

Unwed mothers . . .

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The schools, which have come under so much criticism in recent years, are expected to deal with a child that has been raised by a child, by a mother who has no parenting skills and who herself may have had inadequate parenting. Child-rearing is difficult enough for a mature adult. These young mothers haven't learned most of what they need to know about themselves, let alone about what it takes to be a competent mother."

Interestingly enough, most of us have been at least dimly aware of the things Norton is talking about. But we have not made the connection between child-mothers and the array of problems confronting Black America. The tendency is to see the problems as almost solely the result of racism.

Norton, now a senior fellow at the Urban Institute here in Washington, is well aware of the crippling effect of racism. But it doesn't explain everything. It seems reasonable to suppose, as she does, that at least a part of the explanation lies in the dismal numbers from the Census Bureau.

She does see a glimmer of hope. "The evidence is that the old stereotype of unmarried women having large numbers of children, all of them on welfare, seems to be fading. These girls don't necessarily go on to have many children. After the first baby, they clearly seem to be deciding that they don't want a lot more.

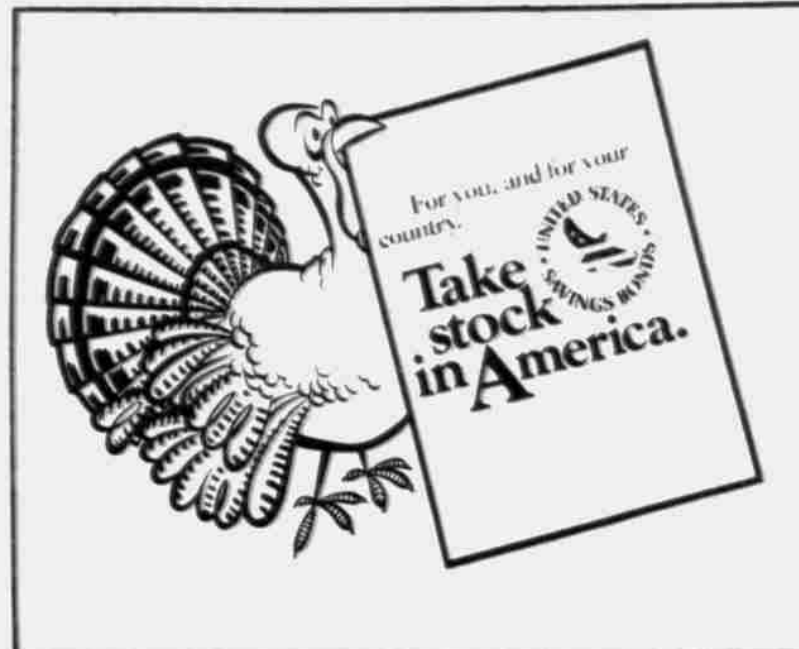
"That suggests that it would be more cost-effective, not to mention more humane, to find ways of intervening after the first baby to help the young mother make more reasonable life decisions," she said.

Such intervention might include increased efforts to get these young mothers back in school, or in some sort of vocational training. But she also thinks it is important to provide some structure for their often chaotic lives.

"It could be extremely useful if we could hook these girls up with older, more stable women who could not only help with babysitting and child-rearing instruction but also give some structure to their lives," she suggests. "Even if it was necessary to pay these women, it would be cheaper than a lifetime of welfare."

Clearly something has to be done. As Norton notes, teen-age mothers are becoming the majority of black mothers. If they are having most of the children, they can't help but pass on the problems. That is not exactly a recipe for racial progress.

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President unknowingly aids ERA

Chicago — When you ask people here to name the single greatest recruiter in the checkered history of the Equal Rights Amendment, they are likely to come back with the same ironic response: Ronald Reagan.

The president and his henchpersons (if you will forgive the expression) have raised the anxiety and the activity level of people who might otherwise have passively watched the moribund amendment slide to its deadline death next June 30.

ellen goodman

The new infusion of energy and anger in this unrattled state is palpable. It includes people who had been lulled percent of banking officials and managers were women. cludes people who had bought the notion that there were, in fact, other ways to win equal rights. It includes people who believe Reagan when he said he was for the E and R, but not for the A.

But now with some help from the Presidential Recruiter, we know what a difference a year makes. We have heard a lot about these Other Ways to equality and learned a lot of Other Lessons.

Other Way Number I: We can win equal rights through executive orders.

We made some real changes in employment for women under one executive order, the one called Affirmative Action.

In the years between 1969 and 1981, women as different as coal miners and bankers were allowed in and up. In 1973, a mere .001 percent of the coal miners were female. By 1979, 11.4 percent were female. In 1970, 17.6 percent of banking officials and managers were woman. By 1980, women comprised 33.6 percent. In both cases, it was the federal watchers who made the difference. Way back then.

Other Lesson Number I: Executive orders are only as useful as the executive.

Now, in the Reagan administration, the word is out that Affirmative Action won't be enforced. That isn't red tape they are cutting; it's the arteries of change.

Other Way Number II: We can win equal rights, through the legislature, statute by statute.

Titles VII and IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are

probably the best examples of statutes used to deal with sex discrimination in education and on the work force. They have helped make progress on such issues as sexual harassment, unequal opportunities in college athletics and discrimination in job hiring and promotion. Until lately.

Other Lesson Number II: A law is only as strong as its teeth. One administration's incisors may become the next administration's gums.

The Title IX guidelines about sexual harassment and athletics are now being diluted with (George) Bush beer, and anti-regulatory brew. The chance to sue in the work place under Title VII will be slowed to a near halt by the cut in investigatory staff at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Other Way Number III: We can use the judiciary to win women's rights.

Over time, the higher courts have been extending equal rights to women by their interpretation of the laws (See Other Way Number II).

But not always.

Other Lesson Number III: You can get to court without a case. A judgment is only as predictable as a judge.

It's no surprise that the Reagan administration, with a solicitor general like Rex Lee, will be, uh, less than ardent in its pursuit of sex discrimination cases.

Nor should it be a surprise when the Supreme Court backtracks with regard to women's rights. Last term, the court ruled, for example, that an Army ex-wife wasn't entitled to any portion of her husband's military pension. Her claim was, the Court said, against "the national interest."

All of these Other Lessons teach basically one fact: The status of women is still fragile. What one Congress giveth, the next Congress may taketh away. What one president supports, the next president may undercut. What one court interprets, the next court may re-interpret.

There is just no substitute for being protected by the Constitution. There is no E and no R without the A.

So, with the help of Ronnie the Recruiter, our awareness is growing and our interest is escalating — just as the time is shrinking. The final lesson would be to end up, too late, with the biggest pro-ERA constituency in history . . . on July 1, 1982.

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