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An examination of modern family communication and moral values in America and Europe

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Abstract
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AN EXAMINATION OF MODERN FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND MORAL VALUES IN AMERICA AND EUROPE

By

Melanie Seasons

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The number one concern of some American voters in the 2004 presidential election was "moral values." This paper is an examination of the American family and its fascination with so-called traditional moral values. The results of the analysis are then contrasted to European families, who seem to, according to some research, be less concerned with such traditional beliefs and values. Moral values are defined, explored, and cross-referenced between the two cultures in order to get a better understanding of how they play a part in modern family communication.
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My parents, Linda Seasons and Ray Seasons
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The modern American family is built from a foundation of nostalgia. It is not uncommon to hear politicians speak of a “return to moral values” or about the “good ol’ days.” So often are we reminded that we must return to family values, it seems that much of the country has become obsessed with the idea.

This paper is an examination of modern American family communication and its fascination with traditional moral values. For this project, it is understood that traditional moral values include a two-parent heterosexual household, married with at least one child. It is also assumed that the family members practice a religion of some sort and are in good standing with the government and law enforcement.

To fully understand the American family’s preoccupation with these values, the American family is contrasted against the European family (who seem to, according to some research, lack concern for such traditional beliefs). The paper is divided into two sections.

The first section of the paper deals specifically with the American family. First, I explore the history of the American family. The United States is, in comparison to others, a very young
country and its relative infancy does impact family life. I describe some influences on the
American family such as the media, religion, and governmental policy and how these affect the
notion of the modern American family today.

Second, I examine the nostalgia trap that so many Americans are prone to. This is the
idea that the American family should be reminiscent of the 1950’s television nuclear family.
Also known as the “Ozzie and Harriet” syndrome, the trap illustrates the unrealistic aspirations
that many American families subject themselves to.

Third, I will examine why there has been a recent push toward traditional values in
America. In the 2004 presidential election, the decline of moral values was the number one
concern of the majority of Americans. This part of the paper attempts to explain the reasons
behind this.

To fully illustrate that profundity of this project, I also examine Europe’s (as a whole)
family structure and its idea(s) of moral values. I chose to study Europe for several reasons. For
one, Europe has some very interesting similarities to the United States demographically. The
European Union is made of different countries with different cultures, but comes together to
represent something more than the sum of its parts. This synergy, although seemingly unique, is
much like that of the United States and its drastically different regions.

Secondly, many European countries were also founded upon many of the same ideals
that we hold to be true in the U.S. The foundation of both unions is very similar and therefore, is
ideal for comparison. But even considering that many Americans’ ancestry stems from European
roots, the American family is still very different from the European family in several ways.
Moral values are important to Europeans as a whole, but they do not dictate the family’s dreams
and aspirations absolute. The second section of my paper attempts to explain why that is. I
examine European media, divorce rates, nontraditional families, and various governmental policies in order to understand why Europeans are not infatuated with traditional moral values or the decline thereof.

A large part of the European section of the project focuses on the European reaction to American family values. This is a vital section because it not only helps to understand the Europeans’ perspectives on America, but it uncovers the intrinsic differences between the two. I do this through researching European newspaper articles and opinion columns on different American media scandals.

It is through this examination of two similar, but distinct cultures that I hope to explain the precarious position that the modern family finds itself in. In America, especially, the modern family has found itself walking the line between public policy and private life, a position that inherently works against itself. Through my research, I’ve found that European families lack the fervor that American families have concerning these opposing forces. By studying them both, it is possible to gain a full and complete perspective of the modern family today. I believe that to fully comprehend any position, one must research more than one perspective. Studying one angle only uncovers half of the story.
The History of the American Family

Prior to 1850

The study of family communication surfaced during a time period that was associated with scientific inquiry and analysis - the 1860s. It was during this time that Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* was published. People who relied on stories, tradition, and folklore, to discuss families were now beginning to think about the origin of the human species and thus, the origin of the family.

There is very little doubt that the family has been around since humans have been around. In hunting and gathering bands, there is evidence of family in the discovery of the first "human" footprints in 1978 by Mark Leakey. Fossilized steps believed to be that of a human ancestor, Australopithecus, show two bipedal creatures, apparently a male and female (although there is no way to tell for sure) walking. Following the adult footprints are those of a child. From anthropological standpoint, these steps show

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evolution in the making. But some scholars use the discovery to prove that family has and always has consisted of a man, women, and their children. They are, more or less, correct. There has been only one culture discovered so far that took a different approach to family.

The Nayar culture of South India, for example is the one culture discovered in which the father does not and is not expected to take on a role in the family. Today, their practices have been altered, but at one time (prior to British rule in 1792) the Nayar were a matrilineal and matrilocal society. Once women in the culture reached puberty, they were ceremonially married to a member of the opposite sex and appropriate caste. After four days of celebration, the husband and bride would consummate the marriage, after which, the man had no obligation to that specific woman if he did not want it. In turn, women may have had several “husbands” and men, literally, hundreds of “wives.” Because the society was primarily matrilineal, the mothers, grandmothers, and other female family members were the ones who took care of the daily duties.\(^2\)

With the exception of the Nayar, the family unit has been around, presumably and in whatever form, since the beginning of human existence. Our development as children lends credence to this theory. As infants, we are born at nine months. But this stage does not mean that we are fully developed. Brain functions continue to develop after we are born. A newborn baby is also not fully physically developed at birth. For example, every infant has a “soft spot” from skull plates that shift after birth in order to allow the head to grow.\(^3\)

Human infants need the care of another to ensure success in maturity. Babies


need constant attention and physical contact to be healthy. The disease known as marasmus, often referred to today as “wasting-away disease” or “failure to thrive” is a phenomenon that was discovered around the turn of the century. It was noted that infants who didn’t receive enough tactile stimulation often died or had severely impaired communication skills as they grew older. Loving touch represents a special bond between infants and their caregivers that is impossible to replace.

It is understood that the family has been around for thousands and thousands of years. This in no way means that during its time on earth, the family unit hasn’t changed. Indeed, the family unit is just as nebulous as ever, changing by the capricious whim of social implications, cultures, and time. The following section explores the history of the modern American family from 1850 to the present. This time frame gives an adequate depiction of the cyclical and sometimes redundant story of the American family.

**1850-1900**

During the mid-nineteenth century America was still a very young country. The expanding capitalist democracy inspired an economic change that would shape the American family into something that we recognize today: the middle-class American nuclear family.

It was the competition aspect of the capitalist economy that produced a very radical change in family structure. The increasing gap between the middle-lower class and the wealthy made social classes even more pronounced. Wealthy family members were always considered more independent of each other, but prior to the mid-nineteenth

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century, many middle class family members were just as independent. In those wealthy and middle class families, men still worked outside the home, but had no obligation to return to tend to family. Wealthy women socialized among the elite while their servants tended to the meals and the children. Poorer families were looked down upon because they had to rely on all family members to pay bills. But during the mid-1800s the family structure began to change.

Competition in the public sphere due to a difficult economy forced middle-class families out of the protective bubble of independent work. The public and private lives of middle-class families became more pronounced. The home and the family became the sanctuary from the public business world. The word “individual” came to represent an individual family instead of an individual person. All decisions made within the family affected the unit as a whole.

Gender roles were reshaped as men stayed out in the public eye and women retreated to the home. A women’s role in a middle-class family became more domesticated. There were not servants to take care of the cleaning, mending, and cooking. With no money to hire servants, more women assumed the roles traditionally left to the “help.” The domestic duties that were frowned upon previously became the social norm. If a woman did not take an active role in the household, she was thought not to have earned her keep.

The change in the role of the American family undoubtedly began to shape the values for that time; the family was now seen as the “ideal.” Unmarried men were seen as distrustful, while married men were seen as grounded and successful. A women’s role

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in the home was no longer defined by the people she knew or the parties she threw, but whether she could perform all the domesticated duties expected of her. Frances Trollope critiqued this practice as a female observer. She said that the practice of domesticity forced women in both wealthy and poor circles to only engage in household business. It was from this initial assignment of a gender role that American families became what they are today. And perhaps it is the practice of these roles that have made the cycle so difficult to change in the present day. A woman in the mid-1800's had to be dependent on her husband and her children to make her life of value. It was this “dependence that was no longer acceptable in the poor [that] became an admirable, even socially necessary, quality in the wife.”

This period is the underpinning for the American family as we know it today. Many of the ideals that were built upon in subsequent decades took their inspiration from this rapidly changing era of American family communication. Stephanie Coontz suggests that this critical period was also when morality became a substantial goal in family communication and that the longing for moral superiority of the late 1800s is not unlike the longing for traditional family values today. This is not to say that moral values were not an important part of life prior to this period. However, this period of time is important because it represents a change in what families viewed as important in terms of moral values, not the individual.

The cause of this longing for moral superiority, Coontz suggests, comes from the pronounced (and aforementioned) economic differences of the population. Prior to the

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7 Frances Trollope, *Domestic Matters of the American*, (1883) pp. 157, 280
Civil War, there were about 50 to 60 millionaires in the U.S.; after there were 4,047. This drastic increase in wealth also produced a balancing increase on the lower end of the spectrum. Many of the elite saw their fortune as the "survival of the fittest" that the Social Darwinists had introduced a decade earlier. Coontz points out that in the 1850s, the Reverend Horace Bushnell said, "Wealth was a reward and honor which God delights to bestow upon an upright people."

In the middle was the new middle-class. But instead of striving for wealth and economic freedom, middle-class Americans strived to distance themselves from the wealthy, as well as the poor. They saw both cultures as undesirable. This change became surprisingly less about economics and more about the undesirable moral values of the lower and upper-class. The very rich and very poor were lumped into a class lacking moral values together. The wealthy were greedy and insatiable and the poor lacked motivation, and both were obsessed with materialism. For the first time, the American middle-class family became the standard against which all moral values were measured.

1901 to 1950

As the 19th century came to a close, the middle-class nuclear family and its moral superiority over other sects prevailed. The media began to reflect this in the publication of several “house and home” type magazines. Good Housekeeping was first published in

1887 and *Ladies Home Journal* in 1883, for example. These publications helped to reinforce the idea of what a family should be and, specifically, what the women’s role should be in the family.

Communication theory also began to surface as a scholarly field of inquiry. The social construction theory of George Herbert Mead, in particular, was one of the most influential of the time. Mead stated that meaning and “reality” are created through communication and language; Meaning, that it is the socially constructed world that gives significance to the people, places, and things around. This theory assumes that anything in question evolves depending on its surroundings. In terms of family communication, Mead shows that the family unit will evolve to reflect the socially constructed world around it. Therefore, the definition of family will always change.

This theory is important to the question of moral values in families because it shows that moral values are not a lucid and rigid ideal. The need for moral values and their emphasis in the family unit will change depending on the world around them.

That changing world became more evident and certainly more important to families during the early twentieth century. The stock market crash of 1929 led to the Great Depression. Families weren’t as worried about the question of moral values as they were keeping alive. Survival became the number one priority of the nation. The fertility rate per women was at an all-time low. Over 1.5 million American women had been abandoned by their husbands. Divorce rates were down, but informal separations skyrocketed and domestic violence soared. Unhappy couples did not have the money for the legal fees associated with a divorce. Overall, families who did stay together lost about 35 percent of their income. Many women went to work where men could not to
help support their families.  

After the nation began to recover from the depression, people had a new interest in forming families, but the early 1940s and World War II brought more obstacles to the front. While young men were out on the line, women went to work in the factories for their country. By 1946, one out of every three marriages was ending in divorce. Rates of unwed mother tripled between 1940 and 1948.  

With the country’s family values in steady decline, it is no wonder that a new chapter in the evolution of the family was just around the corner.

1950-1959

For many Americans, the 1950s represent the period in which the American family was at its best. In fact, when most people think of a nuclear family, they think of the 1950s family. After the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s, the 1950s were a welcome change to families everywhere. The divorce rates dropped drastically, fertility rates hit an all-time high, and family was hailed as a beloved institution.

In retrospect, the 1950s really do seem to be the golden age of families, where everyone was in happy, long-lasting marriages, children respected their elders, and economic troubles were few and far between. At first glance, the figures seem to justify the memories. The “Baby Boom” revitalized the institution of family and parenthood; Many Americans still look to the 1950s as a decade where nothing ever went wrong. There are, however, major arguments against this idea. The “nostalgia trap,” as it’s known in relation to the 1950s family, will be discussed at length in the next section.

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The real history of the 1950s family is much more ambiguous than the media would have us believe. Most women did not work outside the home, while most men did. But at the same time, sexist ideologies would make it very difficult for a woman if she wanted to work outside the home, much like the domestication of the late 1800s. Out-of-wedlock births may have been statistically lower than they are now, but it is also true that men and women got married at a much younger age and had children at a much younger age than they do today. The dialectical differences represent the difficulties in ascertaining what the 1950s really were all about.

Economically, however, the 1950s were a great decade to live in. Government programs allowed greater economic freedom for many families. The number of salaried workers increased by 61 percent between 1947 and 1957. This pushed many families into the “middle-class” economic bracket. Coontz says that the symbol of this economic prosperity is the nuclear family. She points out that during the 1950s the biggest increase in consumer spending was on household goods. “Putting their mouths where their money was, Americans consistently told pollsters that home and family were the wellsprings of their happiness and self-esteem.”

The 1950s also lent to one of the biggest influences on family: the media. Television, especially, became a part of everyday life and for the first time, the public, en masse, was shaped by the images presented. Families began to gather in front of the television for entertainment. Televisions were built as pieces of furniture for the centerpieces of the family room. There is no doubt that the television media plays an important role in the shaping of the American family. And the shows televised during its

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15 Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, p. 25
inception are the perfect examples of what was supposed to be the ideal for the American family, according to the upper-class white male whom most often wrote, produced, and directed 1950s television shows.

First-run television shows of the 1950s were by no means a perfect representation of the families they were supposed to be portraying. Real 1950s families knew that life was not like “Ozzie and Harriet.” But like the media of today, the ideas presented were a mere reflection of the current lifestyle.

When Lucy Ricardo became pregnant on “I Love Lucy,” (despite her and Ricky sleeping in separate beds) the network wouldn’t allow her to use the word “pregnant” for fear of offending viewers. It was already a major faux pas to show a pregnant woman on TV. If implied sex between a married and loving couple on a television show was considered risqué, it was only a reflection of the attitude toward real sex in the 1950s. Unmarried teens that became pregnant were shunned and often hid from the public. The ones who gave birth were encouraged to give up their babies and start anew. It seems that what the 1940s lacked in moral values, the 1950s made up for it in abundance. And just as before in the 1880s, the idea of family once again became intertwined with the idea of traditional values.

1960-present

The 1960s represented a period of upheaval in family values. The whirlwind of change brought on by the sexual revolution, feminist movement, a fundamental distrust of the government, and materialism brought the family into a new era. The civil rights movement illustrated the social instability of the country, followed by the chaotic
Vietnam War and the opposition against it. Much like the period in the 1930s and 1940s, the country was often too preoccupied with matters of state and economy to be worried about family values and traditional morals. And for the next 40 years, in the eyes of many, the role of the family in day-to-day life began to decline.

Divorce rates began to accelerate\(^\text{16}\) (they were already increasing, but the 1960s brought it about much faster). The women’s movement helped women gain more independence figuratively and literally. Some no longer felt the need to be socialized into pre-made gender roles. In fact, a *Time/CNN* poll taken in 1989 found that 94 percent of women believed that the feminist movement helped women become more independent. Between 1960 and the late 1980s, typically “male” professions such as “scientist” or “engineer” saw a drastic increase in women employed.\(^\text{17}\)

The 1970s and 1980s illustrated the further decline of traditional moral values in America. By 1984, one U.S. magazine called the outlook for the traditional American family “bleak” at best. This was at a time when 57.8 percent of women were in the labor force, compared to 34.8 percent in 1960.\(^\text{18}\)

More women working outside the home in the 1980s contributed to a larger net income for two-parent households. Working wives boosted household income by a median of $30,300 in 1982. This money helped boost the economy and maintained an independence from family often associated with the decade. Cyclically, increased income meant increased spending, which meant increased debt, which meant the need for more income and thus, time away from the family.

This cycle was well-documented in the media and could have been a prime cause

\(^{17}\) Claudia Wallis, “Onward, Women!” *Time Magazine*, 4 December 1989
for the so-called decline of family values that began in the 1980s. The next decade would show the longing for traditional family values. Chastising the change in family would become even more prevalent.

The 1990s represented an increase in public awareness about moral values and the affect of values on the family unit. Early in the decade, the country began to question moral values in terms of censorship in the media.

At the forefront of the war against objectionable values were America’s political leaders. In 1992, then-Vice President Dan Quayle gave what is now known as the “Murphy Brown” speech outlining the importance of having a traditional family while haranguing a television sitcom for portraying a single mother by choice. He said:

> It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown - a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman - mocking the importance of a father, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another “lifestyle choice.” I know it is not fashionable to talk about moral values, but we need to do it. Even though our cultural leaders in Hollywood, network TV, the national newspapers routinely jeer at them, I think that most of us in this room know that some things are good, and other things are wrong.\(^\text{19}\)

The question, of course, is what constitutes as good and what constitutes as wrong? Dan Quayle says that raising a child without a father around is wrong, but critiques of his view say that raising a child without a father is better than raising a child with a bad father who is around all the time. The battle between the two is what makes this problem so difficult to define and the solution even more difficult to find. The debate over family values was in the works long before the Murphy Brown comment, but it was Quayle’s speech that served as the catalyst for present-day American media attention.

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\(^{19}\) Dan Quayle, “The Murphy Brown Speech.” (August 1992)
After Dan Quayle, the next Vice-President, Al Gore, has his own way of dealing with family values. Gore and his wife, who were forerunners in advocating censorship in the music media, outlined some of the changes the family has seen in the last 40 years in their book on family values “Joined at the Heart”. In list form, the changes seem overwhelmingly negative. They say that:

- Married couples with children only constitute 35 percent of the families compared with over 50 percent in 1960.
- There are more single-parent households, though they are still not a majority.
- Thirty-three percent of children are born to unwed mothers, compared with 5 percent 40 years ago.
- Marriage rates have steadily declined from 70 percent of the entire “marriage-ready” population in 1960 to 55 percent in 2000. The number of cohabitating couples has increased five-fold.
- Families are forming later: A quarter of all women had not had a child before they turned 35 in 2000, almost double the rate in 1960.

Moral values are even more important to the American public today than they were even a few years ago. In the November 2004 election, roughly 20 percent of Americans cited “moral values” as their number one concern. Conservatives who won the election on that platform promise to reinstate moral values into the country by challenging a number of ideals held closely by liberals as civil liberties. Many of the conservatives have been calling for a return to moral values among the change of the nation. For those who grew up in a much “simpler” time, the change is hard to get used to. Perhaps that is why it’s so difficult to let go of the idea of the traditional nuclear family.
CHAPTER THREE
THE NOSTALGIA TRAP OF STEPHANIE COONTZ

For those who were very young during the 1950s or not even born, it’s very difficult to understand what family life was really like. Most of what we know about the 1950s comes from television. Television shows that depicted family life as it was supposed to be, but certainly not what it was. So why is it that politicians, religious leaders, and political pundits are saying that we need to return to those family values?

Family communication scholar Stephanie Coontz has attempted to answer this question for the last 20 years. She says that the 1950s represent the stability of marriage, traditional gender roles, and innocence for many people. The problems that were around were often hidden from public view. Today, there are so many different types of families that the traditional family is outnumbered in all respects.

A Knight-Ridder news poll conducted in 1996, found that more Americans chose the 1950s as the best decade for children to grow up in. Communities were focused on family, the economy was stable, and most families were run by two-parent households. But it is also true, the poll found, that people are often selective about what they liked about the fifties.\(^2\) They don’t miss the lack of civil rights or the misogynistic attitudes

toward women (when wife beating wasn’t considered a “real” crime\textsuperscript{21}). They want all the good stuff, but want to leave out the bad. Sure, that is the ideal for almost any situation. But it is certainly not realistic. In many cases, the “bad” either influenced or was directly responsible for the “good.”

The 1950s traditional family was a mere blip on the radar screen. Coontz says that the 1950s family was somewhat of an anomaly, sandwiched in between decades of social unrest and economic instability. The 1950s are the exception to the rule when divorce rates decreased, fertility increased, and the age of marriage and motherhood fell.\textsuperscript{22} Even if, as historian Steven Ozment says, “there has never been a time when people didn’t form nuclear families,”\textsuperscript{23} the 1950s family, Coontz points out was a “qualitatively new phenomenon.” But for this type of family to thrive civil rights needed not to exist, gender roles needed to be explicitly practiced and reinforced, and the economy had to be strong enough to support a family on a single income.

Historian Elaine Tyler May points out in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*:

![Image of page from book](image)

The legendary family of the 1950s… was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of “traditional” family life with deep roots in the past. Rather, it was the wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members’ personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life.\textsuperscript{24}

This effort was much easier to come by in a time where racial discrimination was rampant, women were not considered equal partners, and the economy was strong. If one

\textsuperscript{22} Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, p. 25
were to take out all the bad things in the decade, he or she may not be left with only good moral values. When people are nostalgic for the family values of the 1950s, they are not being realistic about what that entails.

Interestingly, the reinforcement of gender roles in the 1950s was also, by some, considered to be an anomaly in the course of women’s rights. Largely thought to have been a direct product of the 1950s, some historians believe that the 1950s, in fact, interrupted the feminist movement as shown in a *Time* article from 1989. Female employment, the article says, had been on a steady rise since the 1890s and the sole exception to this rule was the 1950s where “motherhood and babymaking became a kind of national cult: there was a return to earlier marriage, families were bigger, and divorce rates stabilized.”

Economically speaking, the male breadwinner with a high school education in 1950 could secure a good-paying job to support his family. But after the oil crises in the 1973 and the years of economic reform, it was simply not possible to support a family with the same job in 1950 as 1995. This put more stress on the family unit.

The nostalgia of the 1950s was brought on and sustained through a number of different ways: the media, specifically, television being the most prevalent. It was during the 1950s when television watching became a family affair. White nuclear families watching white nuclear families on television in 1950 was the norm. Today, television programs are rerun constantly on cable. “Nick at Nite” started broadcasting old TV shows in the 1980s and its popularity brought on the inception of the channel TV Land, which broadcasts old shows 24 hours-a-day. While some parents may appreciate the

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25 Wallis, “Onward, Women!”
values expressed on these shows, they may not realize the standard they may be proposing to their children. As Taylor points out, television shows in the 1950s ...proposed a family life as a charming excursion into modernity, but resting on the unshakable stability of tradition. Parents would love and respect each other and their children forever. The children would grow up, go to college, and take up lives identical in most respects to those of their parents.27

As an only child and the product of a “dysfunctional” family, I remember in my childhood watching “Bewitched,” and “The Donna Reed Show” on Nick at Nite and wondering why their were so many differences between my family and theirs.

Children are exposed to more objectionable material today than they were 50 years ago, and so it is easy to see why some people are looking for the easiest road back to 1950. This is primarily due to a relaxation of certain Federal Communication Commission rules (although in 2004 that started to change) and the availability of objectionable material through cable TV and parental ambivalence. House Majority Leader, Tom DeLay, said in the early 1990s that television was responsible the nation’s troubles along with video games, birth control, day care, broken homes, and abortion.28

We can only assume that he means today’s television and not the programs of yesterday.

As a nation, many have been yearning for a selective past for an uncertain future. It may seem easy to go back to a more simple time, but theory shows us that that will not solve any of the problems in the world. People are faced with different issues than their parents and grandparents were. It is important that the model for future prosperity is not based off of a decade that has very little in common with the people of today.

27 Ella Taylor, Prime Time Families: Television Culture in a Postwar America, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) p. 27

Recently, the push toward the “return to family values” has been a point of contention in politics and has brought the debate into the foreground once again. The 2004 presidential election illustrated just how important the American public finds moral values. Newspapers were attributing President Bush’s re-election entirely to moral values. Headlines such as “Faith, Values Fueled Win” from the *Chicago Tribune* and “Values voters’ key to Bush re-election” in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* were plastered all over the country in the first weeks of November. It seems that the entire debate over “moral values” and its reflection in the media came from a *Los Angeles Times* exit poll question. The question and its subsequent speculation may have added fuel to the fire, but it is not the only reason moral values are such a big issue to the American public. In this section, I will examine the now-infamous poll question and what it really means for moral values. In addition, I will explain why there has been a recent push toward this moral agenda in the United States.

*A Los Angeles Times* exit poll conducted on November 2, 2004 at 136 polling
places found that 22 percent of people thought that moral and ethical values were the
most important factor in deciding who voters would vote for. The poll found that 54
percent of Bush’s supporters 24 percent of Kerry supporters said it was most important to
Associates International on Nov. 5 – 8, 2004 found that moral values mattered most in
deciding how to vote 27 percent of voters. In the days following the election, the
American media broadcast that moral values won the election, bringing the debate into
the public once again.

Many political pundits are speculating that the supposed increase in interest in
moral values is false. According to columnist Morris Fiorina from the San Francisco
Chronicle, the moral values story line “grew out of a single poorly written exit-poll item
that was over-interpreted in the heated context of same-sex marriage prohibitions passing
virtually indistinguishable from issues such as terrorism and the economy (both receiving
around 20 percent).

In addition, defining the term moral values complicates matters. Moral values as
a choice on an exit poll can mean different things to different people. It is a collection of
issues, more so than the choice “terrorism” or “the war in Iraq.” For some, moral values
may simply mean the protection of marriage or anti-abortion laws. For others it may
mean the protection of civil rights. For some it may even be the nuclear family ideal.
represented in 1950s media. Regardless, lumping “moral values” in one answer form is not necessarily indicative of the will of the people, according to Fiorina.

Putting the poll in perspective, Dick Meyer of the Washington Post examined exit polls from previous election in 2000 and 1996. In 2000, the consortium that ran the national exit poll did not include an answer choice for moral values. It seemed, according to Meyer, that any answer would have been deeply influenced by the Monica Lewinsky affair and thus not very useful. But in 1996, the moral values answer choice was listed on the exit poll survey. Seventeen percent of voters listed it as their top concern (second only to “health of the economy”). From 17 to 22 percent in 8 years is not exactly mandate for the return of values. So why have the media framed this issue as the deciding factor for voters in the 2004 election?

Put simply, the media have an agenda to inform the public, but in doing so they often, perhaps even unwittingly, tell the public what to think about. The agenda-setting theory of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw says that the news media influence public opinion in a cause and effect chain. For example, in an experiment run by Yale researchers, three groups of people saw news broadcasts of three different news programs highlighting certain issues such as economic inflation, national defense, and the environment, respectively for four straight days. At the end of each viewing, the people were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their own concerns. Each group listed their top concern as the issue that their program respectively highlighted. The experiment showed that the public tends to care more about the issues that they see or read more often.

In the 2004 election, moral values were discussed at length. For example, a
simple Google search of “U.S. moral values” returns over 4,900,000 hits. Applying this to the agenda-setting theory, the more Americans heard about moral values or the decline thereof, the more they began to think of its importance. This, again, was reinforced by the coverage of the exit polls.

Framing moral values as the center piece of American decision in the election serves several purposes. For one, it reinforces the fact that the Republican candidate won. Bush ran his campaign on certain platforms that are associated with moral values including same-sex marriage bans and anti-abortion laws. Citing that moral values were the number one concern of voters symbolically proves that the country was behind him. Secondly, it appeases some of the criticism that surrounded Bush in the run-up to the election, mostly the war in Iraq and the economy.

There have been two long-term trends that can help explain why there has been a recent push toward the return to moral values. According to Lynne Casper and Suzanne Bianchi, the first trend is that the people whom are pushing for moral values tend to only see the family unit a linear model. Casper and Bianchi say that there is a unfounded tendency to believe changes in the family “have been linear, and will continue, unabated, indefinitely.”31 As illustrated in my section on the history of the American family, throughout the last 150 years, the American family has gone through changes that are anything but linear. There were decades that resembled each other greatly in terms of statistics and economy, some that were drastically different, and some that were considered transitory in nature. It would make sense, then, that those who want to keep family values a certain way fear any type of change.

31 Casper and Bianchi, p.xvii
The other tendency is that scholars who wish to illustrate the declining of moral values often chose a particular point in time that will support the arguments that they want to make. For example, one can make a better case for a return to moral values in the 1950s than he or she can in the 1930s and those changes can be exaggerated or minimized depending on the intention.

Another reason people have looked to the return of moral values, is a simple matter of childhood nostalgia. Expounding on Stephanie Coontz’ theory, many people look back to their childhoods as a more simple time. It is no coincidence that the Knight Ridder poll cited earlier said the 1950s were a decade that most people would want to grow up in. The majority population age group did grow up in the 1950s. These are the same people who, in that decade, were either children or young adults who today are touting the praises of a moral America. Today, the media agenda equates moral values and the 1950s family as synonymous, when with a bit of research and common sense, we know that not to be true. In retrospect, childhood will always be a simpler time. It could be just a coincidence that “childhood” for many Americans means childhood in the 1950s. This, in turn, is perpetuated in the media through news and family sitcoms from the decade.

Finally, an issue that is inextricably tied to moral values is also a reason why the American public has seen an increase in moral values coverage. One can not discuss moral values without including the role religion plays. Americans, in general, tend to be a religious group of people. There have been many surveys of the American people citing different results when assessing the numbers of religious people in America. But generally, surveys have found that around 80 percent of Americans cite some personal
belief in religion or a God. Of that number, about 75 percent believe in a Christian God.

Many Christian Americans use the Bible as the source to determine what is moral and what is not. For instance, George W. Bush uses religion in his many public addresses and to make everyday decisions in the White House.\(^{32}\) Religion is clearly a part of life for a majority of Americans, but is religion the reason why Americans are obsessed with morality?

There is a view called the “Divine Command Theory of Ethics” that suggests morality comes from God who wills it to be done. For many Christians, this is the theory that proves morality and religion are inextricably tied. For them, there is no morality without religion.\(^{33}\) In addition, there seems to be a general assumption that most religious people are more ethical or have better values than nonreligious people. But according to a study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics that is only slightly true.\(^{34}\) There is no conclusive evidence that religious people are more “moral” than nonreligious people. We can site religion as a general influence for moral thinking or intention, but there is little indication that religious thinking influences moral action.

The reasons that Americans have become obsessed with family values are not independent of each other. The linear model influences morals, which influences the media agenda, which influences the question of morality in religion. Or it could be the other way around. The reasons why morality has become such a large part of American life are amalgamate. There is no one reason because they all influence one another.

Defining the European Family

When we think of the “European family,” a rush of images does not come flowing to our heads as if someone were to say “picture the American family.” Most of the world has a clear idea of what the American family is and by whom it is influenced. Regardless of the worldly opinions of the American family, it is clear that there is, indeed, a certain prototype.

The European family is more vague. Even though the European Union has its own currency, customs, and constitution, it is difficult to imagine the European family as a single unit. It would seem that there are too many countries and cultures to make a distinct idea of what an E.U. family looks like. Then why is it that the United States of America with its different regions, states, dialects, cultures, and values has this singular idea and the E.U., similar in respect, does not?

This section of the paper attempts to explain this difference by examining the European family in contrast to the American family. I will begin by briefly examining
the history of the modern European family and what influences its moral values, or lack thereof. Second, I will outline some of the divergent viewpoints that are most prevalent between European and American family values. I will then delve into European perception of American values by exploring different media channels. This investigation serves two purposes: To gain a better understanding of why the European values are the way they are and also to gain more rounded characterization of the American family. Finally, I will explain why there are such divergent viewpoints between the two states.

**The History of the European Family**

Before discussing the history of the European family, we must first establish that the European family exists. The European Union is a qualitatively new unit, and therefore the E.U. family is a qualitatively new way to look at Europe’s families. When exploring the nature of the European family, we must keep in mind that generalizations must be made in order to define certain similarities and differences. This account is by no means is to be applied to all European families. The European family, as all families in the world is evolving (especially since the end of WWII). The relative stability in the continent since the fall of communism in the East has made it possible for Europe to be considered as a whole. Sociologists and communication scholars are still working out what it means to be a collective European anything, let alone a collective European family that has a single label and single meaning.

Due to all these factors, the European family is obviously a bit harder to define than the American family. It is even harder for an American to define the European family, especially as far as moral values are concerned. A Google search of “U.S. family
values” yields about 4.9 million hits, whereas “European family values” yields just over 2 million. This is not a small discrepancy.

In researching the modern European family, we must take into account certain historical events that changed the make-up of the family, particularly World War II and the East/West Communist divide. These events reshaped both country borders and European life. The recovery period that came after the war affected the European family in several ways. For one, it was humbling for many families to pick up the pieces left from the fall of the Nazi regime. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the end of the war signified the beginnings of the next great influence: socialism. According to Jack Goody, these socialist regimes affected families in several ways. Through government programs European socialist countries “set aside religious constraints and permitted divorce and abortion, lowering the birth rates, increasing the employment, education, and the opportunities for women more generally, providing communal care for their children both in and out of school.”

Because of this, less emphasis was placed on the family unit. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of East Germany, communism disappeared in Europe, but the differences between Eastern and Western Europe did not. Since 1992, Europe has evolved into a period of relative stability. And it is from this most recent time that the modern European family has begun to evolve again.

The European family suggests some similarities with the American family on a superficial level. The state of the family has evolved from a unit that originally was defined by material objects to a unit that is focused on people.

people through both autonomy and a collective life. Based on census data, more than two-thirds of households have at least one family living in them. Sixty-three percent of those families are considered to be nuclear. Demographically, it seems that the farther South, the greater the size of the family – including extended families. But beyond these broad generalizations, defining the European family is something more difficult.

The European family has handled all of the hardships of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that American families have and with similar results. But, Americans tend to want a more denotative definition even if there isn’t one. The Americans define family in a certain way even if, as the last section proved, it isn’t representative of the general population. Europeans, for the most part, are not quite as interested in defining their family unit and the moral values associated with it (as shown by the Google responses). So, instead of searching aimlessly for a clean-cut definition of a European family, I will explore the idea in terms of family values to help give the unit meaning including divorce; women advancing in the workforce; single, cohabitating parents, and nontraditional families; and religion.

The European family has gone through many changes in terms of divorce. Much like the U.S., there has been a decline in the number of marriages performed, an increase in the number of divorces, and an increase in the average age that people get married at. The number of divorces nearly quadrupled from 1960 to 1996, according to Council of Europe.\(^{37}\) This increase has been stable since 1985. The lowest rates of divorce were found in Italy and Greece, whom in 1999 had respective divorce rates of .60 and .90 per

1000 marriages.  

The divorce rates are often attributed to women’s advancement in the working world. The divorce rates and the structure of the employment force do seem to have a positive correlation, although no causal relationship has been proved. Prior to World War II, married women were banned from working in the British Civil Service. But with more emphasis placed on women’s education, the women’s movement, and the increase of competition in the European economy, women in the workforce became a norm. Now, in many northern European countries, women outnumber men. The ever-increasing numbers affect the family life several ways. For one, with time and money stretched to the limit, women in Europe generally do not have more than two children. Men have been shown to help out more around the house, but women usually bear the majority of household chores and child-care responsibilities. This, no doubt, places strains on the family unit.

The European Union has been, overall, very accepting of the changing values and norms of the family unit. Many different types of nontraditional families have surfaced in the past decades including a rise in single-parent households, cohabitating couples, and gay and lesbian families. Unlike American policy-makers, the change in family in Europe is not viewed as “the end of family.” The problem in examining these new families is that there is not much data on them. There is more information on single parents because their marital status is kept on record with a country’s government. But as far as cohabitating and gay and lesbian couples are concerned, information is sparse.

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39 This includes part-time employment
Cohabitating couples have no legal rights to each other and are therefore considered single in the eyes of the government. While some gay and lesbian families are considered legal in some European countries, their legality is a relatively new development and so there is not enough established information to conduct any worthwhile analysis.\(^{40}\) Recently, however, the E.U. parliament called for gay marriage rights across the Union. While new families are not the norm, they are gaining in numbers and in acceptance.

Most of the opposition to gay marriage in Europe is based in religion. In contrast to America, religion in European countries has been playing a less pivotal role. The secularization of the continent has influenced the family unit as well from the invention and use of contraceptives in family planning to the general acceptance of divorce. Religion, specifically Christianity, has decreased as a part of everyday life for many Europeans. For instance, there is no mention of God or religion in the E.U. Constitution,\(^{41}\) religious apparel has been banned in schools in France and Germany, and often a majority of residents identify themselves as atheists. Several studies have been conducted, and while there are minor discrepancies in their numbers, the results show that Europeans, as a whole, are not very religious. In a 2004 study, Norris and Inglehart found that the least religious country in the E.U. was Sweden, where 64% of respondents claimed not to believe in a God. In contrast, the most religious country was Poland.

\(^{40}\) In Germany, for example, gays and lesbians are allowed to have “registered life partnerships,” which guarantee rights such as inheritance and health insurance and allow couples to share the same surname. In the Netherlands and Belgium, it is legal for gay couples to marry.

where only three percent claimed not to believe in a God.⁴²

These values are what shape the ever-changing definition of the European family. In the next section, I will more closely examine how the divergent viewpoints in connection with moral values came to be including recent wartime policy, the media, and governmental policy. Finally, I will examine a small sect of Europeans whom, like many Americans, believe family values and religion should return to Europe as an everyday way of life.

CHAPTER SIX

DIVERGENT VIEWPOINTS BETWEEN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN FAMILIES

Influences on the Divide

Americans and Europeans have, in modern times, shared a special relationship. Through wars and foreign-policy debates they have continued to support each other. The relationship was born out of World War II and became stronger with the defeat of Communism and the end of the Cold War. Even when relations are strained (as can be shown currently in 2005), Europeans generally still have a favorable opinion of Americans. So why are some American restaurants and cafeterias naming their fried potatoes Freedom Fries in opposition to the French? Why did some Americans start writing letters warning the British to keep out of the November 2004 elections? The perception is that Americans and Europeans are moving farther and farther apart on the values scale. While the question of when is of much debate, the catalyst for much of this speculation seems to be the partial opposition to the war in Iraq launched in 2003 by the U.S. and President Bush. Europeans have sited America’s growing ethnocentrism and unilateralist outlook for the growing hostility where Americans have cited Europeans loss of values and too-liberal stance on certain issues.

Definition of moral values is the most fundamental issue when discussing opposition. Too often, we are operating under the assumption that we are all talking

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43 The German Marshall Fund survey, funded by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, in 2003 found that on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being “very warm” feelings, Europeans rated America a 64. The score was the result of an average of six respondent countries.

44 One study cited the end of the Cold War as the beginning of the relationship strain between America and Europe. It is said that without the common security threat of the Soviet Union, America and Europe were bound to be driven apart by circumstance.
about the same thing. American moral values are considered to be religious moral
values: pro-life, anti-gay, pro-family, protecting the innocent, etc. These values are fairly
exclusive, unwavering from their opinion or goal. Now what can be characterized as
European family values are more public issues; issues that could include equality,
diversity, and the economy.

The problem comes when proponents of each side try to herald their position as
more “moral.” A British paper attacking American definition of moral values said, “The
collapse of Enron, wages to low to sustain families and tax cuts that hurt the poor are not
defined as moral issues, even though the World Health Organisation has reported a return
in the US of diseases more usually associated with poverty in developing countries.”

It seems, then, that as the American definition becomes increasingly narrow, the
European definition becomes broader. For example, one of the issues that European’s
site as a reason for growing unhappiness with the U.S. was the United States’ refusal to
sign the Kyoto treaty on global warming. Many Europeans view environmental concerns
as moral issues, and the rejection of such represents a symptom of a larger problem. As
quoted in an article about U.S. unilateralism, Christopher Bertram, the Director of the
German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin said: “There’s one
fundamental difference, and it’s not just Kyoto or the ICC. It’s whether truly
international issues should be met with a truly international approach. This is a deeply
held view in Europe.” In the spirit of reciprocity, Europeans are not quite as keen to
partake in a war that’s morally importantly to the U.S. administration when they’ve had
little or no support in the issues that are morally important to them like the Kyoto treaty.

Understanding that there is disagreement between Europeans and Americans on what

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constitutes as moral values is something that is plastered all over newspapers. But not very many scholars have tried to indicate why this might be the case.

Discerning the reason this split on definition occurred is not quite as difficult as one would think. It goes back to the inception of the modern family and how it was defined then. Taking the idea of moral values being either a narrow and closed ideal or a broad and open ideal, as pointed out in *The Independent* article is interesting rhetoric. Americans see moral values as a private issue that has worldly consequences, where as Europeans see worldly moral issues that have individual consequences. In the History of the American family section, I discussed the economic influences that helped shape the American family into what it is today. The division of the private and public spheres helped define gender and family roles for American families. While the next few decades in the early twentieth century helped redefine those roles, the 1950s put them back on track. From there, Americans have spent the last 50 or so years trying to redefine those roles again, and this redefinition of public and private is where our problems stem from.

The juxtaposition of maintaining good moral private values and still having equality and diversity are two opposing forces. Trying to balance these forces leads to confusion. In an Op/Ed piece, one author speculates:

> People today, at the end of a century of revolution in private life remember, at the beginning of the century it was not even possible to divorce are wrestling with new ideas of how to create a private life that is meaningful and honest, has integrity and satisfies them, in the face of a climate that preaches only old values are good values, only ‘family values’ can save civilization.\(^{46}\)

The private and public lives of men and women have become blurred, and so what was

\(^{46}\) Shere Hite “Bye Bye Mister American Pie. And Mrs. And Junior. Is Clinton’s real crime to be no better than the rest of us?” *The Observer*, 16 August, 1998, p.23
once a clear and concise definition of family values has become more convoluted.

When Europeans call on American leadership to look at the environment or
poverty levels as moral issues, it does not register quite as well because those issues are
not within the realm of American family values. Some politicians, particularly the left-
leaning Democrats, have tried in the past to take on those issues. But as the American
public calls for family above all, Democrats are left torn between broadening the
definition or losing voters. The have invariably chosen to avoid the latter and thus, the
rift between Americans and Europeans continues.

European values have always been associated with the larger public and not the
private family. This trend has emerged and has continued to evolve since WWII. But it
has only been a recent development, however, that the E.U. is being more vocal about
their opposition to the U.S. and its definition. This is due, in part, to the idea that
American interests are forcing values upon the rest of the world under the guise of
democracy. In 2001, then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice made a speech
detailing the importance of the partnership between Europe and America and the values
that they hold collectively. She said: “Europe and America are partners today. They will
continue to be partners tomorrow and the day after – strong partners. Not because of the
inertia of common history but because of common interests, and, indeed, common
values.”

As research shows, however, the values are not so common. In an opinion
column, one reader comments on what seems to be a moral paradox.

The central issue in Ms. Rice’s article seems to be her (and by
extension Americans’) perception of values. This was, is and will
be the main obstacle in any smooth relations between the United

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47 Condoleezza Rice, America and Europe, Partners Tomorrow and the Day After [News article on-line]
(The International Herald Tribune, 2001, accessed 30 March 2005); available from
http://coranet.radicalparty.org/pressreview/print_250.php?func=detail&par=785; Internet
States and the rest of us. It is truly naïve for Ms. Rice to say that “American values” are not “American” but “universal.” This peculiarly American attitude is what rubs everyone the wrong way.\footnote{Mark Dean Edwards “America and the World (Opinion)” \textit{International Herald Tribune}, 13 June 2001, p. 9}

Much of the opposition to America and its definition of moral values, it seems, is political. And considering these statements were made before the War in Iraq in 2003, the reader’s comment holds more levity.

War will always evoke strong reactions, both positive and negative. When the U.S. decided to go to war in early 2003, European reaction was mixed. The British and the Polish being the most enthusiastic, while the French and the Germans being the most opposed. It seems that since that time relations have been shaky at best. One French diplomat said in relation to their opposition to the war: “Very few European countries are used to saying no to the United States. France has a long history of debate with America, but other countries aren’t so used to this.”\footnote{R.C. Longworth, “Allies Diverge on Vision for World.” \textit{The Daily Times}, 20 February 2002, online edition}

Europeans also have a hard time dealing with the Christian-Right of America and what they view as moral or ethical (again, a question of definition not of principal). As a basically secular society, Gilles Andreani, a French foreign policy scholar, says that Europeans may have trouble “dealing with a government that may be pragmatic but has its values – religion, a certain order of society – so up front.” He continues, “For our secular society, the idea that a presidential candidate would explain how he feels about Jesus is bizarre.”\footnote{Longworth, \textit{Daily Times}} Religion as a moral compass is something that is taken for granted in American Christianity. But in Europe it’s hard to imagine morality in a causal relationship with religion, simply because religion does not play an important role in
everyday life. The question of religion and morality between Europe and the U.S. comes down to a fundamental misunderstanding of what morality is. To Europeans, morality is not tied in with religion, but with a feeling of community value.

The media have a profound impact on how both Americans and Europeans live their lives, especially in the way the Americans and Europeans view each other. The media, specifically television, can help to explain the growing differences between the different definitions of morality. Television in Europe, for example, has long been considered to be more “liberal” than television in America according to David Buckingham, a television specialist at the University of London. This is due, in part, to the lack of a central censoring agency such as the Federal Communications Commission as in America. Each country has their own rules and regulations as far as what is to air on television and radio. By and large, most television programs in Europe would probably never make it to network airwaves in America.

In the United Kingdom, for example, a version of the stage musical “Jerry Springer: The Opera” has been shown uncut on the BBC. The show includes a cast of transsexuals, profanity, and a man in a diaper. “The Naked News” a show that originated in Russia, has made it to the public airwaves in England. It features news anchors who routinely shed their business suits as they recite the news until they are completely in the buff. In America, a version of the show can only be seen on Pay-Per-View Erotica.

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51 Siniša Zrinščak, “Why, At All, Do We Need Religion?” Paper presented as part of the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, San Francisco, California, 14 August 2004
channels in seedy motels. In Italy, a plastic surgery show called “Scalpel! No One is Perfect” showed flat-chested women (unedited, of course) in surgery for breast augmentation.

These instances are not a new development. European media has always been considered “racier” than its American counterparts. In the U.K., the comedy “Are You Being Served?” which ran from 1972 to 1985 the characters routinely made allusions and jokes about a gay character named Mr. Humphries, something really not made popular in America until “Will & Grace” aired in 1998. Many of the adult-centered programming in Europe is aired late at night (usually after 10:30 or 11:00 p.m.) and is considerably more explicit.

Perhaps part of the reason there doesn’t seem to be a need for decency in European TV is because there was no “1950s culture” to compare it to. Europeans began private television viewing around the same time as Americans, but there was no family values standard for the types of programming broadcast. According to a recent BBC poll, the decade with the best TV was 1970s with shows like The Benny Hill Show, which glorified sexual proclivities.

There have been some debates in Europe as to what is appropriate for the airwaves. In Germany, for example, a national media commission was set up to promote standards for TV, radio, and the Internet. But even so, just last year, the daily newspaper Bild ran a front-page story with a topless photo.

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CHAPTER SEVEN
EUROPEAN REACTION TO AMERICAN MORAL VALUES SCANDALS

Examining European media, however, shows that there is more, in the eyes of Americas, indecent sexual exploitation, but it does not really prove how Europeans feel about American media and its connection with moral values. Events in the American media that compromised the integrity of American values were considered by many Europeans to be no big deal. Starting with the affair between Monica Lewinski and President Clinton to the more recent Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction. Europeans have consistently pooh-poohed American priorities.

In 1998 when the Lewinsky-Clinton affair was made public and Clinton was a proven liar, America was turned on its ear. There were debates as to the moral compass of the country then. Pundits were comparing the affair to the Watergate scandal. “Unrevised history reveals that Clinton's actions and behavior (limited to Monicagate alone) rivals or exceeds President Nixon's Watergate misconduct.”55 Democrats questioned the Republicans’ basis for comparison, while the Europeans wondered what

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the fuss was all about. Presidents certainly had extra-marital affairs before Clinton. I’m reminded of President Kennedy (whom had an alleged affair with an East German spy named Ellen Romisch, consequently putting the country in more danger than an affair with a 20-something White House intern). One European columnist asked “Does it really matter whether the US president had sex with someone outside his marriage? Or does only his job performance matter? How did we reach a point where the world openly discusses semen stains?” The Europeans saw Clinton’s affair as a private issue, and thus not about moral values. A Danish paper actually reprimanded Americans for a “childish obsession with smut and scandals not compatible with a well-functioning democracy.” In America, it was Clinton who was lambasted for his lack of fidelity and family values.

While it is true that not all Europeans found Clinton’s behavior excusable, they admonished the situation in a different way, focusing on how the scandal was handled and what it would mean worldwide rather than the moral aspects of the illicit affair. A French paper noted:

Domestic politics aside, the White House runs the risk of seeing its authority challenged oversees…the dollar, already weakened over the past year, is in danger of footing the bill for Monicagate just as it discovers that is has a rival in the euro.

The Berliner Morgenpost said that the scandal had “poisoned the political climate of the United States,” while a writer for The Scotsman pointed out,

The president’s private conduct has probably fallen short of the standards expected by many Americans. But the constitution does

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56 Shere Hite “Bye Bye Mister American Pie. And Mrs. And Junior. Is Clinton’s real crime to be no better than the rest of us?” The Observer, 16 August, 1998, p.23
58 Harper, p. 1
not require that the president serve as the nation’s moral guardian: it only demands that he acts as its political leader.\(^{59}\)

Ironically enough, this shows how far the battle over moral values in America have come. With the entire hullabaloo over George W. Bush’s re-election on a platform of moral values, it seems that the president has become America’s moral guardian. For one, he appoints judges and cabinet members with his moral outlook. He also appoints leaders of governmental organizations like the Federal Communications Commission to tell the American public what is moral and what is not.

The most popular example of FCC involvement with moral decency is the now-infamous Janet Jackson “wardrobe malfunction” at the Super Bowl in 2004. During the half-time show Justin Timberlake performing alongside Janet Jackson ripped open the breastplate of her bustier revealing, for 1.7 seconds, Jackson’s breast adorned with a star-shaped “nipple shield.” Many American viewers who were watching the game with their families were shocked at the nudity. The FCC fined CBS, the network that carried the Super Bowl, $550,000 for the flash. And while it was been proven that nudity is more commonplace on European television, America’s reaction to the event was perplexing to E.U. citizens. It left many asking if America was still a nation of Puritans.\(^{60}\) One paper asked if this was the same country that spends $10 billion a year on pornography.\(^{61}\)

A German paper commented:

How reassuring to the rest of the world that the U.S. has its priorities straight. We, the poorly informed Europeans, wouldn’t have realized that Jackson’s breast was a more important issue than Iraq’s missing weapons of mass destruction. But the U.S. media is

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\(^{59}\) Phil Cullis, “Scandal, Yes, But This is Not Watergate II,” The Scotsman, 29 Jan., 1998, p.12

\(^{60}\) Quoted in Dave Zweifel “Europe Laughs at Breast hysteria” The Capital Times, 19 March, 2004, p. 8a

\(^{61}\) Calum MacDonald, “Nipple that shocked America; Nation in frenzy over Janet’s Superboob” Daily Record, 4 February, 2004, p11
covering the breast-baring incident like the story of the century.62

The paper was right - the same week that the breast incident occurred, a report surfaced on Iraq’s WMDs; some cited a cover-up, including Jackson herself.

From the start, she suspected that the outrage vented against her was deliberately manufactured – by the Republican Party and its more overt supporters in the media – as a distraction from the very damaging news then coming in about Iraq’s clear lack of weapons of mass destruction.63

Part of the reason the Europeans were so confused, excluding cover up, about the hysteria surrounding Jackson’s breast was the sheer amount of violence on American TV that Americans don’t seem to have a problem with. Even 66 ABC affiliates refused to air the movie Saving Private Ryan on Veteran’s day citing not the horrific and life-like violence, but the film’s 21 F-Bombs.

War, religion, and media influences help to drive a wedge in what is viewed as the growing value gap between Europe and America. Consequentially, they influence each other as well. In a classic case of “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Does a secular society promote a more liberal media, which in turn promotes more liberal government policies? Or could it be the other way around? Just as in defining moral values, there is bound to be some overlap because these are not distinct issues. Together, however, they help explain not only the moral values associated with Europeans and how they feel the way they do. In return, it gives another perspective on American moral values.

62 Zweifel, p. 8a
63 Andrew Gumbel, “Sins of the Flesh” The Independent, 19 August 2004, p.2
CHAPTER EIGHT
EUROPEANS WHO SHARE AMERICAN MORAL VALUES

There are, on the flip side, a small group of Europeans who see eye to eye with many pro-value Americans. Their expressions are quite familiar; they are pro-family, pro-life, anti-gay, anti-indecency, and they are fighting hard to bring moral values back to a secular Europe. Unsurprisingly, they believe the way to do this is to bring the Christian Church back into Europe. Heading up the crusade is Rocco Battiglione, a man who is synonymous with the European family values campaign. He emphasizes, as many Americans do, the private moral values that are not based in diversity or equality. He has, in the past, said that he characterizes homosexual behaviors as “an indicator of a moral disorder,” that AIDS is a divine punishment, and has proposed paying women not to have abortions. Battiglione’s ties with the Church and his fervor for moral values strike a reminiscent chord with those of the religious Right and neo-conservative politicians in America. Predictably, Battiglione’s dreams of a united Christian Europe have come up against tough opposition. In October 2004, he lost a campaign to become the E.U. commissioner for justice and home affairs; a slap in the face for the so-called

64 Joan Smith, “What About the Left’s Moral Values?” The Independent, 10 Nov. 2004, p. 37
return of European moral values.

The Catholic Church is behind Battiglione and has been calling for a return to moral values for Europe for a long time. In 1996, the Vatican called for a new campaign of family values to combat what it called a demographic winter. The Pontifical Council for Family commented by saying that the European Union was guilty of introducing specious rights to reproductive health, homosexuality, and abortion and cited Europe’s higher divorce rates and falling number of marriages on the changes.65

Even more recently, there have been an increasing number of meetings and conferences to discuss the decline of moral values in Europe. The most popular is the Venice Colloquium, which has taken place for the last four years. Its goal is to bring like-minded Americans and Europeans together to bridge what they believe is fast becoming a trans-Atlantic divide. They say that if 70 percent of Frenchman would have preferred Sen. John Kerry to win the U.S. presidential election that must mean 30 percent supported George Bush.66 This statement is highly debatable and based mostly in hearsay, but it would not be wrong to say that the U.S. president does have some support in the European Union.

One professor in Scotland disagrees that the moral value problems Europe is facing are based on religion or government entirely. David Smith, of Edinburgh University, says that economic prosperity is the root of crime and the breakdown of family values. “Rising crime seems to be linked with economic growth rather than deprivation. In particular, economic growth leads to increasing opportunities for crime,”

he said in a 1996 conference on the matter. Smith says that with prosperity and emphasis on equal opportunities, families may be comparing themselves to more distant reference groups. This, in turn, can lead to competition in the family structure and the breakdown of the family unit.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{67} Andrew Walker “Envy and Inequality Not Poverty, are the Root of all Crime; Professor Blames the Breakdown of Family Values for Rising Figures.” \textit{The Daily Mail}, 19 September 1996, p.22
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

It’s difficult not to take sides on an issue such as moral values. My inherent biases led me to choose this field as a topic of study. After researching hundreds of articles that place the blame on the decline of moral values on secularization, a lax media, and/or unilateralism, I’ve found that, ultimately, Americans and Europeans are no further than they were ten years ago on conciliation in terms of moral values. There are those who say that it shouldn’t be a compromise and that we are both entitled to our own opinions, and they are correct. But for the sake of foreign relations, America and Europe officials cannot go on like this. The divide across the Atlantic on moral issues is one small part of what could eventually become an even greater divide. Moral values are, for so many, an issue of deep personal conviction. A small contradiction of moral issues between allies can quickly become a large-scale debate. Foreign diplomats may go overseas and schmooze all they can, but both the American and European public know it’s not working, particularly the younger generations who are becoming more and more disillusioned with the divide.

When I was searching for research articles for my thesis, I came across a blog
entry of a young Frenchman who calls himself “Jerome à Paris.” The title of his post was “*Stupid fucking Americans*. Europeans are losing hope” (As an American, and a product of a journalistic school of thought, I’m consequently wondering if I should have censored that F-word). He reacts in his post to the news of an Italian journalist’s bodyguard’s death by friendly American fire:

> Guess what, we're losing the will to complain. It's useless. We've lost hope. The sad events of yesterday have become *typical* of today's America, and we don't expect anything else anymore. We *don't trust you* today (as a country and an administration), and we know we shouldn't expect any different in the foreseeable future.68

To be fair, I do not think that generalizing an entire population based on the perceived actions of a government administration is completely reasonable. But I can see how this particular European could feel the way that he does.

Americans have been hearing about moral values for a while now, but prior to 2001, we kept it in-house. Now many Europeans feel that we are forcing our morals on to others, including them. For whatever reason, this is not getting through to the administration. In her speech, for example, Condoleezza Rice maintained the position that American values are the same as European values, which not only undermines the complaints of the European public, it completely misses the point.

Rice also said in the same speech that some say that although some say “America and Europe are destined to become adversaries. The president and his administration fundamentally reject this premise.”69 It’s nice to know that the U.S. administration has no plans to sever ties with Europe, but if things keep going the way that they are, who’s

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69 Rice, *America and Europe, Partners Tomorrow and the Day After*
to say that Europeans like “Jerome à Paris” won’t completely sever ties with America?

America and Europe have shared a very special, almost sibling-like relationship over the years. And like any family, there are dialectical tensions that are bound to surface from time to time. But as we drift further and further apart, it’s more difficult to see any reconciliation with present circumstances. Both sides have to really be willing to cooperate with each other and acknowledge that there’s a fundamental problem of definition and differing opinions.

In all my research, I came across many accounts of opposition on both sides and the occasional explanation for such opposition. I never saw a credible and plausible plan for the healing of the moral value divide. This could mean that both Americans and Europeans do not want to bridge the gap in foreign relations or that it is not possible to do so. I highly doubt that it is the latter, and so I sadly conclude that at this time Americans and Europeans have little interest in understanding each other.

The fault could not lie with one country alone on either side of the Atlantic. So it is important to remember that if Europeans and Americans are going to come together in the future, both sides have to understand their roles as both problem-solvers and trouble-makers. Chastising each other only leads to hateful speech and irreversible disengagement.

Both the E.U. and the U.S. are guilty of blindness to each other’s cause. American administration chooses to ignore popular European opinion, while a European public scoff at American deep-seated beliefs. It’s hard to say which is worse, and perhaps we shouldn’t try to make that claim. It is clear to me, however, that without serious consideration to this issue, Americans and European may become adversaries, indeed.
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