



Parent Power: The Key to America's Prosperity

Jack C. Westman

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Controversial book says rights of children are more important than rights of parents, and the law should step in more aggressively.

Suggesting that children are exploited in a society that does not properly value the institution of parenthood, Jack C. Westman proposes establishment of a "Parenthood Certification Process," requiring all parents to be certified and sign a Parenthood Pledge, with the possibility of involuntary termination of parental rights for those who do not qualify.

Westman, a psychiatrist, professor, lobbyist, and child advocate who has published scores of articles and numerous books about children and parenting, delves into the individual's right to be a parent versus America's need to control who is and is not qualified to raise its children. Every child born in America has "a constitutional right to have an opportunity to become a competent adult," he states, including the "right to competent parents with adequate resources."

The author notes that marriage requires a license, and most states set minimum standards for the legal relationship between spouses, yet there is no similar standard for the legal relationship between parent and child. He advocates new, legislated standards to ensure that the parent-child relationship is both committed and in the best interest of the child.

Measures are already in place to remove minors from harmful situations after they have suffered damage by abuse, he argues, so why allow newborns to remain with unfit parents in the first place? In particular, Westman targets parents who themselves are minors and thus require legal custodians of their own; others, such as the mentally ill, who also have legal guardians; those incarcerated for violent crimes; and adults who already have been declared unfit in dealings with other children.

Westman's views, and especially his proposed solutions, are controversial, and he is prepared with arguments, statistics, and research to support his assertions. He relies on data from governmental and social services agencies, task force reports, case studies, and his own research to lend credence to his theories. Among the most startling are his statements about the short- and long-term ramifications to the national economy from incompetent parenting and the crisis-based abuse and misuse of social services.

Whether Westman's proposed solutions are desirable, let alone viable, is a highly debatable issue. He suggests some radical changes that challenge what many Americans view as inalienable rights, and he never clearly explains what it would take to implement his ideas. He is passionate about improving both the perception and the reality of childhood and parenthood in the United States, but his proposals are uncomfortably extreme.

Unsettling solutions aside, *Parent Power: The Key to America's Prosperity* contains valuable and disturbing material about America's welfare and the future of its children, and its focus on children's rights is both timely and critical. For instance, recent court decisions granting adoptive parents continued custodianship of their adopted children, even following challenges by birth parents, are evidence of the very shift in focus "from the rights of parents to the best interests of children." The book is well written and informative, but like much of what he writes, it is certain to inspire debate.

CHERYL HIBBARD (July 22, 2013)

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