

JACQUES BARZUN: TRIM THE COLLEGE! ★ IN DEFENSE OF COLONIALISM

American Outlook

Fixing the Family

Government and the culture broke it.
Civil society is restoring it.

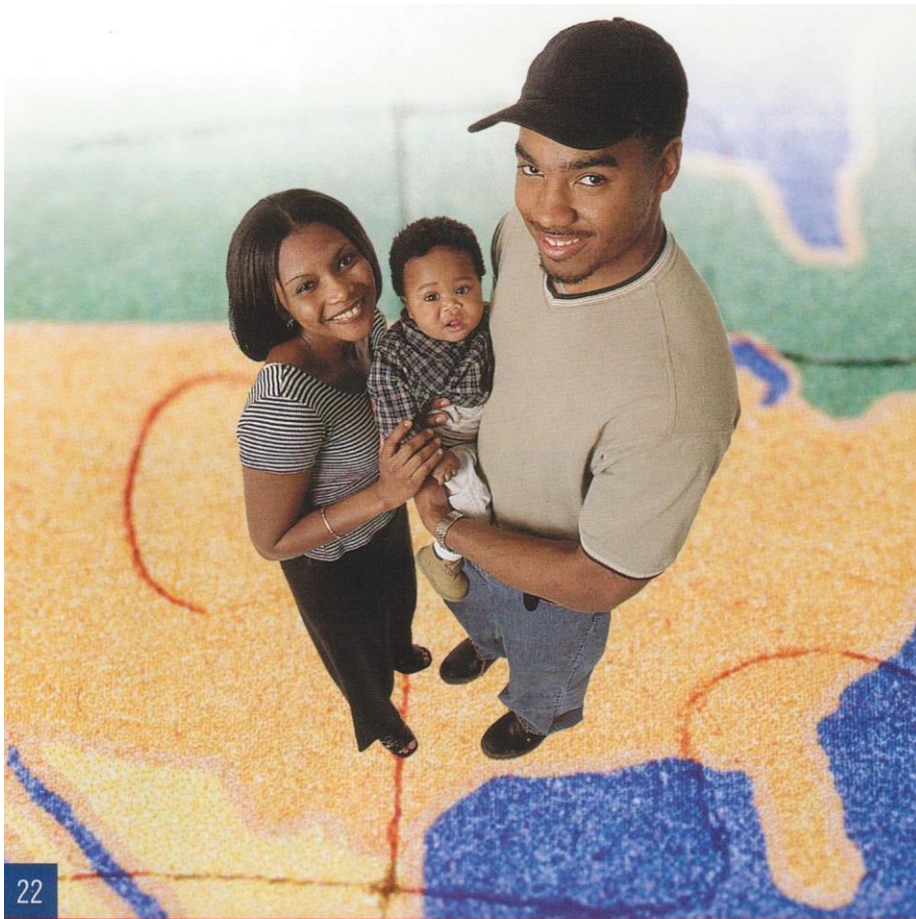
Dan Quayle



Vol. V, No. 3
SUMMER 2002
U.S. \$5.00 CANADA \$5.50
Published by the Hudson Institute

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Environmentalists' biggest fear
Why Americans are sarcastic

ISSN # 1099-8896



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The Sound of Money

American culture is being deprived of genuinely creative and popular music by a global music industry that believes bigger—and blander—is better.

Jonathan Little

Only a few decades ago, musical acts such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles achieved worldwide fame on the strength of their talent. But in the past decade a new musical culture has been forming, one that owes less and less to individual creativity and more and more to the decision of multinational music companies to slot expendable performers and independent songwriters in and out of standardized, made-to-order, market-ready formats. The traditional nurturing of artists and songwriters by recording and publishing companies is increasingly being farmed out to new partnerships and small companies, who, paradoxically, can least afford to put forward the funds for such purposes. This new corporate strategy is having a profound cultural impact that is evident to anyone who has listened to the radio or shopped for new CDs lately.

Beset by increasingly substantial development and marketing costs for new talent (a well-crafted music video, for example, can easily cost half a million dollars or more), and relentlessly driven to be economically efficient by their parent companies, the “big five” record companies are now willing to bet only on surefire winners. Apart from EMI, the major record companies today are in reality only small sub-

divisions of ever-expanding entertainment, publishing, or communication conglomerates. The competitive need to reduce expensive product development costs, coupled with the need for greater economies of scale in producing music, are seen as very real commercial pressures. In the music world, this means offering up more product from existing multiplatinum-selling artists, recycling old hit collections, and prefabricating new hothouse-cultivated artists (who are forced to become “market-ready” in an extremely short timespan, often leaving them ill-equipped and unprepared for the many pressures of continual performing) whom a company other than the “majors” has typically gone to the trouble and expense of bringing to market.

The public are becoming unwitting conspirators in this general trend. Of 2,474 respondents to a *Billboard* magazine poll taken at the end of 2001, nearly 40 percent reported that with remastering to improve sound quality, as well as bonus tracks and more extensive liner notes, they see it as good value to purchase an updated version of an album they already own. By sticking to such tried-and-true musical products, the record companies make it less likely that the growing number of older and more musically conservative customers,