

*New Downwinders:  
The Consequences and Politics of Family Fission*



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By Bryce Christensen

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# New Downwinders: The Consequences and Politics of Family Fission

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On the 27th of January 1951, the U.S. military violently split the atom by detonating a one-kiloton fission bomb above Frenchman Flat, northwest of Las Vegas, so exploding the first of almost one hundred nuclear weapons tested during the Fifties in the Nevada desert. The region, of course, had always experienced the low-level radiation incident to random cosmic rays from outer space and to the normal decay of naturally occurring terrestrial isotopes. However, during this extended period of deliberate and violent atom splitting, Nevada, Southern Utah, and Northern Arizona were exposed to unprecedented radioactivity. Nonetheless, Americans were encouraged to accept rather than worry about the fallout from the testing. First approved by President Harry Truman and then extended by President Dwight Eisenhower, the Nevada tests were represented to an American public as essential "to building the defenses of our country and of the free world" and as "a vital factor in maintaining the peace of the world."<sup>1</sup> And from the very first blast, the authorities assured Americans that "all necessary precautions ... w[ould] be undertaken to insure that safe conditions are maintained."<sup>2</sup> In a typical statement, one government official asserted that the tests were "in no way harmful to humans, animals or crops."<sup>3</sup>

That reassurance—and many that followed—turned out to be tragically false. Indeed, as someone who has lived for many years in Southwestern Utah, I myself know a great deal about the terrible human costs of trusting such deceptive government assurances. Lives cut short by leukemia or thyroid cancer, years spent in chemotherapy, families still carrying a burden of grief—these are the legacy of the Fifties-era tests. My own cousin—who died of leukemia in the late Seventies, leaving two young children (now grown)—was but one of the many Downwinders who paid a high price for the heedlessness of the atom-splitters.

Yet even as Americans give thanks that prominent officials and writers are belatedly looking back at this Fifties catastrophe with honesty, perhaps we ought to be learning some hard lessons relevant to an even more widespread and recent social catastrophe. What can we learn by looking closely at the story of how Fifties atom-splitters exposed Downwinders to terrible danger and then covered up the consequences of their actions? We can learn all too much about how Sixties family-splitters turned the entire nation into social Downwinders who are all paying an awful price for their ideological arrogance.

Caught up in the fervor of the Cold War thinking of the Fifties, prominent politicians endorsed the open-testing of fission bombs with reckless zeal. Nevada Governor Charles Russell, for instance, waxed positively enthusiastic in his support: "It's exciting," he declared, "to think that the sub-marginal land of the proving ground is furthering science and helping national defense. We had long ago written off that terrain as wasteland, and today it's blooming with atoms."<sup>4</sup> Nevada's powerful Democratic Senator Patrick A. McCarran was likely a staunch supporter of the open-air fission tests, asserting that "the lead in the development of this [nuclear] science is in the best interest of the United States, and we must maintain it."<sup>5</sup> McCarran's views were seconded by Nevada's other senator during the Fifties, George W. Malone, who argued that "this country must not discontinue testing until other nations agree to do likewise" and who assured constituents that "these tests do not endanger the lives of our people or the health of future generations."<sup>6</sup>

The media, too, embraced the atom-splitting tests. The editorial board for the Las Vegas *Review-Journal* could hardly have been more effusive: "We like the A[tomic]E[nergy]C[ommission]," they wrote. "We welcome them to Nevada for their tests because we, as patriotic Americans, believe we are contributing something in our small way to the protection of the land we love."<sup>7</sup> In the same spirit, the editors of the *Washington County News* signaled their

firm support for the testing by running a "Boom! Boom! Boom!" political cartoon showing a cowed Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung observing the Nevada Atomic Testing from afar.<sup>8</sup> Editors of other papers unquestioningly provided the government with megaphones for amplifying false assurances about the tests' safety: "A-Bomb Blast Said Safe: AEC Officials Say Hazard Not Possible" ran a typical headline in Salt Lake City's *Deseret Morning News*; similarly, the Washington County News and the *Iron County Record* pliantly carried without demurrer the Atomic Energy Commission's deceptive reports that their "monitors [had] found no trace of radio-active fallout from the test[s]."<sup>9</sup>

Nor was this simply an illustration of the incompetence of parochial journalists: The venerable *New York Times* likewise carried all of the atom-splitters' deceptive assurances in an article headlined "Atom Test Studies Show Area Is Safe; Radiation Is Found Well Below Hazardous Level."<sup>10</sup> Given the attitudes of even the nation's most prominent editors, it is hardly surprising that mere reporters—as historian A. Costandina Titus remarks—provided "news coverage [that] was presented in optimistic terms," as journalists "focused on the visual descriptive effects of the blasts and failed to question more serious potential hazards."<sup>11</sup>

Profiteers also joined in the choir of those singing paeans to the wonders of atom-splitting. A journalist writing in 1952 about the "acute prosperity" of Las Vegas found the city's Chamber of Commerce and its "hotel people" deeply grateful for the tests and more than willing to "attribute the community's present [success] in large part to the publicity that the [nuclear] proving ground has given it."<sup>12</sup> At the time, Nevada promoters trying to lure tourists to the area viewed "the atomic tests [as] only one more superlative in a state endowed with already spectacular history and scenery."<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, even many intellectuals and academics lent their prestige to the prolonged test project. One University of Utah medical professor, for instance, responded to questions about the tests by remarking, "I can't see any possibility of trouble ... We have more than adequate assurance of no contamination to human life."<sup>14</sup> When asked for his perspective, a prominent academic at Columbia did raise a number of technical questions about the tests but finally "offered no direct challenge to the recommended test[s]."<sup>15</sup> And a Berkeley physicist and physician who would years later reverse his position and become an outspoken critic of the tests actually provided the government with a 1957 speech assuring the less educated that "the low levels of radiation being released by the tests" would cause "no harm."<sup>16</sup>

But whether it comes from government officials, elected politicians, journalists, or distinguished intellectuals, reassuring rhetoric does not change dangerous realities. And the realities created by the atom-splitting bomb tests were very, very dangerous. As historian John G. Fuller observes, these atom-splitting tests let loose a "ghoulish family of fission products ... that have little respect for human tissues."<sup>17</sup> As epidemiologists have now established, leukemia, thyroid cancer, and many other often-lethal malignancies followed in the devilish wake of the fission products loosed upon the people unfortunate enough to live beneath the clouds sent up by the atom-splitting in the Nevada desert.<sup>18</sup> Hundreds of these people—who came to be known as "downwinders"—died agonizing and lingering deaths after enduring the trial of radiation and chemotherapy treatments, their descent to the grave one "long journey laden with sorrow and tears."<sup>19</sup> In disease and premature death, these downwinders paid a very high price indeed for the ideological/careerist recklessness of the Cold Warriors who first authorized these atom-splitting tests and then continued them long after they had strong reasons to believe that these tests were sickening and killing their own countrymen. The way in which government officials, political leaders, the media, and the intellectual community all joined together to endorse atom-splitting tests now known to have been terribly dangerous to the human tissues of the nation's own citizens seems astounding. Those who enjoy the advantage of historical hindsight can only shake their heads as they read the false assurances of the test enthusiasts. And even if we can make some allowance for those initially carried away by the national mood of Cold War patriotism, we can hardly justify the closed-mindedness and outright deceitfulness of those bureaucrats, journalists, and intellectuals who persisted in defending the tests even after evidence came to light exposing the terrible risks involved in the atom-splitting tests.

Investigative historians now know that from the very beginning the government officials conducting the atom-splitting tests deliberately hid from the American public the uncertainties surrounding these tests. Documents now open to the public show that even as AEC officials were assuring citizens who would be exposed to atom-splitting fallout

that they would be entirely safe because the radiation in that fallout would be kept below 3.9 rads, their own science was telling them that their safety limit of 3.9 rads was worthless since there was "no safe threshold" for such radiation.<sup>20</sup> In documents then classified as "Secret" and therefore withheld from public scrutiny, the very government officials who were prepared to vouch for the safety of the atom-splitting tests acknowledged that many questions about possible radioactive fallout had "not [been] satisfactorily answered at present"<sup>21</sup> and that, therefore, "the exact danger [of the tests] was not known."<sup>22</sup>

We now know that at the very time that AEC officials were publicly telling downwinders that they were perfectly safe, they were saying very different things in private. Speaking of a downwind area that the government atom-splitters had characterized as safe for its residents, one of those conducting the tests frankly told his colleagues, "I wouldn't live there by any means. And I certainly wouldn't have my family there."<sup>23</sup> Looking back on the work that he and others once did as public-relations officers for those conducting the atom-splitting tests, Oliver Placak speaks candidly: "You can't underestimate the importance of public relations when you are trying to dump radioactive material on people, and we worked at it strenuously."<sup>24</sup>

What was even worse than the misleading pre-test public relations blitz, however, was the utterly deceitful post-test cover-up. It is now well established that atom-splitting officials engaged in a protracted and all-too-effective cover-up when solid evidence began to emerge that the tests were seriously endangering the health and lives of those who lived beneath the windblown clouds of fallout. When, for instance, thousands of sheep in Southern Utah died in 1953 from the effects of fallout-borne radiation, officials did everything possible to hide the real reason for the animals' deaths—and by so doing were able to continue their atom-splitting tests for another five years. Long suppressed or hidden documents reveal that government officials responding to the sheep deaths doctored and suppressed their reports, deliberately lied in court testimony, coercively pressured the most knowledgeable veterinarians and scientists into silence or complicity, enlisted and rewarded mercenary scientists willing to bend the evidence, and manipulated and misled the media.<sup>25</sup>

Historian Philip Fradkin highlights the evil perpetrated by those who covered up the atom-splitters' responsibility for the sheep deaths:

The [dead and sick] sheep were surrogates for humans. They should have been regarded as an early warning so that precautions could have been taken for the people. Instead, the A[tomic]E[nergy]C[omission] went to great lengths, including deception and fraud, to put the blame for the sheep deaths and injuries on anything but radioactive fallout. The sheep deaths and the subsequent coverup of the evidence of the possible cause served as precedents for the human experience.<sup>26</sup>

Having successfully managed a cover-up involving dead sheep, government officials were all too ready and prepared to engage in large scale deception involving the human illness and death. Not long after the first tests, as Fradkin points out, the AEC officials were indeed involved in "cover-ups [that] assumed the proportions of a major crime committed by the federal government against its most trusting citizens."<sup>27</sup> These cover-ups included the deliberate suppression and misrepresentation of much of the AEC's own fallout data, data revealing that civilians were repeatedly exposed to radiation well above the already dubious safety threshold of 3.9 rads.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, subsequent analysis of the AEC's own internal data has established that for young children drinking locally produced milk, the exposure to fallout-borne radiation was between 200 and 1200 rads, an exposure "so high as to represent a serious cause of thyroid cancer."<sup>29</sup>

When confronted with the AEC's own internal reports indicating that test fallout was in fact exposing civilians to radiation much higher than agency officials were publicly acknowledging, one of the atom-splitters justified cover-up as the only way to go forward: "Well, look," he candidly explained to a colleague, "we've told these people all along that [the testing's] safe and we can't change our story now; we'd be in trouble."<sup>30</sup> When reports came in indicating that some civilians living west of the test area were manifesting "visible symptoms of radiation illness," AEC officials

ignored them or deceptively attributed them to other sicknesses.<sup>31</sup> The mere fact that "some people ha[d] gotten sick" simply could not come to public attention in any way that would "curtail the [testing] program."<sup>32</sup>

Even as evidence continued to mount that the atom-splitting tests were putting tens of thousands of Americans at great risk, top AEC officials put their ideological and careerist agendas ahead of public safety. With greater passion than grammatical consistency, AEC commissioner Thomas Murray declared in 1953, "We must not let anything interfere with this series of tests—nothing!"<sup>33</sup> In the grip of this kind of passion, government officials responded to reports of fallout-generated radioactive "hot spots" and of consequent radiation sickness of exposed civilians with nothing but more whitewash. "The AEC commission," Fradkin remarks, "dealt with the problems of fallout by embarking upon a stepped-up public relations program . . . . [P]ublic relations was to be the cure-all."<sup>34</sup> At a time when atom-splitting bombs were exposing tens of thousands of Americans to terribly real dangers, these Americans were—in the words of one informed observer—"told a fairy tale, a nuclear fairy tale."<sup>35</sup>

Culpability for the fairy-tale cover-up rests chiefly with the AEC officials who conducted the dangerous atom-splitting tests. However, others must share part of the blame. Though elected officials were not privy to the AEC's internal documents, they nonetheless surely could have done more to challenge the atom-splitters' misrepresentations, especially after their own constituents began to provide evidence of the true risks of the tests. As late as 1955, the mayor and city council of St. George—a southern Utah community that the AEC Chairman privately admitted was "always plaster[ed]" by radiation from the tests—was still publicly endorsing worthless AEC safety assurances. These AEC assurances, these elected officials publicly asserted, left them with "no cause for worry," since these statements established to their satisfaction that "the fallout is not great enough to cause danger."<sup>36</sup> But far more reprehensible were the tactics resorted to by politicians who joined Senator Malone in invidiously suggesting in 1957 that anyone who highlighted the real risks of the testing was spreading "'scare' stories" that were "Communist inspired."<sup>37</sup>

Communist-baiting politicians were not the only ones helping deceitful AEC bureaucrats to pull off their fairy-tale cover-up, however. Many journalists likewise did their part. Thus, in 1953 when a concerned Utah state legislator called for an end to the a-bomb tests, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* responded that he should "stay out of Nevada's business" (as if tests sending lethal clouds of radiation drifting west over Utah were simply "Nevada's business"!)." <sup>38</sup> When in 1955 a Nevada state legislator called for an end to the testing and the departure from the state of the AEC, the *Las Vegas Sun* sarcastically asked, "Who shall get out of Nevada, the AEC or the crackpot who makes such a suggestion in public?"<sup>39</sup> The *Review-Journal* chimed in with its own foolish bravado: "More power to the AEC and its atomic detonations. We in Clark County, who are closest to the shots, aren't even flickering an eyelid."<sup>40</sup>

Profit-minded business owners also made life easier for AEC publicists. Although a few early reports of excessive fallout radiation did occasion "some concern [among local business owners] about the possible loss of tourist traffic," businessmen generally remained so supportive that as late as 1957 local Chambers of Commerce were still welcoming AEC officials to their gatherings, there to repeat their reassuring lies about the atom-splitting fallout.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1955 the enterprising Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce was even promoting hotel packages for unwary tourists who wanted to participate in "the non-ancient but nonetheless honorable pastime of atom-bomb watching."<sup>42</sup>

No response to the atom-splitters' fairy-tale cover-up is more dismaying, though, than the insouciance, if not outright complicity, of many academics and professionals. Even after 1953 tests that killed many sheep and sickened many Southern Utah residents, AEC officials found that physicians and university professors in the area were "'quite relaxed' about radioactive fallout."<sup>43</sup> A disturbing number of scientists and academics in possession of damning evidence of the tests' real effects were even willing to cooperate with AEC officials in suppressing that evidence.<sup>44</sup> Some very well schooled professionals even helped the AEC to hide the truth from judicial investigators, going so far as to make "false and deceptive representations" in court hearings.<sup>45</sup> It is easy, in fact, to see why researcher Howard Ball believes that some professionals simply became "hired guns" for the atom-splitters. Ball, in fact, surveys the professional critics who disputed the findings of epidemiological studies implicating test fallout in the elevated cancer rates among downwinders, and he discerns a telling commonality linking these critics—"all of whom [were] employed by the federal government."<sup>46</sup>

With good reason, Fradkin speaks of the "arrogance, deception, avarice, deceit, treachery, and fraud" of the Fifties-era atom-splitters who launched their dangerous tests in the Nevada desert and then for years covered up the horrible consequences. Fradkin is fully justified in insisting that "the responsibility for the betrayal of [American] citizens [hurt by these tests] ranged from the presidents of this country to the bureaucrats they nominally controlled, from Congress to the judiciary, and to a lesser extent, from the academic community to the media. The law also was blind to morality and compassion."<sup>47</sup> The arrogance and moral blindness characteristic of the Fifties-era atom-splitters manifests itself in long-secret AEC documents referring to the downwinders as a "low-use segment of the population."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps even more arrogant and blind are the AEC's *public* statements characterizing the area downwind from their test site as "virtually uninhabited," so turning tens of thousands of American civilians into "virtual uninhabitants."<sup>49</sup>

On the 31st of October, the U.S. government conducted the last of its open-air atom-splitting tests. More than 30 years later, after the declassification of scores of damning documents, Congress belatedly issued a formal apology to the downwinders for the lethal harm the federal government had visited upon them and set up a Radiation Exposure Compensation Fund to compensate downwinder victims and families. So closed a chapter of American history that Utah Senator Orrin Hatch has justly described as "absolutely grotesque, rotten, [and] lousy."<sup>50</sup>

Sadly, however, the grotesquerie and arrogance surrounding Fifties-era atom-splitting was only succeeded by a new grotesquerie and arrogance surrounding Sixties-era family-splitting. Scientists whose political ideology and career ambitions blinded them to the consequences of splitting the basic unit of matter merely yielded center stage to activists whose political ideology and career ambitions blinded them to the consequences of splitting the basic unit of society. One dangerous type of fission ceased; another and perhaps even more dangerous type began. And while the fission that split the atom's nucleus rained radioactive fallout for seven years on residents of relatively isolated communities such as Panaca, Nevada; St. George, Utah; and Beaver Dam, Arizona, the fission that splits the nuclear family has been dropping toxic fallout for thirty years on New York City, New York; Atlanta, Georgia; Seattle, Washington, and every town and city in America, large and small.

To be sure, just as the residents of the Southwestern United States had been exposed to background radiation before the AEC went to work with their atom-splitting tests in 1951, even so Americans had been subject to low-level fallout from family disintegration before the Sixties. But the fallout from the family disintegration that began in the Sixties was explosively different, as different as the radioactive ash clouds that began to drift across the Nevada desert were different from the low-level, naturally occurring radiation that preceded the tests. For it was in the Sixties that for the first time in American history, family disintegration became an ideological goal and not a relatively rare tragedy and scandal. For the first time, family-splitting became—just like the Fifties-era atom-splitting tests in Nevada—a deliberate project, driven by politics, ambition, and arrogant careerism. Just as protons and neutrons flew apart violently in the bombs detonated in the Nevada desert during the Fifties, even so in the Sixties family members began to fly apart, as divorce courts sundered husbands and wives, day-care centers severed bonds to children, and don't-trust-anyone-over-thirty propaganda distanced adolescents from their parents.

To be sure, the family-splitting project that began in the Sixties was never under the control of a single federal agency such as the AEC. Nonetheless, the family-splitting that emerged in this decade was—at least initially—the ideological brainchild of a relatively small coterie of radicals, activists, and intellectuals. Indeed, when it began, the family-splitting project depended on a very small army of loosely confederated partisans, an army considerably smaller, in fact, than the military establishment carrying out the Nevada atom-splitting tests.

At the head of the small Sixties-era battalion of family-splitters were New Left theorists like R.D. Laing and Peter Irons, theorists who wanted to split the family so as to end its "repressive functions" in enforcing monogamy, sexual restraint, and the capitalist work ethic.<sup>51</sup> The vocal vanguard of the Sixties-era family splitters also included radical feminists like Germaine Greer and Kate Millett, zealots eager to split "patriarchy's chief institution."<sup>52</sup> Sexual liberationists like Hugh Hefner, William Masters, Jerome Ragni, and James Rado joined in the family-splitting frenzy, as they promoted a "sexual freedom" incompatible with family integrity.<sup>53</sup> Progressive therapists were soon doing their family-splitting part by promoting the "healthy aspects of extramarital relationships" and by advocating a sense of "self-actualization" rarely compatible with marital commitments.<sup>54</sup> And a small squad of divorce lawyers started

agitating for the accelerated family-splitting possible through no-fault divorce statutes.<sup>55</sup> Aggressive atheists coalesced into a family-splitting faction by rallying around Madalyn O'Hair and others attacking all religious supports for family life.<sup>56</sup>

Though affluent and highly visible, the group that made family-splitting one of the defining cultural events of the Sixties was not large. Indeed, a leading social historian sees the Fifties—the decade of the atom-splitters—as a period of "strengthened family orientation and solidifying value consensus."<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the cultural vanguard who set out to make the Sixties the decade of family-splitting had, at least initially, to work against considerable popular resistance.

But just as the Fifties atom-splitters found pliant allies among elected officials, the media, academics, and business leaders, so too did the Sixties family-splitters. Just as eagerly as Senators McCarran and Malone surrendered their state to Fifties atom-splitters, hundreds of state legislators yielded their state statute-books to Sixties family-splitters. A careful historian of the family-splitting innovation embodied in no-fault divorce, Herbert Jacob indeed marvels at how willingly state legislators endorsed this revolutionary change in law at the behest of a relatively small group of advocates and in the almost complete absence of debate over the measure.<sup>58</sup> And just as the Fifties atom-splitters received White House endorsement for their lethal project, so Sixties family-splitters basked in the favor of a Johnson Administration so willing to endorse their project that it endorsed a definition of family that did not distinguish between an intact family and a shattered one: a *family*, a 1970 White House document declared, was "a group of individuals in interaction."<sup>59</sup>

And just like journalists covering the atom-splitting of the Fifties, the journalists covering the family-splitting of the Sixties were more than happy to amplify reassuring but deceptive claims. Just as the *Las Vegas Sun* and *Review-Journal* welcomed the Fifties atom-splitters, even so the putatively conservative *Wall Street Journal* applauded the Sixties family-splitters, hailing the upsurge in nonmarital cohabitation they were starting to effect as a social change meaning "vastly greater freedom in [young people's] personal lives, including in sexual behavior," and applauding the small phalanx pushing for no-fault divorce by characterizing the traditional laws they were replacing as "harsh, [and] unfair" and by hiding the absence of public support for or debate over the new laws with misleading assurances that the new statutes were "win[ing] growing support."<sup>60</sup>

And anyone who heard university professors giving assurances about the atom-splitting tests of the Fifties would have recognized that same professorial confidence later found among professors who justified Sixties family-splitting with campus pleas for "greater acceptance" of the alternative social patterns emerging with "the changing of norms and values."<sup>61</sup>

All too like the Nevada businessmen who saw in the Fifties atom-splitting a chance to enlarge profits by attracting more tourists were the ad executives who saw in a world remade by Sixties family-splitting nothing but a new marketing opportunity: after all, "more working women, more two-income families, [and] more divorces" mean new opportunities to market fast foods, microwave ovens, and other convenience products.<sup>62</sup>

With such a wide range of cultural allies amplifying their efforts, it is hardly surprising that the Sixties family-splitters were soon seeing dramatic effects of their labors: by the end of the Seventies, families were fracturing right and left. Divorce rates soared during the late Sixties and Seventies. So, too, did illegitimacy and cohabitation rates, even as marriage rates and marital fertility rates plummeted.<sup>63</sup> But just as atomic splitting produced a "ghoulish family of fission products ... [with] little respect for human tissues," even so family-splitting likewise produced its own fiendish family of fission products with little respect for human well-being. Again and again since the Sixties, honest researchers have established that the splitting of the family translates into the impoverishment of women and children, violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, physical and mental illness, shortened longevity, suicide, and academic failure.<sup>64</sup> The fallout from family-splitting is thus just as predictably toxic as the cancer-producing fallout from atom-splitting tests in Nevada, and it falls over a much broader swath of the country. Every functioning social Geiger counter has been crackling like crazy ever since the Sixties project in family-splitting began.

Tragically, just as AEC officials and their cadres of cultural allies ignored, suppressed, and denied the first solid evidence of the deleterious effects of Fifties atom-splitting, even so the Sixties family-splitters have again and again ignored, suppressed, and misrepresented the growing indications that their social project is harming—even killing—American men, women, and children. Thus, when Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan published *The Negro Family* in 1965, identifying a host of economic, educational, and social problems as the consequence of family disintegration, he soon found himself subject to ideological hostility even more intense than that faced by Utah ranchers accused of spreading "Communist inspired" scare stories when they suggested that atom-splitting radiation had killed their sheep. Branded a "fascist" and a "racist," Moynihan was pilloried by the media and was hung out to dry by a Johnson Administration in thrall to the family-splitters.<sup>65</sup>

The distressing prevalence of social problems within the black community in recent decades has compelled some grudging but belated acceptance of Moynihan's 1965 report. Unfortunately, however, relatively few have acknowledged the relevance of that report for America's non-black population. Disturbingly impervious to hosts of empirical studies published since 1965, many government leaders, journalists, and business leaders appear even more determined to ignore and hide the consequences of Sixties family-splitting than AEC officials were to ignore and cover-up the harm caused by Fifties atom-splitting. Consequently, even though the Fifties atom-splitting tests finally did end and the evidence of their baleful effects did ultimately compel a federal apology and financial compensation, the Sixties family-splitting project continues apace with its media, academic, and business allies still aggressively supporting a pernicious cover-up.

Consider, for instance, the on-going resistance to the findings of researchers who have identified a number of medical and psychological risks associated with the day-care centers in which family-splitting puts young children.<sup>66</sup> Corporate executives who continue to aggressively recruit young mothers by offering day-care as an employment benefit<sup>67</sup> seem to care no more about that research than Las Vegas hotel owners cared about radiation-illness studies when they advertised their "atom-bomb watching" tourist packages. Meanwhile, when journalists have deigned to handle research on day care, they have done so by giving their misleading but reassuring reports "a great big smiley face of a lead" as they have "buried" negative findings.<sup>68</sup> The journalists who helped the AEC atom-splitters pull off their cover-up would instantly recognize the ploy.

The on-going resistance to the empirical research on the fallout from family-splitting divorce would astound even the most obdurate AEC atom-splitters. Thus, even though research has implicated divorce in a host of serious medical, social, criminal, and psychological evils, sociologist David Popenoe grieves as he surveys the ways many of his colleagues "serve their own agendas" as they go to "sad, even heartrending ... lengths ... to distort the overwhelming evidence and undeniable truths" about the consequences of splitting the family.<sup>69</sup> Today's family-splitters are only too happy to use such ideologues and careerists to pull off a cover-up that is at least as deceptive and illusory as the "nuclear fairy tale" AEC atom-splitters promulgated in the Fifties with the help of nonchalant, ideological, and mercenary scholars.

Once very useful to AEC publicists, academic willingness to disregard hard truths shows up clearly in the work of E. Mavis Hetherington, a prominent sociologist who urges Americans to look at divorce in a "hopeful" way and to view it as "an opportunity to build a better life."<sup>70</sup> Hetherington's own data indicate that divorce can "ruin lives," leaving at least 20 to 25 percent of affected children "deeply scarred"; nonetheless, this academic ally of the family-splitters insists on focusing on "positive effects" evident in the lives of "reasonably happy and competent adults and children who have been resilient in coping with the challenges of divorce."<sup>71</sup> Even more astounding is the sophistic logic of social scientist Nicholas Wolfinger, who asserts that "the prevalence of divorce is good news for children," because it means that "couples usually split up before their marriages degenerate into violence" and because "today's children of divorce have many fellow sufferers, further emphasizing the normality of their shared experience."<sup>72</sup>

The AEC atom-splitters of the Fifties would have loved to have a professor who diverted unwelcome attention away from those suffering from radiation illnesses and cancer by cheerily focusing on the downwinders who were resilient, happy, and healthy. They would have been even more thrilled to have a professor willing to argue that the multiplication of radiation burns and cancer tumors among downwinders was a good thing because it meant those who had them had more fellow sufferers and felt more normal. Nor are such academics now rare: at many American univer-

sities, entire departments have embraced a political orthodoxy that anathematizes all who "think that the nuclear family proves the best unit of social well-being."<sup>73</sup> With the help of politically correct academic institutions, today's family-splitters are successfully hiding hard realities with their own comforting but mendacious fairy tale.

And even as prestigious but left-leaning media outlets—such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Ms. Magazine*—belatedly expose the evils once committed by the Fifties atom-splitters,<sup>74</sup> they continue their own complicity in the family-splitters' fairy-tale cover-up. When, for example, the *Post* highlights Hetherington's divorce research with an adulatory article headlined "D-I-V-O-R-C-E Gets Some R-E-S-P-E-C-T" and the *Times* covers the same researcher's misleading research with an equally laudatory piece titled "Divorce and Family: She Wrote the Book," then Americans have reason to fear that family-splitters can still manipulate our most prestigious newspapers at least as adeptly as the Fifties atom-splitters ever manipulated the *Washington County News* and the *Iron County Record*.<sup>75</sup>

And although some brave lawmakers have raised hard questions about the social fallout of family-splitting,<sup>76</sup> all too many continue to accept the family-splitters' fairy tales just as Senators McCarran and Malone continued to embrace the atom-splitters' fantasies throughout the Nevada tests. Too many lawmakers still buy into the false assurances proffered by the family-splitters willing to promise that no-fault divorce laws would move people out of bad marriages into good ones without driving up the overall divorce rate. Unlike lawmakers who were finally sufficiently in touch with reality to apologize to and compensate the downwinders hurt by the Fifties atom-splitters, too many lawmakers who have available evidence exploding the lies of the family-splitters<sup>77</sup> still refuse to end the bad laws family-splitters have given us.<sup>78</sup> And just as atom-splitters once fatuously promised to help downwinder sheep ranchers provide better nutrition for their sheep without ever acknowledging that it was wind-borne radiation from atom-splitting that was actually killing their animals,<sup>79</sup> even so government officials today loudly boast of all they are doing to enlarge the foster care system for abused children, saying nothing at all about how family-splitting exposes children to a dramatically increased risk of child abuse in the first place.<sup>80</sup>

When atom-splitters recklessly exposed tens of thousands of Americans to lethal fallout risks in the Fifties and then covered up their guilt, their motives were defined by right-wing ideologies and personal career ambitions.<sup>81</sup> Among those who have since the Sixties joined the nation's family-splitters in exposing society to the toxic fallout of family disintegration and then in covering up their culpability, most have been promoting left-wing ideological imperatives and careerist agendas. Like the "hired gun" experts who perversely disputed the epidemiological evidence that atom-splitting was causing cancer, many government employees (including lawmakers, bureaucrats, and academics) covered up for the harm caused by family-splitters, because they found economic and professional advantage by supporting the dubious modern coalition of "the questioning intellectual and the growing state," identified by sociologist Carle Zimmerman as a powerful threat to religion and the family.<sup>82</sup> Like the AEC officials who believed that successful atom-splitting would bring them career advancement, many journalists and academics have aided and abetted the family-splitters, because they recognize that within both the media and academia, they will get further by joining in the "neophilia ... the one-sided value emphasis on what is new" that makes the ever-mutating new social arrangements that family-splitting produces far worthier of favorable attention than the age-old intact nuclear family.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, many of the academics and professionals who helped the atom-splitters manufacture fairy tale illusions during the Fifties themselves lived in safe areas, areas not under the cloud of lethal radiation. Even so, most of those who have helped the family-splitters spread their own batch of fairy tales in recent decades have enjoyed a safety not shared by many who have lived beneath the fallout from family disintegration. As social scientist James Q. Wilson has pointed out, a rich cultural elite can promote permissive attitudes toward marriage and family while finding ways (legal, financial, therapeutic, and educational) to shield themselves—but not their poorer countrymen—from the consequences of those permissive attitudes. Thus, the overwhelmingly rich and privileged family-splitters created "a changed culture—the decline of stigma [attached to out-of-wedlock childbearing], embrace of cohabitation, and the acceptance of divorce—[that] influence[d] most powerfully the people who did the least to create it."<sup>84</sup> The suspicion grows that the overwhelmingly rich and well-heeled family-splitters are, like the arrogant AEC atom-splitters of

the Fifties, quite willing to write off the underclass victims of their recklessness as a "low-use segment of the population" or as "virtual uninhabitants" of their own country.

But it is time to face the sobering truth: the family-splitting that began in the Sixties has exposed all of us—black and white, rich and poor, professors and sheep farmers—to carcinogenic social fallout. Psychological distress, physical illness, drug use, shortened lives, poverty, violent crime, suicide—the fallout from family splitting is all around us. We are now all downwinders. It is time to stop this lethal fallout and the arrogance and deception of the cover-up that has subjected all of us to this entirely unnecessary and prolonged evil. Like the downwinders of the Fifties, we must start cutting through the fairy-tale cover-up and start demanding an end to the horrific splitting of America's basic social unit.

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## **Endnotes:**

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- <sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Barton C. Hacker, *Elements of Controversy: The Atomic Energy Commission and Radiation Safety in Nuclear Weapons Testing, 1947-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 69.
- <sup>3</sup> Qtd. in Ball, op. cit., 56.
- <sup>4</sup> Qtd. in A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001), 97.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 96
- <sup>7</sup> Ball, op. cit., 57.
- <sup>8</sup> Ball, op. cit., 62, 78.
- <sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Philip K. Fradkin, *Fallout: An American Nuclear Tragedy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Qtd. in Titus, op. cit., 95.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Qtd. in Ball, op. cit., 62.
- <sup>15</sup> Hacker, op.cit., 62.
- <sup>16</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 33-34.
- <sup>17</sup> John G. Fuller, *The Day We Bombed Utah: America's Most Lethal Secret* (New York: New American Library, 1984), 24.
- <sup>18</sup> Ball, op. cit., 95, 125-127.
- <sup>19</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 165-167.
- <sup>20</sup> Ball, op. cit., 38-40.
- <sup>21</sup> Day, op. cit., 22.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Walter Goodman, "Thirty Years Later, Fallout in Nevada" [TV Review], *New York Times*, 2 Feb. 1994: C20.
- <sup>23</sup> Qtd. in Day, op. cit., 10.
- <sup>24</sup> Qtd. in Fradkin, op. cit., 113.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. Fuller, op. cit., 88-90, 107-180, 236-259; Fradkin, op. cit., 154-181; Ball, op.cit., 205-210.
- <sup>26</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 147.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Hacker, op. cit., 102-104; Fuller, op.cit, 24, 28, 33; Fradkin, op. cit., 116; Ball, op. cit., 43-44.
- <sup>29</sup> Ball, op. cit., 44.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 89; Fuller, op. cit., 33-34, 41.
- <sup>32</sup> Ball, op. cit., 44, 69.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>34</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 112.
- <sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Mike Carter, "Book Looks at Downwinder; America's Atomic Soldiers Trapped in a Nuclear Lie; A look at 'Downwinders: America's Atomic Soldiers,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 May 1993: A1.

- <sup>36</sup> Qtd. in Ball, op. cit., 74.
- <sup>37</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 127; Fuller, op. cit., 189-190.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. Titus, op. cit., 96.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>41</sup> Ball, op. cit., 63, 77.
- <sup>42</sup> Titus, op. cit., 95.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Fradkin, op. cit., 114.
- <sup>44</sup> Fuller, op. cit., 80, 83, 128-129.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. Ball, op. cit., 209.
- <sup>46</sup> Fradkin, op. cit., 125, emphasis added.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.
- <sup>48</sup> Qtd. in Carter, op. cit., A1.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. Fradkin, op. cit., 129.
- <sup>50</sup> Qtd. in Mark Parasandola, "Uncertain Science and a Failure of Trust: The NIA Radioepidemiologic Tables and Compensation for Radiation-Induced Cancer," *Isis: Journal of the History of Science in Society* 93(2002): 558-585; cf. Tony Semerad, "New Era of Openness Does Little to Ease Utahans' Pain," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Dec. 1993: A1.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. David Martin, "R.D. Laing," *The New Left: Six Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Cranston (New York: Library Press, 1971), 182-183, 194-196; Peter Irons, "On Repressive Institutions," *The New Left: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Priscilla Long (Boston: Extending Horizons/Porter Sargent, 1969), 122-123.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 216-220; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 33, 126-127.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. Lynn Elber, "Eternal Playboy Hefner Gets into Bed with His Own Reality TV Series," *Augusta Chronicle* 7 Aug. 2005: G8; Jana J. Monji, "Hair' Recalls Dream Unfulfilled," *Los Angeles Times* 28 Aug. 1998: 22.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. Phillip L. Elbaum, "The Dynamics, Implications and Treatment of Extramarital Sexual Relationships for the Family Therapist," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 7 (1981): 493-495; Martha Weinman Lear, "Staying Together," *Ladies' Home Journal* Sep. 1991: 60, 64.
- <sup>55</sup> Herbert Jacob, *Silent Revolution: The Transformation of Divorce Law in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 56-59, 150-151.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. Marie Shear, "Separating Church and State," Rev. of *The Atheist: Madalyn Murray O'Hair* by Bryan E. LeBean, *Women's Review of Books*, July 2003: 29-30.
- <sup>57</sup> Allan C. Carlson, *The American Way: Family and Community in the Shaping of the American Identity* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003), 136.
- <sup>58</sup> Jacob, op. cit., 56-59, 150-151.
- <sup>59</sup> Qtd. in Carlson, op.cit., 142.
- <sup>60</sup> James Ring Adams, "Open Dorms and Co-ed Bathrooms," *Wall Street Journal*, 9 Oct. 1973: 26; Mary Bralove, "Doe vs. Doe: Movement to Change Divorce Proceedings Wins Growing Support," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 Jan. 1973: 1.
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. Graham B. Spanier, "Married and Unmarried Cohabitation in the United States: 1980," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45 (1983): 280; Carl Danzinger, *Unmarried Heterosexual Cohabitation* (San Francisco: ER, 1978), 76.
- <sup>62</sup> James S. Norris, *Advertising*, 2nd ed. (Reston: Reston Publishing, 1980), 433.
- <sup>63</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 1: 20, 64; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1988*, 108th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 59, 62, 83, 373, 374.
- <sup>64</sup> Cf., e.g., Karen Seccombe, "Families in Poverty in the 1990s: Trends, Causes, Consequences, and Lessons Learned," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62 (2000): 1094-1113; David Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 5-7, 270-280; Richard H. Needle, S. Susan Su, and William J. Doherty, "Divorce, Remarriage, and Adolescent Substance Use: A Prospective Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (1990): 157-159; Jocelyn Brown et al., "A Longitudinal Analysis of Risk Factors for Child Maltreatment: Findings of a 17-Year Prospective Study of Officially Recorded and Self-Reported Child Abuse and Neglect," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 22 (1988): 1065-1078; The American Academy of Pediatrics Force on the Family, "Family Pediatrics," *Pediatrics* 111 Supplement (2003): 1547-53; P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Andrew J. Cherlin, and Kathleen E. Kiernan, "The Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on the Mental Health of Young Adults: A Developmental Perspective," *Child Development* 66 (1995): 1614-1634; David F. Warner and Mark D. Hayward, "Early-Life Origins of the Race Gap in Men's Mortality," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 47 (2006): 209-226; Bijou Yang, "The Economy and Suicide: A Time Series Study of the U.S.A.," *American Journal of Economics and Society* 51 (1992): 87-99; Timothy J. Biblarz and Greg Gottainer, "Family Structure and Children's Success: A Comparison of Widowed and Divorced Single-Mother Families," *Journal of*

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- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Bryce Christensen, "Time for a New 'Moynihan Report'? Confronting the National Family Crisis," *Family in America*, Oct. 2004: 1-5.
- <sup>66</sup> Richard A. Goodman et al., *Proceedings of the International Conference on Child Day Care Health: Science, Prevention, and Practice, Supplement to Pediatrics* 84 (1994): 986-1020; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development/Early Child Care Research Development, "Does Amount of Time Spent in Child Care Predict Socioemotional Adjustment During the Transition to Kindergarten?" *Child Development* 74 (2003): 976-1005.
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- <sup>68</sup> Sherri Eisenberg, "When It Comes to Day Care, You Can't Trust the Media," *Washington Monthly*, Jun 1997: 15.
- <sup>69</sup> David Popenoe, "Ideology Trumps Social Science," *American Psychologist*, Jun 2000: 679.
- <sup>70</sup> Qtd. in Susan Levine, "D-I-V-O-R-C-E Gets Some R-E-S-P-E-C-T; Psychologist Finds Families Rebound," *The Washington Post*, 22 Jan. 2002: C1.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>72</sup> Nicholas H. Wolfinger, "Repeal of No-Fault Divorce Would Mark Step Backwards," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 Sep 1998: A10.
- <sup>73</sup> George Will, "Academia Stuck to the Left," *Washington Post*, 28 Nov 2004: B7.
- <sup>74</sup> Cf. Goodman, op. cit., C20; Thomas W. Lippman, "For Utah Fallout Victims, Money Is of Little Comfort," *Washington Post*, 18 May 1993: A1; Deborah Davis, "Terry Tempest Williams," *Ms.* Spring 2004: 85.
- <sup>75</sup> Levine, op. cit., C1; Laurence Zuckerman, "Divorce and Family: She Wrote the Book," *New York Times*, 1 Apr 2000: B7.
- <sup>76</sup> Cf. Liz Sidoti, "Hopeful Brownback Calls for Family-Focused Culture," *Deseret Morning News*, 8 Dec 2006: A13.
- <sup>77</sup> Cf. Norval Glenn, "The Recent Trends in Marital Success in the United States," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 261-270; Lynn D. Wardle, "No-Fault Divorce and the Divorce Conundrum," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1991: 79-142.
- <sup>78</sup> Cf. Wolfinger, op. cit.
- <sup>79</sup> Ball, op. cit., 152-153.
- <sup>80</sup> Cf. Bryce Christensen, "Fostering Confusion: What the 'Foster-Care Crisis' Really Means," *Family in America*, May 2001: 1-6.
- <sup>81</sup> Cf. Fradkin, op. cit., 151.
- <sup>82</sup> Carle Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), 552-553.
- <sup>83</sup> Cf. Lewis A. Coser, Intro., *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*, by Florian Znaniecki (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1986), xx.
- <sup>84</sup> James Q. Wilson, *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 211-220.