



## Book Reviews

**All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure.** By Kenneth Kenniston and the Carnegie Council on Children. New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1977. 255 pp. \$10.95.

*Reviewed by Hillary Rodham, attorney with Rose, Nash, Williamson, Carroll, Clay, and Giroir of Little Rock, Arkansas, and member of the Board of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.*

Readers looking for an unbiased review of this important new book will not find it here. The Carnegie Council on Children, a varied group of experts and interested citizens, spent five years under the leadership of M.I.T. professor Kenneth Kenniston studying the ways America regards and raises its children. The result is a thorough, and thoroughly valuable, analysis of the social pressure cooker in which the family and the children it is responsible for rearing find themselves. The analysis supports specific public policy recommendations for the next ten years—it draws a broad vision of the future we should all work toward.

The book's central argument avers that the family cannot be seen as an atomistic element in the larger society, moving or stagnating solely as an effect of its own efforts. Rather, solutions to the so-called "crisis of the family" require that we see the family as one of many social institutions, and one influenced by cultural, economic, and political events as certainly as by the fortunes of its individual members. Thus, the council urges that attention be turned to the impact on families of external factors such as income distribution, accessibility to health care, educational services, legal rights, and runaway technology. Its conclusion—that many families face problems over which they have little or no control—will come as no surprise to persons in the social welfare field, but it is a significant finding for public policy that will affect all families.

A belief in families runs through the book, which in some circles today is a quite old-fashioned idea but one the council embraces enthusiastically, holding that there is still no better way to care for children. This attitude permeates the council's exorcism of certain myths that serve only to inhibit the development of a realistic family policy in this country. The myth of the housewife whose life centers only on her home is effectively dispelled by statistics demonstrating that the average school child now has a working mother. The myth, or perhaps more accurately, the prejudice, that each family should be self-sufficient is challenged in a compelling chapter on the "stacked deck" faced by the poor, minority, or handicapped children who are born into a situation of inequality and, most of them, kept there for the rest of their lives.

One of the freshest contributions the book makes is to the understanding of technology's impact on the family. Americans in the rich, poor, or any other category, are surrounded and victimized by technology: television, nuclear plants, automobiles, drugs. American families that hope to achieve complete control over their children's upbringing find themselves competing with powerful influences. Collective action is needed on the community, state, and federal level to wrest from machines and those who profit from their use the extraordinary power they hold over us all, but particularly over our children.

Lest you think the book's analysis and recommendations were preordained, let me share with you my experience as a staff member and consultant with the council. The council and staff faced with considerable trepidation the awesome charge by the Carnegie Foundation to study the American child. The issue of child-rearing is a controversial one, and it seemed to us that the changing role of the family and the increasing pressures it

faced—to achieve or just to survive—required a thoughtful, unhurried examination. The individuals involved came to their tasks from different experiences and perspectives. They shared an openness toward their responsibilities and a willingness to test preconceptions and unorthodox ideas; they sought out persons from all walks of life and from all over the country; they tested ideas on each other and critical third persons; they struggled to capture in writing the tone of vigorous debate; they rewrote and edited again and again.

Every subject the council examined seemed to raise the same questions: How does a parent, even a well-meaning, committed one, provide for children in our increasingly fragmented society? How does he or she cope on an inadequate income, unable to purchase the services needed by children? How does society assist families in a manner that promotes, rather than discourages, individual responsibility and dignity? Does not every family, at some time, need help—and, if so, what delivery systems are required? If one believes, as the council does, that it is the family's and not the state's responsibility to raise children, then it follows that the family needs strengthening in order to have a chance to survive and overcome the ravages of poverty and its handmaidens of disease, ignorance, hunger, and hopelessness.

But if we are going to require responsibility, then we must offer the opportunity for it to be accepted. Consequently the council proposes a new formula for measuring poverty, to help redress economic inequality. It offers suggestions in other areas: employment, health, and law. Underlying all its recommendations is the need for advocacy on behalf of children, particularly by their parents. Children cannot speak for themselves; they do not vote or contribute to special interest lobbies. Yet, their futures are inextricably bound up with politi-

cal decisions about the allocation of resources. Adults must represent the interests of children that are implicit in such issues as full and fair employment and flexible working schedules for working parents. They must urge the passage of a national health insurance plan that will provide preventive care for the many treatable conditions afflicting thousands of children. They must write and pass the laws that will protect our children against environmental pollution. They will have to reorganize our existing service network and implement necessary new programs so that people, not bureaucracies, are made stronger.

Whether or not one agrees with the council's work, *All Our Children* does fuel the debate over the future of public policy on children and their families—and in that sense is almost required reading for social welfare professionals and policymakers alike.