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April 26, 2009

Letter to Editor – Regarding article on April 25th, “Fatherless boys need role models to teach them how to be men” by Carol Hagan, Jacksonville, AL
The Birmingham News

“The Cry of the Fatherless...and the Fathers”

Thank-you Carol for the submitted article on April 25th. I agree wholeheartedly that boys need male role models – and that the absence of men in families is correlated to delinquency and a whole host of other problems of our boys...and children.

I have been a father, a step-father, a Big Brother, and a scout leader; yet, in each and all of these circumstances, remain deeply interested in the woes of the fatherless. Recent reads by David Popenoe (*Life without Father*) and David Blankenhorn (*Fatherless America*) have been both enlightening and disheartening in terms of the magnitude and severity of this social crisis.

What I can make of the crisis is that there is more at cause than the willful abandonment or denial of fathers; but as well, a prevailing stigma and treatment of fatherhood.

David Popenoe describes it in this way:

The end result of many cultural, social, and economic trends...is a society surprisingly unsupportive of fatherhood. Indeed, if one were specifically to design a culture and a social system for the express purpose of undercutting fatherhood and men’s contribution to the family life, our current society would be close to what would result.

Similarly, David Blankenhorn indicates:

Men, in general, and fathers in particular, are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life: either expendable or as part of the problem. Masculinity itself...is typically treated with suspicion and even hostility in our cultural discourse.

I include these observations only to bring to light that the fatherless have suffered in part because of the devaluing of fatherhood. Whether through the media, the courts or culture, the erosion of the father has lead the way for the dilution of the family – and the child suffer all the more.

Believe it our not, there are fathers *out-there* that want to be parents to their children; but have been reduced to something much less because of mal-treatment and discrimination by the courts; and there are men who want to offer leadership and role modeling to children – but are scared to death of some ill-conceived allegation or pretense that is certain imprisonment and perpetual profile.

Fatherhood is a vital part of the conventional family, and men are needed as role models to boys (and girls); and our society is sadly missing them both....

Perhaps it’s time to add a line to the Pete Seeger song: “Where have all the fathers gone...”

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