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From Cradle to Grave

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JONATHAN FREEDMAN



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July 15, 1993

Eli Segal
Director of National Service
The White House
Washington, D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. Segal,

The task of creating a system of national service is a great challenge. Our mutual friend, Warren Davis, has been kind enough to pass on this letter to you. I am writing in the hope that my book, FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE: The Human Face of Poverty in America, may be of service.

As a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, I have spent the last three years documenting poverty in America, from infancy to old age. I focused on middle class families that "fall through the cracks" as well as the traditional poor. Visiting clinics and homes, I asked people: "What helps, what hurts, what works?"

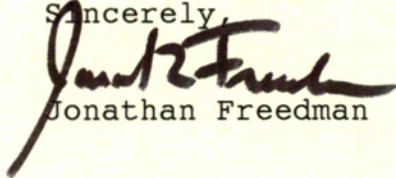
Along my journey, I was inspired by President Clinton's vision of service. In an innovative San Diego drug treatment program for crack-addicted expectant mothers, teen programs in New Jersey Schools, job training centers in Detroit, and family support programs in Seattle, I found extraordinary stories of courage and hope.

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE is being published in hardback by Atheneum/Macmillan in late September, just as America prepares to consider proposals for national service. It documents successful programs from infancy to old age, funded on shoestring budgets, that really work.

I would deeply appreciate it if you, or someone on your staff, took time to read the book and see the programs that it outlines. Perhaps it might be helpful in generating support for service, not only for young people, but for Americans of all ages.

I will be staying with Warren and Madge when I come to Washington, D.C., on September 27, at the beginning of my national book tour. I would be honored to speak about these issues at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Freedman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Jonathan Freedman

ADVANCE COMMENTS ON FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

"If ever poverty is to be lessened, and its predisposing social ills, we must focus on enhancing and fulfilling the positive in human life from the cradle to the grave, as this book so aptly suggests. Once poverty has become a way of life it is already too late."

-- Dr. Jonas Salk

"Jonathan Freedman, in his own Pulitzer prize-winning style, has written an important book on the problems of poverty and dependency in America. And he seeks answers in our communities. The solutions he finds are surprising in their simplicity. A brilliantly conceived, solidly reported, wonderfully written American family portrait -- with a glimmer of hope."

-- Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan

"When I traveled around America holding hearings for the National Commission on Children, I looked into the faces of parents and children struggling to survive against incredible odds. FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE brings their faces to life with the vividness of powerful non-fiction and the passion of a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist writing at his peak. By documenting real success stories, Jonathan Freedman conveys a practical message of hope that we can deal with our social problems. I recommend FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE highly to readers in your house and the White House."

-- Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV
Chairman, National Commission
on Children.

-- continued --

"Jonathan Freedman feels the lives of his subjects, and he conveys their lives with much respect and sympathy. He has written a story about poor people, not poverty; about achievers, not achievement. This is a careful, thoughtful, hopeful and helpful book."

-- Roger Rosenblatt

"Jonathan Freedman has shown us the tragic face of poverty, and it is the face of a child: neglected, abused, and abandoned. FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE demonstrates that even at this late date, it is possible to rescue millions of American children from lives of poverty, hopelessness, crime and drugs -- if we have the will to act and the wisdom to invest in their future."

-- Congressman George Miller
Chairman, House Select
Committee on Children, Youth
and Families (1983-1991)

"Jonathan Freedman's FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE should enjoin the conscience of our nation. I found the chapters dealing with the unemployed, the elderly poor, and the compelling need for humane, affordable, and dignified health care to be especially poignant."

-- Senator Paul Wellstone

"Poverty in America is cruel and expensive. Jonathan Freedman's riveting portrayals of ordinary people expose the hurt, the courage, and the struggle in coping with poverty at every stage of life. He highlights numerous instances of successful helping projects and makes a compelling case that personal and social responsibility reinforce one another. This is a book that animates the face of poverty in America and points the way to realistic and necessary solutions."

-- Harvey V. Fineberg, Dean
Harvard School of Public Health

"An eloquent plea that creative help to the "have-nots" will save money in the long run."

-- Kirkus Reviews

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

In this eloquent and revealing book, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jonathan Freedman offers the first comprehensive view of poverty in America in a generation, showing us beyond the shadow of any possible doubt that the poor are no longer confined to some Other America or so-called "underclass." Drawing on the true stories of people at every stage of life -- infancy, childhood, adolescence, the family, midlife, aging and dying -- he has written a singular book about hardship, about courage and, in the face of incalculable odds, considerable hope.

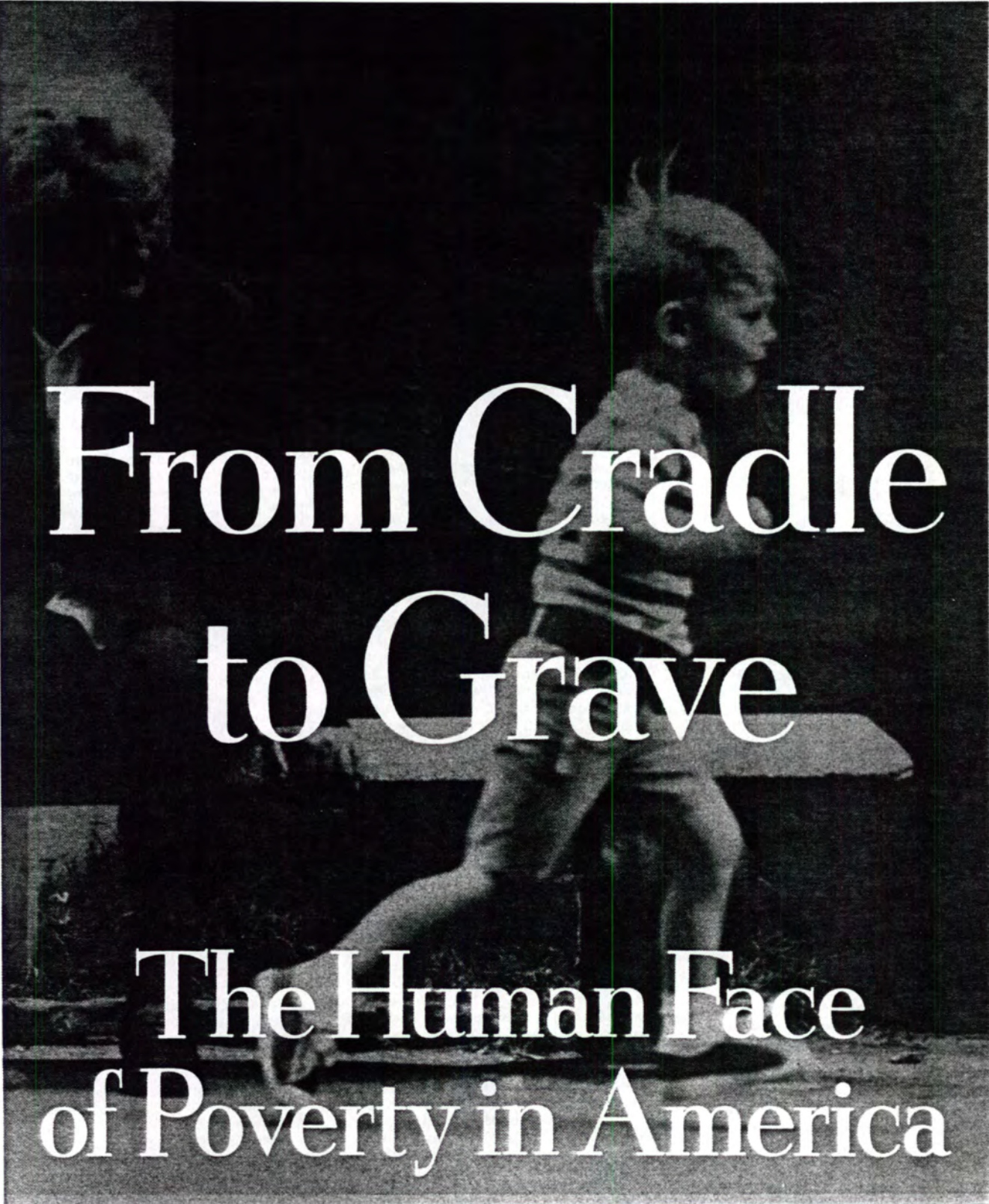
To do so, Freedman went to the people who have been shunned. Visiting prenatal clinics, schools, job training centers and nursing homes, he asked, "What helps, what hurts, what works?" Their responses give poverty a recognizable human face, as he shows us children struggling to grow up, families fighting to keep their homes, displaced workers seeking training, retirees struggling to age and die with dignity.

In his three years of investigating and recording, Freedman also discovered a surprising and, in many cases, heartening number of individuals and organizations already working to eliminate suffering; and it is one of this book's achievements to show how innovative programs, funded on shoestring budgets, can help seemingly hopeless people cope with tribulation and transform their lives. Building on lessons from all parts of the country, Freedman suggests further coherent solutions that are affordable in this deficit-conscious era.

A major work of reportage, FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE is also a timely, deeply informed call for change.

* * *

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE will be published by Atheneum in September, 1993. Contact: Atheneum Publishers, 866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022; Phone (212)702-3810; FAX (212)605-3099.



From Cradle to Grave

The Human Face
of Poverty in America

J O N A T H A N
F R E E D M A N

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, MAY 17, 1993

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Commentary

Saving a Baby at a Time— It's a Start

■ **Children: Millions are at risk, but there is hope in small-scale programs that rehabilitate mothers and make it stick.**

By JONATHAN FREEDMAN

Kenya, a black single mother, entered Options for Recovery, a San Diego County drug-treatment program, in August, 1990, while the National Commission on Children was conducting hearings at the height of the crack-baby epidemic.

Far from the commission's eye and six weeks pregnant, Kenya (who does not want her true name used) was dazed from coming off crack cocaine. Her first drug-exposed baby had died at birth. Early in her second pregnancy, she voluntarily entered treatment.

Kenya sat apart from two dozen other mothers in art therapy, creating a collage of blonde vamps cut out of fashion magazines that she sarcastically called "American Beauty." She mentioned that her first baby had died two hours after being born on a particular day in August. Her face froze with a sudden realization. This was the anniversary of her baby's death.

She laid her head on the table. Tears leaked through her clenched eyes and dripped onto the collage, staining the idealized faces of "American Beauty." She released a cold cry. The women turned from their collages. She screamed again, louder. The women seemed to cringe. The next scream seemed to rise from her womb. Kenya began to moan, rocking rhythmically as if in labor.

Kenya struggled through the next seven months of her pregnancy in suburban San Marcos, while the commission held hearings around the country, from urban ghettos to rural towns. Headed by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W. Va.), the commission was searching for ways to contend with the drugs, violence and poverty engulfing America's children.

The odds against kids are staggering: 375,000 were born exposed to drugs in 1988, according to the Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families. Five million children under age 6 are now in dire poverty—one in three children in major cities. Eight in 10 black children will be paupers before they turn 18, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) estimates.

In the late summer and fall of 1990, the country was preoccupied with Operation Desert Storm, but within the sanctuary of Options, mothers with heroin tracks healing on their arms were building hope. Each day, Kenya and the other women gave each other drug tests and struggled through recovery.

In April, seven months after Kenya's outcry, she cooed joyously, "I have a clean baby boy!"

In Washington, the National Commission on Children was giving birth to a new agenda for children. It hammered out a bipartisan compromise between government activists and those who resisted government involvement. Even conservative advocates of "family values" finally agreed that the job was too big for families to do alone.

The commission issued its report, "Beyond Rhetoric," in June, 1991. It advocated universal prenatal care, a national child-support system and incentives to help parents make the transition from welfare to work.

The media ignored the complex agenda and fixated on the commission's proposed \$1,000 refundable tax credit for every child, which would cost \$40 billion. Congress deep-sixed the children's agenda.

At the nadir, from the White House to the crack houses of America, the cries of children were ignored. Yet in programs like Options, committed counselors and clients were listening, fighting helplessness and making progress, one clean baby at a time.

The cost of Options' treatment is \$60 a day, compared to \$2,000 a day for a crack baby in neonatal intensive care. One baby's \$250,000 hospitalization would pay for treatment for all of the women who enrolled in Options over two years—almost 60 mothers. Not a single Options baby tested positive for drugs.

This spring, Kenya's son is celebrating his second birthday. Still clean, Kenya has completed two years of college in computer science. She wants to work but fears losing Medicaid for her son. She would benefit from a \$1,000 tax credit and guaranteed health benefits.

In Washington, the National Commission on Children has brought together 700 leaders to demonstrate effective programs. One former member, Bill Clinton, is now in the White House. The commission's four-point program deserves the President's—and the American people's—attention:

- The best way to help a child is to help that child's family.

- All children have the same basic needs for love, security, shelter and the guidance to become self-disciplined.

- It's less costly to prevent problems than to pay for consequences; invest in healthy development.

- Individuals, families, communities and government all share responsibility for America's children.

The children's agenda is as urgent as a crack mother's cry, as miraculous as the birth of a clean baby.

Jonathan Freedman is a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist based in San Diego. His book about innovative programs that help people, "Cradle to Grave: The Human Face of Poverty in America," will be published by Atheneum this fall.