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Choosing Fatherhood: America's Second Chance

by Lewis Kostiner
with an introduction by Juan Williams and essays by
David Travis, Shipra S. Parikh, Roland C. Warren, and
Derrick M. Bryan

Families come in all sizes, shapes, and traditions, each a unique variation of a universal human theme. Whether one comes from a heterosexual, single-sex, or one-parent home, stability and love are paramount. Unfortunately, in the United States, the absence of fathers from their children's lives has become a real problem. In fact, the Brookings Institute has identified absentee fathers as among America's most pressing problems—as important as the economy, education, the environment, health care, infrastructure, you name it. Why? Because nearly every social ill finds its roots in the fatherless home.

Choosing Fatherhood: America's Second Chance is meant to explore this issue as no previous book has. And it does so through the art of photography, in which Lewis Kostiner makes portraits of dads who are involved in their children's lives. The book is also accompanied by informative essays by Juan Williams, of Fox News; David Travis, who was Curator of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1975–2008; Shipra S. Parikh, a licensed clinical social worker who also teaches and conducts research at the University of Chicago and Loyola University in Chicago; Roland C. Warren, the former president of the National Fatherhood Initiative, a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing fatherhood in America, who also served on President Obama's task force on responsible fatherhood; and Derrick M. Bryan, a sociologist at the Morehouse College.

Getting fathers to be more involved in their children's lives is of paramount importance, if America is to regain ground as an international leader. Right now, the statistics look grim: forty years ago only eleven percent of America's children lived in homes without fathers, but today more than a third do: more than 24,000,000! This translates into high poverty rates, high drop-out rates in high school, high rates of incarceration, multiple behavioral problems, and the list of social ills goes on.

As President Obama has declared, fatherhood does not begin with conception but with the responsibilities that come with creating and caring for a human life. Although changes in custody rulings and other policy remedies are possible, behavioral patterns are often outside the reach of policy. *Choosing Fatherhood* offers a hopeful direction that America does have a second chance at correcting a troubling trend, but time is slipping, and awareness of the problem is an important start.

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR PRAISE FOR THE BOOK ►

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK



"*Choosing Fatherhood: America's Second Chance*, photos by Lewis Kostiner, is a beautiful, large-format, full-color book of poignant photographs and essays about fatherhood in America. Since World War II, the number of fatherless children in the United States has risen from 11 percent to more than one-third, and it is wreaking havoc and grief in almost every sector of this country. According to the heart-stopping essays by several renowned authors, the absence of fathers in the home is the root cause of the huge increase of poverty, drop-out rates of schools, incarceration, behavioral problems, child abuse, and feelings of abandonment for more than 24 million children today. The book, published in association with the National Fatherhood

Initiative nonprofit organization, is a very important one, and its message offers ways to educate men about the responsibilities and delights and rewards of being present as their children grow up. Get this book for your library!" —Bonnie Neely, owner of Real Travel Adventures and book reviewer for Amazon

"More than 24 million U.S. children have no father at home. One of three babies is born to a fatherless household. The picture gets even bleaker when you break it down by race and ethnicity. More than half of Hispanic babies and seven of ten African American infants will have no dad helping raise them. Those statistics, as well as the hollow left by his own father's absence, prompted photographer Lewis Kostiner '72 to undertake *Choosing Fatherhood: America's Second Chance*, an unflinchingly candid, but hopeful, tribute to fatherhood.

"For *Choosing Fatherhood*, Kostiner spent just a few hours with each of his subjects, so these aren't intimate portraits. Still, they feel honest. Strikingly composed, richly detailed, and handsomely printed, they are devoid of both irony and mawkishness. Their straightforwardness is reminiscent of Walker Evans's and Dorothea Lange's Depression-era portraits." —Charlotte Bruce Harvey, *Brown Alumni Magazine* (link to the full article on www.gftbooks.com)



"Lewis Kostiner, with unselfish commitment to an important cause, has created an arresting body of photographic work which tells us the story of men in need of a second chance. These are men who have reassessed their obligations and have made a commitment to fatherhood—men who are overcoming desperate circumstances and are prevailing through love and care of their children. These finely made environmental portraits are accompanied by a telling text that often saddens but at the same time energizes its readers to be more involved in the need of the oppressed and deprived. It isn't often that a good artist gives so freely of his time, energy, and resources for the public awareness of others' needs. I urge the reader to look carefully at the images to see the real depth of what a photograph can communicate about basic human emotion. Kostiner has done us all a service in drawing the viewer so intimately into the lives of people striving for the better and whom we ought to help." —Charles Traub, Chair, Department of Photography, Video, and Related Media, School of Visual Arts, New York City



"Lewis Kostiner became engaged in the subject of American fatherhood because of a current crisis in our society: far too many fathers are absent from their children's lives. This has come to affect a vast population of children and thus the future of us all. Kostiner, himself, was without the daily presence of his father from the age of three. This is the personal history that naturally informs his vision and feelings. But, despite his opinions and sympathies, Kostiner does not insert a dogmatic ideology or overt sentimentality into these portraits of fathers and their families. Rather, he respects that aspect of photography that sidles up upon neutral expression and is concerned with sensitive and perceptive fact-gathering. After all, his subject is not a fairy tale but a serious reality that needs to be understood from what

actually exists." —David Travis, Curator of Photography, Art Institute of Chicago, 1975-2008

"While many artists, in this post-modern era, create works with memory and history at their fulcrum, Lewis Kostiner responds more intently to his lived experiences and the inspired works of three mentors: Aaron Siskind, Harry Callahan, and Arthur Siegel. Kostiner, across four decades, has made photographic art, like the men who taught him, through direct, spare, uncomplicated, and accepting serial imagery. But Kostiner, in a departure from the men he reveres, accepts the demands of clarity, truth, and communication as the coupling to fuse his subject to his audience. In his continuously vital way, Kostiner has refused to allow realism and narrative to become stale or obsolete.



In *Choosing Fatherhood*, Kostiner addresses contemporary American social issues through portraits of fathers and the families they created. These twenty-first-century photographs are achingly poignant because they confront, as fact, the tragedy and then redemption revealed in the narratives that belie the static calm of the imagery. In this serial project, Kostiner has created a whole narrative, a means to reflect on the social obligations built into the ideas—real and ideal—of the American family." —Alan Cohen, photographer and author of *On European Ground* and *Earth with Meaning*



"The straightforward renderings of the figure in their detailed-packed environments augment these poignant stories in *Choosing Fatherhood: America's Second Chance*. The tradition of documentary photography is intelligently, compassionately, and richly mined here. Lewis Kostiner's commitment to visualizing these father-and-child connections leads one to reflect upon one's own fatherhood—and the collapse of time where our hearts connect." —Kenneth Josephson, Professor Emeritus, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a co-founder of the Society for Photographic Education

"Kostiner is a Chicago-based photographer who became involved with the National Fatherhood Initiative, traveled to community-based NFI programs, and met with and photographed fathers and children. This volume presents his photos full page in an elegant volume (oversize: 10" x 11") with thorough narrative captioning. Also included are essays by journalist Juan Williams; the former president of NFI, Roland C. Warren; the retired curator of photography of the Art Institute of Chicago, David Travis; Shipra S. Parkih, a psychotherapist from Chicago); and Derrick M. Bryan (Sociology, Morehouse College). They write about the importance of fathers and fatherhood and doing it well and offer suggestions for readings and viewings." —Eithne O'Leayne, Editor, Reference & Research Books News of Book News, Inc.

"Open your eyes. Open your arms. Embrace these family pictures! They capture the joys and complexities of fatherhood. Here are images that stand as a compelling alternative to this generation's commonplace picture of children without fathers." —Juan Williams, Fox News

