



THE KINCH FAMILY 1997. Front: John (2), Mary (5), Christina (6), Holly, Judith (3 mos)  
Back: Richard, Josh (14) Elisabeth (8), James (10), Caleb (12)

strangers will approach and speak, others just stare. They are transfixed, because we portray in flesh and blood a life few now know.

We can't quite grasp the reactions because we are just being ourselves. Unlike movie stars, we are famous not for what we have done or pretended to be, but simply for what we are, or rather for what God has made us to be.

Somehow we find a few gifts for Mommie, whose birthday is two days off, smuggling them from her as best we can. I shoo everyone outdoors to the van and follow behind. My eyes linger on the leading lady, the birthday girl, the fruitful vine. Her hair tosses in the breeze, and the little girls about her jump and skip. My own heart is lifted. I am joined to greatness, and the issue of that union is a blessing not just to me, but to all who are watching.

*Richard Kinch is a software writer.*

## OLD DOG, SAME TRICKS

By Ray Wisher

GULF COAST FLORIDA—G. Gordon Liddy said it best: Prisons aren't institutions of correction; they are where anti-social individuals are put to keep them away from the rest of us. Our country suffers from too many high-minded theorists who can't accept the cold reality that some people shouldn't be allowed to

roam free because they are criminals in mind and spirit. They may look like us, but when push comes to shove they act as they think—criminally.

Consider the example of Mr. Boone.

A couple of months ago a series of burglaries occurred in our city. Vacation homes managed by a particular company were targeted. The manager suspected two gentlemen he had let go; one was an older black male, the other a young white male. For a year they had been good employees, or so it seemed, and they had possessed master keys to all the homes for maintenance purposes. Suddenly they were caught with drugs, then were believed to be lifting money from the till. Not that they hadn't been paid well.

About a month ago a black man started robbing purses from old women in parking lots in broad daylight. The description was the same for all the robberies, including the getaway car. Then a white male committed the same type of robbery and was seen fleeing in the same vehicle.

Our department caught the two suspects, and they confessed to the burglaries and robberies: about 15 felonies committed by two people in less than six weeks. Interviewing the older man, Boone, I found him to be charming, intelligent, cunning, and absolutely without remorse. He told me he had been released 18 months earlier after serving half of a 20-year sentence for robbery

and murder—a purse-snatching that went bad when the old lady fell down, hit her head, and died.

When Boone was released from prison, he found a job and for a while seemed to be headed in the right direction. But he didn't work in order to prepare for the future; he was more of an instant-gratification type. And so when he was fired by the vacation-home company, the difference between him and the rest of us surfaced.

He immediately began to "get even" with his former employer by ripping off the company's clients. When that wasn't enough to provide the money and drugs he desired, he went back to his old habits and began robbing elderly women, even though the last time he had done this he had managed to kill an innocent person.

In his final robbery in my town, the woman had been knocked to the ground as she fought to keep her purse. She managed to avoid serious injury (unless you count her anxiety every time she walks down a street today), and thankfully we were able to catch him before he could strike again.

This time, Boone was sentenced to 20 years—which means I'll probably see him in about ten to 12 years. So far, the scariest moment I've had with him was when he was talking to his girlfriend, who had been mixed up in the spree. She said, "You never told me it would end like this."

"Like what?" he asked. She dropped her head. "You going to jail." He paused for a moment and said, "We almost made it. A little while longer and we'd have had enough to get a fresh start."

No remorse. No idea that it's wrong to build your future on the victimization of innocent old women. Nothing. Unlike the rest of us, who might have tried a little harder to find honest work, Boone felt only one thing—disappointment that he didn't have a bit more time to commit more crime.

*Police detective Ray Wisher is a regular contributor to The American Enterprise.*

✕

# A New Brainstorm From the Left

By Kevin Hassett

With all the politically motivated copying of conservative ideas going on in recent years, you might wonder what would happen if liberals ever acquired enough political power to enact the agenda of their dreams. *The Stakeholder Society*, a new book by influential Yale scholars Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott, provides an answer.

Ackerman and Alstott claim our society is unjust and getting worse. The problem is income inequality. To put poor children on a more even footing with wealthier children, they propose a radical solution: Having the government provide every American with an \$80,000 lump sum of cash—with no strings attached—on his or her twenty-first birthday. This is the individual's "stake." Youths could use it to finance college education. They could start a business. Or they could buy themselves a couple of cars and one heck of a stereo. Their choice.

How to pay for this new plan? The money would come mostly from two new taxes. The first is a new annual wealth tax, which would require everyone with financial assets, no matter how small or large, to mail two percent of the value of all they own to the IRS every year.

The second revenue source is a "privilege tax." This Orwellian construction would charge wage earners a large annual lump sum for the rest of their lives, depending on how "rich" the family they grew up in was. If your parents were in the richest 20 percent of the income distribution before you turned 21, you will owe \$6,500 a year. If your parents were in the 20th to 80th percentile, your yearly tax will be \$3,275. Those whose parents were in the bottom of the income distribution owe \$650 annually. To determine your privilege tax, the IRS will, when you turn

21, gather up two decades' worth of your parents' tax returns and then use them to set the sum you'll have to pay in tax for the rest of your days. In addition to helping to fund their "stake" scheme, the progressive "privilege tax" would replace the current payroll tax that funds Social Security and Medicare (which they believe bears down too hard on the poor).

This privilege tax would, of course, induce all sorts of crazy maneuvering. Parents would try to have employers pay them in years not counted in the calculation of their offspring's tax. Children would try to talk their parents into getting divorced if they both worked, in order to lower the relevant family income. It might even be worth the trouble to get adopted by relatives with less income.

By transferring income from those with financial assets to those who are age 21, current consumption would increase at the expense of current savings and investment. This would have a resounding negative effect on national growth; so wages and resources available to society in the future would be reduced significantly.

The reduction in savings would be exacerbated by the operation of the wealth tax. For someone holding a typical 5 percent bond, a 2 percent annual wealth tax is equivalent to a 40 percent income tax. Appended to our current tax system, this would raise the total tax on investment income for upper-income people to 86.6 percent. At that rate, many people would just buy fur coats instead of bonds and other productive investments.

The best way to lift wages is to give workers better tools, but the proposed distortionary taxes would guarantee that, over a period of years, investments in

new "tools" would fall. And when economic growth slows, those at the bottom suffer most. In zapping the wealthy, the Alstott/Ackerman policies may decrease inequality, but they would also leave people at the low end of the income distribution with less food on their tables.

These authors argue, though, that income inequality is so horrible it is worth accepting broadly lower living standards in exchange for the knowledge that we live in an equalized society. By this logic, of course, seizing all of Bill Gates' assets and simply burning them would also represent progress.

What current liberals miss is the simple truth that accepting inequality today makes everyone better off tomorrow. In fact, a smoothly running economy *requires* inequality. If you want to convince people to undergo years of unpleasant training to become a skilled surgeon, you better compensate them highly when they start practicing. Pay surgeons no more than butchers, and you won't see much difference between what they produce. Use taxes to make chainsaw operators no better off than cashiers, and you have been unfair to people who risk life and limb to do their job.

By ignoring critical factors like these, and focusing enviously on income *differences* instead of the actual welfare of those at the bottom, liberal advocates of income leveling are the worst friends a poor person could have. If a just world is one that delivers medicines to children, food to the hungry, and opportunity to the able-bodied, then a just world requires policies that promote efficiency, not equality.

Kevin Hassett is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.