

Restoring Power to Parents and Places

Richard S. Kordesh

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Married adults in the United States may soon be in the minority as more parents live together outside of marriage and single parents raise children alone. This growing group tends to have less education and financial security than the traditional family unit. Richard S. Kordesh addresses this and related concerns about changing family mores in *Restoring Power to Parents and Places*.

This nonfiction book represents a serious study of the causes of and possible solutions to the loss of parental power in modern American society. Kordesh suggests that “thicker” parental roles existed when most people lived and worked together as extended families on farms. The Industrial Revolution caused many to leave the farm in favor of lucrative factory jobs in cities. That type of work kept fathers and sometimes mothers away from home all day, establishing a norm that continues today. Public school systems took over the task of looking after and educating children during the work week. Other public and non-profit entities came into existence to provide services for urban youth, further “thinning” parental roles.

The father of four children himself, Kordesh earned a master’s degree in social work and a doctorate in political science. For more than twenty years he has researched, taught, and written about how parents can create stronger, more productive families within their communities.

According to Kordesh, people of Native American and African American descent have each suffered a serious loss of identity because of the exclusionary treatment their populations received from white people. Many children, separated temporarily but sometimes permanently from their birth families, lost the advantage of living closely with parents during their formative years. Regarding the continuing struggle of African Americans, Kordesh writes, “Industrialized racism established through slavery must be taken into account to explain the perilous conditions faced by their children today.”

Kordesh also asserts that families have become primarily consumers, paying for tasks that used to be accomplished at home. Commercial enterprises now grow and prepare food, manufacture and sell clothing, and provide home and lawn maintenance. Parents could begin to build stronger connections with their children by working with them in the garden and kitchen to both create and prepare meals. In this way, home-based family businesses could be started. The author contends that community development groups have not established workable methods to encourage and facilitate this reversal.

Populism in today’s society is weaker than in previous centuries, but Kordesh suggests that its rich origins in American political history can and should be revitalized to advocate for stronger parental roles. He states, “those roots need to be unearthed in order to recognize the dignified place that productive family institutions have long been accorded in our national identity.”

Kordesh has crafted a thoughtful and comprehensive book that deserves attention. Sidebars and end-of-chapter summaries provide effective reinforcement of important points, and charts lend clarity to the written text. Notes that explain or document historical and sociological highlights appear throughout the book. The bibliography and index give additional reference information.

Those involved in supporting the growth of family-based productive activities, especially parents, educators, and community and political leaders, will benefit from reading this book.

MARGARET CULLISON (March 27, 2012)

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