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# DIVERGING DESTINIES: HOW CHILDREN ARE FARING UNDER THE SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION\*

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*In this article, I argue that the trends associated with the second demographic transition are following two trajectories and leading to greater disparities in children's resources. Whereas children who were born to the most-educated women are gaining resources, in terms of parents' time and money, those who were born to the least-educated women are losing resources. The forces behind these changes include feminism, new birth control technologies, changes in labor market opportunities, and welfare-state policies. I contend that Americans should be concerned about the growing disparity in parental resources and that the government can do more to close the gap between rich and poor children.*

**D**uring the first demographic transition, which began in the early 1800s and continued into the early 1900s in Western industrialized countries, mortality and fertility declined and investment in child quality grew (Coale and Watkins 1986; Notestein 1945). For children, the decline in mortality meant fewer parents lost through death, and the decline in fertility meant fewer siblings with whom to share resources. The growing concern about child quality meant increased investment in public education. Children growing up in 1950 were more likely than those growing up 100 years earlier to live in traditional nuclear families, to be in good health, and to attend school. These changes were society wide, with rich and poor children benefiting alike.

How children are faring under the second demographic transition, which began around 1960, is less certain. The primary trends of the second transition include delays in fertility and marriage; increases in cohabitation, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing; and increases in maternal employment (Lesthaeghe 1995; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988; Mason and Jensen 1995). Some of these trends, such as delays in childbearing, imply gains in parental resources, while others, like divorce and nonmarital childbearing, imply losses. Still others, like increasing maternal employment, suggest both.

Many scholars have argued that the trends associated with the second demographic transition are all of one piece and are fueled by a common factor, such as modernization or women's growing economic independence.<sup>1</sup> They have also contended that people, especially women, who are in the vanguard of change are the most advantaged and best able to deal with its consequences.<sup>2</sup> Much of the general public shares the idea that

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1. Lesthaeghe (1995) provided an excellent review of the different explanations of the trends, including both economic and ideological explanations.

2. This argument was true of the first transition, and it is implied by theories of the second transition, including those that emphasize ideational change (Aries 1980) and those that emphasize economic change