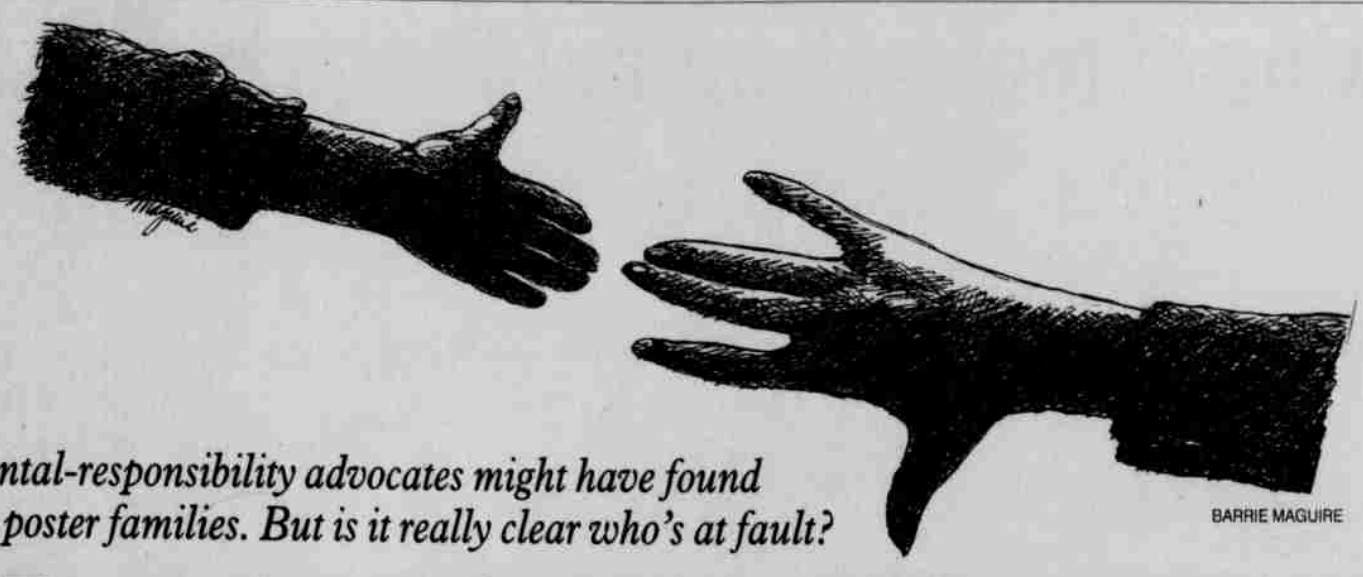


BARRIE MAGUIRE

Parental-responsibility advocates might have found their poster families. But is it really clear who's at fault?

When teens become killers

By Ellen Goodman

Now the Bible is turned on its head: The sins of the sons are visited upon the fathers.

In the days since the Littleton massacre, the country's eyes have turned to the families of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. We've racked up the evidence — a handwritten diary, a sawed-off shotgun on the dresser, bomb makings in the garage — and asked: Where were the parents? The angry sheriff said, "Parents should be accountable for their kids' actions." The governor said, "Charges will and should be filed." The attorney general talked about criminal liability.

The President advanced a gun control package that would make parents outlaws if their children commit crimes.

At last the advocates of parental-responsibility laws seem to have found their poster parents. The Most Wanted parents now are the Klebolds and the Harrises — parents whose unfathomable grief is laced with the arsenic of unending "whys." How reassuring it is to point a finger at Wayne and Kathy Harris, Thomas and Susan Klebold, as proof that we would have known — wouldn't we? How easy to cast them as stunningly, aberrantly "irresponsible" rather than listen to the minister who buried Dylan: "He was their son — but they don't know the kid who did this."

But how do we judge the "crime" of irresponsibility? In the last few years, a wave of laws have been passed to hold parents legally culpable for the actions of their children. These laws were born, understandably, in despair about parents who willfully excuse themselves from the work they give birth to.

A Michigan couple was fined for failing to supervise their drug-using, church-robbing, one-boy crime wave. A Florida mother was sentenced to probation because three of her five children refused to go to school. In Illinois, the parents of a 13-year-old sued the parents of a 17-year-old who murdered their daughter. In Louisiana and California, parents can go to jail if their kids fall in with gangs. Thousands have been fined, sued, or sentenced to counseling or jail.

But the truth is that in many cases, it is not at all clear whether the parents were ineffectual or evil, gave up control, or had it wrested away by their teenagers. Some didn't try, but others, like the mother of the truants, said, "You know, you can try like hell and fail." In the wake of this shooting, how many parents have breached the forbidden threshold to their teenagers' rooms, searching the drawers, the closets, opening the diaries, checking the computer "bookmarks" and "favorites." Suspicion is the order of the post-Littleton day, and distrust has been re-validated as the responsible act.

What greater punishment is there than the life sentence of pain that these parents will have to endure?

But is there anyone who doesn't know the line that we walk as parents of teenagers? How can you screw up raising a teenager? Let me count the ways. By being too authoritarian, too lax, too intrusive, too removed, by treating them like children, by assuming they're adults, by trusting them, by mistrusting them.

Getting into a teenager's mind is like spelunking down a cave without a miner's light. It's a wonder more of us don't get lost.

The Klebolds and the Harrises were not Fagin-like adults who set up their sons in the business of murder. We hold them responsible rather for what they did not know and did not do. For the diary, the Web sites, the trench coats, the arsenal. Where were the parents?

But as the days go on, we get another view that seems more complicated than criminal. A judge remembers that when the boys were in trouble, the two dads came to court, set up curfews, took control. A Little League coach describes the Harrises this way: "Eric's parents are what we could call dream parents." A pastor portrays the Klebolds as "hard-working, very intelligent."

As for warning signs, put these beside the trench coat. In the last weeks of their lives, Eric was trying to enlist in the Marines, and Dylan had gone with his father to place a deposit on a college room. As Thomas Klebold told his pastor, "I thought I was ready to let him go — he was a finished product." I remember my own fury at other parents who put my daughter at risk by their laxity. I also remember what my parents knew of my inner life at 17 — absolutely nothing.

Parental responsibility, neighbor responsibility, school responsibility, peer responsibility? Do we criminalize parents as if they were the sole owners of an 18-year-old? Before we prosecute parents for the sins of their children, I have a question. Tell me what punishment the law can administer that's greater than a life sentence of pain for families who will forever ask themselves, "Why?"

Ellen Goodman is a columnist for the Boston Globe.

Mayoral race invigorates city high school students

By Phyllis Kaniss

During this mayoral campaign, one segment of Philadelphia's population has become politically energized as never before, examining each candidate's positions, hanging on every word in debates.

And most of them can't even vote on May 18.

Public high school students from throughout the city have been bucking every trend in the country by bringing the campaign into their classrooms — proving that, with a little help, young people can not only get turned on to politics, but also become impassioned and informed citizens.

The help has come from a project called Student Voices, put together by the Annenberg Public Policy Center in response to the growing political disengagement by this country's youth. A recent survey by the National Association of Secretaries of State showed that only 32 percent of Americans aged 18-24 voted in the last presidential election, and less than 20 percent in last year's congressional elections.

The survey found that young people are not voting because they are not learning about civics in school, not discussing politics with their parents, and not becoming informed about candidates and issues. The youths also said they were turning off to politics because candidates didn't address issues they care about.

Student Voices set out to tackle some of these issues. Thirty-three high school classes are participating. Each is provided with a computer hooked up to the Internet to research the campaign. Students have also been encouraged to talk to family and community members about issues that concern them — and to bring those concerns to the candidates and the public.

Chances are you have seen some of the students during the campaign: giving interviews to neighborhood newspapers such as the Chestnut Hill Local or South Philly Review or to radio station WHYY (90.9 FM); writing opinion pieces for the Philadelphia Tribune; querying candidates on the Saturday morning newscast on WCAU-10 or critiquing responses in a Candidates Forum on WPVI-6.

An innovative Web site, offering one-stop shopping for political information, has been specially designed for the project by Philadelphia Online. The site allows students to read position papers and biographical information on candidates' Web sites, monitor daily campaign coverage from The Inquirer and Daily News, and look up past stories. Face-to-face contact with the candidates has made all the difference for many students. To the surprise of many cynics, the candidates have not laughed at our requests to spend scarce time with teen non-voters. Instead, each one has recognized the importance of encouraging the city's youths to become involved in the political process, and each has participated in one or another Student Voices event.

The students have asked tough, well-researched questions. They listen politely to proposals for new programs and then ask where the funds would come from. No mistake: These students care about the future of their city and want specific answers.

But the candidates have also been impressive. No stock stump speeches here. Instead, they slip into the role of teacher when talking to students, working hard to communicate what they think can be done to help the city. They encourage youths to stick with their education and vote when they turn 18.

This week, see for yourself. Visit the Student Voices Web site (www.citizenvoices.com/students) and see how voters of the future may inform themselves about campaigns. And tune in to the Pennsylvania Cable Network at 6 p.m. tonight through Thursday (10 p.m. on Friday) to watch unedited sessions of candidates responding to student questions.

What you see may just help you cast your vote come May 18. It may also make you feel a little more optimistic about Philadelphia's future.

Phyllis Kaniss, author of "The Media and the Mayor's Race," directs Student Voices at the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania.

Nixon, Kissinger: Foreign policy, diplomacy never the same again

By Alvin S. Felzenberg



Nixon and Kissinger. They seemed an unlikely pair. They were as different as they were alike.

Richard Nixon was the son of a streetcar motorman turned small-town grocer. His mother baked goods the store sold and took in washing. As a boy, Nixon would lie awake listening to train whistles across the orange groves of Yorba Linda, Calif. He dreamed of traveling to far-off places.

Henry Kissinger immigrated to the United States when he was 15. His German-Jewish immigrant parents fled Nazi Germany in 1938. Kissinger's father became a bookkeeper in Manhattan. Kissinger's mother cleaned houses and started a catering business.

Nixon came out of a small Quaker college in Whittier, Calif. Kissinger became a star on the Harvard faculty. Nixon was shy and reserved, Kissinger outgoing and gregarious. Both served their country in its last epic war, Nixon in the South Pacific, Kissinger in Europe.

Couples

Standout pairs who embody the 20th century.

Kissinger rose to power through his brilliance and careful cultivation of powerful benefactors. His career skyrocketed when he came into the orbit of that renowned collector of art, ideas and brains, Nelson Rockefeller.

Nixon pushed himself to the top with his intelligence and understanding of human nature. He outraged the liberal establishment when he acted on evidence that diplomat Alger Hiss was a Soviet spy. Twice, Nixon persuaded an ambivalent Dwight Eisenhower to keep him on as his running mate. Nixon confounded his critics when he engineered his election as president after a hairbreadth loss to John F. Kennedy in 1960 and failure to win election as governor of California two years later.

Nixon and Kissinger came together in the fall of 1968, after Nixon was elected president. Together; these self-made outsiders forged one of the most successful partnerships in American political history.

Nixon devised his foreign policy. National Security Adviser and eventual Secretary of State Kissinger implemented it. The partnership rested on a mutual regard. Kissinger saw Nixon as "a man of vision and strength"; Nixon said Kissinger could outlast anybody in negotiations.

This synergy of strategist (Nixon) and tactician (Kissinger) produced its greatest success when the two normalized relations with China. While out of office, Nixon had published an article in Foreign Affairs cautioning against continued exclusion of China from the "family of nations." Kissinger later conducted secret negotiations with the People's Republic through its ally Pakistan. He shaped the carefully crafted Shanghai communique, issued at the end of Nixon's historic journey.

Nixon and Kissinger's approach also bore fruit in the Middle East. During the Yom Kippur War, Nixon ordered airlifted to Israel "anything that would fly." Sensing Anwar Sadat wanted the Soviets out of the region, Nixon became an "honest broker." Kissinger became famous for flying from country to country, inventing "shuttle diplomacy" and beginning what became the present peace process.

With the Soviet Union, Nixon and Kissinger produced in 1972 the first strategic arms limitation agreement between the then-two superpowers. As the United States became engulfed in Southeast Asia, the Soviets began increasing their nuclear and conventional arsenals.

Nixon saw detente as realism. To Kissinger, it represented balance-of-power politics.

The pair's one intractable problem was Vietnam. How they ended the war they inherited remains the most controversial of their legacies. Nixon's "peace with honor" entailed replacing American forces with adequately trained Vietnamese. He believed that massive bombing, mining of harbors and roads, and pursuing enemy troops and supplies into neighboring Cambodia would prod concessions out of Hanoi.

But the plan presupposed Nixon's continuation in office, presumed a certainty after his landslide re-election. Then came Watergate. As Nixon's powers diminished, Hanoi disregarded the Paris accords.

As an elder statesman, Nixon regained some of the prestige he lost when he resigned the presidency. His books, articles and speeches helped shape the domestic and especially foreign policy agenda for the next two decades.

Kissinger continues to exert influence. His final volume of memoirs, his 12th book, assures that historians will reckon with his version of events — and with Nixon's.

Couples such as Nixon and Kissinger would be a rarity in any century. The two left indelible marks on the 20th.

Tomorrow: Acel Moore; David Boldt's "Alarms and Diversions"; Anniversary of the Dayton accords.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures about the American presidency.

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