



**IN THIS ISSUE: ONE MORE TIME – EVERY ISSUE IS A FAMILY ISSUE**

Four months ago, in my February issue, I evidenced why every social, economic and public policy issue is at its base a family issue. Right at that time a book was published: [Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis](#), by Robert Putnam.

Putnam argues that children’s access to the core institutions that foster their development – strong families, strong schools, strong communities – is increasingly separate and unequal.

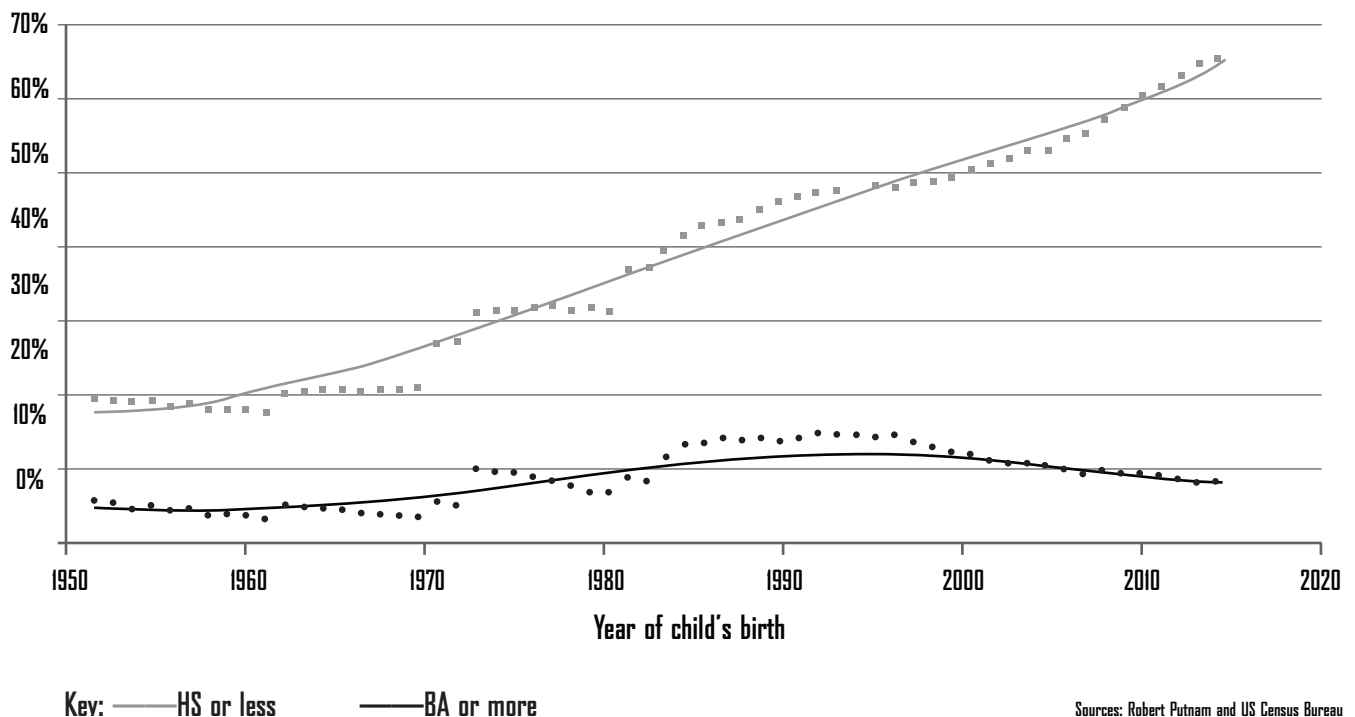
But why has this become so, and what can be done about it?

Putnam describes the American story of the past 50 years: Great rewards go to those with human capital (skills, education, and determination), but not to those without. As it happens, those traits correlate closely with strong family structure. Hence, as family cohesion deteriorates, outcomes diminish for kids in those households.

Here are some of Putnam’s charts, showing:

**PARENTS OF CHILDREN IN SINGLE-PARENT HOMES ARE LESS EDUCATED**

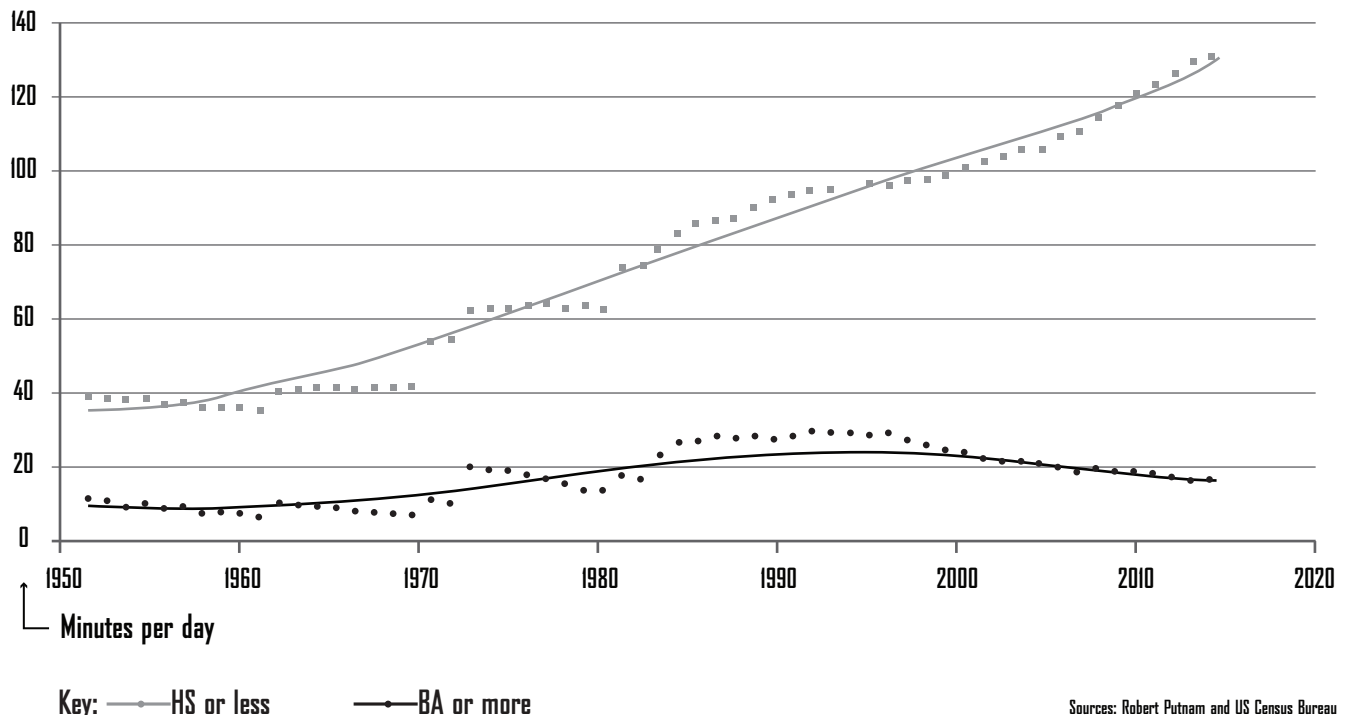
Children (age 0-7) living in a single parent family, by parental education



Trend Analysis That Builds Business Decisions

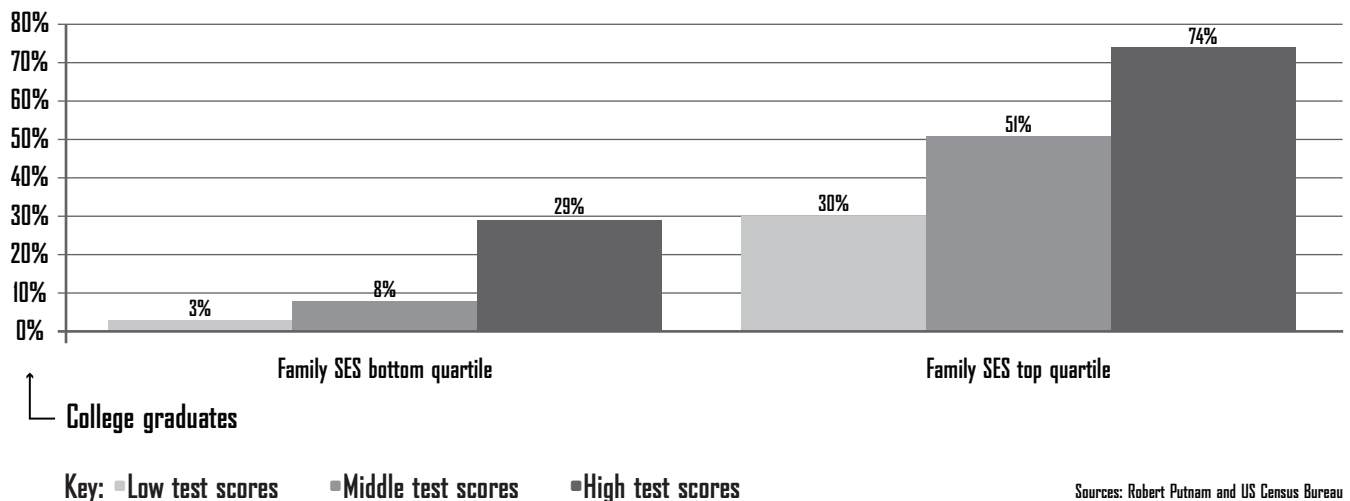
## EDUCATED PARENTS DEVOTE MORE TIME TO CHILDCARE

Time spent by both parents in developmental childcare, children aged 0-4, 1965-2013



## FAMILY BACKGROUND MATTERS MORE THAN TEST SCORES FOR COLLEGE GRADUATION

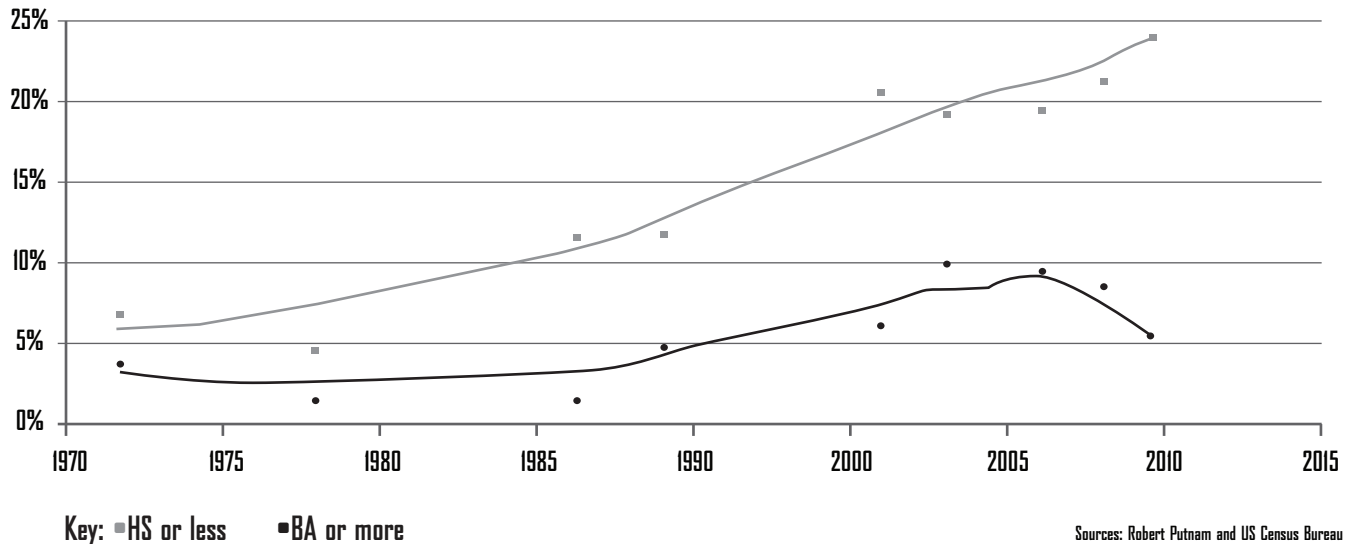
Family background matters more than 8th grade test scores for college graduation



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## CHILDHOOD OBESITY HAS BEEN ALL BUT ELIMINATED AMONG WEALTHIER CHILDREN BUT CONTINUES TO INCREASE IN POORER FAMILIES

Adolescent obesity, age 12-18, by parents' education



In her review of *Our Kids*, Kay Hymowitz [writes](http://www.city-journal.org) at city-journal.org:

In example after example, Putnam shows the “scissoring” of class-based children’s experiences since 1970 as conditions improved for rich kids and declined for the poor and working class. Extracurricular activities, college attendance and graduation, social trust, church attendance, “developmental activities” with parents like reading, museum-going, family dinners, the number of words they hear, and, of course, having two parents living at home: affluent kids are better off than ever while their disadvantaged peers continue to lose ground.

The quality of family life, schools, and communities are mutually reinforcing, leading to success for rich kids and struggle for the poor. The gap, Putnam concludes, is bad for kids, bad for the economy, and – especially given the lack of trust and civic engagement among low-income families – bad for democracy.

Putnam’s prescription for correcting this state of affairs is to rebuild communities, but how is that to be accomplished in an age of *The Big Sort*? Community cannot be imposed.

For a bracing, politically-incorrect view, I recommend James Quinn’s take on [the real reason the American dream is unraveling](#):

The facts prove that people (no matter what race) who marry and stay married offer their children a tremendously better opportunity to succeed academically, thereby giving them a much higher chance of moving up the socioeconomic ladder. This doesn’t mean that children from a single parent household can’t succeed. It just means they have a better chance with two parents.

Harvard Professor Putnam prefers to ignore the politically incorrect fact that a return to traditional families would begin to reverse the 50 years of damage caused by the War on Poverty. He believes it is in the moral interest of wealthier families to help

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## *Trend Analysis That Builds Business Decisions*

improve the economic prospects of poorer children. Liberals also don't think the \$13,000 spent per student per year is enough to educate them properly. He actually believes taking more money from producers and handing it to non-producers will boost the U.S. economy.

The country has spent \$22 trillion on the war on poverty and spends approximately \$1 trillion per year, but liberal academics think if we just spend more, the complete and utter failure of their solutions will be reversed. They ignore the fact a Democratic President (Clinton) and a Republican Congress instituted welfare reform in 1996 that temporarily stopped the increase in spending, halted the rise in unwed births, and put poor people back to work. Today only one welfare program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), effectively promotes self-reliance. Reforms that created TANF in 1996 moved 2.8 million families off the welfare rolls and into jobs. Those gains were reversed as the Obama administration and congressional leadership undid the employment and training requirements enacted 14 years ago.

The American dream has unraveled for many reasons. Not spending enough on welfare programs is not one of the reasons.

Voluntarily putting the country back on a path of self reliance could be done if there was a will to do so. Reversing the culture of dependency would require a major dose of tough love that would upend the entire ideology of liberalism. Able-bodied, non-elderly adult recipients in all federal welfare programs would be required to work, prepare for work, or at least look for a job as a condition of receiving food stamps or housing assistance. This would promote personal responsibility and provide the recipients with some self respect.

Anti-marriage penalties should be removed from welfare programs, and long-term steps should be taken to rebuild the family in lower-income com-

munities. Marriage penalties occur in many means-tested programs such as food stamps, public housing, Medicaid, day care, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The welfare system needs to be revamped to reduce these counterproductive incentives. The appeal of welfare programs as an alternative to work and marriage could be reduced by requiring able-bodied parents to work or prepare for work as a condition of receiving aid. Today government advertises in an effort to get more people to sign up for food stamps and dozens of other welfare programs.

Government should be promulgating the facts on how marriage prevents social ills – poverty, poor education, juvenile crime – associated with children born to unmarried women.

Lastly, we need to cutoff the illegal influx of low-skill immigrants from the South, whose children will receive far more in welfare benefits than they pay in taxes, if they pay any taxes. The country must reject blanket amnesty or “earned citizenship” for millions of illegal immigrants who then could access the welfare system. The welfare system is already unsustainable and adding millions of illegals into the system would be the tipping point.

Lyndon B. Johnson's goal was not to create an ever increasing welfare state, but to give the poor a helping hand towards self-sufficiency. His idealistic aim was to cure and prevent poverty. But, once a program is put into the hands of politicians looking to get re-elected every two years, the unintended negative consequences expand exponentially. \$22 trillion later the American Dream is virtually nonexistent for the 47 million Americans languishing in poverty and the once prosperous middle class who have seen their real wages stagnate due to Federal Reserve created inflation and taxes increase to pay for the ever expanding welfare/warfare state.

Traditional married, two parent families are the antidote to poverty, not government welfare programs.