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Section: COMMENTARY EDITORIALS LETTERS

FOUNDATION CLARIFIES MAIN POINTS OF THEIR STUDY ON VIOLENCE

We appreciate the acknowledgment from William Buckley Jr. ("Poverty and crime prevention," Commentary, Dec. 22) that our recent update of the 1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, chaired by the late Milton S. Eisenhower, is correct in cautioning that fear and endemic violence are at least as high now as 30 years ago. We also appreciate his acknowledgment that reduced joblessness since the economic expansion began in the '90s is part of the explanation for the shorter term reduction in violent crime over recent years.

But Mr. Buckley misses our main point: Based on scientific evaluations over the past 30 years and on the prosperity of the '90s, we are in an enviable position "to establish justice and insure domestic tranquility" (the name, from the Constitution, of the Eisenhower Commission's original 1969 report). We know that corporate welfare, affirmative action for the rich, boot camps, New York City's "zero tolerance" policing and expansion of the prison industrial complex have not established justice (as illustrated by the racial bias in our drug sentencing system) and have not insured domestic tranquility (as evidenced by the failure of crime and fear to decline in the long run, since 1969).

Nor does Mr. Buckley acknowledge what does work, based on good science, to simultaneously establish justice and reduce violent crime. For example, proven successes that we discuss in our update include safe havens after school for inner-city kids, public school innovations like Yale professor James Comer's national strategy in which parents and school staff manage decentralized schools, the Ford Foundation's Quantum Opportunity adult mentoring of inner-city high schoolers, Boston's version of efficient-but-community-friendly policing, the conservative state of Arizona's cost effective diversion of nonviolent offenders into community programs that has reduced both recidivism and costs, and the San Francisco Delancey Street enterprise development miracle in which ex-offenders go straight and become financially self-sufficient.

Mr. Buckley is incorrect that the nation's unconscionable 23 percent poverty rate for children age 5 and under is due to single-parent

households. As the Urban Institute recently concluded, it is true that children in single-parent families and poor states are more likely to be poor than those in two-parent families or high income states. But most of the income gap among children is not because of family type or state of residence. Rather, it is because of differences in the income of the adults the children livewith, concludes the Urban Institute.

This being so, Mr. Buckley needs to support job training for decent jobs, combined with good day care for such households. Perhaps he also might join us in condemning the immorality of supply side economics that gives to the rich and takes from the poor, the working class and the middle class?

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