

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tom Freedman, Mary Smith
FROM: David Hochschild
DATE: June 10, 1998
RE: Preliminary memo on the Parents Bill of Rights

This memo is based on eight articles about the book. The book itself is not yet available in the library but they are ordering it for me this week.

Parents Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

Cornell West, the flamboyant Harvard professor of Afro-American studies, and Sylvia Ann Hewlitt, an economist, have co-written a book called "The War Against Parents." The book makes the case that our society and our government have devalued parenting to a dangerous extent. The tonic they propose for these missteps is a wide-ranging manifesto for parents that calls for changes in federal law, marketplace values, tax codes, entertainment, culture and voting rights. Their agenda seems to be about 30% useful ideas, 30% bad but interesting ideas, 20% academic fluff and 20% old ideas. I've tried to cull out the main points of their work.

Examples of government policy and American culture that hurt parents:

- the government's aggressive pursuit of child support, which values money instead of loving contact between fathers and their children.
- for twenty years, welfare agencies disqualified women from receiving welfare if officials found a man in the house, making it difficult for poor men to act as fathers should and creating a disincentive to marry.
- a marketplace that encourages downsizing, lower pay and longer hours - "From an economic standpoint, raising a child has become the ultimate non-market activity."
- television's portrayal of parents as incompetent, ineffectual fools, creating a stereo-type that does not honor parenting.

Their proposals for how to end the "war":

- *Extend family leave.* Provide 24 weeks of paid, job-protected parenting leave with wage replacement costs covered by social security (the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act provides 12 weeks of unpaid leave). By comparison, the average paid maternity leave in Europe is 20 weeks. The act should also be extended to include companies with fewer than 50 employees. 31% of women work for these companies and are therefore not even entitled to unpaid leave under the 1993 act.

- *Tax relief.* Eliminate payroll tax for working parents with children under 6. Eliminate the marriage penalty in the tax code. Eliminate the sales tax for children's necessities such as diapers and car seats.
- *Recognition for parents.* Establish a National Parents Day to formally honor parenting.
- *Create incentives for family-friendly workplace.* Tax breaks for companies that offer flexible hours and compressed work weeks.
- *Encourage voting.* Waive the application fee for a driver's license if one voted in the last election. The authors also advocate changing the law to allow parents to vote on behalf of their children, essentially doubling parental clout at the polls.
- *Longer school year.* Longer school year and lengthier school days in order to better match the schedule of parents with that of children.
- *Ensure a living wage.* Raise the minimum wage to \$7/hr. in order to provide a living wage for low-income parents (based on research by Columbia University economist Edmond Phelps). Estimated cost: \$100 billion.

Both Hewlitt and West repeatedly make the analogy between their proposal and the GI Bill. To promote the implementation of their agenda, they founded the National Parenting Association, which so far has 9,000 members in six states. Their idea is to create an advocacy organization that will do for parents what the AARP has done for seniors. The number there is (212) 362-7575.

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A PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

In the interest of restoring the dignity and economic well-being of parents and ensuring the health of our democracy, we offer the following Parents' Bill of Rights.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett
Cornel West

Mothers and fathers are entitled to:

I. Time for their children

Grant parents the "gift" of time by providing 24 weeks of paid parenting leave at the time of birth. Develop flexible workplaces that give working parents discretion over when and where work is done; create part-time career ladders; and devise special tax breaks for at-home parents.

II. Economic security

Underpin the lives of parents by guaranteeing a living wage for full-time workers. Support school-to-work initiatives; offer help with housing; and provide a family allowance for families with children under six. Eliminate payroll taxes for families with small children; and get rid of sales taxes on children's necessities such as diapers and car seats.

III. A pro-family electoral system

Encourage mothers and fathers to participate in our democracy by creating incentives to vote and easing registration procedures. Make election days national holidays; and attach voter registration forms to the papers parents fill out when they obtain a birth certificate for a child.

IV. A pro-family legal structure

Strengthen the institution of marriage by promoting pre-marital counseling and making it harder to split. Guarantee generous visitation rights for non-custodial parents; restructure welfare benefits to favor two-parent families; and replace the current emphasis on foster care with an emphasis on adoption.

V. A supportive external environment

Extend the school day and year; encourage the formation of parent patrols to create safe zones around schools; and outlaw the sale of handguns to young people. Increase spending on early childhood education and fund higher salaries for child care workers. Ban alcohol and cigarette advertising on billboards; underwrite drug prevention programs in every school; mandate a Children's Hour on network television and make it much harder for kids to rent an R-rated movie or buy a CD with a parent advisory label. Create an AARP for parents.

VI. Honor and dignity

Establish an Index of Parent Well-Being to provide a counterpoint to the Dow Jones Index; and promote National Parents' Day. Introduce an education credit for at-home parents; and offer specially-designed parent privileges. Priority seating on buses and priority parking in shopping malls for pregnant women and parents with small children would make our public places much more welcoming to families with children.


Join us. If parents join together, we can wield immense clout in the workplace, in Congress, and in statehouses around the country. An organization like AARP—for parents—can make a real difference. Children are 100 percent of our collective future and it behooves us as a nation—parents and non-parents alike—to make sure that mothers and fathers get the support they need to do a good job for their children.

51 West 74th Street, Suite 1B
New York, NY 10023


nationalparenting
association

Tel: 800-709-8795 • 212-362-7575
Fax: 212-362-1916

WHAT YOU CAN DO

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

AT HOME

- Spend half an hour every night either reading to your child or helping with homework. This time is extremely valuable to your child. Studies show that the parent is almost twice as powerful as the teacher in determining success in school. Government can make it easier for parents to be home in the evening—and not take that second job—by **creating special tax breaks and housing subsidies** for families with children.
- Get involved in monitoring television. First, **move the TV out of your child's room**—54% of American children have a television in their bedroom and this encourages more viewing and diminishes a parent's ability to monitor what is seen. Second, **establish clear rules**—no TV during meals or before homework is finished. The entertainment industry can make the parent's task easier by **developing a Children's Hour** on network television which airs in the late afternoon and features high quality educational programs.

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Participate in parent patrols to create a safe zone around your child's school. In New York City 25 schools have set up these patrols—groups of parents who patrol the streets around a school at dismissal time wearing bright orange vests and carrying walkie-talkies and whistles—and they are highly effective in preventing both violence and substance abuse in the vicinity of schools. School districts should **fund rigorous programs of drug education** and prevention.
- **Vote in School Board Elections.** Nationwide less than 20% of parents vote in school board elections or in referenda on school issues. When moms and dads have no say in the size of the school budget or how schools are run it is extremely hard for school districts to respond to the needs of children. If you want your child to have the opportunity to play sports or learn the clarinet, or if you want before- or after-school programs get out there and vote. Even for overburdened parents this is effort well spent.

IN THE WORKPLACE

- Ask your boss for a more **flexible work schedule** so that your children are not home alone and you are able to participate in parent patrols and other school-related activities. Studies show that flextime reduces stress for parents; helps kids (unsupervised children get involved with sex, drugs and crime); and is good for the bottom line. Corporations as different as American Express and First Tennessee Bank saw productivity go up when they established a flexible workplace that gave workers with family responsibilities staggered hours, compressed work weeks and home-based employment opportunities. Government can create special tax breaks for companies that provide working parents with the "gift of time."

IN STATE ASSEMBLIES & IN CONGRESS

- Support legislation that would provide paid parenting leave. The experts are agreed: twenty-four weeks of **partially paid parenting leave** would be immensely helpful to families during the magical first months of life. The NPA is proposing creative ways of financing this leave so that the cost is shared between employers, government and parents.

IN THE NATION

- **Join us.** If parents join together, we can wield immense clout in the workplace, in Congress, and in statehouses around the country. An organization like AARP—for parents—can make a real difference. Children are 100 percent of our collective future and it behooves us as a nation—parents and non-parents alike—to make sure that mothers and fathers get the support they need to do a good job for their children.

Excerpts from *The War Against Parents* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

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npa
nationalparenting
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Dear Friend,

We're pleased that you want to learn more about the National Parenting Association.

We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to building a nationwide parents' movement that gives mothers and fathers renewed respect and practical support. Imagine if parents had an organization like AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons. Then think of the clout that parents could wield in the workplace, in the halls of Congress and in statehouses around the country on issues that count like:

- having time for our kids,
- getting guns out of the hands of children,
- rebuilding a first-rate public school system and making education more affordable from early childhood to college,
- getting rid of the sales tax on children's necessities, like diapers and car seats,
- creating incentives for part-time career ladders and other ways for workers to be productive on the job without sacrificing their families.

These are just a few ideas.

Parents—of every color, rich and poor—struggle to do their best to raise their children. They deserve our help. Children are 100% of America's future. So whether you're a parent yourself, or not, it makes sense for all of us to make sure that mothers and fathers get the support they need to come through for their kids.

Join us today. Make a difference for tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Ann Hewlett
President

Special Offer

The War Against Parents



The War Against Parents

Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West



What We Can Do for America's Beleaguered Moms and Dads

Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West

Houghton
Mifflin

**With a donation of \$50 or more, become a member of the NPA
and receive a SIGNED copy of *The War Against Parents*.**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone: Day () _____

Eve () _____

Please send the completed form and payment to:

National Parenting Association

51 West 74th Street, Suite 1B

New York, NY 10023-2495

(212) 362-7575 Fax (212) 362-1916

A portion of book proceeds will benefit the NPA. Estimated value of goods and services provided is \$20; the balance of the donation is tax deductible.

Social Issues

WORK & FAMILY

PARENTS OF THE WORLD, UNITE

A national organization aims to mobilize moms and dads

Millions of Americans share common ground rooted in a singular and life-changing experience. Chances are good, in fact, that you're one of them. But this massive minority has no real political voice and no legislative agenda. Can they unite?

Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett thinks it's about time they did. Her fledgling National Parents Assn. (NPA) seeks to organize the nation's 62 million parents of children under the age of 18 who, she says, face stressful lives with little cultural or social support from business and government. "Parenting is the ultimate nonmarket activity," she observes. "We've had a hard time giving it stature and standing."

CONSPIRACY. In their new book, *The War Against Parents* (Houghton Mifflin), Hewlett and Cornel West, professor of philosophy of religion and member of the African-American studies department at Harvard University, describe the ways in which they believe parents are conspired against. It starts with the time and money crunch wrought by inflexible work hours, insufficient and unpaid family leave, a marriage tax penalty, and for some, low wages. It extends deep into popular culture, which often denigrates parents and parenting in vapid sitcoms, among other arenas. The role of fathers has been especially underrated and misunderstood, they contend.

Recalling the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, which helped launch a period of postwar growth by giving returning military veterans financial and educational aid, Hewlett and West propose a "parents' bill of rights" (table, page 60). It would provide generous allowances for families—from 24-week paid parenting leaves to subsidies for low-wage workers. They urge a lengthening of the



school day and the school year to better reflect a changing society in which the majority of families are dual earners.

To help make it all happen, Hewlett and West have created the national organization with nearly 9,000 members in six states. Working with school boards and businesses and at the local, state, and federal levels, the NPA will mobilize parents across the political and racial spectrum and eventually do for parents what the American Association of Retired Persons has done for seniors, Hewlett and West hope. The NPA, headquartered in New York City, has membership dues of \$25 a year.

Hewlett, 51, gave birth to her fourth child just over a year ago, and also has a stepchild. West, 45, has a 20-year-old son. They emphasize that they don't

want parents to be viewed as yet another interest group. "Nonparents have a stake in all citizens of the future ending up in good shape," Hewlett says. Parents invest upwards of \$150,000 to raise a child, she notes, but many of that child's contributions as an adult may accrue to society at large.

Hewlett's and West's concerns are not unfamiliar, of course: For all their lack of explicit representation, parents have a host of surrogate advocates. Con-

servative politicians and legislators, recently joined by politicians of nearly all stripes, have long embraced the fuzzy cause of family values. Women's groups, children's advocates, and research organizations have long fashioned agendas to help children and families. The National Partnership for Women & Families—formerly the Women's Legal Defense Fund—did pioneering work 14 years ago

THE NEXT AARP?

The National Parents Assn.'s Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West could wield enormous clout

to promote family-leave legislation that finally became law in 1993; it now is working to expand coverage to smaller companies and helping some states find new ways to fund family leave. The Children's Defense Fund is pushing an initiative to make child care more affordable and more widely available.

Such groups believe a parents' movement would only complement their efforts. "Rarely before in American history have we expected parents to do this challenging job totally on their own as a private matter," observes Wendy Lazarus, director of the Children's Partnership, a Santa Monica (Calif.) nonprofit, nonpartisan group that researches children's issues. "We need to once again establish that parents are doing something that is of civic value."

"LIVING WAGE." Numerous research groups churn out ever more compelling data confirming the demands of parenthood in the two-income-family era. On Apr. 15, the Work & Families Institute released a major study on the changing workforce in America. Among its key findings: Employed married fathers spend more time with their children

Social Issues

PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

An agenda for reform from Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West

TIME-BIND RELIEF Provide paid parenting leave, flexible workplaces, part-time career ladders, and tax breaks for at-home parents.

ECONOMIC

SECURITY Guarantee parents a living wage, introduce a family allowance for families with children under six, eliminate sales tax on children's necessities such as diapers and car seats.

LEGAL STRUCTURES Promote premarital counseling and make it harder to divorce. Restructure welfare to favor two-parent families.

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Create a lobbying group to represent parents. Extend the school day and year, and increase spending on early childhood education.

DATA: SYLVIA ANN HEWLETT, CORNEL WEST
NATIONAL PARENTING ASSN.



than fathers did 20 years ago, while mothers spend about the same amount—but 70% of all parents feel they do not have enough time with their children.

Hewlett and West's proposals are ambitious. Providing wage subsidies to guarantee all workers a "living wage" of \$7.00 or so an hour—a proposal based on work by Columbia University economist Edmund Phelps—would cost \$100 billion a year initially. Representative Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.), who hopes to introduce an "income-protected leave" bill at the beginning of the next session of Congress, concedes that mandating paid time off for new parents will be a tough battle.

The authors know that their proposals are expensive. But their parents' bill of rights is, they say, a starting point, something to be refined and debated as parents around the country unite to make schools, communities, businesses, and government more responsive. Hewlett and West are on a mission—a mission to give parents a voice. Given full expression, that voice could one day prove the loudest and most powerful in the nation.

By Karen Pennar in New York

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