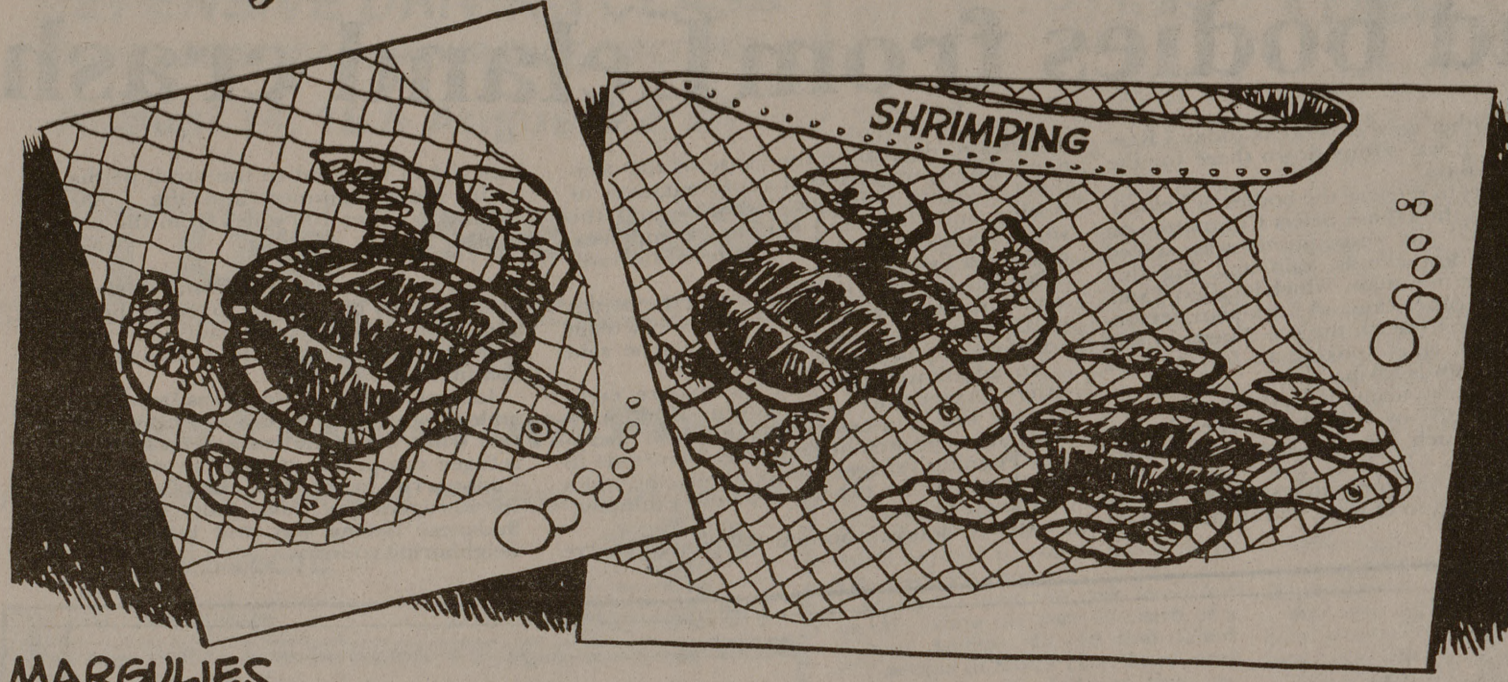


OPINION

Newly Released Hostage Photos:



MARGULIES
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Assessing blame for family disintegration

The graphic "sociological" stories we keep reading about the misery caused by crack addiction — about the disintegration of the family and of the social fabric, sometimes complete with charts and statistics — leave out only one thing — the misery was there before the crack. It is not new and it is not caused by crack. And it is not caused by the "deterioration of the family." It is only made worse.

The press critic Alexander Cockburn wrote, "Amid the ravages of the 1982-3 recession in Reagan's first term, it did not escape the attention of news editors that there were a lot of needy and desperate people about. By 1982 black unemployment approached 20 percent. The reasons for this were as obvious as the misery such numbers implied. Reagan's agenda, scarcely secret, was to lower the costs of production and redistribute wealth upward."

"At the end of 1983, the *Baltimore Evening Sun* studied black families for three months and confided to its readers, 'state and local officials describe the breakdown in black family structure as one of the biggest and most perplexing problems confronting the city.' Nowhere in any of the articles, was there a mention of economic crisis, corporate policies, management agendas or their effects on the poor."

Instead of addressing the fundamental causes of black poverty, from which the great complex of social problems flow, the press, encouraged by the rhetoric of the Reagan years, has instead chosen to focus on "the disintegration of the black family" and on those bootstrap enthusiasts given to announcing that blacks will have to solve their own problems. When Moynihan first wrote his report on the black family, black unemployment was 8.1 percent. At the end of Reagan's two terms, after the great economic recovery he and the Republicans so endlessly extol, black unemployment was 13 percent. According to their figures.

As Lee Atwater knows better than anyone else, the political effect of talking about black problems is death. "We're tired of hearing about it," is the first response; "After all we've done for them," is the second.

"All we've done for them" is one of the saddest chapters in our country's modern history — lets just pass over slavery and a hundred years of legal repression. Republicans have managed to



Molly Ivins

Syndicated Columnist

convince a great many Americans that Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was a failure — Ronald Reagan once claimed it had actually hurt the poor. In fact, it worked. The Great Society programs did exactly what they were intended to do — hunger went down, illiteracy went down, poverty went down, malnutrition went down. And those programs were in place, being run by people who believed in them, for less than three years. Richard Nixon came in in 1968 and began the job of dismantling those programs. Reagan completed the task.

Of course the War on Poverty was not as successful as Johnson promised it would be: It was so hopelessly embedded in the character of that most Texian of presidents to exaggerate, to over-promise, to blow-hard — there was no way he could deliver on all those promises. And for that, they declared the War on Poverty a failure, said after three years of trying that it was hopeless and we ought to call it off. And now they blame the poor for being where they are, as though corporate and government policies aimed at perpetuating their poverty didn't exist. (Not to mention the minor matter of the theft of money from HUD intended to help build housing for the poor. It used to be that "poverty pimps" was a phrase applied to blacks who got jobs administering poverty money and who managed to take off with some of it; turns out the real pimps are people like James Watt.)

For the white press to discuss crack and the "disintegration of the black family" without the economic context of what has been happening in the ghetto is as deeply racist and irresponsible as anything we have ever done in our entirely undistinguished record in this area.

For a lone, noble exception to all this, I commend to anyone interested the July 24 issue of *The Nation* magazine, now available in special bulk orders. *The Nation*, this country's oldest liberal magazine, turned its pages for that issue over to a group of guest editors, all

black women, and the result is "Black Women Speak: Scapegoating the Black Family," an extraordinary special report by those most directly involved and from whom we so seldom hear. Nobody knows better than these women why black families are in trouble. Among other organizations that should be ordering the issue in bulk for their staffs are American newspapers and broadcasters.

The people most responsible for the uglification of American politics — the fine folks who brought you Willie Horton as a national issue — are now about to start using crack and the fear of crime as a replacement for one of the longest-running fear-mongering scams. According to the polls, Americans no longer have a uniformly negative view of the Soviet Union, and so the Republican Party strategists, who for years have gotten away with beating on Democrats for being "soft on defense" and "not tough with the commies," are planning to replace that old dog with a new one — "soft on crime." They plan to whip the fear of crack and crime into a great lather and then accuse the Democrats of being "soft."

Ray Marshall, the Texan who served as Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Labor, said, "We know that a full-employment policy would be good business. With a jobs program, \$15 billion could save the federal government \$30 billion. We've demonstrated that in the past. The main reason we don't do it now is the neo-conservative mythology that it didn't work. The contrary evidence is overpowering."

"We should not let people make abstractions of human suffering . . . Rather, what we should fear most, as citizens of the richest nation on earth, is the judgment of the world community and of history that we were unwilling to be good and faithful stewards of our resources, that we deliberately decided not to use our resources to try to improve the human condition."



To skate or not to skate

Speeding quietly past in green scrubs and a lab coat with a stethoscope in the pocket, Dr. Hal Doerr glides home on his skates, leaving a little of the operating room behind with each step.

The second-year resident with Baylor College of Medicine says the mile-long trip to and from the Texas Medical Center helps take his mind off work.

But each time he rolls into the street, he's breaking the law.

In Houston, street skating is a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by a \$200 maximum fine.

In the past two years, Houston police have started cracking down on skaters, backed up by a 47-year-old law. Skaters argue they are entitled to the same routes as bicyclists, and that cracked and broken sidewalks pose a greater danger than automobiles.

Neither fines nor city council negotiations have resolved the issue. (Many cities, such as Dallas, have similar ordinances, while other places, such as Atlanta, Ga., Venice Beach, Calif., and New York take a more tolerant approach.) Local skaters want the ordinance overturned; police are tired of seeing the law broken. Some skaters feel they are being singled out for harassment; police say it's their job to ticket offenders.

In an effort to smooth matters, state Rep. Debra Danburg, D-Houston, introduced a statewide roller-skating safety bill (House Bill 1412) in March. A skater herself, Danburg sees no reason to keep people from coasting in the streets. The bill was approved in mid-May by the House, and would give skaters the same rights and responsibilities as bicyclists.

Meanwhile, the controversy simmers.

Roller skaters have long been a part of Houston's inner-city landscape. Most noticeable are the Urban Animals, a loose group of several hundred people who glide through downtown late at night, playing hockey and socializing. Their appearance may alarm the uninitiated — a hodgepodge of hippie, Hell's Angels and punk rocker wear that usually includes a black T-shirt emblazoned by the winged Animal logo. The Animals themselves enjoy a renegade image, but on the average they are upstanding citizens ranging in their professions from bartenders to doctors, artists to accountants. Members of The Animals celebrate their 10th anniversary this summer.

The Montrose Skate Shop on Stanford serves as an Urban Animals headquarters and field command station for the skating controversy. There, shop manager and Urban Animal Jim Sherman keeps abreast of the situation, informing fellow skaters of developments.

Leigh Hopper
The Houston Post

Houston police officer John neaux, however, sees the major skaters as a nuisance. He is their foe, having issued most of the citing skaters' increased number, lessness, flagrant disregard for the and complaints from merchants son. He hopes the law stays intact.

He says skaters can't see traffic ing behind them and are vulnerable drunk drivers or police cars in speed chases. He says skates don't any brakes or allow much control, doesn't pose a problem for the athlete, but "99 percent aren't professionals, they're amateurs."

As for enhancing the city's image, bineaux believes skaters do just the posite, frightening tourists who gangs of "30 or 40 skaters at a time

Sherman, who has been ticketed (but got off when the officer didn't attend his hearing), says his beef is with police but with the city council's lack of action.

He says skaters went before the council twice in '87 to explain their ers have a spotless safety record and an important part of revitalizing downtown Houston—but to no avail. The ficial stance remains that skaters adhere to the same safety standards as pedestrians.

Not only is that opinion misguided, Sherman argues, but ticketing skaters at night gives outsiders the impression that Houston's police force is zealous. He estimates skaters' time in court cost the city more and money than the issue is worth.

City councilman-at-large Jim Greenwood views skaters in a positive light but thinks boundaries must be set. He remembers seeing two skaters on a sidewalk in downtown Houston being pulled along by Great Danes.

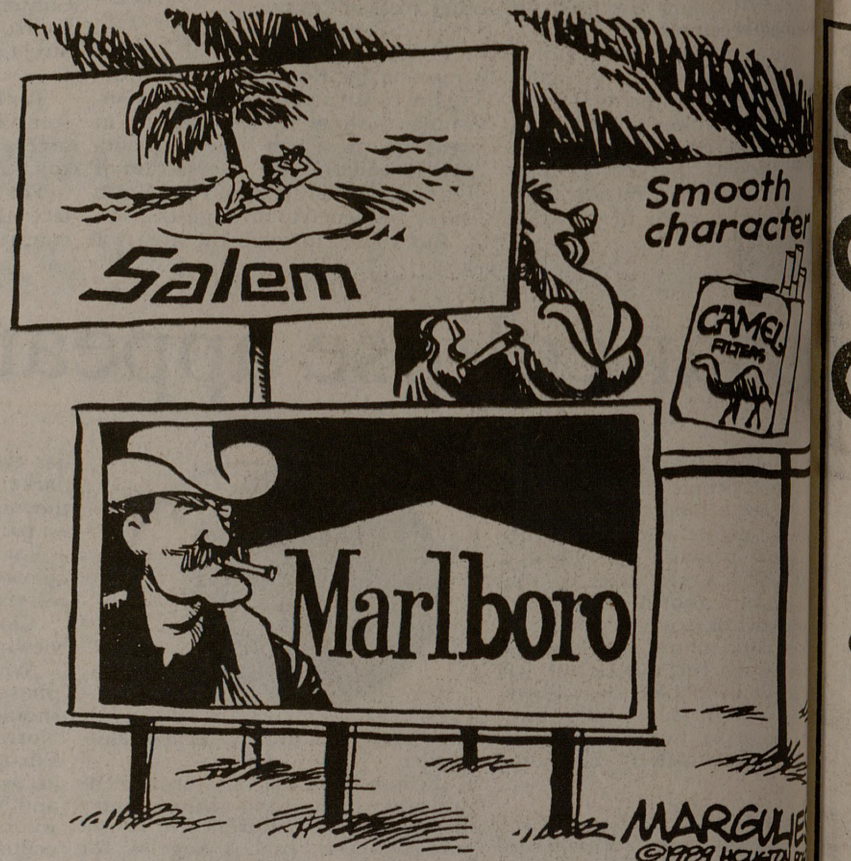
Skaters don't understand why this is a problem.

Babineaux says legalized street skating would be disastrous and that the roller-skating safety bill is "a time waiting to happen."

"If you give these people the right to skate, they'll abuse it," he said. "They'll be on the freeway."

Skaters believe Houston has everything to gain by legalizing street skating. Many point to California's Venice Beach as an example, a skating capital of the world where the sport gives the economy a boost through tourism and equipment rental and sales (A nice pair of skates can easily run \$400.)

Leigh Hopper writes for The Houston Post



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