

## Introduction – The Family Hating Culture

*The Assault on Parenthood* by Dana Mack (1997)

Though representing a period ten years hence, *The Assault on Parenthood* remains relevant to the present conditions that threaten families and parenthood. Don't consider a summary of this book as some exaggeration or hyperbole; but instead, as yet another warning for the wise. Our culture's families are being preyed upon – and the children are the victims.

Dana introduces her research in conjunction with popular culture regarding the role of men (in families) and the relationship of parent to child or children. Whatever these views and lifestyles, the outcome to children is showing increasing signals of neglect and damage – whether in the conventional family or, more commonly, the single-parent one.



The mid to late 1980's seems to be the starting point for her research and commentary. Published in 1993, Barbara Whitehead's article, "Dan Quayle was Right", pressed home the point that ours (single parenthood) was not only the culture of unwed motherhood but of rampant divorce.

**Both of these – she noted – were by-products of an ideology of expressive individualism that had seized postwar generations and driven them to put self-realization before their children's needs.**

In her research – her interviews with parents – Dana discovered that most believe that a dimension of the "crisis of childhood" is being overlooked or ignored; and still, that:

Parents attribute the crisis of youth in large part to the failure of extra familial institutions to reinforce their painstaking work. In fact, parents see the decline of social supports and the breakdown of families as symptoms of a larger phenomenon:

**The sudden and rapid decay of those social values that once fostered a protective culture of childhood.**

Describing themselves as "islands out there", many parents are vulnerable today because of a sense of isolation in the matter of moral virtue...they attempt to instill in their children.

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Governments, child-advocacy groups and other similar institutions are viewed as “more disposed toward harming families”; foremost of which, are the welfare authorities that “engage in reckless and destructive interventions in families’ lives.” **Furthermore, the courts seem unable to handle divorce, custody, or even adoption disputes in any but the most destructive ways for parents and children.**

Parents concerns do not stop at courts and their cadre of counsel; but continues with the school programs perceived as “undermining the mechanisms of family life.” While some allow the varied programs of life-skills to be carried-out, the parents believe such to be failing – where the programs invite risk-taking...rather than delivering “the kind of clear behavioral imperatives kids need.” These programs are criticized for “touching too early on sensitive psychological and emotional issues.”

Where did it all begin? Dana notes that:

For almost a century, child-rearing “experts” have challenged the competence of parents and pushed for ever greater institutionalization of child-rearing.

In the continuation of these developments, “parents are growing impatient with the bureaucratization of children’s lives...and their relationships with their children impoverished by lack of contact.”

This reaction or sense of parents is no more manifested than in the growing preference of educational alternatives. Small “charter” schools (released from mandates and bureaucratic regulations), denominational private schools, and home schooling are ever increasing. In her own observation of this response, **Dana notes that (at the time of the mid1990’s) families had only begun to focus on the central issue behind their many frustrations – the lack of parental empowerment in our society.**

Parental Rights – as one description of this movement – is “mounting a strong and concerted” effort in such areas as state legislation so that they may direct their children’s education. Dana continues:

Parental rights legislation represents the most clearly articulated bid for a return to parental engagement in child-rearing to date, and may serve as a banner under which large numbers of parents fighting disparate battles against a family-hostile system can unite in interests of children’s well-being.

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This effort does not occur without resistance however, as the legislation and other initiatives have been fought by

- ☒ Child-welfare advocates, educators, children’s rights groups, and health professionals
- ☒ National Education Association (NEA)
- ☒ American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- ☒ The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
- ☒ American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

She notes that this war will be a “long and hard one. But the principle behind it is a potent one.” She continues:

**Families are better equipped to set the tone for child friendly social policies than government and the many extra familial institutions that present themselves as “advocates” of family and children.**

She cautions that there are fewer conscientious parents than there once were; but, even so, there are few parents who would not rightfully deserve a chance to remake their children’s childhood in the “image of a richer family life.”

Again, the war may be long and hard. Dana notes that one of the issues is the extent to which “**our family-hostile, child-hostile culture is driven by a dangerously erroneous idea that parents are bad for children – indeed that the traditional family is an endemically pathological institution, a child abuse machine.**” She asserts:

The media’s attention to child abuse has distracted attention from the legions of conscientious parents who – in turn – testify that to be a good parent in a family-hating culture is, in itself, an act of heroism.

This book, she writes, is a petition on their behalf (parents). “It is an expose of the family hating culture from the top down: from the assault on parental authority...”