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1 – COMING APART AT THE SEAMS

In a recent lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, Charles Murray gave a preview of his forthcoming book, “Coming Apart at the Seams.” His thesis: America has never been a classless society, but over the last half century the United States has developed new lower and upper classes that diverge on core behaviors and values to an unprecedented degree. The divergence of America into these separate classes is different in kind from anything America has ever known, maintains Murray, and if it continues, will end what has made America, America.

Murray talks a lot about “The American Project,” which consists of the continuing effort, begun with the Founding, to demonstrate that human beings can be left free as individuals and families to live their lives as they see fit, and to come together voluntarily to solve their joint problems. The society based on that idea produced an exceptional civic culture, so widely shared among Americans that it amounted to a civil religion: “the American way of life.” That culture is unraveling.

Murray espouses that it was recognized and understood at the Founding (and has been taken for granted by all insightful observers since) that for America to work as intended (that is, as a free and self-governing people), certain virtues were and are required. Four of these virtues were so completely, universally understood and accepted that they can be considered the four essential Founding virtues: Industriousness, Honesty, Marriage, and Religiosity.

Trends relating to these four essential virtues are not encouraging.

Marriage: In 1960, 88% of the upper-middle class was married, versus 83% of the working class, a negligible 5% gap. Today, 83% of the upper-middle class is married, but among the working class, marriage has collapsed: only 48% are married. That’s a 35 percentage point gap, amounting to a revolution in the separation of classes in this country.

Why is this a big deal? For one reason, marriage civilizes men, a necessary requirement for a civilized society. Secondly, single people are just not as good producers of social capital (such as civic engagement) as married people. A third, more fundamental reason was noted by Tocqueville himself: “Domestic virtue (marital life) does more for the preservation of peace and good order than all the laws enacted for that purpose, and is a better guarantee for the permanency of the American government than any written instrument, the Constitution itself not excepted.”

There is also the matter of the rise of births to single women. In 1960, the percentage of children born to working class single women was around 6%. By now the figure is closing in around 50%. Why is this important? By all measures, the family structure that produces the best outcomes for children is one containing two biological, married parents. No other set of social science findings is as widely accepted by professionals across the political spectrum as this fact, yet it seems impermissible for politicians, the news media, popular culture or the arts to acknowledge so publicly.

Industriousness: Our defining traditional American trait is in decline. The percentage of upper middle class males not in the workforce went from 1%

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in 1960 to about 2% today. But for working class males the same figure went from 5% in 1968 to 12% in 2008 (before the Great Recession, and surely higher today). Among those in the working class with jobs, the percentage working less than 40 hours a week increased from 13% in 1960 to 21% in 2008. The deterioration in industriousness among working class males has occurred in both booming and softening labor markets.

Honesty: Very little needs to be said about the decline in honesty, as it's a closed case, acknowledged by scholars across the political spectrum: Criminals are overwhelmingly drawn from the working class and below, and the great increases in crime and incarceration over the past decades have overwhelmingly victimized working class communities, while hardly touching upper-middle class communities.

Religiosity: Religion is essential to the health of the nation. Why? Because liberty requires virtue, and virtue requires religion. Why does virtue require religion? Because moral codes lose their power if not based on religion.

Organized religion augments social capital, develops the population's civic skills, and contributes to the socialization of children. So secularization is not a positive trend for the health of the American project. Yet the percentage of Americans saying they have no religion increased from 4% in 1972 to 21% in 2010. Now, secularization has occurred across all social classes, but dramatically more so in the working class. A substantial majority of the upper-middle class (58%) retains some meaningful form of religious involvement, whereas a substantial majority of the working class (61%) does not. This may not conform to popular perception, but it is the fact.

A NEW LOWER CLASS

In addition to the decay of the Founding virtues in the working class, we have a new lower class emerging, people who are becoming increasingly

unattached from society. The magnitude of the problem can be seen by considering three sets of people that cause difficulties for a free society: men who can't make even a minimal living, single women raising minor children, and social isolates, people with no connections to family, church or any local activities. Such people are very rare in upper-middle class populations (around 5%), but are becoming very common in the working class, having grown from 10% of that group in 1960 to fully 35% today, representing a difference in degree so large as to constitute a difference in kind from anything the nation has ever seen.

How do these numbers translate into real life in real communities? They translate into an unraveling of daily life in small ways and large. Go into any working-class community and you will find a variety of people who are making life difficult for their fellow citizens. It is not a crisis, just an unraveling of America's civic culture, with greatest impact on the bottom third of society. And trends are not favorable in the middle class and its communities either.

A NEW UPPER CLASS

In *The Bell Curve* (1994), Murray made the case that the nation was experiencing a fundamental change in the nature of its elites. All of the trends identified there have proven out:

- The increasing market value for brains
- A college system that gets almost all talented youth into college and sorts the very smartest into a handful of elite colleges
- The increasing degree to which the most able marry the most able, and pass on not only their financial success to their children but their abilities as well

This has led to an increasing isolation of the upper class from the rest of the country as it develops a distinctive culture of its own.

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PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

What a picture Murray paints: a new lower class whose members are increasingly unsuited for citizenry in a free society, and a new upper class that is increasingly isolated from, ignorant of, and hostile toward a larger, mainstream culture. What does that make the future look like? If you're a pessimist, it looks like the decline of Rome. But he also notes countervailing trends: for one thing, the coming collapse of the advanced welfare state model in Europe will serve as a cautionary example to us. For another, the insanity of spending trillions of dollars a year on unnecessary transfer payments must and will become increasingly obvious. Thirdly, the United States has a history of confounding pessimists: whenever the American project has suffered a wound that looked as if it might be fatal, it survives, heals and thrives.

The phenomenon of the Tea Party is a case in point, he says. The group has but a few core principles: individual freedom, limited federal government, personal responsibility, free markets, and returning political power to the states and the people. There is nothing about those principles that conflicts with the original nature of the American project and what it stands for. In other words, a huge grassroots movement has arisen spon-

taneously in defense of the principles that animated the American project. In the spring of 2009 that did not seem remotely possible. Do not underestimate the resilience of the American project.

America has always had defects, but we have always worked mightily to correct them. The history of the American project, taken in its grand sweep, has been one of breathtaking progress, in which free people without the dictates of government steadily remediate the nation's shortcomings, while creating a civic culture that inspired not only its own people, but people around the world.

What we have going for us, concludes Murray, is the following reality: from the Founding through its first two centuries, the United States fostered a different way for people to live together, unique among the nations of the Earth, that is still immeasurably precious to some very large number of Americans, who are determined that this way of living together will endure and prevail.

I hope Murray's optimism is warranted. But all we have on our side are the facts, data, reason, truth, logic, reality, decency, virtue, common sense, the commonweal, history, tradition, and human nature. That's all.

2 – THE CRISIS OF MODERN MALE IMMATURITY

A related trend to those identified by Murray is the sea-change that has taken place in the conception and practice of American manhood over the past several decades. In a recent column on the subject, Janice Shaw Crouse catalogs the literature published on the topic in just the recent past:

Gary Cross, "Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity"

Guy Garcia, "The Decline of Man"

Michael Kimmel, "The Perilous World of the American Male"

Kathleen Parker, *Save the Males: Why Men Matter and Why Women Should Care*

Kay Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys*

Janice Shaw Crouse, "The Crisis of the Disappearing Educated Male"

Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming our Young Men*

Clearly, awareness is building, as Kay Hymowitz writes, that we are in the middle of a "momentous

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sociological development.” Crouse points to three trends that she believes stunt young men’s maturity: the decline in marriage (the marriage rate is less than half the level of 1969), the decline in education (34% of women aged 25-to-34 have earned degrees compared to 27% of men), and unclear social identity (previous generations of men had clearly identifiable roles and opportunities, while today they do not).

Crouse writes that as long as the male half of the population is disparaged, denigrated, and infantilized, they will lack the motivation to “man up” and become responsible and accomplished men. An Amazon reviewer by the name of Malcolm Heade writes that Hymowitz’ argument in *Manning Up* could be summarized thusly:

- 1) Beginning in the 1960s, women gained the freedom to have unlimited sex and be financially independent – without getting married – for the first time ever. Vast swathes of young women have been choosing to do just that.
- 2) Today, women in their 20s are far more “together” than men the same age: They are better looking, smoother, probably better educated and probably make more money.
- 3) As such, women in their 20s have sharply-reduced interest in getting married – and even less interest in marrying fellow 20-somethings. It’s not that no woman in her 20s wants to marry any guy in his 20s. Many do. But the percentages are way down.
- 4) Instead of getting married, attractive young women go out and play the field. But they don’t play the whole field – and that’s the key. They generally focus on the most appealing guys: the “alpha” males. As a consequence, “beta” males have been the primary losers in the sexual revolution.
- 5) Beta males are the key to the whole story. A beta male is frequently a male who is trying to be a man by doing the right thing: He works hard to learn the difficult trades demanded in the modern economy; he treats women with respect and deference, he is generally sober, he spends a lot of time trying to understand prevailing political and philosophical currents. As a result, he is very unlikely to be the seductive Prince Charming that today’s young women have been brought up to expect as their birthright. So, he loses the girl to the bad boys, the “natural alphas” and the successful guys in their 30s.
- 6) Women in their 30s who are still unmarried (roughly half nowadays) often begin to get the urge to marry and settle down. But the pickings are slimmer. The women are somewhat less attractive, they have fewer years of fertility remaining and the remaining single men their own age are less interested. Many men in their 30s and 40s have become bitter or dropped out of the dating scene due to years of rejection. Others have been wiped out in a divorce.
- 7) Hymowitz has a good discussion of the negative impact of no-fault divorce laws on the marriage landscape. Roughly 70% of divorces are initiated by women – yet women get the kids almost every time. They also get child support.
- 8) Hymowitz really offers no solution to the man-child issue. But, muses Meade, if women suddenly chose, en masse, to forego years of playing the field and instead settled down with the hard-working, unexciting guys their own age whom they are now ignoring, the man-child phenomenon would be over. This just happens to also be the prescription of Lori Gottlieb in *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough* (2010). Of course, the chances of this happening are not high.