

# **America's Social Revolution**



# America's Social Revolution

Melanie Phillips

Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society  
in association with the *Sunday Times*  
London

First published September 2001  
Civitas  
The Mezzanine, Elizabeth House  
39 York Road, London SE1 7NQ  
email: books@civitas.org.uk

© Melanie Phillips 2001

*All rights reserved*

ISBN 1-903 386-15-2

Typeset by Civitas  
in New Century Schoolbook

Printed in Great Britain by  
The Cromwell Press  
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

# ***Contents***

<i>The Author</i>	<i>Page</i> vii
<i>Foreword</i> <i>David G. Green</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1. The Family	3
2. Crime	29
3. Education	48
Conclusion	69

This book is based on a series of three articles  
by Melanie Phillips which appeared in  
the *Sunday Times* on  
17 June, 24 June and 1 July 2001

## ***Author***

**Melanie Phillips** is a columnist for the *Sunday Times* where she writes about social trends and political ideas. She previously worked for the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, where she developed her critique of moral and intellectual confusion in Britain. Her previous books include *All Must Have Prizes*, a study of Britain's education problems published by Warner Books, and *The Sex-Change Society: Feminised Britain and the Neutered Male*, published by the Social Market Foundation.

## ***Foreword***

Melanie Phillips has become one of the outstanding social commentators of our time and Civitas is delighted to publish her account of *America's Social Revolution*. She discusses crime, welfare dependency and family breakdown and shows how each is inseparable from the moral disputes about marriage, divorce and sexuality which have divided opinion since the 1960s.

For a long time the thoughts of otherwise sharp-minded Western intellectuals turned to jelly when confronted with the rights and wrongs of family breakdown. Trite phrases such as 'you can't turn the clock back' or 'you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube' were decisive arguments for some. And to assert that 'the government should not preach' clinched many a debate in the minds of those inclined to fear excessive government interference in social policy. But as Melanie Phillips describes, many American opinion leaders have now come to the view that it makes little sense to call for non-intervention when the government is already involved. Indeed, public policies have been among the main causes of some of the most socially harmful changes in recent years. Calling for public policies to be neutral between lifestyle choices is counter-productive when huge subsidies are being directed towards fatherless families, unavoidably making lone parenthood more economically feasible and socially acceptable, despite the serious harm done to children and to the wider social fabric.

It should be no surprise that political paternalists do not mind when public policies create dependent client groups who look to the political process for the



means of support, but it is self-contradictory for the champions of freedom to echo the same reasoning. The self-styled social liberals in the modern Conservative party typify the intellectual confusion. Their starting point is that they favour personal freedom. Consequently, they believe that they should be against government control of individual lifestyles or any effort by the government to encourage particular social practices such as marriage. However, they make the unspoken assumption that the lifestyle choices already made, for example by lone parents, were 'free' choices uninfluenced by existing public policies when they were no such thing. In these circumstances, to argue against changes in public policies which are intended to have a different behavioural effect from that of existing policies is not opposition to 'intervention' *per se* but support for existing intervention.

There is a deeper question to be asked when weighing up the value of public policies. Do they tend to encourage independence of judgement or do they result in the manipulation of human behaviour to fit a pattern desired by policy makers? The intention of American welfare reform, including policies supportive of marriage, has been to create independence and to discourage permanent reliance on state aid. Professor Lawrence Mead has called the tendency of US welfare reforms unashamedly paternalist. If he is right, these policies represent the kind of paternalism pursued by parents who are preparing their children to take control of their own lives. The earlier strategy of welfare 'rights' was also paternalistic but it was a brand of paternalism which kept people in a state of permanent adolescence.

Many American commentators across the spectrum of opinion have come to recognise that it makes little

sense to defend personal freedom by calling for non-intervention in an age of massive government programmes with huge behavioural impacts. A genuine effort to encourage liberty can only rest on the kind of financial independence which permits individuals to plan and live out their lives according to their own talents and beliefs. It is an inescapable fact that (apart from a few people of exceptional wealth) the only economically and socially viable way of raising children is the two-parent family in which both partners are fully committed to each other. Consequently, public policies that encourage non-viable lifestyles should be changed. To call for non-intervention or neutrality is to divert attention from the real choice in welfare policy: between, on the one hand, public policies which protect people from poverty by prolonging their dependency and, on the other, policies which encourage personal freedom through financial independence based on work and (where there are children) marriage.

Melanie Phillips and the *Sunday Times* have performed a major public service by bringing to public attention the striking lessons of *America's Social Revolution*.

*David G. Green*

# Introduction

---

---

Britain suffers from a set of apparently intractable social problems: crime, family breakdown, welfare dependency and educational failure. Despite much bombastic rhetoric, none of our political parties appears to have any idea of how to break into these cycles of anti-social behaviour and low achievement. Healthy debate, moreover, has been hampered by our 'culture wars', the deep divisions that now exist over moral and social values and over where the boundaries should be drawn between public policy and private lives.

During the last few years, I became aware that although the United States suffers from very similar social problems and is fighting the same cultural battles, the debate there has been more open and opinion has been shifting as a result. I had read and heard of American experiments with school choice that were raising education standards; accountable policing schemes that were reducing crime; and above all, initiatives designed to shore up the two-parent family which were starting to win people back to the importance of marriage and traditional family life, an approach which was likened in this country to Canute trying to hold back the tide.

What happens in America is of great importance for Britain because significant social and cultural trends have a habit of eventually crossing the Atlantic to influence the development of British society. So I

decided to visit America for the *Sunday Times* to investigate for myself whether these schemes were having an effect—and whether it is possible to drag a society back from the brink of collective suicide. What follows is what I found there: the development of a social revolution.

# 1

## The Family

---

---

### *Using the M-Word*

To most people, Oklahoma probably conjures up little more than the image of corn-filled prairies and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. This south-western state, ‘the buckle of the Bible belt’, is hardly a by-word for cutting-edge controversy.

Yet Oklahoma is putting itself in the front line of America’s culture wars. It is doing what Tony Blair dares not do and what America’s liberals think no government should do. Oklahoma’s social workers, nurses, health visitors and other public sector staff are to give all the people coming to them for help—including never-married and divorced mothers, at-risk teenagers or cohabiting students—the explicit and uncompromising message that marriage is their best protection against abuse, poverty and disease, backed up by a programme of practical guidance to show them how to make marriage work. It is thus challenging head-on the belief which has come to dominate both American and British society: that the state should not make judgments about which family structure works best, and that the progressive dismemberment of the traditional family is an irreversible process.

***‘marriage is their best protection against abuse, poverty and disease’***

Oklahoma has one of the highest rates of divorce and illegitimacy in America. It is also, like other states, awash with money freed up by dramatic falls in the welfare rolls, the result of the 1996 federal act that replaced welfare dependency by the work ethic. Oklahoma is spending millions of dollars from this surplus to fund an extensive programme specifically to promote marriage and reverse the tide of family disintegration.

Public sector staff in health, social work and education are to be trained to advise people about the advantages of marriage and educate them in how to manage relationships so they endure. These clients will get free food, transport and baby-sitting to encourage them to come to these education sessions. Two psychologists have been employed as 'marriage ambassadors' to train university staff, clergy or anyone who wants to know how to offer marriage guidance. The state has also persuaded clergy from different faiths and denominations to agree not to marry couples unless they wait at least four months, during which they undergo several sessions of pre-marital education and will be given support by church-based mentor couples.

All of this is designed to change the culture and win consent for the idea that marriage is a social good that should be encouraged and promoted. The next stages in this revolution will be a sustained programme of abstinence education in schools, a toughening up of the divorce laws, and an attack on the 'marriage penalty', the financial disadvantage to marriage arising from the system of tax credits (a system which has been copied in Britain with no acknowledgement of the disincentive it provides to getting wed).

Oklahoma's marriage agenda is the boldest and most highly developed. But it is not alone. Many other

states are now beginning to dip their toes in this most turbulent of waters. Florida, for example, makes high school students take courses on marriage; Texas and South Carolina offer cut-price marriage licences if couples have premarital counselling; Louisiana and Arizona have introduced 'covenant marriage', a nuptial contract which makes it harder to divorce.

In Modesto, California, the divorce rate is down from 47 per cent in 1986, when it boasted more divorces than marriages, to six per cent, compared to a national drop in divorce of 1.5 per cent. Similar large falls have been recorded in Kansas City and El Paso. These reductions are claimed to be the result of the Marriage Savers programme, devised by journalist Mike McManus and a prototype for the Oklahoma policy of persuading clergy not to marry couples unless they sign up for pre-marital counselling and mentoring.

***'In Modesto, California, the divorce rate is down from 47 per cent in 1986 ... to six per cent'***

All this adds up to a sea-change in American attitudes towards the family. In the last decade, opinion shifted from relative indifference towards the rise in divorce and illegitimacy to a recognition of the importance of fatherhood. But this mainly took the form of getting fathers to pay child support and visit their children with whom they weren't living. Marriage was the unmentionable M-word. The momentum seemed to be with granting equivalence to unconventional unions, illustrated by the ruling of the state court of Vermont that there should be state civil unions for same sex marriages.

The signs are that a new mood may now be stopping the trend of family collapse that has been accelerating

for 30 years. Like Britain, America has very high rates of divorce and lone parenthood. In America, some 45 per cent of new marriages will end in divorce, compared to about 40 per cent in Britain; some 33 per cent of American births are out of wedlock, although this is exceeded by Britain's 40 per cent.

### ***Drawing a Line in the Sand***

But unlike Britain where these trends are increasing, in America they have stopped and are even beginning modestly to go the other way.

***'America has counted the cost of family collapse and decided that it is simply too high a price to pay'***

Rates of divorce, single parenthood, teenage pregnancy, are all now turning down. And the most likely explanation is that unlike Britain where talk of marriage and family values is condemned as extreme, America has counted the cost of family collapse and decided

that it is simply too high a price to pay. From abstinence education in schools and active fatherhood projects to a welter of initiatives to reverse the tide of divorce, America has been changing the national conversation and with it the attitudes of the public.

This is in turn part of a wider phenomenon in which, at some point in the last decade, America decided to draw a line in the sand. It looked at its appalling levels of violent crime, at its disastrous educational standards, at its soaring rates of divorce and illegitimacy, at its inner cities abandoned to decay as the prosperous fled to the leafy suburbs, and it realised it had been pouring trillions of dollars down the drain. The war on poverty had been a catastrophic failure.



From now on, there would be no more excuses. No more blaming poverty or racism or buried childhood trauma for social decline and breakdown. No more sitting back and waiting for state largesse to deliver the solutions. Instead, everyone would start being held stringently to account. Teachers would be made accountable to parents for school standards. Police chiefs would hold their officers to account for crime reduction. And individual citizens would be held to account for their own behaviour: dependency on welfare would be replaced by a universal work ethic, there would be zero tolerance of crime and everyone would be made to face the consequences of their actions.

***'In state after state, real progress is being made in reducing crime, raising educational standards and pushing down teenage pregnancy'***

This trend is far from universal. The culture wars that divide Britain are still raging in the United States. Nevertheless, throughout America, this social and moral revolution has been gathering pace. Liberally-minded Democrats, who shy away from holding individuals to account and cling onto the old excuses, are holding their noses and squealing but are being dragged along by the mounting evidence of success. In state after state, real progress is being made in reducing crime, raising educational standards and pushing down teenage pregnancy, all by challenging the victim culture and insisting instead that people take responsibility for their own life choices and for their children's opportunities. And central to this drive to change individual behaviour has been the role played by religious activism—so much so that President George W. Bush, who was himself rescued

from dependency on alcohol by religious faith, intends to make his new office of faith-based welfare the driving force of his social policy.

### ***Tough-love Democrats and Civic-minded Republicans***

Bush's plans for religion are causing widespread controversy in America, with objections from both left and right. But the social revolution is already well under way and has the potential to create a new type of politics. Tough-love Democrats are joining forces with civic-minded Republicans to challenge shibboleths on crime, education, family and welfare. Certainly, some around President Bush believe that if he succeeds in pushing forward his faith-based 'compassionate conservatism', this could radically reshape the Republican party into a political crusade for the poor, snatching from the Democrats the moral high ground on which they are camped.

These developments will have repercussions for us and will be closely watched by our politicians. Although America is in many ways a very different society from Britain, our social problems are very similar and some of their causes—such as the educational theories which have done such damage in our schools, or the sexual revolution which has undermined the family—are direct imports from the United States. Where America leads, we usually follow; and if its accountability politics start to produce widespread improvements to problems we have come to believe are intractable, then the pressure to change our own approach will become hard to resist. The Labour government has already talked—if cautiously—about encouraging religious groups to deliver welfare services. The Conservative party has looked enviously at

the electoral success delivered by Bush's 'compassionate conservatism', although whether this will help the party resolve its own internal identity crisis is unclear.

Indeed, it is hard to see British politicians yet grasping the nettles that America is now starting to pull up by the roots, simply because Britain has not had the kind of sustained debate on these issues that has been changing American hearts and minds over a period of years. Of all these issues, the most explosive—and the one on which public opinion has been led step by difficult step—is the family. First, America had a debate about the effects of family breakdown upon children, and finally concluded the effects were dire. Then it decided to reform welfare and get lone mothers off welfare and into work. Next, it decided that fatherhood was important and had to be promoted.

***'it is hard to see British politicians yet grasping the nettles that America is now starting to pull up by the roots'***

Opinion now stands at the tipping point on marriage, seen as the unfinished business of welfare reform. The Bush administration is to introduce a fatherhood bill which will give money to fatherhood groups provided they explicitly promote marriage. Suddenly, the previously unsayable is about to become a central plank of social policy. The key is to avoid moralising. Instead, the administration's message is to be that the financial and social costs of family disintegration can no longer be tolerated by responsible governments.

The impetus is being created by the fact that next year Congress is due to re-authorise the welfare reform act passed five years ago. This was the legisla-

tion which controversially ended the concept of automatic entitlement to welfare and gave states the task of getting lone mothers off welfare and into work.

The results have been spectacular. In Wisconsin, where the reform was pioneered, welfare rolls tumbled from 100,000 to 7,000. In Oklahoma, the rolls shrank similarly by 70 per cent. The lone mothers who were targeted went out to work *en masse*. Not only did child poverty go down as a result, but research indicates that rates of child abuse and neglect also dropped—although there is concern about the welfare and behaviour of older children left alone at home. The great unanswered question, though, is what will happen to those women who have still not found work when the five year cut-off for welfare is reached, particularly if the economy has turned down and jobs become scarce for the first time in many years?

However, this act was not just concerned with cutting the welfare rolls. It also gave states block grants to bring down rates of illegitimacy and promote marriage. Some 34 states accordingly promoted abstinence programmes in schools, which contributed to a significant drop in teenage pregnancies. The states, though, largely ignored the marriage promotion aspects of the act, indicating the extreme sensitivity of this part of the programme. Nevertheless, what the effects of this act showed above all was that the state is a powerful mechanism for influencing people's behaviour.

This was not lost on Oklahoma, where an economic study done three years ago for the state's Republican governor, Frank Keating, reported that among the reasons for the state's low median income were the high rates of divorce, child abuse and out-of-wedlock births. So Keating staged a high-profile conference

about promoting and supporting marriage, which sent out a powerful signal that the state was now going to take this seriously.

But shouldn't government remain aloof from the private choices of family life? 'Government is already involved', says Jerry Regier, director of the governor's Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. 'For years we told girls on welfare, if you have a child we will pay for it and set you up in your own apartment. We need instead to incentivise the same girl not to have a child out of wedlock but to have it in marriage for her own and society's well-being.

***'there are studies that indicate on lots of different measures marriage is really good for people'***

'We aren't moralising or telling people how to live their lives but changing the incentives. The key is to encourage marriage for the good of society while not denigrating other lifestyles. If people make certain choices because of bad government policy and then government has to pick up the pieces and pay for those choices, then it's very much government's business.'

### ***Marriage is Good for People***

This pragmatic approach sent Oklahoma officials to the Smart Marriages conference in Washington, set up by former marital therapist Diane Sollee to spread the word about a revolution in marriage guidance. Old-style pre-marital counselling, she says, was worse than useless because it mistakenly stressed compatibility.

'All couples have about ten irreconcilable differences', she says. 'The ones who finish together disagree the same as the ones who separate. The difference lies in attitudes and expectations about disagree-

ment and change in the way they handle it. Courses based on effective behaviour can be taught to anyone. When you tell people about the research they change their minds. The public simply doesn't know the facts.'

And these facts include the huge benefits of marriage for both adults and children. Dr Don Hebbard is a marriage counsellor and Oklahoma's co-ordinator of marriage education. 'We don't want to be judgmental or moralising but we do point out that there are studies that indicate on lots of different measures marriage is really good for people', he says. 'In the last few decades the United States came to believe marriage was a curse. We are trying to correct this. A lot of young people have been raised without a picture of a functioning husband and wife. Most people will get married, so let's give them the tools to make it successful.'

The training is based on identifying relationship problems and improving communications and resolving conflicts. Far from interfering in people's personal lives, the new emphasis on family is designed to promote the framework that will best encourage people to become responsible. Jason Turner was one of the architects of the pioneering Wisconsin welfare reform and is now New York City's welfare commissioner. 'The reform changed the behavioural norms of individuals to take advantage of work by creating the habit of working' he says. 'The next phase should transform behaviour by helping people understand the importance of family, fatherhood and marriage.'

### ***Finding Absent Fathers***

For Turner, the key challenge is reconnecting families with absent fathers, rather than merely getting them to pay child support. Probation officers are used to

help fathers find jobs and get back with their families; the media is used to transmit public service announcements about the importance of fatherhood; and faith-based organisations subcontract with churches to go into the homes of welfare moth-

***'the key challenge is reconnecting families with absent fathers, rather than merely getting them to pay child support'***

ers who are not working and ask them how they can help with their lives, including reaching out to fathers.

Such a programme is in operation on the streets of Washington DC. The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalisation is run by Charles Ballard, a devout black Christian. He brings young fathers, whose average age is 17, from lives of drugs, crime and absence from their families back into close contact with their children and into jobs and even marriage. His main aim is to teach these boys to be responsible fathers. And he achieves all this through a remarkable process.

First, his workers locate single mothers. 'We choose the worst communities', says Ballard, 'and we wear suits. We say to these women, we're doing a survey on fatherhood and we ask them certain questions and watch their expression. No-one has ever asked these people their opinion. In a matter of seconds they change because you are treating them with respect. You see them gritting their teeth; then the tears come. We say we'd love to come back and talk to you.'

'In time, the workers find out the fathers' names from the women. Then we go and find the fathers. We'll knock on doors three to four doors down and ask whether there are any fathers in the street. This is so the father doesn't know we've got his name from the girl, to whom we give a guarantee that he won't know she's given us his name and that he won't hit her

again.' Then they work with both the father and the mother to get them to face up to their situation and encourage them to change.

'We talk to the father and get him to forgive the past and promise he won't carry that legacy into the future. We ask what would have happened if he had approached these problems this way rather than that way, treated the policeman with respect rather than hit him. We work to give the father a sense of responsibility. Then we do a eugenogram, a future family tree where he's creating great-grandchildren who are doctors and lawyers and social workers. So it's a process of reinventing his past, present and future.'

After a 30-day probationary period, the fathers get three to four visits per week where they work through these issues. They are given help with jobs, health and fitness, marriage counselling, and education and budgeting, with their savings matched dollar for dollar and put into a bank account. They are taught to think of their job as their business, so they will arrive half an hour early and leave half

***'Stable married couples move into high-risk neighbourhoods to provide round-the-clock support'***

an hour late; and they are taught community involvement through joining the parent teacher association or helping with clubs.

Stable married couples move into high-risk neighbourhoods to provide round-the-clock support for such fathers as well as for the mothers and children. Through prompting and building on the fathers' feelings for their children, many of whom they may never have seen, the project gets them to discard their high risk lifestyles—gang involvement, use of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, violence, profanity and bad diets.



The results are impressive. Sixty-five per cent find full-time jobs on their own, and another eight per cent find part-time jobs. Seventy-five per cent hang on to their jobs. Only 13 per cent go back to taking drugs. And while not all of them get married, virtually all start playing a major role in the lives of their women and their children.

But don't the women resist the men coming back into their lives? 'About 93 per cent of the women want the men', says Ballard. 'They don't want the neglect, abuse or unfaithfulness. But they want to get married to these guys.'

On the Anacosta housing project in north east Washington, the Ballard programme is in action. Anacosta is grim: houses are boarded up, windows are broken, rusty trailers sit abandoned in the road. Charles Pyatt, a young black man wearing a suit and tie and carrying a clipboard, is going cold-calling on a dilapidated terrace to find single mothers.

Like many workers, Pyatt is himself a graduate of the programme. He was a drug addict and he met his wife through the programme when she was a single mother receiving its help. 'I never saw my own father', he says. 'At one time I never thought about it. Now I think about it all the time. I did find out what his name was. I wonder all the time, should I track him down, will he track me down? Most of my neighbourhood didn't have fathers so it didn't really bother me. Now I realise how important it is, especially for a boy to keep out of trouble.'

Behind grimy windows, shadowy faces peer out suspiciously at this punctiliously dressed apparition. One young woman is curious to see what he wants with her. The patter starts: this is a fatherhood survey, just a few questions.

What does she think makes a good father-child relationship? 'Being there all the time', she says. What is fatherlessness? 'The father's not around', she says, with feeling. 'I take care of my kids myself.' How many does she have? 'Eight'. Pyatt says, did she know that last night 23 million American children went to bed without their fathers? 'It doesn't really bother me', she says, 'because I'm there for my kids. It's sad but there's nothing I can do about it'. What role did her own father play in her life? 'He was never there.' Yes, she would be interested in the programme.

***'The only thing worse than welfare was slavery'***

At the next house, a woman comes to the door more belligerently. 'The father should be around every day of the week', she shouts. 'The mother has to do everything for the child. My kids' father is no good. He needs a job, he lives on the streets, he don't see my kids. He don't come round 'cause I won't have him coming round me. He don't do shit for his kids. Never pays for shoes or clothes or Christmas or anything.' She turns to go back inside. Pyatt says: 'Can we help you with a job?' She returns, interested. 'Yes, I could do with a job.' Within 15 minutes, two single mothers have taken the first steps towards the programme.

'Welfare has meant federally managed fatherhood abandonment', says Ballard. 'The only thing worse than welfare was slavery. Even when they were slaves, people wanted freedom and to work; but welfare creates emotional poverty which is worse than financial poverty and can't be resolved by money. There are now pockets of people who are emotionally disenfranchised but they don't realise it so it's difficult to get a handle on it. We believe that the government must change its attitude towards the family and say it

is a loving man and woman who are married and working hard together to raise responsible children.'

### ***The Fragile Family***

But within the fatherhood movement, there are deep divisions between those like Ballard who believe promoting marriage is vital and those who believe in supporting the 'fragile family' in which parents are not married. Jeffery Johnson is president of the National Centre for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership, which runs the largest network of fatherhood programmes in America. He believes the focus should be on the welfare of the child regardless of the parents' marital status. Sometimes marriage will be an appropriate next step, sometimes not.

'What's important is the real families at the door', he says. 'You can't legislate Cupid. It's not either or, it's both. We work out the most ideal circumstances for raising their child which may be marriage or a team parenting model where child support is needed. And this isn't just about money. Our projects provide parenting education, substance abuse referrals, help with legal paternity suits, job placements.

'Promoting marriage is controversial as the women's groups don't necessarily see it as egalitarian. But there can be consensus if the programme is client-centred and the client makes the choice. There's no consensus when the whole programme is built around that and clients are told to do the right thing. I hope the government will now focus on the formation and maintenance of the two-parent family that works either on the marriage or the parent model. If public policy is to be written around marriage, it will cut down the options.'

Within the Bush administration, however, there is scant support for this point of view. Don Eberly, assistant adviser to the president on faith and community, is a key thinker on marriage and fatherhood. He says the debate is now shifting its gears. Marriage is no longer the policy province of the religious right.

'About 40 per cent of kids go to bed in a house with no father', he says, 'and more than half our children will spend part of their lives in a house where their father doesn't live. We've always had some non-traditional households. But now, 68 per cent of African-American kids are born out of wedlock. A lot of honest people of goodwill from the centre and the left acknowledge it's unargu-

***'you can't allow the nation's children to be raised without intact families'***

able that you can't allow the nation's children to be raised without intact families.

'Winning the fatherhood debate was essential. Now the question is under what circumstances fathers remain active. Generally, father involvement is sustained through marriage. We would say the "fragile family" is only the starting point; if it's the ending point, this is the next scenario for massive governmental costs. The fragile father sends his cheque in on time and visits his children under the supervision of a case worker. This is utterly non-viable.

'The circumstances under which fathers remain involved are themselves quite fragile. If the obstacles aren't minimal, the fathers disappear. The alternative is to do something about the collapse of marriage, accepting this will be very, very hard work. Trying to do something is a heck of a lot better than doing or saying nothing.'

Ballard's is a Christian programme. It achieves what it does not because it tries to convert people to

Christianity but because it sets out to transform an individual through getting him to take responsibility for his behaviour. It therefore becomes a mission rather than a social service.

In America, the most successful faith-based projects work because they try to change individual behaviour, an approach which the sentimental, non-judgmental British might find hard to stomach.

### ***Tough Love for Single Mothers***

In Houston, Texas, the Interfaith Housing Coalition's tough-love programme for single mothers is grounded in precisely this sense of mission. Funded by a number of Christian denominations and Jews, it uses transitional housing to instil personal accountability and the work ethic into the needy mothers who beat a path to its doors.

If the mother is accepted, she is given a comfortable, well furnished apartment, prepared by a host family from the various churches involved in the programme. They prepare the family's first meal, put out vases of fresh flowers and a fluffy toy on the bed for each child. The mothers are asked what their goals are, which are usually to get a job, sustain their family, have their own apartment and a car. They are told they will be supported in achieving all that, but it is made very clear to them they will be held accountable for their behaviour. Few probably appreciate just what that means.

They are given three months to find a job and permanent housing and save money. They are given intensive help from a staff of ten people, mentored and coached in employment skills, taught to read, provided with clothes and child care, their medical and dental problems are dealt with, the children are given educa-

tion or therapy, and when all that is done they are told they now have to work. They must work five days a week, eight hours a day finding a job and they must report to the office at nine ready and dressed for work.

When they do so they are given phone directories and a telephone and are told they must tick off employers as they call them. They must make five interview contacts a day by 11.00 a.m., get themselves there and report back in the evening where they have been. The staff check on their stories with random calls. But if they don't do precisely what they are told, they are out on the streets; and they are told this is their choice.

'We've told them they will make choices that determine whether or not the programme will work', says Interfaith's founder Ben Beltzer. 'We say they have to be here on time. If they are late twice they are out; we lock the door. They can't miss more than two meetings with the volunteers. If they make an excuse, we tell them we're not interested in excuses. The residents are gifted in their ability to con. We have to turn that round. If they are not trying they get a warning and then if they still aren't trying they have chosen to leave.'

And this is no idle threat; about 37 per cent are thrown out. What happens to them when they leave? 'We don't know', says Beltzer. How can they put children out on the street like this? 'We are not doing it', says Beltzer emphatically. 'They are doing it. It's not our choice. It's their choice. In our interview with them, all these conditions are explained very carefully to them. They will say anything to get in but they do know. They see us as Christian do-gooders and think they can get by doing just anything. But it's very stringent here.'

And it works. These women, most of whom need intensive help before they can be considered for employment, generally get jobs within 15-21 working days. Their wages are put into a savings account so they have a nest egg when they move out. They are helped to find somewhere permanent to live—and, if they complete the programme, they can take virtually the entire contents of their apartment with them.

### ***Faith-based and Publicly Funded?***

The Coalition takes no state funding as it starts each day with prayers and offers Bible study to the children. The issue of whether faith-based organisations should be given public money is intensely controversial and has provided the Bush administration with a major headache from an unexpected quarter. It anticipated protests from the left against its brief to encourage more faith-based programmes through grants and charitable donations. Liberals are particularly sensitive about the constitutional separation between church and state. But the religious right have raised unanticipated objections that if government funds faith-based organisations they will be compromised by the criteria it lays down and effectively nationalised.

***‘The issue is not whether these groups are faith-based but whether they help people’***

Bush’s advisers, caught in this pincer, maintain that the constitution merely bans an established church; it is the judges who have extended this to exclude religion from the schools, for example, but there is no constitutional bar to religion playing a role in public life. And the law already provides an acceptable framework for state funding of faith-based groups. In 1999 the ‘charitable choice’ law laid down a

trade-off: religious groups would be protected from pressure to remove their religious identity if they received government money, but their programmes had to be free of proselytising prayer, worship or religious instruction. The problem is, say the advisers, that state authorities still discriminate against religious groups.

Steve Goldsmith, who was domestic policy adviser to the Bush campaign and is now responsible for encouraging philanthropy, says: 'The issue is not whether these groups are faith-based but whether they help people. A lot of public money already goes to faith-based organisations; Catholic and Lutheran social services get most of their money from government. So what's new?'

The law, he says, explicitly states that secular alternatives must be available to faith-based programmes. 'It turns the first amendment upside down to say everyone can help the poor except if they are religious. The president believes there are individuals whose lives are permanently changed through faith. We want to create a level playing field for faith projects because they have transformative power'.

But not all faith-based projects prompt undiluted admiration. At first sight Mission Arlington, in Dallas, Texas, seems extraordinarily impressive. It delivers food, shelter, clothing, assistance and even transport to the destitute of Arlington, a well-heeled district which has chosen not to have a bus service because it wants to keep out the proles. Its scale is spectacular. Four thousand turn up for Bible study on Sundays; 16,000 came to patronise its Christmas store. Everything is donated. One hundred therapists and 60 doctors give their time free. There are only six staff but 2,000 volunteers. The place revolves around the charismatic figure of its founder, Tillie Burgin, a



Mother Teresa figure and former schoolteacher and missionary who, after delivering Christianity to Korea, decided to bring her mission to Arlington.

But it's hard not to feel an uncomfortable sense of manipulation here. Manipulation by the missionaries, who follow up requests for help with food or clothing by at-home visits where there is encouragement to Bible study and prayer. But also manipulation by the claimants, who are given whatever they ask for. So how does Burgin prevent people ripping her off? She maintains that her 'networks' in the community inform on anyone who is cheating or stealing, and whenever such behaviour is discovered the person is confronted and if necessary the clothing or other provisions are taken back. But she can't say how often this happens, nor provide convincing evidence that she spots all anti-social behaviour among her recipients. Nor can she explain how her approach may change anyone's behaviour; she merely repeats that this is the working of God, and gets very angry when she is pressed.

Unlike other faith groups which use religion to deliver a social service which holds people to account for their behaviour, Burgin appears to be using social service to deliver religion.

Faith-based welfare cannot be a panacea for all society's ills. There are some bad faith projects, as any others, and they tend to be resistant to secular processes of accountability. The agenda of religious conversion common to many of them will strike some people as too manipulative to be tolerated. Moreover, it is hard to see such an approach crossing the Atlantic to Britain, since America is by comparison a far more religious country with many more 'can-do' clergy who make our own churches appear half asleep by comparison.

Nevertheless, there are surely some useful lessons for Britain in all of this. Faith projects are a significant factor in the revival of civil society that is now under way in America, with an increasing use of the voluntary sector to inject new values into social problems that have defeated the secular state.

### FAMILY INITIATIVE 1

#### ***'I have seen the worst of how men can be'***

*Charles Ballard is the model of an upright citizen and devoted family man; but it was not ever thus.*

*I have three kids at home, as well as a son of 45 and a daughter of 43. She turned up just last Christmas and I had no idea she existed. I recognised the pain I had caused her since she was a child.*

*I was raised in Alabama. When I was three my father became mentally ill and six kids were left without a father. We grew up in a closed community because of segregation. I was the only one who went awry. I was a very angry guy. When my girlfriend Blanche told me she was pregnant I couldn't handle it so I doubted the baby was my son. I made sure he was taken care of though by sending her a cheque. Excuses have no place.*

*I was jailed in Georgia for attempted murder. I wasn't guilty, but I was an African male and they needed someone to jail. I had been kicked out of the army and was functionally illiterate. At first I was always in fights in prison. Then this guy came and read me psalm 103 and for the first time in my life I slept through the night without a nightmare. The man taught me to read by reading Genesis. A white murderer who had been released took me to church. My heart was changed and I wept like a baby; God used an enemy, a Caucasian male, to bring me to Him.*

*'Out of prison, I went back to Alabama to see my son. I had a changed attitude because I had found Christ and wanted to be involved in my son's life. I went to Blanche and apologised for walking away. There was a little girl playing with him. I never looked at her twice. My son jumped up and ran to me crying, 'Daddy, daddy'. There was a picture of me on the table in my army uniform. Every morning Blanche would say to my boy, that's your daddy, he's a hero. He said daddy, daddy, take me with you. He insisted every time I saw him; so when he was five and a half I adopted him. I washed dishes, I scrubbed floors, whatever it took to raise my son I did it. I worked my way through college and got a scholarship to do a master's degree.*

*'He's done well and has five kids of his own and grandchildren. My daughter Diane showed up on Christmas Day. She has two children aged 20 and 24; her husband was an alcoholic and abandoned her. Over the years she would ask her mom where her father was. Blanche hadn't told me about Diane because of the pain I had caused her. Diane said every time she asked her who her father was, tears would come into her eyes. But as time went on she realised she had made a mistake. Now the healing is going on. I plan to visit Blanche and apologise for mistreating her 45 years ago. I have seen the worst of how men can be.'*

## **FAMILY INITIATIVE 2**

***'We say no sex till after high school,  
no alcohol until 21, and no drugs for ever'***

*Best Friends is a non-religious abstinence programme for girls based in Washington DC that achieves a high degree of success through a shrewdly judged approach. In 1997, only 6.7 per cent of 14-year-old girls on the programme had ever had sex, compared with 45 per*

cent in DC schools generally. In 1995, research showed Best Friends teenagers had a pregnancy rate of 1.1 per cent, compared with 26 per cent in the rest of DC.

*The programme is far from being a joyless, finger-wagging exercise. Starting when the girls are nine and going right through to high school graduation, it builds up their self-respect and aspirations and gives them the self-confidence to deal with the peer pressure on them to drink, take drugs and have sex. It provides weekly fitness sessions where the girls discuss diet and nutrition, takes them out on trips and matches each girl with a mentor teacher whom they meet once a week to talk about anything. Crucially, it builds a corps d'esprit which provides peer and adult support to say no.*

*'Best Friends girls are thought of as hip and cool and have fun, not as hard line goody-goodies', says programme director Monte Corbett. 'We talk to them about how they choose their friends, about how a friend is a person around whom you are a better person. We tell them how to make good decisions, what influences them. We ask them why they want to date and what they should say up front so they don't give mixed messages. After love and dating we go into self respect.*

*'Sex education doesn't discuss problems openly or link it to other abusive behaviour. Contraception programmes talk about safe sex. We think telling them they have a choice to have safe sex or not isn't an option. We say wait until you've got through the high school years to make decisions about what is a very serious adult matter. We discuss magazines, TV and lyrics and then ask them if this is the image they want for their body and the way they want to be treated. We are not in a bubble; in fitness classes we play funky music and they have a lot of fun. Mentors will talk to them about guys pressuring them for sex or drugs.'*

*At Ferebee-Hope elementary school, in south east Washington, Sharkiya Marshall, 11, and Chiquita Smalls, 12, are Best Friends girls. Sharkiya says: 'It's about respecting yourself and staying away from sex, drugs and alcohol and making the right decisions. Like if you have a friend and she's trying to make you smoke cigarettes you say no and try to ignore her and say, it's okay. It helps me because I know not to do it. We have plays and physical fitness and stuff and we have fun.'*

*Says Chiquita: 'Last year I wasn't all that good. I was getting into a lot of trouble fighting. Best Friends helped me. They were talking about how not to have sex and stuff and how to help people and I just started being good. I talk to my mentor about my problems. Drugs can destroy your body. They make us unhealthy.'* Sharkiya: *'A few weeks before Christmas my mentor took me shopping and we went out to eat. Sometimes she helps me with my work. We've got a booklet with 21 ways of resisting peer pressure. It has some words you can use when a boy wants to do some uncomfortable things. You would say "no" like you mean it.'*

*Teacher co-ordinator Freda Stanley says: 'Chiquita has been transformed by Best Friends. They do community service and help at the hospital or with senior citizens. It changes the girls' behaviour because they love it and they want to be in it. A lot of these parents don't seem to know the correct vocabulary to use about sex, drugs or alcohol.'*

*Pauline Hamlette was principal of Amidon school where the first Best Friends programme started in 1987. She says that last year she met her former pupils on that programme who had just graduated from college and many said they were still abstinent. 'It's an important part of the school; it helps raise academic performance as well as improve their quality of life. It*

*makes a difference in attitude, in manners, in how they respond in situations involving boys. We had 100 per cent graduation among Best Friends girls.*

*'In the third grade you could see the potential drop-outs from their lifestyles and culture, and we knew Best Friends caused them to change their minds because they wanted to do better. There were girls who had no intention of going to college but as a result of the programme they did. Girls tend to want to know how to say no. Many come from families where no-one has ever been successful. They will have a mother or sisters who've got pregnant unmarried. We can pick up the girls who are walking on the edge. No-one is caring about them, and suddenly there are people saying you can be successful, you can go to college, you can say no. Some of these girls have never been skating, or to the theatre, or to the White House; we take them there. We say no sex till after high school, no alcohol until 21 and no drugs for ever.'*

## 2

# Crime

---

---

### *From the Pulpit to the Street*

Nowhere are the effects of faith-based programmes more remarkable than in America's new approach to crime. André Norman, of Boston, is a 33-year-old articulate, intelligent, personable black man in a sober business suit. A few years ago, he was an armed robber contributing to the drug-fuelled crime epidemic on the streets of Dorchester, Boston's poorest district. He did two and a half years in jail where he was charged six times with attempted murder—until, he says, God told him to stop. Now he works for a black church project which goes out on the streets with the police and probation to destroy the gang culture, a pioneering joint enterprise which has helped bring down the homicide rate in this small city from more than 150 a year in the early 1990s to 37 last year.

*'clergy have brought religion out of the pulpit and into the streets'*

There are now many in America like André Norman. They are part of an extraordinary development in which the clergy and other black community leaders—not a few of whom have themselves had hell-raising pasts—have brought religion out of the pulpit and into the streets to tackle crime, drug abuse and family and social breakdown. In Boston, the poorest

areas of Dorchester and neighbouring Roxbury were, until 1992, a war zone. There were gun battles between schoolchildren, knife fights on buses, drive-by shootings. Now, these streets are safe to walk and crime is right down.

The reason is an unprecedented working relationship between the police, black clergymen and the probation service, which dramatically altered its whole philosophy and practice. This was crucial. Out went the attitude, still shared in Britain, that probation officers were the prisoner's friend. 'There was a sea change', says Bernard Fitzgerald, Dorchester's chief probation officer. 'Now we speak for the public and the community. We are first and foremost law enforcement officers, and we will help people rehabilitate if they co-operate. If not, we will bring them back before the court to make sure they do. It's the oldest form of community-based correction.'

Of Fitzgerald's 44 probation officers, 38 are on the streets all day and all evening. That way, they can check on whether offenders are violating probation and committing more crime. Supporting this tough approach, the judges helpfully pass tailored community sentences, such as curfews.

'Community sentences are not supposed to be easy; they are supposed to be inconvenient and we make them inconvenient', says Fitzgerald. 'We show up at offenders' houses and we do drug tests in their homes, or they show up for random drug tests here. We stop them hanging around with their chums. If someone is a gang member a condition of probation is you can't be seen in a group larger than two. We mandate drug counselling and treatment.

'We restrict them from certain neighbourhoods. And we make an impact. We hold the key to the jail. The



police can only arrest them. Offenders know it's probation which makes the recommendation to the judge to jail them. This probation revolution still provokes significant resistance. But because of the drastic reduction in violence, people can't argue against it.'

### ***Record Numbers in Jail***

Crime has dropped steeply across America in the past decade. The received wisdom among many criminologists, however, is that this has nothing to do with changes in police behaviour. The drop is said to have been caused instead by America's record rate of jailing young black men, or the decline in the number of teenagers, or the booming economy, or an end to the violent turf wars over crack cocaine (this last explanation causes hilarity among the police, who deal with these turf wars every night); or it's a complete mystery.

It's true that America locks up more people than anywhere in the world. For every 100,000 Americans, 680 are in jail—a fourfold increase since the 1970s—compared with 125 per 100,000 in Britain. But although the American imprisonment rate has helped reduce crime, it cannot be the whole explanation. Violent crime rocketed upwards in the 1980s when the prison rate was rising most steeply. And perhaps most telling, locking up criminals doesn't stop others taking their place. If drug dealers were scarce, the price of drugs would be rising—but instead it's falling, proving the dealers are as numerous as ever.

There is almost certainly no one single reason but a combination of factors; and it is plain that in places like Boston, crime began to tumble in response to clear changes in law enforcement. Jeremy Travis of the

Urban Institute in Washington, and a former Director of the National Institute of Justice, says that the unprecedented rate of imprisonment has probably had only a modest effect.

'It's totally commonsensical that a fourfold increase in imprisonment will have some consequences on crime', he says. 'But most crime is impulse behaviour.' What's more likely, says Travis, is that juvenile violent crime has declined because of a combination of police practice and cultural change. 'What I think happened is that at some point the community snapped and developed a different way of thinking: a different way of policing, a different attitude to guns, and a new relationship between minorities and the police, with the black clergy's previous antagonism giving way to a more mixed attitude.'

The activities of black communities in identifying their own law-breaking youths and then administering tough love to them have been critical.

### ***The Boston Miracle***

In Boston, Bernard Fitzgerald's probation revolution was matched by an even more extraordinary black response centred around the charismatic personality of a black pastor called Eugene Rivers. In the early 1990s, Rivers decided that he and other pastors needed to join forces with white society to stop black youths from killing each other.

'The Boston miracle,' says Rivers, 'was based on a model where the clergy went from pulpit to street and dealt with the gangs. Since 1992 the black clergy have been going out with police and probation. We have a list of names, and we warn them. We tell these kids we know who they are. If you are a kid and get a knock on the door and you see Reverend Friendly and Officer

Maybe and Probation Officer Lock 'Em Up, this has an impact, believe me.'

From his Dorchester church Rivers runs a rescue service for the area's youth with literacy, job training and intensive life support. Much of this work is explicitly designed to provide a fathering role. 'In 95 per cent of cases, these young men were fatherless and in part the gang phenomenon was a cultural outgrowth of fatherlessness', he says. 'I saw these young men were all looking for variations on a father figure. Either the gangs were going to raise them or responsible men were going to do it.'

***'The Boston miracle ...was based on a model where the clergy went from pulpit to street and dealt with the gangs'***

Boston is not the only city to have changed its whole attitude to crime and policing. Philadelphia, on America's north-eastern seaboard, is a gracious city now suffering from the flight of industry and the prosperous. Despite its urbane image—this is solid Democrat territory—and philanthropic tradition dating back to its Quaker founder William Penn, Philadelphia is the heroin capital of the north-east. Its gun laws are particularly lax, reflecting the rugged hunting ethos of rural Pennsylvania.

### ***'Broken Windows' in Philadelphia***

A few miles north of the smart city centre lies the district of Kensington, epicentre of Philadelphia's crack-cocaine and heroin trade and associated epidemic of murder and violent crime.

However, the city's horrific crime rate is now showing a downward trend. Murders dropped from 451 in 1997 to 319 in 2000, and vehicle thefts from more than

20,000 to just over 16,000. For three years, the police have been putting into practice in Kensington the 'broken windows' policy pioneered in New York. This targets an area for police action not only against arrestable crime but any minor incivilities or malfunctions. So they will fix broken water mains here, tow away cars as soon as they look abandoned, move people on who are loitering or urinating.

Britain does not have this level of violence, nor the gun culture that fuels it—but we struggle similarly with local crime waves caused by small groups of repeat offenders. In Britain, though, only a tiny minority of police forces, such as Humberside or Hove in Sussex, are trying to put the 'broken windows' theory into practice. Boston's Bernard Fitzgerald, who was a co-author of the 'broken windows' theory, has now transported his probation ideas to Philadelphia.

It's five o'clock and the youth violence patrol is touring Kensington. The patrol car is driven by an armed policeman, Brant 'Bo' Miles. With him are two probation officers, Rich Hartfuss and Ryan Egan. In this city, probation officers do not sit in their offices waiting for their young clients to report to them. Instead they go out with the police onto the streets and into offenders' homes to check that these youths are not breaching their probation orders.

All three in the patrol car are wearing jeans, scruffy jackets and body armour. The patrol will be on the streets until midnight, checking off their list of 150 young offenders aged 14-24, whom they call 'youth partners' and who are known to commit the majority of the city's crime. The inhabitants of this area are mainly Latino, and their streets are grim. There are boarded up houses and factories, derelict land, an abandoned rail track.

Churches and shops have grilles over their windows. Deep drifts of rubbish are piled in the streets, in the school playground, on wasteland. And everywhere are the murals. Every time a man is shot on these streets, a mural goes up on a wall bearing his face and a message. 'In memory of our brother Tone. RIP. We love you.' 'In loving memory of Mandingo.' 'In memory of Moose.'

***'probation officers do not sit in their offices waiting for their young clients to report to them'***

The patrol has one simple, bleak aim for its 'youth partners'. 'It's to get them to make it alive to 25 after which they have a much higher expectation of living', says the officer in charge, Captain William Maye. It's also to make sure they don't kill anyone else.

The police and probation officers share information and back each other up. 'We are social workers but we're also the arm of the court enforcing the law', says Egan. Two boys on the street look warily at the cruising police car. 'Bo' Miles winds down his window. 'What you guys doing? Have a nice night, go into the house.'

Egan disappears into a house and emerges with Claudio Cruz, 18, who's been on his case-load for two years. He was on drugs and didn't show up for court until the patrol picked him up, after which he did ten months in jail. He's been out 20 days. Now Egan is trying to get him a job. 'He's helping me not hang round the same sort of people, not do drugs', says Cruz.

In Philadelphia, the reduction in crime is due in large measure to its police commissioner John Timoney, said by many to be the most impressive police officer in America. In particular, Timoney is treating

drug crime very seriously indeed. In previous years, it is said, a blind eye was turned to drug-dealing in Kensington on the racist grounds that the only people affected were black or Latino residents. The result was a drug trade that built up for years with no attempt to control it.

Timoney was deputy commissioner in New York when it adopted its 'zero tolerance' strategy and brought violent crime tumbling down. He is following a similar course in Philadelphia, and says it has been widely misunderstood and is almost nowhere else properly enforced. The key is using information to hold officers to account for bringing down crime, and deploying them on intelligently targeted operations which are then followed up.

The lynchpin of the operation is the weekly Compstat meeting, where Timoney and his senior staff grill all district commanders about their weekly figures for crimes and arrests, tip-offs and clear-ups, and discuss their individual strategies for bringing crime down. 'We can now spot patterns at a very early stage so we can deploy officers', says Timoney. 'Before, data was collected only for historical records so we didn't have timely, accurate and complete information.

'The biggest lie in law enforcement is that we work well together. Detectives don't talk to patrol, patrol don't talk to narcotics. Everyone is in their own little silo. Compstat brings them together. The day that stops, the whole thing falls apart.'

His style, however, is very different from the New York operation where Mayor Rudolf Giuliani's fatwa on crime brought peace to the streets but also resulted in police brutality and a disastrous alienation of the black community. 'I know if we do it right crime will go down', says Timoney. 'But I'm not going to be accused

of putting in quotas. We don't want officers to think they must fiddle the numbers. They've got to know why crime is not coming down and have a strategy to deal with it.'

His chief of staff, Gordon Wasserman, was for many years a British Home Office civil servant. He says attitudes in the British police need to undergo a similar change. 'In Britain, most cops don't think they can do anything about crime', he says. 'Here they are told they can. They feel themselves to be responsible for bringing crime down. In Britain no-one is blamed if crime goes up; unemployment or race are blamed instead.'

***'In Britain, most cops don't think they can do anything about crime'***

'Everything follows from the way the police see their job', says Timoney, a fitness freak who rows before work. 'The cops know the last phone call I make before I go to bed is to the police radio to see what's going on, and it's the first one I make before I go rowing in the morning.'

### ***The Vital Father Figure***

However, Philadelphia's crime drop is nowhere near as dramatic as Boston's. That is surely to do with the absence in Philadelphia of a committed community response. Providing surrogate parents for boys whose own families have shattered or failed to care for them is the crucial insight common to all the initiatives which are transforming criminal behaviour into law-abiding lives. And the most successful are almost all rooted in religious faith. In Washington Bob Woodson, a black former social worker and civil rights activist, runs the National Centre for Neighbourhood Enter-

prise whose deceptively bland title conceals an astonishing mission.

For two years he travelled the nation and asked people what worked. 'What I saw', he says, 'blew my mind.' He was then a secular person; but he saw religious people all over the country who had themselves been criminals and drug addicts helping scores of hard-core drug users and criminals turn law-abiding. And the key to the transformation was always faith: not the kind wrapped up in church ritual, but simply providing the means to find a purpose and a meaning to life.

Now, Woodson is a practising Christian and runs 39 groups throughout the country. 'We act like a Geiger counter finding what works', he says. 'I look for the person the young people turn to—there's always someone; then I ask if there are others like them.' He calls them the community's 'Josephs'; like the young foreign prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon whose innate gifts saved the kingdom, there are similarly inspired people in every neighbourhood whose unrecognised ability to heal and to inspire are waiting to be tapped.

Once these Josephs start a conversation about what the gangsters want from their lives, and for their children, and give them hope that they can achieve it, such young men begin to become receptive to rescue.

'All kinds of myths have been defied, that they wouldn't give up the drug trade for low paid jobs', says Woodson. 'The worst place in the country was Benning Terrace in Washington, five square blocks with 55 murders per year where the

***'We've reintroduced fathering to these youngsters'***

police were afraid to patrol. In the last four years there's been not one single gang-related murder in



Benning Terrace. Now grass grows there, walls are painted, there's no graffiti, children play on the streets.

'We've reintroduced fathering to these youngsters. Each of us takes under his wing four of these young men. We say to them if they commit themselves to life we will commit ourselves to them for life, and we have. I've had them in my home, one lived with me for four months, they come to dinner with us and are part of our family. Now we provide training and technical assistance to groups in the community able to do this with these young men. There's now an exponential growth of people making these lifetime commitments.'

### ***The Hostility of the Intellectuals***

Woodson is adamant that it's faith that transforms behaviour. 'Faith is crucial for the change to be sustained. I don't wave a Bible or preach at them; I just live by these principles. Of course there's tremendous hostility from the intellectuals and poverty industry. They are hostile out of fear because it's not something they can explain or control. But some of these élites are themselves rethinking because their sons and daughters are getting into drugs or committing suicide.'

***'When this society was on fire ... all the high liberal intellectuals left town'***

Many ex-drug addicts and criminals say they've been through everything—drug rehab, detox, community sentences, prison, probation—and nothing worked until they found faith. In Boston, Gene Rivers observes: 'A lot of these kids are violent because they don't have faith or hope or values. In their absence kids descend into nihilism and violence. Intellectuals

say there's nothing special about faith. I say okay: so where are the atheists? When this society was on fire in 1991-92, all the high liberal intellectuals left town.'

And even more crucially, it's usually only faith believers who are prepared to risk the danger and the commitment. As André Norman sharply remarks: 'If you didn't have faith, you wouldn't have come into the same room as us. Would you otherwise have let me into your house, be near your kids? Would you have stood on the street corner with me?'

### ***Bible Study and Recidivism***

One of the most astonishing examples of faith transforming criminal behaviour is to be found in a Texas prison. The Carol S. Vance medium security prison at Richmond, near Houston, is the site of the InnerChange programme started by Chuck Colson, who was jailed for seven months over Watergate. Based on a Brazilian prison project, it immerses its prisoner volunteers in an intensive, 16-hour-a-day Bible-based programme for 12-18 months prior to their release. The results so far have been startling. While the recidivism rate at ordinary Texas prisons runs at between 52 per cent and 70 per cent, out of 85 who have completed the InnerChange programme just five returned to prison within two years.

The key is a systematic reprogramming of behaviour with intensive support which continues after release. From five in the morning until lights out at 10.30, there are structured activities around Bible study, with a few hours devoted to work or education and evening sessions on substance abuse or meeting victims face to face. Participants also have church-based mentors who stay in contact with them until after they are released. Near release they are taught

skills such as using a chequebook or how to budget. And after release they still continue with parts of the programme until they are brought back to the prison to graduate six months later, when they are expected to have a job, a place to live, a Christian mentor and a home church. The comparison with British prisons where inmates are often locked up for 23 hours a day and receive minimal education or training, let alone spiritual instruction, and no support after release, is breathtaking.

***'You have a spiritual awakening here, learn limits, boundaries and guidelines'***

Any cynicism about this scheme seems misplaced. Some prisoners may volunteer in order to play the system; but as the programme doesn't start until near parole or the end of a sentence, and parole is not assured for participants, it is hard to see the prison being taken for a ride. It's also hard to be cynical when faced with the prisoners themselves. There's a quality about many of them which is not often found in a prison: an inner serenity and even happiness.

Gerardo Escamilla, 36, has served five years for drug dealing. He says: 'You have a spiritual awakening here, learn limits, boundaries and guidelines. I never had a thought process that said, if I do drugs I'll go to the penitentiary. Now I'm aware that God created me in his image and has a purpose and a plan for my life.'

David Russell, 30, has been in jail since 1994 for burglary. 'I started hanging around with the wrong people; doing drugs and drinking and being selfish. Faith matters: I grew up in a stable family, got scholarships, married and had children and a successful job as a recreation aide. But there was nothing spiritual.

This programme means you can see the possibility for change.'

The life-skills class at InnerChange is a moving sight. About 40 mainly black prisoners in white uniforms sit with open Bibles on their laps listening intently to their teacher. The teacher is reading from a passage about chiselling Solomon's temple. 'It's like that for you', he says. 'It's a quarry. You are being built up, worked on as living stones, chiselled by God'. The prisoners nod. 'God is building up and shaping your life. What if the chisel is in the devil's hands?' A murmur goes up. 'He will make a mess because that's what he lives in, confusion and hurt and frustration. You can't live in this muddle. If you walk out of here and live the same life you have left and go back to the women and the bars, what have you chosen?' 'Hell', they chorus. 'But if you choose heaven you begin to talk differently, act differently, hang around with different people; you will be drawn to people of faith and joy'. 'Amen!', they say.

Some may feel uneasy at this explicit reprogramming. Moreover, just how many criminals or drug addicts would be susceptible to the call of faith remains a moot point, particularly in relatively irreligious Britain—although there are proposals for an InnerChange experiment in a British jail. But faith-based schemes appear to get results that secular programmes just don't achieve.

More broadly, individual accountability is the key to transforming anti-social behaviour; but if people are to change, they need hope and support from people prepared to give them permanent commitment. As John Timoney said in Philadelphia of his policing revolution, 'This stuff is really hard work'.

**CRIME INITIATIVE 1*****'I wasn't blinking'***

*The Reverend Eugene Rivers runs his rescue mission for Boston's black youth from the Baker House, a drop-in-centre-cum-church on the site of a former burned-out crack-house. Most of his young Christian workers once ran with the drug gangs on the surrounding streets, as did he himself as a boy growing up in Philadelphia. He was pulled off the streets by working-class, self-educated black clergy who had themselves been in gangs in a previous generation. Now he is repeating the pattern, as he relates in his mesmerising style—part preacher, part social scientist, part street dude.*

*'When I moved here in 1988, this neighbourhood was hot. First day here I was confronted by young drug dealer who told me he was the president of the neighbourhood. Having been a street dude myself I wasn't going to get run off the street by a kid 20 years younger than me. I and a couple of members of my church began to go to a couple of crack houses with a young crack dealer called Selvin Brown. He said Reverend, I'm going to tell you why black males are holding this society hostage. When Johnny goes to school in the morning, I'm there, you are not. When Johnny comes home in the afternoon I'm there, you are not. I'm influencing a whole generation of kids; I'm a sociopath and I need help. He said all this in a crack house with all the bullets on the floor which they were putting into clips. He said, it's the failure of black men to father the kids in their families which drives the chaos in the community. If there's no father the child will run wild like an animal and in the absence of the father's discipline the forces of the state have to step in. Then*

*there will be excess because that man will not have any ownership of that child who is simply a threat to order. Selvin Brown was 23 and was educating a church whose leadership had gone to Harvard.*

*'We learned then that the black church had to be available to parent these orphans. We started a dialogue with these kids on the street. But in 1991 my attitude changed towards these gangs when my house was shot up. The first bullet lodged 12 inches from my son's head. There were shells all over the place when I came outside. That's when I said, no no no no no. I had to fight now on two fronts: resist excessive police force and take on the criminals. So I began to push hard on law and order. That's when I began to build bridges with the police. I didn't want to hear about racism. I was communicating fiercely that the noise (violence) had got to stop. I told them I was calling for a crack-down. I said we were going to redefine the terms of engagement in the city. I said, I'm going to the white man and I'm going to ask him to come down on you with a hammer. I put \$1,000 on the table for a name for the punk who shot up my house. I said, I want the white man to come and twist your grapes off. In 24 hours I had a name. At that point, the political conversation around policing changed; we de-racialised it and on the black side I wasn't blinking. There was going to be support for law enforcement. Black clergy had to inform the kids the noise wasn't going to be tolerated. It upsets the public, is bad for business and white folk are sick of it, it drives down the real estate market and interferes with tourism.'*

**CRIME INITIATIVE 2*****'Without God you are just whitewashing a tomb'***

*When you arrive at Youth Reach, a small home for delinquent boys in Houston, Texas, you are confronted by a stereotype: a muscular man wearing jeans and a pony tail and tattoos of ghouls, demons and devils all over his arms and head. He looks like a drug addict, which he once was. Now, though, Dave Miranda is training to be a pastor and is operations director of Youth Reach, a spectacularly successful outfit which turns young tearaways into model citizens and professing Christians. Similar places run by the state have a 16 per cent success rate in diverting boys from crime; by contrast, 70 per cent of Youth Reach boys stay out of trouble for at least two years.*

*Its director, Curt Williams, himself also a former drug addict, says it does this by providing these youths with family commitment, of which firm discipline, 24-hour supervision and training in the work ethic are essential components. He also holds them accountable; if they refuse to learn these hard lessons, they're out.*

*'Here we are all responsible. We're not 9-5, we live here with our families and our children play with these boys. It's a lifestyle, a calling. These are not residents but my boys. Their problem is the lack of knowledge of who they are. For us to take them, they must show that if they are told something they are willing to be taught. If they curse or fight, they go. Some of our greatest successes are boys who we threw out—their choice—and who came back.*

*'We're a Christian programme. It's not a religious thing; I can't stand religion. It's a lifestyle and a relationship with the Lord. We simplify it, remove all*

*the junk. We tell the boys, as a Christian I can smoke all the dope I want to but I don't want to because it will hurt my heavenly father. This is extremely palatable to these boys and they want it.*

*'We teach the boys the work ethic. They get up in the morning and they work. Each boy is assigned a horse to look after, there are pigs and chickens to see to, projects where we're building something. They learn construction and automotive skills which will help them be a home owner. One boy lost 100 lbs because we taught him that the Bible says the body is the temple of the holy spirit. A man who has invested a lot in his body does not become a drug addict. We also have terrific, radical fun. We take them scuba diving and dive around the sharks. What's different here is the power of God. Why on earth would you do something like this without the ally of God in your corner? Without God you are just whitewashing a tomb.*

*'Most boys when they come here are using some illegal or prescription drugs. If a boy is hyperactive here we give him a shovel and tell him there's a ditch to dig. If they're on illegal drugs they just stop. Cold turkey. We pray with them through it, we clean them up, we sit with them while they go through the hot sweats and the vomiting. I won't let them go back to it. Faith is everything. If they reject the spiritual element they may get clean for a week or two but they will go back to the same thing.*

*'Discipline here is sure and never doubted. They get bloody blisters on their hands if they do something wrong, like not make their bed, because they go out there and chop logs. As much as you love them discipline is a form of love. They have to understand limits and boundaries to get a job. I tell them, I don't want to see you flipping hamburgers; I want to see them in business with a nice home, a wife, children and a car.*



*'Most of them get married, and as a minister I do most of the weddings. Then they come by and show me the ultrasound pictures of their wives. I'm hard on them even about who they date. I want them to date great godly girls. I'm just proud of them; they are my boys still.'*

*One of these boys, 18-year-old Bryan Watton, says:*

*'I took a lot of drugs, ran away from home, got into trouble with the law. I wasn't seeing the point of living any more. I heard about Youth Reach and knew I needed help. It's given me more than I expected. I feel like I have five dads here. When I leave I plan to play in a Christian band, to play music for Him.'*

*Matt East, 26, says:*

*'I fell into drugs, drinking, sex, parties, just as stupid as I could be. When I came here I was kinda at the end of my rope. They provided a very structured environment; every day you knew what was going to happen. It's a regimen. Through the discussions they reprogramme you. The word of God renewed my mind and strengthened me to live the life I had always wanted to but was powerless to. Now I've married Leah, who's got a degree in psychology, and work here as a counsellor.'*

### 3

## Education

---

---

### *Holding Professionals to Account*

**H**olding professionals to account is an essential counterpart to individual responsibility. If professionals are accountable to the wrong people, though, the public can be short-changed. In education, American teachers have been accountable to school boards which have delivered very low standards of education. As in Britain, American standards are abysmal

largely because the teaching profession was captured by an ideology which overturned the belief that education is about the transmission of knowledge and values. The principal victims of this disastrous flight from the very idea of teaching

*'The principal victims of this disastrous flight from the very idea of teaching have been the children of the poor'*

have been the children of the poor. Now, however, a movement is growing in America to make teachers accountable principally to parents by giving them leverage over their children's choice of schooling. While this does not grapple directly with the twisted pedagogic orthodoxy, the results of this limited experiment have still been remarkable.

The Marva Collins Academy elementary school in Milwaukee, in America's mid-west, has an approach to

reading that would make most British teachers' eyes water. Its four-year-olds get an hour and a half of solid phonics a day. The children are sitting at single desks, facing the front, where the teacher is leading the class in chanting out in unison the letters and phonic sounds they are being taught.

Marva Collins is a private school. So are these pupils the offspring of the wealthy, forced to participate in what most British teachers would regard as the educational equivalent of sending little boys up the chimneys? Far from it. Virtually all these children are poor, black and are being raised by single parents. They are only there because of Milwaukee's system of school vouchers, under which poor parents are funded by the state to send their children to a private school of their choice for free.

You can see why these parents choose Marva Collins. Its results are stunning. By six years old every single child is reading fluently, with many reading textbooks aimed at seven-year-olds. By age 11, these children from the wrong side of the Milwaukee tracks are reading Shakespeare, Chaucer, Kipling, Emerson and W.B. Yeats.

There is no trick here. The children have not been selected for ability. Other than siblings who are given preference, they are chosen at random from the lists of applicants. Parents have simply been able to choose to send their children to a very traditional school which concentrates on the basics in a style of education most American teachers would shun. These parents are the black urban poor who, whenever they are given the chance, turn their backs in droves on America's publicly funded schools because these are not delivering the education they know their children need.

America's education problems are very similar to Britain's—low standards, poor discipline, urban schools suffering from the flight of the middle classes to the suburbs. But, unlike Britain, it is experimenting with some very different remedies, in the teeth of professional hostility and political resistance.

It is increasingly refusing to tolerate the old excuses of poverty, race or discrimination. It has realised it is perfectly possible for the poorest pupils to make it to the best colleges provided they are expected to succeed rather than fail, and provided teachers, parents and pupils are variously held to account. Pupils by being expected to achieve, teachers by becoming answerable through policies from transparent test results to parental choice, and parents through being given greater freedom to choose where to send their child-

***'It is increasingly refusing to tolerate the old excuses of poverty, race or discrimination'***

ren to school, busting open the monopoly of the political and educational cartels that have trapped children in educational disadvantage.

### ***Parents in the Driving Seat***

Unlike Britain, where the Labour government believes in pushing school reform downwards from Whitehall and will not tolerate parental choice, America is realising that raising school standards has to be driven upwards from below—and that parents, not education bureaucrats, have to be in the driving seat. That means not so much vouchers but charter schools, which are publicly funded but independently run by groups of parents, teachers or private companies.

Just like in Britain, school choice is intensely controversial. It is bitterly resisted by many education

intellectuals and liberal Democrats and viewed with deep suspicion by many parents. There is less antipathy to tests, not least because with America's decentralised school system there is no consistent measurement of standards either between states or within them, with some states not testing children at all. However, tests are attacked on the grounds that they will lead to drilling pupils; and they are also a racially sensitive issue, since minority schoolchildren are disproportionately found to achieve poor results.

Nevertheless, President Bush is putting testing at the heart of his education reform, making all states introduce tests although with a battery of devices to prevent centralising the system. But he is being far more wary of politically explosive school choice, promoting private school vouchers only as an exit valve for parents if a school is found to fail four years in a row. And the evidence so far suggests that where vouchers are threatened, the failing state schools suddenly improve.

### ***Charter Schools***

Private school vouchers, however are so unpopular they only account for 20,000 children in the entire country. Choice within the publicly funded system is more palatable. Charter schools now educate about half a million of America's 45 million school-age children, and they are expanding fast. Britain has taken a tiny step down this road by allowing outside bodies to take over failing schools, but their powers are so hedged in that they are likely to make little difference. America's charter schools show what can be achieved when schools really are given their freedom.

For although they are decentralised from federal or state control, America's publicly funded district

schools are run by politicised school boards which are usually under the thumb of the teacher unions, the last bastion of union power in America and a rich source of corruption in American civic life. Charter schools are not controlled by these boards but answer to the state for the delivery of their charter objectives.

In a down-at-heel area of Jersey City, whose shabby streets and scruffy buildings frown over the Hudson river at the glittering canyons of Manhattan, the bright, modern Golden Door charter school for 5-13-year-olds gleams from its grey surroundings. The parents at the school are overwhelmingly poor and black and many are single mothers.

When it opened three years ago, only six per cent of its 11-year-olds passed their yearly test. The group were two years behind. Now, many of the eight-year-olds are reading books aimed two years above them. It's not surprising their scores had been so bad. More than half the pupils in Jersey City high schools drop out, and fewer than half who remain get the grades they should. Golden Door is one of several charter schools in the city set up to challenge that dismal record through choice and competition.

The building is formidably equipped by its owners, the Advantage Schools chain which runs 15 such schools. But its real strength lies in more than its banks of computers or shiny new desks. It is not even that it hired a remarkable principal, Karen Jones. It is that she has the freedom to run the school as she wants without interference, and to hire staff who will deliver to her exacting standards.

Jones, 51, previously a district school teacher for 25 years, is a small, wiry, black woman with a huge personality. She sets a gruelling pace for everyone, from herself down to the cleaners to whom she lays

down the 'non-negotiable' that when she walks through the door in the morning she will see clean floors with no scuff marks. They are; and there aren't any. Tacked right across the entrance hall is a sign proclaiming: 'It is our expectation that all students will achieve: no exceptions, no excuses'. Teaching in the early years focuses on the basics with a lot of 'direct instruction' or whole-class teaching; when the basics have been mastered, older classes loosen up into more informal discussions.

***'It is our expectation that all students will achieve: no exceptions, no excuses'***

The children are set in ability groups and are regularly tested: every five lessons in maths, every ten in languages, every 20 in reading. If they don't make the grade they are re-taught, with teachers giving personal tuition until they make it. 'If necessary, I teach them myself', says Jones. 'One teacher should have re-taught her class but she didn't. I took the children in that class who couldn't cope at all and now they're ahead of the others.'

That teacher has now been sacked. 'She left on Friday because she wasn't teaching well and called one of my children dumb; we were not on the same page', says Jones. She could sack her because at the charter schools the teachers aren't in the unions which tie principals' hands with restrictive practices. 'I don't have to keep bad teachers who undermine morale', says Jones. 'I make sure I look after my teachers' working conditions and salaries and I have independence to set their pay. The public (district) schools don't allow you to reward people who work hard. The only way to run a top notch school is to disregard the bureaucracy.'

This enables her to hire teachers who share her commitment to strict discipline. In contrast to so many American inner-city schools which are sites of violent unruliness, Golden Door is notably orderly. When the children move from class to class they walk in single file with their hands folded in front of their bodies.

Like an increasing number of American schools, Golden Door teaches character education in which specific virtues are advocated over and over again in every context. 'Character education is the cornerstone of our school', says Jones. 'We build it into our curriculum. We study a particular value every month: friendship, respect, courtesy, self discipline, honesty. Character education at school really does challenge bad home backgrounds. We tell the children it takes courage to implement the virtues.' The difference from British schools, where teachers think it is wrong to 'preach' any values at all, could not be more stark.

***'Character education is the cornerstone of our school'***

But the key to her approach is rigorously enforced accountability. 'What makes our school so different is that I demand order from my teachers who demand it from the children. If children misbehave in public schools the teachers are more concerned that they'll be criticised for the numbers of suspensions. Here I don't have that worry. If children don't behave they don't stay here; so they behave.

'To keep order, we have non-negotiables. I don't have children who are in the teachers' face and stop them from teaching. We suspend kids for talking back to the teacher. My teachers know if there's a problem I'm going to back them up. I hold everybody accountable. We don't have fighting or weapons or drugs or kids threatening anyone. It's just not tolerated.'



And the children, many of whom moved to Golden Door from ordinary district schools, really appreciate the discipline. Sugéily, a 13-year-old girl whose parents are from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, says she is glad to have moved from her district school. 'Over here the safety is better, and the teachers, especially the principal', and she gives Jones a big hug. 'They are always on top of us. They are wonderful, they make sure we do what we have to do. My previous school was very different. They didn't have it under control. A lot of teachers didn't care; they just wanted to go home.'

Golden Door teachers acknowledge the effort of working here but praise the school's ethos. Nancy Barone is 58 and was a stay-at-home mom while her children were growing up. At 49, she found she could not get a job in the public schools because of her age. 'It's easier to work in the public schools because here they expect such a lot of you. They are really into giving these children a fantastic education. I get here at 7 a.m. and leave at 6 p.m. and work another hour at home and at weekends. They want a lot of documentation about how the kids are doing and a lot of correcting of work. It's really great because it forces you to do all this.' Another teacher, Claudia Alin, says: 'We stop children here falling through the cracks as they do in the public schools. We set high expectations for them and we let them know they will succeed and they do.'

The school is the personal project of Jersey City's mayor, Bret Schundler. School choice reform is Schundler's passion, and enabled him as a Republican to win an unprecedented second term as the mayor of an overwhelmingly Democrat city. In the early 1990s education standards in the city's schools were at such a catastrophic level that the state of New Jersey took control of them from the school boards. But truancy

rates and test scores only marginally improved while violence actually went up—a cautionary tale for the British government which similarly believes Whitehall can force the pace of school improvement.

New Jersey handed the schools back to the boards in dismay, and Schundler swept to power on the promise of an array of school reforms. The state of New Jersey allowed him to establish a number of charter schools but he was blocked on other measures such as the introduction of publicly funded vouchers. He had come up against the immovable force of the teacher unions, which use their considerable powers of patronage to fund both Democrat and Republican politicians—an influence which effectively blocks reforms expressly designed to break it.

Schundler, who is now running for governor, rebuts the criticism that school choice creams off the best pupils from the public system. 'These parents looking for alternatives aren't the ones whose children are all getting As. Their children are struggling.'

### ***School Choice and Scholarship***

School choice, he says, was crucial to win him votes from people who normally regard Republicans as anathema, because he was proposing a permanent shift of power to ordinary parents. Here again is the 'compassionate conservative', the phenomenon of a Republican who presents himself as a champion of the poor—and who says the way to help them is not by forcing them to take the school place they are allotted, but allowing them to choose where to educate their children.

However, as mayor he is relatively powerless to do what he wants. The state of New Jersey, which disliked his education ideas, allowed a number of charter

schools to be set up in order to take the wind out of his sails. But the state has now blocked their expansion, and blocked Schundler's idea for a voucher scheme. So he created a privately funded scholarship programme with money from individuals and corporations to enable poor parents to send their children to private schools. A remarkable 36 per cent of all eligible pupils applied, even though the scholarships provided only part of the schools' tuition fees, requiring the parents to pay the rest.

His scheme is not alone in provoking such a response. In Washington, another privately-funded scholarship scheme has attracted similar enthusiasm from poor, mainly black parents, even though they too have to pay a proportion of these private school fees. The attraction is not just higher academic standards. It's also religious-based school discipline. For unlike in Britain, the American separation of church and state means that parochial church schools are all in the private sector. And a lot of poor parents are willing to undergo considerable financial sacrifice to send their children to such schools. Danny LaBry, director of the Washington scholarship fund, says: 'It produces self discipline and changes the family's lifestyle. They give up going to MacDonal'd's once a week so they can take care of the tuition.'

Lisa Jones, 34, a single mother who works with mentally handicapped people, says: 'The biggest word for me is budget. I have a jar and put in it half of every pay packet to pay for my daughter's education here.' Rhonda Sapp, 39, an administrative assistant, says: 'I recycle the children's clothes. I often take the tax refund and put it towards the education bill. I don't eat out often and I do creative things with the shopping. If you go to the grocery store at 6 a.m. you get cheaper food.'

These parents have gathered on a Saturday afternoon in St Augustine's Catholic school in a shabby part of Washington, where one third of pupils are on these scholarships. People whose incomes range from the low paid to the desperately poor are thronging the hall filling in forms as their children take tests, administered by Professor Patrick Wolf of the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, to measure whether their education standards have risen as a result of moving to St Augustine's and other private schools from the public sector.

So far, his carefully controlled study has found the switch has produced significant academic gains for these pupils. This is reinforced by the school's principal Shelore Williams, who says when the scholarship children arrive about three-fifths of them are behind the other pupils; but they catch up. The school is not selective. Wolf's research also confirms the findings of other studies which show not only improvements for the pupils who move but also for those left behind, as the publicly funded schools raise their game to prevent pupils from haemorrhaging away.

### ***The Fight for Vouchers***

But private or publicly funded voucher schemes are still very thin on the ground in America. They are intensely controversial and provoke passionate opposition. Critics claim that public vouchers would denude the publicly funded school system of money. In fact, this is hard to understand since parochial schools are generally far cheaper than publicly funded schools. Indeed, teachers in such schools are often paid a great deal less than those in the district schools and yet they get much better results.

There are even more deeply felt objections. Many Americans believe that vouchers erode the division between church and state because their tax-payer dollars would be spent on educating children at church schools. America's constitution forbids the creation of an established church, and over the years the courts have interpreted this much more broadly and removed prayer and religious teaching from the school day.

Vouchers are also said to favour the white middle class who would use them to abandon the publicly funded schools. This ignores two evident truths. The white middle class has already abandoned inner city schools since it has the money to move to the leafy suburbs or use the private schools. And so not surprisingly it is poor black people who are now demanding that they too should be given the means to choose their children's schools. The voucher movement is largely a revolt by the black poor.

Rhonda Sapp, whose son Arnett, 10, is now at St Anthony's, a Catholic school in the city, says she chose it for its academic standards and its discipline. 'If you tell children high standards are normal they will reach them', she says. 'I live in public housing in a high drug traffic-area. The discipline he gets gives Arnett self-esteem so the things going on don't affect him. It helps him stand up to peer pressure.'

***'I live in public housing in a high drug traffic-area. The discipline he gets gives Arnett self-esteem so the things going on don't affect him'***

'The straw that broke the camel's back in his previous school was when his teacher was very worried he would fail his tests but he got the highest scores in the city. Arnett doesn't misbehave in school and so the

teacher assumed he couldn't do anything because she was so focused on those who couldn't sit in their seats. At St Anthony's there's zero tolerance of indiscipline, and when he first went there I went into shock at the amount of homework he had each night. Once he adjusted he would finish it quite easily.'

Support for vouchers from ethnic minorities is the key reason why they are working in Milwaukee, one of only a handful of cities to have a publicly funded scheme. Milwaukee is a very mixed city; half its population is European, 35 per cent African-American, 10 per cent Hispanic and four to five per cent Asian. However, the public sector schools are more than 60 per cent black and poor since wealthy white people live in the suburbs or send their children to private schools. In 1990, graduation rates from the city's schools were less than 35 per cent. Now they're up to 51 per cent and test scores are rising fast.

The reason is Milwaukee's extensive programme of school choice. It has a system of weighted vouchers which enable people in poverty or on low incomes to send their children free to any private school of their choice. This has created a new problem as people complain that they lose their voucher credit once their incomes rise above the limit. The city has also funded and encouraged the creation of charter schools which have no income limit.

The choice movement in Milwaukee started as a grass-roots black protest when some influential black figures, horrified by the poor schooling being suffered disproportionately by black children, decided it was time that poor black people were given the same power over their children's lives as white parents. It was, in short, a black liberation struggle in the classroom.

And it won some crucial political battles in Milwaukee. Mayor John Norquist is a Democrat who, unusually for his party, is a staunch supporter of school choice. 'I thought there were greater threats to our inner city kids than religion,' he says. 'Separation of church and state is very important but it does not mean separation of religion from the culture. I believe strongly that the government should not directly fund the parochial schools but if the money goes through the parent then the parent is making the choice'.

*'Separation of church and state is very important but it does not mean separation of religion from the culture'*

Doesn't it mean, though, that popular schools become grossly over-subscribed? 'It all works itself out', says Norquist. 'Because of our various systems of choice we have created a soup of creativity, and standards have gone up overall.'

### ***The Battle for the School Board***

The other even more crucial battle was over control of the school board, which as elsewhere was a fiefdom of the teacher unions and as such an implacable foe of school choice. However, a key group of choice supporters won seats on the board and neutered its opposition. One of this group, Ken Johnson, a black electrician and a Democrat, is the board's chairman.

'There was a perception that public education was just a hole for money to flow into', he says. 'Most of us are the products of public sector schools and we believe in public education to educate most children. But standards aren't high enough. Now there's a new fervour about public education and the feeling that it can work in Milwaukee.'

Under the pressure created by parents choosing to leave the public sector, the board was forced to allow schools to experiment and innovate. The result was an explosion of Montessori schools which in turn forced the city's schools to raise their game. The pressure also forced an end to the union-imposed seniority rule, under which any teacher vacancies had to be filled by the most senior teacher who applied—who all too often had been pushed out for incompetence by another school.

Susan Mitchell, president of the American Education Reform Council, says that imposing reform top-down never works because there are no incentives: the dollars and the kids keep coming anyway. 'When people have an exit strategy, the public schools get better. Choice is a reality in this country if you have money. Low-income kids are held hostage. It's not democratic. How can we say to people, you must take responsibility and get off welfare, but in education you must stay in a system where only four in ten graduate high school?'

At Marva Collins, Dorothy Smith, 57, is working as a volunteer in the kitchens. She has three adopted children and five grandchildren, all at the school. All but one had been in the public system. 'They wanted to label them as slow learners and they weren't doing well,' she says. 'The school had a high rate of suspensions and a lot of kids weren't learning properly and were acting up. Now the children are doing very well here and there's no question of them being slow learners. But without vouchers there's no way they could come here.' Robert Johnson, 34, is a fire-fighter with three children at the school. His two oldest were in the public system for a year. 'The kids there were out of control, the teachers were yelling at them and



doing little teaching. My daughter began to withdraw. The teacher thought she was the problem. I'm looking at the classroom and seeing how they behave and thinking, *they're* the problem. Now the children are responding well to the high standards here. They love their teachers and enjoy coming to school.'

### ***Character on the Curriculum***

The striking thing about Marva Collins, as seems true of so many successful American schools, is the huge emphasis on character education. Principal Robert Rauh says the children are taught from the start that, whatever happens to them, they have the ability to choose their response, so they never develop a victim mentality. The whole curriculum is based around values explicitly taught. Proverbs and homilies festoon the walls: 'Say well is good—do well is best.' 'Active thinker: makes things happen; possibility thinker has great wonderful ideas.' The children are taught to recite the Marva Collins creed, displayed prominently on the walls, which is all about personal responsibility: 'I was born to win if I do not spend too much time trying to fail'; 'I will wave proudly my flag signifying that I am a failure by choice'; 'I must be willing to accept the consequences of failure'.

***'You will not be hurt or bullied if you use your superior thoughts, just like the creed talks about.'***

A class of nine-year-olds is reading a set book; the teacher interrupts the narrative to illustrate a moral from the story: 'You will not be hurt or bullied if you use your superior thoughts, just like the creed talks about.' On a blackboard is the value word of the week: 'self-governed', and its definition: 'controlled by one's own actions', for all pupils to read and ponder.

But not all choice schools go back to basics. In Jersey City, the Learning Community charter school was set up by a group of parents to provide a progressive education based on 'learning by doing'. They say their test scores in language and arts are high, although they admit they're not so good in maths. But it's hard to see, from some of the classes, that this school is really expanding these children's education. One class of eight to nine-year-olds is supposedly studying native Indians with artefacts borrowed from a museum. There is chaos and noise, with children randomly banging tables, shouting and drumming and the teacher looking flustered. The parents say they want to create 'independent critical thinkers', but their idealism has already got them into trouble. The first principal they hired was sacked last year because he 'didn't share our vision'.

Other charter schools have used their freedom to teach an Afro-centric curriculum. But Mayor Norquist says a school like this in Milwaukee was forced to change to a traditional curriculum when black parents shunned it. 'Parents don't want ethnic education', he says. 'If choice schools are not set up properly, they die.' And in any event, plenty of public-sector schools are delivering this kind of ethnic education too, but parents are unable to move their children from them. At least here they have the choice to vote with their feet.

What matters above all, however, is how teachers teach. At Marva Collins, Robert Rauh says fewer than five per cent of the city's schools teach phonics at all and only about one per cent in the highly structured way he uses. School choice enables parents to use a big stick to lever up standards in schools, but if there are too few teachers who understand what high standards actually are, such improvement will soon hit a ceiling.

There is no discussion in America, for example, about reforming teacher training. Most American parents, politicians and teachers simply haven't grasped that even in many of the 'choice' schools, standards are still dismayingly low. It's the same problem as in Britain, a culture that still does not understand the nature and extent of the poison that has got into the bloodstream of the educational world. But within these limitations, opening up real choice for parents is producing some startling results, and giving the lie to the notion that for inner-city schoolchildren, little can be done.

### EDUCATION INITIATIVE 1

***'We should be worried about the crushing peer pressure on public-sector school kids'***

*A growing number of American parents are opting out of the school system altogether and educating their children at home. The home-school movement now claims to number about two million children across the country. It is a largely middle-class, conservative, religious movement, with the mothers bearing the main burden of teaching their children at home. Test results indicate that these home-schooled children are becoming the best educated in the country, as some of their scores outshine even the most exclusive private schools.*

*The centre of this movement is in Warrenton, Virginia, about an hour's drive from Washington DC. This is the home of Chris Klicka, a lawyer who set up the Home School Legal Defence Association which first fought for home schooling to be made legal and now defends home-schoolers against claims they are neglecting or abusing their children. He and his wife Tracy, both devout Christians, live with their seven children in a large, neat, grey clapperboard house with maroon*

*shutters in the Virginia countryside. Inside, there are Biblical homilies everywhere on the walls. Several other home-schoolers have arrived to talk about a way of life which is common around here; most families who belong to the local church are home-schoolers.*

*'We give the kids the tools and the opportunity to be self-disciplined and grounded in really solid values', says Klicka. 'Our modern school system has got so distracted from the basics. Academics are an issue, but also morals. You can't talk about the Bible in school. How can you teach without some kind of standards? The philosophy in schools now is let the children choose their own values. You can see the outcome in the crime rate.'*

*The moms who do most of the teaching say they provide the basics and then the children have the tools to learn on their own. The families may hire tutors or send the children to colleges for more advanced work, but the crucial point is that they are in control of the children's education. Tracy Klicka says it's been tough teaching seven children and running such a large family. And these moms forego paid employment so the family finances suffer too. But they say there are so many educational materials on the market, it's not difficult to teach, and some of the best home-schoolers are moms without a college degree.*

*Stephen and Judy Davis have four home-schooled children: Jonathan 19, Elizabeth 17, Josiah 13, and Lydia 8. Stephen, 50, is a university chemistry teacher and Judy, 50, was a French teacher who after teaching in Zaire concluded that peer influence in American schools was detrimental. 'The overriding thought was that we wanted to be in control of the values our children were taught', says Stephen. 'The decline in education is connected to a decay in the Christian world-view. The system has insulated parents from*

*taking responsibility for their children, which they now say is the role of the teacher.'*

*'We wanted their learning to have as its basis the religious truth we hold to be very precious', says Judy. The results are impressive. Jonathan has won scholarships; Elizabeth, a grave, self-contained girl, has achieved perfect scores in her SAT aptitude tests. But aren't there serious disadvantages in being separated from their peers and not being exposed to the rough edges of life? 'I see plenty of my peer group in church', says Elizabeth, 'and I have a good friendship with my brother and sister.'*

*'Instead of fearing home-schoolers aren't properly socialised', says Judy, 'we should be worried about the crushing peer pressure on public-sector school kids. They live in terror of having someone make fun of the way they dress or speak. They are victims of a herd mentality. Home-school children can relate to adults. They are much more individualistic because they don't have the pressure to conform.'*

*David Poe, 23, was home-schooled throughout and is now working in rocket engine design. 'My mother was very organised and had lessons planned out for six months ahead. We'd start at nine and take a half-hour break for lunch and then get back into it. I went to community college where I did physics and math'. But he agrees that going to college was 'a bit of an adjustment'.*

*Jenny Flathers farms cattle, dairy goats and hogs. She also home-schools her four children: Megan 16, Will 15, Caitlin 12 and Aaron 10. Says Megan: 'I was very excited when I started home-schooling and was very happy to switch. I saw my friends at church activities. The advantage is, if you are done with a subject, you can move on. At school you have to wait for everyone else.'*

*Jenny adds: 'It kinda gave them their childhoods back. They have time to play and dress up and build forts outside. They can get school done in three hours. One child took his books and did his maths watching a goat being born. And you find a way of doing things like theatre or sports.'*

## Conclusion

---

---

The scope and effects of America's social revolution should not be over-estimated. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has written in *One Nation, Two Cultures*,<sup>1</sup> America is now a country divided between the super-individualist culture of moral and cultural relativism, individual licence and 'anything goes', and the culture of social virtue based on civic responsibility, family values and sexual morality, and holding behaviour to account. The war between these two cultures continues to rage in America, as it does in Britain.

***'it is not only that the churches in Britain are not yet part of the solution; they are very much part of the problem'***

But unlike Britain, the American social virtue agenda has been given enough scope to notch up some important and remarkable successes; and it is growing.

As Don Eberly from the president's faith and community office observes: 'We're coming to terms with the effects of the American democratic experiment: a disintegrating social order in the midst of prosperity. There is a sense in which we are turning a corner. There is a conversation about values and family and community which we didn't have before. Something big is happening on the American scene. It's a coming of age.'

---

1 Himmelfarb, G., *One Nation, Two Cultures*, New York: Knopf, 1999.

American solutions, however, cannot be transported wholesale to Britain. There are significant differences between the two societies. Unitary Britain does not lend itself to the kind of vigorous experimentation that takes place in individual American states, which can turn into social laboratories for the testing of innovative policy ideas. British academia, reliant as it is on state funding, has been incapable of promoting the diversity of views that helped furnish the debates in America over the past 20 years or so and which have moved the national conversation along. Britain is also a less religious society than the United States. It is hard to envisage the British clergy getting itself out of the pulpit and into the streets, as has happened in America. Indeed, it is not only that the churches in Britain are not yet part of the solution; they are very much part of the problem, having absorbed the statist mindset so thoroughly that they often merely replicate the moral equivocations of secular society. The Church of England in particular has succumbed to much of the relativist agenda and the culture of excuses that lie behind the erosion of moral norms and the collapse of education standards. In short, Britain has not yet drawn its own line in the cultural sand.

Nevertheless, pragmatism is a powerful social motor; and if America starts to produce significant improvements to the problems that most alarm us, the consequent change in the cultural climate may alter the political landscape in Britain, too. After all, there are few more potent attractions for politicians than political success. The most striking feature of the American social revolution is the way it is redrawing the map of American politics. The most successful policy innovations belong to the social conservative agenda which now unites 'tough-love' Democrats, like Senator Joe Lieberman, with civic-minded Republi-



cans. George W. Bush won the presidency because he displayed that counter-intuitive characteristic for a Republican, a social conscience. He showed his concern to rescue those at the bottom of the social heap from educational and social disadvantage—not by patronising or infantilising them, the approach which has hitherto kept them trapped, but by encouraging the best in them to flower. In New Jersey, Bret Schundler's startling success in beating back his own hidebound establishment to win the Republican nomination for governor was also made possible by his political adroitness in appealing to life-long Democrats through his programme to restore order to the neighbourhoods of the poor and to let their residents take back power over their children's education.

Social conservatism now has the American wind in its sails. It transcends the old, out-dated divisions between left and right by promoting approaches designed to bring out the best in people's character and discourage the worst. Most important of all, it embodies the fundamental premise of progressive politics—the optimistic belief that even the most difficult of social problems can be solved. By contrast, British political and intellectual life is mired in a culture of despair. So-called 'progressives' merely seek to appease the forces eroding social, moral and cultural norms and which are creating countless victims; while many conservatives appear unable to grasp just what has to be done to support and encourage the most decent instincts of the people. America may be different from Britain, but its attempts to renew civil society offer a universal message for any British politicians with the vision and courage to listen.

***'Social conservatism  
now has the American  
wind in its sails'***