



Sylvia Ann Hewlett. *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children.* New York: Harper, 1991.

Sylvia Hewlett's book, *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children*, is written for a general lay audience but should also be of interest to scholars concerned with children and the family. In a lively and readable style Hewlett, an economist by training, details the way American society short-changes its children — both poor and middle class — and describes concrete policy recommendations for how we might begin to rectify these problems.

Although Hewlett's writing style is accessible to all readers, she continually backs up her position with extensive footnotes. She describes, in gripping detail, the ways poverty affects the lives of children in the United States — the high infant death rate, especially when compared to other industrialized countries; lack of health care; increasing out-of-wedlock births; lack of child care; lack of adequate housing; and poor educational facilities. She also shows how middle class children are short-changed — tracing increasing adolescent drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, and academic failures to parents' increased work schedule, a greater cultural emphasis on individualism and personal fulfillment, and a resulting decrease in time and attention devoted to their children. Throughout the book she shows how the problems children face today result from the

choices adults make to put themselves and their own personal fulfilment ahead of the needs of their children; from changes in the economy that have resulted in heavier workloads outside the home for both mothers and fathers; and from public policies that target the elderly, often the very affluent elderly, while shortchanging the young. In excruciating detail she shows how the long-term costs of neglecting our children are far greater than the potential costs of providing adequate care.

Throughout the book Hewlett shows how other industrialized countries, many with fewer resources than the United States, have managed to provide for their children in ways far superior to our own. She ends the book with a discussion of concrete policies that the United States could pursue to begin to combat its children's problems, including parental leave, free prenatal and maternity care, improved child care options for working parents, increased investments in education, and housing subsidies for families with children. She also shows how private industry can develop policies that enhance parents' ability to spend time with their children and very bravely calls for extensive modifications in divorce laws that would make divorce a more lengthy process and help ensure that children maintain contact with both parents. All of this is done without the nasty, vengeful, antifeminist tone that can be detected in political statements regarding the family that come from right wing politicians. Instead, Hewlett seems able to avoid political posturing and propose humane and practical solutions to children's problems. Most importantly, Hewlett shows how these solutions are essential to the long-term health of society and all of its members.

I used Hewlett's book last year in a class called "Children and Society," that I taught for a public policy department. The book mashed well with other reading I assigned from academic journals, and, in fact, provided the students with a nice change of pace. The book also triggered excellent discussions regarding the nature of the problems children face, the reasons for these problems, and possible solutions. Scholars should not be misled by the accessible nature of the book or the fact that students enjoyed it, for it is well grouped in the academic literature. Teachers should also not be put-off by the publication data. Even though the book appeared in 1991, the problems it details are still very much with us and the policy recommendations Hewlett proposes are still viable. I recommend it highly to both scholars and teachers. It details problems that are among the most severe facing our nation, and it develops sound and reasonable policy solutions.

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