diagnoses were vindicated. The judge and her panel failed, however, to critique the behavior of judges during the life of the Inquiry, who threw out Cleveland cases on the grounds that the diagnosis was suspect. The judicial panel found no reason to doubt the pediatricians' clinical findings—an astonishing affirmation of the signs seen on the bodies of the 165 children diagnosed by Cleveland doctors as having been sexually abused. (One hundred and twenty one were diagnosed by Dr. Higgs and her colleague Dr. Geoffrey Wyatt.) The Report also criticized them, however, for over-confidence, and being insensitive to the
resource and management crisis they presented to their colleagues. But the Report was also stiffly critical of the police surgeons, Dr. Raine Roberts and Dr. Alistair Irvine who crusaded against the pediatricians. The report concluded that the police surgeons’ knowledge of anal abuse was “slight,” it said they were overly emotional and became partisan with the dissenting parents. What the British media has been unable to address, amidst a plethora of chilling articles from “innocent parents” is that if the pediatricians were right—and it looks as if they were—then the police and most everyone else was wrong.

FOOTNOTES

3. The sign of rape is a bruise, palpable evidence of something trying to get in where it doesn’t belong and hurting, bruising, scarring, tearing. The anus closes up. The sign of chronic anal penetration, “anal dilatation,” is an anus that opens, it relaxes so the incoming object won’t cause it pain. It’s a dramatic sign because once the child relaxes for a few seconds, the anus simply opens. It takes nine to thirty seconds for this to happen, so even if doctors had been examining children’s bums, the likelihood is they didn’t look long enough to see this distinctive sign. It’s a disturbing sign because it reveals how children’s bodies learn to receive and deal with an incoming object. The body learns to take responsibility for the acts of the perpetrator.

Beatrix Campbell is a journalist who has worked for many years for the cooperatively-owned London news and listings weekly, City Limits. Her work also appears in newspapers, magazines and on television. She is the author of Wigan Pier Revisited, Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory, and a forthcoming book on the Cleveland child sexual abuse scandal. She has long been active in left and feminist politics in Britain.
FAMILY VIOLENCE AS HISTORY AND POLITICS

Linda Gordon

In the past few decades many have come to the understanding that family violence is a social problem. This has been a very important breakthrough. A century of romanticizing family life, of peddling the myth that "normal" family life is peaceful and harmonic, has led to embarrassment and shame about family violence. The result has been to punish doubly the victims of family violence by forcing them to hide their problems and to blame themselves. Sometimes even the aggressors in family violence have benefitted from this new understanding that they are not unique, allowing them to ask for help.

However, another aspect of family violence has not been understood: that it is an historical and political problem. Most writing about child abuse proceeds as if it is obvious and unarguable what child abuse is. By contrast, an historical view shows that, for example, some forms of today's child abuse were yesterday's spanking; one family's child neglect is another family's standard. Without historical analysis of how family violence was constructed as a social problem, increasing concern about it is taken to mean that the incidence of family violence itself is increasing. In fact there is no conclusive evidence about trends over time.

Family violence is political in a double sense. First, the very definition of what constitutes


Wright Morris photo, 1947.
unacceptable domestic violence developed and then varied according to political moods and the force of certain political movements. In my remarks today I am going to illustrate this variation by offering a periodization of the history of family violence, in which you will see how various definitions correlated to the larger political context. Second, I also argue that family conflicts were political in a second sense—having to do with power relations. By and large domestic violence grew out of intrafamily power struggles in which valuable resources and benefits were at issue. Men fought to enforce their dominance and privilege; women to get what they wanted for themselves and their children. Family violence is also influenced by extrafamilial social change and social conflict. Children were influenced by new cultural patterns which offered autonomy and values alien to their parents, and the latter fought to hold their children to more traditional norms of family life. One aspect of social change in particular—the increasing independence of women and privilege of children—has been experienced and fought out within the family particularly acutely.

My study is based on a new kind of source for historians: case records of social work agencies. There are great problems of bias in these records. The “clients” were almost exclusively poor, largely Catholic immigrants, and predominantly female. The charity workers, later professional social workers, were exclusively well educated, at first exclusively and then predominantly WASPs, and their leadership exclusively male. The workers were the authors of the case records and their view of clients was often disdainful, paternalistic at best, ignorant and obtuse in many cases. Yet ironically this very bias reshaped my work in what I now consider very fruitful ways. The bias made it impossible to think that one could study family violence as an objective problem, and forced me to realize that the very concept of family violence is a product of conflict and negotiation between people genuinely suffering from domestic violence and social control agents attempting to change the behavior of people considered unruly and deviant.

Three major themes arose from the very nature of my sources. First, that family violence was constructed as a social problem in the 1870s in response to complex historical changes. Second, that in the century of its recognition as a social problem, the campaign against family violence has had different meanings according to the overall political and social context. Third, that these meanings always represented a negotiation between the needs of clients, usually the women and children victims.
of such violence, and the social control agendas of child-welfare agencies.

My emphasis on the historicity and social construction of family violence must not be interpreted to deny nor minimize the physical and emotional sufferings of its victims. It is not that the beatings, neglect, rapes, even tortures were only imaginary or distorted accusations constructed of misunderstanding or bias. The challenge is to bear in mind that family violence is always both a set of physical acts and a set of meanings attributed to those acts. Spanking always hurts but may be less destructive than forms of emotional rejection. Moreover, most family "violence" does not consist of overt assaults or sexual molestation. Most of it is more passive, such as inadequate supervision, or indeterminate—when does spanking become abusive? Leaving a five year old alone may be safe in some contexts, neglectful in others. The determining contexts are created not only by the physical conditions, such as neighbors, safety of the house, traffic, food, but also by the cultural meanings, the feelings of the five year old, the attitudes of the neighbors. Moreover, a great deal of family violence is determined after the fact: Leaving the child alone becomes identified as mistreatment after she has fallen out a window, not before.

There are always a minority of extreme, brutal, and clearcut cases of violence, with which we are more familiar because they are the most publicized. But we will never construct a policy that can actually stop family violence or help its victims to escape it unless we keep our focus on the more typical cases, which are complex and frequently ambiguous. Let me tell you two such stories, both of them true, both of them "typical." I will return to these cases later as a means of suggesting how differently they might have been interpreted at various times.

Bessie Smith and Lucia Amato

Most of you know about Bessie Smith, the great blues singer, but perhaps fewer know that she too had a run-in with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC). Bessie Smith had been badly cheated by Columbia Records, which induced her to sign a contract relinquishing all royalties on her recordings forever. As a result, even after she was successful and famous, she spent most of her time on the road to support herself, her sisters, and a 10-year-old adopted son. The son, Jack, often travelled on his mother's tours. In 1929, after years of ambivalence, Bessie had achieved a final break with an abusive husband. Bitter and angry, one night he came to her home and took Jack, whom he found there alone. He went to the SPCC and reported that the child stayed out all night, consorted with immoral company, and refused to go to school. The SPCC prosecuted but the judge returned the boy to his mother's custody with the proviso that he remain in Philadelphia with his aunt when Bessie Smith was on the road. Jack, unhappy with this arrangement, after two weeks ran away to New York to find his mother. Caught in Newark, he was given into his father's custody. But neither he nor his new woman wanted the boy—clearly he had only wanted to hurt Bessie—and they mistreated him terribly, keeping him locked in a dark basement room. Again the boy ran away; this time he was sent to reform school. Bessie Smith was unable to secure his release for three years.

An Italian immigrant family, let us call them the Amatos, were "clients" of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) from 1910 to 1916. They had five young children from the current marriage and Mrs. Amato had three from a previous marriage, two of them still in Italy and one daughter in Boston. Lucia Amato kept that daughter at home to do housework and look after the younger children while she earned money doing home piece-rate sewing. This got the family in trouble with a truant officer, and they were also accused, in court, of lying, saying that the father had deserted when he was in fact at home. Furthermore, once while left alone, probably in the charge of a sibling, one of the children fell out a window and had to be hospitalized, making the mother suspect of negligence.

Despite her awareness of these suspicions against her, Mrs. Amato had gone to many different agencies, starting with those of the Italian immigrant community and then reaching out to elite (Protestant) social work agencies, seeking help, reporting that her hus-
band was a drunkard, a gambler, a non-supporter and a wife beater. The MSPCC agents at first doubted her claims because Mr. Amato impressed them as a "good and sober man," and blamed the neglect of the children on his wife's incompetence in managing the wages he gave her. The Society ultimately became convinced of her story because of her repeated appearance with severe bruises and the corroboration by the husband's father. Mr. Amato Sr. was intimately involved in the family troubles, and took responsibility for attempting to control his son. Once he came to the house and gave the father "a warning and a couple of slaps," after which the father improved for a while. Another time he extracted from his son a pledge not to beat his wife for two years.

Lucia Amato did not trust this method of controlling her husband. She begged the MSPCC agent to help her get a divorce; then she withdrew this request; later she claimed that she had not dared take this step because his relatives threatened to beat her if she tried it. Then Mrs. Amato's daughter (from her previous marriage) took action, coming independently to the MSPCC to bring an agent to the house to help her mother. As a result of this complaint Mr. Amato was convicted of assault once and sentenced to six months. During that time Mrs. Amato survived by "a little work and... Italian friends have helped her," according to her case worker. Her husband returned more violent than before; he went at her with an axe, beat the children so much on the head that their "eyes wobbled" [sic] permanently; and supported his family so poorly that the children went out begging. This case closed, like so many, without a resolution.

The "Invention" of Child Abuse

Child abuse was "discovered" as a social problem in the 1870s. Surely many children had been mistreated by parents before this, but in this decade there was a widespread alarm about it. As a result, organizations, usually called SPCCs, were established throughout the US and Europe. Many new social conditions contributed to this concern—particularly the awful conditions of urban poverty and unemployment in growing industrial cities.

One major political influence on the SPCCs was the women's rights movement. In fact, every time child welfare movements have arisen, every time there have been concerns with the sufferings of children and demands for greater social responsibility for children—whether the immediate demand was education or health or welfare—feminism has been influential. There are three reasons for this. One is that women have been responsible for child-raising in most societies, and that women far more than men have tended to internalize the needs of children, to be able to see children as subjects and not merely objects. A second reason is that feminist movements have an interest in criticizing the oppression that takes place within the family, opening the family to scrutiny; as heads of families, many men have benefitted from the privacy that families provide them, have been resistant to criticizing intrafamily relations. Third, the women's rights movement of the 19th century, just like that of today, argued a critique of social and cultural violence altogether, which extended to a critique of corporal punishment. As women demanded more autonomy in their role as child-raisers in the 19th century, they also mounted a propaganda campaign arguing for more "tender" methods of disciplining children and against the heavy use of physical coercion.

The anti-child-abuse campaign was anti-patriarchal in its very conception. A word about the definition of patriarchy is necessary here. In the 1970s a new definition of that term came into use: patriarchy became a synonym for male supremacy, for "sexism." I use the term in its earlier, historical and more specific sense, referring to a family form in which fathers had control over all other family members—children, women, and servants—a control which flowed from the fathers' monopolization of economic resources. The patriarchal family presupposed a family mode of production, as among peasants, artisans or farmers, in which individuals did not work individually as wage laborers. That historical patriarchy defined a set of parent-child relations as much as it did relations between the sexes, for the children rarely had opportunities for economic independence except by inheriting
The family property, trade or craft.

The claim of an organization such as an SPCC to speak on behalf of children’s rights, its claim to the license to intervene in parental treatment of children, was an attack on patriarchal power, and very much one of the contributions of the 19th-century women’s rights movement.

The Contest Over Proper Parenting

At the same time, the anti-child-abuse movement had class and cultural meanings that were by no means so progressive. Agencies like the SPCCs were attempting to impose elite, WASP values on working-class immigrant families. The MSPCC attempted to enforce norms of proper parenting which were not only alien to the cultural legacy of their “clients” but also flew in the face of many of the economic necessities of their lives. For example, MSPCC agents prosecuted cases in which cruelty to children was caused, in their view, by children’s labor: girls doing housework and child care, often required to stay home from school by their parents; boys and girls working in shops, peddling on the streets; boys working for organ grinders, lying about their ages to enlist in the navy. In the pre-World War I era, the enemy of the truant officers was usually parents, not children. To immigrants from peasant backgrounds it seemed irrational and blasphemous that adult women should work while able-bodied children should be idle. In another example of cultural disagreement, the MSPCC was opposed to common immigrant practices of leaving children unattended, and allowing them to play and wander in the streets. Both violated the Society’s norm of domesticity for women and children; proper middle-class children in those days did not—at least not in the cities—play outside without being attended.

The style of mothering and fathering being imposed was new. Mothers were supposed to be tender, gentle, to protect their children above all from immoral influences, and the child savers considered yelling, rude language or sexually explicit talk to be forms of cruelty to children. Fathers were to provide models of emotional containment, to be relatively uninvolved with children; their failure to provide was often interpreted as a character flaw, no matter what the evidence of widespread, structural unemployment.

The Clash of Class and Culture

The MSPCC’s model of parenting had no room for cultural variety. The WASP agents, for example, hated the eternal cabbage of Irish cooking, and the garlic and olive-oil of Italian cooking, and considered this food unhealthy (overstimulating, aphrodisiac). They were unable to distinguish alcoholics and heavy drinkers from moderate wine and beer drinkers, and they believed that any woman who touched even a drop of spirits was degenerate and an unfit parent. Many of these forms of depravity were specifically associated with Catholicism. Agents were convinced of the subnormal intelligence of most non-WASP and especially non-English-speaking clients, and the agents’ comments and expectations in this early period could easily be transposed for similar views of blacks in the mid-twentieth century. Particularly these child welfare specialists misunderstood and disapproved of non-nuclear
child-raising patterns: children raised by grandmothers, complex households composed of children from several different marriages (or, worse, out-of-wedlock relationships), children sent temporarily to other households.

The peasant backgrounds of so many of the "hyphenated" Americans created a situation in which ethnic bias could not easily be separated from class bias. Class misunderstanding, moreover, took a form specific to urban capitalism: a failure to grasp the actual economic circumstances of this immigrant proletariat and subproletariat. Unemployment was not yet understood to be a structural characteristic of industrial capitalism. Nor were disease, overcrowding, crime and—above all—dependence understood as part of the system, but rather as personal failings.

Given these biases, you will not be surprised to hear that some cases of cruelty to children arose from disagreement about proper child-raising, and that others arose from the inevitable cruelties of poverty—cruelties experienced by parents as well, such as disease and malnutrition, children left unattended while their parents worked, children not warmly dressed, houses without heat, bedding crawling with vermin, unchanged diapers, injuries left without medical treatment. But at the same time it would be a great mistake to conclude that family violence was ONLY a figment of cultural bias or an inevitable result of poverty. On the contrary, all the evidence indicates that family violence was experienced as a problem by its participants who—despite their awareness of the discrimination they were likely to encounter at the hands of the SPCCs—eagerly sought the help of these agencies. From very early on in the history of these agencies, the major sources of complaints were family members themselves, primarily women and secondarily children. For women and children, the oppressiveness of the class discrimination they experienced from the agencies was by no means always worse than the oppression they experienced within their families from husbands, mothers or fathers. Women manipulated agencies focused on child abuse to get help against wife abuse. Moreover, in child abuse cases we see women's own violence, quite in contrast to the nineteenth-century feminist image of women as naturally tender and peaceful, and women's self-criticism of themselves as childraisers, again in contrast to the feminist view of women as natural mothers. Some of that self-criticism was a self-destructive guilt, but some of it was instead an honest expression of frustration that they were unable to live up to their own standards for good motherhood. Child protection agencies may have seen themselves as teaching good standards to poor and ignorant parents, but in fact they were encountering people with their own strong views about good family life, who hoped to use these agencies in their own interest.

It was in this context of class, ethnic, and gender conflict that family violence was first defined. Family violence has never been defined outside a context of political and social conflict. In every time period, family violence has been defined and treated in a complex negotiation, involving charity and professional workers and the fears of the social groups they represented, and the needs of family violence victims, women and children, looking for help.
Periodization

I want to trace this historical construction of family violence through five approximate and overlapping periods.

—The late nineteenth century, when family violence agencies were part of the general charity organization, moral reform movement.

—The Progressive Era, when family violence was assimilated to an environmentalist analysis and reform program.

—The Depression, when intrafamily violence was radically deemphasized in favor of amelioration of economic hardship.

—The 1940s and 1950s, when psychiatric categories and intensely “pro-family” values dominated the social work approach to family problems.

—And finally the 1960s and 1970s, when feminist and youth movements began a critique of the family which forced open doors that hid family problems in various closets.

Nineteenth-century Child Saving

Nineteenth century definitions of domestic violence mirrored the values of the social movements that produced them. They reflected the emphasis on illegitimate male power characteristic of feminists, as well as the moralism and class arrogance of campaigns to help the poor. Cruel parents, both in SPCC rhetoric and in the labelling SPCC agents used, were mainly drunkards, and drunkards were mainly immigrants. Male cruelty was depicted as sexual and physical violence resulting from drink. The image of maternal cruelty was a negligent mother, lying abed in a drunken stupor while her children cried for food.

Because of the emphasis on drink, and the envisioning of cruelty to children as something that “they”—the immigrant poor—did, never “us”—the respectable classes, even anti-feminist moral reformers could include wife-beating within the jurisdiction of the SPCCs without taking the feminist message personally, so to speak. In practice, however, the inclusion of wife-beating was mainly accomplished by the demands of the poor client mothers. These often accused their husbands of child-beating in order to draw agency workers into their homes to witness violence against women.

Moreover, up to at least 1910, child protection agencies identified and prosecuted many incest cases, virtually all of them attacks by men on girls. Incest was well known not only to all child welfare workers but to the public as a major category of family violence. Its causes and patterns were attributed to male depravity in the same manner as wife-beating.

Had the Amato case appeared in 1890, the child savers might have been quick to see Mr. Amato as a brutal man, depraved, of inferior stock. The sympathy thus engendered for Mrs. Amato, however, would have been condescending and would have associated her problems primarily with alcohol rather than with her structural position in the family and city. They would not have helped her seek economic independence as a route to safety but would more likely have offered two choices: either reforming her husband through a combination of moralizing and punishment, or institutionalizing her children. Bessie Smith would have received no sympathy whatsoever: her show-biz career, her independence, her Blackness all put her beyond the bounds of the definition of proper motherhood. But her husband would have gotten no more sympathy.

Progressive Era

Social work as a whole was becoming professionalized during the Progressive era, and in theory its diagnoses became scientific and environmentalist. The evidence of the case records, however, casts doubt that this environmentalism lessened the class and ethnic biases. Blaming cruel behavior on the environment did not produce a more respectful attitude towards different cultures, but rather an emphasis on the need to acculturate immigrants and the poor to the superior norms of the profession. At the same time, the statism of the Progressive reformers increased the power of child-protection agencies to determine arbitrarily what constituted inadequate child-raising and when parental custody of children could be severed.

The most important operative change in child-protection work was the discovery of
child neglect (as opposed to abuse) as the major category of improper parenting. Many sorts of stress—poverty, unemployment, illness, alcoholism—contributed to child neglect. So did intrafamily problems, such as marital violence and single motherhood. Indeed, single mothers were so overrepresented in child neglect cases that this might be described as the first “discovery” of woman-headed households as a social problem. Social workers’ growing fear of single motherhood underlay Mrs. Amato’s difficulty in getting the help she needed. Neglect was of course the charge against Bessie Smith. In the 19th century she might have been labelled depraved. Under the impact of Progressive environmentalism there might have been more attempt to reform her into providing a proper, stable home for her son. But the environmentalism would not have made the child protectors more open to the possibility that there was more than one way of raising a child.

Yet in their conflicts with social workers, many so-called neglectful parents, like Mrs. Amato, were influential in teaching social workers about child neglect and its remedies. These mothers barraged child welfare agencies with demands for help, for child care, for relief, for collection of child support payments. They were often victimized by their search for help, losing their children because they confessed their own “negligence” to powerful agencies. But in taking that risk they contributed their views of what were minimal standards for children and demonstrated that the poor, drunk, and “depraved” were by no means without aspirations for their children. Moreover in Bessie Smith’s case we should not forget that it was her husband who dragged the boy to the SPCC. If we blame the agency for arrogance and interference, we must also acknowledge the intrafamily conflict that gave rise to their intervention.

The responses of parents also helped expose a contradiction in child-protection work which was discovered in this period and continues to the present: the difficulty in distinguishing culpable parental negligence from the inevitable results of poverty. As some social workers began to admit this difficulty, they met a fundamental contradiction in “scientific” child-protection work: The notion of child neglect implies a commitment to guarantee a minimal standard of living for all children. Yet this goal clashed with the principles of private child-raising, an economic system based on free enterprise, and the norm of economic autonomy for each family—a system that defined public aid as a necessary evil that should be kept to a minimum and made as uncomfortable as possible for recipients. The resulting ironies created one of the bitterest ironies of child-protection work: the usual solutions involved taking children away from parents, rather than helping parents, despite an ideology that children need mothers, thus penalizing not only the culprits but the victims.

The Progressive era produced a cover-up of wife-beating as a form of family violence. The old feminist diatribes against drunken, brutal men came to seem moralistic and unscientific. Instead marital violence was portrayed as mutual, resulting from environmental stress, lack of education or lack of mental hygiene. Be-
ing a wife-beater did not undermine Bessie Smith’s husband as a complainant. In the Amato case, the agency downplayed the marital violence and focused its reform efforts on Lucia: agents undertook regular supervision of her household, attempting to “Americanize” her, to instruct her in proper child care and housekeeping methods.

The cover-up extended to that other highly gendered form of family violence, incest. In a pattern familiar to those who have followed the public alarm about sexual assault of children in the 1980s, in the decades 1910-1930 sexual assault by strangers was emphasized and incest—that is, sexual assault within the family—de-emphasized. Sexual assaults were blamed on “dirty old men,” who were considered sick. This paralleled, of course, the decline of a feminist analysis of male domination in the family. Incest and sexual abuse were fit into a new category, sexual delinquency. In this new understanding, the victims, almost always girls, were labelled as sexually deviant and criminal, even when they had been raped or mistreated at young ages, and were often incarcerated in industrial schools.

The Depression

One of the major characteristics of Depression-era social work was a policy of defending the “conventional” nuclear family. This meant working against all centrifugal forces in the family, at the expense of asking women and children to suppress their own aspirations. The great advances in provision of general welfare necessitated by the massive unemployment of the 1930s have tended to occlude other dimensions in which social policy at that time moved in a conservative direction. In treatment of conflict between the sexes, Depression-era family violence agencies strengthened still further the Progressive-era tendency to de-emphasize male violence as a
significant family problem. A sympathy arose for the unemployed husband, the stress and role conflict that frequently engendered his violence; remarkably less sympathy was engendered for the situation of working mothers doing double days in the attempts to hold their families together. Indeed, women were consistently held responsible for the treatment of children and the general mood of the family, as men were not. The treatments of preference for family violence were reconciliation and economic aid. The very meaning of family violence had shifted: it was seen as an epiphenomenon of extrafamilial events. Mrs. Amato’s problems might have been interpreted as resulting from unemployment. Could Bessie Smith have been pressured to give up singing the blues, return to her violent man, and make him a home so that her child could be properly raised?

Indeed, violence altogether was deemphasized, and the SPCCs devoted themselves primarily to child neglect, defined in turn primarily as physical deprivation. Child protection workers became clients’ advocates to relief agencies. These changing definitions were expressions not only of the ideology of the social-work establishment, but of clients’ demands. In the Depression clients were more effective at doing what they had so often tried before—forcing agencies to go beyond their own jurisdictions, to see the impossibility of solving violence problems through counselling or punishment while ignoring poverty.

But relief alone was no answer to family violence. Poverty creates stress but does not cause family violence. After all, most poor children are neither abused nor neglected. It is obvious how a Depression agency might have responded to Mrs. Amato—offering her relief—and obvious what the limitations of that response would have been.

World War II and the 1950s

The defend-the-conventional-family policy in social work continued straight through the 1940s and 1950s. These decades represented a low point in public awareness of family violence problems and in the status of child protection work within the social work profession. Family case work was, however, no longer reluctant to inquire into the roots of intrafamily conflict, but did so now in psychiatric categories. The goal of the new psychiatric therapy was individual maturity, and this was often measured by the patient’s ability to adjust to a nuclear family life. The roots of most interpersonal problems were sought in individual complexes, not in cultural or structural arrangements. The most notorious example of the psychiatrization of family violence work was in the blaming of wives for their abuse by husbands—again, a double standard in requirements of individual responsibility for their actions. The “nagging wife” of traditional patriarchal folklore was now transformed into a woman of complex mental ailments: failure to accept her own femininity and attempting to compete with her husband; frustration as a result of her own frigidity; a need to control resulting from her own sexual repression; masochism; failure to achieve full genital sexuality. These neuroses required diagnosis and treatment by professionals—they could not be improved through relying on friends. Moreover, these neuroses indicated treatment not of the assailant but of the victim. Mrs. Amato might have been urged to question how and why she provoked her husband, what were the anger she felt towards her second set of children, what was her part in her husbands’ failure to support. Bessie Smith would certainly have been blamed, for she provoked her man in every way—not only through her infidelities (which in fact were few in comparison to his) but through her so obviously “wearing the pants” and rejecting her femininity.

The psychiatrization of family violence work also affected problems with children. Child neglect cases were increasingly seen as products not of poverty but of neurotic rejection or negligence. Indeed, a new category of cruelty to children was now developed: emotional neglect. Emotional neglect was a gendered form of child abuse—only mothers could be guilty of it. Emotional neglect as a category allowed the mystification of incest in a new way, the “discovery” of emotional incest, seductiveness, between mother and child. I do not mean to deny the possibility that such seductiveness exists and might be bad for children. I am merely
pointing to the irony of child-protection policies which rarely admitted the occurrence of actual sexual molestation of children but evinced interest rather in symbolic sexual behavior in the form of certain inappropriately intimate emotional relations, indulged in by women. Another of Bessie Smith's unconventionalities, which might well have gone unnoted in earlier periods, might have been the central focus of diagnosis now: her lesbian affairs—certainly this made her ipso facto emotionally retarded and incapable of truly feminine maternalism.

The 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s family violence was rediscovered and reinvented in a new social context. Professionally, the first wave of anti-cruelty to children work had been a campaign of charity volunteers, later social workers, who used the issue in building their group prestige. Child abuse was an effective fund-raising issue—the MSPCC was, until at least 1920, one of the best endowed, most upper class charities in Boston. Later child protection work helped in the development of a new profession, social work. Family violence was defined in terms of problems that social work could solve. In the 1960s, by contrast, child abuse was seized upon by doctors, particularly pediatricians and psychiatrists, its diagnosis and treatment medicalized.

A second context of rediscovery and redefinition of family violence in the last decades was the civil rights, anti-war, student, and women's movements, all of them challenging family norms in different ways. Indeed, the issue of family violence offers another vantage point from which to evaluate the influence of the social movements of the 1960s, often underestimated when that influence is measured strictly in terms of institutional or legislative change. Combined, these movements raised critical questions about the sanctity of family privacy, the privileged position of the male head of family, and the importance of family togetherness at all costs. The movements created an atmosphere in which child abuse, wife beating and incest could be pulled out of the closet. The atmosphere was pervaded by a critique of more accepted forms of violence as well: cultural, military and political. Wife beating, for example, is now viewed by an increasing segment of the population, including professionals and law-enforcement officials, as entirely unacceptable in all circumstances. Anger against child abuse shades into a critique of military aggression and media macho, into a rejection of all physical punishment, and into demands for better social supports for child raising. In challenging the ideology of separate public and private spheres, the new social movements also challenged the power of professionals to define and cure social problems. Their anti-authoritarian interpretive framework stimulated collective citizens' action on family violence. Self-help projects such as battered women's shelters and Parents Anonymous compete with professionals for hegemony. These projects render evident what was previously disguised—the role of victims, "clients," in defining the problem and the remedies. Mrs. Amato might have gone to a battered women's shelter, or joined Parents Anonymous, with a variety of outcomes, most of them better than her fate in 1916 when we left her. Bessie Smith might have found a veritable protest movement organized on her behalf.

Family violence is a problem inseparable from the family norms of a whole society or from the overall political conflicts in that society. It is a changing historical and cultural issue, not a biological nor sociobiological universal. About some individual cases of family violence there may be general agreement on standards and definitions, but as a public issue, family violence has been a virtual lightning rod for different social and political perspectives. Born as a social problem in an era of a powerful women's rights movement, the 1870s, campaigns against child abuse and wife beating have tended to lose momentum and support, even to disappear altogether, when feminist influence is in decline. In such periods family togetherness is often sought at the expense of individual rights and by ignoring intrafamily problems, rather than by exposing and attacking them. Alternatively, family violence problems were redefined as if they were outside the family in order to present myths of the har-
mony of the normative family. Such a redefinition may be happening now—as for example sexual abuse of children is being publicized as a problem of public places and day care centers, or in the enormous hype about kidnapped children most of whom are runaways from family violence or kidnapped by their own parents.

If family violence is political, that is because family is a political concept. Historically, definitions of family violence were an important aspect in redefining the modern normative family, in the establishment of what is today referred to as “the family” as a signer in political discourse. To use that phrase implies the existence of “family” as a subject that is both unified and autonomous, neither of which is accurate. Conflicts of interest, and dependence on larger social groups have always characterized virtually all families. “The family” is a piece of ideology, not description. Historically campaigns against family violence have had the doubled function of seeking to alleviate suffering and constructing that ideology, and today’s campaigns are not different.

Linda Gordon teaches history at the University of Wisconsin/Madison. She is a former editor of Radical America.
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INFORMING THE "CRUELTY":

The Monitoring of Respectability in Philadelphia’s Working-Class Neighborhoods in the Late Nineteenth Century

Sherri Broder

To talk about “child abuse” in the family is at the same time to define a norm of appropriate parenting. The term “abuse” has meaning only in relation to a norm of proper family life; one defines the other. This article looks at the social and political context in which child abuse and proper family life were simultaneously defined in one particular time and place: the working-class neighborhoods of late nineteenth-century Philadelphia. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia reformers of diverse political perspectives contested the meanings of family relations and child abuse in order to define both the “problem” of the working-class family and its solution. As they responded to reform intervention in their neighborhoods—at times actively seeking out reformers, other times shunning them as intruders—the city’s laboring men, women, and children also articulated their own, frequently conflicting, perspectives on appropriate standards of behavior. By examining both reform thought and the case records of one Philadelphia child welfare organization, the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty (SPCC), this article suggests that in the late nineteenth century, both the norm of the respectable laboring family and its antithesis, the abusive or neglectful one, were constructed through a process of negotiation within the working class and between laboring families and child welfare reformers.

I would like to thank Margaret Cerullo and Marla Erlien for their helpful editorial suggestions and David Weinburg for his generous archival assistance.
Late nineteenth century Americans believed that the family held a key position in the transmission of civic values and in the creation of a virtuous and educated citizenry. Hence the health of the nation’s families was directly related to the health of the Republic. But reformers of all political perspectives agreed that the working-class family was hard-pressed to meet this demand. Child labor, male unemployment, and the need for women’s wage labor all made a mockery of the ideal Victorian family with its male breadwinner, virtuous “true woman” and educated future citizens.

Conservative and liberal middle-class reformers located the source of urban social problems in the family relations of the poor, and argued that the improperly socialized children of the urban poor were a threat to the “property, morals, and political life of the Republic.” In turn, labor reformers argued that economic inequality and harsh living and working conditions threatened to destroy working-class families and make it impossible to educate the next generation of citizens. As reformers of diverse perspectives transformed criticisms of family relations into more encompassing critiques of the changes wrought by industrial capitalism, family life was politicized. In the decades following the Civil War, the visibility of urban poverty and labor unrest across the nation prompted reformers’ attention to working-class family life. In this context, Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty emerged as part of a larger debate about the nature of family and society.

Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

For liberal and labor reformers, children served as a particularly powerful symbol of exploitation and of reformers’ hopes for the future of the nation. Liberal reformers saw working-class children as crucial participants in the struggle to prevent the development of a permanent underclass in which poverty, dependence, and vice would be passed from one generation to the next. In the 1870s, liberal reformers across the nation founded child protection societies such as the Children’s Aid Society in New York City and the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty, which was established in Philadelphia in 1877. Of course, poverty is not synonymous with cruelty and child neglect. In order to understand the impetus behind the child-saving movement and the conflation of poverty and child neglect, it is necessary to understand the particular social, cultural, and political contexts in which cruelty was defined.

Among prosperous Americans, patterns of childrearing had changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the century, the sentimentalization of Protestantism and the influence of romanticism each contributed to the perception of childhood as a time of innocence. At the same time, the spread of evangelical religion and the belief that mothers were responsible for raising the next generation of citizens newly highlighted the
significance of the mother’s role in childrearing. Maternal love and the internalization of values replaced the earlier emphasis on the submission to parental authority and the use of corporal punishment. Although middle-class parents still taught their children the value of control, they now emphasized the importance of self-control rather than that which was enforced externally. In this context, whipping and beating was no longer considered a legitimate way to punish unruly children.³

Liberal reformers who scrutinized the family life of the poor did so in relation to new attitudes toward children particular to their own class background and an intensified concern with the problems of the city. Childsavers were concerned with specific incidents of violence toward children, but they also expanded the concept of cruelty to include the issue of child neglect. For SPCC reformers, child neglect encompassed the moral as well as physical environment in which children were reared. In this way, reformers identified a whole manner of life which they deemed harmful to American children and to the republic.

Class conflict was embedded in the actual practice of reform intervention and in the vision of family life that formed the ideological basis for philanthropic activities. Child welfare reformers’ concerns were shaped in the context of fears of political upheaval, labor unrest, and the social and political threat posed by the growth of a propertyless, chiefly immigrant working class. Moreover, their definitions of abuse, proper parenting, and the nature of family life were frequently class-bound. The ideal of proper family life upheld by charity reformers and the Pennsylvania SPCC and enforced by law was based on a strikingly different understanding of childhood and the family economy than that expressed by members of working-class households. The legislation advocated by the SPCC, which regulated child labor, mendicancy, street-selling, and children’s presence in brothels, was widely perceived as an attack on the family economy of the poor.³

The Labor Movement’s Response: The Cruelty of Poverty

In response to child welfare reformers, labor leaders appropriated the liberal themes of neglected children and prostitution, using these issues as metaphors for class exploitation. They transformed the “problem” of working-class family life into a sharp critique of the existing social order. Labor leaders situated their discussion of child neglect in the context of the movement for the eight-hour day, by claiming that working people were unable to protect

From Child Welfare Exhibit, 1913.
their children from the wicked influences of the streets because of the long hours they were forced to toil. Similarly, images of the working girl seduced by an aristocratic rake or forced to sell herself or starve were used to illustrate the ravages of class exploitation and the sexual and economic vulnerability of working class women. In the labor press, the city’s trade unionists denigrated the efforts of philanthropists who established societies to rescue prostitutes and street children. They argued that wealthy employers exploited female and child labor, prompting poorly-paid workers to turn to vice, and then financed philanthropic ventures to rescue fallen women and street children. They claimed organizations such as the SPCC were “not much better than a fraud” and charged reformers who claimed to protect children with “wanton neglect” of the city’s child laborers in factories and mills.

As labor reformers created an oppositional political culture, they skillfully turned dominant perceptions upside down, rather than creating new paradigms. This constrained labor activists at the same time that it gave their analyses their forceful appeal. Forced to work within the dominant framework in order to enter a national political debate, still they shared many of the values of the dominant culture. Labor leaders did not engage in a sustained critique of power relations between men, women, and children within working-class families; instead they relied on an idealized vision of the family-as-it-should-be to launch an attack against the capitalist social relations which hindered its realization.

The Respectable and the Rough

If domestic issues were a source of tension between liberal reformers, labor leaders, and the residents of Philadelphia’s working-class neighborhoods, they were also contested within the working class. Residents of the city’s poorer neighborhoods differed sharply in their attitudes toward drinking, sexual activity, child labor, and prostitution. Notions of proper parenting and family life were an important element in late nineteenth century working class distinctions between respectable and rough behavior. For instance, respectable notions of “manliness” stressed the husband’s and father’s role as a good provider, in contrast to rougher standards of male behavior which em-

As we Sow, we Shall Reap.

The neighborhood here shown is a representation and true type of hundreds of localities which exist all over the face of this fair land. The scene tells its own story—a tale of brutal passion, poverty, base desires, wretchedness and crime.

From Thomas Hill’s Right and Wrong, Contrasted, 1884.
phased drinking, carousing, and athletic prowess. The distinction between respectable and rough behavior and by extension, respectable and disreputable families, was a central organizing principle of urban working-class social life in Philadelphia throughout the period.  

Respectability was not an imitation of genteel norms of domesticity, nor was it a product of middle-class reformers who sought to impose their own view of appropriate behavior. Instead, it evolved more out of a repudiation of the "degraded" poor, than out of an attempt to imitate middle-class behavior. Late nineteenth century respectability was the product of a complex heritage that drew on aspects of working-class republicanism, religious values which favored temperance, hard work, and sexual propriety, and an ongoing dialogue with middle-class standards of domesticity.

In contrast, rougher Philadelphians drew on the rowdier aspects of working-class culture which were increasingly repudiated by members of their own class over the course of the nineteenth century. In rougher neighborhoods, men and women alike drank and caroused on street corners and in grog shops and brothels. They gambled in policy houses and openly "ran the growler," as the custom of buying kettles of beer from local groceries or taverns was called. These Philadelphians tended to labor intermittently, and their work was frequently tied into local networks of commercial vice.

Although it is not clear to what extent notions of respectability varied across cultures, native whites and blacks and Irish, German, Jewish, and Italian immigrants all monitored the boundaries of approved and illicit behavior within their own communities. Roughness and respectability, then, could divide men and women within each ethnic group. At the same time, a defense of respectability united men and women of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds in the organized labor movement.

Although they deplored the habits of the unrespectable poor, labor leaders treated their plight more sympathetically in the 1880s and 1890s and fashioned a political analysis of the causes of begging and prostitution. Indeed the rhetorical defense of tramps and prostitutes became part of the political culture of labor radicals. Yet it is doubtful that political identification with the cause of the "rough" working class in rhetoric extended into actual neighborhood relations. The labor movement appealed to those workers who perceived organization into trade unions as one way to avoid the descent into the ranks of the casual poor and petty criminal class. It is likely that the identification of the labor movement with the "rough" working class in political rhetoric was accompanied by sharpening distinctions of respectability in working-class neighborhoods. If the labor press defended the "degraded poor" as the victims of monopoly and denigrated moral reformers, in their families and neighborhoods those who identified with the respectable working class appealed to moral reform agencies such as the SPCC to assert their own claims to morality. In a sense, the neighborhood offered a parallel arena to the labor movement in which unskilled workers and women who labored in the home could exercise another, different set of status distinctions than those based on skill or occupation.

Contrary to the social control model of intervention which analyzes only the imposition of reformers and their class-bound norms of family life, this article highlights the role of
working people in appealing to the power and resources of moral reformers. Although reformers from the SPCC worked closely with the police and magistrate courts, they relied on the local community for evidence in their investigations. Furthermore, police, judges, and reformers were not alone in their efforts to redress misconduct and make distinctions between acceptable and criminal forms of behavior. The distinction between "public" and "private" conduct was blurred in Philadelphia's neighborhoods where residents were as committed to the supervision of others' conduct as were moral reformers.

**Neighborhood Justice**

In close-knit urban neighborhoods the correction of unruly children, abusive husbands, and neglectful mothers was considered a collective responsibility. Working-class family life was not marked by the intense privacy which characterized Victorian middle-class domesticity. In late nineteenth-century working-class communities, women were the moral guardians of the street as well as the home. Female neighborhood networks were central in enforcing what historian Christine Stansell has termed a "domestically based neighborhood justice." Neighbors used observation, gossip, threats to "inform the Cruelty," as the SPCC was called, and actual appeals to the SPCC to enforce proper family and gender roles and set standards of community behavior. Among their concerns were drinking, rowdiness, illicit sexuality, non-support, and child neglect.

Working-class attempts to use the SPCC to achieve their own ends were an extension of more informal means of shaping community behavior, such as gossip, ostracism, and cat-calling and hooting in the streets. Even those interactions with the SPCC initiated by laboring men and women, however, differed from local sanctions in one important respect. The SPCC was not a neutral arena, but an upper-middle-class organization tied in with the police and court system, as well as the charities. In its ability to imprison parents, remove children, and define a family's parenting as inadequate, the SPCC exhibited a substantial measure of power.

Although many working-class men and women initiated complaints and appeals to the SPCC, others who scorned the values of the respectable working-class community and the dominant culture alike thwarted the agents' investigations. In the city's "low" neighborhoods, rougher Philadelphians repudiated both the genteel domestic ideal of reformers and its working-class counterpart. The varied responses of the city's residents to the presence of moral reformers and the intense controversy which surrounded the intervention of the SPCC in working-class neighborhoods point to clear social and cultural divisions between Philadelphia's respectable working class and the "degraded poor." The case records reveal not only the existence of competing standards of behavior in the city's neighborhoods, but also a significant ambivalence toward the authority of the SPCC. The SPCC was alternately perceived as a resource for troubled families, and as an organization inextricably bound up with the police, magistrate courts, and the state. When agents intervened without an invitation, family members could express fear, resentment, indignation, and fierce dislike. In rough neighborhoods, women's networks protected friends, neighbors, and family members from the visits of the police and the SPCC.

**Public Families**

Late nineteenth-century Philadelphia was known as the "City of Homes." In contrast to the vertical development of New York with its scarce land and many-storied tenements, Philadelphia expanded horizontally to the north and west in block after block of small houses made of brick and stone. Although the city did not have a tenement house problem comparable to that of New York, Philadelphia's pattern of development bred its own housing problems. Behind the neat rows of houses that made the city famous, the poor lived in back-alley shacks, decrepit buildings originally built as one-family dwellings which now housed several families, and one-roomed shanties built in subdivided lots and back yards in the older sections of the city.
Philadelphia had "decent" working-class neighborhoods such as the Kensington textile district, but it also had its share of slums notorious for their high rates of crime and disease. A housing reformer described one such area with a "low" reputation in the 1880s as "inhabited by the very lowest and most desperate characters, both white and black, a locality through which no sane, sober, respectable man or woman would ever think of passing, where licentiousness reigned supreme."13

Reformers mistakenly portrayed these neighborhoods as places where people of all ages and races mingled promiscuously, but where the moral standards were uniformly low. In part the perception of widespread depravity in slum neighborhoods arose out of an inability to grasp social distinctions more readily apparent to working-class residents. Even if they had no choice but to live among dance halls and low lodging houses, residents of notorious neighborhoods could still cling to the social distinctions which were pervasive throughout the "better" working-class districts. Other residents might tolerate prostitution and drunken carousing less out of sympathy with their rougher neighbors, than out of the recognition that the economic base of their neighborhood was interwoven inextricably with gambling, drinking, and other forms of commercial vice.

In crowded working-class neighborhoods, many of the activities of daily life occurred on the stoops, in the yards, and in the streets. Much of women's domestic labor took place in the company of or within earshot of neighbors. Other work performed for cash in the neighborhood also brought women together in public and in their homes. With so little privacy, there were ample opportunities for neighbors to
Neighbors notified the SPCC when children were left unsupervised too long or too often, or when parents were unable or unwilling to feed and clothe them. Paradoxically, the care and close attention of neighbors often testified to parental neglect. Needy children were left to the supervision of all of the mothers on the street. Such children were the beneficiaries of a tradition of mutual aid in poor communities. But there were limits to neighbors’ tolerance and ability to provide non-reciprocal services. Many of the anonymous letters mailed to the SPCC appear to have been sent from residents whose concern for mistreated local children was matched by their belief that a neighbor’s expectations of mutual aid had become a nuisance.

Working-class Philadelphians made ready use of the SPCC when they discovered situations of abuse or neglect, but their turn to the child protection agency was usually a last resort only after other attempts to remedy the problem had failed. Once an appeal to the SPCC had set the process of investigation in motion, the case was beyond the control of the original complainant. This sense that the consequences of an SPCC investigation might be serious and that the outcome of intervention could never be known in advance probably contributed to the initial reluctance to inform the SPCC. Case records reveal the vast extent to which neighbors routinely intervened before notifying authorities. When agents investigated cases of neglect they came across children who had been fed, clothed, and sheltered for weeks or months by local families. Similarly, when neighbors appealed on behalf of a wife against a husband, or a child against a parent, they had probably interceded in family arguments many times already. Threats to notify the SPCC were often used in an attempt to frighten the guilty parties into changing their behavior. For instance, neighbors told agents investigating a case that the complaint brought against one mother was untrue since “she does not whip the child at all, as she is afraid of this Society [the SPCC].” In this way, the “Cruelty” had an impact even on those families it never contacted directly.

Like incidents of outright cruelty, suspicions of improper mothering on the part of local women also galvanized working-class women’s appeals to the SPCC. One woman sought out

...
the SPCC because an acquaintance of hers had been drinking heavily, forcing her son and daughter to scavenge food from gutters and garbage barrels. The defendant’s next door neighbor confirmed this story, and declared that her neighbor was “a disgrace to her sex.” In another instance, five matrons testified to the ill effects of intemperance on the children of a neighboring family which the neighbors took turns feeding.

Other complaints to the SPCC focused on the theme of sexual misconduct by neighboring adolescent girls, wives, and fathers. If the mother of an adolescent girl appeared unwilling to protect her from exposure to the immoral conduct of others, neighborhood women might demonstrate their concern by notifying the SPCC. Proper but poor Philadelphians who lived near houses of ill-fame also worked hand-in-hand with the SPCC in order to prohibit the presence of young girls in houses of prostitution. In other cases, neighbors were motivated less by the desire to protect adolescent girls than by sheer outrage at the sexual behavior of adults that was in obvious violation of respectable mores. In these cases, indignant neighbors appealed to the SPCC in an effort to put an end to the drunken carousals, fighting, and singing which punctuated their sleep. Finally, the issue of incest also incensed residents of working-class neighborhoods. This is particularly significant since middle-class social observers commonly described crowded working-class homes as breeding grounds for incest. Although case records support middle-class suspicions that incest did occur in the homes of the city’s poorer families, records indicate clearly that when incidents of incest became well-known, working-class men and women responded with anger and indignation.

Although SPCC annual reports addressed the crimes of rape and incest in Victorian fashion, with veiled references to those “practices” whose “terrible nature must forever remain—from the very foulness of the crimes—a part of the unwritten history of the Society’s work,” the SPCC pioneered efforts to work with youthful victims of sexual abuse. At a time when even girls who were unwilling partners were perceived as immoral, the attitude of the SPCC toward the victims of rape and incest was quite supportive. On the other hand, SPCC agents also described prostitutes and indeed any other sexually active women as “victims” of male sexuality. This view of male sexuality as aggressive also colored their perception of abusive fathers and other men as predatory “brutes” and enabled them to believe girls’ tales of mistreatment. The SPCC campaign against the sexual abuse of girls was part of their broader commitment to preventing parental abuse of children. At the same time, their views about male sexual violence and their efforts to prevent the specific male abuse of female children also drew on popular perceptions about sexual relations between men and women. Although their analysis of male violence incorporated notions of female vulnerability to male power, the SPCC insisted on the limited extent of their mandate and refused to handle cases of wife-beating.

Whose Family? Whose standards?

Neighbors who appealed to the SPCC for aid in monitoring the boundaries of respectability similarly insisted on their right to define the meaning of family relations when they defended their neighbors against reformers’ charges. The same scrutiny and interest in each other’s household affairs which formed the basis for testimony of violence or neglect could also provide evidence of good character. Neighbors came to the defense of a recently widowed man under investigation for failing to provide properly for his five children. The agent recorded, “The man is a sober industrious man. His [late] wife is spoken of as being every inch a lady, and the neighbors say that on her account they would not see the children suffer in any way, but they know the man is struggling manfully to keep his family together, and he should receive praise instead of censure.” Similarly, her neighbors on Leithgow Street spoke well of Lizzie H., charged by a policeman with sending her thirteen-year-old daughter Mamie out to beg. They informed agents she was a “hardworking woman” who “works hard at the wash-tub, and trys [sic] to make a living for her
children.” One neighbor described the subject of another investigation for neglect as a “sober, hardworking woman” who “would make any sacrifice for her children.”

The character testimonials offered by respectable neighbors indicate working-class standards of manliness and maternal care which centered around hard work, sobriety, and solicitude for children. Of course, men and women who sought to defend others against allegations of child neglect or an improper home environment would be likely to couch their defense in terms likely to appeal to the values of the SPCC agents. The appeal of these values, which were also prescribed by liberal reformers and charity visitors, implies neither the successful imposition of genteel norms of domesticity, nor the working-class emulation of the Victorian middle-class.

If neighbors’ statements sound like a sentimental defense of the worthy poor, the context in which their judgments were formed and spoken lent their words a different meaning. Although the presence of sentimentalized imagery in working-class language was unmistakable—so that the reformers and laboring men and women referred to the same characterizations of virtue—they frequently ascribed different meanings to them. A good mother by working-class standards might be forced by misfortune to take in the wash of a “low” lodging house or send her children peddling. If these disreputable practices lowered a family’s social status—and they did—they did not always destroy a woman’s reputation as a mother. Nor did they necessarily warrant the provision of information to agents who might take steps to remove the children. When neighbors insisted on a mother’s love for her children or a father’s dedication to supporting his family, their defense bespoke a first-hand knowledge of the difficult circumstances of raising children in the city’s poorer wards. They were not identifying their neighbors as good providers or “true women” by middle-class standards of parenting and domesticity. Instead, they were defending the conduct and reputation of those accused of wrongdoing by representatives of another class and way of life. Even when they were committed to values similar to those of liberal reformers, the distinctions they drew between respectable and disreputable behavior drew less from middle-class assessments of the worthy poor than from the specific experiences of laboring families.

While some residents of Philadelphia considered the SPCC an aid in promoting respectability in their neighborhoods, others in the working class community shunned the SPCC, as they did the police and other representatives of the law. In the Annual Report for 1892 the SPCC noted, “The reformer will ever be considered as an intruding enemy by those whose vicious plans he seeks to circumvent.... He is apt to draw upon himself the hate and ill-will of the vicious and evil-doer.” This hatred of the SPCC was reflected in its popular nickname, “The Cruelty.” Opposition to the SPCC was also evident in the refusal of many citizens to testify against neighbors. Case records are replete with descriptions in which no evidence could be gleaned from the community. Agents noted the difficulties encountered in Italian and Jewish neighborhoods where the residents claimed ignorance of English; they complained that “poor Irish” and blacks practiced a similar clannishness, refusing to testify against friends and foes alike. In other cases, the knowledge that an SPCC agent was venturing into the vicinity would prompt the residents of a street to take collective action to prevent an investigation. Drawing on an effective intelligence network among the poor, men, women, and children would cry out “Investigation! Investigation!” in warning whenever an SPCC agent drew near in order to alert the entire community.

Although there were many reasons for residents of the city’s rougher neighborhoods to wish to escape the scrutiny of the SPCC, at stake was the right of moral reformers to intrude into the streets and homes of the city’s families. In late nineteenth-century cities, gangs of boys and young men often patrolled the streets, claiming certain well-marked territory as their own and discouraging outsiders, whether representatives of the law or other outsiders. In poorer neighborhoods, class, racial, religious, and ethnic resentments and/or language barriers contributed to the pervasive distrust of outsiders. Preachers, “friendly visitors,” and SPCC agents faced taunts, ridicule, and other forms of intimidation when
they entered the city's rougher wards. In the case of the SPCC, neighborhood hostility was sparked by the recognition that an agent's visit could provoke a number of consequences, ranging from loss of reputation to a term in the House of Correction and removal of one's children.

Many of the survival strategies of the chronic poor—from begging, scavenging, and the pawning of clothes and household goods, to participation in the street trades, petty theft, and casual prostitution—by definition constituted child abuse to SPCC agents. Although reformers claimed to investigate suspected Philadelphians in all walks of life, making no distinction "between the rich... who live in larger houses and... [the poor] who live in courts and alleys," it was the poorest families who were least able to provide the proper material and moral environment for their children. In this sense the SPCC was indeed a class-biased society, which proposed to attack and "root out" the domestic habits of the chronic poor. Over the course of the nineteenth century, parental custody rights evolved from a property right in children, to a trust dependent upon the fulfillment of parental responsibilities. As child protection agencies across the nation took a larger role in defining the nature of appropriate parental responsibilities, those families least able to approximate this ideal—whether because of poverty, the death of the primary breadwinner, or the nature of the mother's or children's employment—became vulnerable to the removal and placement of children in other homes or institutions.

More than any other activity of the SPCC, it was the controversial employment of the legal concept of the state as parent (prens patriae) that struck fear into Philadelphia's poorer families and neighborhoods and demonstrated the cost laboring families could pay for their deviation from genteel norms. In the minds of many of the city's poorest residents, SPCC intrusion into the neighborhood evoked the possibility of family disruption. While debates over the merits and disadvantages of family separation raged in social science and reform circles, active resistance to this practice united the residents in the city's "low" neighborhoods.

Case 13,287.

NO ONE TO CARE FOR THE CHILD.

From the Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty

Sometimes neighbors refused to offer information to agents and then warned the subject of the investigation of the agent's visit. In such cases the agent might find on a return visit that the suspect had moved to a different community. While neighbors might pass on information in an effort to help one another, combining to repel an agent's visit often worked to the advantage of all those who lived on the street. In communities where the local economy was based on the commerce in sex and alcohol, neighbors' attitudes toward the saloons and brothels in their midst could be ambiguous. Seamstresses, laundresses, landlords, lodginghouse and saloon keepers and domestic servants might have extensive ties to local brothels; they could also suffer the consequences of a police raid or an agent's visit. For instance, if a young child was found in a house of ill-repute, all of the residents could end up in
jail. Similarly, a keen agent who came to investigate a case of cruelty in one household might also notice that the children of another household were sent out peddling or that a woman in another building was “running the growler.”

The female networks that enabled respectable women to police their own neighborhoods through gossip and observation also enabled “rougher” women to protect their homes and families. Women played a prominent role in the intelligence networks of the poor. They congregated on stoops, in neighborhood grocery stores, on corners, in brothels where they played cards and drank beer, and in each other’s houses. When necessary, women relied on the ready accessibility of neighbors for shelter, protection and defense against constables and SPCC agents. Neighboring women frequently distracted the agents, allowing those under suspicion to slip away unnoticed. Agents recounted how

As soon as it was known that Agents were in the neighborhood, a general alarm spread among the neighbors, and the corners were immediately filled—by all sorts of people, but none of them were willing to tell where Defts were... Every person seemed interested in getting Defts away.

Agents learned that in cases like this, investigations and arrests were best conducted at night in order to catch the sleeping family unaware.

Conclusion

Late nineteenth-century working-class Philadelphians perceived the SPCC as a prying, intrusive group of meddlesome moral reformers and as a somewhat effective ally of the respectable working class. Over the years, in their annual reports and board minutes, the SPCC reported a gradual if sometimes grudging acceptance of their presence in Philadelphia’s families and neighborhoods. Conflict over the definition of the SPCC’s mission persisted, however, among family members and within the city’s poorer neighborhoods as well as between the SPCC and its “clients.”

In the city’s rougher wards, pervasive hatred and condemnation of the SPCC’s intervention endured. As an obvious refutation of the genteel mores of the middle class, the street culture of rough men and women demonstrated a strong sense of class identity that rivaled that of the respectable working class. Although class hatred clearly shaped the responses of Philadelphians in tough districts, however, their resistance to authority grew out of the simple desire to evade the law, rather than out of a sustained political analysis of class relations, similar to that which informed the labor movement’s political disdain for moral reformers. Ironically, those who displayed the strongest repudiation of the laws that enforced genteel family norms were the least interested in organizing politically as a class. In fact, as historian Kenneth Fones-Wolf notes, rougher Philadelphians actually served to fragment a working-class political presence in Philadelphia when they “helped Republican bosses ‘mobilize the slum vote’ ” in exchange for keeping moral reformers out of their neighborhoods.

The SPCC was created in part in response to reformers’ alarm at the disparity between the childrearing standards of the prosperous and the poor. But the readiness of laboring people to “inform the Cruelty” revealed dissension over domestic issues within the working class as well. Respectable Philadelphians made sharp distinctions between criminal and appropriate behavior, and they used the SPCC to enforce them. Their reliance on the authority of the SPCC and the resources it controlled ultimately served to confer legitimacy on the organization’s role in working-class families and neighborhoods. The presence of the SPCC in the city’s working-class wards may have heightened divisions between the respectable and disreputable poor as legal sanctions intensified the risk of deviance. If reform activities underscored these boundaries, however, they did not create them, for such distinctions were already an indigenous part of working-class life.

FOOTNOTES

2. See Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class (New York:
3. Although organized labor and middle-class reformers supported child labor legislation in the 1880s and 1890s, many working-class parents did not, because they depended on children's earnings.


5. The Pennsylvania SPCC supported legislation which regulated children's employment in industrial manufacturing, but blamed the "insatiable longing of parents" for their children's earnings for making child labor laws a "practical nullity." See Ninth Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty, covering operations for the year 1885 (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, and Scott's Printing House, 1886), 11-12. The SPCC was more effective and far more widely recognized for its efforts to suppress children's participation in the street trades than in factories. Labor leaders reported child labor offenses to the Philadelphia SPCC in the 1880s, but in at least one case they argued that the SPCC's dependence on the financial contributions of the wealthy hindered its ability to deal effectively with the problem of industrial child labor.


10. Stansell, City of Women, 60-61.


16. SPCC CR, May 18, 1887, #7747.

17. SPCC CR, 1887, #8211.

18. SPCC CR, 1880, #2099.

19. SPCC CR, 1896, #15412. See SPCC CR, 1896, #15079, for a complaint about noise and "growler-running."

20. SPCC CR, 1880, #1512.


22. SPCC CR, 1893, #12978.

23. SPCC CR, 1879, #1148.

24. SPCC CR, 1893, #13165.

25. SPCC CR, 1887, #7624.


28. SPCC CR, 1896, #15739; SPCC CR, 1901, #20047; #20165; SPCC CR, 1879, #968.


31. See SPCC CR 1877, #69, in which the mistress of a large house tells the SPCC agent who has come to investigate an anonymous complaint of ill-treatment of a servant girl that she is pleased he investigates charges without regard to the social status of the defendant.


33. SPCC CR, 1893, #12577, #12467; SPCC CR, 1896, #15791.

34. See Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 29-30, 197, and 201, for a discussion of neighbors' relations with prostitutes in Victorian England. See Roy Roszniewski,
Sherri Broder recently completed her dissertation in American social and women’s history on “Politics of the Family: Political Culture, Moral Reform, and Family Relations in Gilded Age Philadelphia.”

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AIDS:  
The Cultural Agenda  

Simon Watney

In Britain, a critique of the popular presentation of AIDS is crucial since its images and language set the stage for repressive policies against those most vulnerable to AIDS. In order for us to intervene against the strategies of social control and surveillance that substitute for effective education to halt the transmission of the HIV virus, we need to examine both the rhetoric of AIDS and the place of homosexuality within the dominant culture.

We must begin by exposing the categories that the dominant media utilizes. Ideology seeps in exactly where language is medical or scientific. The cultural agenda of AIDS hides within the apparently straightforward medical discourse about the "AIDS virus," the "AIDS carrier," the "AIDS test."

The responses to AIDS shaped by this rhetoric are informed by various legacies available within the culture: the legacy of contagion regarding disease, and the fear and hatred of homosexual desire. If the gay and lesbian response to AIDS bypasses the latter, we will fail to formulate effective strategies and prepare ourselves for the increased mobilization by the "general population" against the gay and lesbian community.

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the third international conference on Lesbian and Gay Studies, "Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?", at the Free University in Amsterdam, December 15-18, 1987.

London Underground guard decided to wear female uniform on his last day of work as a protest, Chris Davies Network photo.
The Rhetoric of AIDS

The cultural agenda of AIDS is constituted by creating a picture of AIDS that is medically misinformed, socially misleading and, in turn, politically motivated. In Britain, all discussion of AIDS proceeds by collapsing the difference between HIV infection and AIDS into the notion of the “AIDS virus.” HIV is the virus that can cause damage to the immune or nervous systems and can be passed between people through the exchange of some bodily fluids. [To date, approximately 80 per cent of those who have the HIV infection are expected to develop some immune deficiency—eds.] AIDS represents the specific array of diseases that develop as a result of damage to the immune system. [Approximately 35-50 per cent of those who have HIV infection (the virus) have, within nine years, gone on to develop opportunistic infections or malignancies that make up the syndrome AIDS—eds.] The political and social consequences of this woeful conflation of the virus (HIV) and AIDS become apparent in the slippage into the rhetoric of “AIDS carriers” and the “AIDS test.” Talk of “AIDS carriers” establishes a discourse that brings the entire cultural legacy of contagion and “plague” into operation. It implies that people with AIDS are themselves threatening to the rest of the population, rather than threatened—clinically and socially. Here another condensation takes place—collapsing the distinction between infectious and contagious. Contagion conjures miasmatic risk: a poisoned atmosphere surrounds the carrier and threatens to spread. The legacy of contagion leads us to the third term of the rhetoric—the notion of an “AIDS test.” The HIV antibody test misdescribed as an “AIDS test,” is widely regarded as some kind of remedy to the entire AIDS epidemic, as a way to contain (the virus within) a particular population.

A tragic irony emerges that reveals the political dimension of the rhetoric. On the one hand the rhetoric of AIDS strongly implies that AIDS is a contagious condition. Most discussion of AIDS is framed in terms of the (mis)perceived “threat” of its “spread.” Yet, on the other hand, we know a great deal about the modes of transmission of the HIV virus. In fact recent figures from the US show that safer sex campaigning amongst gay men has now brought the seroconversion rates* down to below one per cent in the gay communities of both San Francisco and New York. Yet this extraordinary and unparalleled achievement is invariably disavowed by the dominant cultural agenda concerning AIDS. What we find is the popular assumption that there is an intrinsic causal relation between the source of an infection, and its cause. It is a commonplace of modern epidemiology that the emergence and subsequent spread of an infectious agent are defined and determined by its mode of transmission. As a disease of the blood, which can also be transmitted sexually, HIV will only spread according to the routes available to it. It is not a respecter of persons. Yet most media commentary seems to take the side of the virus in what is seen as its purposeful mission to rid the world of black Africans, IV drug users, workers in the sex industry, the “promiscuous” and obviously gay men. There is a close and fundamental connection between the social position of these groups before AIDS, and their subsequent evaluation as its direct cause. Thus we may understand the constant tendency to distinguish between supposedly “innocent” and “guilty” people with AIDS. The inconvenient fact of hemophiliacs who have contracted HIV infection via contaminated blood products is turned around to reinforce the agenda, rather than to threaten it with the recognition that HIV is, after all, a virus and not an agent of moral retribution.

The entire cultural agenda of AIDS is constructed according to a retributory logic which we should examine very carefully indeed, since the future of lesbian and gay culture depends on our understanding its picture of us, and the real fears and anxieties it reveals concerning the

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*Seroconversion refers to the change in the blood resulting from infection with HIV. Approximately 6 weeks to 6 months after infection, the body produces antibodies to the virus. The test for the virus identifies whether there are antibodies present in the blood. Thus seroconversion rates refer to the rate of new infections determined by the number of positive test results for the HIV antibody.
place of homosexuality in the modern world. Thus, when President Reagan speaks of “routine” testing we should be aware that the sole justification of such measures is retribution against those who are held to “threaten” the majority of the “innocent” population. The “innocence” of this population resides precisely in its supposedly “natural” and uncontaminated heterosexuality. It is almost as if AIDS is being used ideologically to justify a massive act of collective social amnesia concerning both the findings of the Kinsey Report, and the increasing evidence of the actual fact of human sexual diversity. The construction of AIDS as a “gay plague” both repeats the ancient taboos against homosexuality in general, and sodomy in particular, and adds a new dimension to them—a literally deadly threat. Hence AIDS is widely read as “nature’s way of telling us something,” or words to that effect. But, as anthropologist, Mary Douglas, and others remind us, “nature” in such pronouncements is always a cultural construct.

The hatred and fear of homosexual desire is not simply a case of “irrational” behavior that can be easily erased. In some cultures, notably Britain, it remains a fundamental agency of social cohesion and identity, both for the individual and for the collective. Certainly the particular blaming mechanisms which are used to make individual people with AIDS from particular social groups seem “responsible” for their illness are highly significant. This “high-risk” group is thus made to appear intrinsically threatening, rather than vulnerable. In order to see how AIDS has been made to activate an agenda that long preceded the emergence of HIV, it is necessary to consider some aspects of contemporary British culture and society. In particular we should consider the role of familial identities, following Foucault and Donzelot in their argument that “the family” is not the a priori target of social policy, but rather is its most fundamental and powerful instrument.²
The cultural responses to AIDS cannot simply be characterized as involving a "moral panic," a temporary phenomenon. Homosexuality is permanently available as a coercive and menacing category to stabilize and prop up the institutions of familial life, and the identities they produce. Social policy, then, is most intimately experienced in relation to desire itself and the cultural means of constituting and maintaining "heterosexual" identities—identities stabilized by an ongoing sense of threat. Thus we may begin to understand the seeming obsession with homosexuality in modern Britain, whether it is presented as a "threat" within the home, in the form of deviant members of the family who must be expelled; or as deviant images invading the "innocent" space of domesticity via TV or video; or as a supposedly external "threat" in the form of explicit sex education in schools, the sexuality of public figures, and above all, now, in the guise of AIDS. The passionately held popular held perception of "the family" as a uniquely threatened and vulnerable institution offers crucial support for "protectionist" Thatcherite cultural politics. Most threatening of all to the modern Thatcherite family is the spectre of the male homosexual, reincarnated in the likeness of the predatory, determined invert, casting his lascivious gaze from the pages of Victorian sexology manuals onto "our" children, and above all our sons. Thus, homosexuality has recently come to occupy a very strange position. The homosexual is both necessary as a regulative instrument, justifying any amount of aggressive defences in the name of "protecting standards of decency" and so on, whilst at the same time he is an impossibility, since the same body of thought adheres strictly to the notion of homosexual object-choice as a product of corruption. It is of course an easy slip from corruption theories of homosexuality per se to contagion theory of AIDS.

In this context we must recognize the inadequacy of any attempt to "explain" this complex scenario in terms of a supposedly unified "homophobia." This both pathologizes social, cultural and economic structures of power, and suggests that we can understand the full range of psychological anxieties and fears concerning homosexuality in terms of a single cause. The cultural agenda of AIDS demonstrates with frightening clarity the power of "the home" as the central territory of an entirely new disciplinary reality and government. The family becomes established as the privileged site for locating and regulating normative distinctions between social "types." Defined with the full authority of Nature, these distinctions are now reinforced by the macabre spectacle of AIDS, read as an indictment of all those who stray from the "safety" of moralised personal management. The power of this structure resides precisely in the degree of consent which it can muster, via mechanisms of guilt and greed, hysterical modesty and naked ambition. Thus we should not be tempted to think of something called "the State" coercively directing and dictating something else called "the family."

In all of this it is desire that is the central missing term, necessarily absent and displaced, since it is desire that is the real threat to family life; that which can never be sufficiently normalized and policed. The ideology of the family, familialism, prefers to talk of the "AIDS test" to any consideration of Safer Sex, because that would threaten the real power relations that statistics of actual domestic violence, child abuse, and so on, inexorably reveal. Familialism "naturally" prefers the possibility of the actual spread of HIV infection through institutionalized ignorance concerning its modes of transmission, to the kinds of sex education that would address the plain, unbearable fact of sexual diversity. It is this brutality that we must now work to expose in all its cruel and callous variants: the "wisdom" of a social order that can casually contemplate the annihilation of those whom it condemns as "high-risk" groups.1

At this point another and far more tragic irony emerges. For by refusing to acknowledge the achievements of gay men in checking the spread of HIV infection in their communities, familialists run the gravest risk of actually encouraging its spread into their own homes. It is now apparent that HIV can be transmitted as easily via vaginal intercourse as by rectal intercourse. This is why we must resist the agenda set by those who claim to be "saving" their children form the "defilement" of prophylactic
education at the very moment at which they render them horribly vulnerable to HIV. For monogamy is no defense. A sexual cosmology that invites us all to make sense of our sexual desires, and sexualities, in terms of a ruthless distinction between the “pure” and the “promiscuous” is ultimately doomed. Sexual desire, cannot be forever successfully displaced into the dismal sublimations of “looking after the home” and carving the roast beef on Sunday.... If we wish to do honor to all those who have suffered so much through these last terrible years, we must make it our task, collectively, to resist and to challenge the dominant cultural agenda of AIDS with all the experience and knowledge we have gained, at such an appalling cost of human life and misery. For it is this agenda that established the “meaning” of AIDS for us all, from teachers and doctors and health care providers, to judges, lawyers, and even Prime Ministers. At this moment in time the only people actively contesting its authority are those whom it already delegitimizes in the name of “the promiscuous” or as members of “high-risk” groups.

FOOTNOTES


Simon Watney is on the board of the Health Education Committee of the London based Terrence Higgins Trust, Britain’s first AIDS service organization. He is the author of Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media, recently published by the University of Minnesota Press.
"The Insurrection must be quelled immediately, and the first step should be to throw out television, a la South Africa." The Palestinian uprising must be suppressed "brutally and rapidly."

Henry Kissinger at a private gathering with US Jewish leaders.

*New York Times, March 6, 1988*
The Palestinian Uprising (Intifada)

Challenging Colonial Rule

Salim Tamari

This year, 1988, is the end of the second decade of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It’s also the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. Which means we have two generations who grew up under Israeli control in the Galilee, and one whole generation that grew up under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Demographically, roughly 60 percent of the people of the West Bank and Gaza are today under 17 years of age. These are the core of the people you watch every day confronting Israeli soldiers. Age is significant here: it suggests the context in which young people begin to lose fear in facing death or mutilation of their bodies.

When Israel entered the occupied territories after defeating the armies of Jordan, Syria and Egypt in June 1967, it was not very clear what it wanted to do with the territories. There was a vigorous debate between the two branches of the National Unity Government of that time, very similar to the unity government ruling Israel today. Then it comprised the right-wing Herut Party, which is the core of today’s Likud coalition, and the Labor Party. In that period the perspective of former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan determined Israeli strategy. Perhaps the best way to summarize Dayan’s perspective is that Israeli rule should be felt but not seen. Arabs should be able to administer their own affairs and go through the cycle of

This article is adapted from a talk given at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington on February 15, 1988. It was first published in Middle East Report, May-June 1988, and has been revised and updated for this publication.

An Israeli soldier takes aim during a West Bank demonstration.
life—birth registration, marriage, school, receiving services—without having to encounter Israeli officials. At the same time, Israel should keep a firm grip on all matters relating to security and the resources of the region.

The Contesting Perspective was expressed recently by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir: that Israel should establish a fear of the Jews in the hearts of the Arabs. It was Dayan’s strategy of control through indirect means that triumphed. Dayan cleverly charted the integration of the occupied territories into the body of Israel through three institutional mechanisms—infrastructure, labor and markets. These three central control mechanisms were the foundation on which Israel constructed its political hegemony over the region, undergirded of course by Israel’s monopoly of coercive force and a pervasive intelligence network.

In terms of physical infrastructure, Israel began a substantial process of restructuring the transport and communications network of the West Bank and Gaza, relinking them with Israel. It became much easier for a Jewish settlement in a place like Ariel, or Qiryat Arba in the Hebron district, to connect with Tel Aviv and Jerusalem than it was for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank to interact with the Arab villages there. There is a security function here, i.e., it allows Jewish settlers to move freely without going through Arab concentrations of population, but the original intention was to create a network that would physically integrate the occupied territories with the state of Israel.

In the same manner, the water and electricity grids and the whole system of land zoning were integrated with Israel in such a way that for water and electricity supplies the Arabs had to depend on Mikerot, the Israeli water company, and on Israeli utilities. The net result was to create forms of dependence by the Arab municipal organizations on Israel and its economy.

Labor and Markets

More important than this integration of infrastructure was the manner in which Moshe Dayan’s policies opened Israeli markets for the movement of Arab labor. Since the early 1970s, Israel began to absorb very large numbers of Arab workers into Israeli construction, services, agriculture and, later on, the industrial sector. These workers were absorbed at the bottom of the occupational pyramid: they did what is known as “black labor”—sometimes the Israelis call it “Arab labor.” It’s a phrase that replaced the idiom “Kurdish labor,” because ethnically speaking the bottom of the heap in the Jewish pecking order were the Jewish Kurds who had come from Iraq and Iran. But now the Palestinians from the villages and camps of the West Bank and Gaza began to occupy those arenas of work that were regarded as undesirable by the Jewish work force. This was especially true of the catering and service sector, and in construction as that sector evolved into a de-skilled sector of the Israeli economy.

The purpose of this integration of Arab labor was dual. On the one hand, it defused social pressures that would accrue from a high level of unemployment among the Arab population, especially given the fact that Israel now erected immense obstacles in the growth and development of local industries, both in terms of investment and in terms of markets for Palestinian products. It also allowed Israel to develop capital intensive industry to absorb the Jewish work force released from menial jobs by the influx of Arab laborers from the occupied territories. As a result, we have today roughly 100,000 workers commuting daily from camps, villages, and urban centers in the West Bank and Gaza to Israel, most of them going back to their villages in the evening. Roughly half of these workers are involved in the construction sector. This group constitutes one-third of the total labor force in the West Bank and half the labor force in Gaza.

The third mechanism of integration was markets. The West Bank and Gaza became the most significant market for Israeli commodities, perhaps second only to the US if we include armaments and diamonds. Nearly 90 percent of all goods imported into the occupied territories—some $780 million worth in 1986—come from Israel. This makes up more than 11 percent of Israel’s total exports. The West Bank and Gaza market is tariff-free, they have easy access to it because of its proximity, and of course it is highly non-competitive. The
Israelis do not allow Arab commodities to move into the Israeli sector, and at the same time they have thwarted the development of the local industrial manufacturing sector for the Arabs. So the Arabs are very much a captive market for Israeli processed foods which they keep in Israeli-made refrigerators and so forth.

These three mechanisms—infrastructure, labor and markets—must be seen as the institutional building blocks for Israel’s political control of the territories. But they are not themselves the cement of this control. Ultimately, Israel’s control over the territories is political and military, and not socioeconomic. The bonding force behind the political control is the process of land confiscation and settler colonialism which began in 1968. In the first phase, the Labor Party was in control. The idea was to establish Jewish settlements acting as a human belt between Jordan and the West Bank. Israel first established a number of Jewish settlements along the Jordan valley corridor, with an outlet from Jericho to Jordan. The idea was to be able to barter the territories with Jordan against a peace treaty. This was the essence of the plan associated with the name of Yigal Allon, who was deputy prime minister in the early 1970s.

The Likud came to power in the 1977 elections and completely sabotaged the whole perspective of bartering land for peace. In order to preempt any possibility of returning the territories to any form of Arab control, the Likud began a phase of intensive settlement in the densely populated area of central Palestine, the Ramallah-Nablus-Hebron-Jerusalem area. Any attempt to negotiate a territorial deal with any Arab authority—Palestinian or an Arab state—would henceforth trigger a communal conflict within Israel. This was the period when the Likud backed the Gush Emunim, the movement of extreme religious groups associated with the settlement movement, in order to settle Arab-inhabited areas. If you look at a map and you color-code the settlements—there are about 120 now in the West Bank and Gaza—you will see that Labor settlements are dotted around the western Jordan Valley, while Likud-sponsored settlements tend to be in the central highland, in the middle of Arab-populated areas.

These settlements involved extensive land confiscation. It was necessary to take over land from private Arab owners, as well as state or public land, which now reverted to the Jewish National Fund. About 55 percent of the total land area in the West Bank and 30 percent of the total land in Gaza are now in Jewish hands. I say Jewish hands and not Israeli hands intentionally. There is an extra-territorial definition of public land in Israel so that it belongs to the Jews in totality and not to the Israeli Jews in the state of Israel. Israeli citizens who are non-Jews have no access to this land, but Jews who are not Israeli do have access. Many of the settlers in the West Bank and Gaza today are Jews who have just arrived from the Soviet Union, from North America, and to some extent from Latin America. Soviets and Americans have finally found peaceful coexistence in the hills of the West Bank and on the beaches of Gaza.

Before 1977 the ideological nature of the settlers and the physical location of settlements were such that they were controllable. They could be isolated in terms of future political settlements. This is exactly what happened in Sinai, when the settlers were ready to give up the land for significant amounts of compensation. The ideological commitment of the pres-
ent Jewish settler movement in the West Bank is such that these people are likely to fight against any territorial deal. The Likud knows they are likely to fight, and intentionally backs up their intransigence so that in any negotiations they can say, “Look, we’d like to have peace, but we have our constituency, a large number of our citizens now who consider this to be more their land than Tel Aviv or Haifa, certainly much more than Brooklyn.”

Phases of Resistance

Palestinian resistance to this policy of intransigence has been well documented. It took various forms, it was persistent, it was protracted, it was occasionally violent.

Here I want to contrast two different phases in Palestinian resistance to the policy of integration/annexation. One I call the phase of liberation, and the other the phase of independence. Until the mid-1970s, the Palestinian nationalist movement, in both rhetoric and program, had as its goal the establishment of a secular state in all of Palestine. The means for achieving this goal was armed struggle and protracted people’s war. The Vietnamese/Chinese model was predominant, not only in the minds of the leftist segment of the movement but also in the mainstream Fatah branch.

Since the mid-1970s, and to a large extent as a consequence of the October War in which for the first time there was a stalemate between the military might of Israel and that of the Arab world, a significant shift occurred in the ideological formulations of Palestinian nationalist objectives. That strategy now called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state in those areas from which Israel would withdraw. In other words, the Palestine national movement signalled its willingness to establish a state coexisting with the state of Israel, given certain conditions—among which is the right of Palestinians either to return to those areas in which Israel will remain in full control or to be compensated for their losses.

One consequence of this strategy is that it distinguishes the nature of struggle for Palestinians living in Israel, whose main objective would be equality with Jews, from those living in the West Bank and Gaza, where the focus has become separation and independence. One attribute of this shift is that the language of secular politics is less used than the language of independence and sovereignty. Secularism is still the ideology of the Palestinian national movement, but the movement no longer sees the people of Palestine as belonging to confessions—Muslims, Christians, Jews. Rather, it sees the conflict as basically a national struggle between Arabs and Jews.

In this period, the PLO developed a strategy of building embryonic institutions of power in the occupied territories. First, there was the issue in 1976 of contesting municipal elections against slates of Israeli collaborators. It also meant the development of local institutions like workers’ syndicates, professional associations, municipalities and especially universities to serve as institutional components of future power, so that when a Palestinian state arrives it will not arrive in a vacuum. It will already have an infrastructure of political and civic institutions to support it.

One aspect of this strategy of institution-building was also the notion of survival: until the Israelis withdraw, and they’re going to be here for a long time, we need both the political will and the institutional fabric to help us survive these years of land confiscation, repression and deportation. This strategy of informal resistance, if you like, or institutional resistance, was actually far more successful than even its own designers envisioned. By the late 1970s, it had established the complete political hegemony of Palestinian nationalism and the PLO as the single articulator of Palestinian aspirations. And it was in response to this that the Likud introduced the “iron fist” policy in 1981 when it installed Menahem Milson, Arabist and professor of Arabic literature at Hebrew University, to “administer” the West Bank.

Milson thought that Moshe Dayan had left the Arabs alone too long, and had allowed Palestinian nationalism to fester. He proposed a policy of positive interference. Israel should punish the nationalists and support the Palestinians who think “positively,” meaning people who are willing to collaborate. This was part of
a general policy which the Likud adopted in the early 1980s, in which the main objective was to smash the bases of PLO power both militarily and politically. The Lebanon campaign was its most violent aspect. A corollary was the political repression of nationalist institutions in the occupied territories. Israel disbanded the municipal councils which had been democratically elected in 1976. The military regime, behind the mask of a "civil administration," began a wave of arrests, detention without charges, deportations and house demolitions, and set up armed militias of collaborators known as the Village Leagues.

The accumulation of these acts of repression, coupled with the increased confiscation of land after 1981, was the prelude to the present uprising. A second phase of the "iron fist" came in 1985, after Yitzhak Rabin became defense minister. Palestinians had successfully defeated Israeli efforts to establish the Village Leagues as a counterweight to the nationalist forces. The economic downturn in the oil-producing Gulf states had closed off an important pressure release valve for young Palestinian job seekers. The PLO and Jordan had engaged in competitive funding and organizing among various sectors. Incidents of confrontation multiplied. Under Rabin, Israel qualitatively intensified its repressive measures, to which the defense minister himself applied the term "iron fist."

The acts of civil disobedience and confrontation with the military forces that we see today are not radically different from what was happening from 1981 to 1987, certainly since 1985. There were daily, weekly, monthly occurrences, but the dispersed nature of these confrontations made them containable. The Israelis were able to isolate them and, they thought, maintain a
pacified population. It was a manageable insurrection.

What is new about the present uprising is both its scale and its character. By scale I mean the involvement of large numbers of people who have not participated before—women, children, many workers who used to go to work in Israel and now are on strike for the third month, professionals and shopkeepers who are the lifeline of the economic sectors in the main urban centers.

It's interesting here to recall Rabin's remark at the beginning of the uprising, that this was a movement instigated by outside agitators. "We have good people, good Arabs," Rabin was saying in effect. "There's a few hotheads being roused by phone calls from Abu Jihad in Tunis." Two weeks later, the scale of the uprising had taken everybody by surprise—including the Palestinians, by the way. Rabin was in trouble. If indeed the PLO was instigating this, then the PLO was capable of mobilizing the whole population. And so Rabin, very embarrassed, reversed his position. Now we have intelligence reports, he said, which show that this uprising is spontaneous, the work of long years of frustration and festering wounds of unresolved Palestinian nationalism. But Rabin was still in trouble: either way it was a crisis the Israelis were not able to handle. Rabin and the Israeli defense establishment decided that it's better to deal with the spontaneity of the masses rather than the clout of the PLO.

Consequences of the Uprising

Rabin's dilemma points to the major significance of the uprising: its scale and durability have created an unprecedented challenge to Israeli control. Israel can no longer govern "the territories."

This important point is occasionally obscured by the media's attention to questions of riot control technique: which combination of live ammunition, beatings, tear gas and rubber bullets will bring the Palestinian population to heel? The latest device, introduced in mid-March, is a "Catapult": manifesting a creative synthesis between Palestinian ecology and Israeli knowhow, the machine is composed of a large rock basket and a revolving turret which can spit hundreds of medium-sized stones with high velocity at troublemakers. The problem, of course, is that the harder the Israelis try, the more pathetic their attempts look. The image of the valiant encircled David has been shattered beyond repair. To add insult to injury, his slingshot has been appropriated—and very skillfully—by the children of Nablus and Hebron and the hundreds of villages of the West Bank and Gaza.

What it boils down to, ultimately, is that the greatest military power in the Mediterranean can no longer subdue the spontaneous defiance of a civilian population whose only armament is street stones and lack of fear.

Secondly, the uprising signifies a shift in the center of gravity of Palestinian politics, from the Palestinian diaspora communities in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. This shift began in the mid-1970s. Its landmarks were the 1974 Palestine National Council resolution calling for an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, the contestation of the municipal election of 1976, and the institution-building strategy I described earlier. Where the external PLO leadership once led the internal movement under occupation, today the internal movement sets the tone for the formulation of Palestinian politics outside.

Thirdly, the uprising is significant also because it involved not only the West Bank and Gaza but, for the first time, full participation of Israel's Arab citizens in the Galilee and elsewhere. There have been instances of Palestinian solidarity across the Green Line before, but not on this scale and not in this manner. The general strike on December 21 was unprecedented. It was a signal to the Israelis that if they continue along this road, then they will have to deal not only with the Arabs of the territories but with "their" Arabs as well.

A fourth and very important consequence of the insurrection is that it created an instrument of political unification for all the various Palestinian factions that have so far been divided. There's something now called the Unified National Command of the Uprising, which has been issuing directives. The population has actually responded to and followed these directives in terms of strikes, confrontations, and civil disobedience. Furthermore, the revolu-
tionary rhetoric of the current uprising is matched by an intensely pragmatic grasp of what the masses can and cannot do. It sets the limits of popular participation but also assumes that its scope will move in ever-widening circles. Thus one would hope that the present movement will avoid the pitfalls of the 1936 revolt which, by 1938, had fallen into brigandage.

Finally, at the political level, I think the uprising has defeated the notion that the physical, economic, infrastructural integration of the West Bank and Gaza into the body of the state of Israel creates irreversible facts. This has been the position of the school of thought associated with Meron Benvenisti, and on the Palestinian side with people like Sari Nusaibeh. Integration has proceeded too far, they said. The best we can hope for now is a fight for civic equality, for enfranchisement. It is quite remarkable that it took Palestinian children just a few days of street rage to demolish this bizarre argument of structural determinism in its entirety. I think it's clear, from both the Palestinian and Israeli perspectives, that separation is the only way, and separation along the lines of Palestinian sovereignty is becoming a very clear-cut option for the future.

You seem to agree with Rabin's second diagnosis, that the uprisings are the result of accumulated frustration and grievances.

I cited Rabin to give you a clue about what Israeli strategists are thinking, not because I agree with his assessment. I think the word frustration is not the right one. Frustration is what you feel when your beloved has not returned your amorous overtures. What we have here is repression. It's not a psychological state of mind, but a political response to a physical state of affairs. The word frustration obscures the relationship between Israel and the occupied territories. One, because it obscures the hierarchical form of control. Two, because it misconstrues the nature of the response, which is not a mindless volcanic eruption but a politically motivated act, spontaneous but with clear political objectives: we want independence, we don't want you to be here, we want you to get out! The fact that it uses crude instruments of warfare, like stones, should not detract from the clarity of the political message behind it.

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*Israeli-Occupied Territories: The West Bank and Gaza are dotted with at least 152 Israeli settlements—both civilian and paramilitary. Over half of the land in the West Bank and over a third of the Gaza strip has been taken over exclusively for Jewish use.*
Palestinians who in his eyes are willing to circumvent the leadership chosen by the Palestinian people to represent them. Why don't the Palestinians meet with Shultz and tell him that? I think the problem is that Shultz knows the situation. They know that he knows that. And he knows why they would meet with him if he changes the conditions of the encounter.

It's clear that many Palestinians today are willing to contemplate interim solutions to the Palestinian problem, including forms of autonomy, provided that these interim solutions are negotiated with the Palestinian leadership, and not with Palestinian collaborators. It's now clear that the Palestinian leadership is willing to contemplate a solution which accepts a sovereign state of Israel side by side with a state of Palestine. But sovereignty must be the object of these negotiations, not "autonomy" under Israeli hegemony.

How do you evaluate the role of settler intrusiveness in arriving at some kind of settlement?

This is the situation we're facing now: if Israel remains in control of the territories, by the year 2010 Arabs and Jews may achieve demographic parity in Palestine—there might be as many Arabs as there are Jews. 1987 was the first year since 1948 in which there were as many Arab babies born as Jewish babies in the Holy Land, which was Golda Meir's nightmare. What do you do about these demographics? Labor thinks that the sooner they get rid of the territories, the better. At least the dovish wing of the Labor Party. This is the preoccupation of—let's call it the Left of the Israeli political establishment. The Right wants to have its cake and eat it at the same time—they want the land, and they want Jewish sovereignty, and they don't want to treat the Palestinians as citizens. Now the extreme Right, of course, wants the land without the people, and the extreme Right is gaining ground in Israel. But it's false to see Israel as a place in which only right extremism is gaining. Significant sectors of the Jewish public and the Jewish political parties are taking more courageous steps in the direction of negotiation with the Palestinians. It's unfortunate that part of the motivation for peace is racist fears of demographic parity. But this is something that works in our favor and we should thank the Lord for these small mercies. The uprising has been the latest phase in making this dent in the collective Israeli consciousness: one, you cannot continue like this; and two, the West Bank and Gaza have become ungovernable. The sooner we come to a solution, the better for everybody.

What are the prospects for sustaining the uprising?

It's hard to tell. Already it has gone beyond the wildest expectations of most people, Israelis and Arabs. Part of it is youthful enthusiasm. But what's critical is that all people are participating with the same enthusiasm as these young people. They will have to devise mechanisms of durability in the coming months. Otherwise it's impossible to imagine how a shopkeeper economy can sustain an uprising of this sort. Already they have been very imaginative about it. For example, confrontation and sabotage is being coordinated in such a way that it does not put too much pressure on any one area or sector. The problem is going to be with the workers who work in Israel. We're talking about 100,000 people, roughly one-third of the total labor force, who live from the daily wages they receive in Israel. Unless the rest of the population can share their resources with these people, the uprising is bound to take different forms of political opposition.

What can you say about the role of the Muslim fundamentalists, particularly given the unified command that's been set up?

Within the Palestinian national movement, the Muslim currents always were very hostile to the PLO because the PLO was a secular movement which was colored by leftism. The whole idiom and vision of a future Palestinian society put forth by the PLO was distasteful to the Muslim currents. I see this clearly because one of the ideological battlegrounds has been the university campuses. Recently, around 1983-84, the Muslim Brothers and perhaps less radical wings began to find accommodation with the national movement. In return, the price paid by
You say it was spontaneous, not directed from outside?

Spontaneity and direction from outside are not necessarily exclusive categories. There is no question that in the initial phase of the uprising, the element of spontaneity was predominant, and it involved young street gangs who were not necessarily part and parcel of the national movement. It also involved a fundamentalist current in Gaza which was outside the domain of the PLO. However, by the second week, it was clear that the political currents were involved. And the manifestoes issued by the Unified Command made it clear that they consider themselves part and parcel of the PLO. It’s not a question of PLO or not PLO, but two dimensions of the Palestinian national movement.

There is a high degree of coordination between them, but they are not the same, because of physical dislocation and because of the differential weight of these components of the PLO. It’s clear, for example, that the weight of the Muslim fundamentalist groups is much higher inside than outside, in Gaza than in the West Bank. In summary, I would say that the element of spontaneity took the movement unaware, but it soon gathered momentum. Today I think there’s no question that the uprising is being directed—not from the outside but from the inside. The outside has become aware of the political weight of the inside.

Ultimately your question is this: what exactly is the organic link between Fatah and the Popular Front and the Democratic Front, etc., as far as their internal cadres are concerned, with the external leadership. This is something I cannot answer.

Why is the PLO directing Palestinians not to talk to Shultz?

Shultz’s visit is in the great American tradition of refusing to deal with the Palestinian question realistically. The US so far has been backing the most extreme interpretation of Israel’s future rule over the territories, and has not considered negotiating a territorial settlement with the Palestinians themselves. It is Shultz who refuses to meet with the Palestinians. Shultz in the past has met with Palestinians, with a small “p” if you like, the kind of
the national movement was to begin to consider the Islamist currents as legitimate strands of opposition within Palestinian society. Until then relations between these two currents were quite tense and sometimes violent. In fact, the national movement always considered the Muslim currents to be almost treasonous. There were cases where we know that the Israeli security establishment collaborated with the Muslim currents. For example, in Umm al-Fahm in the Galilee in the 1970s, Israel did supply arms to the Muslim groups. Some of these groups passed on the guns, or sold them, we’re not sure, to members of Fatah. When it was exposed, the whole thing created a scandal in the defense department. I’m not saying that the Muslim Brothers in Umm al-Fahm were agents of the Israeli state, but certainly there was a level of manipulation.

In Gaza, the security establishment allowed the Muslim Brothers to attack the Red Crescent Society and the Communists without interference. On two occasions they burned liquor stores in Gaza, and the security establishment did nothing. So it’s clear that the Israelis saw the Muslim currents as an asset in the battle against Palestinian nationalism. By 1983-84 this picture changed and two things happened. In Gaza, the Muslim currents began to gain ground, both organizationally and in terms of sympathy from the population. Also, and perhaps the two are related, they began to talk politics. For example, in the platforms of contesting university elections they don’t have an ideological platform, they have what you might call a service platform: we will fight to reduce fees, we will talk with the administration about improving food in the cafeteria, things that were always in the platform of the secular blocs. So there was, if you like, a certain degree of moderation in their politics which had a return on this investment in terms of increased adherence to their bloc.

There is also within Fatah, which is the biggest movement in the underground in the West Bank, a certain sympathy with the Muslim currents. Fatah itself is a mixture of several ideological currents. A certain wing of it is very sympathetic to the religious branch. So I think what we’re seeing now is a form of symbiosis that has its positive and negative consequences.

It’s good because the maximum amount of unity is necessary. Its negative aspects draw from the fact that the Palestinians have always prided themselves on being a secular society and a secular movement, and today they are being infested by Khomeinism.

How do you see Palestinians obtaining their political demands?

We can say the stones are the building blocks of the future mode of struggle. The stones will not become guns, because Palestinians in the territories do not have access to arms. The youth in the streets have proven to be more effective in using forms of civil disobedience than those with guns.

But this has to be translated into political terms, which are the following: that we are willing to negotiate, and we have the power to negotiate. We can veto any political option that does not meet our minimum. This is what they are saying. We are willing to negotiate if you come halfway in our direction. Halfway means that we will discuss interim solutions for solving the Palestinian problem, including autonomy, if we know that autonomy will evolve into sovereignty. For that to occur, two things are necessary: for Israel to disabuse itself of the notion that it can negotiate with everybody except the Palestinians—and this is very necessary—and for Washington to ally itself with this new position that Israel will have to arrive at. One would hope the US Congress would be affected by the current political mood both in Israel and in the world at large, so as to make a more realistic assessment of what the Palestinians want and therefore bring the Palestinians themselves to a more realistic formulation of their demands. I think these shifts are likely to happen dramatically—for example, new elections, a single incident, or maybe a dramatic gesture can push things very suddenly in a new direction. I think the atmosphere is very fertile for this at the moment.

Salim Tamari is a professor of sociology at Birzeit University in the West Bank. He is a Visiting Professor of sociology at the University of Michigan for the 1987-88 academic year.
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Vol. 19, No. 4 with "Bananas, Bases, and Patriarchy: Women and the Militarization of Central America" by Cynthia Enloe.

Vol. 19, Nos. 2-3. SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE BRITISH MINERS' STRIKE OF 1984-85 with articles by John Field, Bob Sutcliffe, and Larry Goldsmith and Brian Flynn; Also, articles on the IWW, and the working class in the academy.


Vol. 18, No. 6. SPECIAL ISSUE ON CULTURE AND YOUTH" with articles on "Women in Pop Music," Punk and Hip Hop Subcultures; Rock against Sexism, and "Zoot Suits and Style Warfare, and "Confessions of a 'movement DJ."" Illustrated galore.