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FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2013

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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, single parent families and the decline of men. Then, leaning in or falling behind. Behind the headlines, the history of women in defense.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to *To the Contrary*, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. Up first, are single families hurting men?

New research shows the decade's long decline in men's wages may be linked to the rise of single parent families. The number of children living with two parents has declined by almost 20 percent during the past 40 years. The majority of single parent households are led by women. The struggles men face in the workforce may be both caused by and the effect of single parent households. Men who don't make as much money or don't hold stable jobs are not attractive as partners, so some women are choosing to bear and raise children alone. A growing bank of research shows men raised by single mothers may be less successful, thus creating a vicious cycle.

So Congresswoman Norton, do you think that mothers are the cause – single mothers are the cause of men doing poorly in the workforce.

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON: No, Bonnie, our poor response to the globalization of the economy is responsible. If it weren't for women's incomes, the American standard of living would have taken a nosedive.

GENEVIEVE WOOD: I think it'd be more accurate to say the breakdown of the family is a problem here and that's – that has contributed, yes, to economic woes, but a lot of other cultural woes that go with that.

PATRICIA SOSA: I mean, I think this is a very simplistic explanation of a very, very complex problem.

FRANCESCA CHAMBERS: And I don't think this is something that's been a phenomenon occurring, you know, any time in the future. This has been going on for decades.

MS. ERBE: Well, it has been going on for decades, but – or at least a couple of decades that more women can't find men they want to, you know, be with permanently, and so they have kids on their own. I don't know the percentages in this survey that we're discussing, but I would imagine that a lot of those single parent families they're talking about are not divorced women, are not widows, but they are women who actually

went out on their own and had children. I want to know what you all think the impact of that is on raising sons.

DEL. NORTON: You know, the notion of a vicious cycle is very important here because if men are not perceived as in some ways equal in their ability to earn an income, women – many women would rather not. And they go on, unfortunately have children anyway, and look for another kind of mate. Those mates aren't to be found very easily. So it's very hard and I think it'd be a big mistake to see this as anything but a cycle that we must break into.

MS. WOOD: I completely agree with you. I mean, look –

MS. ERBE: You're making history –

MS. WOOD: We're making history in the show. I mean, look, 40 percent of children in this country are now born out of wedlock, 40 percent, and it wasn't that way that many years ago, but it's because of this vicious cycle. The fact is we know that children coming – you know, that families made up of two-parent stable household are just more financially stable. They provide better, not just finances, but a better culture for children growing up. And the fact is children coming out of broken homes or single parent homes; they don't tend to do as well statistically, whether it'd be in education or whether it'd be in how many of them are graduating from high school. All of that contributes to whether somebody's going to get a good job or not down the road and what their prospects are. So it is a vicious cycle and I think we really – we as a culture, not just the government, as a culture, need to say marriage is important. Children having a mom and dad is important. And yes, it makes a difference in their lives.

MS. SOSA: I – that's true that we need to, you know, encourage people to get married and have kids within, you know, marriage relationships, so they can have two parents at home. Everybody knows that's the best structure. But the fact is that is going to be very, very difficult for many of these women in the communities that they live to really live in that environment. Obviously, the data is showing that that's not an option. And I think, sometimes we like –

MS. ERBE: So what is –

MS. SOSA: Well, that's the point, I –

MS. ERBE: What is something that really can be done about it because I agree with Genevieve about telling people they should get married, but nobody's listening?

MS. SOSA: Yeah, and I will tell you. I was a single mom. I am a single mom.

MS. ERBE: But divorced.

MS. SOSA: I got divorced when my kids were very young and it took me a long time to find a partner, which I eventually did, but in the meantime, I decided I have to be in community. I cannot do this alone. And I built a community of women, a community of mail friends, so my kids were exposed to everything. And I think we need to start thinking creatively about how to raise these kids because I think single motherhood is not the only part of the problem, but it is part of the problem and we need to be very creative in the solutions we look for.

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, a lot of women don't have the choice, quite honestly, whether or not they're going to raise the child alone. And I think that that's a lot of the problem.

MS. ERBE: What do you mean by that – a lot of women don't have the choice –

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, the sense that –

MS. ERBE: You mean they get pregnant and they –

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, the sense that, yeah, they get pregnant and then the father doesn't stick around. So it's not that they're necessarily choosing because they got divorced or choosing because they want to raise the kid alone because, you know, the male isn't making enough money or anything like that, is that the partner is choosing not to stick around. So that's, I think, another part of this issue.

MS. ERBE: But there's another choice, obviously too, they could –

MS. CHAMBERS: Just to not have done it in the first place.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: Certainly use – you know – use contraception, A, or B, if you're pregnant and you can't – not in a situation to raise a child properly, terminate the pregnancy.

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, I wouldn't personally say that that's a choice and I don't think you – but you know, adoption is another choice to choose to give your child a better life because, to go back to the statistics that you were talking about, you know, kids who are in two-parent homes, only a third of those children are in poverty, whereas kids who are in single parent homes, you know, are much likely to be in poverty and 80 percent more likely I think to be in poverty.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, but all of these choices are important and women are taking them. For example, women don't have many children. They make this one mistake. But look, I'm so frustrated with this issue in terms of finding a way into it. For most of my time in the Congress, I've had a Commission on Black Men and Boys. Here am I a flag carrying feminist. The way I am trying to break into it is trying to focus on

boys and men because really that's the missing ingredient. These women who are raised by single women do much better than the boys raised by single women. That says to me that we got to focus on boys and men much more than we have in the past.

MS. WOOD: Because the little boys and little girls, but they need fathers. And it's a bigger impact on little boys, they don't have that male role model. And to your point, I mean, you're right. We got to find ways, how do – there're going to be families that have single moms or single dads with children. Unfortunately, in many cases, what happens is these communities – all these folks are together. So you – because of the economic standpoint and the like, you have a lot of single mothers living next door to each other, other single mothers – kids with no fathers. They're not in a place where they see a guy getting up and going to work every day. I mean – and that's tragedy because that tells a child they've got nothing – what's their life supposed to look like? They need the role models.

MS. SOSA: Another point, I mean, the guys have to wake up. The guys have to take some responsibility. So I appreciate the fact that you're focusing on the boys and the men because, you know, the rules of the game are out there. Go to college, get an education, you will get a better job. And they're not going to college. And they're not getting a better education. So that has to be put on the table, too.

MS. ERBE: And this issue will continue. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @TotheContrary.

From single parent households, to working women.

More and more self-described feminists are opting for the traditional role of housewife. In 2011, the number of stay-at-home mothers rose for the first time since the economic downturn and young mothers account for a significant portion of this increase. A recent "New York" Magazine cover story profiles a 33-year-old mom with an advanced degree. She says despite being a, quote, "flaming liberal feminist," end quote, leaving her career to tend to her husband and kids has been incredibly rewarding. While Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg is telling young women to lean in and embrace career ambitions, many young mothers' ambitions appear to center on the home.

Samantha Ettus wrote an opinion piece this week for "Forbes" Magazine saying the retro wife mentality makes it hard for corporate women to get to the top and the American economy will be in trouble if women are not afforded a fair opportunity in the workforce.

SAMANTHA ETTUS: (From tape.) They just don't represent women today. More than 70 percent of moms are working moms and the discussion should really be around how to make their life as successful and enjoyable as possible and productive as possible and not about catering to this small group of people who have the sort of – it's really a luxury haste where they are stay-at-home mom. You know, we're working for such a long time. Our careers are from ages 21 to 75 perhaps. And children are young

and you know, those years at home are so short that it's such a small percentage of a woman's career. And the reality of the workforce today is that there unfortunately is no on ramp.

MS. ERBE: So Patricia Sosa, this is a huge topic, obviously, we don't have a ton of time, but she did also say in that article that the women who – these women – and we're talking about, as she mentioned, a very rich, well-educated segment of the population, we're not talking about the average person, but these women with these high-powered Ivy League degrees, who start in the workforce and say, oh, I – you know, I had a kid. I want to do this and I'm leaving so I can take care of it. Do they impact other women in the workforce who are trying to get ahead and wouldn't quit their jobs? Do they get tagged in some way?

MS. SOSA: I think this is a very simplistic way of looking at this debate. I think there is – women should have choices. And the problem is when you have the debate and you focus like on the wrong people, great, magnificent. You went to Harvard. You decided to get married. You want to stay home with your kids, more power to you. But you know what, the policy debate should not be about those women because they're not the ones that need child care. They're not the ones that need a higher minimum wage. They're not the ones that need parental leave. They're 75 percent of the women that have no choice, that have to work. And the debate should be centered on those women and not in just the privilege ones that can stay at home.

MS. WOOD: I kind of agree. (Laughter.) Well, I just – I think it's – I just think it's pathetic, frankly, when, here we say women should have choices and then women are coming out and criticizing other women for their choices. I mean, so what if you have a Harvard degree or if your degree is from the University of Texas or you didn't go to college? If you have the opportunity to raise your children at home and not have a job outside the home, and that's what you want to do, good. If you're somebody who has one of those degrees or doesn't, but decided you want to work outside the home and that works for your family, that's good, too. I just don't understand why –

MS. ERBE: It's still something new – it's still something relatively new and the media are going to cover it and we're going to talk about it, for a woman to say I am a blazing liberal feminist and I'm going home and becoming a full time homemaker.

DEL. NORTON: Part of it is that even some of these women – and remember, not all of these women are very rich. They're very well educated. Really don't have the kind of resources to get an educated nanny and when they look at what's out here, they decided, wait a minute, I'm going – I have one child, one life. I'm going to take care of that. You know, this is a really false debate. Let's not set it up. This is a tiny group of women. At the same time that they are getting out, look about leaning in. You also have women going up the corporate ladder. We have women competing for the first time in positions they never would have even thought of. And I am completely unbothered by this choice. I thought, when I was a young feminist, we were always accused of wanting everybody to go to work. That was because at that time the housewife lifestyle seemed to

be the only lifestyle. Over and over again we said we're for choices. We're for choices. We're for choices. Now, how can we not be for choices?

MS. WOOD: Nobody could say it better than that.

MS. CHAMBERS: No, absolutely. And I have to agree with you on that, second time in this show. I would agree with you on that point that the feminism is supposed to be about choice and if that's your choice to do that, you don't want to – you know – you don't want to work. You want to be at home with your children. I was telling you before the show that that's what my grandma did. She had seven kids. She wanted to stay at home with her kids and that's lovely, but that's not necessarily my personal choice. But I respect other women who make that choice and that's how they want to spend their lives and be there for their children.

MS. SOSA: The problem is that you don't want that to equate the fact that when it goes to policy to support working families, this country is not where it needs to be. You know, we have parental leave, but it's not paid parental leave. You know, child care policies are still very weak and programs are not strong. So there's a lot that we need to do for the working family before we start worrying.

MS. ERBE: But does the retro housewife mentality hurt women in a way, hurt –

MS. SOSA: Let me tell you –

MS. ERBE: – the average working women.

MS. SOSA: It could potentially hurt women. It potentially hurts women, particularly girls because the reality is that most women do not have a choice. And you want your girls – I'm a mother of a 13-year-old girl – I want her to welcome the working world. I want her to want to be part of the working world because she's likely to have to be part of what world. I don't want her to feel frustrated or she didn't find a right husband in order to be, you know, raising her kids –

DEL. NORTON: So what do these women have to do with that?

MS. SOSA: Well, because it becomes – it makes it like that's the ideal choice. They're the lucky women. The rest of us, have to do it because we're forced to do it.

MS. WOOD: No, but I think we need to be very careful. I mean, I think some people want to go and they get a great education for the sake of getting a great education. And I don't think it should be a bad thing for them. They say, OK, I've done that, but I don't necessarily then have to go into the workforce.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah.

MS. WOOD: And people – we say people have to work. Families have to make decisions. It may be different. We have a bigger house if both of us work. We may have a smaller house if one of us stays home. Those are choices, too. And having a smaller house with one parent at home may be a really good choice for a lot of families.

MS. ERBE: Last word, Eleanor.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, the growing number of house husbands has not hurt men in the workplace. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE: Right, but – exactly, but there is that gender difference that women get tagged by women who decide – corporate women and ambitious women do get tagged by women, you know, who decide to opt out of the workforce –

DEL. NORTON: That will not be for men.

MS. ERBE: – but it doesn't happen to men.

DEL. NORTON: It doesn't. The romanticization of the housewife lifestyle, I do not see in our country today.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines, women in defense. In honor of Women's History Month, we take a look at women's role in national security throughout history and in today's world.

(Begin video segment.)

TRICIA WARD: Most people don't know that women have been in war disguised as men as far back as the Revolutionary War and it shows the role of women fighting side-by-side their male counterparts throughout history. And when they weren't fighting with the males, they were there as Army Nurse Corps, helping them in the battlefield. So women have been on the front lines for a lot longer than people care to admit.

MS. ERBE: The history of women in the military is highlighted by pioneers such as Deborah Sampson, one of the only women to fight in the Revolutionary War. She did so disguised as a man.

Other women of note include the first female brigadier general in the Army Anna Mae Hays, the first female rear admiral in the Navy Alene Duerk, and the first female secretary of any military branch, Sheila Widnall, who served as secretary of the Air Force in the 1990s. This covert and overt battlefield service, as well as female representation in the defense contracting industry is what led several women to form Women in Defense.

Tricia Ward is the organization's president.

MS. WARD: Women in Defense really started out 1979. It really was the brainchild of about seven really dynamic women and you know, these women got together and just said, you know, it really would be of benefit, mutual benefit to everyone, not only the industry, to defense writ large, it really would be of benefit for us to form our own organization. We didn't even have a name at that point. Since then, it really has grown over the past 27 years.

MS. ERBE: The group held its annual Women's History Month event, giving the Service to the Flag award to Carolyn Becraft, former assistant secretary of the Navy. Also in attendance was Brigadier General Wilma Vaught, another highly decorated service woman.

MS. WARD: As I stood with General Vaught and the Honorable Carolyn Becraft to my right, and hearing the stories that they talked about, Carolyn has said that when she was pregnant with her first child, she was asked to leave the Army, but that's the way it was in her day. I thank them both sincerely for paving the way for me specifically. I've had four children on active duty.

MS. ERBE: Tricia Ward has done it all. The now retired naval senior Chief Ward works in support of the military with Booz Allen Hamilton. She says people don't realize gender is not the issue inside military and defense fields. Both the men and women are focused on the job.

MS. WARD: Now, that I have a perspective from both sides, I think the difference is what people from the outside make it such a huge difference. When you're in the Navy and you are standing shoulder to shoulder with your male counterparts, you don't know there is a difference. I really didn't know there was a difference till I got out and heard everyone talk about how different it was. So I think it's really the outside looking in.

MS. ERBE: And even now, Ward sees women as an integral part of the mission for national security.

MS. WARD: The interesting thing is that in many of the cultures in the Middle East men aren't allowed to talk to the women villagers. So our soldiers would go in and try and get intel from friendly villagers and they really couldn't. They weren't allowed to go into the kitchen because that was considered where the women were and they certainly couldn't go into the bedrooms and they weren't allowed to talk to the children. Where if you have women there with you, they certainly can. It's very – it's very appropriate for our female Marines to go in and talk to them. So we were able to get lots of advantageous information to help us get a handle on what was going on in those areas and help.

MS. ERBE: And with a record number of women entering the military and more women joining national security fields, Women in Defense will continue to grow.

MS. WARD: We're currently over 4,000 members and that spans from the New England shoreline, it goes all the way down to what we now call the Space Coast, which is the Gulf Coast of Florida. It also goes from D.C. all the way up to LA. Our mission really is to cultivate and provide professional opportunities and cultivate and apply networking for women across all defense industries, primarily in national security because we're a national security organization.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: I am just blown away, Genevieve, by the contrast between how much progress women are making in defense contracting industries, running major companies, lots of them, but then you hear about this documentary that's out, "The Invisible War," how women at the bottom, at the lower ranks are getting raped by their commanding officers. How is – make sense of that for me please.

MS. WOOD: Well, I think – I don't think many people realize how many women are involved in our military and defense industry, if you will, whether both be in the services themselves or actually defense industry, in contractors. Look, the documentary that you mentioned, I haven't actually seen it, but there have been some terrible things that have happened. There's no doubt about that. But I think we need to be very careful that we don't let that paint the entire military or defense industry as anti-woman because it is not. And the military and defense contractors, just like the workplace and just like children need moms and dads, it's better off that the defense industry has men and women in it.

MS. ERBE: But isn't it interesting that at least on the surface, Eleanor, it seems like women have advanced much more quickly in defense contracting companies than in the military itself?

DEL. NORTON: And let me say just how remarkable it is. This is an industry where to be hired in one of those CEO jobs, you had to be a general, a retired general, admiral. Here are these women, most of whom have never been in the service that are just very smart. How did very smart in this industry get to move up faster than in many other industries? I think it may go back to our last segment, which was about boys and how they're being raised. Look at what generation these women are in. These women did not spend every Saturday and Sunday watching football.

MS. SOSA: But let me say something. My partner comes from that field, so I've been looking at this. It merits looking closer. These companies have done a good job in promoting the women. They have created a friendly environment for the women and they have decided we need real talent and we cannot compromise. If it's a man or female, we need the talent and we're going to give them the opportunity. So it's definitely worth looking closely because I think they can be a model for a lot of other sectors.

MS. CHAMBERS: And I think you're absolutely right. You know, I also have friends in this industry. I have a friend who's a JAG, so I was asking him about this before the show, and he said that in the defense contracting industry, women are more likely to move up than in the military –

MS. ERBE: Why?

MS. CHAMBERS: – but almost more likely than men to move up. You know –

MS. ERBE: Why? That's the key question.

MS. CHAMBERS: That's a really – that is very good question.

MS. WOOD: The requirements are different. Well, being in – military jobs are not exact same thing as defense contracting jobs. Defense contractors are more businesses, if you will, whereas the military, there's also things that come into physical strengths and the like.

MS. CHAMBERS: Physical challenges.

MS. ERBE: But Eleanor, you said lots of them aren't – didn't grow up –

(Cross talk.)

DEL. NORTON: These are not veterans.

MS. ERBE: But the ones we – that Tricia Ward spoke about and women in defense, most of them aren't former officers.

DEL. NORTON: They are. But they were in the service when there were very few women. Now, we have large numbers of women coming in with men of this generation, boys of this generation, and they're intersex. I don't mean that was the case when there were very few women and these women entered as pioneers into the armed forces.

MS. CHAMBERS: I do think it has a lot to do with the physical aspects. Last summer, the Marines started opening up a lot more to women. And the women who were trying out, they weren't able to meet the physical requirements.

MS. ERBE: All right. That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Great topics and thank you. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and @TotheContrary. Please check our new website, pbs.org/to-the-contrary, where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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