



- TWT HOME
- OPINION
- SPORTS
- CULTURE
- BOOKS
- BLOGS
- COMMUNITIES**
- PHOTO GALLERIES

- ENTERTAIN US
- FAMILY
- GLOBAL
- LIFE
- SPORTS VIEW
- POLITICS
- RELIGION
- FOOD & TRAVEL
- HEALTH & SCIENCE
- BUSINESS

COMMUNITIES HOME ► POLITICS ► **THE CONSCIENCE OF A REALIST** ABOUT US | WRITE FOR US | CONTACT US | FEEDS | TERMS

Asking Stephanie Coontz: What's the deal with "family values"?

Comment(s)



Friday, October 19, 2012 - The Conscience of a Realist by Joseph Cotto

Joseph Cotto



Ask me a question.

FLORIDA, October 19, 2012 — The American family can only be described as a work in progress.

The times are changing very quickly, which has resulted in the traditional family unit being questioned. In some cases, old ideas are undergoing adaptation to our society's emerging social norms.

Needless to say, this has left more than a few in a state of aggravation. Many of these people believe that America should return to a bygone era during which everything seemed to be a bit simpler.

Were things really ever this way, though?


Stephanie Coontz is one of our time's foremost social scientists. She has written about the American family at length, and uncovered more than a few inconvenient truths in the process.


EDITORS' PICKS

 **My age 42 birthday wish: Meeting 43 by 43**

 **Hawaiian coffee startup sees global interest**

 **An American mother fights for her adoptive daughter in the Congo**

 **Theo Walcott's injury; Eusebio gone; tough days for soccer**


 **The overtime of fame: Chris Kluwe, show trials and the NFL**

 **Abandoned horses suffer in Maryland as adoptions dwindle**

 **Jerusalem 3D IMAX offers a sensory ride for the spirit**

 **TeamBuilders Counseling Services on best resolutions to make in 2014**

 **Why the Obama administration is terrified of the Bob Gates revelations**

 **IRS to get 'license to kill' groups that oppose Obama agenda**

MOST READ

The unique dialects of Appalachia give the

In this first part of a candid discussion with me, she explains about how "family values" might be defined, why family life has seen so many changes over the last several years, whether or not championing the historical Western family concept is an answer to contemporary societal problems, and much more.

Joseph F. Cotto: *Very often, we hear a great deal about "family values". How would you define this term?*

Dr. Stephanie Coontz: I hardly ever use the term, because it is often shorthand for valuing only one particular kind of family. The family values I grew up with were to respect the individuality of each family member, while working for the good of the family as a whole, and to judge other families by how they act and what they do, not by how they look from the outside or what they SAY they believe. Unfortunately, that is a set of family values that gets far too little attention in our political debates.

Cotto: *Over the last several years, American family norms have changed considerably. Why do believe that this has taken place?*

Dr. Coontz: There are many different sources and types of change, some positive and some negative. Women's new legal rights and growing economic independence have transformed the traditional basis of marriage, making negotiation, compromise, and flexibility about roles far more important than in the past. Couples that have adjusted enjoy more intimate, fairer marriages than ever before. Domestic violence rates have been halved in the past 20 years.

New values about equality and individualism have also greatly improved the status of children in most families. Child abuse is down. Mothers, including working moms, actually spend MORE time interacting with their kids than in the past, and fathers who live with their children have tripled the amount of time they spent with their children.

But the same values and economic trends that have improved many relationships have also given people more options to leave relationships, and in some cases more incentives to do so. And they have greatly increased the time pressures on families and the volatility of family finances, all of which lead to more family stress.

Cotto: *Needless to say, there is a great deal of opposition to these changes. What would you suppose that this opposition is rooted in?*

Dr. Coontz: Some people oppose these changes because they have very fixed ideas about what the "right" gender roles, family arrangements, and, and personal life choices are, and they hate the increasing tolerance for choice and diversity. Others are understandably anxious about the rapidity of social and personal change, which has created some new problems in the process of solving many old ones. There's a tendency to think that if we just turned the clock back on family life we could get rid of those new problems, without recognizing that in doing so we would recreate the conditions that made so many people so dissatisfied with traditional gender roles and traditional restrictions on individual choice in the first place.

Cotto: *From your perspective, is championing the traditional Western family unit a viable answer to many of our country's social problems?*

Dr. Coontz: No it's not. For one thing, the male breadwinner family that most people think of when they hear the word "traditional" was actually a historical fluke — a short historical time period after World War II when the age of marriage fell to new lows, the fertility rate soared, and for the first time in history the average man could support his family without relying on the labor of his children and wife.

For most of history, women were co-providers with their husbands, on the farm or in small businesses. Today women have rejoined men in the workforce, partly by choice, partly by economic necessity.

[mountain people their identity](#)

[Why English should be the official language of the United States](#)

[University of Maryland offering free online Android programming course](#)

[Deportation of German homeschool family affects US homeschool freedom](#)

[Fibromyalgia solved: Not in the mind, but a very real physical ailment](#)

[George Washington's views on political parties in America](#)

[One woman's story of domestic adoption fraud](#)

[Midseason replacement TV shows: Whats new for 2014?](#)

[Convicted felon Robert Creamer is heading Americans United for Change](#)

[Why did Osama bin Laden hate Americans, Jews and Christians?](#)

QUESTION OF THE DAY

FEATURED



Riffs

Find up-to-date information on the D.C. and Baltimore live music scenes and read interviews with artists and reviews of the latest releases and concerts.

[The Saint Johns perform at the 9:30 Club](#)

Florida singer/songwriter duo's recent performance at DC's 9:30 Club reviewed.

[The Devil Makes Three: Bluegrass in action at the 9:30 Club](#)

Bluegrass trio, The Devil Makes Three: Updated down-home action at the 9:30 Club.

[Minor Alps perform at the Black Cat](#)

Juliana Hatfield and Matthew Caws appearance as Minor Alps in DC.

[Review: Classic hardcore punks H2O at the Fillmore](#)

Classic hardcore punks H2O in action in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Metro News

Find the latest news and happening that effect those in the Washington D.C., Northern Virginia and Maryland Metro region.

It's All Smoke and Whiskey

All of the world's problems, solved on your back porch

The Tygrrrr Express

A politically conservative and morally liberal Hebrew alpha male hunts left-wing viper

TV Den

Television commentary, reviews, news and nonstop DVR catch-up by Lisa King Dolloff and friends.

Gorilla Position

The world of professional wrestling as seen through the eyes of columnist James Ryan, including previews, recaps, interviews and all of the latest wrestling news.

VIDEO

Wives' employment is critical to most families' economic security, and mothers who have rewarding jobs with some level of flexibility have lower rates of depression than other moms. But the fact that 70 percent of America's children live in homes where every adult in the household works outside the home means we have to come up with better quality child care or preschool along with more flexible work options for more parents. We simply can't pretend these challenges will go away if we could somehow send women back home.

Cotto: *Many look back at the 1950s as being a halcyon era for traditional family values. Were the '50s really a time of such social standards?*

Dr. Coontz: That's the second problem with championing the so-called traditional family. Behind the Norman Rockwell pictures and the happy sit com sets lay a much more complex reality. Yes, out of wedlock births were lower then, as were divorce rates. But domestic violence was much more widespread than today. Infanticide was more common. Child abuse and incest were swept under the rug. Poverty and child malnutrition rates were higher. African-American families were subject to vicious retaliation when they tried to exercise their citizenship rights. Gays and lesbians were forced to live in the closet. Anti-semitism was widespread. Disabled and mentally challenged children were often warehoused.

Even those supposedly happy homemakers lived precarious lives. In only 8 states did a homemaker have any claim at all to the income her husband earned during marriage.

This article is the copyrighted property of the writer and Communities @ WashingtonTimes.com. Written permission must be obtained before reprint in online or print media. REPRINTING TWTC CONTENT WITHOUT PERMISSION AND/OR PAYMENT IS THEFT AND PUNISHABLE BY LAW.

More from **The Conscience of a Realist**

blog comments powered by Disqus



AP Top Stories January 9 A (Runtime: 01:05)

More Video

[View all Videos >](#)



Giffords Skydives on Shooting Anniversary



Raw: Conjoined Whales Discovered, Dead



Bullock, Timberlake Winners at People's Choice

PHOTO GALLERIES



Mercatello sul Metauro

Images from Mercatello sul Metauro and Rubino

53 Photos



Cherished Korean Christmas Memories Gallery

From Korea In Years Gone By -

Photographs by 1st LT David Bartruff, USAR

26 Photos



The Waldorf Astoria Spa

When you're not on the slopes, relax and renew at the Waldorf Astoria Spa.

9 Photos



Slideshow: Photos from the 2013 Holiday Gift Guide featuring the best video game-, comic book- and pop culture-themed gift ideas

Photos from the 2013 Holiday Gift Guide featuring the best video game-, comic book- and pop culture-themed gift ideas include Sideshow Collectibles' Hulk Maquette, Hasbro's Anakin to Darth Vader figure and Uncle Milton's Spider-Man Web Creator Lab.

7 Photos



Advent Harvest at the Vine Church of Petaluma, California

21 Photos



Images from St. Peter's square, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome

Images from St. Peter's square, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome (September 2012/Jacque Kubin)

44 Photos



Pyramids and Egypt

Historical treasures of Egypt.

8 Photos

Elton John, Verizon Center, DC - Nov 2013



Images for his Madman Across the Water
Tour, November 2013.

25 Photos



Mt. Rushmore - Dave Bartruff

Mt. Rushmore - Dave Bartruff

19 Photos



**Bluefields Bay Villas & Patrick Marti:
Business & Peace Corp working
together to make a difference**

Bluefields Bay Villas & Patrick Marti: Business & Peace Corp
working together to make a difference

53 Photos

POPULAR THREADS

Powered by [Disqus](#)
