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Dr. Jata

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W. C. NORRIS

May 3, 1988

William C. Norris, Chairman
William C. Norris Institute
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Dear Bill:

I have read -- and re-read several times -- the article "Families and Schools" by John S. Coleman that you were good enough to send me. This is one of the most insightful analyses I have seen of some of the basic problems of our society, and it's really frightening in its implications. If Coleman is right, and I have no doubt he is, our problems have very deep roots and there are no simple, straightforward ways for dealing with them.

We have been aware for a long time of the far-reaching structural changes that have occurred in our society since the onset of the industrial revolution two centuries ago: the movement of work from the home to the factory, the rise of the corporation as the dominant form of productive organization, the changing role of women, the assumption by government of many vital functions historically vested in the family. But for the first time to my knowledge Coleman has brought all of this into coherent perspective by focussing on the impact of these and other structural changes on the role and functions of the family itself. There has been a lot of talk lately about the need to "restore family values," but most of this is pure political blarney (politeness keeps me from using the word I started to use). Few people bother to define what they mean by "family values," let alone set forth any rational means for "restoring" them.

Coleman's concept of "social capital" throws an entirely new light on our problems. We've heard a lot about "human" capital, but one of the important sources of the difficulties we face is the extent we have sacrificed "social" capital in our efforts to maximize "human" capital. In Coleman's formulation, human capital develops and resides within individuals (e.g., self-realization and the like). In contrast, social capital develops and resides within institutions, notably the family. Adults, including parents, are the chief beneficiaries of accumulations of human capital; children, on the other hand, are the members of our society most dependent on social capital. And what is particularly significant in the present context is the fact that the gravely depleted stock of social capital characteristic of today's society is the chief obstacle to our children's ability to develop human capital of their own.

Coleman does not suggest any easy answers -- nor should he have, because there aren't any. But a careful reading of his paper suggests some lines of thought that may be productive.

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For example, he emphasizes that one of the chief structural changes brought about by the industrial revolution was the transfer of productive work from the home to the factory. A major consequence of this transfer was to deprive children of the training and preparation for life that from time immemorial had been a natural part of growing up in an environment that was not only a home but a place of work. Society's answer to this radical depletion of social capital was creation of the public school system, and that answer worked reasonably well for the better part of a century.

But an even more serious depletion of social capital is now under way: the movement of women from the home to the factory, store, or office. Whereas the departure of men from the home deprived children of the opportunity to learn a trade in the process of growing up, the departure of mothers jeopardizes their opportunity to acquire other less tangible attributes that are even more important to meaningful and successful living: emotional adjustment, sense of self-worth, basic social skills, attitudes toward life, etc. The first five years of a child's life shape the kind of person he or she is going to be.

One of Coleman's few specific suggestions is that just as massive public investment was made in the public school system to compensate for the depletion of social capital created by the movement of men from the home to the factory, major public investment must now be made in a comprehensive day care system that will provide enriched child care "all day; from birth to school age; after school, every day, till parents return home from work; and all summer" (Coleman's emphasis).

This is an area in which Control Data's experience is particularly enlightening: You've already done it, and it works. The Northside Daycare Center was not only important to the success of the Northside Plant but provided a rich growing-up experience that will serve many young people well for the rest of their lives. I recall Roger Wheeler telling me about ten years ago that children who had had the benefit of CDC daycare experience were about three years further advanced in classroom work than children of the same age in the general school population. That's a striking verification of Coleman's thesis, and a concrete example of one way to create social capital.

But it took a system of universal education to replace at least partially the social capital lost by moving work from the home to the factory. By the same token, it will take a system of universal daycare to offset the grave further loss of social capital we are now experiencing as women likewise leave the home. Valuable as they are, daycare centers such as Northside are isolated oases in a vast desert. To continue the analogy, ways must be found to make the desert bloom. Because of the magnitude of the task, that will take much the same kind of massive public investment in a universal daycare system that creation of the universal school system required that began in earnest about a century ago.

I hope that we have learned something from what went wrong with the public school system, and that we can avoid making the same kind of mistakes as we move inevitably toward a public daycare system. There is a great advantage in the fact that such a system has not yet begun to take form. You know from ex-

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perience the massive resistance to change on the part of an entrenched educational bureaucracy. Fortunately, a comparable bureaucracy in daycare has not yet emerged, and it should be possible to accomplish things here that are exceedingly difficult, and perhaps impossible, in the education system.

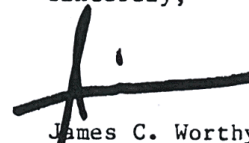
Where we went wrong in the schools was to assume that if they were supported by public funds public agencies should run them. I don't need to repeat to you the fallacies of that argument. It is right and proper that the public through appropriate instrumentalities should determine policies, set standards, and provide surveillance, but public agencies are exceedingly inept when it comes to operations.

A universal daycare system appears to be an effective means for restoring some part of the social capital now being lost. Before that system starts down the same muddy road the school system is on, there is an opportunity for innovative entrepreneurs to blaze an alternative trail.

This will take a lot of thought and skillful doing. All I want to do in this letter is put forward an idea that I think is worth exploring. The only specific suggestion I would make is this: All the logics of a voucher system for education apply with equal force to a voucher system for daycare, and would, in fact, be by far the most effective way for the public to make the very substantial investment in social capital the situation so urgently requires.

On a related matter: As I told you over the telephone the other day I have some ideas for more closely integrating work and schooling. That, however, will have to be the subject of another letter -- this one is already far too long.

Sincerely,



James C. Worthy

P.S. Millie and I are moving back to Evanston next week. Until about next November, I can be reached at my office at Northwestern (Karen has my address and phone number there) or at our new home. 23 Calvin Circle. Evanston. IL

60201, telephone 312/492-2860.)