Personality and Birth Order: First-Borns and Later-Borns

Does birth order have any effect on personality? The naysayers, including psychologists Monica A. Seff et al., argue that "research on birth order effects has been remarkably inconsistent and inconclusive with regard to various personality and behavioral outcomes." MIT historian Frank Sulloway disagrees. In his book, Born to Rebel, he offers proof of the relationship between birth order and personality.

Researching the lives of historical figures, Sulloway observes that later-borns tend to champion liberal or unconventional ideas while first-borns do not: "Later-borns were more likely than first-borns were to support each of the 61 liberal causes . . . surveyed, from the Protestant Reformation to the American civil-rights movement" (qtd. in Cowley and Springen). Rule-breaking later-borns include Susan B. Anthony, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Charles Darwin. In contrast, first-borns defend the status quo (Sulloway 79). Naturalist Louis Agassiz fits this mold. The most influential naturalist of his day, first-born Agassiz staunchly opposed...
Darwin's radical notions about biological change:

When Darwin proposed a revolutionary solution—that all nature's variety stems from a simple process that preserves useful variations and discards harmful ones—the authorities were appalled. "A scientific mistake" thundered Louis Agassiz, [ . . . ] "untrue in its facts . . . and mischievous in its tendency." (Cowley and Springen)

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