

BY THE YEAR 2000

Future Flash

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BY THE YEAR 2000, a KCET/28 public affairs program, focuses on issues affecting Southern California and its future.

FAMILY DIVERSITY

BTY 2000 Pays Tribute To The American Family

From *Ozzie & Harriet* to *Full House*, no other institution in America has changed so much or become more diversified than the American family. BTY 2000 will focus on the social and legal implications of American family diversity in **We Are Family**. Episode airs June 21. We dedicate this final issue of FUTURE FLASH to this important subject.

Family Facts

- The U.S. Census estimates that less than 27% of the nation's 91 million households in 1988 fit the traditional family model.
- Experts estimate that one-third of all American children born during the 80s will probably live in a stepfamily before they are 18.
- The national divorce rate has doubled since 1965.
- Single parent households comprise over 10% of all California households.
- 75% of all single parent families in California are headed by women. Half of these live below the poverty line.
- The elderly represent the fastest growing segment of the nation's population. For the first time in American history, Americans now have more living parents than children.
- Families provide 80%-90% of the needed care for the elderly.
- By the year 2000, Asians, Blacks and Latinos will form the majority of California households.
- By 1995, 66% of all California married couple households will be dual wage earners.

Redefining The Family

Americans are somewhat schizophrenic in their attitudes on "family." Imprinted in our subconscious is the idealized model of the 50s yet only a small minority of us follow it throughout our lifetimes. Childless couples, domestic partners (including gays and lesbians), communal groups, single parents, and stepfamilies are as common as apple pie. These forms challenge the definition of "family." So the question arises: how do we match the realities of family diversity with our needs to nurture strong family relationships in the 90s and beyond?

Public and private institutions have been slow to respond. Family rights activists point out that unless outdated policies and programs change, "non-traditional" families will continue to face prejudice and discrimination. The following are some of the examples cited by the L.A. City Task Force on Family Diversity in its 1988 report:

- A legal system which favors higher standards of living for the divorced husband over lower standards for the divorced mother-child family.
- Committed gays and lesbians in lifemate relationships not offered the same employer benefits provided to married couples (eg., bereavement leave, pension survivor benefits, and health insurance).
- Housing discrimination against unmarried couples, the disabled, and families with children.
- Caring and responsible stepparents denied the same legal rights that biological parents have over the child's care.
- Inaccurate and often misleading portrayals of American family life on commercial TV.

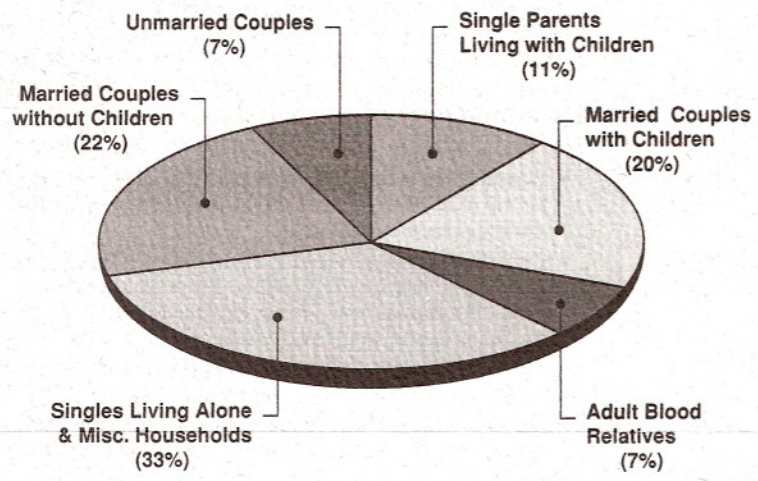
As a starting point for change, family rights activists say we need to define "family" more in terms of its functions (eg., to care and nurture) than its forms. Thomas F. Coleman, Executive Director of the Family Diversity Project, explains: Using "a fair and nondiscriminatory definition of family" both the government and private sectors must "find ways to update the policies that are out of match with the present demographics ... that's the politics of the '90s. That's what's going to work."

Some progress is being made. State Senator Diane Watson and State Assemblyman Tom Bates have issued reports recognizing family diversity and recommending

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Charting The Course

Breakdown of L.A. City Households



Source: Family Diversity Project

Redefining Family (continued)

that benefits given to married couples extend to all family structures. In addition, State Assembly Bill 167 which would legalize same-sex marriages failed in committee, but will be re-introduced this summer. Some progress toward more inclusive family policies is also being made at municipal levels, most notably in San Francisco, Laguna Beach, L.A. and West Hollywood.

Additional information regarding family-related issues can be obtained by contacting:
Family Diversity Project
 (213) 258-8955

Upcoming ...

JUNE: We Are Family (6/21), Heal Thyself (6/28)
JULY: Blackboards To Keyboards (7/5), The Color Of Power (7/12), Diversity University (7/19), Skin Deep? (7/26)
 Shows air Fridays at 9 PM, and repeat Saturdays at 3 PM and Sundays at 10:30 AM.

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