Homeward Bound

"A revelatory and path-breaking work."
—Susan Faludi, author of *The Terror Dream*

FULLY REVISED WITH A NEW POST 9/11 EPILOGUE

AMERICAN FAMILIES IN THE COLD WAR ERA

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FIGURE 1 Atomic-age newlyweds prepare for their "sheltered honeymoon" in their new fallout shelter. Surrounded by consumer goods and other supplies, they pose for news cameras. At the rear of the photo, next to the portable toilet, is the entrance to the shelter. (*Steve Wever, Miami Herald.*)

INTRODUCTION

I
N THE SUMMER OF 1959, a young couple married and spent their honey-
moon in a bomb shelter. *Life* magazine featured the "sheltered honeymoon"
with a photograph of the duo smiling on their lawn, surrounded by dozens of
canned goods and supplies. Another photograph showed them descending
twelve feet underground into the twenty-two-ton steel and concrete 8-by-11-
foot shelter where they would spend the next two weeks. The article quipped
that "fallout can be fun" and described the newlyweds' adventure—with obvious
erotic undertones—as fourteen days of "unbroken togetherness."[1] As the couple
embarked on family life, all they had to enhance their honeymoon were some
consumer goods, their sexuality, and privacy. This is a powerful image of the
nuclear family in the nuclear age: isolated, sexually charged, cushioned by abun-
dance, and protected against impending doom by the wonders of modern tech-
nology (see Figure 1).

The stunt was little more than a publicity device; yet, in retrospect it takes
on symbolic significance. For in the early years of the cold war, amid a world of
uncertainties brought about by World War II and its aftermath, the home
seemed to offer a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside
world. The message was ambivalent, however, for the family also seemed partic-
ularly vulnerable. It needed heavy protection against the intrusions of forces
outside itself. The self-contained home held out the promise of security in an
insecure world. It also offered a vision of abundance and fulfillment. As the cold
war began, young postwar Americans were homeward bound.

Demographic indicators show that in this period, Americans were more
eager than ever to establish families. The bomb-shelter honeymooners were part
of a cohort of Americans who lowered the age at marriage for both men and
women and quickly brought the birthrate to a twentieth-century high after more
than a hundred years of steady decline, producing the "baby boom" (see Tables 1
and 2). Virtually everyone of childbearing age participated in the production of
the baby boom. Americans of all racial, ethnic, and religious groups, of all
socioeconomic classes and educational levels, married younger and had more

FIGURE 2   The honeymooners kiss as they descend into their backyard bomb shelter for two weeks of "unbroken togetherness." *(Courtesy of Bll Sanders, photographer.)*

children than at any other time in the twentieth century. Black and white, rich and poor, they all brought the marriage rate up and the divorce rate down. Although the nation remained divided along lines of race and class, and only members of the prosperous white middle and working classes had access to the suburban domesticity that represented the "good life," family fever swept the nation and affected all Americans. These young adults established a trend of early marriage and relatively large families that lasted for more than two decades (see Table 3). From the 1940s through the early 1960s, Americans married at a higher rate and at a younger age than did their European counterparts.[2]

Less noted but equally significant, the men and women who formed families between 1940 and 1960 also reduced the divorce rate after a postwar peak. Marriages forged in the late 1940s were particularly stable. Even those couples who eventually divorced remained together long enough to prevent

## TABLE 1: MEDIAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE, 1890–2005
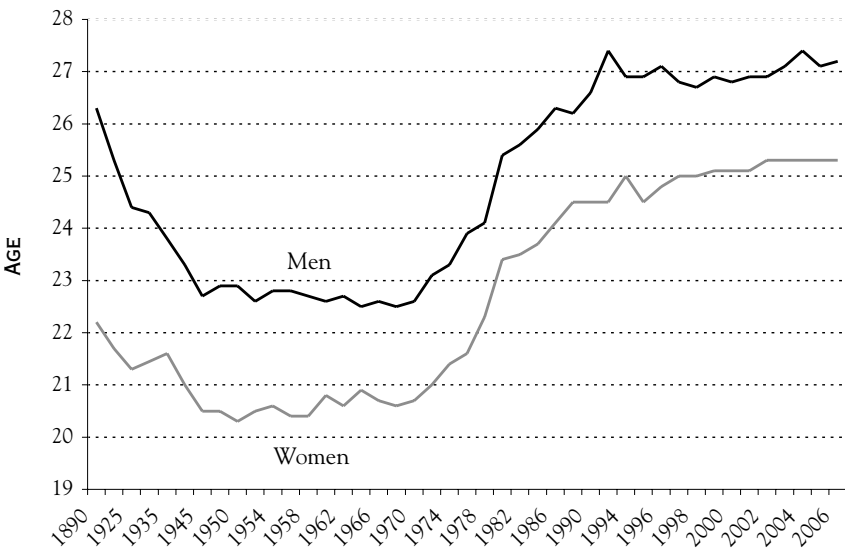
SOURCES U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports,* Series P20-514, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998 (Update)"; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the U.S., Colonial Times to 1970,* Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 19; U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1981,* Vol. 3 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1985), Table 1-9, pp. 1–11; U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2005 and Earlier* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, September 21, 2006), Table MS-2, www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ms2.pdf).

the divorce rate from rising until the mid-1960s (see Table 5). Although the United States maintained its dubious distinction of having the highest divorce rate in the world, the temporary decline in divorce did not occur to the same extent in Europe. Contrary to fears of commentators at the time, the roles of breadwinner and homemaker were not abandoned; they were embraced.

Why did postwar Americans turn to marriage and parenthood with such enthusiasm and commitment? Scholars and observers frequently point to the family boom as the inevitable result of a return to peace and prosperity.[3] They argue that depression-weary Americans were eager to put the disruptions and hardships of war behind them and enjoy the abundance at home. There is, of course, some truth in this claim, but prosperity followed other wars in our history, notably World War I, with no similar increase in marriage and childbearing.

TABLE 2: FERTILITY RATE PER 1,000 WOMEN AGED 15–44
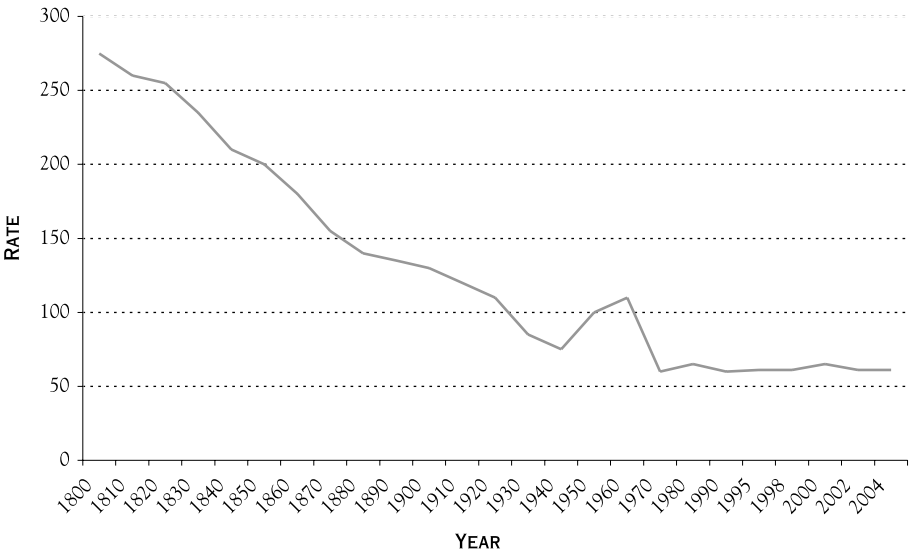
SOURCES   U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the U.S., Colonial Times to 1979,* Part 1, bicentennial ed., Series B 5-10 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975) p. 49; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1986,* 107th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 57; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *National Vital Statistics Report,* Vol. 47, No. 18 (Hyattsville, Md.: Maryland National Center for Health Statistics, 1999), Table 1, p. 22.; U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, Selected Years 1976–2004* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), Table H1, www.census.gov/population/www/ socdemo/fertility.html#hist).

Peace and affluence alone are inadequate to explain the many complexities of the post–World War II domestic explosion. The demographic trends went far beyond what was expected from a return to peace. Indeed, nothing on the surface of postwar America explains the rush of young Americans into marriage, parenthood, and traditional gender roles.

It might have been otherwise. The Great Depression of the 1930s brought about widespread challenges to traditional gender roles that could have led to a restructured home. The war intensified these challenges and pointed the way toward radical alterations in the institutions of work and family life. Wartime brought thousands of women into the paid labor force when men left to enter the armed forces. After the war, expanding job and educational opportunities, as well as the increasing availability of birth control devices, might well have led young people to delay marriage or not to marry at all, and to have fewer children

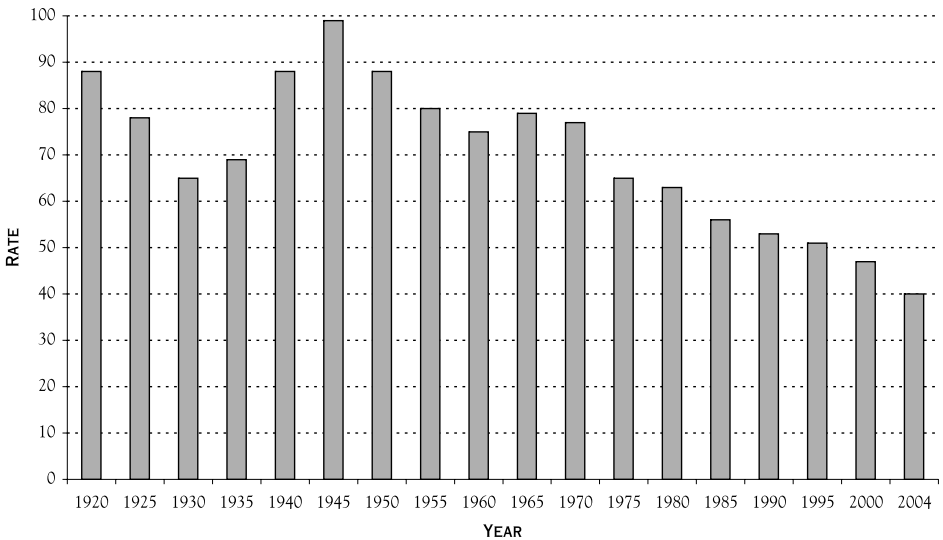## TABLE 3: BIRTHRATE, WHITE AND NONWHITE, 1909–2004

SOURCES   U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1990*, Vol. 1 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1985), Table 1-1, pp. 1–2; National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Birth Data Files*, "Birth, Fertility, and Total-Fertility Rates by Race: United States, 1980–2005" (Hyattsville, Md.: NCHS, 2005), www.census.gov/compendia/statab/vital_statistics).

if they did marry. Indeed, many scholars and observers at the time feared that these changes seriously threatened the continuation of the American family. Yet the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that postwar American society experienced a surge in family life and a reaffirmation of domesticity that rested on distinct roles for women and men.[4]

The demographic explosion in the American family represented a temporary disruption of long-term trends. It lasted only until the baby-boom children came of age. The parents, having grown up during the depression and the war, had begun their families during years of prosperity. Their children, however, grew up amid affluence during the cold war; they reached adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s, creating the counterculture and a new women's liberation movement. In vast numbers, they rejected the political assumptions of the cold war, along with the domestic and sexual codes of their parents. This generation

## TABLE 4: MARRIAGE RATE PER 1,000 UNMARRIED FEMALES, 1920–2004

SOURCES U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 64; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1981*, Vol. 3 (Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 1985), Table 1-3, p. 1-6; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 44, No. 11 Supplement (Atlanta, Ga.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, June 24, 1996), Table 1, pp. 7–8; U.S. Census Bureau, *2001 Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), Table 117, p. 99; National Marriage Project, *The State of Our Unions* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University, 2006), Figure 1, p. a17, www.marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2006.pdf).

brought the twentieth-century birthrate to an all-time low and the divorce rate to an unprecedented high.[5]

Observers often point to the 1950s as the last gasp of time-honored family life before the sixties generation made a major break from the past. But the comparison is shortsighted. In many ways, the youths of the sixties resembled their grandparents, who came of age in the first decades of the twentieth century. Like many of their baby-boom grandchildren, the grandparents had challenged the sexual norms of their day, pushed the divorce rate up and the birthrate down, and created a unique youth culture, complete with music, dancing, movies, and other new forms of urban amusements. They also behaved in similar ways politically, developing a powerful feminist movement, strong grassroots activism on behalf of social justice, and a proliferation of radical movements to challenge the status quo. It is the generation in between—with

TABLE 5: ANNUAL DIVORCE RATE PER 1,000 MARRIED WOMEN, 1860–2004
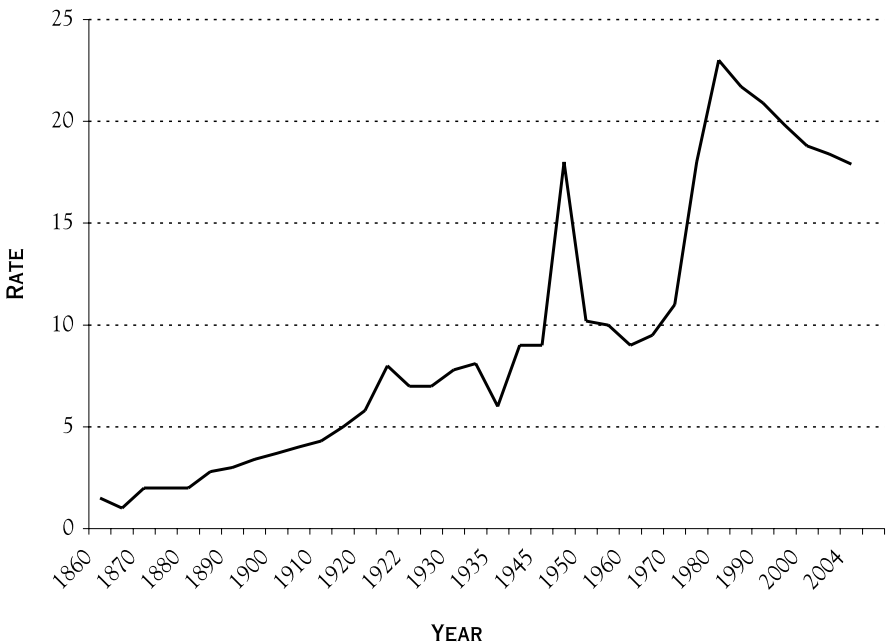
SOURCES   Andrew J. Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), Figure 1-5, p. 21; National Marriage Project, *The State of Our Unions* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University, 2006), Figure 5, p. a19, www.marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2006.pdf).

its strong domestic ideology, pervasive consensus politics, and peculiar demographic behavior—that stands out as different.[6]

Observers normally explain the political activism and the demographic behavior of the baby-boom generation as the effects of affluence and the result of expanding opportunities for women in education and employment. Yet the same conditions existed twenty years earlier at the peak of the domestic revival. The circumstances were similar, but the responses were different. What accounted for the endorsement of "traditional" family roles by young adults in the postwar years and the widespread challenge to those roles by their children?

These questions stimulated the exploration that led to this book. Answering them requires entering the minds of the women and men who married and raised children during these years. The historical circumstances that framed their lives shaped the families they formed.

What makes the postwar demographic explosion even more curious and remarkable is its pervasiveness across all groups in the society. Americans of all backgrounds rushed into marriage and childbearing, even though many of these newly formed families—most notably large numbers of Americans of color—were excluded from suburbia, the site of the "American way of life." Racial and class divisions were concealed beneath an aura of unity in the aftermath of the war. Post–World War II America presented itself as a unified nation, politically harmonious and blessed with widespread affluence. Emerging triumphant from a war fought against racist and fascist regimes, spared the ravages of war-torn Europe and Asia, and prosperous from the booming wartime economy, the United States embraced its position as the "leader of the free world."

But major challenges lay ahead if the nation was to maintain its leadership in the world. The atomic blasts that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked both the end of World War II and the beginning of the cold war. The United States now faced its former ally, the Soviet Union, as its major foe. The cold war was largely an ideological struggle between the two superpowers, both hoping to increase their power and influence across the globe. The divisions in American society along racial, class, and gender lines threatened to weaken the society at home and damage its prestige in the world. In the propaganda battles that permeated the cold war era, American leaders promoted the American way of life as the triumph of capitalism, allegedly available to all who believed in its values. This way of life was characterized by affluence, located in suburbia, and epitomized by white middle-class nuclear families. Increasing numbers of Americans gained access to this domestic ideal—but not everyone who aspired to it could achieve it.

Poverty excluded many from suburban affluence; racism excluded others. Nevertheless, experts and officials insisted that the combined forces of democracy and prosperity would bring the fruits of the "good life" to all. Racial strife, they asserted, was diminishing. Workers, they argued, were prosperous. But anxieties surrounding these issues did not disappear. Policymakers perceived racial and class divisions as particularly dangerous, because dissatisfied workers and racial minorities might be drawn to left-wing political agitation, leading to socialism or even communism. According to the cold war ethos of the time, conflict within the United States would harm our image abroad, strengthen the Soviet Union, and weaken the nation, making it vulnerable to communism. The worst-case scenario was communist takeover and the defeat of the United States in the cold war. Although strategists and foreign policy experts feared that the Soviet Union might gain the military might and territorial expansion to achieve world domination, many leaders, pundits, and observers worried that the real dangers to America were internal ones: racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption. To alleviate these fears, Americans turned to the family as a bastion of safety in an insecure world, while experts, leaders, and politicians promoted codes of conduct and enacted public policies that would bolster the American home. Like their leaders, most Americans agreed that family stability appeared to be the best bulwark against the dangers of the cold war.

These widely held beliefs and the public policies they generated led to some dramatic transformations in American society, beyond the rush into marriage, childbearing, and domesticity. Most important, they blurred class lines while sharpening racial divisions. The massive infusion of federal funds into the expansion of affordable single-family homes in suburban developments made it possible for white working-class families to achieve a middle-class lifestyle. Second-generation European immigrants moved out of their ethnic neighborhoods in the cities, leaving their kinship networks, along with their outsider status, behind. Postwar prosperity and the promise of assimilation made it possible for ethnic Americans with white skin to blend into the homogeneous suburbs. Jews and Catholics joined Anglo-Saxon Protestants in these all-white communities, even if they could not join their country clubs or social gatherings. Greeks, Poles, and Italians joined Norwegians and Swedes as members of the white middle class, reaping the benefits of affluence and the American way of life.

People of color were excluded from the vast majority of these suburban communities and were denied the benefits of American prosperity even if they could afford them. With very few notable exceptions, residential segregation defined

the postwar suburbs. Persistent racial discrimination proved to be the nation's worst embarrassment throughout the cold war. It also proved to be a situation that African-Americans were unwilling to tolerate. It is no accident that the civil rights movement developed in the wake of World War II, as black soldiers returned from fighting a war against racism to face segregation, discrimination, and brutality at home. Black leaders and federal officials also understood that the national government needed to promote civil rights at home in order to save face abroad, as the Soviet Union and other communist countries pointed to American race relations as an indication of the hypocrisy and failure of the American promise of freedom for all.[7]

But the strategic alliance between the national government and civil rights leaders required that the movement remain limited to legal and political rights, which were consistent with principles of equal opportunity. Issues such as school desegregation and access to public transportation did not violate private property rights. Although most Americans approved of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision to desegregate public schools, as late as 1964, 89 percent of those polled in the North and 96 percent in the South believed that "an owner of property should not have to sell to a Negro if he doesn't want to." Anything that hinted of a redistribution of wealth evoked fears of socialism and a threat to American capitalism. These cold war principles precluded governmental efforts to strengthen the hand of those with less against those with more. Civil rights leaders understood these imperatives, and they limited their efforts to achieving political rights rather than economic justice. After all, the rallying cry of the United States in the cold war was "freedom," not "equality," and "freedom" became the rallying cry of the civil rights movement as well.[8]

The focus on political rights allowed the government to support certain aspects of the civil rights movement, such as the dismantling of the Jim Crow system in the South, while doing nothing to alleviate residential segregation or the widespread poverty that kept Americans of color at the bottom of the society. As a result, American leaders spoke loudly and often about the efforts the nation was making to eradicate institutionalized racism, claiming that the situation for black Americans was improving. At the same time, they allowed racial segregation to prevail in the suburbs, where the Federal Housing Authority and lending banks maintained redlining policies that prevented black Americans from obtaining home mortgages.[9]

These policies did little to challenge the racial attitudes of white Americans. In the late 1950s, in spite of widespread support for school desegregation, white Americans were less enthusiastic about bringing the races into closer contact in

more private realms. Although 60 percent of whites outside the South said they would stay if a black family moved next door, only 45 percent said they would remain in the neighborhood if large numbers of people of color moved in. Disapproval of racial integration was strongest in the most intimate realm of life: the family. The vast majority of Americans—92 percent in the North and 99 percent in the South—approved of laws banning marriage between whites and nonwhites. As late as the mid-sixties, more than half of northern whites and over three-fourths of southern whites still opposed interracial marriage.[10]

The long-term effects of these policies and attitudes were devastating. Black Americans were excluded from most suburbs, even if they could afford suburban homes. That exclusion denied them the opportunity for capital accumulation and upward mobility that homeownership provided. So while white working-class Americans prospered and joined their middle-class peers as suburban homeowners, African-Americans lost ground economically. They were forced to reside in substandard urban housing, left out of postwar prosperity, and denied the government subsidies available to whites.

Out of these developments came a society with a rhetoric of classlessness, but sharply divided along racial lines. From a prewar nation made up of many identifiable ethnic groups, postwar American society divided rigidly along the color line. The children of immigrants identified as outsiders before World War II became "white" after the war, gaining access to the privileges and opportunities that whiteness bestowed, such as life in the suburbs.[11] Political leaders highlighted the nation's prosperous all-white suburbs, hid its poverty in rural and urban areas, and masked its racial oppression by promoting the civil rights movement. Nevertheless, the "American way of life" embodied in the suburban nuclear family, as a cultural ideal if not a universal reality, motivated countless postwar Americans to strive for it, to live by its codes, and—for black Americans—to demand it.

Scholars of the postwar era have begun to examine the connections among cold war politics, suburban development, race relations, and the domestic ideal. The context of the cold war points to previously unrecognized links between political and familial values. Diplomatic historians painted one portrait of a world torn by strife and a standoff between two superpowers that seemed to hold the fate of the globe in their hands. Sociologists and demographers provided a different picture of a private world of affluence, suburban sprawl, and the baby boom. This disconnect suggested the peculiar notion of domestic tranquillity in the midst of the cold war.[12] In *Homeward Bound,* public policy and political ideology are brought to bear on the study of private life, locating the family within

the larger political culture, not outside it. This approach illuminates both the cold war ideology and the domestic revival as two sides of the same coin: postwar Americans' intense need to feel liberated from the past and secure in the future.

These cold war anxieties are most apparent in the anticommunist hysteria that swept the nation in the postwar years. Public opinion polls taken at the time illuminate the breadth and depth of anticommunist sentiment in the nation. The vast majority of those polled believed that members of the Communist Party in the United States were loyal to Russia, not to America, and that membership in the Communist Party should be forbidden by law. Although the Communist Party remained legal, it was extremely perilous to join. In the late 1940s, nearly three-fourths of those polled believed that members of the Communist Party should not be allowed to teach in colleges and universities. Fully one out of three said that communists should be killed or imprisoned. Only 16 percent believed they should be left alone. Americans expressed nearly as much hostility to communists in the United States after the war as they did to Nazi leaders in Germany during the war (one-third said Nazis should be executed, another third said they should be imprisoned, and 19 percent said they should be tried and punished). In 1950, at the height of the anticommunist crusade in the United States, 90 percent of Americans polled believed that communists should be removed from jobs in industries that would be important during wartime. When asked what should be done with Communist Party members in the event of a war with Russia, only 1 percent believed it was best to do "nothing, everyone [is] entitled to freedom of thought."[13] Although freedom of thought was one of the most cherished principles of the democracy that cold warriors were fighting to protect, most Americans in 1950 would deny this basic right to members of a small oppositional political party.

Political opportunists like Senator Joseph McCarthy preyed upon these anticommunist sentiments. McCarthyism targeted perceived internal dangers, not external threats. The Soviet Union loomed in the distance as an abstract symbol of what Americans might face if they became "soft." Anticommunist crusaders called on Americans to strengthen their moral fiber in order to preserve their freedom and their security. A society weakened by luxury and decadence would be vulnerable to subversion from within. Deviations from the norms of appropriate sexual and familial behavior might lead to social disorder and national vulnerability.

Fears of decadence and "softness" led to widespread purges of those whose political or sexual inclinations might make them security risks. The most severe

censure was reserved not only for those suspected of ties to the Communist Party, but also for gay men and lesbians, who faced harsh repression and official homophobia. As anticommunist crusaders launched investigations to root out "perverts" in the government, homosexuality itself became a mark of potential subversive activity, grounds for dismissal from jobs, and justification for persecution. In what came to be known as the lavender scare, more people lost their jobs than those who were fired for being suspected "reds." To escape the status of pariah, many gay men and lesbians locked themselves in the stifling closet of conformity, hiding their sexual identities and passing as heterosexuals. As one lesbian recalled, "It has never been easy to be a lesbian in this country, but the 1950s was surely the worst decade in which to love your own sex."[14]

The domestic ideology emerged as a buffer against those disturbing political and sexual tendencies. Yet domesticity ultimately fostered the very tendencies it was intended to diffuse: materialism, consumerism, and bureaucratic conformity. This inherent tension defined the symbiotic connection between the culture of the cold war and the domestic revival. Rootless Americans struggled against what they perceived as internal decay. The family seemed to offer a psychological fortress that would protect them against themselves. Bolstered by heterosexual virility, scientific expertise, and wholesome abundance, it might ward off the hazards of the age.

This challenge prompted Americans to create a family-centered culture that was more than the internal reverberation of foreign policy, and that went beyond the explicit manifestations of anticommunist hysteria such as the "red" and "lavender" scares. It took shape amid the legacy of the depression, World War II, and the anxieties surrounding atomic weapons. It reflected the fears as well as the aspirations of the era. Prosperity had returned, but would there be a postwar slump that would lead to another depression, as there had been after World War I? Would the GIs be able to find secure positions in the postwar economy? Women had proved themselves competent during the war in previously all-male blue-collar jobs, but what would happen to their families if they continued to work? Science had discovered atomic energy, but would it ultimately serve humanity or destroy it?

The family was at the center of these concerns, and the domestic ideology that was taking shape provided a major response to them. The legendary white middle-class family of the 1950s, located in the suburbs, complete with appliances, station wagons, backyard barbecues, and tricycles scattered on the sidewalks, represented something new. It was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of "traditional" family life with roots deep in the past. Rather, it was the

first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life.[15]

To gain insight into this unique historical era, I have drawn on a wide range of sources, including evidence from the popular culture, especially movies, mass-circulation periodicals, and newspapers; the writings of professionals in numerous fields; and the papers and statements of those who influenced and formulated public policies. In addition, I have utilized a remarkable data collection—the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS)—which consists of several surveys of 600 white middle-class men and women who formed families during these years (see Appendix I).[16] E. Lowell Kelly, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, was interested in long-term personality development among married persons. The 300 couples who participated in the study were contacted through announcements of engagements in the late 1930s in New England local newspapers. Kelly sent questionnaires to them every few years and took his most detailed and extensive surveys in 1955. By that time, most of the respondents had been married for at least a decade and were rearing their baby-boom children in suburban homes.

The KLS questionnaires are a valuable source for finding out why white middle-class Americans adhered so strongly to a normative and quite specifically defined notion of family life at the time. Many respondents filled pages with their detailed testimonies, often attaching extra sheets to explain their answers more fully. They wrote about their lives, the decisions they made concerning their careers and children, the quality of their marriages, their family values, their sexual relationships, their physical and emotional health, and their major hopes and worries. They also reflected on their marriages, what they felt they had sacrificed, and what they had gained. In these open-ended responses, freed from Kelly's categories and concerns, they poured out their stories.[17]

The respondents to the KLS were among the cohort of Americans who began their families during the early 1940s, establishing the patterns and setting the trends that were to take hold of the nation for the next two decades. Their hopes for happy and stable marriages took shape during the depression, when many of their parents' generation struggled with disruption and hardship. They entered marriage when World War II thrust the nation into another major crisis, wreaking further havoc on families. They raised children as the cold war took shape, with its cloud of international tension and impending doom.

Yet these women and men were hopeful that family life in the postwar era would be secure and liberated from the hardships of the past. They believed that affluence, consumer goods, satisfying sex, and children would strengthen their

families, enabling them to steer clear of potential disruptions. In pursuing their quest for the good life, they adhered to traditional gender roles and prized marital stability; few of them divorced. They represent a segment of the predominantly Protestant white population who were relatively well educated and who generally lived comfortable middle-class lives. In other words, they were among those Americans who would be most likely to live out the postwar American dream. Their poignant testimonies, however, reveal a strong undercurrent of discontent; their hopes for domestic happiness often remained unfulfilled.

The KLS participants, as well-educated, affluent, heterosexual, and married, represented the white Protestant men and women who were most likely to reap the benefits of postwar prosperity and achieve the ideal of "the American way of life." They may not have found the perfect contentment they hoped to realize in their comfortable suburban homes, but they had the best opportunity to pursue its promise. As long as they conformed to the prevailing norms of political and personal behavior, their virtue and patriotism would not be questioned, and they would have access to the suburban dream. It is important to keep in mind who was not represented in the sample. With very few exceptions, Americans of color had no such access. Nor did single women or men, because suburban homes were built for families. Those who divorced faced a powerful stigma that cast their personal virtue and even their status as mature adults into question. Childless couples were excluded from the child-centered culture of the suburbs and were regarded with either pity or scorn, depending on whether their childlessness resulted from chance or choice.[18]

Although all groups contributed to the baby boom, it was the values of the white middle class that shaped the dominant political and economic institutions that affected all Americans. Those who did not conform to them were likely to be marginalized, stigmatized, and disadvantaged as a result. So although the KLS sample included only a few individuals from other ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds, it was made up of men and women who wholeheartedly and self-consciously attempted to enact cultural norms. These norms represented the ideal toward which upwardly mobile Americans strove and reflected the standard against which nonconforming individuals were judged. It is all the more important, then, to understand the standards of appropriate behavior established by the white middle class. During the postwar years, there were no groups in the United States for whom these norms were irrelevant.

The responses of individuals in the KLS breathe life into contemporary values and reveal how postwar Americans fortified the boundaries within which they lived. They wanted secure jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages in a

secure country. Security would enable them to take advantage of the fruits of prosperity and peace that were, at long last, available. And so they adhered to an overarching principle that would guide them in their personal and political lives: containment. Containment was the key to security. The word had currency at the time in its foreign policy version, first articulated by George F. Kennan, the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, in 1946. The power of the Soviet Union would not endanger national security if it could be contained within a clearly defined sphere of influence.[19] But the term also describes the response to other postwar developments. The terrifying destructive potential of the atomic bomb would not be a threat if it could be contained, first in the hands of the United States and later through peaceful applications. If the atom were "harnessed for peace," as the proponents of nuclear energy claimed, it would enhance, rather than threaten, our security. Domestic anticommunism was another manifestation of containment: If subversive individuals could be contained and prevented from spreading their poisonous influence through the body politic, then the society could feel secure.

In the domestic version of containment, the "sphere of influence" was the home. Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, so they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men aspired. Domestic containment was bolstered by a powerful political culture that rewarded its adherents and marginalized its detractors. More than merely a metaphor for the cold war on the homefront, containment aptly describes the way in which public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.

There were, of course, those who did not live in tune with the containment ethos. In addition to southern black civil rights activists, there were dedicated women and men who continued to work for liberal political causes such as peace and women's rights, often labeled as "pink" for their efforts. There were also increasing numbers of married women who worked outside the home, a few of them managing to juggle domestic responsibilities with full-time careers, although most worked in jobs or community volunteer efforts that were secondary to their responsibilities as homemakers. Rebellious youths and nonconforming Beats of the 1950s made it clear that not everyone or everything could be contained in the nuclear family ideal. But these were the exceptions. Vast numbers of American women and men during the early years of the cold war—more than ever before or since—got married, moved to the suburbs, and had babies. If they felt frustrated with their lot, the women were more likely to turn to tranquilizers, and the men to *Playboy* magazine, for

escape. But few were willing to give up the rewards of conforming for the risks of resisting the domestic path.[20]

The familial ideology that took shape in these years helps explain the apolitical tenor of middle-class postwar life. With the notable exceptions of labor unions and black civil rights organizations, and the incipient antinuclear movement, the 1940s and 1950s did not foster the emergence of grassroots social movements whose leaders would challenge the system. Rather, professionals became the experts of the age, providing scientific and psychological means to achieve personal well-being. These experts advocated coping strategies to enable people to adapt to the institutional and technological changes taking place. The therapeutic approach that gained momentum during these years was geared to helping people feel better about their place in the world, rather than change it. It offered private and personal solutions to social problems. The family was the arena in which that adaptation was expected to occur; the home was the environment in which people could feel good about themselves. In this way, domestic containment and its therapeutic corollary undermined the potential for political activism and reinforced the chilling effects of anticommunism and the cold war consensus.

Ultimately, containment proved to be an elusive goal. But it held sway on the diplomatic and the domestic levels well into the 1960s, when it collapsed in disarray. The baby-boom generation abandoned the idea, shrugging off the obsession with security and the vision of the family in which their parents had placed their highest hopes. By the late 1960s, many among this new, "uncontained" generation had rejected the rigid institutional boundaries of their elders. They substituted risk for security as they carried sex, consumerism, and political activity outside the established institutions. Activism replaced adaptation as the strategy for changing the conditions of life. Despite their simultaneous assault on the cold war ideology and the imperatives of domesticity, the baby boomers did not abandon the therapeutic methods and personal values that had motivated their parents.[21] Rejecting familial security as the means but retaining individual freedom and fulfillment as the ends, they carried forward the quest for liberation through politics as well as their personal lives. When a powerful backlash emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in reaction to the assault on containment, the rhetoric of the cold war revived, along with a renewed call for the "traditional" family as the best means to achieve national and personal security. These tensions fueled the culture wars that continued to the end of the cold war and beyond, until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, diverted Americans' attention to a new crisis.

   The story of domestic containment—how it emerged, how it affected the lives of those who tried to conform to it, and how it ultimately unraveled—will help us come to terms with ourselves and the era in which we live. In the postwar years, Americans found that viable alternatives to the prevailing family norm were virtually unavailable. Because of the political, ideological, and institutional developments that converged at the time, young adults were indeed homeward bound. But they were also bound to the home. The chapters that follow explore the reasons why, in the cold war era, it was the vision of the sheltered, secure, and personally liberating family on which homeward-bound Americans set their sights.