

Society's condemnation of etiquette for being artificial and repressive stems from an idealistic if hopelessly naive belief in what we might call Original Innocence—the idea that people are born naturally good but corrupted by civilization. This is a very sweet idea, but it bears no relation to human nature.

Yes, we're born adorable, or our parents would strangle us in our cribs. But we are not born good; that has to be learned. And if it is not learned, when we grow up and are not quite so cuddly, even our parents can't stand us....

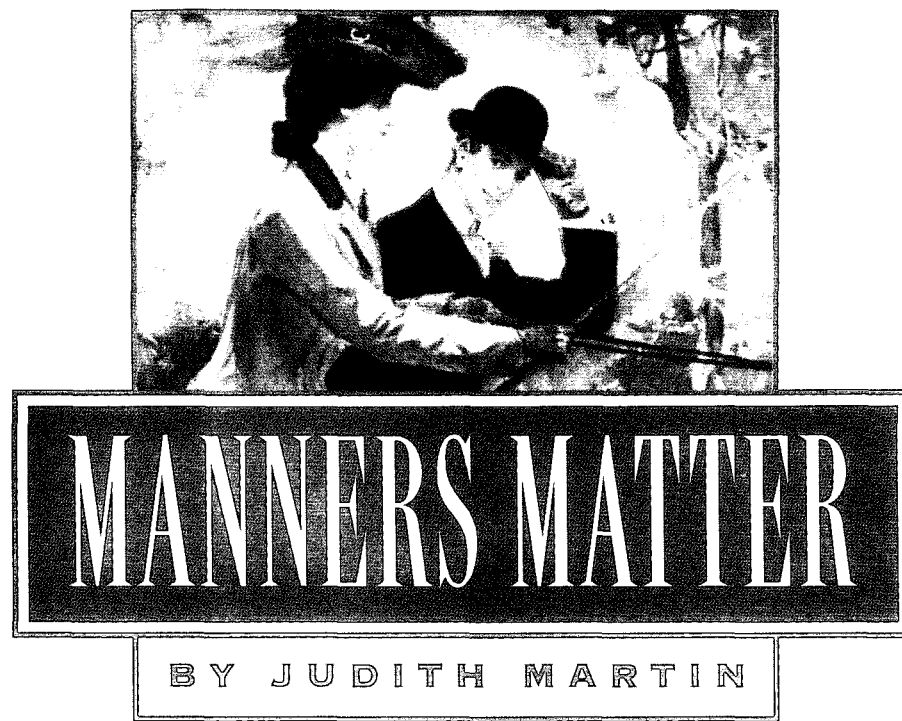
Administering etiquette, like administering law, is more than just knowing a set of rules. Even the most apparently trivial etiquette rules are dictated by principles of manners which are related to, and sometimes overlap with, moral principles. Respect and dignity, for example, are two big principles of manners from which a lot of etiquette rules are derived. This does not mean that you can simply deduce your rules of behavior from first principles. There are things you just have to know, like whether a man is supposed to show respect by taking his hat *off*, as in church, or putting a hat on, as in a synagogue.

Moral people who understand these principles still figure that civility is not a top-priority virtue. First, they're going to fix the world, and then on the seventh day they're going to introduce civility. Deep in their hearts, they think etiquette is best applied to activities that don't really matter much, like eating or getting married.

But the absence of manners is a cause of some of our most serious social problems. For instance, our school systems have broken down from what is called a lack of discipline. What does that mean? It means that such etiquette rules as sitting still, listening to others, taking turns, and not hitting others have not been taught.

A great deal of crime begins with the short tempers people develop from being treated rudely all the time, and from perceived forms of disrespect. Getting "dissed," as it's called in the streets, is one of today's leading motivations for murder.

Nor will the business of government be done well, or sometimes done at all, by people who can't work together in civil, statesman-like ways. That is why we have all those highly artificial forms of speech for use in legislatures and courtrooms. Even in a courtroom where free-



# MANNERS MATTER

BY JUDITH MARTIN

dom of speech is being defended, there is no freedom to speak rudely. In legislatures we have phrases like "my distinguished colleague seems to be sadly mistaken"—because if we spoke freely and frankly, people would be punching each other out instead of airing arguments.

**W**e have a legal system that bars us from acting on natural human impulses to pillage, assault, and so forth. Whether we appreciate it or not, we also have an extra-legal system, called etiquette, that does many of the same things.

Law is supposed to address itself to the serious and dangerous impulses that endanger life, limb, and property. Etiquette addresses provocations that are minor but can grow serious if unchecked. Etiquette has some very handy conflict resolution systems—such as the apology, sending flowers in the morning, saying "I don't know what I was thinking"—that help settle things before they have to go through the legal system.

But as we've seen in the past few decades, when people refuse to comply with etiquette the law has to step in. A classic example is smoking. We've had to use the law to explain such simple etiquette rules as: You don't blow smoke in other people's faces, and you don't blow insults in other people's faces pretending it's health advice. Sexual harassment is another example that had to be turned over to the law because those in a position of

power refused to obey such basic values as "Keep your hands to yourself."

It's a dangerous idea to keep asking the law to do etiquette's job. Not that I wouldn't love to have a squad of tough cops who would go around and roust people who don't answer invitations and write thank-you notes. But when we have to enlarge the scope of law to enforce manners, it really does threaten freedom.

Even I think people should have a legal right to be obnoxious. I don't think they should exercise it. And I do think they should be prepared to take the consequences: If you stomp on the flag, some people will not want to listen to your opinions. If you disrupt and spoil activities for other people who want to participate, they're going to throw you out. Those are the mild little sanctions of etiquette, but they work.

Trying to live by law alone does not work. Every little nasty remark is labeled a slander and taken to court; meanness gets dressed up as "mental cruelty"; and everything else that's annoying is declared a public health hazard. That's why we need the little extra-legal system over which I have the honor of presiding.

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# WHY THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

## Will Never Become Obsolete

BY KARL ZINSMEISTER

In 1978, anthropologist Mary Leakey made a breathtaking discovery in a fossil lava bed in east Africa: the first human footprints, 3.6 million years old. They clearly indicate two creatures walking upright, between four and five feet tall, one larger than the other, apparently a male and a female. They were walking next to each other, perhaps, Leakey thinks, holding hands. There is also a third set of prints, much smaller, belonging to a child. These are carefully placed within the larger prints—as a youngster playfully following his parents through soft ground would do. The significance of Leakey's find, summarizes author William Tucker, is to remind us that "The nuclear family was not invented in Europe in the eighteenth century nor in Europe of the eighth century, nor even Ancient Egypt of the eighteenth century B.C. When the first diminutive human-like creatures walked on the planet three and a half million years ago, they had already formed the nuclear family."

Over the last 20 years, the irreplaceable benefits of the traditional family, particularly when it comes to raising healthy children, have been clearly documented by research. Where the traditional family is in trouble, we now know, there will be crime, drug abuse, poor educational outcomes, suicide, promiscuity, and society as a whole will be in trouble. This is no longer scientifically controversial.

We've touched on some of that sociological evidence in previous editions

of this magazine; those arguments won't be repeated here. Instead, I want to present in the pages following a *different* kind of defense of the traditional family—a reading from human history and biology. For there is much evidence from these areas as well that the traditional family is a natural and irreplaceable component of human society, and something that will, perforce, be with us so long as civilization flourishes.

There are *reasons* why the traditional mother-father-child family has existed since the beginning of human time.

### ORIGINS OF THE FAMILY

**W**e *Homo Sapiens* have a serious biological problem—called childhood.

As Harvard scientist Stephen Jay Gould points out, "human babies are born as embryos, and embryos they remain for about the first nine months of life." If humans were born at the stage of development more typical of other mammals, a baby would remain *in utero* for up to a year longer than the nine months it already does. The reason we are born "premature" instead is elemental: very few female pelvises could expel a neonate the size of a one-year old infant. Human labor is already quite difficult compared to other animals, and newborns are only 40 percent

the size of the average one-year old. More importantly (since skull diameter is the limiting factor in vaginal birth) the brain of a 9-month-gestation newborn is only about one-quarter its final size.

Premature birth solves a human physiological dilemma, but it creates a cultural one. While monkey infants can navigate independently and find and cling to their mother when they need her, while newborn horses can run from danger just a few hours from birth, and while other animals can hunt, dig, swim or fly within days of their arrival into the world, human young remain utterly helpless for an extended period, unable even to control their own temperature, see clearly, grasp, or roll over. Even the healthiest of babies thus requires intensive care and supervision.

And the incapability of humans extends far beyond infancy. It is a long time before we are finally able to survive on our own. While most mammals are autonomous and essentially full-grown within a single season, it takes our brains about fifteen annual cycles to reach their final capacity, and our bodies even a little longer. We are far slower to develop to independent maturity than any other living creature.

This problem is made even knottier by the fact that human culture is so complex that no individual can begin to be a competent citizen until he or she has undergone years and years worth of intensive acculturation. We must absorb millions of bits of information from our