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WHERE HAVE ALL THE MOTHERS GONE?

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"There are exceptional women, there are exceptional men, who have other tasks to perform in addition to the task of motherhood and fatherhood, the task of providing for the home and of keeping it. But it is the tasks connected with the home that are the fundamental tasks of humanity...if the mother does not do her duty, there will either be no next generation, or a next generation that is worse than none at all..." Theodore Roosevelt (Dobson 155).

The majority of politicians today would rather drill their own teeth than voice such a politically suicidal statement as the previous quotation by Theodore Roosevelt. In the 1988 Reagan Administration, during a debate over the government giving child care grants, most participants favored the grants "only for families whose children were being cared for outside the home" (Dobson 159). When one of the President's advisors argued for tax-credits for any family with children under a certain age—including stay-at-home mothers—one bureaucrat said, "Why should some woman who is not doing anything be given a grant or tax break?" (Dobson 159). Mothers and their roles of raising children are often scoffed at in such a manner or given no recognition at all by society today. Yet, "newspaper headlines about the disasters of drugs, suicide, and violence tell us loud and clear just how badly our young people need mothering" (Dobson 164). Still the popular belief persists that motherhood is not an acceptable form of employment. In a "round table" discussion on health insurance, Presidential nominee Mike Dukakis, turning to a woman seated with her husband and three children asked, "Do you work?" The woman replied, "I take care of my children. I work very hard" (Dobson 158).

Research reports reveal that many women would rather be at home during the early years of their children's lives than at work. One recent poll shows that 84 percent of all employed mothers would prefer to be at home if money were not an issue (Dobson 133). However, in spite of their preferences, many of these women are forced to work to provide the extra income necessary to pay their federal tax bill (Dobson 125). In the last twenty-five years the number of mothers in the work force has tripled (Hewlett 213). "We have no choice," said a father of two, ruefully. "Sandra [wife] has got to go back to work." The children needed her, but the family needed her salary more (Keating 120).
It is time to give stay-at-home mothers equal opportunities! Even though the U.S. Department of Labor tells us that "41.3 percent of all married mothers with preschool children are full-time homemakers...[and] another 20 percent only work part time," this part of our population is virtually ignored by the government (Dobson 112). One step that would go a long way towards correcting this problem would be to update the Tax Reform Act of 1986. This legislation provided for the dependents' deduction to be raised from $1,000 to $2,000 per child. This should be increased again to $7,000. This proposal is not as radical as the difference in numbers would have it seem. An increase to $7,000 would simply "return the average family to the level of taxes that families enjoyed at the end of World War II, when corrected for inflation" (Dobson 136). This additional tax-credit could allow mothers, who so desired, to stay at home with their children.

A second method of action that could be taken is equal media coverage. Today's society demands equal time and space for Republicans, Democrats, whites, blacks, homosexuals...and the list goes on. So why not devote the same amount of time and space to stay-at-home mothers as to mothers in the work force? "Countless times each day a mother does what no one else can do quite as well. She wipes away a tear, whispers a word of hope, eases a child's fear...But no editorials praise these accomplishments" (Dobson 164). Instead, the newspaper headlines boast that "Ms. Jones is named the first female Vice President of Trendy, Cash and Now" (Dobson 164). It is no wonder that women who stay at home to perform the crucial task of raising the future generation of our nation feel alone and outdated. The media would have them believe that because they are not out in the work force, their potential is being wasted. Stay-at-home mothers need to know that they are not alone. A group of people that make up almost 41.3 percent of the population deserve some media recognition.

Motherhood is a precious and honorable occupation. "A mother's love is the common currency that not only enables individuals to resist a slide into madness and antisocial behavior but also permits civilization to prevail from one generation to the next" (Dobson 137). When mothers play such a critical role in society they deserve a tax break and some media recognition. They especially deserve a break if they are willing to give up a career to give their children the love and guidance that children so desperately need. If our nation does not start providing for and encouraging mothers to do their duty by raising their children, "there will either be no next generation, or a next generation that is worse than none at all..."
Works Cited

