

Another reason there is so little debate is that the rise of divorce was, in part, a response to a very real problem. Before the 1960s, women had trouble escaping from constraining or abusive marriages. Countless millions were subjected to lives of misery because they couldn't or wouldn't get out of horrible marriages. No one wants to go back to the old days, and criticism of divorce should not be viewed as a fundamental attack on feminism or women's rights. But feminists need to concede that the current situation is unacceptable, too.

Finally, this problem is ignored because the solutions aren't obvious. Galston proposes that we should beef up child-support enforcement to at least reduce the financial disruption. Some evidence suggests that fathers forced into making financial contributions tend to demand more of a relationship with their children. Galston also argues that divorce laws should err on the side of keeping minor children in their pre-divorce residences and communities.

The key is to draw a much clearer distinction between divorces that involve kids and those that don't. In fact, divorce among childless adults should be even easier, to reduce the odds of a baby being born into a disintegrating family. But divorce among couples with children should be harder. Too often, parents fail to look beyond their selfish needs; they should have to prove that separation is good not only for the adults but for the kids. Perhaps waiting periods or counseling requirements would mitigate the damage to children.

Most importantly, society has to offer clearer messages about what is shameful and what isn't. Casual divorce should be disparaged as much as casual sex. Pundits who reminisce about restoring the stigma to out-of-wedlock births might remember that divorce used to be considered dishonorable too. (In a *Newsweek* piece on this subject, Bill Turque recalls the 1952 *Look* magazine article about Adlai Stevenson: "Can a Divorced Man be Elected President?") If Bill Clinton screwing around on his wife was a legitimate character issue, then so too was Reagan's divorce from Jane Wyman after they'd had children.

At the same time, we should heap praise on couples that split up without having kids; by going through a small ordeal now, they've prevented a much greater future tragedy. Conversely, some parents who stay together for the kids' sake should be considered heroes. The message should be everywhere—on TV shows, in the psychologist's office, and at the holiday dinner table—that while it often takes "strength" to leave a bad marriage, it takes courage and maturity to put the happiness of your children before your own.

To be sure, there are some times when divorce really is best for the kids. And it's very hard for any individual, let alone a lawmaker, to make sweeping conclusions about someone else's marriage. But at least a public debate about divorce might guilt trip some parents into putting the needs of their kids first.

*Steven Waldman is a Monthly contributing editor.*

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## Open the Doors to College *by Nicholas Lemann*

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**T**he bright line running through American society is higher education; generally speaking, those who have it are doing well, and those who don't, aren't. For 30-year-old men, the annual earnings gap between college graduates and high school graduates is more than \$13,000—nearly triple what it was 15 years ago. (Women with college degrees don't have as good a deal as men and women without college degrees have been less hurt by deindustrialization, so the female earnings gap is much smaller.) The dream of middling prosperity that animates American life has become substantially linked to access to higher education—it equals opportunity.

Despite all the hype about how hard it is to get

into college, most bachelor-degree granting institutions are only minimally selective. The real filter between them and America's 18-year-olds is not academic ability; it's money. Anybody with well-off parents can go to college. For people without well-off parents, however, the shot at college is getting noticeably longer.

Access to higher education expanded tremendously after 1945, to the point where, unlike any other country in the world, we began to send most high school graduates on to more school. Remember, though, that the much-loved G.I. Bill was a package of veterans' benefits, not an educational-policy act. It implanted in the public's mind the idea that going

WE DO NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, AGE, SEX, OR RELIGION. STUDENTS SIMPLY MUST BE ABLE TO AFFORD \$20,000 TUITION PER YEAR.

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tract, faraway, dreamy issue for most Americans. It is the crucial point around which they orient their lives as they raise children. Opportunity in the narrow, self-interested sense as well as the larger social sense is involved. Why don't presidential candidates realize this?

*Nicholas Lemann is a national correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly.*

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## More National Service, Not Less *by Scott Shuger*

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Contrary to the shallow stereotypes served up by conservative critics, domestic national service needn't be glazed-eyed do-gooders sitting around a campfire singing "Kumbaya." It could be putting the vast unused talents and energies of our citizens, especially those between age 15 and 30, to work systematically on our country's most pressing social