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Rereading america 11th edition summary

Rereading America is a favorite among students because it works. Watch yourself grow as a critical thinker and writer as you grapple with cross-curricular readings that not only engage, but also challenge you to reexamine deeply held cultural assumptions, such as viewing success solely as the result of hard work. Extensive apparatus offers you a proven framework for revisiting, revising, or defending those assumptions as you probe the myths underlying them. Rereading America has stayed at the forefront of American culture, contending with cultural myths as they persist, morph, and develop anew. The eleventh edition features a refreshed collection of readings with more writing instruction, to help you apply to your own writing the strategies used in the readings. Also Available: Previous 10th Edition Read online (or offline) with all the highlighting and notetaking tools you need to be successful in this course. Learn More Writer's HelpSearch for help with your writing, quiz yourself to improve your grammar, and check out sample papers to help you learn more and improve your writing. Learn More LaunchpadGet the e-book, do assignments, take quizzes, prepare for exams and more, to help you achieve success in class. Learn More *Asterisks indicate new selections 1. Harmony at Home: Myths of Family Gary Soto, “Looking for Work” Stephanie Coontz, “What We Really Miss About the 1950s” Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian, “The Color of Family Ties: Race, Class, Gender, and Extended Family Involvement” *Larissa MacFarquhar, “When Should a Child Be Taken from His Parents?” Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of American Families *Amy Ellis Nutt, From Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family * Sheryll Cashin, From Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy *Mimi Schippers, From Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities 2. Learning Power: The Myth of Education and Empowerment John Taylor Gatto, “Against School” Mike Rose, “I Just Wanna Be Average” Jean Anyon, From Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work *Nikole Hannah-Jones “Choosing a School For My Daughter In a Segregated City” Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of Education and Empowerment *Sherry Turkle, “Education: Attentional Disarray” *Peggy Orenstein, “Blurred Lines, Take Two” *Sara Goldrick-Rab, “City of Broken Dreams” 3. The Wild Wired West: Myths of Progress on the Tech Frontier Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, “Our Future Selves” *Jean M. Twenge, “Has the Smartphone Destroyed a Generation?” *Kenneth Goldsmith, “Let’s Get Lost” *Noreen Malone, “Zoë and the Trolls” *Jessie Daniels, “Twitter and White Supremacy, A Love Story” Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of Wired Culture *Bruce Schneier, “How We Sold Our Souls—and More—to the Internet Giants” *Kevin Drum, “You Will Lose Your Job to a Robot—and Sooner Than You Think” *Yuval Noah Harari, “Big Data, Google, and the End of Free Will” 4. Money and Success: The Myth of Individual Opportunity Gregory Mantsios, “Class in America” Barbara Ehrenreich, “Serving in Florida” Alan Aja, Daniel Bustillo, William Darity Jr., and Darrick Hamilton, “From a Tangle of Black Pathology to a Race-Fair America” *Mehrsa Baradaran, From How the Other Half Banks Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of Individual Opportunity Diana Kendall, “Framing Class, Vicarious Living, and Conspicuous Consumption” *Ellen K. Pao, From Reset: My Fight for Inclusion and Lasting Change *Kate Aronoff, “Thank God It’s Monday” *Rutger Bregman, “Why We Should Give Free Money to Everyone” 5. True Women and Real Men: Myths of Gender Jamaica Kincaid, “Girl” *Lisa Wade and Myra Marx Ferree, “How to Do Gender” *Carlos Andrés Gómez, “Guys’ Club: No Faggots, Bitches, or Pussies Allowed” Ruth Padawer, “Sisterhood is Complicated” Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of Gender *Allan G. Johnson, From The Gender Knot: “Patriarchy” Jean Kilbourne, “‘Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt’: Advertising and Violence” Rebecca Solnit, “The Longest War” *Jackson Katz, “From Rush Limbaugh to Donald Trump: The Defiant Reassertion of White Male Authority” 6. Created Equal: The Myths of Race Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” Linda Holtzman and Leon Sharpe, “Theories and Constructs of Race” Sherman Alexie, “Gentrification” *Marc Lamont Hill, “Nobody” Visual Portfolio: Reading Images of Race *Amani Al-Khatahtbeh, From Muslim Girl *José Orduña, “Passport to the New West” Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Carola Suárez-Orozco, “How Immigrants Become ‘Other’” Gary Colombo is professor emeritus of English and ESL at Los Angeles City College. He has also published Mind Readings: An Anthology for Writers (2002), and with Bonnie Lisle and Sandra Mano, Frame Work: Culture, Storytelling and College Writing (1997), both for Bedford/St. Martins. Robert Cullen is professor emeritus of English at San Jose State University, where he taught a wide range of courses in writing, rhetoric, composition pedagogy, and American literature.. Bonnie Lisle teaches in the UCLA Writing Programs. With Gary Colombo and Sandra Mano, she is the author of Frame Work: Culture, Storytelling, and College Writing (Bedford/St. Martins, 1997). 2 3 REREADING AMERICA Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing ELEVENTH EDITION EDITED BY Gary Colombo Emeritus—Los Angeles City College Robert Cullen Emeritus—San Jose State University Bonnie Lisle University of California, Los Angeles 4 For Bedford/St. Martin’s Vice President, Editorial, Macmillan Learning Humanities: Edwin Hill Executive Program Director for English: Leasa Burton Senior Program Manager for Readers and Literature: John E. Sullivan III Executive Marketing Manager: Joy Fisher Williams Director of Content Development, Humanities: Jane Knetzger Developmental Editor: Cara Kaufman Editorial Assistant: William Hwang Content Project Manager: Pamela Lawson Senior Workflow Project Manager: Jennifer Wetzel Production Supervisor: Brianna Lester Media Project Manager: Allison Hart Manager of Publishing Services: Andrea Cava Project Management: Lumina Datamatics, Inc. Composition: Lumina Datamatics, Inc. Text Permissions Manager: Kalina Ingham Text Permissions Editor: Mark Schaefer, Lumina Datamatics, Inc. Photo Permissions Editor: Angela Boehler Photo Researcher: Candice Cheesman/Krystyna Borgen, Lumina Datamatics, Inc. Director of Design, Content Management: Diana Blume Text Design: Janis Owens/Lumina Datamatics, Inc. Cover Design: William Boardman Cover Image: American Landscape #1, Nabil Mousa 5 Copyright © 2019, 2016, 2013, 2010 by Bedford/St. Martin’s. All rights reserved. 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If you do find a broken link, please forward the information to cara.kaufman@macmillan.com so that it can be corrected for the next printing. 6 mailto:cara.kaufman@macmillan.comPREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS ABOUT REREADING AMERICA Designed for first-year writing and critical thinking courses, Rereading America anthologizes a diverse set of readings focused on the myths that dominate U.S. culture. This central theme brings together thought-provoking selections on a broad range of topics — family, education, technology, success, gender, and race — topics that raise controversial issues meaningful to college students of all backgrounds. We’ve drawn these readings from many sources, both within the academy and outside of it; the selections are both multicultural and cross-curricular and thus represent an unusual variety of voices, styles, and subjects. The readings in this book speak directly to students’ experiences and concerns. Every college student has had some brush with prejudice, and most have something to say about education, the family, or the gender stereotypes they see in films and on television. The issues raised here help students link their personal experiences with broader cultural perspectives and lead them to analyze, or “read,” the cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape their lives. By linking the personal and the cultural, students begin to recognize that they are not academic outsiders — they too have knowledge, assumptions, and intellectual frameworks that give them authority in academic culture. Connecting personal knowledge and academic discourse helps students see that they 7 are able to think, speak, and write academically and that they don’t have to absorb passively what the “experts” say. FEATURES OF THE ELEVENTH EDITION A Cultural Approach to Critical Thinking Like its predecessors, the eleventh edition of Rereading America is committed to the premise that learning to think critically means learning to identify and see beyond dominant cultural myths — collective and often unconsciously held beliefs that influence our thinking, reading, and writing. Instead of treating cultural diversity as just another topic to be studied or “appreciated,” Rereading America encourages students to grapple with the real differences in perspective that arise in a pluralistic society like ours. This method helps students to break through conventional assumptions and patterns of thought that hinder fresh critical responses and inhibit dialogue. It helps them recognize that even the most apparently “natural” fact or obvious idea results from a process of social construction. And it helps them to develop the intellectual independence essential to critical thinking, reading, and writing. Timely New Readings To keep Rereading America up to date, we’ve worked hard to bring you the best new voices speaking on issues of race, gender, class, family, education, and technological progress. As in past editions, we’ve retained old favorites like Gary Soto, 8 Stephanie Coontz, John Taylor Gatto, Mike Rose, Sherry Turkle, Barbara Ehrenreich, Jamaica Kincaid, Jean Kilbourne, Rebecca Solnit, Sherman Alexie, and Ta-Nehisi Coates. But you’ll also find a host of new selections by authors such as Amy Ellis Nutt, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Peggy Orenstein, Yuval Noah Harari, Jean M. Twenge, Ellen K. Pao, Carlos Andrés Gómez, Marc Lamont Hill, Amani Al-Khatahtbeh, and José Orduña. And like earlier versions, this edition of Rereading America includes a healthy mix of personal and academic writing, representing a wide variety of genres, styles, and rhetorical strategies. Visual Portfolios In addition to frontispieces and cartoons, we’ve included a Visual Portfolio of myth-related images in every chapter of Rereading America. These collections of photographs invite students to examine how visual “texts” are constructed and how, like written texts, they are susceptible to multiple readings and rereadings. Each portfolio is accompanied by a series of questions that encourage critical analysis and connect portfolio images to ideas and themes in chapter reading selections. As in earlier editions, the visual frontispieces that open each chapter are integrated into the prereading assignments found in the chapter introductions. The cartoons, offered as a bit of comic relief and as opportunities for visual thinking, are paired with appropriate readings throughout the text. Focus on Struggle and Resistance Most multicultural readers approach diversity in one of two 9 ways: either they adopt a pluralist approach and conceive of American society as a kind of salad bowl of cultures or, in response to worries about the lack of “objectivity” in the multicultural curriculum, they take what might be called the “talk show” approach and present American culture as a series of pro-and-con debates on a number of social issues. The eleventh edition of Rereading America, like its predecessors, follows neither of these approaches. Pluralist readers, we feel, make a promise that’s impossible to keep: no single text, and no single course, can do justice to the many complex cultures that inhabit the United States. Thus the materials selected for Rereading America aren’t meant to offer a taste of what “family” means for Native Americans or the flavor of gender relations among immigrants. Instead, we’ve included materials like excerpts from Sheryll Cashin’s Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy or Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” because they offer us fresh critical perspectives on the common myths that shape our ideas, values, and beliefs. Rather than seeing this anthology as a mosaic or kaleidoscope of cultural fragments that combine to form a beautiful picture, it’s more accurate to think of Rereading America as a handbook that helps students explore the ways that the dominant culture shapes their ideas, values, and beliefs. This notion of cultural dominance is studiously avoided in most multicultural anthologies. “Salad bowl” readers generally sidestep the issue of cultural dynamics: intent on celebrating 10 America’s cultural diversity, they offer a relatively static picture of a nation fragmented into a kind of cultural archipelago. “Talk show” readers admit the idea of conflict, but they distort the reality of cultural dynamics by presenting cultural conflicts as a matter of rational — and equally balanced — debate. All of the materials anthologized in Rereading America address the cultural struggles that animate American society — the tensions that result from the expectations established by our dominant cultural myths and the diverse realities that these myths often contradict. Extensive Apparatus Rereading America offers a wealth of features to help students hone their analytic abilities and to aid instructors as they plan class discussions, critical thinking activities, and writing assignments. These include: A Comprehensive Introductory Essay The book begins with a comprehensive essay, “Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths,” that introduces students to the relationships among thinking, cultural diversity, and the notion of dominant cultural myths, and that shows how such myths can influence their academic performance. We’ve also included a section devoted to active reading, which offers suggestions for prereading, prewriting, note taking, text marking, and keeping a reading journal. Another section helps students work with the many visual images included in the book. 11 “Fast Facts” Begin Each Chapter Several provocative statistics before each chapter introduction provide context for students and prompt discussion. For example, “Following the 2016 presidential election, 64% of Americans said that fake news stories online had left the nation confused about basic facts. However, 84% also feel either ‘very confident’ or ‘somewhat confident’ that they can recognize fake news when they see it.” Detailed Chapter Introductions An introductory essay at the beginning of each chapter offers students a thorough overview of each cultural myth, placing it in historical context, raising some of the chapter’s central questions, and orienting students to the chapter’s internal structure. Prereading Activities Following each chapter introduction you’ll find prereading activities designed to encourage students to reflect on what they already know about the cultural myth in question. Often connected to the images that open every chapter, these prereading activities help students to engage the topic even before they begin to read. Questions to Stimulate Critical Thinking Three groups of questions following each selection encourage students to consider the reading carefully in several contexts: “Engaging the Text” focuses on close reading of the selection itself; “Exploring Connections” puts the selection into dialogue with other selections throughout the book; “Extending the Critical Context” invites students to connect the ideas they read about here with sources of knowledge outside the anthology, including library and Internet 12 research, personal experience, interviews, ethnographic- style observations, and so forth. As in past editions, we’ve included a number of questions linking readings with contemporary television shows and feature films for instructors who want to address the interplay of cultural myths and the mass media. Also as in past editions, we’ve included a number of questions focusing on writers’ rhetorical and stylistic strategies. Identified as “Thinking Rhetorically” for easy reference, these questions typically appear as the final item under “Engaging the Text.” “Further Connections” Close Each Chapter Located at the end of each chapter, these questions and assignments invite students to undertake more challenging projects related to the chapter’s theme. They often provide suggestions for additional in-depth research or activities that require community engagement. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Critical thinking is always a collaborative activity, and the kind of critical thinking involved in the creation of a text like Rereading America represents collegial collaboration at its very best. Since publication of the last edition, we’ve heard from instructors across the country who have generously offered suggestions for new classroom activities and comments for further refinements and improvements. Among the many instructors who shared their insights with us as we reworked this edition, we’d particularly like to thank James Allen, College of DuPage; Deborah Bertsch, Columbus State Community 13 College; Ruth Blandon, East Los Angeles College; Nancy Botkin, Indiana University South Bend; Tony Bowers, College of DuPage; Michael Duncan, University of Houston–Downtown; Irene Faass, Minneapolis Community and Technical College; Rebecca Fleming, Columbus State Community College; Karen Forgette, University of Mississippi; Melanie Gagich, Cleveland State University; Rick Garza, Reedley College; Joshua Giorgio- Rubin, Indiana University South Bend; Sara Heaser, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse; Owen Kaufman, Quinebaug Valley Community College; Julia Klimek, Coker College; David McCracken, Coker College; Alisea McLeod, Rust College; Ilona Missakian, Fullerton College; Stan Porter, Merced College; Pegeen Powell, Columbia College Chicago; Edwin Sams, San Jose State University; Jasna Shannon, Coker College; Abha Sood, Monmouth University; Jeffrey Susla, University of Hartford; Kerry Taylor, Anne Arundel Community College; Bronte Wieland, Iowa State University. 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We’re especially 16 grateful to Edwin Hill, Leasa Burton, and John Sullivan. We thank Cara Kaufman, our editor, whose patience and professionalism have helped us immensely throughout the development of this new edition. We also want to thank Pamela Lawson, who served as content project manager; Lumina Datamatics, Inc., who managed copyediting and composition; William Boardman, who produced our new cover; Mark Schaefer, for clearing text permissions; Candice Cheesman and Krystyna Borgen, for researching and tracking down art; and editorial assistant William Hwang who helped out with many of the hundreds of details that go into a project such as this. Finally, we’d like to acknowledge our spouses, Elena Barcia, Liz Silver, and Roy Weitz, for their love and support. Gary Colombo Robert Cullen Bonnie Lisle WE’RE ALL IN. AS ALWAYS. 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Diagnostics that help establish a baseline for instruction Assign diagnostics to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement and to help students plan a course of study. Use visual reports to track performance by topic, class, and student as well as improvement over time. Adaptive exercises that engage students Writer’s Help 2.0 includes LearningCurve, game-like online 19 quizzing that adapts to what students already know and helps them focus on what they need to learn. Student access is packaged with Rereading America at a significant discount. Order ISBN 978-1-319-24513-9 for Writer’s Help 2.0, Hacker Version, or ISBN 978-1-319-24515-3 for Writer’s Help 2.0, Lunsford Version to ensure your students have easy access to online writing support. Students who rent or buy a used book can purchase access and instructors may request free access at macmillanlearning.com/writershelp2. Instructor Resources You have a lot to do in your course. We want to make it easy for you to find the support you need — and to get it quickly. Resources for Teaching Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing, Eleventh Edition, is available as a PDF that can be downloaded from macmillanlearning.com. Visit the instructor resources tab for Rereading America. In addition to chapter overviews and teaching tips, the instructor’s manual includes sample syllabi. 20 //macmillanlearning.comCONTENTS PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS INTRODUCTION: Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths 1 HARMONY AT HOME Myths of Family LOOKING FOR WORK, GARY SOTO “For weeks I had drunk Kool-Aid and watched morning reruns of Father Knows Best, whose family was so uncomplicated in its routine that I very much wanted to imitate it. The first step was to get my brother and sister to wear shoes at dinner.” WHAT WE REALLY MISS ABOUT THE 1950s, STEPHANIE COONTZ “What most people really feel nostalgic about . . . is the belief that the 1950s provided a more family-friendly economic and social environment, an easier climate in which to keep kids on the straight and narrow, and above all, a greater feeling of hope for a family’s long-term future, especially for its young.” THE COLOR OF FAMILY TIES: RACE, CLASS, GENDER, AND EXTENDED FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, NAOMI GERSTEL AND NATALIA SARKISIAN “Marriage actually diminishes ties to kin.” WHEN SHOULD A CHILD BE TAKEN FROM HIS PARENTS?, LARISSA MACFARQUHAR 21 “When a child has been left alone because his mother can’t afford childcare and has to go to work, is that poverty or neglect?” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF AMERICAN FAMILIES FROM BECOMING NICOLE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY, AMY ELLIS NUTT “I am the proud father of identical twins. One is a boy and one is a girl.” FROM LOVING: INTERRACIAL INTIMACY IN AMERICA AND THE THREAT TO WHITE SUPREMACY, SHERYLL CASHIN “White people who have an intimate relationship with a person of color, particularly a black person, can lose the luxury of racial blindness . . . and gain something tragic, yet real.” FROM BEYOND MONOGAMY: POLYAMORY AND THE FUTURE OF POLYQUEER SEXUALITIES, MIMI SCHIPPERS “What if having more than one long-term partner was available to wives as well as husbands, and tolerated or even expected across and within all races and classes?” 2 LEARNING POWER The Myth of Education and Empowerment AGAINST SCHOOL, JOHN TAYLOR GATTO “School has done a pretty good job of turning our children into addicts, but it has done a spectacular job of turning our children into children.” 22 “I JUST WANNA BE AVERAGE,” MIKE ROSE “I was placed in the vocational track, a euphemism for the bottom level. Neither I nor my parents realized what this meant.” FROM SOCIAL CLASS AND THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF WORK, JEAN ANYON “Public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes.” CHOOSING A SCHOOL FOR MY DAUGHTER IN A SEGREGATED CITY, NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES “Legally and culturally, we’ve come to accept segregation once again. Today, across the country, black children are more segregated than they have been at any point in nearly half a century.” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT EDUCATION: ATTENTIONAL DISARRAY, SHERRY TURKLE “Other generations passed notes, doodled, or zoned out. [Oliver’s] generation can send texts and go to Facebook. He calls his generation ‘lucky’: ‘We have the awesome new power to erase boredom.’” BLURRED LINES, TAKE TWO, PEGGY ORENSTEIN “A paramedic who responded to some UC Berkeley calls . . . told a reporter that he had personally stopped a group of these top-tier college boys as they dragged an 23 unconscious girl out of a party. . . . ‘Who knows what their intentions were?’ the paramedic mused.” CITY OF BROKEN DREAMS, SARA GOLDRICK-RAB “‘Money has a lot to do with stress. . . . People obviously start thinking, should I just stop going to school? This is a lot of money I’m paying for classes, I shouldn’t be here.’” 3 THE WILD WIRED WEST Myths of Progress on the Tech Frontier OUR FUTURE SELVES, ERIC SCHMIDT AND JARED COHEN “Soon everyone on Earth will be connected. With five billion more people set to join the virtual world, the boom in digital connectivity will bring gains in productivity, health, education, quality of life and myriad other avenues in the physical world.” HAS THE SMARTPHONE DESTROYED A GENERATION?, JEAN M. TWENGE “There is compelling evidence that the devices we’ve placed in young people’s hands are having profound effects on their lives — and making them seriously unhappy.” LET’S GET LOST, KENNETH GOLDSMITH “I think it’s time to drop the simplistic guilt about wasting time on the Internet and instead begin to explore — and perhaps even celebrate — the complex possibilities that lay before us.” ZOË AND THE TROLLS, NOREEN MALONE “Gamergaters had not only created a whole new set of 24 celebrities, like [Milo] Yiannopoulos and [Mike] Cernovich; it had solidified their methods . . . and their grudges had calcified into a worldview.” TWITTER AND WHITE SUPREMACY, A LOVE STORY, JESSIE DANIELS “On Twitter, Trump and white supremacists are in a racists-loving-each-other-feedback-loop through retweets while they simultaneously use the platform to bully, harass, and threaten black women, Jews, and anyone else who opposes them.” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF WIRED CULTURE HOW WE SOLD OUR SOULS — AND MORE — TO THE INTERNET GIANTS, BRUCE SCHNEIER “It’s the location of your phone, who you’re talking to and what you’re saying, what you’re searching and writing. . . . Corporations gather, store, and analyze this data, often without our consent. . . . We may not like to admit it, but we are under mass surveillance.” YOU WILL LOSE YOUR JOB TO A ROBOT — AND SOONER THAN YOU THINK, KEVIN DRUM “No matter what job you name, robots will be able to do it. They will manufacture themselves, program themselves, and manage themselves. If you don’t appreciate this, then you don’t appreciate what’s barreling toward us.” BIG DATA, GOOGLE, AND THE END OF FREE WILL, YUVAL 25 NOAH HARARI “Proponents of the Dataist worldview perceive the entire universe as a flow of data . . . and believe that humanity’s cosmic vocation is to create an all-encompassing data- processing system — and then merge into it.” 4 MONEY AND SUCCESS The Myth of Individual Opportunity CLASS IN AMERICA, GREGORY MANTSIOS “From cradle to grave, class position has a significant impact on our well-being.” SERVING IN FLORIDA, BARBARA EHRENREICH “I had gone into this venture in the spirit of science, to test a mathematical proposition, but somewhere along the line, in the tunnel vision imposed by long shifts and relentless concentration, it became a test of myself, and clearly I have failed.” FROM A TANGLE OF PATHOLOGY TO A RACE-FAIR AMERICA, ALAN AJA, DANIEL BUSTILLO, WILLIAM DARITY JR., AND DARRICK HAMILTON “What explains the marked and persistent racial gaps in employment and wealth? Is discrimination genuinely of only marginal importance in America today?” FROM HOW THE OTHER HALF BANKS, MEHRSA BARADARAN “Approximately 70 million Americans do not have a bank account or access to traditional financial services. That is more people than live in California, New York, and 26 Maryland combined.” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY FRAMING CLASS, VICARIOUS LIVING, AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION, DIANA KENDALL “The poor do not fare well on television entertainment shows, where writers typically represent them with one- dimensional, bedraggled characters standing on a street corner holding cardboard signs that read ‘Need money for food.’” FROM RESET: MY FIGHT FOR INCLUSION AND LASTING CHANGE, ELLEN K. PAO “So many super-rich people I encountered in the corridors of power believed that the rules didn’t, or shouldn’t, apply to them. Any of the rules.” THANK GOD IT’S MONDAY, KATE ARONOFF “A few trends surface: a near-total collapse of work-life balance, marathon working days, unclear job descriptions, a cult-like enforcement of the company’s mission, and a senior management that’s as demanding and raucous as it is disorganized.” WHY WE SHOULD GIVE FREE MONEY TO EVERYONE, RUTGER BREGMAN “It is now within our means to take the next step in the history of progress: to give each and every person the security of a basic income.” 5 TRUE WOMEN AND REAL MEN 27 Myths of Gender GIRL, JAMAICA KINCAID “Try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming.” HOW TO DO GENDER, LISA WADE AND MYRA MARX FERREE “Somewhere between reaching out to learn the rules [and] learning . . . what rules were ‘meant to be broken,’ we manage to develop a way of doing gender that works for us.” GUYS’ CLUB: NO FAGGOTS, BITCHES, OR PUSSIES ALLOWED, CARLOS ANDRÉS GÓMEZ “I want more than this narrow slice of humanity I’ve been given permission to taste. . . . I’m tired of needing to throw hurtful words like ‘faggot’ or ‘bitch’ or ‘pussy’ around to prove that I’m a man.” SISTERHOOD IS COMPLICATED, RUTH PADAWER “Where . . . should Wellesley draw a line, if a line should even be drawn? At trans men? At transmasculine students? What about students who are simply questioning their gender?” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF GENDER FROM THE GENDER KNOT: “PATRIARCHY,” ALLAN G. JOHNSON “We cannot avoid participating in patriarchy. It was handed to us the moment we come into the world. But we can choose how to participate in it.” 28 “TWO WAYS A WOMAN CAN GET HURT”: ADVERTISING AND VIOLENCE, JEAN KILBOURNE “Ads don’t directly cause violence, of course. But the violent images contribute to the state of terror . . . a climate in which there is widespread and increasing violence.” THE LONGEST WAR, REBECCA SOLNIT “Violence doesn’t have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender.” FROM RUSH LIMBAUGH TO DONALD TRUMP: CONSERVATIVE TALK RADIO AND THE DEFIANT REASSERTION OF WHITE MALE AUTHORITY, JACKSON KATZ “Conservative talk radio, like Trumpism, champions the reassertion of an idealized, throwback White masculinity as the solution to America’s myriad problems at home and abroad.” 6 CREATED EQUAL Myths of Race THE CASE FOR REPARATIONS, TA-NEHISI COATES “An America that asks what it owes its most vulnerable citizens is improved and humane. An America that looks away is ignoring not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the certain sins of the future.” THEORIES AND CONSTRUCTS OF RACE, LINDA HOLTZMAN AND LEON SHARPE “While race itself is fiction, the consequences of racism 29 are a historical and contemporary fact of American life.” GENTRIFICATION, SHERMAN ALEXIE “I waved to them but they didn’t wave back. I pretended they hadn’t noticed me and waved again. They stared at me. They knew what I had done.” NOBODY, MARC LAMONT HILL “The stories of Ferguson, Baltimore, Flint, and countless other sites of gross injustice . . . spotlight the nagging presence of the exploited, the erased, the vulnerable, the dehumanized — those who are imagined, treated, and made to feel like Nobody.” VISUAL PORTFOLIO READING IMAGES OF RACE FROM MUSLIM GIRL, AMANI AL-KHATAHTBEH “I was suddenly confronted by my own suffocating vulnerability: the intense self-realization that, among the three of us, I was the only one wearing a headscarf — the only one ‘visibly’ Muslim.” PASSPORT TO THE NEW WEST, JOSÉ ORDUÑA “In this border region, the horizon between natural violence and state violence has been collapsed. The arid climate, the flash floods, the diamondbacks, the mountain impasses, the distance, and the heat of the sun have all been weaponized. . . . This is murder without a murderer.” HOW IMMIGRANTS BECOME “OTHER,” MARCELO M. SUÁREZ-OROZCO AND CAROLA SUÁREZ-OROZCO “Unauthorized immigrants live in a parallel universe. 30 Their lives are shaped by forces and habits that are unimaginable to many American citizens.” INDEX OF AUTHORS AND TITLES 31 THINKING CRITICALLY, CHALLENGING CULTURAL MYTHS BECOMING A COLLEGE STUDENT Beginning college can be a disconcerting experience. It may be the first time you’ve lived away from home and had to deal with the stresses and pleasures of independence. There’s increased academic competition, increased temptation, and a whole new set of peer pressures. In the dorms you may find yourself among people whose backgrounds make them seem foreign and unapproachable. If you commute, you may be struggling against a feeling of isolation that you’ve never faced before. And then there are increased expectations. For an introductory history class you may read as many books as you covered in a year of high school coursework. In anthropology, you might be asked to conduct ethnographic research — when you’ve barely heard of an ethnography before, much less written one. In English, you may tackle more formal analytic writing in a single semester than you’ve ever done in your life. College typically imposes fewer rules than high school, but also gives you less guidance and makes greater demands — demands that affect the quality as well as the quantity of your work. By your first midterm exam, you may suspect that your previous academic experience is irrelevant, that nothing you’ve 32 done in school has prepared you to think, read, or write in the ways your professors expect. Your sociology instructor says she doesn’t care whether you can remember all the examples in the textbook as long as you can apply the theoretical concepts to real situations. In your composition class, the perfect five- paragraph essay you turn in for your first assignment is dismissed as “superficial, mechanical, and dull.” Meanwhile, the lecturer in your political science or psychology course is rejecting ideas about country, religion, family, and self that have always been a part of your deepest beliefs. How can you cope with these new expectations and challenges? There is no simple solution, no infallible five-step method that works for everyone. As you meet the personal challenges of college, you’ll grow as a human being. You’ll begin to look critically at your old habits, beliefs, and values, to see them in relation to the new world you’re entering. You may have to re- examine your relationships to family, friends, neighborhood, and heritage. You’ll have to sort out your strengths from your weaknesses and make tough choices about who you are and who you want to become. Your academic work demands the same process of serious self-examination. To excel in college work you need to grow intellectually — to become a critical thinker. WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING? What do instructors mean when they tell you to think critically? Most would say that it involves asking questions rather than 33 memorizing information. Instead of simply collecting the “facts,” a critical thinker probes them, looking for underlying assumptions and ideas. Instead of focusing on dates and events in history or symptoms in psychology, she probes for motives, causes — an explanation of how these things came to be. A critical thinker cultivates the ability to imagine and value points of view different from her own — then strengthens, refines, enlarges, or reshapes her ideas in light of those other perspectives. She is at once open and skeptical: receptive to new ideas yet careful to test them against previous experience and knowledge. In short, a critical thinker is an active learner, someone with the ability to shape, not merely absorb, knowledge. All this is difficult to put into practice, because it requires getting outside your own skin and seeing the world from multiple perspectives. To see why critical thinking doesn’t come naturally, take another look at the cover of this book. Many would scan the title, Rereading America, take in the surface meaning — to reconsider America — and go on to page one. There isn’t much to question here; it just “makes sense.” But what happens with the student who brings a different perspective? For example, a student from El Salvador might justly complain that the title reflects an ethnocentric view of what it means to be an American. After all, since America encompasses all the countries of North, South, and Central America, he lived in “America” long before arriving in the United States. When this student reads the title, then, he 34 actually does reread it; he reads it once in the “commonsense” way but also from the perspective of someone who has lived in a country dominated by U.S. intervention and interests. This double vision or double perspective frees him to look beyond the “obvious” meaning of the book and to question its assumptions. Of course you don’t have to be bicultural to become a proficient critical thinker. You can develop a genuine sensitivity to alternative perspectives even if you’ve never lived outside your hometown. But to do so you need to recognize that there are no “obvious meanings.” The automatic equation that the native-born student makes between “America” and the United States seems to make sense only because our culture has traditionally endorsed the idea that the United States is America and, by implication, that other countries in this hemisphere are somehow inferior — not the genuine article. We tend to accept this equation and its unfortunate implications because we are products of our culture. THE POWER OF CULTURAL MYTHS Culture shapes the way we think; it tells us what “makes sense.” It holds people together by providing us with a shared set of customs, values, ideas, and beliefs, as well as a common language. We live enmeshed in this cultural web: it influences the way we relate to others, the way we look, our tastes, our 35 habits; it enters our dreams and desires. But as culture binds us together it also selectively blinds us. As we grow up, we accept ways of looking at the world, ways of thinking and being that might best be characterized as cultural frames of reference or cultural myths. These myths help us understand our place in the world — our place as prescribed by our culture. They define our relationships to friends and lovers, to the past and future, to nature, to power, and to nation. Becoming a critical thinker means learning how to look beyond these cultural myths and the assumptions embedded in them. You may associate the word “myth” primarily with the myths of the ancient Greeks. The legends of gods and heroes like Athena, Zeus, and Oedipus embodied the central ideals and values of Greek civilization — notions like civic responsibility, the primacy of male authority, and humility before the gods. The stories were “true” not in a literal sense but as reflections of important cultural beliefs. These myths assured the Greeks of the nobility of their origins; they provided models for the roles that Greeks would play in their public and private lives; they justified inequities in Greek society; they helped the Greeks understand human life and destiny in terms that “made sense” within the framework of that culture. Our cultural myths do much the same. Take, for example, the American dream of success. Since the first European colonists came to the “New World” some four centuries ago, America has been synonymous with the idea of individual opportunity. For 36 generations, immigrants have been lured across the ocean to make their fortunes in a land where the streets were said to be paved with gold. Of course we don’t always agree on what success means or how it should be measured. Some calculate the meaning of success in terms of six-figure salaries or the acreage of their country estates. Others discover success in the attainment of a dream — whether it’s graduating from college, achieving excellence on the playing field, or winning new rights and opportunities for less fortunate fellow citizens. For some Americans, the dream of success is the very foundation of everything that’s right about life in the United States. For others, the American dream is a cultural mirage that keeps workers happy in low-paying jobs while their bosses pocket the profits of an unfair system. But whether you embrace or reject the dream of success, you can’t escape its influence. As Americans, we are steeped in a culture that prizes individual achievement; growing up in the United States, we are told again and again by parents, teachers, advertisers, Hollywood writers, politicians, and opinion makers that we, too, can achieve our dream — that we, too, can “Just Do It” if we try. You might aspire to become an Internet tycoon, or you might rebel and opt for a simple life, but you can’t ignore the impact of the myth. Cultural myths gain such enormous power over us by insinuating themselves into our thinking before we’re aware of them. Most are learned at a deep, even unconscious level. Gender roles are a good example. As children we get gender role models from our families, our schools, our churches, and 37 other important institutions. We see them acted out in the relationships between family members or portrayed on television, in the movies, or in song lyrics. Before long, the culturally dominant roles we see for women and men appear to us as “self-evident”: for many Americans it still seems “natural” for a man to be strong, competitive, and heterosexual, just as it may seem “unnatural” for a man to shun competitive activity or to be romantically attracted to other men. Our most dominant cultural myths shape the way we perceive the world and blind us to alternative ways of seeing and being. When something violates the expectations that such myths create, it may even be called unnatural, immoral, or perverse. CULTURAL MYTHS AS OBSTACLES TO CRITICAL THINKING Cultural myths can have more subtle effects as well. In academic work they can reduce the complexity of our reading and thinking. A few years ago, for example, a professor at Los Angeles City College noted that he and his students couldn’t agree in their interpretations of the following poem by Theodore Roethke: My Papa’s Waltz The whiskey on your breath Could make a small boy dizzy; 38 But I hung on like death: Such waltzing was not easy. We romped until the pans Slid from the kitchen shelf; My mother’s countenance Could not unfrown itself. The hand that held my wrist Was battered on one knuckle; At every step you missed My right ear scraped a buckle. You beat time on my head With a palm caked hard by dirt, Then waltzed me off to bed Still clinging to your shirt. The instructor read this poem as a clear expression of a child’s love for his blue-collar father, a rough-and-tumble man who had worked hard all his life (“a palm caked hard by dirt”), who was not above taking a drink of whiskey to ease his mind, but who also found the time to “waltz” his son off to bed. The students didn’t see this at all. They saw the poem as a story about an abusive father and heavy drinker. They seemed unwilling to look beyond the father’s roughness and the whiskey on his breath, equating these with drunken violence. Although the poem does suggest an element of fear mingled with the boy’s excitement (“I hung on like death”), the class 39 ignored its complexity — the mixture of fear, love, and boisterous fun that colors the son’s memory of his father. It’s possible that some students might overlook the positive traits in the father in this poem because they have suffered child abuse themselves. But this couldn’t be true for all the students in the class. The difference between these interpretations lies, instead, in the influence of cultural myths. After all, in a culture now dominated by images of the family that emphasize “positive” parenting, middle-class values, and sensitive fathers, it’s no wonder that students refused to see this father sympathetically. Our culture simply doesn’t associate good, loving families with drinking or with even the suggestion of physical roughness. Years of acculturation — the process of internalizing cultural values — leave us with a set of rigid categories for “good” and “bad” parents, narrow conceptions of how parents should look, talk, and behave toward their children. These cultural categories work like mental pigeonholes: they help us sort out and evaluate our experiences rapidly, almost before we’re consciously aware of them. They give us a helpful shorthand for interpreting the world; after all, we can’t stop to ponder every new situation we meet as if it were a puzzle or a philosophical problem. But while cultural categories help us make practical decisions in everyday life, they also impose their inherent rigidity on our thinking and thus limit our ability to understand the complexity of our experience. They reduce the world to dichotomies — simplified either/or choices: either women or 40 men, either heterosexuals or homosexuals, either nature or culture, either animal or human, either “alien” or American, either them or us. Rigid cultural beliefs can present serious obstacles to success for first-year college students. In a psychology class, for example, students’ cultural myths may so color their thinking that they find it nearly impossible to comprehend Freud’s ideas about infant sexuality. Ingrained assumptions about childhood innocence and sexual guilt may make it impossible for them to see children as sexual beings — a concept absolutely basic to an understanding of the history of psychoanalytic theory. Yet college-level critical inquiry thrives on exactly this kind of revision of common sense: academics prize the unusual, the subtle, the ambiguous, the complex — and expect students to appreciate them as well. Good critical thinkers in all academic disciplines welcome the opportunity to challenge conventional ways of seeing the world; they seem to take delight in questioning everything that appears clear and self-evident. QUESTIONING: THE BASIS OF CRITICAL THINKING By questioning the myths that dominate our culture, we can begin to resist the limits they impose on our vision. In fact, they invite such questioning. Often our personal experience fails to fit the images the myths project: a young woman’s ambition to be a test pilot may clash with the ideal of femininity our culture 41 promotes; a Cambodian immigrant who has suffered from racism in the United States may question our professed commitment to equality; a student in the vocational track may not see education as the road to success that we assume it is; and few of our families these days fit the mythic model of husband, wife, two kids, a dog, and a house in the suburbs. Moreover, because cultural myths serve such large and varied needs, they’re not always coherent or consistent. Powerful contradictory myths coexist in our society and our own minds. For example, while the myth of “the melting pot” celebrates equality, the myth of individual success pushes us to strive for inequality — to “get ahead” of everyone else. Likewise, our attitudes toward education are deeply paradoxical: on one level, Americans tend to see schooling as a valuable experience that unites us in a common culture and helps us bring out the best in ourselves; yet at the same time, we suspect that formal classroom instruction stifles creativity and chokes off natural intelligence and enthusiasm. These contradictions infuse our history, literature, and popular culture; they’re so much a part of our thinking that we tend to take them for granted, unaware of their inconsistencies. Learning to recognize contradictions lies at the very heart of critical thinking, for intellectual conflict inevitably generates questions. Can both (or all) perspectives be true? What evidence do I have for the validity of each? Is there some way to reconcile them? Are there still other alternatives? Questions like these 42 represent the beginning of serious academic analysis. They stimulate the reflection, discussion, and research that are the essence of good scholarship. Thus whether we find contradictions between myth and lived experience, or between opposing myths, the wealth of powerful, conflicting material generated by our cultural mythology offers a particularly rich context for critical inquiry. THE STRUCTURE OF REREADING AMERICA We’ve designed this book to help you develop the habits of mind you’ll need to become a critical thinker — someone who recognizes the way that cultural myths shape thinking and can move beyond them to evaluate issues from multiple perspectives. Each of the book’s six chapters addresses one of the dominant myths of American culture. We begin with the myth that’s literally closest to home — the myth of the model family. In Chapter One, “Harmony at Home,” we begin with readings that show what makes the mythical nuclear family so appealing and yet so elusive. Subsequent readings enrich our understanding of family by exploring the intersections of family life with race, class, and gender — key themes that resonate throughout Rereading America. These selections ask fascinating questions: How can a family best help a transgender daughter navigate her adolescence? When should child protection agencies or courts intervene in a family’s affairs, and are their life-altering decisions swayed by racial bias? Is 43 choosing a partner of a different ethnicity a political as well as a romantic act? And what about setting monogamy aside and choosing two or more partners? Chapter Two, “Learning Power,” gives you the chance to reflect on how the “hidden curriculum” of schooling has shaped your own attitudes toward learning. You’ll also encounter readings here that address problems currently associated with higher education, including campus sexual assault and student debt. We begin our exploration of American cultural myths by focusing on home and education because most students find it easy to make personal connections with these topics and because they both involve institutions — families and schools — that are surrounded by a rich legacy of cultural stories and myths. These two introductory chapters are followed by consideration of one of the most durable American myths — our national belief in progress. In Chapter Three, “The Wild Wired West: Myths of Progress on the Tech Frontier,” you’ll have the chance to explore how technologies like the Internet and social media are reshaping American lives. You’ll also be invited to consider how technologies like data mining and artificial intelligence may threaten our privacy, our ability to make a living, and even our sense of personal agency. The second portion of the book focuses on three cultural myths that offer greater intellectual and emotional challenges because they touch on highly charged social issues. Chapter Four introduces what is perhaps the most famous of all American myths, the American Dream. “Money and Success” 44 addresses the idea of unlimited personal opportunity that brought millions of immigrants to our shores and set the story of America in motion. It invites you to weigh some of the human costs of the dream and to reconsider your own definition of a successful life. The next chapter, “True Women and Real Men,” considers the socially constructed categories of gender — the traditional roles that enforce differences between women and men. This chapter explores the perspectives of Americans who defy conventional gender boundaries. Chapter Six, “Created Equal,” critically examines the meaning of race and the myth of racial and ethnic superiority. It looks at the historical and contemporary consequences of racism, offers personal perspectives on racial and religious discrimination, and explores antiracist activism. Each of these two chapters questions how our culture divides and defines our world, how it artificially channels our experience into oppositions like black and white, male and female, straight and gay. THE SELECTIONS Our identities — who we are and how we relate to others — are deeply entangled with the cultural values we have internalized since infancy. Cultural myths become so closely identified with our personal beliefs that rereading them actually means rereading ourselves, rethinking the way we see the world. Questioning long-held assumptions can be an exhilarating experience, but it can be distressing too. Thus you may find certain selections in Rereading America difficult, controversial, 45 or even downright offensive. They are meant to challenge you and to provoke classroom debate. But as you discuss the ideas you encounter in this book, remind yourself that your classmates may bring with them very different, and equally profound, beliefs. Keep an open mind, listen carefully, and treat other perspectives with the same respect you’d expect other people to show for your own. It’s by encountering new ideas and engaging with others in open dialogue that we learn to grow. Because Rereading America explores cultural myths that shape our thinking, it doesn’t focus on the kind of well-defined public issues you might expect to find in a traditional composition anthology. You won’t be reading arguments for and against affirmative action, bilingual education, or the death penalty here. We’ve deliberately avoided the traditional pro- and-con approach because we want you to aim deeper than that; we want you to focus on the subtle cultural beliefs that underlie, and frequently determine, the debates that are waged on public issues. We’ve also steered clear of the “issues approach” because we feel it reinforces simplistic either/or thinking. Polarizing American culture into a series of debates doesn’t encourage you to examine your own beliefs or explore how they’ve been shaped by the cultures you’re part of. To begin to appreciate the influence of your own cultural myths, you need new perspectives: you need to stand outside the ideological machinery that makes American culture run to begin to appreciate its power. That’s why we’ve included many 46 strongly dissenting views: there are works by community activists, gay-rights activists, socialists, libertarians, and more. You may find that their views confirm your own experience of what it means to be an American, or you may find that you bitterly disagree with them. We only hope that you will use the materials here to gain some insight into the values and beliefs that shape our thinking and our national identity. This book is meant to complicate the mental categories that our cultural myths have established for us. Our intention is not to present a new “truth” to replace the old but to expand the range of ideas you bring to all your reading and writing in college. We believe that learning to see and value other perspectives will enable you to think more critically — to question, for yourself, the truth of any statement. You may also note that several selections in Rereading America challenge the way you think writing is supposed to look or sound. You won’t find any “classic” essays in this book, the finely crafted reflective essays on general topics that are often held up as models of “good writing.” It’s not that we reject this type of essay in principle. It’s just that this kind of writing has lost its appeal for many authors who stand outside the dominant culture, and it is being supplanted today by new forms of expression evolving in academia, in the business world, and on the Internet. Our selections, instead, come from a wide variety of sources: professional books and journals from many disciplines, popular 47 magazines, college textbooks, personal memoirs, literary works, nonfiction best sellers, and online publications. We’ve included this variety partly for the very practical reason that you’re likely to encounter texts like these in your college coursework. But we also see textual diversity, like ethnic and political diversity, as a way to multiply perspectives and stimulate critical analysis. For example, an academic article like Jean Anyon’s study of social class and school curriculum might give you a new way of understanding Mike Rose’s personal narrative about his classroom experiences. On the other hand, you may find that some of the teachers Rose encounters don’t neatly fit Anyon’s theoretical model. Do such discrepancies mean that Anyon’s argument is invalid? That her analysis needs to be modified to account for these teachers? That the teachers are simply exceptions to the rule? You’ll probably want to consider your own classroom experience as you wrestle with such questions. Throughout the book, we’ve chosen readings that “talk to each other” in this way and that draw on the cultural knowledge you bring with you. These readings invite you to join the conversation; we hope they raise difficult questions, prompt lively discussion, and stimulate critical inquiry. THE POWER OF DIALOGUE Good thinking, like good writing and good reading, is an intensely social activity. Thinking, reading, and writing are all forms of relationship — when you read, you enter into dialogue 48 with an author about the subject at hand; when you write, you address an imaginary reader, testing your ideas against probable responses, reservations, and arguments. Thus you can’t become an accomplished writer simply by declaring your right to speak or by criticizing as an act of principle: real authority comes when you enter into the discipline of an active exchange of opinions and interpretations. Critical thinking, then, is always a matter of dialogue and debate — discovering relationships between apparently unrelated ideas, finding parallels between your own experiences and the ideas you read about, exploring points of agreement and conflict between yourself and other people. We’ve designed the readings and questions in this text to encourage you to make just these kinds of connections. You’ll notice, for example, that we often ask you to divide into small groups to discuss readings, and we frequently suggest that you take part in projects that require you to collaborate with your classmates. We’re convinced that the only way you can learn critical reading, thinking, and writing is by actively engaging others in an intellectual exchange. So we’ve built into the text many opportunities for listening, discussion, and debate. The questions that follow each selection should guide you in critical thinking. Like the readings, they’re intended to get you started, not to set limits; we strongly recommend that you also devise your own questions and pursue them either individually or in study groups. We’ve divided our questions into three 49 categories. Here’s what to expect from each: Those labeled “Engaging the Text” focus on the individual selection they follow. They’re designed to highlight important issues in the reading, to help you begin questioning and evaluating what you’ve read, and sometimes to remind you to consider the author’s choices of language, evidence, structure, and style. Questions in this category are labeled “Thinking Rhetorically,” and we’ve included more of them in this edition. The questions labeled “Exploring Connections” will lead you from the selection you’ve just finished to one or more other readings in this book. When you think critically about these connecting questions, though, you’ll see some real collisions of ideas and perspectives, not just polite and predictable “differences of opinion.” The final questions for each reading, “Extending the Critical Context,” invite you to extend your thinking beyond the book — to your family, your community, your college, the media, the Internet, or the more traditional research environment of the library. The emphasis here is on creating new knowledge by applying ideas from this book to the world around you and by testing these ideas in your world. ACTIVE READING You’ve undoubtedly read many textbooks, but it’s unlikely that you’ve had to deal with the kind of analytic, argumentative, and 50 scholarly writing you’ll find in college and in Rereading America. These different writing styles require a different approach to reading as well. In high school you probably read to “take in” information, often for the sole purpose of reproducing it later on a test. In college you’ll also be expected to recognize larger issues, such as the author’s theoretical slant, her goals and methods, her assumptions, and her relationship to other writers and researchers. These expectations can be especially difficult in the first two years of college, when you take introductory courses that survey large, complex fields of knowledge. With all these demands on your attention, you’ll need to read actively to keep your bearings. Think of active reading as a conversation between you and the text: instead of listening passively as the writer talks, respond to what she says with questions and comments of your own. Here are some specific techniques you can practice to become a more active reader. Prereading and Prewriting It’s best with most college reading to “preread” the text. In prereading, you briefly look over whatever information you have on the author and the selection itself. Reading chapter introductions and headnotes like those provided in this book can save you time and effort by giving you information about the author’s background and concerns, the subject or thesis of the selection, and its place in the chapter as a whole. Also take a look at the title and at any headings or subheadings in the piece. These will give you further clues about an article’s general 51 scope and organization. Next, quickly skim the entire selection, paying a bit more attention to the first few paragraphs and the conclusion. Now you should have a pretty good sense of the author’s position — what she’s trying to say in this piece of writing. At this point you may do one of several things before you settle down to in-depth reading. You may want to jot down in a few lines what you think the author is doing. Or you may want to make a list of questions you can ask about this topic based on your prereading. Or you may want to freewrite a page or so on the subject. Informally writing out your own ideas will prepare you for more in-depth reading by recalling what you already know about the topic. We emphasize writing about what you’ve read because reading and writing are complementary activities: being an avid reader will help you as a writer by familiarizing you with a wide range of ideas and styles to draw on; likewise, writing about what you’ve read will give you a deeper understanding of your reading. In fact, the more actively you “process” or reshape what you’ve read, the better you’ll comprehend and remember it. So you’ll learn more effectively by marking a text as you read than by simply reading; taking notes as you read is even more effective than marking, and writing about the material for your own purposes (putting it in your own words and connecting it with what you already know) is better still. 52 Marking the Text and Taking Notes After prereading and prewriting, you’re ready to begin critical reading in earnest. As you read, be sure to highlight ideas and phrases that strike you as especially significant — those that seem to capture the gist of a particular paragraph or section, or those that relate directly to the author’s purpose or argument. While prereading can help you identify central ideas, you may find that you need to reread difficult sections or flip back and skim an earlier passage if you feel yourself getting lost. Many students think of themselves as poor readers if they can’t whip through an article at high speed without pausing. However, the best readers read recursively — that is, they shuttle back and forth, browsing, skimming, and rereading as necessary, depending on their interest, their familiarity with the subject, and the difficulty of the material. This shuttling actually parallels what goes on in your mind when you read actively, as you alternately recall prior knowledge or experience and predict or look for clues about where the writer is going next. Keep a record of your mental shuttling by writing comments in the margins as you read. It’s often useful to gloss the contents of each paragraph or section, to summarize it in a word or two written alongside the text. This note will serve as a reminder or key to the section when you return to it for further thinking, discussion, or writing. You may also want to note passages that puzzled you. Or you may want to write down personal reactions or questions stimulated by the reading. Take time to ponder 53 why you felt confused or annoyed or affirmed by a particular passage. Let yourself wonder “out loud” in the margins as you read. The following section illustrates one student’s notes on a passage from Mike Rose’s “I Just Wanna Be Average” (p. 123). In this example, you can see that the reader puts glosses or summary comments to the left of the passage and questions or personal responses to the right. You should experiment and create your own system of note taking, one that works best for the way you read. Just remember that your main goals in taking notes are to help you understand the author’s overall position, to deepen and refine your responses to the selection, and to create a permanent record of those responses. 54 55 Keeping a Reading Journal You may also want (or be required) to keep a reading journal in response to the selections you cover in Rereading America. In such a journal you'd keep all the freewriting that you do either before or after reading. Some students find it helpful to keep a double-entry journal, writing initial responses on the left side of the page and adding later reflections and reconsiderations on the right. You may want to use your journal as a place to explore personal reactions to your reading. For example, you might make notes about ideas or lines in the reading that surprise you. Or you might want to note how the selection connects to your own experiences or why you found it particularly interesting or dull. You can do this by writing out imaginary dialogues — between two writers who address the same subject, between 56 yourself and the writer of the selection, or between two parts of yourself. You can use the journal as a place to rewrite passages from a poem or an essay in your own voice and from your own point of view. You can write letters to an author you particularly like or dislike or to a character in a story or poem. You might even draw a cartoon that comments on one of the reading selections. Many students don't write as well as they could because they're afraid to take risks. They may have been repeatedly penalized for breaking "rules" of grammar or essay form; their main concern becomes avoiding trouble rather than exploring ideas or experimenting with style. But without risk and experimentation, there's little possibility of growth. One of the benefits of journal writing is that it gives you a place to experiment with ideas, free from worries about "correctness." Here are two examples of student journal entries, in response to Mike Rose's "I Just Wanna Be Average" (we reprint the entries as they were written): Entry 1: Personal Response to Rose It's interesting that Rose describes how school can label you and stifle your dreams and also how it can empower you and open doors in your life. When he goes to Our Lady, they put him in a crappy Voc-Ed. track by mistake — incredible because this could mess up his entire life. I 57 knew lots of kids who were forced into ESL back in middle school just because they spoke Spanish. What a waste! Still, when Rose meets Mr. MacFarland, his whole life changes cause the guy makes learning exciting and he knows how to hook the kids on ideas. Mr. Moore was my Mr. Mac. He used to push us to read stuff way beyond grade level, things like Fight Club and Malcolm X. He was also like MacFarland because he made everything personal. We used to spend weeks doing research on big issues like police brutality — and then we'd hold day-long debates that'd get really heated. But then there were a-hole teachers too — the ones who didn't care and would just sit there and read the paper while we did homework drills in our books. We had some nut-jobs like Brother Dill, but nobody'd dare hit us or call us names. All that's changed since Rose was in school — or maybe it's changed at least in public school. Maybe the nuns still can get away with it? Entry 2: Dialogue Between Rose and Ken Harvey Rose: I never really understood why you said that you just wanted to be average. It always seemed to me that you were just buying into the bull that the Voc-Ed. teachers were handing out about us. Why would you give up when you were obviously smarter than most of them? Harvey: You wouldn't understand 'cause you were one of 58 MacFarland's favorites. You were a hipster-nerd and that was the ID that got you through school. Mine was different. I was a jock and a rebel—and both seemed better than being a brain. We thought you guys were just kissing up—and that you read books because you couldn't make it on the field. Rose: But you just threw your future away. We all knew you were a leader and that you could've done anything if you tried. Harvey: Yeah, but why try? I wasn't interested in postponing my life the way you were. I had girlfriends and people thought I was cool. My parents didn't expect much out of me except sports. So why not just do the minimum in school and enjoy my life? Reading a lot of weird books on religion and philosophy didn't make me particularly happy. Maybe we just wanted different things. Have you thought about that? Rose: I just figured you were protecting yourself against being classified as a Voc-Ed. Protecting yourself against being seen as working class. Harvey: Maybe I wasn't. Maybe I was happy being who I was and I didn't need school to change me the way you did. School just isn't for everybody. You'll notice that in the first entry the writer uses Rose's 59 memoir as a point of departure for her own reflections on school and education. She also uses the journal as a place to pose questions about Rose's essay and about schooling in general. In the second entry she explores how a shift in perspective might challenge Rose's conclusions about Ken Harvey and his attitude toward education. Rose sees the damage schooling can do, but he ultimately accepts the idea that education can empower us. That's why he assumes that Harvey has given up on himself when he won't try to be more than just average. But what if Harvey's choice isn't just a matter of self- protection? What if it's a rational expression of who he is? Here, the writer uses an imaginary dialogue to explore alternatives to Rose's own thinking about school as a means of self- transformation. WORKING WITH VISUAL IMAGES The myths we examine in Rereading America make their presence felt not only in the world of print — essays, stories, poems, memoirs — but in every aspect of our culture. Consider, for example, the myth of "the American family." If you want to design a minivan, a restaurant, a cineplex, a park, a synagogue, a personal computer, or a tax code, you had better have some idea of what families are like and how they behave. Most important, you need a good grasp of what Americans believe about families, about the mythology of the American family. The Visual Portfolio in each chapter, while maintaining our focus on myths, also carries you beyond the medium of print 60 and thus lets you practice your analytic skills in a different arena. Although we are all surrounded by visual stimuli, we don't always think critically about what we see. Perhaps we are numbed by constant exposure to a barrage of images on TV, in films, and in social media and other websites. In any case, here are a few tips on how to get the most out of the images we have collected for this book. Take the time to look at the images carefully; first impressions are important, but many of the photographs contain details that might not strike you immediately. Once you have noted the immediate impact of an image, try focusing on separate elements such as background, foreground, facial expressions, and body language. Read any text that appears in the photograph, even if it's on a T-shirt or a belt buckle. Remember that many photographs are carefully constructed, no matter how "natural" they may look. In a photo for a magazine advertisement, for example, everything is meticulously chosen and arranged: certain actors or models are cast for their roles; they wear makeup; their clothes are really costumes; the location or setting of the ad is designed to reinforce its message; lighting is artificial; and someone is trying to sell you something. Also be sure to consider the visual images contextually, not in isolation. How does each resemble or differ from its neighbors in the portfolio? How does it reinforce or challenge cultural beliefs or stereotypes? Put another way, how can it be 61 understood in the context of the myths examined in Rereading America? Each portfolio is accompanied by a few questions to help you begin this type of analysis. You can also build a broader context for our visual images by collecting your own, then working in small groups to create a portfolio or collage. Finally, remember that both readings and visual images are just starting points for discussion. You have access to a wealth of other perspectives and ideas among your family, friends, classmates; in your college library; in your personal experience; and in your imagination. We urge you to consult them all as you grapple with the perspectives you encounter in this text. 62 CHAPTER 1 HARMONY AT HOME Myths of Family Self-portrait with family in SUV, Michigan (2007) FAST FACTS 1. Among adults younger than 35, roughly 61% live without a spouse or partner. In 2017 the median household income for partnered adults was $86,000, versus $61,000 for unpartnered adults. 63 2. Nearly 33% of the U.S. adult population share a household with at least one "extra adult" (e.g., an adult child, a sibling, an elderly parent, or an unrelated housemate). This percentage, measured in 2017, is up from 14% in 1995. 3. Since the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide (Obergefell v. Hodges), the percentage of same-sex cohabiting couples who are married has risen from 38% to 61%. LGBTQ Americans who marry are twice as likely as the general public to cite legal rights and benefits as a very important reason to marry. 4. Ten percent of Americans today say they would oppose a close relative marrying someone of a different race or ethnicity — down from 32% in 2000. The percentage of nonblack Americans who would oppose a relative marrying a black person has dropped from 63% in 1990 to 14% today. 5. Among 41 countries studied by the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, the United States is the only country that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents. Several countries offer a year or more of paid leave. 6. Nearly 450,000 American children live in foster care. Drug abuse by a parent is associated with roughly a third of the cases in which a child is removed from home. 7. Estimates of the number of Americans in polyamorous (multiple- partner) relationships vary widely — from 1.2 to 9.8 million people, according to Internet polyamory sites. Data from (1), (2), (3), (4) Pew Research Center, tank/2017/10/11/the-share-of-americans-living-without-a-partner-has-increased- especially-among-young-adults/; tank/2018/01/31/more-adults-now-share-their-living-space-driven-in-part-by-parents- living-with-their-adult-children/; 64 //www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/31/more-adults-now-share-their-living-space-driven-in-part-by-parents-living-with-their-adult-children/ tank/2017/06/12/key-facts-about-race-and-marriage-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia/; (5) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, (6) "Number of Children in Foster Care Continues to Increase," US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, November 30, 2017; (7) Elisabeth Sheff, The Polyamorists Next Door: Inside Multiple-Partner Relationships and Families (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 3. THE FAMILY MAY BE THE ORIGINAL CULTURAL INSTITUTION; people lived in families long before they invented the wheel, began farming, or founded cities. You might think that by now we would have clear and stable ideas about what defines a family, how families form and dissolve, what forms they can take, and how they can best raise their children, but such absolutely fundamental elements of family life have shifted dramatically through the centuries and continue to change today — perhaps faster than ever before. The most dramatic recent change in the United States is the groundswell of support for same-sex marriage: marriage equality, a concept almost unheard of thirty years ago, is now being claimed as a fundamental human right. Other changes are garnering fewer headlines but nonetheless are reshaping the values and behaviors we associate with family life. Both divorce and cohabitation have become more common and less stigmatized, and "singlehood" has gained traction as a perfectly normal alternative to marriage. An increasing number of adult Americans are now living in multigenerational families, whose larger households help them economize in tough times as well as 65 //www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdfprovide for elderly members. Meanwhile, birth control, reproductive technologies, surrogacy, and genetic screening for heritable diseases are giving people more choices about whether, when, and how to have children. Although experts agree that family and marriage are changing, there is little consensus about what these changes mean. Are we witnessing the collapse of family values, or a welcome evolution beyond restrictive and discriminatory models of family life? Central to this cultural debate is the traditional nuclear family — Dad, Mom, a couple of kids, maybe a dog, and a spacious suburban home. Millions of Americans aspire to this middle-class "model family," while others see it as limiting, unattainable, or simply outdated. Whatever value you, your family, or your community may place on the nuclear family, it's important to recognize that it has been around only a short time, especially when compared with the long history of the family itself. In fact, what we call the "traditional" family, headed by a breadwinner-father and a housewife-mother, has existed for little more than two hundred years, and the suburbs came into being only in the 1950s. But the family as a social institution was legally recognized in Western culture at least as far back as the Code of Hammurabi, created in ancient Mesopotamia some four thousand years ago. To appreciate how profoundly concepts of family life have changed, consider the absolute power of the Mesopotamian father, the patriarch: the law allowed him to use 66 any of his dependents, including his wife, as collateral for loans or even to sell family members outright to pay his debts. Although patriarchal authority was less absolute in Puritan America, fathers remained the undisputed heads of families. Seventeenth-century Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire enacted laws condemning rebellious children to severe punishment and, in extreme cases, to death. In the early years of the American colonies, as in Western culture stretching back to Hammurabi's time, unquestioned authority within the family served as both the model for and the basis of state authority. Just as family members owed complete obedience to the father, so all citizens owed unquestioned loyalty to the king and his legal representatives. In his influential volume Democracy in America (1835), French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville describes the relationship between the traditional European family and the old political order: Among aristocratic nations, social institutions recognize, in truth, no one in the family but the father; children are received by society at his hands; society governs him, he governs them. Thus, the parent not only has a natural right, but acquires a political right to command them; he is the author and the support of his family; but he is also its constituted ruler. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, new ideas about individual freedom and democracy were stirring the colonies. And by the time Tocqueville visited the United States in 1831, 67 they had evidently worked a revolution in the family as well as in the nation's political structure. He observes: "When the condition of society becomes democratic, and men adopt as their general principle that it is good and lawful to judge of all things for one's self,… the power which the opinions of a father exercise over those of his sons diminishes, as well as his legal power." To Tocqueville, this shift away from strict patriarchal rule signaled a change in the emotional climate of families: "as manners and laws become more democratic, the relation of father and son becomes more intimate and more affectionate; rules and authority are less talked of, confidence and tenderness are oftentimes increased, and it would seem that the natural bond is drawn closer." In Tocqueville's view, the American family heralded a new era in human relations. Freed from the rigid hierarchy of the past, parents and children could meet as near equals, joined by "filial love and fraternal affection." This vision of the democratic family — a harmonious association of parents and children united by love and trust — has mesmerized popular culture in the United States. From the nineteenth century to the present, popular novels, magazines, music, and advertising images have glorified the comforts of loving domesticity. For several decades we have absorbed our strongest impressions of the family from television. In the 1950s we watched the Andersons on Father Knows Best, the Stones on The Donna Reed Show, and the real-life Nelson family on The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet — shows which portrayed the mythical American family as happy, healthy, and modestly 68 affluent. Over the next three decades the model stretched to include single parents, second marriages, and interracial adoptions on My Three Sons, The Brady Bunch, and Diff 'rent Strokes, but the underlying ideal of wise, loving parents and harmonious happy families remained unchanged. More recently, our collective vision of the family has grown more complicated. In shows like The Sopranos, Sister Wives, Here and Now, Transparent, The Fosters, and This Is Us, we encounter not only diverse families (for example, same-sex, multiracial, or polygamous households), but also a wide range of social issues including adoption, foster care, infidelity, substance abuse, domestic abuse, immigration status, and transgenderism. Although media portrayals of family have evolved dramatically since the 1950s, our never-ending fascination with television families underscores the cultural importance of family dynamics and family boundaries. There are a few reasons why Rereading America begins with this chapter on myths of family. First, we all know a lot about families from living in our own families, observing our communities, and consuming various media. We may not be licensed experts, but we are deeply knowledgeable. In addition, the notion of an ideal nuclear family is a perfect example of a cultural myth that held sway for decades despite its dubious relation to real life. As you proceed through the chapter you can judge for yourself how much power that myth retains today. Finally, other key topics in Rereading America — notions about gender, race, and success, for example — are powerfully shaped 69 by family life. The myth of the idealized nuclear family is explored in the chapter's first reading selection, "Looking for Work," in which Gary Soto recalls his boyhood desire to transform his working- class Chicano family into a facsimile of the Cleavers on Leave It to Beaver. Stephanie Coontz, in "What We Really Miss About the 1950s," then takes a close analytical look at the 1950s family, explaining its lasting appeal to some Americans but also documenting its dark side. Together these selections describe and then reread a complex set of cultural assumptions. The next few selections draw on sociology, public policy, law, and the visual arts to provide broader and more recent perspectives on the meanings of family. "The Color of Family Ties: Race, Class, Gender, and Extended Family Involvement," by Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian, challenges common misconceptions by carefully examining how ethnicity and social class shape the behaviors of American families. The next reading — "When Should a Child Be Taken from His Parents?" — asks us to consider one of the most difficult and consequential decisions a society can make, the decision to break apart a family to guarantee the safety or even the survival of its children. The need to separate some parents from their children is in itself a troubling reality, but as author Larissa MacFarquhar reveals, such decisions about child welfare may also reflect racial or class bias. Next, midway through the chapter, the Visual Portfolio offers you a chance to practice interpreting images; the 70 photographs in this collection suggest some of the complex ways the contemporary American family intersects with gender, ethnicity, and social class. The chapter ends with three readings that explore twenty-first century challenges and opportunities for American families. First, Amy Ellis Nutt tells the story of how a family supports the transition of one of their identical twin boys, Wyatt, into a young transgender woman, Nicole. Next, in a selection from Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy, Sheryll Cashin explains why the growing number of interracial marriages may foster healthier race relations and serve as a powerful counterforce to white supremacism. The chapter concludes with a short reading by sociologist Mimi Schippers that questions our cultural assumption that a monogamous couple is the best or only foundation of family life. Sources Lerner, Gerda. The Creation of Patriarchy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print. Mintz, Steven, and Susan Kellogg. Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Life. New York: Free Press, 1988. Print. Tocqueville, Alexis de. Democracy in America. 1835. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Print. BEFORE READING 71 Spend ten minutes or so jotting down every word, phrase, or image you associate with the idea of "family." Write as freely as possible, without censoring your thoughts or worrying about grammatical correctness. Working in small groups, compare lists and try to categorize your responses. What assumptions about families do they reveal? Draw a visual representation of your family. This could take the form of a graph, chart, diagram, map, cartoon, symbolic picture, or literal portrait. Don't worry if you're not a skillful artist: the main point is to convey an idea, and even stick figures can speak eloquently. When you're finished, write a journal entry about your drawing. Was it easier to depict some feelings or ideas visually than it would have been to describe them in words? Did you find some things about your family difficult or impossible to convey visually? Does your drawing "say" anything that surprises you? Write a journal entry about how you think attending college has changed, or will change, your relationship to your family. Study the frontispiece to this chapter on page 15 and discuss the way photographer Julie Mack has chosen to portray her family. Is this a "typical" family? How do you read the expressions of the people and the emotional tone of the image as a whole? Why is the family posing in their SUV, in their driveway, seemingly at dusk? 72 LOOKING FOR WORK GARY SOTO "Looking for Work" is the narrative of a nine-year-old Mexican American boy who wants his family to imitate the "perfect families" he sees on TV. Much of the humor in this essay comes from the author's perspective as an adult looking back at his childhood self, but Soto also respects the child's point of view. In the marvelous details of this midsummer day, Soto captures the interplay of seductive myth and complex reality. Gary Soto (b. 1952) grew up "on the industrial side of Fresno, right smack against a junkyard and the junkyard's cross- eyed German shepherd." Having discovered poetry almost by chance in a city college library, he has now published more than forty books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for children, young adults, and adults. He has also received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, in addition to numerous other awards. His recent publications include Meatballs for the People: Proverbs to Chew On (2017) and The Elements of San Joaquin (2018). ONE JULY, WHILE KILLING ANTS ON THE KITCHEN SINK with a rolled newspaper, I had a nine-year-old's vision of wealth that would save us from ourselves. For weeks I had drunk Kool- Aid and watched morning reruns of Father Knows Best, whose family was so uncomplicated in its routine that I very much 73 5 wanted to imitate it. The first step was to get my brother and sister to wear shoes at dinner. "Come on, Rick — come on, Deb," I whined. But Rick mimicked me and the same day that I asked him to wear shoes he came to the dinner table in only his swim trunks. My mother didn't notice, nor did my sister, as we sat to eat our beans and tortillas in the stifling heat of our kitchen. We all gleamed like cellophane, wiping the sweat from our brows with the backs of our hands as we talked about the day: Frankie our neighbor was beat up by Faustino; the swimming pool at the playground would be closed for a day because the pump was broken. Such was our life. So that morning, while doing-in the train of ants which arrived each day, I decided to become wealthy, and right away! After downing a bowl of cereal, I took a rake from the garage and started up the block to look for work. We lived on an ordinary block of mostly working class people: warehousemen, egg candlers, welders, mechanics, and a union plumber. And there were many retired people who kept their lawns green and the gutters uncluttered of the chewing gum wrappers we dropped as we rode by on our bikes. They bent down to gather our litter, muttering at our evilness. At the corner house I rapped the screen door and a very large woman in a muu-muu answered. She sized me up and then asked what I could do. 1 74 "Rake leaves," I answered smiling. "It's summer, and there ain't no leaves," she countered. Her face was pinched with lines; fat jiggled under her chin. She pointed to the lawn, then the flower bed, and said: "You see any leaves there — or there?" I followed her pointing arm, stupidly. But she had a job for me and that was to get her a Coke at the liquor store. She gave me twenty cents, and after ditching my rake in a bush, off I ran. I returned with an unbagged Pepsi, for which she thanked me and gave me a nickel from her apron. I skipped off her porch, fetched my rake, and crossed the street to the next block where Mrs. Moore, mother of Earl the retarded man, let me weed a flower bed. She handed me a trowel and for a good part of the morning my fingers dipped into the moist dirt, ripping up runners of Bermuda grass. Worms surfaced in my search for deep roots, and I cut them in halves, tossing them to Mrs. Moore's cat who pawed them playfully as they dried in the sun. I made out Earl whose face was pressed to the back window of the house, and although he was calling to me I couldn't understand what he was trying to say. Embarrassed, I worked without looking up, but I imagined his contorted mouth and the ring of keys attached to his belt — keys that jingled with each palsied step. He scared me and I worked quickly to finish the flower bed. When I did finish Mrs. Moore gave me a quarter and two peaches from her tree, which I washed there but ate in the alley behind my house. 75 10 I was sucking on the second one, a bit of juice staining the front of my T-shirt, when Little John, my best friend, came walking down the alley with a baseball bat over his shoulder, knocking over trash cans as he made his way toward me. Little John and I went to St. John's Catholic School, where we sat among the "stupids." Miss Marino, our teacher, alternated the rows of good students with the bad, hoping that by sitting side-by-side with the bright students the stupids might become more intelligent, as though intelligence were contagious. But we didn't progress as she had hoped. She grew frustrated when one day, while dismissing class for recess, Little John couldn't get up because his arms were stuck in the slats of the chair's backrest. She scolded us with a shaking finger when we knocked over the globe, denting the already troubled Africa. She muttered curses when Leroy White, a real stupid but a great softball player with the gift to hit to all fields, openly chewed his host when he made his First Communion; his hands swung at his sides as he returned to the pew looking around with a big smile. Little John asked what I was doing, and I told him that I was taking a break from work, as I sat comfortably among high weeds. He wanted to join me, but I reminded him that the last time he'd gone door-to-door asking for work his mother had whipped him. I was with him when his mother, a New Jersey Italian who could rise up in anger one moment and love the next, told me in a polite but matter-of-fact voice that I had to 2 76 leave because she was going to beat her son. She gave me a homemade popsicle, ushered me to the door, and said that I could see Little John the next day. But it was sooner than that. I went around to his bedroom window to suck my popsicle and watch Little John dodge his mother's blows, a few hitting their mark but many whirring air. It was midday when Little John and I converged in the alley, the sun blazing in the high nineties, and he suggested that we go to Roosevelt High School to swim. He needed five cents to make fifteen, the cost of admission, and I lent him a nickel. We ran home for my bike and when my sister found out that we were going swimming, she started to cry because she didn't have the fifteen cents but only an empty Coke bottle. I waved for her to come and three of us mounted the bike — Debra on the cross bar, Little John on the handle bars and holding the Coke bottle which we would cash for a nickel and make up the difference that would allow all of us to get in, and me pumping up the crooked streets, dodging cars and pot holes. We spent the day swimming under the afternoon sun, so that when we got home our mom asked us what was darker, the floor or us? She feigned a stern posture, her hands on her hips and her mouth puckered. We played along. Looking down, Debbie and I said in unison, "Us." That evening at dinner we all sat down in our bathing suits to eat our beans, laughing and chewing loudly. Our mom was in a good mood, so I took a risk and asked her if sometime we could 77 15 have turtle soup. A few days before I had watched a television program in which a Polynesian tribe killed a large turtle, gutted it, and then stewed it over an open fire. The turtle, basted in a sugary sauce, looked delicious as I ate an afternoon bowl of cereal, but my sister, who was watching the program with a glass of Kool-Aid between her knees, said, "Caca." My mother looked at me in bewilderment. "Boy, are you a crazy Mexican. Where did you get the idea that people eat turtles?" "On television," I said, explaining the program. Then I took it a step further. "Mom, do you think we could get dressed up for dinner one of these days? David King does." "Ay, Dios," my mother laughed. She started collecting the dinner plates, but my brother wouldn't let go of his. He was still drawing a picture in the bean sauce. Giggling, he said it was me, but I didn't want to listen because I wanted an answer from Mom. This was the summer when I spent the mornings in front of the television that showed the comfortable lives of white kids. There were no beatings, no rifts in the family. They wore bright clothes; toys tumbled from their closets. They hopped into bed with kisses and woke to glasses of fresh orange juice, and to a father sitting before his morning coffee while the mother buttered his toast. They hurried through the day making friends and gobs of money, returning home to a warmly lit living room, and then dinner. Leave It to Beaver was the 78 20 program I replayed in my mind: "May I have the mashed potatoes?" asks Beaver with a smile. "Sure, Beav," replies Wally as he taps the corners of his mouth with a starched napkin. The father looks on in his suit. The mother, decked out in earrings and a pearl necklace, cuts into her steak and blushes. Their conversation is politely clipped. "Swell," says Beaver, his cheeks puffed with food. Our own talk at dinner was loud with belly laughs and marked by our pointing forks at one another. The subjects were commonplace. "Gary, let's go to the ditch tomorrow," my brother suggests. He explains that he has made a life preserver out of four empty detergent bottles strung together with twine and that he will make me one if I can find more bottles. "No way are we going to drown." "Yeah, then we could have a dirt clod fight," I reply, so happy to be alive. Whereas the Beaver's family enjoyed dessert in dishes at the table, our mom sent us outside, and more often than not I went into the alley to peek over the neighbor's fences and spy out fruit, apricots or peaches. 79 25 30 I had asked my mom and again she laughed that I was a crazy chavalo as she stood in front of the sink, her arms rising and falling with suds, face glistening from the heat. She sent me outside where my brother and sister were sitting in the shade that the fence threw out like a blanket. They were talking about me when I plopped down next to them. They looked at one another and then Debbie, my eight-year-old sister, started in. "What's this crap about getting dressed up?" She had entered her profanity stage. A year later she would give up such words and slip into her Catholic uniform, and into squealing on my brother and me when we "cussed this" and "cussed that." I tried to convince them that if we improved the way we looked we might get along better in life. White people would like us more. They might invite us to places, like their homes or front yards. They might not hate us so much. My sister called me a "craphead," and got up to leave with a stalk of grass dangling from her mouth. "They'll never like us." My brother's mood lightened as he talked about the ditch — the white water, the broken pieces of glass, and the rusted car fenders that awaited our knees. There would be toads, and rocks to smash them. David King, the only person we knew who resembled the 3 80 35 middle class, called from over the fence. David was Catholic, of Armenian and French descent, and his closet was filled with toys. A bear-shaped cookie jar, like the ones on television, sat on the kitchen counter. His mother was remarkably kind while she put up with the racket we made on the street. Evenings, she often watered the front yard and it must have upset her to see us — my brother and I and others — jump from trees laughing, the unkillable kids of the very poor, who got up unshaken, brushed off, and climbed into another one to try again. David called again. Rick got up and slapped grass from his pants. When I asked if I could come along he said no. David said no. They were two years older so their affairs were different from mine. They greeted one another with foul names and took off down the alley to look for trouble. I went inside the house, turned on the television, and was about to sit down with a glass of Kool-Aid when Mom shooed me outside. "It's still light," she said. "Later you'll bug me to let you stay out longer. So go on." I downed my Kool-Aid and went outside to the front yard. No one was around. The day had cooled and a breeze rustled the trees. Mr. Jackson, the plumber, was watering his lawn and when he saw me he turned away to wash off his front steps. There was more than an hour of light left, so I took advantage of it and decided to look for work. I felt suddenly alive as I skipped 81 down the block in search of an overgrown flower bed and the dime that would end the day right. ENGAGING THE TEXT 1. Why is the narrator attracted to the kind of family life depicted on TV? What, if anything, does he think is wrong with his life? Why do his desires apparently have so little impact on his family? 2. Why does the narrator first go looking for work? How has the meaning of work changed by the end of the story, when he goes out again "in search of an overgrown flower bed and the 82 dime that would end the day right"? Explain. 3. As Soto looks back on his nine-year-old self, he has a different perspective on things than he had as a child. How would you characterize the mature Soto's thoughts about his childhood family life? (Was it "a good family"? What was wrong with Soto's thinking as a nine-year-old?) Back up your remarks with specific references to the narrative. 4. Review the story to find each mention of food or drink. Explain the role these references play. 5. Review the cast of "supporting characters" in this narrative — the mother, sister, brother, friends, and neighbors. What does each contribute to the story and in particular to the meaning of family within the story? EXPLORING CONNECTIONS 6. Look ahead to the excerpt from Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family (p. 73). Compare Soto's family to the Maines family, being sure to consider ethnicity, gender roles, levels of affluence, and the different time periods and locations. What would it be like to live in each of these families — particularly as a young boy like Gary or like Nicole's brother Jonas? Can you see any important similarities in addition to the numerous differences? 7. Compare and contrast the relationship of school and family in this narrative to that described by Mike Rose in "I Just Wanna Be Average" (p. 123). 83 EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT 8. Write a journal entry about a time when you wished your family were somehow different. What caused your dissatisfaction? What did you want your family to be like? Was your dissatisfaction ever resolved? 9. "Looking for Work" is essentially the story of a single day. Write a narrative of one day when you were eight or nine or ten; use details as Soto does to give the events of the day broader significance. 84 WHAT WE REALLY MISS ABOUT THE 1950s STEPHANIE COONTZ Popular myth has it that the 1950s were the ideal decade for the American family. In this example of academic writing at its best, Stephanie Coontz (b. 1944) provides a clear, well-documented, and insightful analysis of what was really going on and suggests that our nostalgia for the 1950s could mislead us today. Coontz teaches family studies and history at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington; she also serves as Director of Public Education at the Council on Contemporary Families, a nonprofit association based at the University of Texas, Austin. An award-winning writer and internationally recognized expert on the family, she has testified before a House Select Committee on families, appeared in several television documentaries, and published extensively for both general and scholarly audiences. Her recent books include Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage and The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (both 2016); this excerpt is from her earlier study The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families (1997). IN A 1996 POLL BY THE KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWS AGENCY, more Americans chose the 1950s than any other single decade as the best time for children to grow up. And despite the4 85 research I've done on the underside of 1950s families, I don't think it's crazy for people to feel nostalgic about the period. For one thing, it's easy to see why people might look back fondly to a decade when real wages grew more in any single year than in the entire ten years of the 1980s combined, a time when the average 30-year-old man could buy a median-priced home on only 15–18 percent of his salary. But it's more than just a financial issue. When I talk with modern parents, even ones who grew up in unhappy families, they associate the 1950s with a yearning they feel for a time when there were fewer complicated choices for kids or parents to grapple with, when there was more predictability in how people formed and maintained families, and when there was a coherent "moral order" in their community to serve as a reference point for family norms. Even people who found that moral order grossly unfair or repressive often say that its presence provided them with something concrete to push against. I can sympathize entirely. One of my most empowering moments occurred the summer I turned 12, when my mother marched down to the library with me to confront a librarian who'd curtly refused to let me check out a book that was "not appropriate" for my age. "Don't you ever tell my daughter what she can and can't read," fumed my mom. "She's a mature young lady and she can make her own choices." In recent years I've often thought back to the gratitude I felt toward my mother for 5 86 5 that act of trust in me. I wish I had some way of earning similar points from my own son. But much as I've always respected his values, I certainly wouldn't have walked into my local video store when he was 12 and demanded that he be allowed to check out absolutely anything he wanted! Still, I have no illusions that I'd actually like to go back to the 1950s, and neither do most people who express such occasional nostalgia. For example, although the 1950s got more votes than any other decade in the Knight-Ridder poll, it did not win an outright majority: 38 percent of respondents picked the 1950s; 27 percent picked the 1960s or the 1970s. Voters between the ages of 50 and 64 were most likely to choose the 1950s, the decade in which they themselves came of age, as the best time for kids; voters under 30 were more likely to choose the 1970s. African Americans differed over whether the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s were best, but all age groups of blacks agreed that later decades were definitely preferable to the 1950s. Nostalgia for the 1950s is real and deserves to be taken seriously, but it usually shouldn't be taken literally. Even people who do pick the 1950s as the best decade generally end up saying, once they start discussing their feelings in depth, that it's not the family arrangements in and of themselves that they want to revive. They don't miss the way women used to be treated, they sure wouldn't want to live with most of the fathers they knew in their neighborhoods, and "come to think of it" — I don't know how many times I've recorded these exact words — 87 "I communicate with my kids much better than my parents or grandparents did." When Judith Wallerstein recently interviewed 100 spouses in "happy" marriages, she found that only five "wanted a marriage like their parents'." The husbands "consciously rejected the role models provided by their fathers. The women said they could never be happy living as their mothers did." People today understandably feel that their lives are out of balance, but they yearn for something totally new — a more equal distribution of work, family, and community time for both men and women, children and adults. If the 1990s are lopsided in one direction, the 1950s were equally lopsided in the opposite direction. What most people really feel nostalgic about has little to do with the internal structure of 1950s families. It is the belief that the 1950s provided a more family-friendly economic and social environment, an easier climate in which to keep kids on the straight and narrow, and above all, a greater feeling of hope for a family's long-term future, especially for its young. The contrast between the perceived hopefulness of the fifties and our own misgivings about the future is key to contemporary nostalgia for the period. Greater optimism did exist then, even among many individuals and groups who were in terrible circumstances. But if we are to take people's sense of loss seriously, rather than merely to capitalize on it for a hidden political agenda, we need to develop a historical perspective on 6 88 where that hope came from. Part of it came from families comparing their prospects in the 1950s to their unstable, often grindingly uncomfortable pasts, especially the two horrible decades just before. In the 1920s, after two centuries of child labor and income insecurity, and for the first time in American history, a bare majority of children had come to live in a family with a male breadwinner, a female homemaker, and a chance at a high school education. Yet no sooner did the ideals associated with such a family begin to blossom than they were buried by the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s. During the 1930s domestic violence soared; divorce rates fell, but informal separations jumped; fertility plummeted. Murder rates were higher in 1933 than they were in the 1980s. Families were uprooted or torn apart. Thousands of young people left home to seek work, often riding the rails across the country. World War II brought the beginning of economic recovery, and people's renewed interest in forming families resulted in a marriage and childbearing boom, but stability was still beyond most people's grasp. Postwar communities were rocked by racial tensions, labor strife, and a right-wing backlash against the radical union movement of the 1930s. Many women resented being fired from wartime jobs they had grown to enjoy. Veterans often came home to find that they had to elbow their way back into their families, with wives and children resisting their attempts to reassert domestic authority. In one 7 89 10 recent study of fathers who returned from the war, four times as many reported painful, even traumatic, reunions as remembered happy ones. By 1946 one in every three marriages was ending in divorce. Even couples who stayed together went through rough times, as an acute housing shortage forced families to double up with relatives or friends. Tempers frayed and generational relations grew strained. "No home is big enough to house two families, particularly two of different generations, with opposite theories on child training," warned a 1948 film on the problems of modern marriage. So after the widespread domestic strife, family disruptions, and violence of the 1930s and the instability of the World War II period, people were ready to try something new. The postwar economic boom gave them the chance. The 1950s was the first time that a majority of Americans could even dream of creating a secure oasis in their immediate nuclear families. There they could focus their emotional and financial investments, reduce obligations to others that might keep them from seizing their own chance at a new start, and escape the interference of an older generation of neighbors or relatives who tried to tell them how to run their lives and raise their kids. Oral histories of the postwar period resound with the theme of escaping from in- laws, maiden aunts, older parents, even needy siblings. The private family also provided a refuge from the anxieties 8 9 90 of the new nuclear age and the cold war, as well as a place to get away from the political witch hunts led by Senator Joe McCarthy and his allies. When having the wrong friends at the wrong time or belonging to any "suspicious" organization could ruin your career and reputation, it was safer to pull out of groups you might have joined earlier and to focus on your family. On a more positive note, the nuclear family was where people could try to satisfy their long-pent-up desires for a more stable marriage, a decent home, and the chance to really enjoy their children. The 1950s Family Experiment The key to understanding the successes, failures, and comparatively short life of 1950s family forms and values is to understand the period as one of experimentation with the possibilities of a new kind of family, not as the expression of some longstanding tradition. At the end of the 1940s, the divorce rate, which had been rising steadily since the 1890s, dropped sharply; the age of marriage fell to a 100-year low; and the birth rate soared. Women who had worked during the Depression or World War II quit their jobs as soon as they became pregnant, which meant quite a few women were specializing in child raising; fewer women remained childless during the 1950s than in any decade since the late nineteenth century. The timing and spacing of childbearing became far more compressed, so that young mothers were likely to have two or more children in diapers at once, with no older sibling to help in their care. At the same time, again for the first time in 91 15 100 years, the educational gap between young middle-class women and men increased, while job segregation for working men and women seems to have peaked. These demographic changes increased the dependence of women on marriage, in contrast to gradual trends in the opposite direction since the early twentieth century. The result was that family life and gender roles became much more predictable, orderly, and settled in the 1950s than they were either twenty years earlier or would be twenty years later. Only slightly more than one in four marriages ended in divorce during the 1950s. Very few young people spent any extended period of time in a nonfamily setting: They moved from their parents' family into their own family, after just a brief experience with independent living, and they started having children soon after marriage. Whereas two-thirds of women aged 20 to 24 were not yet married in 1990, only 28 percent of women this age were still single in 1960. Ninety percent of all the households in the country were families in the 1950s, in comparison with only 71 percent by 1990. Eighty-six percent of all children lived in two-parent homes in 1950, as opposed to just 72 percent in 1990. And the percentage living with both biological parents — rather than, say, a parent and stepparent — was dramatically higher than it had been at the turn of the century or is today: seventy percent in 1950, compared with only 50 percent in 1990. Nearly 60 percent of kids — an all-time high — were born into male 10 11 92 breadwinner–female homemaker families; only a minority of the rest had mothers who worked in the paid labor force. If the organization and uniformity of family life in the 1950s were new, so were the values, especially the emphasis on putting all one's emotional and financial eggs in the small basket of the immediate nuclear family. Right up through the 1940s, ties of work, friendship, neighborhood, ethnicity, extended kin, and voluntary organizations were as important a source of identity for most Americans, and sometimes a more important source of obligation, than marriage and the nuclear family. All this changed in the postwar era. The spread of suburbs and automobiles, combined with the destruction of older ethnic neighborhoods in many cities, led to the decline of the neighborhood social club. Young couples moved away from parents and kin, cutting ties with traditional extrafamilial networks that might compete for their attention. A critical factor in this trend was the emergence of a group of family sociologists and marriage counselors who followed Talcott Parsons in claiming that the nuclear family, built on a sharp division of labor between husband and wife, was the cornerstone of modern society. The new family experts tended to advocate views such as those first raised in a 1946 book, Their Mothers' Sons, by psychiatrist Edward Strecker. Strecker and his followers argued that American boys were infantilized and emasculated by women who were old-fashioned "moms" instead of modern 12 93 "mothers." One sign that you might be that dreaded "mom," Strecker warned women, was if you felt you should take your aging parents into your own home, rather than putting them in "a good institution … where they will receive adequate care and comfort." Modern "mothers" placed their parents in nursing homes and poured all their energies into their nuclear family. They were discouraged from diluting their wifely and maternal commitments by maintaining "competing" interests in friends, jobs, or extended family networks, yet they were also supposed to cheerfully grant early independence to their (male) children — an emotional double bind that may explain why so many women who took this advice to heart ended up abusing alcohol or tranquilizers over the course of the decade. The call for young couples to break from their parents and youthful friends was a consistent theme in 1950s popular culture. In Marty, one of the most highly praised TV plays and movies of the 1950s, the hero almost loses his chance at love by listening to the carping of his mother and aunt and letting himself be influenced by old friends who resent the time he spends with his new girlfriend. In the end, he turns his back on mother, aunt, and friends to get his new marriage and a little business of his own off to a good start. Other movies, novels, and popular psychology tracts portrayed the dreadful things that happened when women became more interested in careers than marriage or men resisted domestic conformity. Yet many people felt guilty about moving away from older 13 94 20 parents and relatives; "modern mothers" worried that fostering independence in their kids could lead to defiance or even juvenile delinquency (the recurring nightmare of the age); there was considerable confusion about how men and women could maintain clear breadwinner-homemaker distinctions in a period of expanding education, job openings, and consumer aspirations. People clamored for advice. They got it from the new family education specialists and marriage counselors, from columns in women's magazines, from government pamphlets, and above all from television. While 1950s TV melodramas warned against letting anything dilute the commitment to getting married and having kids, the new family sitcoms gave people nightly lessons on how to make their marriage or rapidly expanding family work — or, in the case of I Love Lucy, probably the most popular show of the era, how not to make their marriage and family work. Lucy and Ricky gave weekly comic reminders of how much trouble a woman could get into by wanting a career or hatching some hare-brained scheme behind her husband's back. At the time, everyone knew that shows such as Donna Reed, Ozzie and Harriet, Leave It to Beaver, and Father Knows Best were not the way families really were. People didn't watch those shows to see their own lives reflected back at them. They watched them to see how families were supposed to live — and also to get a little reassurance that they were headed in the right direction. The sitcoms were simultaneously advertisements, etiquette manuals, and how-to lessons for a new way of 95 organizing marriage and child raising. I have studied the scripts of these shows for years, since I often use them in my classes on family history, but it wasn't until I became a parent that I felt their extraordinary pull. The secret of their appeal, I suddenly realized, was that they offered 1950s viewers, wracked with the same feelings of parental inadequacy as was I, the promise that there were easy answers and surefire techniques for raising kids. Ever since, I have found it useful to think of the sitcoms as the 1950s equivalent of today's beer ads. As most people know, beer ads are consciously aimed at men who aren't as strong and sexy as the models in the commercials, guys who are uneasily aware of the gap between the ideal masculine pursuits and their own achievements. The promise is that if the viewers on the couch will just drink brand X, they too will be able to run 10 miles without gasping for breath. Their bodies will firm up, their complexions will clear up, and maybe the Swedish bikini team will come over and hang out at their place. Similarly, the 1950s sitcoms were aimed at young couples who had married in haste, women who had tasted new freedoms during World War II and given up their jobs with regret, veterans whose children resented their attempts to reassert paternal authority, and individuals disturbed by the changing racial and ethnic mix of postwar America. The message was clear: Buy these ranch houses, Hotpoint appliances, and child-raising ideals; relate to your spouse like 96 this; get a new car to wash with your kids on Sunday afternoons; organize your dinners like that — and you too can escape from the conflicts of race, class, and political witch hunts into harmonious families where father knows best, mothers are never bored or irritated, and teenagers rush to the dinner table each night, eager to get their latest dose of parental wisdom. Many families found it possible to put together a good imitation of this way of living during the 1950s and 1960s. Couples were often able to construct marriages that were much more harmonious than those in which they had grown up, and to devote far more time to their children. Even when marriages were deeply unhappy, as many were, the new stability, economic security, and educational advantages parents were able to offer their kids counted for a lot in people's assessment of their life satisfaction. And in some matters, ignorance could be bliss: The lack of media coverage of problems such as abuse or incest was terribly hard on the casualties, but it protected more fortunate families from knowledge and fear of many social ills. There was tremendous hostility to people who could be defined as "others": Jews, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, the poor, gays or lesbians, and "the red menace." Yet on a day- to-day basis, the civility that prevailed in homogeneous neighborhoods allowed people to ignore larger patterns of racial and political repression. Racial clashes were ever-present in the 1950s, sometimes escalating into full-scale antiblack riots, 14 97 25 but individual homicide rates fell to almost half the levels of the 1930s. As nuclear families moved into the suburbs, they retreated from social activism but entered voluntary relationships with people who had children the same age; they became involved in PTAs together, joined bridge clubs, went bowling. There does seem to have been a stronger sense of neighborly commonalities than many of us feel today. Even though this local community was often the product of exclusion or repression, it sometimes looks attractive to modern Americans whose commutes are getting longer and whose family or work patterns give them little in common with their neighbors. The optimism that allowed many families to rise above their internal difficulties and to put limits on their individualistic values during the 1950s came from the sense that America was on a dramatically different trajectory than it had been in the past, an upward and expansionary path that had already taken people to better places than they had ever seen before and would certainly take their children even further. This confidence that almost everyone could look forward to a better future stands in sharp contrast to how most contemporary Americans feel, and it explains why a period in which many people were much worse off than today sometimes still looks like a better period for families than our own. Throughout the 1950s, poverty was higher than it is today, but it was less concentrated in pockets of blight existing side-by- 15 98 side with extremes of wealth, and, unlike today, it was falling rather than rising. At the end of the 1930s, almost two-thirds of the population had incomes below the poverty standards of the day, while only one in eight had a middle-class income (defined as two to five times the poverty line). By 1960, a majority of the population had climbed into the middle-income range. Unmarried people were hardly sexually abstinent in the 1950s, but the age of first intercourse was somewhat higher than it is now, and despite a tripling of nonmarital birth rates between 1940 and 1958, more than 70 percent of nonmarital pregnancies led to weddings before the child was born. Teenage birth rates were almost twice as high in 1957 as in the 1990s, but most teen births were to married couples, and the effect of teen pregnancy in reducing further schooling for young people did not hurt their life prospects the way it does today. High school graduation rates were lower in the 1950s than they are today, and minority students had far worse test scores, but there were jobs for people who dropped out of high school or graduated without good reading skills — jobs that actually had a future. People entering the job market in the 1950s had no way of knowing that they would be the last generation to have a good shot at reaching middle-class status without the benefit of postsecondary schooling. Millions of men from impoverished, rural, unemployed, or poorly educated family backgrounds found steady jobs in the steel, auto, appliance, construction, and shipping industries. 16 99 30 Lower-middle-class men went further on in college during the 1950s than they would have been able to expect in earlier decades, enabling them to make the transition to secure white- collar work. The experience of shared sacrifices in the Depression and war, reinforced by a New Deal–inspired belief in the ability of government to make life better, gave people a sense of hope for the future. Confidence in government, business, education, and other institutions was on the rise. This general optimism affected people's experience and assessment of family life. It is no wonder modern Americans yearn for a similar sense of hope. But before we sign on to any attempts to turn the family clock back to the 1950s we should note that the family successes and community solidarities of the 1950s rested on a totally different set of political and economic conditions than we have today. Contrary to widespread belief, the 1950s was not an age of laissez-faire government and free market competition. A major cause of the social mobility of young families in the 1950s was that federal assistance programs were much more generous and widespread than they are today. In the most ambitious and successful affirmative action program ever adopted in America, 40 percent of young men were eligible for veterans' benefits, and these benefits were far more extensive than those available to Vietnam-era vets. Financed in part by a federal income tax on the rich that went up to 87 percent and a corporate tax rate of 52 percent, such 100 benefits provided quite a jump start for a generation of young families. The GI Bill paid most tuition costs for vets who attended college, doubling the percentage of college students from prewar levels. At the other end of the life span, Social Security began to build up a significant safety net for the elderly, formerly the poorest segment of the population. Starting in 1950, the federal government regularly mandated raises in the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation. The minimum wage may have been only $1.40 as late as 1968, but a person who worked for that amount full-time, year-round, earned 118 percent of the poverty figure for a family of three. By 1995, a full-time minimum-wage worker could earn only 72 percent of the poverty level. An important source of the economic expansion of the 1950s was that public works spending at all levels of government comprised nearly 20 percent of total expenditures in 1950, as compared to less than 7 percent in 1984. Between 1950 and 1960, nonmilitary, nonresidential public construction rose by 58 percent. Construction expenditures for new schools (in dollar amounts adjusted for inflation) rose by 72 percent; funding on sewers and waterworks rose by 46 percent. Government paid 90 percent of the costs of building the new Interstate Highway System. These programs opened up suburbia to growing numbers of middle-class Americans and created secure, well- paying jobs for blue-collar workers. Government also reorganized home financing, underwriting 17 18 101 low down payments and long-term mortgages that had been rejected as bad business by private industry. To do this, government put public assets behind housing lending programs, created two new national financial institutions to facilitate home loans, allowed veterans to put down payments as low as a dollar on a house, and offered tax breaks to people who bought homes. The National Education Defense Act funded the socioeconomic mobility of thousands of young men who trained themselves for well-paying jobs in such fields as engineering. Unlike contemporary welfare programs, government investment in 1950s families was not just for immediate subsistence but encouraged long-term asset development, rewarding people for increasing their investment in homes and education. Thus it was far less likely that such families or individuals would ever fall back to where they started, even after a string of bad luck. Subsidies for higher education were greater the longer people stayed in school and the more expensive the school they selected. Mortgage deductions got bigger as people traded up to better houses. These social and political support systems magnified the impact of the postwar economic boom. "In the years between 1947 and 1973," reports economist Robert Kuttner, "the median paycheck more than doubled, and the bottom 20 percent enjoyed the greatest gains." High rates of unionization meant that blue-collar workers were making much more financial 19 20 102 35 progress than most of their counterparts today. In 1952, when eager home buyers flocked to the opening of Levittown, Pennsylvania, the largest planned community yet constructed, "it took a factory worker one day to earn enough money to pay the closing costs on a new Levittown house, then selling for $10,000." By 1991, such a home was selling for $100,000 or more, and it took a factory worker eighteen weeks to earn enough money for just the closing costs. The legacy of the union struggle of the 1930s and 1940s, combined with government support for raising people's living standards, set limits on corporations that have disappeared in recent decades. Corporations paid 23 percent of federal income taxes in the 1950s, as compared to just 9.2 percent in 1991. Big companies earned higher profit margins than smaller firms, partly due to their dominance of the market, partly to America's postwar economic advantage. They chose (or were forced) to share these extra earnings, which economists call "rents," with employees. Economists at the Brookings Institution and Harvard University estimate that 70 percent of such corporate rents were passed on to workers at all levels of the firm, benefiting secretaries and janitors as well as CEOs. Corporations routinely retained workers even in slack periods, as a way of ensuring workplace stability. Although they often received more generous tax breaks from communities than they gave back in investment, at least they kept their plants and employment offices in the same place. AT&T, for example, received much of the technology it used to finance its postwar 21 103 expansion from publicly funded communications research conducted as part of the war effort, and, as current AT&T Chairman Robert Allen puts it, there "used to be a lifelong commitment on the employee's part and on our part." Today, however, he admits, "the contract doesn't exist anymore." Television trivia experts still argue over exactly what the fathers in many 1950s sitcoms did for a living. Whatever it was, though, they obviously didn't have to worry about downsizing. If most married people stayed in long-term relationships during the 1950s, so did most corporations, sticking with the communities they grew up in and the employees they originally hired. Corporations were not constantly relocating in search of cheap labor during the 1950s; unlike today, increases in worker productivity usually led to increases in wages. The number of workers covered by corporate pension plans and health benefits increased steadily. So did limits on the work week. There is good reason that people look back to the 1950s as a less hurried age: The average American was working a shorter workday in the 1950s than his or her counterpart today, when a quarter of the workforce puts in 49 or more hours a week. So politicians are practicing quite a double standard when they tell us to return to the family forms of the 1950s while they do nothing to restore the job programs and family subsidies of that era, the limits on corporate relocation and financial wheeling-dealing, the much higher share of taxes paid by corporations then, the availability of union jobs for noncollege 22 23 104 youth, and the subsidies for higher education such as the National Defense Education Act loans. Furthermore, they're not telling the whole story when they claim that the 1950s was the most prosperous time for families and the most secure decade for children. Instead, playing to our understandable nostalgia for a time when things seemed to be getting better, not worse, they engage in a tricky chronological shell game with their figures, diverting our attention from two important points. First, many individuals, families, and groups were excluded from the economic prosperity, family optimism, and social civility of the 1950s. Second, the all-time high point of child well-being and family economic security came not during the 1950s but at the end of the 1960s. We now know that 1950s family culture was not only nontraditional; it was also not idyllic. In important ways, the stability of family and community life during the 1950s rested on pervasive discrimination against women, gays, political dissidents, non-Christians, and racial or ethnic minorities, as well as on a systematic cover-up of the underside of many families. Families that were harmonious and fair of their own free will may have been able to function more easily in the fifties, but few alternatives existed for members of discordant or oppressive families. Victims of child abuse, incest, alcoholism, spousal rape, and wife battering had no recourse, no place to go, until well into the 1960s. At the end of the 1950s, despite ten years of economic 24 105 40 growth, 27.3 percent of the nation's children were poor, including those in white "underclass" communities such as Appalachia. Almost 50 percent of married-couple African American families were impoverished — a figure far higher than today. It's no wonder African Americans are not likely to pick the 1950s as a golden age, even in comparison with the setbacks they experienced in the 1980s. When blacks moved north to find jobs in the postwar urban manufacturing boom they met vicious harassment and violence, first to prevent them from moving out of the central cities, then to exclude them from public space such as parks or beaches. In Philadelphia, for example, the City of Brotherly Love, there were more than 200 racial incidents over housing in the first six months of 1955 alone. The Federal Housing Authority, such a boon to white working-class families, refused to insure homes in all-black or in racially mixed neighborhoods. Two- thirds of the city dwellers evicted by the urban renewal projects of the decade were African Americans and Latinos; government did almost nothing to help such displaced families find substitute housing. Women were unable to take out loans or even credit cards in their own names. They were excluded from juries in many states. A lack of options outside marriage led some women to remain in desperately unhappy unions that were often not in the best interests of their children or themselves. Even women in happy marriages often felt humiliated by the constant 25 106 messages they received that their whole lives had to revolve around a man. "You are not ready when he calls — miss one turn," was a rule in the Barbie game marketed to 1950s girls; "he criticizes your hairdo — go to the beauty shop." Episodes of Father Knows Best advised young women: "The worst thing you can do is to try to beat a man at his own game. You just beat the women at theirs." One character on the show told women to always ask themselves, "Are you after a job or a man? You can't have both." The Fifties Experiment Comes to an End The social stability of the 1950s, then, was a response to the stick of racism, sexism, and repression as well as to the carrot of economic opportunity and government aid. Because social protest mounted in the 1960s and unsettling challenges were posed to the gender roles and sexual mores of the previous decade, many people forget that families continued to make gains throughout the 1960s and into the first few years of the 1970s. By 1969, child poverty was down to 14 percent, its lowest level ever; it hovered just above that marker until 1975, when it began its steady climb up to contemporary figures (22 percent in 1993; 21.2 percent in 1994). The high point of health and nutrition for poor children was reached in the early 1970s. So commentators are being misleading when they claim that the 1950s was the golden age of American families. They are disregarding the number of people who were excluded during that decade and ignoring the socioeconomic gains that 26 27 107 45 continued to be made through the 1960s. But they are quite right to note that the improvements of the 1950s and 1960s came to an end at some point in the 1970s (though not for the elderly, who continued to make progress). Ironically, it was the children of those stable, enduring, supposedly idyllic 1950s families, the recipients of so much maternal time and attention, that pioneered the sharp break with their parents' family forms and gender roles in the 1970s. This was not because they were led astray by some youthful Murphy Brown in her student rebel days or inadvertently spoiled by parents who read too many of Dr. Spock's child- raising manuals. Partly, the departure from 1950s family arrangements was a logical extension of trends and beliefs pioneered in the 1950s, or of inherent contradictions in those patterns. For example, early and close-spaced childbearing freed more wives up to join the labor force, and married women began to flock to work. By 1960, more than 40 percent of women over the age of 16 held a job, and working mothers were the fastest growing component of the labor force. The educational aspirations and opportunities that opened up for kids of the baby boom could not be confined to males, and many tight-knit, male- breadwinner, nuclear families in the 1950s instilled in their daughters the ambition to be something other than a homemaker.28 108 Another part of the transformation was a shift in values. Most people would probably agree that some changes in values were urgently needed: the extension of civil rights to racial minorities and to women; a rejection of property rights in children by parents and in women by husbands; a reaction against the political intolerance and the wasteful materialism of 1950s culture. Other changes in values remain more controversial: opposition to American intervention abroad; repudiation of the traditional sexual double standard; rebellion against what many young people saw as the hypocrisy of parents who preached sexual morality but ignored social immorality such as racism and militarism. Still other developments, such as the growth of me-first individualism, are widely regarded as problematic by people on all points along the political spectrum. It's worth noting, though, that the origins of antisocial individualism and self- indulgent consumerism lay at least as much in the family values of the 1950s as in the youth rebellion of the 1960s. The marketing experts who never allowed the kids in Ozzie and Harriet sitcoms to be shown drinking milk, for fear of offending soft-drink companies that might sponsor the show in syndication, were ultimately the same people who slightly later invested billions of dollars to channel sexual rebelliousness and a depoliticized individualism into mainstream culture. There were big cultural changes brewing by the beginning of the 1970s, and tremendous upheavals in social, sexual, and 109 50 family values. And yes, there were sometimes reckless or simply laughable excesses in some of the early experiments with new gender roles, family forms, and personal expression. But the excesses of 1950s gender roles and family forms were every bit as repellent and stupid as the excesses of the sixties: Just watch a dating etiquette film of the time period, or recall that therapists of the day often told victims of incest that they were merely having unconscious oedipal fantasies. Ultimately, though, changes in values were not what brought the 1950s family experiment to an end. The postwar family compacts between husbands and wives, parents and children, young and old, were based on the postwar social compact between government, corporations, and workers. While there was some discontent with those family bargains among women and youth, the old relations did not really start to unravel until people began to face the erosion of the corporate wage bargain and government broke its tacit societal bargain that it would continue to invest in jobs and education for the younger generation. In the 1970s, new economic trends began to clash with all the social expectations that 1950s families had instilled in their children. That clash, not the willful abandonment of responsibility and commitment, has been the primary cause of both family rearrangements and the growing social problems that are usually attributed to such family changes, but in fact have separate origins. 110 111 ENGAGING THE TEXT 1. According to Coontz, what do we really miss about the 1950s, and what don't we miss? Explain how it might be possible for us to miss an era that's now half a century in the past. 2. In Coontz's view, what was the role of the government in making the 1950s in America what they were? What part did broader historical forces or other circumstances play? 3. Although she concentrates on the 1950s, Coontz also describes the other decades from the 1920s to the 1990s, when she wrote this piece. Use her information to create a brief chart naming the key characteristics of each decade. Then consider your own family history and see how well it fits the pattern Coontz outlines. Discuss the results with classmates or write a journal entry reflecting on what you learn. 4. Consider the most recent ten years of American history. What events or trends (e.g., same-sex marriage, immigration policies, and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements) do you think a sociologist or cultural historian might consider important for understanding our current mythologies of family? How do you think our ideas about family have changed in this decade? EXPLORING CONNECTIONS 5. The mythic nuclear family of the 1950s included kids. Do you think people today place less emphasis on raising children, and if so, why? How might Coontz respond to the "Future Salmon" 112 cartoon on page 24 or to the frontispiece to this chapter (p. 15)? 6. Review "Looking for Work" by Gary Soto (p. 20). How does this narrative evoke nostalgia for a simpler, better era for families? Does it reveal any of the problems with the 1950s that Coontz describes? 7. Look at the image on page 525 and discuss which elements of the photo — and of the 2016 Trump-Pence campaign more generally — could be considered nostalgic. Do you think the title "What We Really Miss about the 1850s" would be an apt one for this image? EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT 8. Watch an episode of a 1950s sitcom such as Father Knows Best, The Donna Reed Show, Leave It to Beaver, or I Love Lucy. Analyze the extent to which it reveals both positive and negative aspects of the 1950s that Coontz discusses — for example, an authoritarian father figure, limited roles for wives, economic prosperity, or a sense of a secure community. 9. Coontz suggests that an uninformed nostalgia for the 1950s could promote harmful political agendas. What connections do you see between her analysis and the campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" or other recent political stances or events? Do you agree with Coontz that nostalgia can be dangerous? Why or why not? 113 THE COLOR OF FAMILY TIES: RACE, CLASS, GENDER, AND EXTENDED FAMILY INVOLVEMENT NAOMI GERSTEL AND NATALIA SARKISIAN The myth of the nuclear family is not just a harmless cliché; rather, it can lock us into fundamental misunderstandings of how American families live, misunderstandings that can divide groups and promote simplistic public policy. In this study, sociologists Naomi Gerstel and Natalia Sarkisian examine data on black, white, and Latino/a families to challenge the popular notion that minority families have weaker ties and are more fragmented than white families. They find that social class is more important than ethnicity; moreover, while differences between ethnic groups do exist, each group has developed ways to cope with the practical, emotional, and financial challenges they face and to maintain family solidarity. Gerstel is Distinguished University Professor and professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; she has published widely on such topics as the changing American family, elder care, child care, and work schedules. Sarkisian is Associate Professor of Sociology at Boston College. The two coauthored the 2012 book Nuclear Family Values, Extended Family Lives: The Importance of Gender, Race, and Class. "The Color of Family Ties" appeared in 114 American Families: A Multicultural Reader, edited by Stephanie Coontz (see p. 26) with Maya Parson and Gabrielle Raley (2008). WHEN TALKING ABOUT FAMILY OBLIGATIONS and solidarities, politicians and social commentators typically focus on the ties between married couples and their children. We often hear that Black and Latino/a, especially Puerto Rican, families are more disorganized than White families, and that their family ties are weaker, because rates of non-marriage and single parenthood are higher among these minority groups. But this focus on the nuclear family ignores extended family solidarities and caregiving activities. Here we examine these often overlooked extended kinship ties. Taking this broader perspective on family relations refutes the myth that Blacks and Latinos/as lack strong families. Minority individuals are more likely to live in extended family homes than Whites and in many ways more likely to help out their aging parents, grandparents, adult children, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other kin. According to our research using the second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households, as Figures 1 and 2 show, Blacks and Latinos/as, both women and men, are much more likely than Whites to share a home with extended kin: 42 percent of Blacks and 37 percent of Latinos/as, but only 20 percent of Whites, live with relatives. Similar patterns exist for 29 115 living near relatives: 54 percent of Blacks and 51 percent of Latinos/as, but only 37 percent of Whites, live within two miles of kin. Blacks and Latinos/as are also more likely than Whites to frequently visit kin. For example, 76 percent of Blacks, 71 percent of Latinos/as, but just 63 percent of Whites see their relatives once a week or more. Figure 1. Ethnicity and extended kin involvement among men. Data from National Survey of Families and Households, 1992–1994. 116 Figure 2. Ethnicity and extended kin involvement among women. Data from National Survey of Families and Households, 1992–1994. Even if they don't live together, Blacks and Latinos/as are as likely as Whites — and in some ways more likely — to be supportive family members. But there are important racial and ethnic differences in the type of support family members give each other. Whites are more likely than ethnic minorities to give and receive large sums of money, and White women are more likely than minority women to give and receive emotional support, such as discussing personal problems and giving each other advice. When it comes to help with practical tasks, however, we find that Black and Latino/a relatives are more 117 5 likely than Whites to be supportive: they are more likely to give each other help with household work and child care, as well as with providing rides and running errands. These differences are especially pronounced among women. This is not to say that Black and Latino men are not involved with kin, as is implied in popular images of minority men hanging out on street corners rather than attending to family ties. In fact, Black and Latino men are more likely than White men to live near relatives and to stay in touch with them. White men, however, are more likely to give and receive large- scale financial help. Moreover, the three groups of men are very similar when it comes to giving and getting practical help and emotional support. These data suggest that if we only consider married couples or parents and their young children, we are missing much of what families in general and families of color in particular do for each other. A focus on nuclear families in discussions of race differences in family life creates a biased portrait of families of color. Explaining Race Differences: Is It Culture or Class? When discussing differences in family experiences of various racial and ethnic groups, commentators often assume that these differences can be traced to cultural differences or competing "family values." Sometimes these are expressed in a positive way, as in the stereotype that Latino families have more 118 extended ties because of their historical traditions and religious values. Other times these are expressed in a negative way, as when Blacks are said to lack family values because of the cultural legacy of slavery and subsequent years of oppression. Either way, differences in family behaviors are often explained by differences in cultural heritage. In contrast, in our research, we find that social class rather than culture is the key to understanding the differences in extended family ties and behaviors between Whites and ethnic minorities. To be sure, differences in cultural values do exist. Blacks and Latinos/as are more likely than Whites to say they believe that extended family is important; both groups are also more likely to attend religious services. Blacks tend to hold more egalitarian beliefs about gender than Whites, while Latinos/as, especially Mexican Americans, tend to hold more "traditional" views. But these differences in values do not explain racial differences in actual involvement with relatives. It is, instead, social class that matters most in explaining these differences. It is widely known (and confirmed by U.S. Census data presented in Table 1) that Blacks and Latinos/as tend to have far less income and education than Whites. Families of color are also much more likely than White families to be below the official poverty line. In our research, we find that the differences in extended family ties and behaviors between Whites and ethnic minorities are primarily the result of these 119 10 social class disparities. TABLE 1 Education, Income, and Poverty Rates by Race WHITES BLACKS LATINOS/AS Median household income $50,784 $30,858 $35,967 Percentage below poverty line 8.4% 24.7% 22.0% Education: Less than high school 14.5% 27.6% 47.6% High school graduate 58.5% 58.1% 42.0% Bachelor's degree or higher 27.0% 14.3% 10.4% Data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. Simply put, White, Black, and Latino/a individuals with the same amount of income and education have similar patterns of involvement with their extended families. Just like poor minorities, impoverished Whites are more likely to exchange practical aid and visit with extended kin than are their wealthier counterparts. Just like middle-class Whites, middle- class Blacks and Latinos/as are more likely to talk about their personal concerns or share money with relatives than are their poorer counterparts. More specifically, it is because Whites tend to have more income than Blacks and Latinos/as that they are more likely to give money to their relatives or get it from them. And the higher levels of emotional support among White women can be at least 120 in part traced to their higher levels of education, perhaps because schooling encourages women to talk out their problems and makes them more likely to give (and get) advice. Conversely, we find that the relative economic deprivation of racial/ethnic minorities leads in many ways to higher levels of extended family involvement. Individuals' lack of economic resources increases their need for help from kin and boosts their willingness to give help in return. Because Blacks and Latinos/as typically have less income and education than Whites, they come to rely more on their relatives for daily needs such as child care, household tasks, or rides. The tendency of Blacks and Latinos/as to live with or near kin may also reflect their greater need for kin cooperation, as well as their decreased opportunities and pressures to move away, including moving for college. Social Class and Familial Trade-Offs How do our findings on race, social class, and familial involvement challenge common understandings of minority families? They show that poor minority families do not necessarily lead lives of social isolation or lack strong family solidarities. The lower rates of marriage among impoverished groups may reflect not a rejection of family values but a realistic assessment of how little a woman (and her children) may be able to depend upon marriage. Sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2007) recently found that because disadvantaged men are often unable to offer women the kind of economic 121 15 security that advantaged men provide, poor women are less likely to marry. Instead, these women create support networks beyond the nuclear family, regularly turning to extended kin for practical support. Reliance on extended kin and lack of marital ties are linked. In another analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households, we found that, contrary to much rhetoric about marriage as a key source of adult social ties, marriage actually diminishes ties to kin. Married people — women as well as men — are less involved with their parents and siblings than those never married or previously married. These findings indicate a trade-off between commitments to nuclear and extended family ties. Marriage, we have found, is a "greedy" institution: it has a tendency to consume the bulk of people's energies and emotions and to dilute their commitments beyond the nuclear family. On the one hand, then, support given to spouses and intimate partners sometimes comes at the expense of broader kin and community ties. Indeed, married adult children take care of elderly parents less often than their unmarried siblings. Marriage can also cut people off from networks of mutual aid. Married mothers, for example, whether Black, Latina, or White, are often unable to obtain help from kin in the way that their single counterparts can. Although the "greedy" nature of marriage may pose a problem across social class, it is especially problematic for those less well off economically, as these 122 individuals most need to cultivate wider circles of obligation, mutual aid, and reciprocity. On the other hand, support to relatives sometimes comes at the expense of care for partners, and can interfere with nuclear family formation or stability. Indeed, individuals who are deeply immersed in relationships with extended families may be less likely to get married or, if they marry, may be less likely to put the marital ties first in their loyalties. Several decades ago in her observations of a poor Black community, anthropologist Carol Stack (1974) found that the reciprocal patterns of sharing with kin and "fictive kin" forged in order to survive hardship often made it difficult for poor Blacks either to move up economically or to marry. To prevent the dilution of their social support networks, some extended families may even discourage their members from getting married, or unconsciously sabotage relationships that threaten to pull someone out of the family orbit. As sociologists Domínguez and Watkins (2003) argue, the ties of mutual aid that help impoverished individuals survive on a day-to-day basis may also prevent them from saying "no" to requests that sap their ability to get ahead or pursue individual opportunities. Overall, we should avoid either denigrating or glorifying the survival strategies of the poor. Although social class disparities are key to understanding racial and ethnic variation in familial involvement, it is too simple to say that class differences create "more" involvement with relatives in one group and "less" in 123 another. In some ways economic deprivation increases ties to kin (e.g., in terms of living nearby or exchanging practical help) and in other ways it reduces them (e.g., in terms of financial help or emotional support). These findings remind us that love and family connections are expressed both through talk and action. Equally important, focusing solely on the positive or on the negative aspects of either minority or White families is problematic. Instead, we need to think in terms of trade-offs — among different kinds of care and between the bonds of kinship and the bonds of marriage. Both trade-offs are linked to social class. Why Do These Differences in Family Life Matter? Commentators often emphasize the disorganization and dysfunction of Black and Latino/a family life. They suggest that if we could "fix" family values in minority communities and get them to form married-couple households, all their problems would be solved. This argument misunderstands causal connections by focusing on the family as the source of problems. Specifically, it ignores the link between race and class and attributes racial or ethnic differences to cultural values. Instead, we argue, it is important to understand that family strategies and behaviors often emerge in response to the challenges of living in economic deprivation or constant economic insecurity. Therefore, social policies should not focus on changing family behaviors, but rather aim to support a range of existing family arrangements and improve economic conditions for the poor. 124 20 Social policies that overlook extended family obligations may introduce, reproduce, or even increase ethnic inequalities. For example, the relatives of Blacks and Latinos/as are more likely than those of Whites to provide various kinds of support that policymakers tend to assume is only provided by husbands and wives. Such relatives may need the rights and support systems that we usually reserve for spouses. For instance, the Family and Medical Leave Act is an important social policy, but it only guarantees unpaid leave from jobs to provide care to spouses, children, or elderly parents requiring medical attention. Our findings suggest that, if we really want to support families, such policies must be broadened to include adult children, needy grown-up brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles.

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