Lillian Rubin, Families On The Fault Line Essay, Research Paper

Lillian Rubin’s book, Families on the Fault Line, goes directly to the experience of everyday people and shows how the connection between economic decline and racial tension is continuously reinvented in America. She interviewed 162 families in all, mostly white, but including a substantial number of blacks, Latinos, and Asians, many from families she had kept in touch with since first interviewing them for her book Worlds of Pain, written about twenty years before. Rubin’s compassion for her subjects’ situation is clear, and this, added to her training as a psychotherapist, enables her to gain their confidence and draw out the truth about their experiences and their attitudes. She argues that the myth of America as a classless society keeps the problems of working-class families from being acknowledged and dealt with, and that, for these invisible” Americans, the shrinking economy has brought fear and anger, hopelessness and helplessness. Rubin sees an shocking rise in white ethnicity as frustrated white working-class families seek to place the blame for their problems on ethnic minorities–an attitude, she claims, that has been fostered by national administrations as a way of deflecting anger about the state of the economy and the declining quality of urban life. Rubin warns that failure to recognize the suffering of the working-class family and to seek solutions for its problems jeopardize “the very life of the nation itself . The most striking part of this book is the evidence of the political machine that practically invites racism and other divisive forces into the situation. Families on the Fault Line contributes to a broader understanding of the pressures on the family through the case studies that Rubin demonstrates by using real people to illustrate these many different areas of class, race, and ethnicity in the reading.

There are many current pressures on the family both internal and external.

The make-up of the family is not as “cut and dry” as it once was. The nuclear family is dead and what has replaced it has put all old theories about the family to the test. One major change has been evolving in recent years is the rise of the dual-earner family. Accompanying this dual-earning family change, the women s position in the family has been changed radically from that of one hundred years ago. There are specifically three important issues have been raised about women s position in the family. This first issue is that the development of gender inequality within the family is a result of the changing economy. The second issue is that capitalism being the only form of economy we are familiar with pushes for the working of every family member to create a strong economy. Lastly, the evolution of the family dispersed from economic development and instead become a more social issue. Because the position of women in the family has been so altered from past history, projections made, even forty years ago are increasingly wrong. Though, even with the changing structure of the family the economic labor power has not significantly increased. The role of housewife in the post-industrial age was just as important to women as today s dual earning household. The housewife was the counter-part to the husband s role of breadwinner. It was the wife who cleaned the husband s clothes, prepared his food and provided emotional support, without which he could not fulfill his role as breadwinner. With the evolution of the labor market and capitalist economy with the ever-increasing consumption of the family unit the homemaker was called to enter the workforce. Having to cope with the traditional stresses of the household chores and stresses of working outside the home, the women are facing more pressures than ever before and it is taking a toll on the family.

The economy plays an important role in families and another facet of the

economic family unit is reproduction. The goal of the family unit is to produce children, which in turn expands the labor force, which creates a larger economic base. Corporations produce wealth in the form of goods and services and a can last well beyond an individual life span. Capitalism is a powerful institution with holds on the economy, political state and family as well. The payment of wages allows the corporations to grow and continue to produce goods and exploit workers. In the modern era, most families are not units of production and consumption, mainly just consumption. They do not accumulate wealth, but simply take the wage and spend it on commodities that satisfy their needs. Families have a limited life span, related to the cycle of growth and decline of individual family members. The family, unless it has property, will inevitably decline to be replaced or reborn in new formations down the generations. Wages earned allow families to survive and reproduce labor power, in the form of children. It is the children that will outlive the family and become the new labor power. The economy and household/family are separated easily in the modern era. As already stated above, the family of today is primarily a consumption unit, while the economic state is filled with units of production and consumption as well, it produces wages and employment. The family s main tie to the economic state is through labor power. A very low level of division of labor characterizes domestic labor. The same person (usually the housewife) does a range of activities, which, in the social spheres are carried out by specialists. Some examples of this are catering, education and health businesses. Secondly the products of domestic labor do not have to be sold on the market for the labor to be recognized at useful. This makes domestic labor a non-market production. Lastly the labor-power is not offered on a market and therefor makes up non-waged labor (housework is non-paid).

According to what has been discussed so far the definition of a family

would be a non-capitalist unit in which the maintenance and reproduction of labor power takes place. The Webster s Dictionary describes a family as “a group of related things or people”. Because the governments definition of family lets several groups that may still be considered families “slip through the cracks”, this gives bargaining power to the family unit yet again to change government regulation. One aspect of the political sphere that the family continually challenges is gender equality. Starting with the latter part of the nineteenth century where waves of feminist protest began throughout the western world. Women organized in groups starting at the family level and gaining support from other women s groups. One of the first cases early feminists argued before the government was their collective right to vote. The women s movement appeared to lose its momentum after women gained the right to vote. But although women s groups were no longer held together by a single goal. They continued to fight for women s rights on several fronts. However, it wasn t until the 1960 s that the movement regained its previous strength. Women in families are not the only ones who have argued with the political sphere and won some political rights. Some Gay families or same-sex couples have won the right to adopt children and in some states to get married.

The Modern family depends heavily on the all the institutions of society for

support. Where in the past the family was independent, now it needs the bonds created through long access to each sphere either political or economic. The labor power generated by the family unit gives it he bargaining power to compete head to head with the ever growing and dominant labor market and government bureaucracy. But because the family is the smallest group and is based on individual consumption it can seem over-taxed when dealing with mighty corporations and large political states. However, in the global market place the power lies in the hands of those that control the labor and the consumption. Currently, the family institution relies on the economy and political state, but as the bargaining for labor power continues the family is emerging as the dominant force. As new evolutions of families are being allowed to participate in our culture, more power will create more labor and more reproduction. It is a basic fact that history repeats itself, maybe the family will gain the dominant role it had before the industrial revolution and mercantilism.

We live in difficult times in a country that is divided by class, race, and social conception. The intense pain that many American families are living with today, and the anger they feel, won t be softened by a retreat to inaccurate assurance and easy promises.