

The Civil Disobedience of Raising a Family

In case you haven't noticed, times have changed, and somehow, those who hold to traditional societal norms have [become the new face of counter culturalism](#). As this is unfamiliar territory to those on the traditional end of the spectrum, a few lessons are needed in how to live up to this new moniker. One of those lessons is how to engage in civil disobedience.

If you're like me, the phrase "civil disobedience" conjures up images of bra-burning hippies protesting Vietnam and demanding that society "make love, not war." But in a world where up has become down and good has become evil, civil disobedience no longer means we must take to the streets and chain ourselves to some inanimate object. In reality, the best civil disobedience we, as members of the new countercultural movement, can perform is right in our own homes, raising our families.

Author Neil Postman recognized almost a quarter-century ago just how countercultural the idea of raising a traditional, nuclear family was becoming. "If parents wish to preserve childhood for their own children," he wrote in his book, [Building a Bridge to the 18th Century](#), "they must conceive of parenting as an act of rebellion against culture." With that end in mind, he offered a few simple ways in which parents can engage in this rebellion.

The first is to stay married. Doing so is "an insult to the spirit of a throwaway culture in which continuity has little value," Postman wrote.

Today we're very dismissive of the prominent role marriage plays in raising a strong family, with many parents choosing to divorce or never marry at all because they would rather

pursue some elusive happiness for themselves than build a strong foundation for their children. As a friend recently observed to me, it's no wonder we have such an identity crisis these days, with boys wanting to become girls and vice versa. The compounding of several generations of divorce has released children from their moorings, and they drift out to sea, desperately trying to find their places in life and gain acceptance.

A second way to engage in this new civil disobedience is to raise a family in close contact with extended relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. "It is ... almost un-American to remain in close proximity to one's extended family," Postman wrote, likely referring to the tendency of adult children to move away and establish themselves in cities many miles from where they grew up. Many adult children are also actively [cutting off their parents](#) over disagreements or other allegedly "toxic" behavior, making children ever more likely to miss out on "the meaning of kinship and the value of deference and responsibility to elders."

I've had the fun of seeing this element of family-rooted civil disobedience in action during the last year, as I've watched a friend of mine and her family move in across the street from her widowed mother. While I'm sure the close proximity has its challenges at times, all parties involved regularly express delight about being neighbors. Grandma has a steady stream of company, while daughter and son-in-law appreciate the meals and help that another pair of adult hands can offer their growing family.

A third exercise in civil disobedience is found in teaching children good morals. Postman encouraged us "to insist that one's children learn the discipline of delayed gratification ... modesty in their sexuality ... [and] self-restraint in manners, language, and style." In an age when children are told to be true to themselves and do whatever feels good, teaching them to restrain their emotions and desires, putting others first

and self second, “is to place oneself in opposition to almost every social trend.”

Postman’s fourth civil disobedience recommendation is the “most rebellious of all,” for it strikes at the heart of what today’s society deems important, namely, media—social, entertainment, and news. We should limit the media that children are exposed to, Postman wrote, while also being fully aware of what they *do* view and then being ready to counteract and “critique ... the themes and values” that media serves up.

Keeping tabs on the media your children consume requires a lot of commitment and determination to stand your ground, despite what your children and others think of you. It will mean denying your children phone privileges until they are much older. It will also mean that you must set a good example, limiting your own media consumption in order to spend time with your children so that they won’t even miss the entertainment media provides. Furthermore, it will mean that you need to be prepared to have conversations with your children about difficult topics—such as sex, gender, and other hot-button political issues—so that they hear your perspective and viewpoint before they try to sneak off and find the answers to their deepest questions from media.

Are you ready to engage in a little civil disobedience for the new counterculture? It’s not hard to start—especially if you’re already married with kids—and it [can be done from the comforts of your own home](#). The hard part, however, is in the persevering, for this type of civil disobedience can’t be done in one short little protest. It’s a long march that requires patience and commitment, but one that offers great rewards not only for yourself but for your children. And for everyone else in society. That’s what civil disobedience is for.

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