



# Thomas Jefferson Research Center

The fate of humanity is in the hands of our children.

Abraham Lincoln

## THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS RESPONSIBILITY

Number 204

May 1983

1143 North Lake Avenue, Pasadena, California 91104

12313

## CRIME AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Reviewed by Frank Goble

Seventeen years ago, the Thomas Jefferson Research Center published a report called "Responsibility and Survival."

"There is mounting recognition, deep concern, and a vast amount of factual evidence," the report stated, "that this nation and the world are drifting in the direction of increasing lawlessness by individuals and governments. We have lived with irresponsibility so long that it has assumed an aura of fashionable respectability. This is quietly, but relentlessly, destroying the very fiber of our society . . ."

"What should be the most important part of education, the teaching of responsible behavior, is being badly neglected. Yet this is the key to success of individuals and societies."

Criminologists, almost without exception, have ignored or rejected this idea that a major reason for increasing crime was insufficient emphasis on ethical instruction in our schools and colleges and other institutions.

This is why a recent article "Crime and American Culture" by the distinguished criminologist, James Q. Wilson, is so significant. "In no area of inquiry," he says, "are we more in need of better answers than in the effort to explain the relationship between crime and the conditions of American life."

He admits that criminologists have not been very successful in identifying either the root causes of crime or the

social conditions that promote it.

One by one Dr. Wilson examines the popular explanations for increasing crime. He says that people who blame poverty for crime can point to the fact that there is more crime per capita in poor neighborhoods, "but they have difficulty explaining why, in the nation as a whole, crime rates seem to have been stable or declining during the Great Depression and to have risen sharply during the prosperity of the 1960's."

Those who blame the disintegration of the family point to studies that show that broken homes are more likely to produce delinquent children, "but they can take scant comfort from the work of other scholars that finds no relationship between single parent families and crime."

Other experts have claimed that crime is going up because there are more young males in the population. The problem with this theory, Dr. Wilson points out, is that it does not explain why the number of crimes committed by young males in any given age group has also increased. He says that a delinquent youth born in Philadelphia in 1958, "is five times more likely to commit a crime than one born in that city in 1945."

He thinks it is quite possible that changes in the speed and severity of punishment affect the rate of crime, but points out that this has been very difficult to prove.

The way to analyze crime, Wilson says, is to study American history and try to discover why there have been periods in America when crime went down and stayed down for relatively long periods of time. His approach is

certain to be criticized by other criminologists because, as we at the Thomas Jefferson Research Center have frequently said, orthodox behavioral scientists have little use for history and tend to ignore it.

Professor Wilson admits that American history is "inaccurate, fragmentary, and often inconsistent." But he says that thanks to the work of recent historians, "We can draw on quite a large number of studies of crime rates during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and these can be supplemented by studies in other nations that have kept better records. No single study alone would be decisive, but what is impressive about the findings we now have is that different scholars, using different methods of investigating different cities and states, have come to conclusions that are, with only a few exceptions, quite consistent."

What makes Wilson's article extremely significant is both his unorthodox approach and his unorthodox (to science) conclusion that it is America's neglect of "character training" during the last 60 years that seems to provide the best explanation for recent high crime rates.

Here is a brief summary of Dr. Wilson's historical survey:

At the time of the American Revolutionary War, many colonists were concerned that the rebellion would cause widespread crime and disorder. This did not happen. And when the framers of the U.S. Constitution gathered in Philadelphia in 1787, crime was not a serious problem.

Although the statistics are rather poor, crime rates apparently went up

Crime and American Culture is an article by James Q. Wilson which appeared in the Winter 1983 issue of The Public Interest.

at about the time Andrew Jackson became President in 1824 and stayed up through the 1830s and 1840s. Those familiar with this have tended to blame it on the growth of American cities.

But then, Wilson explains, something happened which the conventional theory that urbanization caused more crime could not explain. Beginning in about the middle of the 19th century and continuing with some fluctuations into the early part of the 20th century, the rate of crime went down. This in spite of the fact that many foreign immigrants were coming to the United States, factory work was increasing, and more Americans were moving to the cities.

The most logical explanation, Dr. Wilson believes, and an explanation supported by several historians, is that starting in 1840 and carrying into the early 20th century, a set of essentially Victorian values took hold. "Popular literature emphasized the values of thrift, order, industriousness, sobriety, mastery of passions, and a deep regard for the future. Conduct often departed from these standards, but for the most part there was agreement that such conduct was a departure to be deplored and, if possible, corrected."

He admits that it is difficult to prove this point but states that, "Given the present state of historical scholarship, the evidence of the effect of the new moral code is largely circumstantial. But it is not trivial."

**T**owards the middle of the 19th century, more and more Americans became concerned about crime and disorder in their cities and developed a number of efforts for social reform. Although these efforts varied, the one thing they shared in common was "a desire to alter and strengthen human character."

Joseph F. Kett, who studied this period of history, found that all of the various reform movements had a common desire to instill "decision of character," by which was meant a "strenuous will" aimed at "inner control" and "self-restraint."

Professor Wilson reports that the first decades of the 19th century witnessed a series of religious revivals. Many of the converts in this period were young people in their teens and early twenties. There was a strong Sunday School movement and in 1829, over 40% of children from four to fourteen were said to attend Sunday Schools in New York City.

In the years prior to 1830, the consumption of alcoholic beverages had risen sharply. Norman H. Clark estimated that the annual per capita

consumption of alcohol in the United States rose from about 2.5 gallons in 1790 to 7 gallons in 1810 and 10 gallons in 1829. The temperance movement was an important part of the national reform effort and one estimate found that beginning around 1830, alcohol consumption began to decline rapidly and per capita consumption fell from more than 7 gallons to less than 2 gallons per year.

"The temperance movement," writes Dr. Wilson, "was the most dramatic example of the effort of 19th century Americans to invest in the control of self-indulgent impulses, but it was only a part of a much wider effort to protect the character-building role of families, or to supply a substitute for familial influences at a time of growing personal liberty and rapid social change." These efforts stressed the need for self-control, delayed personal gratification, and social relations on the basis of mutual restraint.

"But beginning in the 1920s, or at least becoming visible then," writes Wilson, "we see the educated classes in America repudiating moral uplift as it had been practiced for the preceding century. Religious revivals, once led by liberal college students such as Theodore Weld, were now scorned by college-educated persons as being the province of narrow-minded opportunists . . . Revivalism became synonymous with fundamentalist Protestantism, and that was discredited in intellectual minds . . . Secular public schools, so it was thought, had now made day-long Sunday Schools unnecessary . . . Prohibition came to be seen by intellectuals as an expression of the narrow-mindedness of American farmers and villagers.

"Whereas in the 19th century, scarcely anyone denied that the object of character formation was to restrain self-indulgent impulses, by the 1920's, popular versions of the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud were widely circulated and misinterpreted as meaning that repressing one's instincts was bad, not good.

"The children's stories of the first half of the 19th century portrayed a world in which there was no conflict between moral correctness and worldly success; a 'Christian citizen' would prosper in this world as in the next. In the second half of the 19th century, that literature had become less moralistic, but still likely to emphasize success. By the 1920s, it had begun to emphasize happiness apart from success.

**A**dvices to parents during the 19th century had emphasized the great

importance of inculcating moral and religious principles. This view still persisted early in the 20th century, but by 1920 began to change. "Whereas the child was once thought to be endowed by nature with dangerous impulses that must be curbed, he was now seen as equipped with harmless instincts that ought to be developed. . . .

"Where once the stress had been on moral development and the decisive importance of the mother's character, now the literature was more likely to emphasize the enjoyable aspects of child rearing in which fun and play were important. In 1890, 1900, and 1910, one-third of the child rearing topics discussed in a sample of articles from the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Good Housekeeping* were about character development; in 1920, only 3% were. By 1930, articles on moral character had, by and large, been replaced with ones on 'personality development.'"

Therefore, James Wilson concludes, "The demise of Victorian morality, the inability of the state to recreate that morality, and the growth in personal freedom and social prosperity, have combined to produce an individualistic ethos that both encourages crime and shapes the kind of policies that we are prepared to use to combat it."

Reo M. Christenson, who reviewed "Crime and American Culture" in a recent issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, refers to a second report by an English scholar, Christie Davies, analyzing crime in Britain, and reaching conclusions almost identical to Dr. Wilson's. Davies reports that Britain's high crime rates in the middle of the 19th century diminished thereafter and remained very low until recent years. In recent years, the rate has increased rapidly in England as it has in the United States.

Davies explains that following the earlier crime wave, the dominant "Victorian elite" imbued all social classes with the conviction that each individual was morally responsible for his own behavior. This belief was aided by the influence of John Wesley and Methodism. The values stressed during this period were "honesty, industry, willingness, conscientiousness, punctuality, sobriety, and a sense of responsibility."

"But as the Victorian moral crusade faded," writes Christenson, "the belief became fashionable that society, rather than the individual, was responsible for crime. This led to preoccupation with public remedies for the consequences of individual

misbehavior, rather than with moral attitudes which contributed to crime." The result was a significant increase in crime in Britain in spite of the fact that economic conditions improved and increasing welfare had largely eliminated poverty.

**H**ow long will it take, we wonder, before concerned Americans realize that our exploding social problems are primarily the result of the fact that our various institutions no longer place sufficient emphasis on the basic rules of good conduct which provide the essential foundation for our entire society?

It is as President Dwight D. Eisenhower said years ago, "Without a moral and spiritual awakening, there is no hope for us."

\*\*\*\*\*

## AH, GOOD OLD McGUFFEY

By Marvin Stone

McGuffey's Readers are remembered by Americans mainly as a quaint set of books, full of quotable maxims, that taught their grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents reading and a great deal more.

Therefore, it may surprise some people to learn that more than 150,000 were sold last year.

That may not look like much compared with the 122 million copies distributed between 1836 and the 1920s, but it could be called a boomlet, and—according to publisher Van Nostrand Reinhold—it's a boomlet that is building.

This revival tells something about our times. School authorities, in explaining the return of McGuffey to the classroom, credit a yearning for a simpler life and the desire to promote honesty, industry and more-responsible and humane behavior. McGuffey's Readers are well designed for these ends, but, of course, the primary objective is reading skill. Teachers describe gratifying successes.

In Bristol, Va., Evelyn Murray, who has charge of the reading program there, reports that "it's amazing to see" the change in the students' attitudes. When the McGuffey books were adopted as a supplement, "the children seemed to be wanting something like this. They take the books home. They have a McGuffey Day, and they look forward to it." She

sees remarkable improvement in the pupils' reading, and is awaiting the results of spring tests to assess just how big that improvement is.

None of this would be possible if children didn't like the books. They do. And even a brief examination will show why.

William Holmes McGuffey, with the help of his brother Alexander, led a quiet revolution in education, one that endures to this day. Until a Cincinnati printer first published McGuffey's works in 1836, the model for most reading books had been the New England Primer, a frightful experience for young and old. Harvey C. Minnich, in his 1936 biography of McGuffey, quotes a few lines from that earlier reader. After threatening those present with "a dreadful fiery Hell," it particularizes:

*When wicked children mocking said  
To an old man, "Go up Bald Head,"  
God was displeased with them and sent  
Two bears which them in pieces rent.*

Whatever one may think about the moral, those verses are hardly calculated to entice the beginning reader. McGuffey's offerings were as different from them as his new, expansive Ohio country from gloomy early Boston.

Not that McGuffey neglects the moral. It almost always is there. But instead of impending damnation, there are satisfactions of kindness, joys of work and play and often the lure of learning something in which a young person is interested.

In the Second Reader, a boy helps with his younger brother's load. He slips the basket over a pole, to be carried by both ends. The reader then learns that if the basket is shifted toward the little brother's end, that end will be heavier. "Tom does not know about this," reflects the big brother. "But I will not do it." He slips the basket to his own end. He is happy that he did this.

Two boys find a nut and argue over ownership. They ask an older boy to judge. He gives each a half of the shell and keeps the kernel as his fee. "This is the way," he says, "in which quarrels are very apt to end."

A mother shows her son how her hand makes a shadow: "The dark is only a big shadow over everything," she says. He no longer is afraid.

"Remember," McGuffey writes, "that God made all creatures to be happy." It is a benign world, which invites a child to take part—and to read.

In Bristol, Evelyn Murray is looking ahead. McGuffey's vocabulary, she observes, has twice the words of today's standard readers. "The children are learning those words. You know, children don't write well now because they don't have the words." But she believes McGuffey students will.

That would be a boon indeed.

---

From the Editors Page, U.S. News and World Report, May 2, 1983, copyright U.S. News and World Report 1983 and reprinted with permission.

## PARENTS REACTIONS TO VALUES EDUCATION

"Reactions of Parents of Different Ethnic and Social Economic Groups to Instruction in Values Education in a Metropolitan Area," is the title of a doctoral dissertation by Young Jay Mulkey, University of Texas, 1979. Dr. Mulkey is now President of the American Institute for Character Education.

Many educators are concerned about ethical instruction because they feel the subject is too controversial. Actually, Gallup Polls over the last 14 years have found that most parents (80% or more) want schools to teach ethical values. This is closely related to the public perception as measured by Gallup that "lack of discipline heads the list of major problems confronting public schools."

Dr. Mulkey mentions one survey, however, conducted among 386 educators asked if they were free to discuss controversial issues, where the findings revealed that educators felt that parents were the leading group exerting pressure to prevent controversial discussion in the classroom (Morrisett: 1975).

Educators have also expressed concern regarding the possibility that cultural differences between Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans might cause difficulties for school districts with large Mexican-American populations that wish to discuss ethical values in the classroom.

Norman Bull (1979) felt that socioeconomic differences decide the moral values that groups might hold.

And school districts with various economic levels represented in their schools might find parents unable to agree on which values should be taught.

The purpose of the Young Jay Mulkey study was to attempt a systematic survey of parents in one urban area to determine their feelings about values education.

The study set out to answer the following questions in one community:

(1) Do parents want the public schools to teach their children values?

(2) Which one of three general approaches to values education do parents prefer—indoctrination, clarification, or noninterference?

(3) Should a values education curriculum teach abstract values such as, justice, honesty and truthfulness, as well as social issues such as, the decline of personal honesty, changing attitudes towards human life, and the government's responsibility to its citizens for the environment and living conditions?

(4) What values do parents want emphasized in values education, if any?

(5) Are there differences in responses to the above questions between ethnic groups and socio-economic status groups?

Professor Mulkey's procedure was to select a sample of 40 parents with ten from each of the following strata: Anglo-American upper/middle class; Anglo-American lower socio-economic class; Mexican-American middle/upper class; and Mexican-

American lower socio-economic class. The school districts used were located in San Antonio, Texas.

All parents were interviewed personally and asked specific questions from an interview check list. Only parents who had at least one child attending public school in the San Antonio district were interviewed.

When parents were asked "Should public school teachers teach certain ideals or leave developing pupil's values to the church and home?" all 40 parents regardless of race or economic level felt that public school teachers should teach certain ideals.

When parents were asked whether public school teachers should tell children which values they must hold, or conduct discussions so that pupils could draw their own conclusions and choose their own values, 37 out of 40 parents wanted teachers to avoid indoctrination. There was very little difference of opinion between the four groups although those who wanted indoctrination were all upper income Anglo-Americans.

When parents were asked if values education curriculum should include abstract moral values and social issues, 38 out of 40 said yes. That the parents approved of the inclusion of such values as, truth, honesty, justice, power, charity, democracy and freedom was evident in the answers that they gave to the questions asked.

In other words, for this particular group of parents, there was remarkable agreement regardless of whether they were Anglo-American

or Mexican-American or high income or low income. All of them wanted their children to have values education in school. Nearly all of them felt that a values education curriculum should include the teaching of abstract moral values and the study of social issues. Nearly all felt that the discussion approach was better than indoctrination.

The values which the parents felt the schools should teach are listed according to the frequency with which the parents identified them as follows: responsibility, respecting others, self-respect, patriotism, and truthfulness.

### CLASSES SCHEDULED

The following adult classes will be offered in Pasadena, California.

\* Achievement Skills Instructor Training Class, June 28 and 29, 1983.

\* Achievement Skills Class for Adults, July 7 through August 24, 1983 (two hours each week).

\* Gilmore Parent Seminar Instructor Training Course, July 7, 8, 9, 1983.

Achievement Skills classes are also available in St. Louis (call 314-863-3365) and Medford Lakes, NJ (call 609-654-2798).

Dr. Gilmore will personally conduct a five-day Instructor Training Program at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, July 11-15, 1983. His telephone number is 617-536-5817.

Gilmore Parent Seminars are also available in St. Louis. Call the number mentioned above. And in Mt. Airy, North Carolina (call Dr. David Long, 919-786-8355).



## Thomas Jefferson Research Center

1143 North Lake Avenue • Pasadena, California 91104  
(213) 798-0791

# NO. 204

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS RESPONSIBILITY

Non-Profit Organization

U. S. POSTAGE

PAID

Permit No. 1735  
Pasadena, CA

ROBERT CLANCY  
PRESIDENT  
HENRY GEORGE INSTITUTE  
5 E 44TH ST  
NEW YORK NY 10017

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED