



For Moral Ambiguity: National Culture and the Politics of the Family

Michael J. Shapiro

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Under the banner of family values, a war of more than words is being waged. At stake is the control of contemporary national culture-and the consciousness of succeeding generations. Michael J. Shapiro enters the fray with this galvanizing book, which exposes the assumptions, misconceptions, and historical inaccuracies that mark the neoconservative campaign to redeem an imagined past and colonize the present and future with a moral and political commitment to the "traditional family."

Contesting the neoconservative assumption of a natural relation between a historically constant, traditional family structure and civic life, Shapiro shows how the situation of the family in relation to public life has emerged differently in different historical periods in response to diverse shaping forces. His work juxtaposes moralizing versus historically sensitive, critical treatments of familial and public attachments, revealing how "the family"-as represented in historical and contemporary fiction, cinema, television, and other genres and media-emerges as a contingent cultural and historical structure.

Shapiro treats the ways in which family space, however changeable, serves as a critical locus of "enunciation"-as a space from which diverse family personae challenge the relationships and historical narratives that support dominant structures of power and authority and offer ways to renegotiate the problem of "the political." By extending recognition to less heeded voices and genres of expression, he seeks to frame the political within a democratic ethos. His work compels us to understand "the political" as the continuous negotiation of different modes of civic presence.

Michael J. Shapiro is professor of political science at the University of Hawai`i. He is the author of numerous books, including *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minnesota, 1997) and *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation, and Gender* (1999).

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