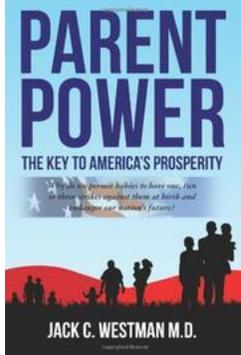


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Parent Power: The Key to America's Prosperity

Why do we permit babies to have one, two or three strikes against them at birth and endanger our nation's future?

By Jack C. Westman

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Westman, professor emeritus of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, questions what rights children have over their own care.

As a nation, are we denying children their basic rights of humanity by favoring their parents' rights over their own? Westman examines such controversial questions and considers how certain standards of parenthood should be upheld. In a thoughtful, thorough investigation into what has gone wrong in the child-parent-family dynamic, Westman focuses on our cultural, societal and political systems. One of the main problems, he says, is "juvenile ageism," or our failure to consider children as full citizens in need of and deserving of parents who are qualified to manage their care. Equally problematic, he says, is that parenthood isn't treated as a career—a damaging, ultimately counterproductive problem, he says, since many parents do not have the emotional, financial and logistical support necessary to take care of their children. "This decline in family wellbeing," Westman writes, "deprives us of parents who are able to develop the characters and wellbeing of our young people...our nation's greatest natural resource." This isn't only an issue of children's rights, though, but a larger social concern, since these children ultimately grow into adults who will either contribute positively to society or perpetuate cycles of abuse and neglect. Westman deftly takes on assumptions about parenthood and child care—for example, the idea that a genetic connection is an automatic basis for a parent to have custody of their child even if that parent is too young and/or incompetent to handle the responsibility. In that vein, Westman makes a solid argument that, as a society, we need to be more proactive in helping both parents and children. One of his more controversial proposals is the idea that minors, people with mental health problems and/or anyone currently incarcerated should go through a certification process to make sure they are competent to take on the responsibility of parenthood. This burden isn't punitive, Westman argues, but an effort to provide support and guidance to help parents create healthy, sustainable and safe family structures.

Shatters some preconceived notions of parenthood and presents a solution-oriented response to strengthening the family.