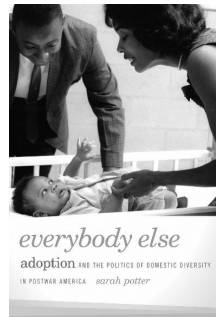
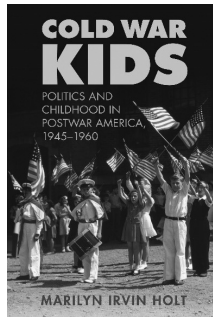
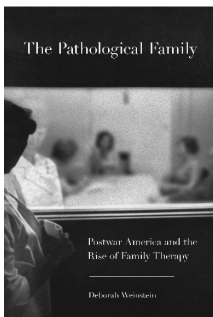


Review Essay

The Personal and Political Postwar American Family

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THE PATHOLOGICAL FAMILY: Postwar America and the Rise of Family Therapy. By Deborah Weinstein. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2013.
COLD WAR KIDS: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945–1960. By Marilyn Irvin Holt. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas. 2014.
EVERYBODY ELSE: Adoption and the Politics of Domesticity in Postwar America. By Sarah Potter. Athens: The University of Georgia Press. 2014.

The proposition of 1960s radical feminism that the personal is (always) political notwithstanding, how the relationship between the private and the public is understood and experienced is shaped by particular historical conditions and changes over time. Undergirded by this premise, Marilyn Irvin Holt's *Cold War Kids*, Deborah Weinstein's *The Pathological Family*, and Sarah Potter's *Every-*

body Else are all concerned with mapping the shifting conceptual and material boundaries between the family and society from 1945 to 1960 in the United States. Collectively examining the ideas, initiatives, and experiences of a wide array of historical actors—from federal policy makers to scientific experts to adoptive and foster parents from diverse class and racial backgrounds—these three historians convincingly contend that the supposedly private realms of childhood and the family attained heightened public and political significance in the postwar period, with important ramifications for both family life and American politics that have continued to resonate into our own time.

Cold War Kids thoroughly documents the growing involvement by the federal government in fostering the health, education, and welfare of American children from across the social spectrum during the fifteen years following World War II. Although local and state governments began to assume some responsibility for children's welfare beginning in the nineteenth century and federal policy makers expressed interest in children's issues during the Progressive era, the 1920s, and the New Deal years, legislation addressing child labor and the needs of dependent children targeted only the most socially and economically marginalized. It was not until after World War II, Marilyn Holt explains, that the federal government "began to consider America's youth as one collective group" (8), thereby marking the postwar era as a crucial "turning point" (2) in the history of childhood. Indeed, in contrast to those historians of childhood and of twentieth-century American politics who have characterized the postwar years as a period of inertia in between the governmental welfare activism of the Progressive era/New Deal, on the one hand, and the Great Society, on the other, Holt reveals the post-World War II years to be "a pivotal period in which the federal government's role in issues related to America's youth was hotly debated, periodically challenged, sometimes championed, and slowly expanded" (2–3).

Through her examination of presidential speeches, records from congressional debates and investigations, and reports issued by White House conferences and presidential commissions, Holt demonstrates that Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, members of their administrations, members of Congress, and public servants in an array of federal agencies became prominent participants in the growing public discourse about children and family life that characterized the postwar years. Federal government officials were motivated to speak up and act on behalf of children by a whole array of developments, sensibilities, and concerns familiar to scholars of the postwar period, including: longings for familial and social stability following the Depression and World War II, confidence in the booming economy, anxieties about the survival of democracy and capitalism spurred by the Cold War, angst about rising rates of working women and juvenile delinquency, the prevalence of racial discrimination and the burgeoning civil rights movement, a national housing crisis, and the sheer numbers of young people in the population putting demands on educational and welfare systems that families, local communities, and state governments could not meet on their own. Although their views were never monolithic or uncontested, federal govern-

ment officials shared with one another and the wider public the conviction that young people were essential to preserving a “democratic, economically sound, and secure America” (153) and that as such, “society had a responsibility to help them along the way” (148). “As a result,” Holt contends, “the growing-up years of the baby boomers and teenagers of the era were influenced in innumerable ways by public discourse, political ideology, Cold War rhetoric, and the policies of presidential administrations” (8).

Holt’s examination of the expanding federal government engagement with issues related to child welfare begins with an analysis of the two postwar White House Conferences on Children and Youth, held in 1950 and 1960. The first such conference had been sponsored by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 and was followed by three others prior to World War II. Drawing and building on the growing cultural recognition of “children as beings with rights” (21), the postwar conferences also signaled a paradigm shift by advocating a greater role for the federal government in securing those rights not just for the most disadvantaged, but for *all* children. The wide range of topics addressed at the conferences focused on both entrenched social problems and concerns specific to the postwar period. Perhaps most notably, both postwar conferences paid particular attention to children’s personal happiness and psychological well-being. Clearly influenced by the growing therapeutic ethos promulgated by midcentury psychologists and child-rearing experts, participants at the White House Conferences linked children’s personality formation and mental health to victory in the Cold War. Thus, according to the members of the Executive Committee for the 1950 White House Conference, only “emotionally sound” children would grow up to become the “efficient workers, clear thinkers, [and] loyal citizens” (24) the nation needed to stave off the threat of communism and preserve the American way of life. Virtually all other aspects of children’s lives were studied, analyzed, discussed, and debated at the postwar conferences, including the threat of nuclear war, the influence of television, the problem of racial discrimination, the national housing shortage, the challenges to family life posed by divorce and working mothers, and the implications of the baby boom. The next step was for participants to find ways to “turn talk into action” (43) by spurring change at the federal, state, and local levels. Some proposals, such as the call from the 1950 conference to end segregation, were met with opposition by some conference participants, as well as powerful resistance from state and local authorities. On other issues affecting children’s lives raised at the conferences, such as the lack of day care for working families, the federal government remained largely silent and refused to advance a policy agenda. While concrete results from the discussions, pledges, and recommendations generated by the postwar White House conferences were often slow to materialize or never came to fruition at all, Holt concludes that the gatherings nonetheless played a vital role in establishing the federal government as a leading voice in the growing public conversation about children’s rights and welfare.

Subsequent chapters in *Cold War Kids* meticulously catalogue federal government efforts to assume greater responsibility for children in three key areas: education, children's health, and the problems of delinquent, dependent, and orphaned children. Of these issues, federal government involvement in education generated the most discussion and the most conflict within the federal government and with the wider public. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower repeatedly sought, albeit cautiously, to convince Congress to appropriate federal monies to address the problems of teacher shortages and limited classroom space, which were severely exacerbated by the baby boom. Their efforts were defeated by opponents who balked at the increase in the federal budget, railed against the federal government's intrusion in state and local affairs, and fretted that parochial schools either would or would not be included in publicly funded programs. Truman and Eisenhower met with more success when they could justify their proposed investments in education by claiming they were vital to national security. The Defense Area School Aid package, the National School Lunch Program, the Special Milk Program and, most famously, the National Defense Education Act considerably enlarged the federal government's role in public education, all in the name of winning the Cold War. "This was not funding for the love of learning or for the sake of a child's general education," Holt emphasizes. "It was a response to the threat of Soviet superiority" (80). Holt's recounting of the familiar story of federal government involvement in the battle over school desegregation takes on new meaning when placed in the wider context of concurrent contests over federal government engagement in education and children's welfare more generally. Here was another case of at once tentative and highly consequential federal action, which would, over time, come to fundamentally alter the educational expectations and experiences of children throughout the United States.

As was the case with education, it was not a new proposition that the government had some responsibility to address the problem of delinquency or alleviate the suffering of dependent and orphaned children. What *was* new at midcentury was the mounting attention by the federal government to these issues and, in the case of delinquency, the recognition that youthful deviance was not limited to the working class, but was a problem threatening all of America's children. Amidst the "chorus of opinions, commentary, and conjecture" (87) about delinquency in the postwar years, the federal government made its most important contributions by gathering and disseminating information about the incidence, causes, and implications of youthful misbehavior. The U.S. Children's Bureau and the Department of Justice compiled statistics on juvenile crime rates, Truman and Eisenhower supported the organization of national conferences on the issue, and the Senate convened hearings in 1953 to investigate the problem. The widely publicized congressional hearings fingered multiple causes for delinquency, among them poor parenting, bad neighborhoods, deficient schools, gangs, comic books, and rock and roll. Despite Eisenhower's subsequent requests for federal funding to combat the problem, however, Congress refused to allocate any money, preferring to leave both prevention and control in the hands of state and local agencies.

Nonetheless, the federal government's fostering of awareness of the problem of juvenile delinquency during the postwar years did lead to some self-regulation by the comic book industry, as well as contributed to the passage of the 1961 Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Control Act, which allotted \$10 million per year in federal grants for projects and programs developed at the state and local levels. In the case of dependent and orphaned children, the federal government acted through the Children's Bureau and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to promote foster care as an alternative to institutionalization and to press for stringent state guidelines for adoption. As a result of a good bit of political wrangling that was never far removed from the national preoccupation with the fight against communism, Congress also passed several laws intended to facilitate more international adoptions by increasing the number of "displaced" and "refugee" orphans admitted into the country. Ultimately, Holt concludes, the federal government response to the problems of delinquency and dependent children illustrates that "the best that presidential administrations and federal agencies could sometimes do was to keep a spotlight turned on an issue ... In place of concrete action, backed by federal funds, the government oftentimes took the position of standing vigilant, trying to keep problems from worsening while at the same time providing more youngsters with stability and the chance to have the kind of growing-up years America expected for its youth" (115-16).

Finally, the issue of children's health also became "a matter of national concern" (146) in the postwar years, although here, too, the nature and extent of federal government involvement in what was conventionally conceived of as the responsibility of the private family was fervently debated. Holt traces the political battles waged by the Truman administration in seeking to secure national health insurance, which included sacrificing a specialized bill that would have provided healthcare for all children under the age of eighteen. While national health insurance failed, other aspects of Truman's ambitious healthcare agenda did meet with some success, including the passage of legislation securing federal funding for hospital construction and mental health initiatives. Although Eisenhower firmly avowed his opposition to "socialized medicine" (127), he eagerly endorsed the Poliomyelitis Vaccination Assistance Act of 1955, which guaranteed that all children would receive the recently developed polio vaccine. He also became an outspoken advocate for physical fitness, spearheading the creation of the President's Council on Youth Fitness in 1956, whose mission was to foster public awareness and to encourage community programming promoting children's physical activity. The federal government also responded to intensifying public calls to regulate hazardous chemicals, including radioactive fallout, in food and milk supplies. Cold War rhetoric, intertwined with references to children's promise, figured amply into debates about federal government involvement in children's health, as when supporters of physical fitness made connections between children's sound bodies and the requirements of national citizenship. While many Americans remained unaware of the ways in which the federal government's health care, education, and welfare policies and programs

affected their lives and others disagreed about the merits of particular policies and the reach of federal power, Holt's comprehensive and cogent study shows that by the end of the 1950s, there emerged a growing consensus that children's well-being deserved some measure of protection by government representatives in Washington.

Along with federal officials, scientific experts also contributed to the intensifying public discourse about children and family life in the postwar United States. The pervasive influence on American society and culture of scientific knowledge and expertise about family life, as well as the consolidation of the therapeutic ethos, at midcentury has been well documented by historians. Surprisingly, Deborah Weinstein's *The Pathological Family* is the first to examine the interventions of the newly emerging field of family therapy in relation to these developments and as such makes a significant contribution to the scholarly literature on the intellectual and cultural history of the postwar era. "[T]he concurrent expansion of a therapeutic ethos and the growing fixation on the family in postwar America were deeply intertwined, not just parallel trends," Weinstein asserts. "The history of family therapy contributed to the synergy between these seemingly distinct domains" (3). Tracing the "distinctive but difficult transition" (11) by which family therapists and researchers came to identify the family as the "subject of clinical care," Weinstein provides much nuanced analysis of "the theoretical and methodological work entailed in moving from an individual to a familial view of pathology" (5). In so doing, she shows that the relationship between "the therapeutic and the political" was "complex" and "paradoxical" (176). On the one hand, family therapists reinforced prevailing conceptions of the family as a private entity by promulgating the view that family relations, dynamics, and conflicts should be understood and addressed in exclusively psychological terms. Family therapists, Weinstein explains, "attempted to use therapeutic means to address social ills ... while attributing those social ills to pathological families" (5). On the other hand, however, the theories and practices of family therapy can (and must) be understood as political enterprises in a variety of ways. Although they prided themselves on effecting a "radical break from mainstream psychiatry and psychoanalysis" (9), many family therapists implicitly and explicitly drew on and re-inscribed normative conceptions of the heterosexual white, middle-class nuclear family, thereby shoring up existing gender, class, and racial power relations. They also established their social relevance and significance by drawing connections between the psychological health of the family and the survival of democracy in a nation embroiled in the Cold War. At the same time, some family therapists took into consideration not only the family context, but larger cultural and social contexts as well in their determinations of diagnosis and treatment, while others openly wrestled with the relationship between their endeavors to reform family relationships and larger processes of social change.

Weinstein begins by tracing the origins of family therapy in earlier modes of scientific thought and practice and by situating its appearance as a new field in the 1950s within the particular social and cultural developments of the postwar

period. During the first half of the twentieth century, marriage counselors, child guidance and mental hygiene professionals, and psychoanalysts had all identified family relations and child rearing as crucial factors in fostering individual mental health and happiness, as well as social stability and progress, thereby laying the foundation for some of family therapy's core assumptions and goals. The myriad disruptions in family life precipitated by World War II, including geographic mobility, absent fathers, and working mothers, as well as the high rates of neuropsychiatric disorders diagnosed among America's soldiers, concomitantly initiated widespread cultural anxieties about the state of the family and hastened the rapid growth of psychoanalytic psychiatry as the postwar period began. With the advent of the Cold War, anthropologists and sociologists, public intellectuals, producers of popular culture, and federal government officials (as Holt shows), joined with psychologists and psychiatrists in highlighting the family as a central object of concern and in fashioning links between family well-being and the survival of democracy. Within this milieu, family therapy emerged as a distinctive clinical field within psychiatry. The founding generation of family therapists innovated a "heterogeneous, sometimes contradictory" (36) set of theoretical frameworks and therapeutic practices. For example, they differed on their degree of reliance on psychoanalytic tenets and methods and disagreed about what constituted a "normal" and "abnormal" family. What bound them together was their shared focus on "the family itself the locus of disease and the target of treatment" (26), their conception of the family as a dynamic and interactive "emotional system" (32), and their emphasis on contextual change. As therapists Jay Haley and Lynn Hoffman expounded: "[I]f the individual is to change, the context in which he lives must change. The unit of treatment is no longer the person ... it is the set of relationships in which the person is imbedded" (45–46).

Weinstein then examines the ways in which two key analytic categories of midcentury thought—the idea of "the system" and "the culture concept"—figured into "the mutual formation of the field of family therapy and its object of study, the family as a unit of disease and treatment" (48). At the forefront of conceptualizing the family as a system was the Palo Alto-based interdisciplinary research group headed by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, which convened in 1952. Composed of two anthropologists, two psychiatrists, and a communications analyst, the Palo Alto group initially set out to study "paradoxes in communication" (50), one component of which was to analyze communication by schizophrenic patients. Bateson and his colleagues drew on the ubiquitous interest in systems—broadly understood as "organized, complex entities with the capacity for self-regulation" (48)—that cut across such diverse domains as business management, sociology, cognitive psychology, computer science, molecular biology, and engineering at midcentury. They were also influenced by the related theory of "cybernetics," a set of ideas about "control and communication" (51) emerging from mathematics and engineering that was based on "a model of circular causality" (52). Informed by systems and cybernetic thinking, the Palo Alto group developed the double bind theory of schizophrenia, which posited that

“mothers played a role in causing schizophrenia through the paradoxical messages they communicated to their children during infancy” (55). The double bind theory proffered a view of the etiology and treatment of schizophrenia that shifted the focus from the body and mind of the individual to relationships among family members. The theory also re-inscribed normative conceptions of the heterosexual nuclear family and reinforced notions of the potentially pathological nature of mother love that predominated in midcentury scientific thought and popular culture. Most importantly, Weinstein argues, the Palo Alto group’s formulation of the double bind theory helped to lay the foundation for the new field of family therapy, with its “characterization of family life that focused on patterns of interaction” (81). Due in part to the interdisciplinary origins of the field, the cultural and political implications of the conception of the family as system were not homogeneous, but multivalent and contradictory. For example, notions of the family as a homeostatic system “suggested tightly organized family patterns centered around a well-established norm,” whereas conceptions of the family as an ecological system “suggested the importance of a wider environmental context for understanding and treating the family” (76). Thus, Weinstein contends, the theories and practices of family therapy offered myriad possibilities both for encouraging “social reform” and enacting “coercive control” (78).

As with the category of the system, the notion of culture became an essential analytic concept for family therapists as they endeavored to construct their new field and to delineate the family as their primary locus of study and treatment. Theorizing about the relationship among mental health, the family, and culture was not new in the postwar period, as child guidance and mental hygiene professionals of the early twentieth century had identified the family as “a crucial site of potential intervention in the adjustment between individual and community” (85). Many early family therapists drew on this basic proposition and also considered attention to the social setting in which the family was embedded to be a logical extension of their primary interest in the role of context in shaping psychopathology. Family therapists were also influenced by the culture and personality school of thought that had flourished across the social sciences beginning in the 1920s, which identified culture, rather than biological race, as the key factor in shaping human behavior. As with their deployment of systems thinking, family therapists’ “varied uses of culture also contained tensions and contradictions, most notably those between ... views of family therapy as a conservative force for maintaining the nuclear family and a progressive force for overcoming social inequality” (83). Thus, some family therapists fashioned themselves as “agent[s] of the culture” (105), whose primary function was to assist their patients with adjusting to the familial and social status quo. Others contended that the family “played a central role in perpetuating social ills” (93), such as anti-Semitism and racial prejudice, and envisioned remedies that pointed both “inward to mental life and outward to social life” (95). Still others incorporated the culture-of-poverty argument from anthropology and sociology to make a case for the part enacted by “disorganized, pathological families” (98) in contributing to poverty

and juvenile delinquency. Although culture-of-poverty explanations could be deployed for both progressive and conservative ends, many family therapists who utilized this framework endorsed “a multilevel intervention to change both family and societal systems” (101–02). Family therapists of the postwar era thus invoked the culture concept in a wide variety of ways, which held “political as well as psychological implications” (93) for the families they studied and treated, as well as for the society in which their nascent field was taking root.

Weinstein’s remaining chapters examine the research and treatment methodologies devised and utilized by family therapists. She analyzes the role of observation and place in three residentially based research projects and explores family therapists’ use of visual technologies, such as one-way mirrors and films, in professional training programs and their efforts to study and treat juvenile delinquency. This focus on tools and techniques both thoughtfully complements previous discussions of postwar family therapy’s theoretical formulations and provides fascinating insight into the epistemology and practice of scientific observation at this particular moment in history. In her investigation into the residential studies that relied on direct observation of family interactions, Weinstein finds that researchers wrestled with “a set of interrelated and unresolved tensions: between observation and participation, sight and insight, proximity and distance, natural and artificial, and nonintervention and experimentation” (112). They also struggled to discern the relationship between the pathological and the normal family. “At stake,” Weinstein concludes, “was not only observation as a research methodology or even epistemic category but also the very making of the family, through observation, into an object of study, unit of disease, and subject of therapeutic intervention” (112). Likewise, family therapists’ use of optic technologies for educational, therapeutic, and research purposes was also central to the process of the making of the family into a therapeutic subject and to the development of family therapy as a field. By concentrating on the “performative dimensions of family interactions as well as their own interventions,” family therapists effected a shift of orientation from “inner psychic conflicts” to “observable interactions among family members,” thereby helping to solidify the primary goal of family therapy as “changing family communication and structure rather than producing insight” (146–47). Weinstein also shows that as in the realm of theory, the “visions of family life” (145) produced through family therapy practices also entailed complex political implications. Thus, the “visibility and openness” supported by family therapy’s observational and visual techniques held “liberating potential” for seeing and enhancing family life in ways that promoted social equality. At the same time, however, “family therapists also disavowed their own techniques for disciplining observation in their claims of openness” (169–70).

If federal government officials and family therapists endowed childhood and the family with enhanced public, scientific, and political import in the decades following World War II, what did the family mean—personally and politically—to “everybody else?” This is the guiding question Sarah Potter

poses in her innovative study of ordinary men's and women's conceptions and experiences of family life during the postwar period. *Everybody Else* mines the case records from the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society (ICH & A) of over two hundred fifty working- and middle-class black and white couples that sought to adopt children or serve as foster parents in order to investigate "the role that nuclear family membership played in people's everyday lives during the baby boom" (2). Whereas previous historians of adoption have focused primarily on birth mothers and social workers, Potter turns her lens on the ideas, hopes, and struggles of those often ignored in the historical scholarship—the couples from diverse backgrounds who desired to become adoptive and foster parents. Beyond its contributions to the history of twentieth-century adoption and foster care, Potter's study compellingly illuminates "the changing political significance of the family for ordinary men and women" (2) during the postwar period. She joins Holt, Weinstein, and other recent historians who have challenged assumptions about the private, apolitical nature of the postwar family, showing that for many ordinary Americans at midcentury, the lines between "supposedly separate public and private spheres" (9) became increasingly blurred and interwoven. "For these individuals," she contends, "the family was hardly a refuge from politics; instead, the family was the lens through which they assessed opportunity, evaluated hardship, and coped with inequality. It was, in short, political" (6).

Part I of Potter's study examines the ways in which social workers and prospective adoptive and foster parents affiliated with the ICH & A reckoned with the idealized visions of family life propagated during the postwar period. In an era of intensive pronatalism in which the heterosexual nuclear family was heralded as the primary source of personal happiness, the fundamental marker of social adulthood, and a crucial measure of national belonging, adoption was increasingly pursued, accepted, and professionalized in the years following World War II as a way to secure the promises of normative domesticity for all Americans. The core imperative of adoption in this period, which was embraced by social workers and adoption applicants alike, was to create adoptive families that seemed to be formed by nature rather than by design, thereby rendering invisible any public involvement in the supposedly private sanctuary of family life. Such a move was achieved through the ubiquitous practice of "matching," by which children's race and ethnicity, intelligence, and religious background were correlated to those of their adoptive parents, as well as through the institution of more rigorous adoption and foster care application processes and the establishment of greater legal restrictions placed on adoption records. The irony, Potter points out, is that the emphasis on engineering, oversight, and regulation entailed in these practices "only reified the differentness of adoption," while also portending to unveil the "inextricability of public and private in postwar family life" (32), not only for adoptive families, but for all Americans.

The connections between public and private life that necessarily, if not always openly, marked the adoption process at midcentury had already begun to be interwoven in the lives of ordinary Americans as a result of the Great Depression,

the Great Migration, and World War II. Indeed, the vast majority of adoptive and foster care applicants in the ICH & A case records attested to the ways in which the challenges posed by these economic and social upheavals profoundly shaped their longing for and commitment to family life. Applicants and social workers also affirmed the family's central role in coping with the hardships wrought by these historical developments. Potter then goes on to show that with the advent of greater prosperity in the years following the war, the ties between "the household and the world outside its doors" (46) that had been forged out of the struggles of previous decades became even more intricately bound. She finds that during the postwar period, adoptive and foster care applicants and their social workers (and by extension a range of ordinary people) ascribed to a powerful "shared ideology" (49) that proffered the companionate nuclear family as the linchpin of personal happiness, purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. As the ICH & A case records reveal, these ideals were produced and reinforced not only in the realms of Cold War political rhetoric, scientific expertise, and popular culture, as other historians have argued, but were also circulated through the myriad "social, familial, and professional contexts" (49) of ordinary people's everyday lives. Those who did not meet the prescriptions of the family ideal thus faced considerable social pressure to conform to the dictates of domesticity or risk social exclusion by extended family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. In this very palpable way, ordinary people came to understand and experience family life not only as a matter of individual personal satisfaction, but also in terms of social belonging.

Although family ideals were widely shared among postwar Americans, expectations for and patterns of family life were fundamentally shaped by the era's unequal gender, race, and class relations. In Part II of *Everybody Else*, Potter examines the domestic obligations of men and women from diverse social groups, documenting the ways in which gender roles sharply diverged along lines of race and class. Her deft analysis of ICH & A case records in these chapters yields fascinating insights into how the family functioned as a site where social inequality was felt, assessed, and negotiated by ordinary men and women as they executed the responsibilities of everyday life. While both social workers and applicants acknowledged men's role as the chief family breadwinner, social workers were most concerned with gauging potential fathers' characters and personalities in order to determine how well they would fulfill their requisite emotional functions in the family. In contrast, applicants from all backgrounds stressed the links between fathers' economic and emotional duties, while African American and white working-class applicants also contended with the deeply entrenched influences of race and class on men's abilities to materially provide for and nurture their families. "Shared family ideals led to starkly different family experiences," Potter concludes, "which in turn informed men's assessment of the privileges and inequalities that shaped their own and their children's lives" (71). Likewise, there was no single model of domestic femininity in the postwar period. Despite their own status as working women, social workers buttressed the ideology of what Betty Friedan famously termed "the feminine mystique"

by emphasizing the importance of women's fulltime contributions to the household. Female applicants, however, expressed a broad range of satisfactions and dissatisfactions with both paid and unpaid labor, which depended on their racial identities and the material conditions of their lives. One of Potter's more intriguing findings is that, contrary to Friedan's thesis, white working-class women were more unhappy with their domestic roles than white middle-class women, whose economic and educational resources allowed them freedom to escape some of the drudgery of housework, as well as fostered in them a sense of entitlement to pursue fulfilling opportunities beyond the household. Thus, Potter contends, "Women's family labor, and women's assessments of their family lives, were not simply a response to restrictive gender roles but were instead inextricable from larger social and structural inequalities outside the household" (99–100).

Ordinary postwar families were political in one final sense—their family ideals shaped how they interacted with and became involved in the world around them. Part III of Potter's book explores the ways in which family ideals influenced ICH & A applicants' relationships to housing, as well as motivated their engagement in civic and political activities in their communities. In a chapter entitled "Constructing Domesticity," Potter analyzes "the place where ideas about family and ideas about housing met in people's daily lives" (128), an intersection heretofore uncharted in the historical literature on the postwar period. Chicago provides an excellent case study, as the area was intensely affected by the related trends of suburbanization and housing segregation that transformed urban areas throughout the United States in the postwar period. The Great Migration spurred the rapid growth of Chicago's African American population, leading to a severe housing shortage in the city's Black Belt. African Americans who remained in the Black Belt faced daunting problems of overcrowding, escalating rents, low quality housing options, crumbling infrastructure, and declining social services, while those who attempted relocate to white areas were met with two responses by white homeowners—flight to outlying areas, which further exacerbated inner-city deterioration, and the threat of violence. Within the context of these volatile conditions, which affected all Chicagoans in one way or another, the social workers and the diverse applicants working with the ICH & A uniformly drew strong emotional connections between housing and family and attached deep personal family meaning to domestic and residential spaces. Homes and neighborhoods were understood as sites for realizing family dreams, fostering family relationships, expressing family goals and values, and cultivating family stability and security. Despite this shared sensibility and despite the association in the popular imagination of the postwar family exclusively with the suburban single-family home, the ICH & A case records attest that "both houses and families came in a variety of shapes and sizes, and homes could be put to a variety of uses" (145). Thus, Potter finds that applicants chose from a "diversity of acceptable options" (148) in living spaces and arrangements, which depended both on a family's material resources, as well as on the value families placed on such priorities as financial stability, the proximity of family and friends, and domestic privacy.

Not surprisingly, the most important factor in determining how ordinary families related to housing was race, as African Americans faced both limited housing options and judgement by whites for what were perceived to be deviant living arrangements and child rearing practices. “The strong ideological and material relationship between family and housing, when combined with diverse domestic practices, made for a potentially combustible mix” (156), which, Potter avers, helps to explain the eruption of racial violence and the intense struggles over integration that occurred in Chicago in the postwar period.

Commitment to family life also prompted ordinary men and women to take part in community affairs. Although adopting or fostering a child was no longer touted in the wider culture as an act of good citizenship (as it had been in the early twentieth century), social workers in the postwar period nonetheless looked for evidence of applicants’ community engagement as a measure of the sort of “giving, sociable personality” (165) that was essential for good parenting. At the same time, applicants from diverse backgrounds “presented themselves as good people—and good potential parents—to their social workers by emphasizing their community mindedness” (166). As with other aspects of the ordinary people’s lives examined in this study, applicants’ public and political involvement, while commonly shaped by a devotion to the family, diverged along lines of class and race. Middle-class men and women were avidly dedicated to community activities, especially those that promoted wholesome activities for children and shored up moral standards. African Americans, who were summarily ignored by the white power structure dominating Chicago city politics, actively participated in an array of church, civic, educational, and political groups aimed at “contributing to the community and uplifting the race” (172). The ICH & A records reveal that some African Americans found it difficult to sustain the time and energy required for civic participation in the face of the substantial obstacles they faced in supporting their families. Even so, Potter maintains, many African Americans managed to uphold an allegiance to both family and politics, “for the welfare of the family and community were undeniably linked” (176). Perhaps Potter’s most suggestive finding here is that white working-class men and women, who were less involved in formal civic organizations than their white middle class or African American counterparts, nonetheless conceived of their cultivation of “personal relationships and obligations between individuals” in their extended families, neighborhoods, and communities as “the most basic form of good citizenship” (177). Potter agrees with their assessment and links the preference for interpersonal relationships among working-class men and women to their distrust of a civic culture long dominated by middle-class attempts to control the lives of the working class, as well as to the tradition of mutual benefit societies that did so much to sustain working-class communities during the early twentieth century.

According to Holt, Weinstein, and Potter, the enhanced public and political significance afforded to childhood and family life at midcentury has had important repercussions for both American family life and politics from the postwar period to today. Holt argues that the expansion of federal concern for children’s

welfare in the postwar era laid the foundation for several important federal initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s, including the Head Start Program, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Indian Child Welfare Act, as well as for the conviction that the government has a responsibility to secure children's legal rights in addition to promoting their welfare. Although the last formally designated White House Conference on Children and Youth was held in 1970, and the 1980s witnessed a backlash against federal assistance to children, the postwar period stands as a reminder of what is possible when federal authorities seek to dedicate themselves to advancing the cause of children's welfare. The legacies of the establishment of the field of family therapy have also been varied and complex. By the 1970s family therapy was consolidated as a professional field and institutionalized as a key component of mainstream psychotherapy. Weinstein argues that on the one hand, the optimism of the first generation of family therapists that their theories and methods would "revolutionize the treatment of psychological and social problems" (13) have mostly faded from view. On the other hand, the field has been responsive to a variety of social and political influences such that it has come to address a widening variety of family issues, to recognize the growing diversity of family life, and to accept challenges from within its ranks to the gender and racial biases deeply rooted in the field's theories and its modes of professional practice. Whether this means the field of family therapy can be marshaled anew to serve both personal and political ends is hard to say. As Weinstein submits, "We only have to look at the enduring power of the discourse of 'family values' to see that the popular notion of the family as the locus where everything can go right or wrong is still with us—and still contested" (180). Finally, Potter maintains that the crucial connections "between inequality, politics, and the family" that were cast in the lives of ordinary people in the postwar period presaged the movement of the family to the "center of American politics" (7) for both the left and the right in the 1960s and 1970s and beyond. To be sure, the domestic diversity that characterized family life in the postwar period (and indeed has marked family life throughout the history of the United States) has become more pronounced, more visible, and, to some extent, more acceptable in American society and culture than in the past. While families no longer live their differences against the backdrop of such a uniform set of shared family ideals, the family in its many forms continues to function as a site where many Americans hope to realize both personal satisfaction and social belonging. It is also a site where racial and class inequality continues to be felt, assessed, and reckoned with, as well as where efforts to cope with such inequality are sometimes channeled into concerted civic participation and political action. For all of these reasons, it seems, the family is likely to remain a formidable force in both our personal lives and our political culture for some time to come.