

April 27, 2004

Study Questions

Read: Coontz: Looking for Someone to Blame: Families and Economic Change. 123-140
Newman: Family Values against the Odds
Rubin: Families on the Fault Line

1. Coontz says that families she speaks with are apprehensive about the future, despite all the indices of a strong economy. What reasons do they give for these anxieties? Does anyone you know talk about these kinds of worries?
2. Coontz says “there’s a growing sense that the old rules don’t work anymore, that the expected connections between hard work, economic progress, and individual rewards no longer hold.” Give two examples supporting this argument. Give two examples against.
3. Per capita income is up by almost 40 percent since 1973. What does “per capita” mean? Why might this measure of economic well-being fail to tell the whole story?
4. Television watching explains the decline in civic participation in this country. Defend this statement. Dispute it.
5. “Marriage is the best anti-poverty program for children.” (Dan Quayle) Defend this statement with statistical findings from studies. Disagree with it using statistical findings.
6. What are the psychological costs to the family of downward mobility?
7. What often happens to the family structure of downwardly mobile families?
8. What are some of the effects on families of unemployment and other consequences of economic restructuring, according to Rubin?
9. How does Rubin describe economic restructuring?
10. How do you feel about programs such as USAID (Agency for International Development) providing many benefits to US companies who relocate their manufacturing operations in other countries, given that this means fewer jobs for Americans? Is a protectionist attitude good, or is it an example of hyper-nationalism and bad for free trade? Defend legislation that favors American workers. Defend free trade legislation.
11. Rubin talks about the growth of jobs for “contingent” workers (“throwaway workers”). What does this mean? What are the benefits to employers? Costs? How many are there now?
12. Are things better for U.S. Blacks today, or worse? Formulate arguments supporting both positions.

13. Why do Rubin's Chinese interviewees complain about discrimination today?
14. On p. 317, Rubin speaks of *myths*. What are myths? How are myths different from something that is simply untrue?
15. How are white immigrant groups in the USA, like the Irish and Italian earlier in this century, similar to, and different from, Blacks?