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1 – POST-MARITALISM, A NATION OF SINGLES, POST-FAMILIALISM

POST-MARITALISM

In what may be called “The Great Crossover,” the median age of American women having babies (25.7) is, for the first time ever, lower than the median age of marriage (26.5). This reflects how the views of marriage and children have changed among young adults, namely, that marriage and children are two separate things.

These dramatic changes result in [dramatic statistics about American children](#). Among them, 48% of first births are by unwed mothers, and by age 30 two-thirds of American women have had a child, typically out of wedlock.

According to Kay Hymowitz, author of [Marriage and Caste in America: Separate and Unequal Families in a Post-Marital Age](#), young adults have increasingly come to see marriage as a “capstone” rather than a “cornerstone” – that is, something they do after they have all their ducks in a row, rather than a foundation for launching into adulthood and parenthood. Increasingly, delayed marriage does not mean delayed motherhood.

The disconnect between marriage and childbearing is a troubling new trend, believes Hymowitz, because the personal decision to become a parent ahead of a marriage commitment – when done by such a large a portion of the population – has consequences for society at large. Specifically, family instability is one of the greatest risks to children’s well being, and unmarried adults, including single 20-somethings who make up about half of unmarried parents, are by definition unsettled. Further, most researchers agree that on average,

whether because of instability or absent fathers or both, children of unmarried mothers have poorer outcomes than children growing up with their married parents.

A NATION OF SINGLES

Jonathan V. Last is author of [What to Expect When No One’s Expecting: America’s Coming Demographic Disaster](#). He writes in [The Weekly Standard](#):

Americans have been wedded to marriage for a very long time. Between 1910 and 1970, the “ever-married rate” – that is, the percentage of people who marry at some point in their lives – went as high as 98.3% and never dipped below 92.8%. Beginning in 1970, the ever-married number began a gradual decline so that by 2000 it stood at 88.6%.

Today, the numbers are more striking: 23.8% of men and 19% of women between the ages of 35 and 44 have never been married. For people between 20 and 34 – the prime-childbearing years – the numbers are even more startling: 67% of men and 57% of women in that group have never been married. When you total it all up, over half of the voting-age population in America are single.

How did we get to an America where half of the adult population isn’t married and somewhere between 10% and 15% of the population don’t get married for the first time until they’re approaching retirement? It’s a complicated story involving, among other factors, the rise of almost-universal higher education, the delay of marriage, urbanization, the invention of no-fault divorce, the legitimization of cohabitation, the increasing cost

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of raising children, and the creation of a government entitlement system to do for the elderly childless what grown children did for their parents through the millennia.

But all of these causes are particular. Looming beneath them are two deep shifts. The first is the waning of religion in American life. The second shift is the dismantling of the iron triangle of sex, marriage, and childbearing.

Where is this trend line headed? In a word, higher. There are no indicators to suggest when and where it will level off.

The question, then, is whether America will continue following its glidepath to the destination the rest of the First World is already nearing. Most experts believe that it will. As the Austrian demographer Wolfgang Lutz puts it, once a society begins veering away from marriage and childbearing, it becomes a “self-reinforcing mechanism” in which the cult of the individual holds greater and greater allure.

As Robert George put it after the election, limited government “cannot be maintained where the marriage culture collapses and families fail to form or easily dissolve. Where these things happen, the health, education, and welfare functions of the family will have to be undertaken by someone, or some institution, and that will sooner or later be the government.” Marriage is what makes the entire Western project – liberalism, the dignity of the human person, the free market, and the limited, democratic state – possible. George continues, “The two greatest institutions ever devised for lifting people out of poverty and enabling them to live in dignity are the market economy and the institution of marriage. These institutions will, in the end, stand or fall together.”

POST-FAMILIALISM

For most of human history, the family – defined by parents, children and extended kin – has stood as the central unit of society. In Europe, Asia, Africa and, later, the Americas and Oceania, people lived, and frequently worked, as family units.

Today, in the high-income world and even in some developing countries, we are witnessing a shift to a new social model. Increasingly, family no longer serves as the central organizing feature of society. An unprecedented number of individuals – approaching upwards of 30% in some Asian countries – are choosing to eschew child bearing altogether and, often, marriage as well.

So writes Joel Kotkin, senior editor at NewGeography.com.

The post-familial phenomena has been most evident in the high income world, notably in Europe, North America and, most particularly, wealthier parts of East Asia. Yet it has bloomed as well in many key emerging countries, including Brazil, Iran and a host of other Islamic countries. The reasons are economic, social, cultural and personal.

To be sure, many of the changes driving post-familialism also reflect positive aspects of human progress. The change in the role of women beyond sharply defined maternal roles represents one of the great accomplishments of modern times. Yet this trend also generates new pressures that have led some women to reject both child-bearing and marriage. Men are also adopting new attitudes that increasingly preclude marriage or fatherhood.

A society that is increasingly single and childless, writes Kotkin, is likely to be more concerned with serving current needs than addressing the future oriented requirements of children. But globalization, urbanization, the ascendancy of women and changes in traditional sexual relations are probably with us for the long run.

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- Strategic business direction
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2 – PART-TIME, SELF-EMPLOYED, TELECOMMUTING AMERICA

A DISASTROUS NEW NORMAL

Mort Zuckerman, editor-in-chief of [US News & World Report](#), writes of a part-time, low-wage epidemic:

The number of Americans now working part-time has soared to 8.3 million – up 313,000 in the past two months alone. With economic growth declining or stagnant for quarter after quarter, many companies feel it is too risky to take on people full-time.

This has created an army of underutilized labor. The number of Americans working full-time has declined by 5.9 million since September 2007, while the number working part-time has jumped by 2.6 million. Over the same period low-wage occupations have grown nearly three times as fast as mid-wage and higher-wage ones.

The long-term nature of these trends suggests they are more structural than cyclical. From academia to retail, government to warehouse work, employers are increasingly offering part-time work or nominally full-time jobs with lower wages and fewer benefits.

ObamaCare will accelerate this trend starting in 2014, as the costs of insuring full-time workers will get so high that firms will have incentives to limit their weeks to 29 hours or fewer.

Social mobility in America is already much less than we have long liked to believe. And disparities in income, education and social behavior are reinforcing themselves all the more, so future mobility might be lower still. Thus many Americans' gut feeling that the American dream is fading.

This isn't surprising when 23 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed.

START-UPS GET LEANER

As Catherine Rampell writes in [The New York Times](#), start-ups have been getting leaner and meaner for more than a decade. In 1999, the typical new business had 7.7 employees; its counterpart in 2011 had 4.7. We're headed toward an "agent economy," where everyone becomes an agent or a service provider instead of an employee.

With a work force of contractors, companies can add or divest themselves of human resources as business demands. But the implications for the American work force are worrisome, writes Rampell, and may help explain why economic output is growing much faster than employers are adding jobs.

For decades, new companies have produced most of the country's job growth. But the number of people employed by new businesses peaked in 1999, the height of the tech bubble, and has fallen by 46% since then, to 2.5 million in 2011.

The decrease in start-up size is probably driven by some combination of technology, changes in management philosophy and tighter financing. This focus on leanness and streamlining is not limited to high-tech start-ups. Over the last five years, the number of new employer businesses, including new franchises for existing companies, fell by 20%, to 536,445 in 2011 from 667,341 in 2006.

But there was tremendous growth in businesses that are operated by one person, partly reflecting the fact that more Americans are going it alone as consultants and contractors. The number of one-employee businesses grew by 33.8% from 2000 to 2010, according to the Census Bureau. Some economists refer to this phenomenon as job-less entrepreneurship.

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US NEW BUSINESS FORMATION RATE CONTINUES TO DROP

Charles Hugh Smith [writes](#) of the decline of self-employment and its implications:

Spend some time walking through Silicon Valley or New York City, and you'll likely leave under the impression that entrepreneurship is alive and well in the United States. But spend some time wading through some of the latest census data, and you may come away with a very different impression: the decline of small business.

The trajectory of self-employment from 1970 to the mid-2000s tracked general economic growth, which was weak in the 1970s but began a 30-year boom in the early 1980s. Things changed in the most-recent recession, as the self-employed ranks have lost 1.6 million from the peak in 2007. The number of self-employed has fallen to early 1980s levels. This is the statistical equivalent of 6 million people losing full-time jobs and then 4 million of those people getting part-time jobs.

After a brief increase in 2012, the self-employed as a share of total employment is falling off a cliff. This is scary when one considers that the US employment base is disproportionately dependent upon the viability of as few as 4% of the labor force and fewer than 2% of the population as the primary "job creators," i.e., incorporated self-employed.

Small business plays two critically important and often unrecognized roles. One, it tends to give new workers their first employment experience. Two, small business tends to train workers who are then able to move up the job ladder to better paying corporate jobs, having learned the ropes at a small business. Small business is the incubator of employment. As it declines, so too do opportunities for first jobs, second chances and economic independence.

MORE AMERICANS WORKING REMOTELY

As Neil Shah writes in [The Wall Street Journal](#), more American employees are working from home at

least one day a week – a trend that could lower companies' costs and boost productivity. Some 13.4 million people, or 9.4% of US workers, labored at least one day at home per week in 2010, compared with 9.2 million people, or 7% of US workers in 1997.

My editor at *NewGeography.com*, Joel Kotkin, agrees, [writing](#) that the rise of telecommuting is unstoppable:

Telecommuting and home-based work seems to be the inevitable wave of the future, whether corporate managers like it or not. Working at home grew faster percentage-wise than any other mode of work access in the United States between 2000 and 2010. In that decade, the country added some 1.7 million telecommuters, almost twice the much ballyhooed increase of 900,000 transit riders.

As workers become more familiar with technology, these trends should accelerate. A survey by the Information Technology Association of America found that 36% of respondents would choose telecommuting over a pay raise. These preferences appear to be even greater among millennial generation workers, who, according to a Pew study, tend to seek a "balance" between work and life. Global Workplace Analytics suggests this means they will be more attracted to flexible work throughout their careers, particularly as they start families.

For parents, particularly women, telecommuting provides a golden opportunity to balance the challenges of child-raising with those of work. Working at home, full- or part-time, shrinks the number of hours wasted commuting and allows greater flexibility that is often critical to maintaining a family. In a country with a deteriorating fertility rate, and ever greater strains on those trying to raise children, telecommuting offers, at least for some, a way to remain in the labor force without cheating the next generation.