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## “A Barometer of Social Breakdown” — Greeting Cards in the Postmodern Age

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Our greeting cards betray us. According to Hallmark, Americans gave approximately 103 million Father’s Day cards this past weekend, but only half of those were given to fathers.

As Heather MacDonald reports in *City Journal*, Hallmark’s 2007 line of over 800 different Father’s Day cards provides a “barometer of social breakdown.” How so?

She explains that Hallmark offered this year a special “For Mother on Father’s Day” card in its “Mahogany” line directed primarily to African-Americans.

Here is the text of one of the cards:

*for My Mother*

*ON FATHER'S DAY*

*You hear a lot of talk*

*these days about*

*children growing up*

*without a father—*

*without this*

*and without that.*

*You hardly ever hear*

*About the mothers who,*

*In spite of everything,*

*Raise their children to be strong,*

*To believe in God, to work hard*

*To make their lives worthwhile . . .*

*That's the story*

*I'd like to tell*

*Because that's*

*How you raised me.*

*In spite of it all,*

*it's our story . . .*

*I made it because of you.*

*Have a wonderful day.*

Note carefully the wording of the message — “You hear a lot of talk these days about children growing up without a father—without this and without that.” It insinuates that having no father is of no more importance than doing without any number of other things. No big deal.

There is nothing wrong with honoring mothers on any day, but our society is not strengthened by confusing mothers and fathers. To the contrary, in doing so we not only sow the seeds of our own cultural dissolution, we bring undeniable harm into the lives of millions of children. This is all done in the name of sensitivity, of course.

Heather MacDonald comments:

*You have to admire Hallmark's willingness to take the bit in its teeth. With 70 percent of black children born out of wedlock, with marriage a moribund custom in inner cities, Father's Day does pose a problem. Hallmark has solved it with aplomb. The light scorn directed at the complaints of “children growing up without a father—without this and without that,” as if fathers were as discretionary as Tivo, is both an inspired way of minimizing the problem and a fair articulation of how fathers are viewed in poor black communities, and by large swathes of the aging feminist establishment as well.*

More:

*There were no “For mother on Father's Day” cards among the rest of the store's Father's Day offerings, only in the “black” section (though of course the 48 percent Hispanic and 25 percent white illegitimacy rates are no cause for celebration). No evidence yet of same-sex marriage or “You've got a new turkey-baster baby!” greeting cards, either; but if Disney is offering gay marriage getaways, Hallmark will surely follow.*

Our greeting cards tell the story of our social pathology. The marginalization of fatherhood —and the epidemic of missing fathers — is treated as a matter of little individual or social consequence.

The greeting card business is big business, and given the shape of our postmodern society, it is a complicated business. Cards are now directed at any number of different family structures and “lifestyles.” Some celebrate divorce, while others promise healing after an abortion. One firm offers a line of cards to be shared by adulterous lovers. The disappearance of social standards opens a whole new marketplace for morality and for greeting cards as well.

These new cards are indeed sending a message loudly and clearly — we are in the midst of a massive social and moral revolution. Our greeting cards betray us.

