

MARK BALDRIDGE

Nuclear family sprouts mutation

They say the family is in danger, but I say, brother, it's already dead.

The American family—you know, as in "Traditional Family Values"—has come under a lot of scrutiny in recent years, culminating in a bizarre media frenzy surrounding the Dan Quayle sound-bite awhile back.

Whenever white guys in suits start talking about "tradition," you just know they're harking all the way back to the 1950s when white guys in suits ruled the earth.

But the so-called "nuclear" family is itself the breakdown of a much older, larger, more complicated family form—something that could only be called the molecular family.

The molecular family is a big sprawling mass of irregular shape and indefinite boundary.

It includes uncles, grandparents, aged patriarchs, cousins and in-laws. It extends to dogs and cats.

The family that evolved along with human beings is this kind of family. Mom, dad and the kids is a recent interpolation, a kind of social experiment performed on a large scale by upwardly mobile white guys in suits.

Of course it's passing away, and it shouldn't be mourned. It was a necessary, though doomed, stop-gap in the rift between two powerful forces: the clan and modern life.

We are clanish creatures. By nature we group ourselves into tribes—much like wolves in packs or geese in gaggles.

It's in our nature. We are suited to the tribe and it to us.

Where the clan has broken down, for political or economic reasons, human beings have created new clans, clubs, fraternities and secret societies.

Even where the clan structure is strongest, in what we call "primitive" societies, there are strong subgroups—ideotribes with their own rules and interconnections—that exclude the many and include the chosen few.



We cannot escape the compelling urge to form families, and yet the nuclear family, with which we're most familiar, is unfulfilling of our deepest human needs.

With the emergence of nations a few centuries ago, there was a concerted effort to get members of a country to identify the clan with the "motherland." Patriotism became a virtue.

But where there are clans, there is no need for patriotism—only courage and patience.

Courage, because it's assumed one will go to war when the clan goes to war and die to protect the clan. That's natural, we're talking about family.

Patience, because the clan can be more than a little trying when you're trapped inside it.

That's part of the reason the family has deteriorated so in the face of modernism.

The modern world is inclement to the clan.

The clan is based on staying together, generally in one place. The modern world makes it compellingly easy to travel—to get away from the oppressive comfort of community.

The modern world tears families apart and is not too fond of old age and death.

To many people, the modern practice of relegating our old and infirm to a kind of perpetual limbo—a cold and impersonal medical hell—is inconceivably barbaric.

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We can never go back, either. Because the clan is always a burden. It is

heavy, not light. Community means, to some extent, being tied together with battleship chain.

Not everyone wants that, and modern life has made it escapable.

But the alternative is isolation—to be one in a world of strangers, to be eternally "outside." Not many can stand that. And from isolation there is no "escaping."

So for a while now we've limped along on the bad legs of the nuclear family. But we can't do that much longer. The de-stigmatization of divorce, along with later marriage and fewer children per marriage, has left too many of us to live too much of our lives alone, seeking something we're frightened of finding.

What we need—and are in the process of developing, I believe—are new forms of community.

Families are opening themselves to networks of pseudo-relatives—friends of the family, basically, but with more say and influence on how the family is run.

Networks of all kinds, in real time and in cyber space, are what will save us from the death of the family.

Networks, shifting and yet ever-present, are the new family, with an new set of family issues and family problems.

But we must have something. The death of the clan, otherwise, would mean the death of Homo sapiens. It's part of what makes us human.

Baldridge is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

SAM KEPFIELD

Chris Columbus no anti-Christ

Columbus Day has come and gone, and the truly sensitive can rest easy now after using the moment of silence at Broyhill Plaza to vent their rage against centuries of oppression.

The image of Indians in American before Columbus that is currently being peddled is one of pastoral bliss, of a native people living simply and in harmony with nature and each other. Only with the coming of now-dead white guys did the hapless natives become enslaved and oppressed.

Well, not quite. Before we get all dewy-eyed over this, let's look a little more objectively at history. First off, they're not really "Native Americans." Indians crossed the land bridge from Asia and are as much immigrants as Germans or Irish settlers. They just got here a few thousand years earlier.

Slavery, it seems, was nothing new to Indians. Even the five civilized tribes practiced enslaving members of other tribes; the Pawnee Indians in Nebraska, because they were villagers, were often targets of slaving raids. It was more akin to the European device of indentured servitude with some Pueblo Indian tribes.

As for living in harmony with nature, this is another myth that deserves to be punctured. Indians sought to control their environment just as much as white settlers later did. It's human nature. The Indians were limited only by the relatively low level of technology available. Mayan civilizations in Central America over-irrigated to the point where their water table became saline and unfit for consumption.

Plains Indians used prairie fires to clear out old undergrowth, allowing better crops of grass with which to feed animals. The fires could cover the area of several modern counties and led to another not-so-modern phenomenon—dust storms. Buffalo hunts were not always scenes out of "Dances With Wolves." Tribes would drive



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the beasts over a cliff, killing hundreds, but only using a few, leaving the rest to rot.

Those who revile Columbus as the anti-Christ seem to live in a fantasy universe, thinking that if only whites hadn't showed up, all would be well. True, there wouldn't be any reservations, or alcohol, but there wouldn't be any horses either, or metal tools with which to sow and reap their crops.

And, let's face it, the discovery of America was inevitable. You can't have the growth in technology that was occurring in Renaissance Europe, plus the outward search for new lands and new sources of wealth, and then expect a huge land mass like North America to go undiscovered forever.

Would it have been any better if Leif Ericson had done a better job of exploiting his discovery of America? What about the Chinese? Or the Romans? What about any other European power in the late 15th century?

It was inevitable, and unavoidable, just as were the plagues that swept the continent and decimated Indian populations. For the most part, the diseases were a simple biological process, germs borne by vectors finding an unprotected host.

There were other low points, to be sure. Alcohol remains the most destructive legacy of that era, but even it was not universal. Certain tribes, such as the Pawnee, had little or no use for alcohol, and the stereotype of the drunken Indian was rarely found

among them.

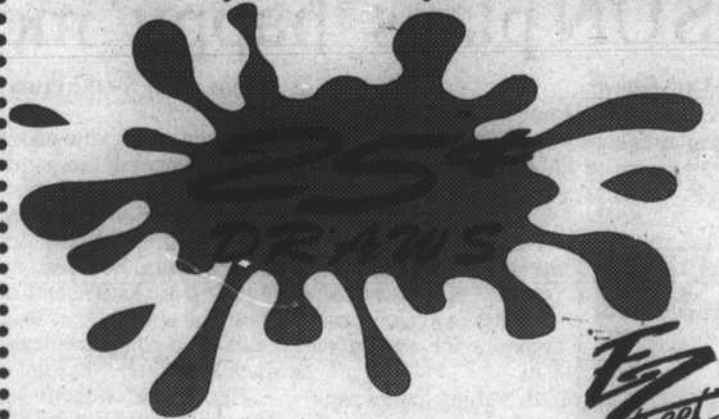
Such facts contradict the current trendy view of white vs. "oppressed people." This stereotype casts both groups as faceless, monolithic blocs, seeing each other as enemies. But, as professor Patricia Nelson Limerick argued in her reinterpretation of Western history, "The Legacy of Conquest," such an impression overlooks the fact that among both races, there were varying tribes and different responses to the process of conquering the frontier.

Among Indians, there were those who actively resisted, just as there were those who gladly helped the whites. Indian scouts for the U.S. Army were sometimes motivated by a desire for revenge on an opposing tribe, something the commanders played on. Were they traitors to their race? Hardly. They were doing the best they could to adapt in a changing world.

It is high time to stop this ridiculous notion that Columbus Day is a glorification of oppression. Those who chant "Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Western Civ's got to go" at a university that would not be standing but for those dead white males that they protest, should pipe down and study both cultures, white and Indian, see the good as well as the bad in both. Above all, stop feeling guilty because you're white, or victimized because you're not.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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