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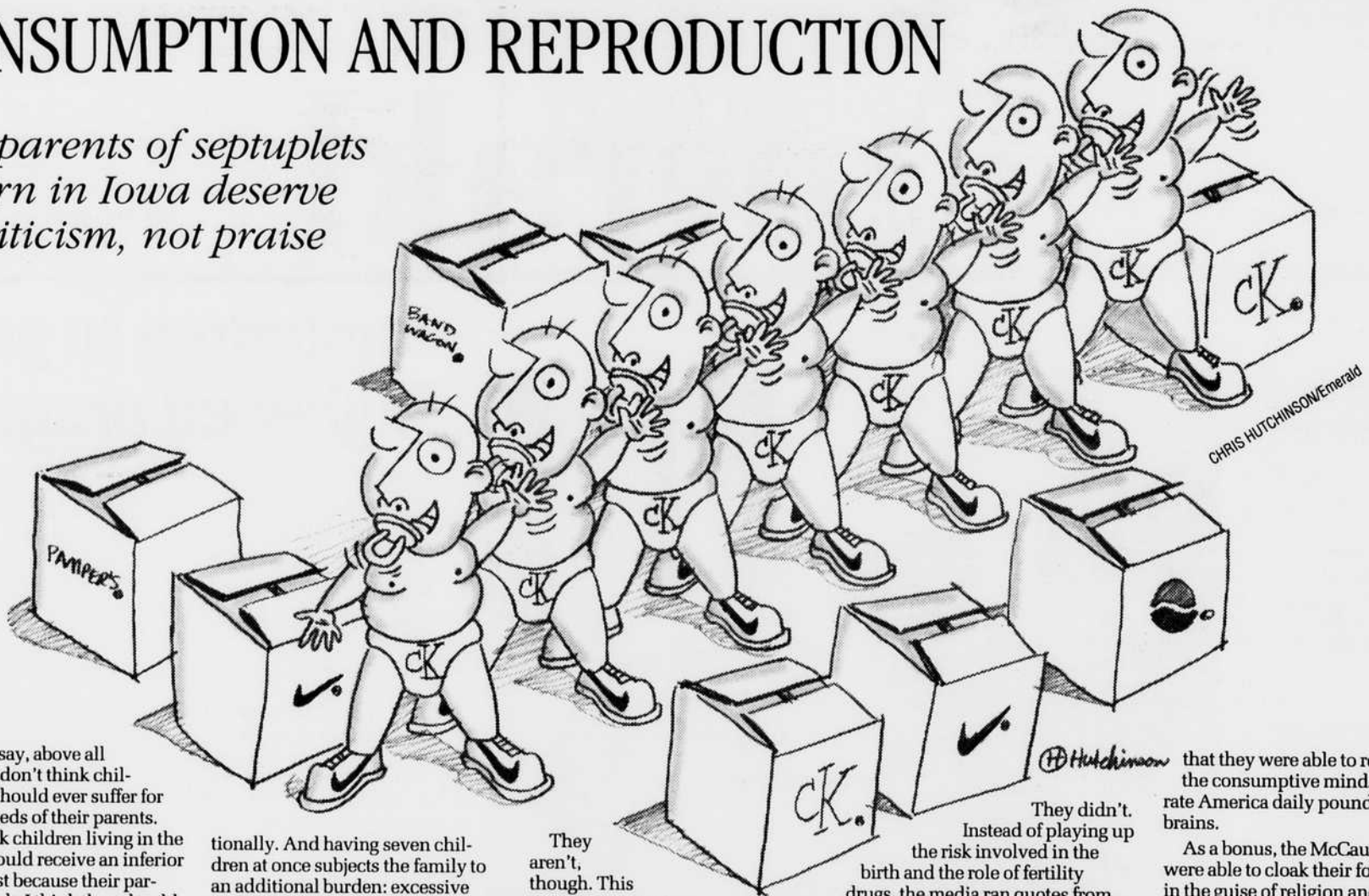
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CONSUMPTION AND REPRODUCTION

The parents of septuplets born in Iowa deserve criticism, not praise



Let me say, above all else, I don't think children should ever suffer for the deeds of their parents. I don't think children living in the inner city should receive an inferior education just because their parents did, nor do I think they should have to forego college because their family cannot afford tuition.

I don't think kids whose parents are on welfare should be cut off from food simply because their mother wasn't able to get a job and care for them within the time arbitrarily allotted by policy-makers in Washington.

And I don't think the septuplets born in Iowa to Kenny and Bobbi McCaughey should starve just because their parents decided not to selectively abort and instead opted to raise seven babies. I also don't think, however, that the parents should be congratulated for their foolishness.

There are numerous reasons why people should not be encouraged to have seven children. Families that have more than two kids contribute to overpopulation, one of the most significant environmental problems in existence. Most parents are not capable of caring for seven children, either financially — as the Iowa case has shown — or emo-

tionally. And having seven children at once subjects the family to an additional burden: excessive media attention.

Nevertheless, when Bill Clinton phoned the McCaugheys, he congratulated the mother, saying, "I admire you, and I think it's great, and I hope it will be a great adventure for you the whole way through."

I don't understand why taking fertility pills and having seven babies — at great physical and financial risk to yourself and the children — is admirable. I pity those children, along with their older sister.

The Iowa community and the nation as a whole apparently see it differently. Corporate donations have poured in, showering the infants, who are mostly still in critical condition, and their parents with free groceries, a new house, a van, diapers for life and college scholarships, among other gifts. Individuals have joined the companies in providing money for the family.

Such an outpouring of charity is not inherently bad. I wish the same groups who are dumping money and gifts on the McCaugheys were willing to give money to other needy families, such as those on welfare and those who had seven kids the usual way: one baby at a time.

They aren't, though. This case has received unique attention from the media and unique generosity from the community. As The Associated Press reported, a family in Washington, D.C., recently had sextuplets, five of which survived. They received no phone call from the president, no gifts from car companies or home builders and no donations from baby food companies.

Something about the McCaughey case made it different, and that bothers me.

Admittedly, the fact that this was the first documented case of seven simultaneous births makes it newsworthy. That doesn't mean the nature of the coverage had to be what it was.

Instead of heaping praise and front-page photos upon the couple, the media could have used this opportunity to question the increasing number of multiple births being caused by the use of fertility drugs. They could have challenged the assumption that it is the sacred duty of citizens to have as many children as possible. They could, in short, have used the absurdity of the situation to question the dominant views on child raising in the United States.

They didn't. Instead of playing up the risk involved in the birth and the role of fertility drugs, the media ran quotes from Kenny McCaughey like: "God could have given us one. But God is entitled to give us seven."

Unless God is a major pharmaceutical company, I doubt she had much to do with this particular birth. Nevertheless, the religious fervor of the McCaugheys has received heavy praise when it should be challenged as representing one of the fundamental reasons we've been unable to combat overpopulation in this country.

The media orgy over the septuplet birth has left me feeling ill, but it didn't surprise me. Even Clinton stumbled upon the fundamentally "American" character of this fiasco of modern family planning: "You know, when those kids all go off to school you will be able to get a job running any major corporation in America. You will be the best organized manager in the United States."

I've gotten used to seeing consumption, greed and stupidity extolled daily in the press. Normally, this sludge is poured forth from the business page in stories that reiterate press releases from proud corporate polluters. In this case, however, a single family was capable of such irresponsibility and ignorance

that they were able to represent the consumptive mindset corporate America daily pounds into our brains.

As a bonus, the McCaugheys were able to cloak their foolishness in the guise of religion and middle-American pleasantries. Little wonder the media snapped the story up as it was fed to them.

The McCaugheys don't have to run a corporation after they get done raising their kids. They have already done enough to help business simply by providing the media with seven models of how we are supposed to reproduce and consume without thought.

I don't blame the septuplets for being born into their family, and I would hate to see them suffer without food or adequate care because of it. But I hate seeing millions of children suffer throughout the world even more.

For those children, I do blame the parents, the press, the corporations and the community for providing a justification for the consumptive ideology that has condemned all those children to poverty so seven babies could be raised — complete with minivan and baby formula and new house and adorable little outfits — in what the parents have labeled "a household of faith."

Mike Schmierbach is the editorial editor for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the paper.

OPINION

Mike Schmierbach

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trade helps Mexico

Wow! I never thought I'd see a 1,100-word letter entitled "Collegio misguided" printed in ODE. Should I feel honored?

The author of the letter suggests not. In a long, drawn-out style, Michael Goodman implicated my stereotypical insensitivity to poor farmers. But I want to help the poor like everyone — if only in a different way.

While studying for a year in southern Mexico, I saw countless impoverished Mexicans anguish over high tortilla prices. Corn is artificially expensive due to quotas, advocated by Goodman to "protect the farmer," which restrict American imports. Shunning cheaper American crops, however, subjects Mexico's 80-plus million tortilla consumers to higher prices. With all of his self-righteous talk of helping poor Mex-

ican farmers, Goodman damns every Mexican consumer to further poverty. The money which could be saved on cheaper tortillas would create new jobs in competitive industries. And the money which could be spent on American corn would come back to Mexico by way of American consumption of Mexican goods (which creates jobs), or American investment into the Mexican economy (which creates jobs).

Here's the classic example of the protectionism which Goodman advocates:

Having modeled its economy around British socialism, India moved in 1948 to protect its hand-loomed industry by placing high tariffs on imported textiles. The bureaucrats' arguments were the same as Goodman's: You couldn't free up trade without hurting workers and destroying

the cultural relevance of that industry. Consequently, India adopted tariffs, and its workers subsidized hand-loomed and other inefficient industries for decades through artificially high prices. Japan, facing the same dilemma, chose short-term worker displacement instead of long-term subsidy. Now look to Mexico, which currently subsidizes an inefficient agricultural industry in corn. They could do like Japan, and face the painful, but necessary displacement of poor farmers, or they could continue on like Goodman suggests, and end up like India.

Michael Goodman makes the most arrogant of mistakes: He believes his limited mind is smarter than a free, spontaneous market. When Goodman, or anyone else, begins a high-minded, holier-than-thou

quest for "economic" or "social" justice, like Indian bureaucrats 50 years ago, everybody loses in the long run. By protecting inefficient farmers out of compassion, he effectively screws over every Mexican consumer. Surely, many Mexican farmers will suffer as NAFTA rolls along — as will Pennsylvania steelworkers — but only to the extent of the current protectionist policy. Yet for every agricultural job lost in Chiapas and Oaxaca, many more will be created in Monterrey, Guadalajara and Mexico City — in comparatively efficient industries. So if you were a Mexican policy-maker, would you use free Japan or socialist India as an economic model?

I thought so.

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