



SPECIFICALLY,
**WHAT MUST WE
DO TO REPAIR OUR
CULTURE OF
MASSIVE FAMILY
FRAGMENTATION?**

COMPILED & WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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***SPECIFICALLY,* WHAT MUST WE DO TO REPAIR OUR CULTURE OF MASSIVE FAMILY FRAGMENTATION?**

MITCH PEARLSTEIN

FOUNDER & AMERICAN EXPERIMENT SENIOR FELLOW

Introduction

The symposium in your hands or maybe on your screen grapples with one of the biggest problems – and consequently hardest jobs – facing the United States: What can we do to repair our country’s very culture of massive family fragmentation? It features 35 essays by 36 men and women from Minnesota and across the country, adding up to perhaps the most vital voices on the topic ever published in one place. At least I’ve never seen a similar collection.

Center of the American Experiment has dealt frequently with family fragmentation (the still-new

term of art for “family breakdown”) since we started in 1990. I began studying it with extra emphasis while writing my 2011 book, *From Family Collapse to America’s Decline: The Educational, Economic, and Social Costs of Family Fragmentation*. Other germane publications since then have included symposia such as *Fragmented Families and Silence of the Faithful: How Religious Leaders and Institutions Must Speak Up and Reach Out*; a paper by Senior Fellow Rhonda Kruse Nordin titled, “*Where the Boys Are:*” *The Unacknowledged Worlds of Nonmarital Fathers*; and a second book of mine, *Broken Bonds: What Family Fragmentation Means for America’s Future*, released in 2014.

In addition to requisite analyzing and interpreting, all these publications, to one degree or another, also have addressed what actually might be done to improve matters measurably. They are anything but recommendation free. Nevertheless, it's time to focus all the more on what needs to be done – on what needs to be done *specifically* – so that our nation no longer has one of the highest rates of family fragmentation in the world. More directly, it's time to focus intensely on the very culture that leads to so many babies coming into this world outside of marriage. To so many husbands and wives divorcing. To so many cohabiting couples going their separate ways so quickly. To so many children caught up and hurt by it all, often seriously. To so much “churning,” as sociologist Andrew Cherlin has summed up the disruption, pain, and damage.

Hence, this symposium: *Specifically, What Must We Do to Repair Our Culture of Massive Family Fragmentation?* What do its 35 essays (one was coauthored) propose? I'll start introducing some of those ideas in a moment, but first a preview of “analyzing and interpreting” as to why American culture, while oftentimes exceptional in socially benign and constructive ways, sometimes is not.

Katherine Kersten: “Our society has lost the moral vocabulary and categories of thought on which [a] vision of the ‘good life’ is based. This change in mindset is the biggest barrier we face in reviving a culture of marriage and family.”

Heather Mac Donald: “The largest contributor to families that are fatherless *ab initio* is the belief that fathers are an optional appendage to raising a child. Feminism has taught generations of females (and many males) that strong women can do it all, including raising law-abiding, self-controlled children.” Elsewhere in her essay, Mac Donald writes about the need to “revalorize” fathers.

Arvonne Fraser: “So long as the good-father model is that of supporting a family, marriage rates will decline because a majority of men can no longer live up to that model, and our culture does not encourage or support sharing the responsibilities of parenthood – that is doing what has historically been called women’s work.”

Some writers take a more religiously flavored tack in probing the culture. Here are two.

Fred Hinz: “As a nation, not only have we come to publicly disavow the connection between marriage and functioning families, we’ve lost something even more basic – namely, the public understanding that we are created beings, beings created to live within a divinely ordered world, and beings called on to conform our behavior to the divine order.”

Jason Adkins: “A lifelong marriage and the expectation of children may be your truth, but don’t try suggesting it should be the general norm for most people. Such skepticism is especially salient because the ideal of permanence and stability in marriage and family life is seen more and more as unrealistic.”

Perhaps surprisingly, writers cite public policies as malignant cultural determinants relatively infrequently. Then again, maybe it isn’t surprising given that the exercise at hand encourages one to think more about atmospheric above than politics below. Nonetheless, **Bob Woodson** decisively argues: “The tragic plummet of marriage and family throughout black America since the mid-1960s is due largely to the creation of a self-perpetuating welfare system that was marked by disincentives and penalties for a key stepping stone to self-sufficiency: entering a marital union.”

Getting to the point of fixing the culture, writers once again take both religiously based

and non-religiously based approaches, with some melding the two. I'm struck by how many of the recommendations are more micro than macro in scope and more personal than programmatic in practice. We start with five largely secular suggestions.

Chuck Chalberg: "If the culture is to be restored – if family fragmentation is to be reversed – it will have to be accomplished in small steps by many, many individuals. At this late date in what has been called the 'culture wars,' we have little choice."

Kathryn Hickok: "Many younger adults know that what they experience in mainstream culture is unsatisfying. They want to believe there is more and their lives can be different. Forging a new path is hard, but it's worth the effort. Helping them choose hope and to find the courage to be happy is the first step in healing the culture, because one who has hope lives differently."

Amber and David Lapp: "When we speak of culture, many times we think of powerful top-down institutions: film production companies in Hollywood, advertising agencies on Madison Avenue, television networks in Manhattan. Those institutions are, indeed, powerful, but influencing culture need not always come from the top down. It can also come from the bottom up, through social movements that begin in the peripheries. This is important to keep in mind when thinking about how we can repair the culture that is fueling family fragmentation."

C. Peter Magrath: "The best I can offer is a suggestion, not a solution, to this terrible problem of abandoned children. It is that when two persons come together to be married and live together they take a vow, not only to love and cherish each other but also to be forever responsible for the children they produce or adopt."

Erin Mundahl: "Making families stronger means spending more time with family. Only by coming to love not the ideal of family, but the people themselves – with all their annoying habits and human flaws – can the institution be strengthened. Love is a choice; it's also hard work. The same is true of friendships."

Next are five faith-based counterparts.

Bryan Dowd: "When people become sick of their autonomy, their rights, and themselves, they will ask if there is an alternative. There is: a Savior whose service is perfect freedom – and it is better offered as preventive, rather than remedial, counsel."

Todd Flanders: "Repairing a culture of family fragmentation requires a culture of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice must be modeled and taught if it is to be handed on. There must be schools that inculcate it. Consequently, the ongoing viability of such schools requires vigorous defense of First Amendment freedoms of speech, association, and exercise of religion."

Bob Osburn: "Just now, I received an email from a couple who are courageously preparing to tie the knot after nine years of living together. My wife and I are involved in their lives because we want their family to join us on the social escalator and because we share the human responsibility to love our neighbors as ourselves. Will you join us?"

Larry Purdy: "Apart from a return to faith, is there any other precise repair once can offer? I know of none. Friends across the ideological spectrum offer none. Yet, sadly, how likely is it that a meaningful return to faith will occur?"

Ken Lewis: "I believe that if we want a healthy nation and healthy families, the primary solution is spiritual. Isn't what Micah predicts exactly what we long for?"



Several writers looked to government and public policy as a means of strengthening families, while other participants pointed to the pronounced limitations of such means.

Here are five passages on the possibility of politics and public policy aiding in the remaking our culture. It's hard to miss their, at best, cramped optimism.

Larry Mead: "Over recent decades, government has enforced the law more effectively, required more welfare recipients to work, and began to raise standards in schools. These policies worked only because they were backed by popular support. Attitudes shifted from tolerance toward an insistence on better behavior, and that change was more important than policy innovation in achieving change. Marriage is similar. Few people oppose the value of marriage as such, yet many do not achieve it. That's because we have not yet evolved the combination of more demanding policies with public support that has brought progress in other areas."

Frank Conte: "To preserve the family and preserve a social order, we may need to start thinking the unthinkable – something like a basic income guarantee for everyone. The culture wars distract us, but the path to renewing the family is foremost economic."

Pete Hegseth: "Conservatives must stop obsessing – politically and culturally – over same-sex marriage. I believe children deserve a mother and father and also believe advocating a traditional view should always be protected (a religious liberty). But beating this dead horse – a debate that was lost in the culture long before it was manifest in public policy – undercuts conservatives' ability to influence deeper problems affecting families and kids, issues such as no-fault divorce and absentee fathers."

Heather Mac Donald: "There are no policy initiatives that will combat family breakdown, contrary to the fond hopes of conservative policy wonks everywhere."

Chuck Chalberg: "As English essayist G.K. Chesterton once put it, 'What is hope if not hoping when everything seems hopeless. Where is the basis for hope today? It is right where it's always been: within each of us. Laws and policies may not be irrelevant, but they are almost beside the point.'"

One more powerful, albeit quite different passage before concluding.

Chong Yang Thao was born in Laos and came to Minnesota in 1980, along with members of her family, after four years in a refugee camp in Thailand. She grew up in St. Paul, earned two degrees at the University of Minnesota, and has taught at Como Park Senior High School in St. Paul for the last nineteen years. Her essay is about family fragmentation in the Hmong community, a topic barely acknowledged or known in the rest of the Twin Cities. Here is a small sampling of her candid and, I emphasize, brave essay, "A People without a Story Dies."

Whatever the reasons, and maybe there are no good or real reasons, the abandonment of families in America creates one cycle of dependency as mothers become sole providers and children are displaced. When a man marries a child-bride, he will quickly impregnate her in an effort to make her stay with him. As these girls are young, usually uneducated, and in America without their families, they and their children form another cycle of dependency. This, by far, is the most destructive factor in the fracturing of Hmong families.

My great thanks to Chong and all 36 writers for one of the most important collections the Center has ever released. One of our best to read, too. In going through it, you may find that different pieces contain different statistics regarding identical or approximate issues. This is pretty much inevitable in a publication like this as authors draw on a variety of sources. Be assured, though, that data, when they do differ in this way, are of similar direction and proportion.

My gratitude as well to generous funders who make complex and time-consuming projects like this one possible, especially the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the LML and FTL Lanners Foundation, and Karen and Mahlon Schneider.

Also Peter Zeller for everything pertaining to operations and production, both before writers wrote what they wrote and after I typed these salutes. Kent Kaiser, who has served as copy editor for every symposium I can recall and did so here again, to the marked satisfaction, even happiness of seemingly everyone he marked up. Designer Scott Buchshacher for the graphic artistry that surrounds. And then there are the thousands of American Experiment members who have made our work possible for 26 years now.

Have a good summer, and as always, we welcome any thoughts you might have.

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Credible Witnesses Needed

By Jason Adkins

Changing the culture of family fragmentation is a tall order, particularly when it means rebuilding or repairing what is broken—as both family life and our culture are today. Politics can work only at the margins of these challenges, “nudging” people one way or another. Appeals to reason,

“Many people do not even know what a healthy and happy family looks like, because they have not experienced it themselves.” *Jason Adkins*

whether through the educational system or in the public square, can work only inasmuch as people are willing to listen or even sense that there is a problem. Like with the solution to many challenges in American life today, both policies and arguments are necessary, but neither is sufficient.

Furthermore, the dominant cultural narrative is often hostile to commitments, duties, and bonds other than to one’s own pursuits, ideals, and dreams. A lifelong marriage and the expectation of children may be your truth, but don’t try suggesting it should be the general norm for most people. Such skepticism is especially salient because the ideal of permanence and stability in marriage and family life is seen more and more as unrealistic.



Changing the culture will require offering a different narrative. We must win the “story wars,” as author Jonah Sachs calls our public conversation. Yet building a better narrative won’t be done with exhortations and moralizing, or even sophisticated communications efforts. Many people do not even know what a healthy and happy family looks like, because they have not experienced it themselves. They need to have hope that the abundant life offered by the bonds of family and community is even possible.

Therefore, actual models of people forming families and creating stable, loving environments that focus on the well-being of children (rather than the desires of adults) need to be present in every place and community. We need witnesses to the happiness and fulfillment offered by the bonds of family and community—bonds that do not inhibit our freedom but instead are the very places in which we learn that we are made for each other.

Christians have a special responsibility to rebuild a culture marred by family fragmentation, because they are called to make their families a “domestic church.” Like the church, the family is a communion of persons—literally a sharing of gifts between people who are interdependent on one another and seek to support each other in the midst of life’s joys and challenges. The family, then, is a school of virtues, and a place of peace, solidarity, and blessing.

Yet the blessings of family life are not meant to be kept hidden under a bushel. The gifts of family life are meant to be shared. Like the church, which is called to go forth and bring the life and love of Christ to others, so too the domestic church—the family—must be missionary disciples of this abundant life.

The missionary discipleship of the family can take many forms. Simply staying married and having children (and doing so with joy, not looking like sourpusses) is countercultural. (When my wife and I are told that we have our hands full with four kids, we always say, “Better than empty!”)

Rooting one’s family in a place and forgoing building a better career in order to build a better family can be a beautiful gift that allows your children to know their relatives and grandparents and be tied more closely to the broader community. It highlights the importance of the permanent things over the transient nature of most jobs and a life viewed increasingly in transactional, individualistic, and utilitarian terms.

Married couples can mentor the newly engaged, seek to help struggling couples in myriad ways, or simply make their homes places of hospitality and friendship. We should support other families when they struggle, particularly when juggling work and children, and we should also find opportunities to serve the broader community, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Undoubtedly, just keeping it all together these days is hard enough for most people, let alone making a home and family life a “domestic church.” Yet if we wish to renew the culture of the family, we must provide compelling examples, which will take great sacrifice. Perhaps that is why the Greek word for *witness* is *martyr*.

Jason Adkins is executive director and general counsel of the Minnesota Catholic Conference.

Dads' Lives Matter

By Randy Ahlm

"This project is . . . much more interested in the kinds of conversations worried grandparents might have around kitchen tables" related to the fragmentation of families and the effect on society. Now, that comment in the email invitation

"Maybe the answer is in Hollywood, after all." Randy Ahlm

from Mitch Pearlstein caught my eyes. I'm no policy wonk, nor am I a grandfather yet, but I do know that both of my grandfathers would have said the same thing at their kitchen table if asked why fragmented families are a problem in America: "It's because fathers aren't taking care of their families. They need to know that they are accountable to take care of their kids, no matter what and without any exceptions."

This may seem old-fashioned, but think about the kitchen table conversations you have had with siblings, children, or friends; "It's a shame Rob doesn't spend more time with his kids" or "Too bad Jim moved away; he never sees his son, and James Jr. hasn't been the same since he left."

We all know intuitively that fathers are important to raising children. There are many reasons why some fathers don't get it, and I couldn't possibly begin to identify or solve all of them in eight hundred words. Yet I do believe that if we could convince society that dads' lives matter, then we could make the world a much better place.

There is a plethora of research that supports the importance of a father's involvement in his children's lives (and, yes, moms are important, too), but the question is, how do we make it a moral imperative that dads stay involved? When do we stop marginalizing the role fathers play, and how do we compel a man who fathers a child to make sure he knows that his commitment and willingness to be an engaged father can have a significant impact on the child he rears?

It's tempting to blame the marginalization of men on Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and others who began the campaign in the 1960s to render men unimportant to the fulfillment of a woman's life. Maybe it's due to the constant portrayal of men as imbeciles in movies and sitcoms; e.g., *Daddy's Home*, released as a Christmas movie in 2015, or Al Bundy (played by Ed O'Neill) in the 1990s sitcom *Married with Children*. I certainly ranted about both trends to the rolled eyes of friends and family over the years, but what if I told you I was wrong? What if there is actually an example of a bumbling Dad from Hollywood who actually exemplifies why dads' lives matter?

Many readers have probably watched the sitcom *Modern Family* which stars a traditional white suburban family of five, a gay couple adopting a Vietnamese child, and an old divorced guy (Ed O'Neill, again) marrying a Columbian woman with a child. I initially resisted watching the show, because it seemed to glorify some societal trends that I am not fond of, but after finally giving in I came to realize how brilliant the show is because it actually reinforced that dads do matter.

One of the storylines is father Phil Dunphy played by Ty Burrell trying to be the cool dad. His kids Haley, Alex, and Luke mock him, his wife nags him, his father-in-law looks down on him, and



he typically loses his real-estate deals to powerful women realtors. Episode after episode reinforces the bumbling nature of Phil. There is even an episode where his father comes to visit in his RV and is portrayed in the same silly manner as Phil.

Yet the hidden beauty of Phil Dunphy is that he takes his fatherhood responsibilities seriously and is committed to raising his children. In one of my favorite episodes, he takes his daughter Haley on a college visit to his alma mater. After a full day of embarrassing her, the show ends with Phil pulling Haley out of a potentially threatening situation at a fraternity party, with her finally understanding that her crazy dad was always going to be looking out for her. There are many other great examples where Phil comes through in the end for his kids and demonstrates why dads matter to their children.

There have been some other great dads in Hollywood: Tony Danza in *Who's the Boss*, Bill Cosby in *The Cosby Show*, and J.K. Simmons in *Juno*, all who took accountability for their families. The real point is that dads' lives matter in the raising of children. Not every situation is the same, and, admittedly, not every family lives in a nice Southern California home like the Dunphys', but we must find ways to encourage fathers to take accountability for their children and know they are crucial to the well-being of children. Maybe the answer is in Hollywood, after all.

Randy Ahlm is Principal of RCA Consulting and a former member of American Experiment's Board of Directors.

The Absence of “Teamness”

By Frank B. Cerra

The progressive fragmentation of the American family is readily apparent. This opinion piece makes the observation that the root cause of this fragmentation is the inability of the family to develop and sustain a successful team with a clear,

“In its final analysis, the family is a team undertaking, and there is much to learn from the attributes of successful teams.” *Frank Cerra*

shared mental model and values of what a family is and does. This thesis is a “coin with two sides.” On one side are the attributes of the existing culture, and on the other are the attributes of successful teams.

The Culture of Fragmentation. American culture has transitioned from a “we” to an “I” orientation with a shift in values to “what’s good for me is what I need and will do,” and if the “I” cannot achieve what “I” desires, or something goes wrong in achieving it, someone else must be at fault. Much of this stems from the transition from a one- to a two-career family in the absence of sufficient rooting in creating a shared mental model, with a compromise approach, to a win-win way of problem-solving. In addition, the emphasis is on the acquisition of wealth and security and a

decline in emphasis of spirituality/religiosity in the presence of a rise of extremism that is intolerant of others views and values.

Success of Teams. In its final analysis, the family is a team undertaking, and there is much to learn from the attributes of successful teams. The core of these successes is a shared mental model of what the team needs to accomplish—in this case, the success of the family as a family team in setting the goals to be achieved. To accomplish this requires an environment of mutual respect and interdependency that transcends food, clothing, and shelter and creates the development of shared values and behaviors within which spirituality/religiosity are the basis for mutual trust and open communication. Adaptability to changing situations and challenges, together with parental leadership, mutual support, and joint decision-making are important enabling attributes.

Approach. Unfortunately, the concept of the family as a team does not seem to be part of the current American culture, although the concept is well developed in sports, the military, manufacturing and successful corporate cultures. Consequently, a variety of programs, professionals, and organizations involved in pre-marital and marital preparation and support are filling this gap. Perhaps these services need a greater emphasis on “teamness” and the attributes of successful teams. Ideally, religious communities, without extremism, should lead in this development with the development of the necessary educational and support services for their congregations.

Frank B. Cerra, M.D. is emeritus professor and dean of the Medical School and former senior vice president for health sciences at the University of Minnesota.

Expect the Young to Be Heroic

By Chuck Chalberg

As we wonder what might be done to repair the fractured American family, I’m reminded of the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s reminder that culture trumps politics. Surely he was right about that.

Southern author Flannery O’Connor may or may not have known of Moynihan or his reminder, but she would not have been likely to disagree. In the mid-1950s, she wrote the following in a letter to a friend: “If you live today, you breathe in nihilism.

“Shame may or may not have a place in modern society, but at least we should avoid celebrating what should not be celebrated.” *Chuck Chalberg*

In or out of the Church, it’s the gas you breathe. If I hadn’t had the Church to fight it with or tell me the necessity of fighting it, I would be the skinkingest logical positivist you ever saw right now.”

Whew! And that was sixty plus years ago! What would she say today? If our culture was nihilistic then, it is hyper-nihilistic (rather than post-nihilistic) today. Is there any basis for hope? Of course, there is. There always is. As English essayist G.K. Chesterton once put it, “What is hope if not hoping when everything seems hopeless?”



Where is the basis for hope today? It's right where it's always been: within each of us. Laws and policies may not be irrelevant, but they are almost beside the point.

What would not be beside the point would be to put both O'Connor and Chesterton on your list of authors who deserve a first or second reading. Both were childless, and neither is on hand to comment on the seemingly hopeless state of the American family. Yet both understood the importance of family and of religion—and of the hopeful connection between the two. (Chesterton also understood that “without the family we are helpless before the state.”)

Here, John Adams was right—and helpful, if not necessarily brimming with hopefulness. The American republic, he cautioned, was designed for a religious people, the implication being that if we ceased to be religious, we would cease to be a viable republic. Without vigorous and vibrant families it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a viable republic.

Much more recently, another John from Massachusetts at least thought he was trying to be helpful. When Secretary of State John Kerry was asked how international edicts calling for reductions in carbon emissions might be enforced, he replied “public shaming.” Really?

When it comes to the state of our culture and what to do about it, I'd settle for something less than that. Shame may or may not have a place in modern society, but at least we should avoid celebrating what should not be celebrated.

When I was in high school, which was almost as long ago as Flannery O'Connor was expressing her concerns about a different sort of environmental poison, a classmate of mine disappeared. We soon

learned the reason. She was pregnant. There was no need—or occasion—for public shaming. Having shamed herself and her family, she went away. She subsequently married the father, gave birth, and quietly finished high school.

While recently reading Peggy Noonan's new collection of essays, I came across her response to the applause that greeted a very pregnant graduate as she received her diploma. Noonan was not about to applaud their applause. That stipulated, public shaming was not her answer either, but she did offer this cautionary reminder: “In the sound of that applause, I heard a wall falling . . . a wall of sanctions that said: We as a society do not approve of teenaged unwed motherhood because it is not good for the child, not good for the mother, and not good for us.”

Somehow, she went on, we must recover a piece of the “old America,” namely the “delicate sense of the difference between the general (‘We disapprove’) and the particular (‘Let's go help her’).” Here is Noonan's concluding message to us: “What you applaud, you encourage.” And: “Watch out what you celebrate.” In sum, when it comes to dealing with unwed motherhood, it's better to be individually helpful than to be collectively celebratory.

While at least tangentially on the subject of schools, we must make sure that they work to help recover a sense of the heroic. Here's a “do” rather than a “don't.” Let's ask—nay, let's expect—the young to try to be heroic in their own lives. Perhaps that applause was a tribute to that pregnant girl's own heroism, especially her decision to keep her baby rather than abort it. Somehow I doubt it. So does Noonan. In any case, it should be more than possible to couch conversations about teen sex in heroic terms, as in the heroism that comes with abstention.

It can also be important to recover a sense of the heroic in terms of what is taught in the classroom. Admittedly, this will also be difficult to do, especially in our nihilistic, highly materialistic age. Yet it can be done, one teacher and one lesson at a time. Perhaps, just perhaps, great examples of heroism in public life can lead to personal acts of heroism in private lives.

If the culture is to be restored—if family fragmentation is to be reversed—it will have to be accomplished in small steps by many, many individuals. At this late date in what has been called the “culture wars,” we have little choice.

The consensus has it that Peggy Noonan’s “old America” has long since lost that war. Actually, that may be a good, perhaps even hopeful, thing. After all, from the vantage point of defeat, we may be better positioned to realize—and act upon—the truth of this Oscar Wilde aphorism: “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”

John C. “Chuck” Chalberg is retired from Normandale Community College and is an American Experiment Senior Fellow.

What is a “Family”?

By Ward Connerly

According to Dictionary.com, a family is defined as “a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not” or “any group of persons closely related by blood, as parents, children, uncles, aunts, and cousins.”

I have a close friend who was raised by a very racist, abusive family. She was in and out of many

homes and spent her teen years testifying in criminal court against her biological family. When she was 17, she moved in with and eventually married a Hispanic man whom she had known for years. They had a child, then two weeks later her husband died at 19 years of age. His family took her in as their own, telling her that she was no longer their daughter-in-law, but she was now their daughter. She has been a member of the “family” for the last 27 years. Her mother lovingly calls her “my vanilla.” Everywhere she goes, she introduces them as her family, because that is who they are.

“Perhaps, we need to begin healing fragmented families by showing our love to all types of families.” *Ward Connerly*

Whether we agree or not with same sex marriage, it is hypocritical to say that we believe in and will even fight for equality for all in America and not give same-sex couples the respect of being called a family. Remember, there was a time in our nation when an interracial couple was not allowed to marry. Also, at the same time a couple that chose for whatever reason not to have children, they were not considered a family.

When my mother died in 1943, I lived for a spell with a maternal aunt and her husband and later with my widowed grandmother. In each instance, I was part of a loving family.

All of the models of family cited above are at variance with the “traditional” family model—



husband, wife, and children. Yet each model is firmly implanted in American culture.

It seems to me that a better definition of family would be “a group of two or more people, regardless of sex, race, color or national origin, who love and care for each other.” Our concept of family affects the way that we view the problem of “fragmented families.” The days of the typical nuclear family seem to be a thing of the past and we must adapt to this reality.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 1960, 73 percent of children were living in the home with their two married parents, who were in their first marriage; 14 percent of children were living in a step-parent marriage, while 9 percent were living in a single-parent home. The remaining 4 percent were not living with a parent at all; usually they were with grandparents. Compare that with the home life of a child today. In 2013, 46 percent of children were living in the home with their two married parents, who were in their first marriage; 15 percent of children were living in a step-parent marriage; 34 percent were living in a single parent home; 5 percent were living without a parent. There are no data on same-sex marriage or partnership living; therefore, those kids are lumped in with the single family children.

Thus, in the last 50-some-odd years, the rate of single-parent homes has gone up 25 percentage points. First-time married couples with children have decreased by a whopping 27 percentage points. As a Christian and a Republican, my ideas on family may not be very popular. Yet it is loving, inclusive, and all-around right. Maybe the question about what we can do about our fragmented families should really be a question of what can we do to help individuals thrive in whatever kind of family they are in.

There have been many positive changes in our K-12 classrooms over the last few years. Those changes include books and teaching that create an environment of tolerance for all types of families. There are also many community resources that help families with respect to money management, employment, and childcare options, for example. Perhaps, we need to begin healing fragmented families by showing our love to all types of families, if not for the sake of the parents but for the sake of our children and our nation.

Ward Connerly is president of the American Civil Rights Institute.

Path to Renewal is Foremost Economic

By Frank Conte

What will it take to repair the very culture that is fueling family fragmentation in the United States? The short answer is a miracle. The longer answer demanded by the rational mind is no more assuring.

The last happy warriors of the greatest generation are about to leave us less happy. The great-grandparents and grandparents who fought in World War II and elsewhere, who labored to create an economic engine that rebuilt Europe and a benign empire, who watched Communism fall flat on its face and beheld the wonders of technological progress, are no longer confident.

Dismayed by 9/11 and the Great Recession, they worry about what the more precariously uncertain future will bring for their grandchildren, who seem not to grasp the severity of the problem. The

successes and the perpetual replication of the material wealth and easy comforts are in the rear-view mirror. The elders see cultural decline as it marches with economic stagnation making the Next Big Thing all the more elusive. The elders believe that President Reagan's sunny optimism about the unfinished project of American idealism is simply unavailable to a new generation.

Instead, we have a strange fondness among some economists longing for misleading nostalgia, the 1950s, where "equality" prevailed (in factory assembly lines and low CEO pay), where high marginal tax rates put the rich in their place, and exports were our unabashed virtues and inferior imports our luxurious vice. (Of course, the reformers will be happy only to leave aside the fifties culture and the paternal social order that fostered American economic growth, but that is another story.)

"For the first time, America's children will almost certainly not be as well educated, healthy, or wealthy as their parents, and the result stems from the growing disconnect between the resources available to adults and those invested in children," write June Carbone and Naomi Cahn, two law professors. Whether this is the result of the older living at the expense of the young is up for debate. Alongside that thought is another. Political scientist Charles Murray notes that the percentage of children with both biological parents under one roof declined from 95 percent in 1960 to 34 percent in 2010.

This Carbone-Cahn-Murray assessment is amplified by the estimable Northwestern economist Robert Gordon who in his new work, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, writes that "Social conditions are decaying, and clearly there is a chicken-and-egg, two-way causality between stagnant incomes and social dysfunction." He adds, "A lack of job opportunities may be responsible for declin-

ing marriage rates and for the sharp increase in the percentage of children living with only one parent."

Worries about the necessary leap in productivity to get out of this mess are compelling. Yet the prevailing wisdom is that growing income inequality is the root of our problem and any talk of reforming the culture or better economic efficiency will have

"To preserve the family and preserve a social order, we may need to start thinking the unthinkable – something big like a basic income guarantee for everyone." *Frank Conte*

to wait after the enactment of \$15-an-hour minimum wage. The inequality meme is not merely economic. It also calls into question all the things that made America great. Human achievement (or hard work) and material progress are based on a system that is rigged, at least if we take the insurgent candidates for president in both parties seriously.

The solutions proposed struggle to be second best. The visible hand of redistributionist government says the elites can spread the wealth while accepting no better than two percent annual growth rates. This is the new normal: The boisterous reaction against free trade, the scientific truth of economics, calls for walls against people, and taxes on foreign goods. Sure-to-be-costly family and medical leave policies can make families whole again. Various aspects of the sharing economy with its independent contractors are mere races to the bottom for the American worker if not altogether illusions of



autonomy. These innovations must be regulated, say the smart set.

Families in America were once able to endure the hardships of fortune: a death, a lost job, or an act of nature. Today they are the collateral damage of an economy and a culture, if you believe all the downside talk, which have run off the tracks. Declining wages fuel sour moods. Jobs are shipped heartlessly overseas. Climate change urgency keeps us awake in a constant state of alarm. Technology displaces interaction and intimacy, extending information devoid of knowledge. The coarse and unrefined edges of popular culture take hold with great digital dispatch. The rise of opiates among white high school educated workers, disabled or not, is a mortal response for those who have given up on the idea of a good life (which was once inculcated at the family table, in the church, and in the classroom). How can the family endure?

Conservatives have boxed themselves in with a single-point-of-failure theory of history. The great zig-zag of progress doesn't prevent them from rewriting and modifying Spengler or Burckhardt for our current condition. Their beloved sociologist Robert Nisbet lamented the decline of authority and autonomy of the tribal social bond against the rise of the State. In his durable classic, *The Twilight of Authority*, Nisbet noted, "The centralization, and, increasingly, individualization of power is matched in the social and cultural spheres by a combined hedonism and egalitarianism, each in its own way a reflection of the destructive impact of power on the hierarchy that is native to the social bond."

It may be true that as the State grows, it does so at the expense of traditional morality. But the institutions favored by conservatives, church and family, have also failed us. Few historians are able to appreciate the nearly coincidental unfolding of the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church with the suc-

cessful legal push for gay marriage in Massachusetts in 2004. To Joe Six-pack, the authority of the church to pronounce on marriage in light of the enormity of scandal borders on farce. Progressivism, wrought with its own contradictions, marches on thanks to the hypocrisy of traditionalists.

The renewal of the American family will depend on various new forms of the institution and an unpalatable acceptance that it might take a village to raise a child. To this end, there are no shortage of policies, some of which will bring unintended consequences. The gig economy, the robots, the end of manual labor and disappearing retail jobs do not bode well for the family. To preserve the family and preserve a social order, we may need to start thinking the unthinkable—something big like a basic income guarantee for everyone. The culture wars distract us, but the path to renewing the family is foremost economic.

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Rising Above the Noise

By Bryan Dowd

Our assignment was to discuss specific steps that might "repair the very culture that is fueling family fragmentation in Minnesota and the United States." That is a difficult assignment for two reasons. First, there is no cultural consensus that family fragmentation produces net harm to individuals and society; second, even if there were such agreement, convincing people to reduce family fragmentation is a tough sell.

The lack of cultural consensus is somewhat surprising. A large body of research by the likes of the Brookings Institution and professors at MIT (not exactly conservative think tanks) confirms that family fragmentation—either through single parenthood or divorce—makes people poorer, especially women, and reduces children’s chances of economic success, especially boys. Surely, in our consumption-driven society, we could find

“Government programs send
messages as well as money.”
Bryan Dowd

agreement that reducing poverty is a desirable goal, and anything that reduces it deserves serious consideration. Well, not so much.

The National Center for Health Statistics recently released a study that charts American opinions on social issues. Societal approval of single women having and raising children, young couples living together before marriage (which increases the likelihood of later divorce), and premarital sex among eighteen year olds actually is on the rise. Only approval of divorce is on the decline, and that might have been a function of poor economic conditions in the year in which the survey was administered. We seem to be a long way away from consensus that the net effects of family fragmentation are negative.

But perhaps the polls are misleading. Suppose the pollsters instead had asked parents whether those behaviors reflect their own values or the values they attempt to instill in their children. In his book *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960*

- 2010, Charles Murray suggests that the answers would depend on the socioeconomic status of the respondents. On average, wealthier parents likely would respond that divorce is much less acceptable and unlikely in their own marriage, and they intend to work harder to protect their children from harmful behaviors.

To change the culture regarding family fragmentation, we need a new message that somehow rises above the noise level in the media and explains the harms of family fragmentation, particularly to the subset of the public most vulnerable to those harms. The government, media, community activists, pastors, and individuals all can play a role.

The wealthy have a disproportionate influence on government policy and media messaging, and as Murray points out, it’s time for them to preach what they practice. The message need not be “judgmental” (only “intolerance” and “lack of inclusiveness” are greater sins). The data are fully capable of speaking for themselves.

Government programs send messages as well as money. A vast array of government programs has given tacit approval and even differential assistance to poor families when the father is absent. Remarkably, many church-based social service programs do the same thing. That may have been appropriate when single parenthood was a rare tragedy, but not when it is a lifestyle. Minimally, we could offer the same level of assistance to low-income families with intact marriages.

Community activists can play an important role by exploring and explaining all the underlying reasons for family fragmentation. The political left believes that family fragmentation is caused by inadequate access to contraception, lack of jobs, and inadequate wages, and those all can be examined

in the bright light of data. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that wealth disparities could be reduced if individuals in lower socioeconomic tiers mimicked the marriage and parenting behaviors of those who are experiencing better economic outcomes.

The correlation of family fragmentation and poverty doesn't imply causation, but it doesn't imply lack of causation either, and the data strongly suggest that family fragmentation is an important risk factor for poverty. To say that you are concerned about income inequality but are ambivalent regarding marriage, divorce, and single-parenting is like saying you are concerned about cancer but are ambivalent regarding carcinogens.

The toughest messaging job falls to pastors. Long before marriage became the civil rights issue of our time, it was a sacrament, and sacraments are not about rights but about obedience and self-discipline. Breaking the chains of self-absorption isn't easy, and there is no more unwelcomed message in today's culture than the suggestion that life comes with a set of rules that we didn't write, that are impervious to our suggested improvements, and to which we will be held accountable—even when acknowledgement of that reality clearly leads to human flourishing. Explaining that reality is part of a responsible pastor's job description.

The personal damage done by our current interpretation of marriage as an institution easily created and easily dissolved by the state is intense and ongoing, and when people become sick of their autonomy, their rights, and themselves, they will ask if there is an alternative. There is: a Savior whose service is perfect freedom (*Book of Common Prayer*) – and it is far better offered as preventive, rather than remedial, counsel. If motorists repeatedly are being hit by trains at a railroad crossing, you don't build a hospital at the crossing;

you put up flashing lights and a warning gate and explain the advantages of obeying the rules.

Individuals also are important messengers. A personal example of life-long commitment based on self-sacrificial love can be intensely powerful to the people who observe it and subsequently desire it for themselves. To paraphrase Gandhi's advice, perhaps the most important step we can take is to encourage ourselves and others to be the cultural change we desire. But be forewarned: To paraphrase Bette Davis's assessment of old age: Obedience, self-discipline, self-sacrificial love, and lifelong commitments ain't no place for sissies.

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Religious Schools Must Remain Free

By Todd R. Flanders

Repairing a culture of family fragmentation requires a culture of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice must be modeled and taught if it is to be handed on. There must be schools that inculcate it. Consequently, the ongoing viability of such schools requires vigorous defense of First Amendment freedoms of speech, association, and exercise of religion.

David Brooks has recently drawn attention to how today's society promotes self-centered "résumé virtues"—the kind needed to get the job done, close the deal, make the grade—at the expense of "eulogy virtues"—the self-sacrificial kind that take us outside ourselves, like fidelity and courage.

“We all know that the eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé ones,” Brooks wrote in the *New York Times*. “But our culture and our educational systems spend more time teaching the skills and strategies you need for career success than the qualities you need to radiate that sort of inner light.”

We may sympathize with Brooks’s perspective, grounded in a classic understanding of virtues as perfections of human nature. The very word “virtue” suggests natural moral obligations. To the extent that people develop the virtues, they are better people. To the extent that they do not, they are in some ways defective.

Brooks rightly judges the eulogy virtues superior. Yet do we have, any longer, a common philosophy or moral vocabulary that can assert their objective superiority? Has not our elite culture, including the education establishment, thrown such ideas into radical doubt?

“Perhaps the defense of fundamental freedoms is not yet too much to ask in a society that takes pride in its tolerance.” *Todd R. Flanders*

We need only consult our Supreme Court. It now holds that all Americans have the right “to define and express their identity” (*Obergefell*) based on their “own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (*Casey*). In this view, education should foster the autonomous development and expression of

individualized identities rather than any coherent understanding of the virtues. One moral virtue alone need be taught: a certain understanding of tolerance. Each student must be made to accept—even to affirm and celebrate—all others’ autonomous values, so long as those values make demands on no one else.

Yet marriage and family make demands. It is easy to see why traditionally held understandings of marriage, gender, and sexuality become marginalized in this new approach.

There remain educational institutions committed to truths sown into human nature by “Nature’s God.” As a country, we used to accept these truths as confirmed by both reason and revelation. Indeed, our country’s founding took for granted the truth that liberty and the virtues live together or die together. Not so very long ago, all schools taught such truths. Today, it is largely private, and usually religious, schools that continue this American tradition.

They must remain free to do so, because where such truths are taught and supported, families can form, flourish, and endure trials. Many families, certainly, continue the practice of committed marriage outside of religious traditions. But it’s important that there remain places of witness willing, and at liberty, to preach the practice.

Perhaps the defense of fundamental freedoms is not yet too much to ask in a society that takes pride in its tolerance. Perhaps people with the “coexist” bumper stickers can be persuaded, with clarity and charity, truly to mean what they say.

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Repairing a Sense of Responsibility

By Arvonne Fraser

Every generation has its own ideas about families based on experience and the dominant culture reflected in their schoolbooks and the media they encounter. My 1930s primary school reader pictured the normal family as mom at home with Dick and Jane and dad off at work. The family was white, of course, and the word “divorce” would never be in a school text; it was usually whispered.

Yet my sisters and I knew Aunt Sybil was trying to get a divorce because her husband had left her. She worked as a nurse, we were told, and put our cousins, Shirley and Gene, in what they called

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Arvonne Fraser

“boarding school” and sent them from New York to our Minnesota farm for the summer. Only years later we learned that boarding school was actually an orphanage and Aunt Sybil was not a nurse. She was what today would be called a live-in caretaker for senior citizens. She didn’t earn enough to support her family. My sisters and I thought having cousins visit was great fun, but Cousin Gene years later commented how our mother “worked like a dog” those summers with six or eight children to

feed and tend.

As this story illustrates, family fragmentation is not new. It has both economic and cultural roots. To improve lives for both adults and children as well as the whole society, we must build upon the cultural reverence for families but also begin to value and respect the unpaid work involved in rearing and caring for children.

Culturally, we must see children not as the property and obligation of individual parents but as future citizens. Instead of expecting parents to present society with healthy young adults, well-educated and trained for paid work, our American culture must welcome and value each new baby born in this country as a new citizen and take a measure of responsibility for its welfare.

For starters, we might reinstate the teaching of civics—the rights and duties of citizens—in schools, as former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor advocates. Children must learn the kind of government we have and their obligations as part of it.

Our culture emphasizes the rights of individual citizens but not the responsibilities of citizenship. As we argue over various articles of the U.S. Constitution, we should also be discussing the meaning and purpose of its preamble which states, “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility... promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our *posterity*.” (Italics are added. Google “posterity” and you will find it means future generations, children, our successors.)

Our Constitution, in essence, considers we, the people, as a family with each member having rights and responsibilities. While we have made progress culturally in recognizing the diversity

among families, what needs repair is the sense of responsibility within and about families and within and about our society as a whole. We are all in this together.

With the majority of women of working age now in the paid labor force, our culture must stop denigrating what historically has been unpaid labor—that of child care and rearing, plus care of the home. So long as the good-father model is that of supporting a family, marriage rates will decline because a majority of men can no longer live up to that model, and our culture does not encourage or support sharing the responsibilities of parenthood—that is, doing what has historically been called women’s work.

Instead of expecting parents, and especially mothers, to provide businesses and other institutions with effective workers, we must recognize we are asking her to do two jobs—one paid, one unpaid. To make matters worse, we don’t pay her as much as we do her male counterparts, even though we expect her to contribute financially to support the family.

If we want to encourage marriage, we must raise boys to share the task of raising children and keeping house. Our media must be a partner in repairing our culture, not perpetuate the old-fashioned Dick-and-Jane, mom-and-dad paradigm. If our society can invent the internet, we ought to be able to repair our culture by bringing it up to date.

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Only a Renewal of Self-Worth

By Jake Haulk

A look at the rate of out-of-wedlock births in countries around the world is an eye opener. In 2009, European countries, including Iceland (66 percent), Norway (55 percent) and Sweden (55 percent), Estonia (60 percent), Slovenia (52 percent), France (52 percent) along with other Northern European countries and Mexico (55 percent) topped the list with the United

“Obviously, we must begin with ourselves if we are to teach or preach to others.” *Jake Haulk*

States following behind at 38 percent. The U.S. rate varies widely by demographic group, with African-Americans at about 72 percent, Hispanics 54 percent, non-Hispanic whites 29 percent, and Asians 17 percent. Interestingly, the lowest rate was posted in Greece (5 percent) with Switzerland, Poland, and Italy following at under 20 percent and Canada at 25 percent. This is indeed a western world epidemic that has far-reaching implications.

Since 1980, out-of-wedlock births have skyrocketed in Europe. In 1980, Iceland’s out-of-wedlock birth rate was already at 40 percent, as was Sweden’s. France was at only 11 percent in 1980 and has seen its rate jump to among the world’s highest. More welfare programs and



increased attention to women's rights are credited for much of the big surge in rates.

Meanwhile, the U.S. rate rose from 18 to 38 percent over the period. The surge in out-of-wedlock births has happened in virtually all First World countries, except Japan, where the rate is still only two percent. Each country will have a somewhat different set of causal factors for the rise, but there are some commonalities. Japan is not western, but it would be worth a look to see why that country's out-of-wedlock rate is so low.

Moreover, divorce rates in most European countries are very high—in many cases, well above the United States' marriage dissolution rates. Indeed, the divorce rate in Iceland is said by some to be meaningless because of the amount of cohabitation there. In short, high rates of out-of-wedlock births and divorce in the United States are not a rarity among the advanced nations of the world. One major difference is that the out-of-wedlock birth rate among whites in much of Europe is far above the rate for whites in the United States and Canada. A harbinger, perhaps?

To be sure, Iceland and the Scandinavian countries are relatively small in terms of population. The populations are also homogeneous and, in the case of Iceland, were largely isolated from the rest of the world for centuries. Apparently the social stigma attached to out-of-wedlock births was never strong (at least for several centuries), and the more forceful role played by women has created a culture that does not hold marriage sacred as the Judeo-Christian heritage does. Nonetheless, the Icelandic culture does place high value on rearing children in a safe, warm, caring environment, even when there might be multiple fathers represented in a household.

Icelanders are demonstrating that a society can exist and thrive for an extended period when

Christian norms are tossed aside. Indeed, very few Icelanders are religious or attend church services. Despite the high out-of-wedlock birth rate, 70 percent of Iceland's adolescents live in a two-parent household. By way of comparison, in the United States, only 58 percent of adolescents live in a two-parent home, even though the out-of-wedlock birth rate is significantly lower here. At the very least, this statistic points to how the cultures and policymakers in the two countries differ when it comes to care and protection of children. Still whether Iceland's apparent ability to be relatively stable while defying historical social norms can continue indefinitely remains to be seen. It seems doubtful to me.

In sum, despite the success to date of the experiment in egalitarian communal living in Iceland, it does not offer much in the way of guidance for the problems created by the extremely high out-of-wedlock births in minority communities in the United States. One major difference is that in Iceland there still exists a strong work ethic in which both men and women have very high rates of labor force participation. Education is highly valued, and children are expected to learn and are pressured societally to learn. Thus, despite the high rate out-of-wedlock births, all working-age persons, except the infirm, are expected to pull their weight and help those who cannot. That is not the situation in much of the rest of Europe and certainly not in the United States.

What can we take away from the Icelandic experience that might be helpful? Certainly not much that would work toward stopping family disintegration here. The problem in the United States does not arise out of an egalitarian family culture. Instead, the problem here can be traced back to cultural relativism, the Great Society programs, the bigotry of soft expectations, and unwillingness to hold people responsible for their actions.

Current liberal policies are to throw more taxpayer money at the problems. That has proven not to work. Only a renewal of individual and societal self-worth that comes about through achievement and courage in the worst-hit neighborhoods—and that includes many white communities as well—will stem this tide of family and social degradation.

If we believe, as traditions from all over the world hold, that the family is the building block of any successful, stable society, then we must find ways to re-instill that value and belief in this country. Loose knit, fluid, changing groupings do not provide stability. Children need continuity and a sense of security to grow up well balanced and secure in themselves.

Obviously, we must begin with ourselves if we are to teach or preach to others.

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Playing the Movie Forward

By Pete Hegseth

When thinking about the issue of family in our culture—and family fragmentation in particular—the first thing that comes to mind for me is children. Adults are obviously affected by challenges like divorce and single-parenting, but children end up bearing the brunt of eroding cultural norms. As is commonly and crudely said in the military, “sh*t rolls downhill”; kids of fractured families are at the bottom of society’s hill.

As I mention in my new book *In The Arena*, “The

family is, simply put, the greatest antipoverty and equal opportunity tool in our arsenal, and is the key incubator of future good citizens. This is not a socially conservative construct, but instead a civic imperative. Strong families = healthy children = good citizens.”

Pro-family public policy and incentives have minimal impact on future citizens (kids!) without a culture that reinforces resilient families. Without good families, we don’t get good kids, and without good kids, our republic cannot be sustained.

“Ultimately, at the level of culture, the best solution is a revival of faith in our country.” *Pete Hegseth*

Families, and therefore a culture that reinforces them, are literally existential for free peoples.

Practically speaking as it pertains to this symposium, and as a conservative, how better can we influence the culture to fortify strong, resilient families and thereby incubate good citizens? I have two modest suggestions, to start.

First, conservatives must stop obsessing—politically and culturally—over same-sex marriage. I believe children deserve a mother and a father and also believe advocating a traditional view should always be protected (religious liberty). But beating this dead horse—a debate that was lost in the culture long before it was manifest in public policy—undercuts conservatives’ ability to influence deeper problems affecting families and kids, issues such as no-fault divorce and absentee fathers.



Worse, because the mainstream media and culture no longer recognize opposition to same-sex marriage as legitimate public discourse, raising the issue ends up disqualifying conservatives from making deeper cultural arguments. It's unfortunate and undemocratic, but people simply will not listen. I'm not saying conservatives should retreat from all culture wars (the pro-life cause, among others, should never be surrendered), but when it comes to threats facing families and kids, gay marriage is not the closest crocodile to the canoe.

Second, if you're like me, the first question that comes up around the dinner table when you hear about a couple getting divorced is: "Do they have kids?" or "How are the kids handling it?" Inherently—no matter where people stand politically—everyone recognizes that divorce is exponentially more tragic when kids are involved. I say this as someone who was divorced from my ex-wife before we had kids, and now—in my second marriage—would do anything to avoid complicating the lives of our three boys with a difficult divorce. It's not to say that my first divorce was a good thing, only that the damage was confined to adults, not kids. Our culture already understands this distinction, but we could do a better job teasing it out.

Again, divorce is difficult no matter the situation, and some marriages must end, even with kids. But "playing the movie forward" for married couples with kids is, as best I can tell, the strongest deterrence against giving up on struggling marriages with kids at stake. Before kids become casualties of divorce, they are often the glue for marriages. We could probably leverage this resiliency more.

Ultimately, at the level of culture, the best solution is a revival of faith in our country. There is simply

no replacement for the grace, selflessness, and redemptive qualities of faith in Jesus Christ. When American culture started to sideline faith—ripping it from our schools, media, and public squares—we hastened the decline of our family structure.

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Loving Commitment as an Act of Daring

By Kathryn Hickok

"The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life," wrote Pope Benedict XVI. At its heart, the crisis of family fragmentation in American culture has progressed from a crisis in love to a crisis of hope. Repairing a culture of lasting love requires restoring hope by way of healing the heart, choosing courage, and restoring reverence.

The pain younger people have experienced growing up and the cynicism and fear their experiences have produced cannot be overcome merely by wishing for a return to traditional values regarding love, dating, and marriage. For many, these standards of behavior and patterns of life seem too remote when they have grown up confused about what love looks like and requires. They may even doubt love and commitment are possible. Many adults now experience a trepidation induced by the thought that if those they love and admire did not have lifelong marriages or find a good partner at all, then how could they expect to succeed where others didn't? Too many grow up

without models of healthy adult relationships.

Blundering through their own attempts to find intimacy and to experience love and often lacking wise guidance, young adults are often schooled in brokenness—in everything that can go wrong between human beings. Even single people who are generally well-intentioned in their desires and goals for life, love, and marriage become deeply discouraged over time. Fear sets in, as does a sense that there is not much hope.

Pope Francis addressed this aspect of fear in attitudes toward marriage and family life in a 2015 statement to the youth of the world:

Dear young friends . . . many . . . say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment, making a definitive decision, “forever,” because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. I ask you, instead, to be revolutionaries . . . yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes you are incapable of responsibility, that believes you are incapable of true love. . . . Have the courage to swim against the tide. And also have the courage to be happy.

Loving commitment has become an act of daring. To recognize this is to be able to challenge people to rise to it. How do we do that?

First, we should teach children that to be is more important than to do. Until we internalize our own intrinsic worth as persons (who we are, as opposed to what we produce or how we appear), many other issues about how we live will be peripheral.

In philosophical terms, only a free “subject” can choose to love another and to bind oneself for life. To the extent to which we are “self-possessed” —

able to know and value ourselves and to make decisions rooted in our true selves—we can make commitments and relate to the concept of “forever.”

We must show children that love recognizes the beauty and goodness of the other person; it is opposed to any form of “use.” Healing the family and the culture of the family can’t take place when

“Loving commitment has become an act of daring. To recognize this is to be able to challenge people to rise to it.” *Kathryn Hickok*

love is understood or experienced primarily as a form of use. Letting oneself be used isn’t love, either, contrary to expressions and images current in music, art, and fiction.

We must cultivate a sense of reverence for each other, ourselves, the world, and life. The twentieth-century philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand described reverence as a “responsive attitude to the value of being . . . pervaded by the disposition to recognize something superior to one’s arbitrary pleasure and will, and to be ready to subordinate and abandon oneself to it.” Reverence increases one’s capacity to love. It is both a foundation of purity and a requisite quality of mind for receptivity in learning things of value. Cultivating reverence prepares children for healthy emotional intimacy.

Fostering hope in children by introducing them to value, reverence, goodness, and beauty are things each of us can do through everyday contact with



the people around us. The specifics are as varied as our personal circumstances. As humans, we are wired to desire what is beautiful, good, and true.

Many younger adults know that what they experience in mainstream culture is unsatisfying. They want to believe there is more and their lives can be different. Forging a new path is hard, but it's worth the effort. Helping them to choose hope and to find the courage to be happy is the first step in healing the culture, because one who has hope lives differently.

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Allowing Space for Religious Schools to Flourish

By Fredric Hinz

What's causing America's families to fragment in such great numbers? What can be done to begin to restore them to wholeness? Finding answers—good answers, practical answers—to these questions are among the most pressing challenges we face as a society.

What forms families? On the superficial level, families are formed when males and females instinctively come together long enough to produce babies. Yet something greater than instinct is required to hold men and women together long enough to produce *functional* families—the kind of families on which communities and cultures

can be built. That something greater, I believe, is the institution of marriage. Indeed, from time immemorial, marriage has been the glue that has bound the two created halves of humanity together with a degree of permanence indispensable for the flourishing of children and society in general.

If marriage is that necessary precursor to families that function, then it seems clear that we have an immense challenge ahead of us. For as a nation, not only have we come to publicly disavow the connection between marriage and functioning families, we've lost something even more basic—namely, the public understanding that we are created beings, beings created to live within a divinely ordered world, and beings called on to conform our behavior to that divine order. Indeed, quite the contrary, we now seem fully committed to conceiving of ourselves as nothing more than accidents of nature living in a plastic world.

It will be impossible to restore a strong marriage and family culture without first recovering a common worldview, which, at minimum, acknowledges our created status and the mutual obligations that flow from that status. Indeed, I believe that is precisely what John Adams was trying to convey when he observed that “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people” and “wholly inadequate to the governance of any other.” There, I would contend, he is calling on us to recognize the simple truth that for any nation to endure, its people must have access to a source of transcendent order that will allow them to discipline their innate inclination to self-interest and thus foster a sense of real national unity. Hence, Adams insisted that we be a nation intentionally committed to cultivating a specific type of citizen—a moral and religious citizen—a citizen that sees himself as conscience-bound to be responsible to the Creator as well as his fellow creatures.

Now, what is true of our nation is also true of our families, for they, too, are little societies that require the internal discipline that springs from properly ordered consciences. As with nations, so with families: If they are to remain a cohesive whole, if they are to provide the permanence and love that children need, they must also be grounded in a transcendent worldview. Its citizens, too, must understand themselves to be created beings called to live within an ordered framework—a framework that provides each with a deep sense of purpose and meaning and in which personal relationships naturally imitate the pattern of sacrificial love set by the Creator Himself.

**“I believe it is the school
which is most amenable to our
collective action.” *Fred Hinz***

What must we do, then, to reverse America’s culture of family fragmentation? In my view, we must once again become a society that, while allowing all citizens the freedom of living according to whatever religious or nonreligious tenets they choose, also publicly acknowledges the great and unique public good that is derived from families that have deeply held religious values at their core. We must once again come to recognize that a religious view of life is not just to be tolerated among us but actively promoted, because it most reliably produces that particular type of person on which our families and our communities depend.

How could such a thing be done? Surely such a recovery would require the concerted efforts of the three great mediating institutions of life: the

family, the church, and the school. Of these, I believe it is the school which is most amenable to our collective action. It is there that we must begin. We must insist, for example, that our secular government voluntarily restrict its own sphere of influence and allow space for other non-secular forms of education to flourish.

Government officials must come to see that it is in the best interest of the nation that they relinquish their long-standing monopoly, or near monopoly, on K-12 education in favor of greater educational pluralism. They must come to recognize that in their current refusal to fund parents’ religious educational choices, they are engaging in a form of bias that is unconstitutional and profoundly harmful to society, as it makes it much more difficult to raise up the very moral and religious people for which our government was designed.

What practical steps can we take to stem America’s family crisis? There are many good answers, but surely one of the best is to do everything we can to remove the government’s current bias against people who choose a religious education for their children, for it is in such an education that they will gain access to the deep spiritual resources needed to form lasting marriages and functioning families, to the great benefit of us all.

Rev. Fredric Hinz is a pastor in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and serves as its Public Policy Advocate in the State of Minnesota.



“The Liberty to Bind Oneself”

By Katherine Kersten

The following story sheds light on why America’s marriage culture is crumbling.

When my children were small, I was part of a parent discussion group. Each year, the discussion leader would ask, “What do you want most in life for your son or daughter?” Each year, the women in the group—though good mothers—would greet this question with indecision. They would pause and look around, slightly embarrassed.

Then, without exception, they would say the same thing: “I just want her to be happy.” Everyone would nod, “Yes.” But I could see that, for all their sympathetic nodding, this answer didn’t satisfy them.

When my turn came, I would say this: “What do I want for my child? I want her to be wise, kind, just, responsible, courageous, self-reliant, generous, honest, and good. I want her to fulfill her obligations to her family and fellow citizens and to be a productive member of society.” The women in my mothers’ group agreed with my words after hearing them.

Why did they have such trouble articulating this idea themselves? I suggest it’s because our society has lost the moral vocabulary and categories of thought on which this vision of “the good life” is based. This change in mindset is the biggest barrier we face in reviving a culture of marriage and family.

Psychologist Phillip Rieff documented the philosophical shift I’m describing in his

ground-breaking 1963 book, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. There, he chronicled the rise of “psychological man”—a model for the “organization of personality” that has largely replaced “Judeo-Christian man,” the character ideal on which Western civilization was built.

The Judeo-Christian model of man teaches that we should strive to develop personal virtues—honesty, self-mastery, generosity, and industry. At the same time, we should seek to overcome the vices to which human nature is heir, including selfishness, laziness, dishonesty and greed.

**“For Judeo-Christian man,
human beings find meaning by
taking on obligations to others.”**

Katherine Kersten

For Judeo-Christian man, human beings find meaning by taking on obligations to others. G.K. Chesterton put it this way: “The liberty for which one should chiefly care is the liberty to bind oneself” – to a creed, a family, a community of fellow citizens.

Yet “psychological man” views life very differently, says Rieff. His ideal is radical individualism. For him, life is about “finding” himself, “being” himself, and expressing himself. Liberty, for him, means living and doing precisely as he wants, without the burden of obligations to others. He thinks only of rights, not responsibilities, and aspires to nothing higher than health, safety, pleasure, and material well-being.

Psychological man's view of happiness saturates the culture in which we live. It is deadly to marriage and family life, because they require a lifetime of self-sacrifice, delay of gratification, and compromise.

Today's Millennials, as a group, embrace the version of happiness I've just described. They drift in and out of relationships, delay or reject marriage, and regard having babies out of wedlock as no big deal. Many of their elders share this view as well. After all, "me"-centered Boomers in their 60s have launched what's been called the "gray divorce revolution."

How can we turn the tide on psychological man's model of happiness? The catalyst of such change will have to be extraordinary, because, on its face, this notion of freedom and a life lived for pleasure is so seductive.

"Psychological man" is the child of affluence, but prosperity and self-government depend on a certain kind of citizenry: self-sacrificing, hard-working, decent, and responsible.

As marriage and family—the seedbeds of virtue—fade away, we are likely to see both prosperity and responsible self-government decline. This process is far-advanced in our inner cities. Perhaps Americans will begin to wake up to the threat it poses as it makes inroads in other sectors of the population.

The aging of our population and our declining birthrate may also eventually raise awareness of the critical role that marriage and family play in social well-being. Or perhaps these phenomena will prompt a religious revival—another Great Awakening that will resurrect Judeo-Christian man as our society's character ideal.

One thing is certain: Psychological man's promise that self-absorption brings happiness will eventually be exposed for the lie it is.

Katherine Kersten is an American Experiment Senior Policy Fellow.

Changing Culture from the Bottom Up

By Amber Lapp and David Lapp

When we speak of culture, many times we think of powerful top-down institutions: film production companies in Hollywood, advertising agencies on Madison Avenue, television networks

"Young adults very much dislike it when adults tell them that getting married is the 'financially responsible thing to do.'" *Amber and David Lapp*

in Manhattan. Those institutions are, indeed, powerful, but influencing the culture need not always come from the top down: It can also come from the bottom up, through social movements that begin in the peripheries.

This is important to keep in mind when thinking about how we can repair the culture that is fueling family fragmentation.

One example of a bottom-up effort to strengthen



the marriage culture is the “I Believe in Love Project,” where we serve as contributing editors. The Project centers on a website, www.ibelieveinlove.com, and invites ordinary young adults to share their stories about the journey to find and keep lifelong love. A single mother writes about what she is doing to date more intentionally and meet a good man whom she could eventually marry. A new father in a cohabiting relationship writes about his journey to overcome drug addiction and about why he wants to get married. A woman writes about how she and her husband overcame infidelity to find healing and hope in their marriage.

On the ground, local coordinators (like us) meet regularly with writers to discuss posts, which become opportunities to build friendships and discuss mindsets that are important as one prepares for, enters into, and sustains a marriage. We recently started a small group in which writers gather to share ideas, swap stories, and eat s’mores around a backyard bonfire.

The Project includes three aspects that we believe could be adapted to other initiatives that seek to influence culture.

Personal empowerment. Among Americans ages 25 to 34, 51 percent have married and 61 percent of those never married say that they want to get married. Among the never-married, only 4 percent say that they don’t want to get married, while 34 percent are not sure if they want to get married.

It’s good news that most young Americans want to marry, and for the significant minority of those who are unsure, who is best suited to reach them? Someone preaching from on high about the virtues of marriage and touting its economic benefits? (In our experience, young adults very much dislike it when adults tell them that getting married is the

“financially responsible thing to do”—they believe you should get married for love, not money.)

No, what might make the most difference are opportunities for Millennials to speak for themselves about marriage to their peers. The young man who had children outside of marriage but eventually married the mother of his daughters can make a more persuasive case about why marriage matters to an ambivalent peer than we can. The young woman who wants to get married but is confronting her anxieties about marriage can share her journey with her unmarried peers. Their stories of overcoming fears and difficulties and journeying toward marriage have the potential to play a small part in culture change from the bottom up.

Personal transformation. Our own interviews with working-class young adults revealed that many young people are suffering from the legacy of their own parents’ divorce and other childhood traumas, like abuse. Many also hold, to borrow from psychologist Carol Dweck’s terminology, a “fixed mindset” about love and happiness, rather than a “growth mindset.” Practically, this means that many young people believe that no longer feeling in love five years into marriage is an indication that the couple should divorce, rather than seeing it as an opportunity for love to grow stronger.

That is why further education and healing are vital. With the I Believe in Love Project, we do this through inviting young people to reflect and write about big questions like, “What is love?” and “What is happiness?” and “What does dating with a purpose look like?” We also encourage writers to seek healing through professional help if they are struggling from trauma or mental health problems.

Intentional community. Bottom-up initiatives

could take a cue from the research of psychologist Timothy Wilson: Sometimes the best way to address a social problem like family fragmentation is through indirection. He points out that some of the most effective teen pregnancy prevention programs are those in which volunteer service plays the main role and explicit sex education takes on a more minimal role.

Applying that insight to renewing a marriage culture, we could see how marriage education classes might be good—but so are gathering the neighbors for a bonfire, coming together to form a community garden, or creating a neighborhood childcare co-op so that working families who struggle to find reliable childcare can keep their jobs. These kinds of neighborly activities could be the organic outgrowth of people who gather around the common purpose of helping each other achieve their shared aspirations for thriving families.

In other words, efforts to renew a marriage culture need not only explicitly say something about marriage or mindsets, or remain in the abstract: When we babysit for a neighbor, or provide a meal for a new mother, or point an unemployed friend to a new job opening, we are doing what Peter Maurin described as building “a society where it is easier for people to be good.”

Amber and David Lapp, co-investigators of the Love and Marriage in Middle America Project, are research fellows at the Institute for Family Studies, affiliate scholars at IAV, and contributing editors at the I Believe in Love Project.

Say What You Mean— And Often

By David Lebedoff

Specifically, we should stop describing the problem as “fractured families,” which sounds like an orthopedics ad. What we are really talking about is the fact that children need parents. So let’s just say that.

Also, we’ve got to say it a lot more, and specifically talk about the consequences which flow from children not being raised by parents.

I hope that the readership of this symposium is familiar with that distinguished American philosopher, Mel Brooks. Way back in the sixties

“If we are going to say that certain conduct is wrong, then we must also say why it is wrong.” *David Lebedoff*

he and Carl Reiner did a series of skits, which fortunately were taped and still are hilarious.

In one of the skits, Brooks played a world-famous psychiatrist. He had healed the most intractable disorders. In the skit, he was brought to treat a patient said to be beyond all cure—a man who did nothing all day but sit and tear paper. No one had been able to treat him for this obsession.

Brooks the shrink took on this challenge. He stood and watched the man incessantly tearing



paper. And then he spoke to the patient and cured him forever. “All I said to him” was this, Brooks explained: “Don’t tear paper! What’s the point? Cut it out.” (Or words to that effect.)

Tearing paper is indeed ridiculous. So is destroying the concept and structure of the family. Someone should just say, “Cut it out!”

The amazing thing is that very few do say this. Mitch Pearlstein is very much excepted. His voice should be a chorus, and it should be national, loud, and enthusiastically bipartisan.

This symposium was asked to address *specifically* how to repair the culture that is fueling family fragmentation. Nothing is more specific than simply saying, “Cut it out.”

Lots of people have to say this. All the time.

I think the reason for the relative silence on the issue is a reluctance to offend anyone. If one talks about births outside marriage, that may be seen as a slur on unwed mothers. It is not. If we believe children born outside marriage and raised by one part-time parent or by no parent at all, will as a result often have fewer opportunities for the rest of their lives, then we should say so.

We are not speaking of individual cases, but rather of the effect on society as a whole. I know there are single mothers working at three different jobs to give their children a better life. These are heroic figures. Yet if the mother is fifteen years old and the father is in prison, the task is more than daunting. We could accomplish specific good by reducing the incarceration rate for drug offenders. Public disapproval of the retreat from family is at least as important.

The shocking growth of unwed births is in many

cases very bad news for the children. We must say this. Our words do not mean that a single parent is better or worse than one who is married, but we must say, because it is true, that the odds of success in raising a child are increased by two parents.

Yes, some single parents do a wonderful job of raising their children, and some married parents, at all income levels, fail miserably at this essential mission, and some couples who never get married raise their children very well. But as a general proposition, to deny the role of family, however one defines family, is terribly unfair to the lives of those who had no choice in the matter.

It is suggested that cigarette smoking was greatly reduced by a publicity campaign that on occasion used images of the ghastliest medical results of the nicotine addiction. They weren’t easy to look at.

Many people won’t want to look at the damage done by fragmented families, either, but we have a duty to let them know. Just as smoking causes cancer, fragmented families all too often produce children whose life opportunities are tragically diminished.

If we are going to say that certain conduct is wrong, then we must also say why it is wrong.

The facts about fractured families are as grim as the picture of a withered lung. Yet those facts and figures form a picture, too—a picture of undeniable consequences, and that picture must be shared widely and clearly. If you show people where one road will lead, many may choose a higher path.

This doesn’t mean that a widowed parent must remarry, or that divorce is a mistake. There are many ways to have a good family. Yet for those who bring children into the world, there is no way to have no family at all. The consequences of denying

this very simple truth and denying it for the first time in human history will doom not only our progeny but our civilization.

David Lebedoff is a Minneapolis author and attorney. His most recent book is BUZZ: A Novel.

A Modern Revival

By Ken Lewis

To a hammer, everything looks like a nail. As a member of the clergy, I am sure that some will see this piece as a perfect display of that aphorism.

There are many steps that we can and must take to address family fragmentation: education, personal example, communication, responsible stewardship, and discerning consumption of our entertainment media. Many other approaches will be discussed elsewhere in this compilation—all of them good.

I believe America, more than anything, needs revival, a spiritual revival not unlike those experienced in America's first and second Great Awakenings.

John Adams wrote in a letter to the officers of the Massachusetts militia in October 1798:

But should the people of America once become capable of that deep simulation towards one another . . . which assumes the language of justice and moderation, while it is practicing iniquity and extravagance and displays in the most captivating manner the charming pictures of candor, frankness, and sincerity, while it is rioting in rapine and insolence, this country will be the most miserable habitation in the world. Because

we have no government, armed with power, capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge and licentiousness would break the strongest cords of our Constitution, as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

Friends, we have shot *beyond* the point Adams described.

At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Dr. James McHenry, one of the delegates from Maryland, recorded an encounter between a woman waiting for the outcome of this most important assembly. She saw Benjamin Franklin emerging from Independence Hall and called to

“I believe America, more than anything, needs revival, a spiritual revival not unlike those experienced in America's first and second Great Awakenings.” Ken Lewis

him, “Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” To which Franklin replied, “A republic, if you can keep it.”

I'm certain many of the other Founders would agree with Adams and Franklin. The ailments of America's families are both a cause and a symptom of the national malaise threatening to spiral out of control, except for God's intervention.



In this brief space we haven't the ability to discuss revival fully. There are two points that must be made, though. The first is counterintuitive. Revival does not occur when the irreligious suddenly "get religion." Rather, the first mark of revival occurs when the religious, the individuals who regularly attend a place of worship, are truly moved by God and changed by Him. They also are marked by humility, the first sign of which is turning from their old narcissistic ways to treat others, particularly members of their families, as God would have them. They live as if His Scriptures actually matter in their lives, heeding God's Word for their own good. They have been changed, *by God*, from the inside out.

Only then do those who have paid little attention to God or His precepts see this startling transformation, and in response examine their own lives, opening themselves to the necessary change in their lives, too.

In the last verses of the Old Testament, the prophet Micah predicts the return of God's prophet Elijah, called to preach God's truth to a beleaguered, needy people. Note carefully the primary outcome of Elijah's ministry in Micah 4:6: He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

I believe that if we want a healthy nation and healthy families, the primary solution is spiritual. Isn't what Micah predicts precisely what we long for?

Franklin reminded us that republics are fragile. So are families. Adams asserted that our national freedoms and health would flourish only in an environment that respects the God who gave us the "natural rights" we celebrate in America. Family health is no different than a nation's. In Adams's observation, "Avarice, ambition, revenge and licentiousness," can destroy a nation. We know they

can destroy families too. Only God is able to help us overcome ourselves.

The second truth about revival is that only God can bring this awakening, but we can petition Him to "awaken" us again. We can truly practice what we preach, knowing that the opposite of life-giving revival is death-dealing hypocrisy. Again, the first sign that God is acting to bring new life to a troubled people is that the "religious people" begin actually to live as if they mean it, because they have truly been changed by God. No charade any longer. We must humble ourselves and ask

"Community leaders and thought leaders must suck it up, risk feminist wrath, and state explicitly and often that children need their fathers."

Heather Mac Donald

Him to grant that America will see, once again, that God and His Word are essential to family life as well as national life.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV) If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Pastor Ken Lewis is a retired clergyman, having served most recently at Trinity Baptist Church in St. Paul. Over a forty-year span, he served four churches in South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Revalorizing Fathers as a Marriage Culture Prerequisite

By Heather Mac Donald

There are no policy initiatives that will combat family breakdown, contrary to the fond hopes of conservative policy wonks everywhere.

Removing the marriage penalty in the tax code or providing more tax credits for child-rearing would be the solution to single-parent child-rearing only if the absence of those initiatives were the cause. They are not. There are a vanishing small number of biological parents who decide against a marriage that they would otherwise eagerly undertake because it would lower their combined income; if they are that careful with tax planning, they are likely to be careful about planning for their child's future, as well.

The largest contributor to families that are fatherless *ab initio* is the belief that fathers are an optional appendage to raising a child. Feminism has taught generations of females (and many males) that strong women can do it all, including raising law-abiding, self-controlled children. The dominant media discourse portrays males as domestic violence perpetrators far more often than as essential components of a home with a child. Academic gender theory builds on feminism's disregard for males with the view that gender is merely a construct, implying that there is nothing unique that a biological father brings to childrearing.

To the contrary, biology, common sense, and empirical observation tell us that on average,

males and females are different and bring different capacities to childrearing. Children—both boys and girls—need their fathers. To be sure, many children have been raised without fathers, due to death or other catastrophic circumstances, and have turned out well, but social science data are almost unanimous regarding the fact that, on average, children raised by just their mother fare poorly. If a father is alive, he should be raising his child, absent clear proof of unfitness.

A prerequisite to reviving a marriage culture for childrearing, therefore, is to revalorize fathers. Community leaders and thought leaders must suck it up, risk feminist wrath, and state explicitly and often that children need their fathers and that males bring unique gifts to their children. The greatest advantage a mother can provide her child, they should say, is that child's father raising him in their home together. No government check or parade of social service workers and nurse practitioners can replace the love, discipline, and oversight that a father provides—not to mention live-in help with the trauma, fatigue, and tribulation that raising a child inevitably brings.

Restoring the culture's once self-evident understanding of the essential contribution of both biological parents to their children will also risk offending the proponents of gay childrearing. Gay marriage advocates like David Blankenhorn have assured supporters of the biological two-parent family that there is no fatal contradiction between support for gay childrearing and the biological family; humans are fully capable of maintaining two logically conflicting propositions, Blankenhorn and others have said. If so, it will be incumbent on those gay marriage advocates to affirm resolutely the normative ideal of the biological family unit, against the inevitable



charge that doing so does not respect the diversity of all families.

Heather Mac Donald is the Thomas W. Smith Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and the author of the just released The War on Cops.

Developing Surrogate Families

By Roy Magnuson

“What will it take – not generally speaking, but precisely speaking – to repair the very culture that is fueling family fragmentation in Minnesota and the Nation?”

From the perspective of a decades-long classroom teacher and multi-sport athletic coach, I will argue that individuals seek a version of a family culture in other places, even if their personal life is partially or significantly minus a united family setting.

When classrooms work, they develop, over time and with a plan and guidance, a supportive culture that shares many family characteristics: trust, respect, openness, and a willingness to share and take risks. Even students whose personal situation is fractured or less than ideal often show, by their willingness to adapt their behavior to fit into the classroom culture, that there is a need for a place to belong, for a place to fit in.

The same is true in the world of athletics. Again, students whose lives are fractured will adapt their behavior in order to be part of the team. Despite the occasional success of a team noted for discord—for example, Al Davis’s Oakland Raiders or some of the New York Yankee teams—most

teams that are successful celebrate the positive chemistry of the teammates as a major factor in the success of the whole being greater than the sum of the individual parts.

For our high school and youth teams, success in helping players build skills, develop character, and improve both socially and athletically are clear goals. Many of our kids, the same as in the classroom, are seeking the equivalent of a family setting.

Sadly, there is another surrogate setting to which our youth will also gravitate, if their home lives are fractured. In the extreme, it is the illegal world—structured gang or less structured but still counterproductive—where they will seek

“Students whose lives are fractured will adapt their behavior in order to be part of a team.” Roy Magnuson

new peer groups. The consistent seeking out and acceptance of these social groups has shown a multi-generational staying power.

The fracture of families clearly exists. Yet when one looks at how substitute families often assist young people in transitioning the challenging years from childhood to adulthood, it becomes clear that while general principles exist, exceptions may rule. To put it a different way: Why do some succeed when others don’t?

Transitioning the individual to the general is a daunting task. Fracturing families and culture are very real, as are the effects. The causes, from the perspective of the teacher/coach, are varied. There

is no one size fits all: Poverty, yes but not always; divorce, yes, but not always; mobility, the same; neglect or abuse, also the same. Some make it, and some don't—even within the same original family structure. The question of why, again, is relevant.

It seems very difficult to challenge the original premise; people – youth and adults – will seek to create a family or surrogate family structure. In response to this need, our schools, classrooms, and extracurricular activities should consciously try to create alternative spaces for youth to fulfill this need. So should our faith communities, nonprofits, and structured social groups (Scouts, for example). As kids age, employment, when structured well, can also make a difference.

These are not rocket-science conclusions. They don't come with an enormous societal price tag (although it may mean yet another discussion of what our ultimate goal for our schools is). It may encourage us, as a society that is composed of potentially positive structures for youth and young adults that are governmentally or privately offered, to see if we can move backwards from outcomes to strategies in a civil manner that veers away from the classic splits over taxes and the role of religion.

The shared outcome we would be seeking is helping young people from fractured situations to develop surrogate family structures. Such structures may very well do for them what they have done for many (not all, but many). This, then, could create a new generation more likely to succeed and pass on the values that families share.

Why do some make it and many don't? Somehow, those who make it find a connection. Or, the connection might find them.

Roy Magnuson is a longtime teacher and coach at Como Park Senior High in Saint Paul.

A More Embracing Vow

By C. Peter Magrath

A picture haunts me. It's of a child lying face down on a beach in Turkey—a child who drowned as he and his family tried to flee the horrors in Syria. He was not an American child, abandoned and forgotten, as are so many in the United States from the too many fragmented (former) families, from which children have, at best, only one parent to raise and nurture them. Yet that child was a young

“Trying is at least a statement of caring and love for the children of God.” *C. Peter Magrath*

person of God—and our concern should be with all of God's people, regardless of geography.

Mitch Pearlstein has demonstrated the sad toll—the wreckage—that family fragmentation has created in these United States of disunited families. Can something be done? I am not sure, but surely we must try, because the human and spiritual costs—the wastage—are unacceptable. If we don't try, then we are giving up—in effect saying we don't care. Trying is at least a statement of caring and love for the children of God.

The best I can offer is a suggestion, not a solution, to this terrible problem of abandoned and neglected children. It is that when two persons come together to be married and live together they take a vow, not only to love and cherish each other



but also to be forever responsible and care for the children they produce or adopt. Obviously such a vow is not enforceable any more than the vow of fidelity between the couple, but it could be a powerful statement that children must be at the heart of any marriage.

Children—all children—matter a lot. They are the future in this country, and all of them deserve to be nurtured and raised, for they are God’s children. Statements of deep belief, of one’s convictions, can be powerful and become part of a society’s culture, and one must always fight for the good society.

Years ago I learned a slogan: “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Perhaps this is silly and trite, but this venture is worth pursuing.

C. Peter Magrath is a former president of the University of Minnesota and three other American universities.

Public Support and Demanding Policies

By Lawrence M. Mead

Marriage has declined in America, to the point where more than 40 percent of first marriages break up and over 40 percent of children are born to unmarried parents. Turmoil due chiefly to marital instability has engulfed families at the bottom of society and is ascending into the middle class. The effects are damaging to children and also to their parents, many of whom never find the harmonious private life they seek.

Social problems in America today are all about behavior, not values. Few approve of, say, crime, living on welfare without working, or failing to get through school, yet these problems occur. Progress against them has required a combination of better policies and stronger social authority. Over recent decades, government has enforced the law more effectively, required more welfare recipients to work, and begun to raise standards in schools. These policies worked only because they were backed by public support. Attitudes shifted from tolerance toward an insistence on better behavior, and that change was more important than policy innovation in achieving change.

Marriage is similar. Few today oppose the value of marriage as such, yet many do not achieve it. That’s because we have not yet evolved the combination of more demanding policies with public support that has brought progress in other areas. Federal experiments have shown that counseling spouses on how to marry and stay married has little effect. That is because the tested programs were nondirective and because public opinion was not yet mobilized to demand change. To be effective, policies must more clearly expect better behavior, and the public must back them up.

The best hope is probably “ceasefire,” the approach to urban crime developed by David Kennedy and his associates at John Jay College in New York. Big cities in America once seemed helpless to prevent violent crime, much of it due to gangs selling drugs and killing rival gang members. Kennedy showed that the police and other agencies could confront the gangs and reduce violence sharply simply by telling them clearly that further killing would not be tolerated. Henceforth, youth who shot others would serve longer prison terms, but those who left the gangs would get help to rebuild their lives. The demands were backed by local elected officials and community leaders, including

ministers from black churches.

The same approach could affect at least one aspect of the marriage problem—unwed pregnancy among disadvantaged youth. Right now, social agencies merely pick up the pieces after young mothers have children and the fathers disappear, usually without ever marrying. The authorities should instead confront youth in poor areas with demands to stop this, backed up by sanctions. Henceforth, youth still in school who have children without marriage—both male and female—should be put in special, single-sex schools that

“Restoring some of the traditional disapproval of illegitimacy must be part of the solution to the marriage problem.” *Lawrence M. Mead*

prepare them only to go to work and support their children. For them, work will preempt other opportunities like going to college. These demands would have to be supported, as in the crime case, by local officials, community leaders, and clergy.

Some fear to enforce marriage lest single parents be stigmatized. Restoring some of the traditional disapproval of illegitimacy must be part of the solution to the marriage problem. Yet the ceasefire approach does minimize this cost. When the authorities confront gangs, they make clear that the rules are changing. Violence prior to that time would be tacitly overlooked. It is *further* violence that would be strongly deterred, going forward. The same could occur with unwed pregnancy. The rules would change so that childbearing once again

would be supposed to occur only within marriage. Society could accept past single mothers yet turn away from further unwed pregnancy in the future. Part of the plan must be providing free long-term contraception to all lower-income young women.

As this approach suggests, it's crucial to begin with unwed pregnancy among youth, where the school system offers some leverage over lifestyle and where the public will for change is probably strongest. Change would also begin locally, in cities where the authorities could assemble the critical alliance for change that is essential to changing behavior. And, as with crime, success would depend on maintaining that coalition over time. If the authorities were to lose their focus on communicating and enforcing standards, crime or unwed pregnancy would rebound.

What about unwed pregnancy above school age, or the plague of divorce among those who do get married? Here there is little prospect of enforcing anything, and change must depend mainly on opinion alone, again seconded by free contraception. The public must come to disapprove, and thus deter, the flouting of marriage in the same informal but effective way it opposes racist attitudes towards minorities or smoking in enclosed spaces. Yet the very success of deterring unwed childbearing among youth—if achieved—would be a giant step in that direction. It would show that opinion can be effective. Society need not, in the name of tolerance, accept the collapse of the values it esteems.

Lawrence M. Mead is professor of politics and public policy at New York University and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.



“You’re Now Free to Move about Your Community”

By Erin Mundahl

Some 8.6 million flights left U.S. airports in 2015.

If so, you know the drill. Before each takeoff, passengers take their seats, buckle in, and sleep through, talk over or perhaps even listen to a short safety presentation. “Please put your devices into airplane mode,” the flight attendant tells you. In airplane mode, a phone or tablet’s connectivity is disabled and it can only access previously downloaded data. Using airplane mode prevents the phone’s satellite service from potentially disrupting the plane’s navigation systems.

**“The germ of community is buried
within each human heart. All it takes
is proper husbandry.” *Erin Mundahl***

If millions of Americans fly, tens of millions more are living in a sort of social airplane mode, living a sort of atomized existence, cut off from broader social community.

The fragmentation of the family is only one facet of a broader social problem of disconnectedness that has existed far longer than the twelve years of Facebook’s existence. The work of social scientists like Robert Putnam shows that social interactions—everything

from club membership to dinner parties—have been in decline for nearly fifty years.

Today, despite the opportunities to stay logged-on, “friended,” and “liked,” as well as to be connected through shared videos, pictures, and voice from the across the country or around the block, many Americans feel more emotionally checked-out than ever.

In 2014, the problem made headlines after the National Science Foundation published the results of a survey of face-to-face interviews with 1,500 adults, finding that one-quarter of Americans describe themselves as lonely and believe they have no one to talk to about their personal struggles and triumphs. It’s not just that more and more Americans are living alone—although Census data show that this to be true—but that more people live more isolated lives.

Like passengers on an airplane, their world is narrowly contained, remaining polite but very reserved. Instead of nurturing relationships, our culture instead fosters an environment of separation. To an extent, this reflects a darker side of the move from tight city neighborhoods and small towns to the sprawling suburbs, where it is easier to surround oneself with those who share similar lifestyles and values. As Putnam writes in his book on the decline of American communities, “By creating communities of homogeneous political interests, suburbanization reduces the local conflicts that engage and draw the citizenry into the public realm.”

Still, suburbs are not the only cause of social detachment. If this story needs a villain, the most likely culprit is the screen. First it was the television, followed only afterwards by smartphones and laptops. Surveys show that television viewing is the least-satisfying leisure activity, and yet, it remains one of the most popular, sucking up hours of time each day. Out of all leisure activities, it is also one of

the most isolating.

As T.S. Eliot wrote in the early 1960s, television “is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome.”

Even the family watching “together” is really only a collection of single viewers sitting side by side, each lost in their own silent world. Since they mainly watch alone, T.V. creates a social world that turns inwards, rather than out into the broader community. The advent of the laptop and the Internet only expedited the rush to gather around the electronic hearth.

Rebuilding family and community requires the reversal of this turn inwards. After all, the true social network isn’t Facebook; it exists in the community right outside your door. What is both liberating and difficult is that the task of strengthening communities cannot be outsourced to government programs or even church groups. Instead, it rests with individual choices to make time for friendship, to reach out to other people, to form and to nurture personal ties.

Making families stronger means spending more time with family. Only by coming to love not the ideal of the family, but the people themselves—with all their annoying habits and human flaws—can the institution be strengthened. Love is a choice; it’s also hard work. The same is true of friendships.

The germ of community is buried within each human heart. All it takes is proper husbandry.

“We’ve reached cruising altitude. You’re now free to move about your community.” Will you?

Erin Mundahl, originally from Independence, Minnesota, is now a writer in Washington, DC.

Iron Range Lessons of Family and Steel

By Mary Ann Nelson

Every year, an international film institute brings to Minneapolis and St. Paul over 300 films by independent filmmakers from around the world. It’s an opportunity for us to better understand other cultures and see how we’re more alike each other than different in the things that count in life, especially development of youth and family success.

My husband and I are avid fans because of compelling stories from widely different cultures

“I worry about young people today who don’t have an opportunity to sit around the proverbial kitchen table hearing sustaining advice from parents and grandparents.” *Mary Ann Nelson*

about individual struggles against overwhelming odds. The positive supports from others inspire people to be courageous and self-disciplined in making tough decisions to improve themselves and their families. It’s an uplifting experience. These messages often contrast starkly with the barrage of local news stories about crime, violence, and growing assaults against the very community values that sustain us as a society. Too often, common sense seems to be lagging.



In my family, our parents often sat around the kitchen table with us to talk issues. As kids who grew up in a sometimes rough and tumble Iron Range culture, we were encouraged to speak out about things we cared about and to be responsible for our behavior choices. Whining was not okay in our house. If any of us complained about unfair treatment by the school or a neighbor, we knew our parents would probe for “the whole story” about what happened and why.

Injustice wasn’t tolerated, but neither was our being lazy or disrespectful to adults. I remember special “children only” time with my Finnish grandfather, who listened solemnly as we buttered our saltine crackers together (his favorite) and talked. We were a little fearful of his gruff style but proud of the attention. Family gatherings on the Slovenian side were different, celebrated with alcohol and arguments by the adults as we children played. Still, adults took time to advise us about what we should and should never do to be successful. We knew we were loved even as they admonished:

“You come from hardy stock—we’re counting on you to do the right thing no matter what.”

“Always work hard in school, no one can ever take your education away from you.”

“Don’t hang around with shifty or violent kids who will get you into trouble.”

“Nothing good happens after midnight so get yourself home.”

“Always believe in yourself because you can be what you want to be in America.”

I worry about young people today who don’t have an opportunity to sit around the proverbial kitchen table to hear sustaining advice from parents and grandparents. We seem to live in an American

society increasingly unable or unwilling to engage as individuals to do the heavy lifting needed to resolve the most intractable problems rooted in family dysfunction.

During my career as a teacher and school administrator I worked with parents that refused to support school efforts to engage their children and instead took stands that undermined offers of help. Yet there were many effective parents who, despite economic struggles or family challenges, were able to collaborate with the school to motivate and inspire their child to do better in their own interests. Most of these children were rescued by effective parent and school partnerships. But schools are often left with few resources to apply when parents refuse to do their part.

It seems that common sense solutions to family dysfunction could supplement government programs (many of which often don’t work as intended). How powerful if each of us would reach out to individuals in need of a caring friend in the neighborhood or workplace. With respect and understanding we could help someone who is ready to listen to find a better path. Community service volunteering is a great start: local Rotary clubs, church groups, social service helpers, school volunteers. Personal connections pave the way to building resilience and self-confidence during times of stress. Ideas will be inspired for how our society can better support development of successful individuals and families. It starts with individuals taking action.

Instead of looking the other way when we see evidence of anti-social values taking hold of our community’s youth, consider becoming engaged and speaking out.

Rather than avoiding the risk of being called offensive or out of line, consider showing personal

courage and extending a hand of friendship to a neighbor experiencing difficulty.

And we could each consider ways to help with the heavy lifting of community outreach that starts with each of us caring and serving others.

Mary Ann Nelson is a career educator having worked as teacher, school superintendent, Minnesota Assistant Commissioner of Education, and university faculty member.

Strengthening the Marriages and Relationships of New Parents

By Rhonda Kruse Nordin

I became a mother in 1989. That year, I joined four million women strong in our shared pursuit of motherhood. The vast majority of these women, like me, were married. We outnumbered by four-to-one the women who by chance or choice had chosen to go it alone. Today, more than a quarter-century later, despite efforts to reduce the nonmarital birth rate, its proportion of annual births has soared to more than 40 percent nationally.

Admittedly, 60 percent of nonmarital births are to cohabitating couples, but this doesn't guarantee these couples raise their children together. On the contrary, the majority of unmarried partners part within five years. The result: Their children grow up in the so-called fragmented family we reference today.

I propose we reduce the number of children growing up in single-parent homes by increasing the number of parents who stay married.

Essentially, I propose a comprehensive effort to strengthen the marriages and relationships of new parents. Many have already said "yes" to marriage. Let's help them continue saying "yes." Married parents remain the majority of couples becoming parents each year and provide the blueprint for the future intimate relationships of their children. I fear further erosion of the proportion of married parents unless a widespread attempt is made to bolster the institution of marriage and safeguard it among those who have already chosen it.

"I propose relationship education as an add-on to new parent education currently offered in schools, churches and health care facilities."

Rhonda Kruse Nordin

I propose expanding childbirth education to include "relationship education" that immediately reframes the definition of parenthood as such: The responsibility of being a parent extends beyond caring for a baby. Parenthood means that men and women care for their marriage (or relationship) and plan for the role that each plays, not just as a father or mother but for the very important role that each plays as the spouse (or partner) of a parent. This is a role few consider, yet playing this role well largely determines the



course a marriage (or partnership) takes, and charts the course for child and family wellbeing.

Family fragmentation as a result of divorce occurs at every stage of the family life cycle; however, marriages are most vulnerable during the early parenting years. Thoughts of divorce are more prevalent when there are babies or preschoolers in the home than at any other time in the family life cycle.

Each year in the United States, more than one million couples end their marriages. Approximately 62 percent of divorces involve parents, and of parents who divorce, nearly 45 percent do so before a first child leaves kindergarten; 15 percent of divorcing parents dissolve their union before their baby is even 18 months of age.

The relationship of parents who are not married at the time of birth is even more susceptible to breakup—almost doubly so. Within one year of birth, nearly half of unmarried fathers live apart from the mother and baby; and within five years, 63 percent of fathers are no longer living with either the mother or their children, and only one in four professes more than quarterly contact with his offspring.

Clearly, there is stress in the homes of new parents—married or unmarried—that justifies the addition of relationship education to help parents navigate this critical period deemed high risk and, thus, lay the groundwork for family preservation.

Relationship education at this critical time strengthens the parent relationship, increases family stability, and enhances co-parenting abilities, cooperation, and father involvement, which benefit the family immediately and for years to come.

Having a baby is a time of natural change for couples. Childbirth expert Dr. Penelope Leach calls it one of life's teachable moments, when most men and women are motivated, optimistic, and open to positive changes to benefit their baby.

Becoming a family is also a transition period for unmarried parents and represents an opportunity to introduce marriage as a natural progression to their relationship that will prepare them to meet inherent challenges of parenthood and enhance long-term family well-being.

Key to this endeavor are current philosophies and research that suggest couples experience less stress and relationship vulnerabilities, and most importantly avoid divorce, when they know what to expect and are given ways to cope with changes and challenges that often lead to family fragmentation. Couples who participate in relationship education after childbirth are:

- Four times more likely to identify problems in their marriage.
- Twice as likely to discuss problems with each other.
- 75 percent more likely to seek and receive support.

I propose relationship education as an add-on to new parent education currently offered in schools, churches and health care facilities, attended by 96 percent of all new parents.

Additionally, workplaces provide relatively unexplored venues to reach new parents via wellness programs, as prime childbearing years often coincide with prime working years.

Being a parent and being the spouse of a parent

requires hard work and self-discipline in a common cause. Marriage has never been a simple social institution and, indeed, becomes more complex when it expands to include children. Every couple is different, just as what makes them happy in relationships varies.

Yet we need to acknowledge that what makes children happy wavers little: Children desire to be part of and play a role in a stable family. Most of us would give our kids just about anything yet stop short of giving them the best gift of all—a stable marriage.

Rhonda Kruse Nordin is an American Experiment Senior Fellow. Her most recent Center publication is “Where the Boys Are”: The Unacknowledged World of Nonmarital Fathers.

Helping Others Join Us on the Social Escalator

By Bob Osburn

America’s social escalator, the one that carries young people from lower-class homes into solid middle-class lives, is broken, according to Charles Murray’s *Coming Apart* (2012). Massive family fragmentation is one of the main reasons.

Murray’s thesis (focused on white America, but applicable to virtually all Americans) is that America’s “new upper classes” (college degree holders, almost always) are doing what it takes to make their marriages work and to keep their families from fragmenting. They know that their kids’ prospects are enhanced when mom and dad lead orderly lives where fights are not final. By contrast, many with less than a college degree

increasingly lead lives that are in shambles. Family fragmentation is exploding amongst those in the “new lower class.”

The question fairly begs to be asked: Why doesn’t the new upper class show the new lower class the way out of their quagmire? Precisely because, Murray writes, there is among the new upper class a “collapse of confidence in codes of honorable behavior. . . . The new upper class still

“Are we whose lives are marked by order, coherence, and discipline willing to mentor those without it, perhaps because they themselves grew up in chaotic home lives?” Bob Osburn

does a good job of *practicing* some of the virtues, but it no longer *preaches* them”[emphases mine]. The new ethic of “nonjudgmentalism . . . keeps the good stuff” out of the hands of those whose families are failing.

Drawing on Murray, the remedy I am proposing goes like this: Yes, preach what you practice. Yes, get on your figurative soapbox and declare the four “founding virtues” that made America great: (1) sex belongs in no place other than marriage; (2) work hard in hopes of a fair reward; (3) honesty is by far and away the best policy; and (4) follow the God who created us and wants to redeem us from sin. If the new upper classes (folks who read this essay) will preach what they practice, they will not only make America great, but, more importantly, will help repair our broken social escalator.



Lest you write me off as the village crank who delights to jar folks out of their emotional socks with words like preach and sin, may I suggest that you find suitable words in your moral vocabulary that elevate your capacity to care about the human cost of massive family fragmentation?

Nevertheless, those who are succeeding must start actively preaching, promoting, and recommending their example to those hell-bent on fragmenting their families. The successful must not fail to tell the stories of God's grace, hard work, personal discipline, integrity, and the relentless pursuit of education that got them and their kids to a fortunate place where the social escalator works well.

Let me offer some questions for the members of the new upper class who should start preaching what they practice.

- Does anyone doubt that Jesus fully loved those he also told to stop sinning? This raises a question for today's cultural authorities: Who made the rule that love forbids moral judgment?
- Is it a combination of Minnesota modesty and cultural relativism that forbids us from telling someone that living together without the benefit of matrimony increases the probabilities of negative life outcomes for them and their children?
- Just as none of us would let our little children wander into traffic for fear that they would be run over, why are we so afraid to tell our neighbors (youth and adults) that if they wander into and out of intimate relationships they will not only harm their future marriage prospects but the overall life prospects of their children?
- Does anyone believe that inviting others to practice what we preach means that we have innately superior marriages and families? "There but for the grace of God go I." Translated, all marriages take work.
- Are we whose lives are marked by order, coherence, and discipline willing to mentor those without it, perhaps because they themselves grew up in chaotic home lives?
- Why do our educational institutions teach, without apology, that the following are wrong: cigarette smoking, cheating, failing to recycle, using too much of the earth's resources, eating fatty, sugary foods, and disagreeing with the LGBT lifestyle, but refuse to tell students that sex must be reserved for marriage?
- Do we have any hope of reversing the crushing tide of fragmented families if we vote for presidential candidates whose marriage and family lives contradict what social science tells us about giving kids a leg up in life? The adult children of these leading candidates only made it out of the crocodile-infested swamps of failure because mom and dad had lots and lots of money. The vast majority of Americans do not.

Just now, I received an email from a couple who are courageously preparing to tie the knot after nine years of living together. My wife and I are involved in their lives because we want their family to join us on the social escalator and because we share the human responsibility to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Will you join us?

Bob Osburn is executive director of the Wilberforce Academy, where he works to train college students to apply their faith to challenging problems in society.

The Failure of Secularism to Stem the Tide

By Larry Purdy

Question: “What will it take – not generally speaking, but precisely speaking – to repair the very culture that is fueling family fragmentation in Minnesota and the Nation?”

One answer—if not the answer—is simple: We might be able to repair our culture if we meaningfully returned to and practiced the values taught in strict Judeo-Christian cultures (and, to be entirely fair, embraced by other religions to the extent they parallel Judeo-Christianity’s timeless principles). Such a return to “faith” would reverse, at least to some degree, the family fragmentation we witness in far too many of our communities.

Although fearful of being characterized as judgmental, benighted, or, worse, racist and bigoted, there is little doubt that our increasing acceptance of secularism and our commensurate rejection of faith have done nothing to stem the rise in broken families. In the worst case, it has fueled it. It is a phenomenon that seems to be duplicated in virtually every culture where secularism has become the dominant ideology.

Modern cultures’ increasing acceptance of focusing on the immediate desires of the individual, with

no attention whatever paid to the eternal price one may pay for his or her actions, has enabled too many people to reject duties and obligations that our once-upon-a-time stricter adherence to faith naturally imposed and reinforced. It is doubtful these same sorts of strictures can effectively be reinstituted via manmade secular legislation (even in the minds of many who argue that religion itself is manmade). When there is a belief in nothing but the here and now and no attention paid to the hereafter, there is little incentive to refrain from the

“Our increasing acceptance of secularism and our commensurate rejection of faith have done nothing to stem the rise in broken families.”

Larry Purdy

pursuit of purely selfish ends. Thus, the increasing acceptance of people’s selfishness seems to be the driving force for the family fragmentation we see happening all around us.

Apart from a return to faith, is there any other precise repair one can offer? I know of none. Friends across the ideological spectrum offer none. Yet, sadly, how likely is it that a meaningful return to faith will occur?

Larry Purdy is a retired attorney in Minneapolis.



Eighty Hours of “Couples” Education?

By Don Racheter

Before being licensed to practice medicine, one must go to medical school for four years and then generally complete a three-year residency. Once licensed, doctors must complete CMEs, Continuing Medical Education units, to stay licensed.

Before one can be licensed to practice law, one must go to law school for three years. Once licensed, lawyers must complete CLEs, Continuing Legal Education units to stay licensed.

If, as a society, we want to answer the question, “*Specifically*, What Can We Do to Change America’s Culture of Massive Family Fragmentation?” the answer may lie in treating the granting and keeping of a marriage license similarly.

While it would be unreasonable to mandate that people seeking to marry spend three to seven years going to “couples school” together before being eligible for a license to wed, it might be both reasonable and useful for them to have to complete a certain number of hours (say, eighty) of testing, role playing, and counseling, especially about the “big four” items that cause friction and breakups in marriages: poor communications, family issues, money, and sex. Then, perhaps we should require that they complete yearly CFEs, Continuing Family Education units (say, a minimum of four hours, and more if a counselor detects problems).

Would this require many more family counselors and the investment of substantial dollars to

make such a system work? Of course, but we currently have a surplus of college graduates who can’t find suitable jobs and could perhaps be quickly retrained to become family counselors with a guaranteed source of clients. Either the married couples or the state would have to pay for the CFE sessions.

Currently as a society, we are wasting many, many dollars dealing with the breakup of families. Costs for divorce and child custody disputes. Costs for creating new single-parent households. Costs

**“Perhaps we should require that
[married couples] compete yearly
Continuing Family Education units.”**
Don Racheter

for counseling to help people get over the anger and grief of dissolutions. Costs to deal with delinquency and crime caused by the lack of two-parent supervision of teenagers. Costs for dealing with disruptive students in our classrooms. Costs in lost economic potential in split households – and the list goes on and on. Therefore, on balance, it would probably be much cheaper for America to invest in prevention of marriage breakups than to pay the costs later, when failure manifests.

Generally, a multi-causal approach to solving a problem has a greater potential for success than a single-causal approach; therefore, I renew my call for additional reforms included in an article of mine in a previous American Experiment symposium, “Time for a Fifth Great Awakening”

(W)e need our leaders, especially our religious leaders, to preach and teach to our youth about why out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, divorce, and broken homes are bad for the individuals involved and bad for society as a whole. Writers, actors, producers, and others in the mass media and entertainment industries can also take a leading role in this. While it is a good thing for educators to teach their students to be tolerant of differences in race, creed, color, class, and so on, we need them to go back to teaching students to be less tolerant of behaviors that have such negative social consequences.

As I also argued in that piece, we need politicians to repeal public policies with pernicious incentives that provide welfare to single mothers and penalties for having a contributing father in the home. Speaking of incentives, let's add some positive ones to our state and federal tax codes to provide a refundable tax credit for each year a couple stays married, starting with an amount equal to the average cost of four hours of CFEs and growing larger every year the pair stays married.

Don Racheter is a retired political scientist now serving as president of Public Interest Institute, a pro-free-markets, limited-government, and traditional-values think tank located in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Let's Stop Fracturing Families

By Mark Ritchie

I know a bit about the fracturing of families. A drunk driver shattered our family by killing our daughter.

In my service as a volunteer with Minnesota MADD, I have met hundreds who have suffered the same devastation. Alcohol-related car crashes, and the accompanying suffering and grief that can tear families apart, cannot be tolerated by a society dedicated to supporting families.

In my service as Minnesota's Secretary of State I have also met a number of families shattered by another preventable injury – the stress of multiple military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of sustaining a military force large enough to properly wage the wars we have chosen, our

“The effects of multiple deployments could have been avoided by having a properly sized military force.”

Mark Ritchie

national political leaders have opted to shrink the size of our military and instead to send troops back to the Middle East over and over again.

The effects of multiple deployments could have been avoided by having a properly sized military force. The impacts of this policy choice—multiple deployments vs. adequate force size—can be measured in many heartbreaking suicides, domestic conflicts, and divorces. Instead of funding our military properly Congress chose to cut taxes and use sequestration to shrink our Armed Forces.

Center of the American Experiment has asked an important question “What can we do to change America's culture of massive family



fragmentation?” From my experience I can offer two suggestions.

First, end the culture of excusing drunk driving. There are many ways to keep drunks off the road if we decide that is important to protecting individuals and families. Keeping drunks off the road could be as simple as requiring everyone convicted of an alcohol-related crime to install an ignition interlock system that prevents driving when impaired.

Second, promote a culture of responsibility in regards to our Armed Forces. Reducing multiple deployments could be as simple as ending congressionally mandated budget sequestration, freeing our military leaders to maintain the overall force size needed to avoid the devastating effects of relying on too few to carry the burden of war.

These culture changes would not come easily. We would need to confront those who benefit from weak drunk driving laws and those who prefer tax cuts over fully funding our military. So be it.

Coddling drunks has resulted in one in every three families being disrupted by drunk drivers. The idea that we can cut taxes in times of war no matter the impact on our servicemen and women is shameful. Enough already.

Supporting our families in times of crisis and personal stress is crucial. Many of us, including our family, found the love of family, friends, neighbors, and fellow church members truly life-saving. But if we can keep families from being shattered in the first place it would be so much better.

Next time you have the opportunity to keep a drunk driver off the road or to speak out against tax cutting at the expense of family stability please

find the courage. Each family saved from being shattered by outside forces is a precious gift to all.

Mark Ritchie served as Minnesota's Secretary of State from 2007 until 2015. At present he leads the citizen's committee working to bring the 2023 World's Fair to Minnesota.

Someday that Young Woman will be Someone's Mother

By Deborah L. Ruf

As I pondered the topic of family fragmentation, I turned to a 2015 American Experiment symposium that asked a similar question of religious leaders and people from faith communities. One essay, in particular, caught my eye: *Focus Efforts on Women*, by Laurence Cooper. He made a good case for the value of women knowing what they want and knowing how to influence the men in their lives. The difficulty here is that too many women don't know what they want and don't know how to ask for it.

I work with families as an educational consultant. When I recommend books on parenting, most parents admit up front that the mother is the one who will do the reading, and the father just wants her to point out the important parts. One author I recommend is Michael Gurian. He writes about gender differences and the difference in the way most women relate to others compared to most men. He writes about the role of fathers in young men's lives and the issues and feelings about sex that males and females have. Most significantly in my mind, though, is that he writes about how,

since the sexual revolution, women have lost much of their persuasive powers with men because they don't understand the difference in how men think about sex compared to themselves. Crudely put, they give in too early.

I insist both parents, even when the couple is divorced, attend my consultations. We have the sex differences talk as part of the overall consultation. I point out the roles each of them must play, and I point out when one must defer to the other, as when adolescent boys need to separate from their mothers. I tell them that I will gladly have the sex talk with their children if they don't know how to

“Someday that young woman is going to be someone's mother. Don't hurt her.” *Deborah L Ruf*

do it themselves. This talk isn't about how to do sex. It's about how to explain the psychological, medical, and emotional reasons about why not to do sex, how long to wait, and the value of both parents working together for the benefit of their children.

I gave the sex talks to all three of my own sons. I told them about the scientific and medical reasons why good men should take on the role of being a protector of women. I explained that too many parents aren't giving their sons or daughters the information they need to interact safely and responsibly with members of the opposite sex. Many of the young women they would meet would be unnecessarily vulnerable if no one had honestly spoken with them about how men think about sex compared to how most women do. I told them

that if a young woman says “no” it means no. I also told them that if a young woman doesn't clearly say “yes,” it still means no. I told them about how women think and about how easily damaged she could be emotionally if he assumed she saw a sexual encounter the way he did and then he left her. I then explained that someday that young woman is going to be someone's mother. Don't hurt her.

There's lots more I tell parents and lots more I told my sons. When talking to young people, it is important to make it clear “why” a certain behavior is valuable. When we add in the ripple effects of why (emotional damage, hurting others, sexually transmitted diseases, fatherless children, etc.), the majority of our young people are fully capable of becoming more responsible.

Deborah L. Ruf is an educational consultant for families and a high intelligence specialist at Educational Options.

Can a Scientific Case be Made for Marriage?

By Don Samuels

In the poorest of communities, parents, who for generations were unknowingly parenting for failure, are being convinced, in significant numbers, to change behaviors and begin parenting for success. They are making the improbable switch because they were given supportive facts and data revealed in research. They were instructed on the new science on brain plasticity, brain development, and the capacity of parents to predispose their child for creativity, curiosity, memory capacity, confidence, and high aspiration.



Scientific observation and data are objective. They are not confused with dogma, opinion, or even values. For this reason, parents are disarmed and potentially more open to be persuaded. They

“Leaders who wish to restore marriage must put facts together and establish scientific credibility.” *Don Samuels*

get past any fear that they are being asked to believe in someone else’s ideas or to subscribe to subjective tenets. I would hardly have believed it, had I not witnessed for myself these transformed perceptions.

The logical question then is: Can such a persuasive scientific case be made for marriage? Do data support the premise that marriage is good for men and women? What does research say about the benefits of marriage for childhood? Do data prove that marriage is good for community, and society? If such data exist, they must be assembled and disseminated, accessibly and persuasively, as part of any attempt to revive the institution of marriage.

The truth is, we live in a resolutely cynical society, where leadership has proven to be increasingly unethical. Moral authority is a compromised persuader. The moral standing of previously unquestionable authorities, from police to clergy, from bankers to politicians, has become battered by revelations of prejudice, abuse, and neglect. People are now less confident in what and who they believe than in what they know and what’s proven.

Another major reason for our shift from religious to scientific authority is that many of our long-held religious beliefs have been modified by science. Of those changes, many have prevailed against initial condemnation by moral and spiritual leadership. By now, we know that the world is not flat, is not the center of the planetary system, and was not created in a day or two. We also know that all people are genetically equal. We know that corporal punishment of children and adults does more harm than good. We know that women voting is good for democracy and that homosexuality is not a choice. It is only natural, then, that modern Westerners would feel free to experiment with sexuality and family.

We cannot wish this trend away. It is here to stay. Leaders who wish to restore marriage must put facts together and establish scientific credibility. We must prove our premise—that marriage is good for men, women, and children and that it leads to happier, healthier, and more prosperous communities and a stronger nation. Given our historic fallibilities, on the one hand, and the persuasive power of research, on the other, we owe that to our audiences.

Don Samuels is an ordained minister, a Minneapolis School Board Director, and CEO of MicroGrants.

The Importance of being Loudly Intentional

By Fred Senn

“What will it take – not *generally* speaking, but *precisely* speaking – to repair the very culture that is

fueling family fragmentation in Minnesota and the Nation?”

We have developed a very dangerous blind spot. As a society, we are choosing to ignore the consequences of family fragmentation: It's just too messy to deal with.

Somewhere in a management class years ago, I heard this story.

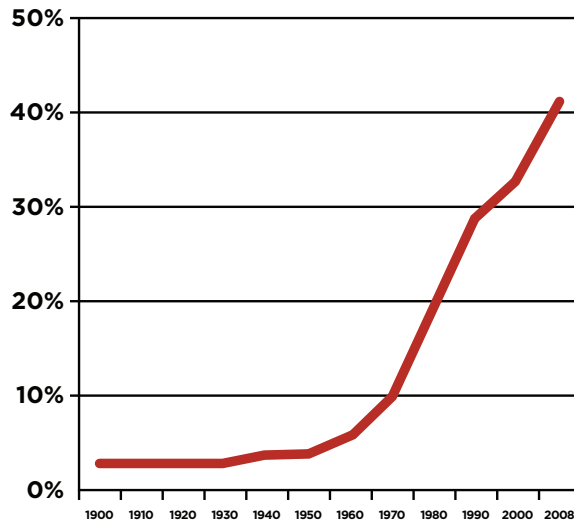
Inside the factory manager's office, a huge chart graphed how quality continued to slip on the factory floor. Then, one day the manager

“People are more receptive to messages that are moving with cultural change than messages moving against cultural change.” *Fred Senn*

took the big chart off his office wall and put it outside where all the employees could see it. They would glance at it every day to see how their shift did. And quality improved.

Objective information changes behavior. For most of us, our environment is invisible; we rarely see beyond our immediate time and place in the world to grasp the context. The societal dangers of obesity, smoking, and drunk driving are examples of threats that took a long time to be understood at street level.

**Percentage of Children Born to Unmarried Mothers
1900-2008**



U.S. Bureau of the Census and National Center for Health Statistics. Rates before 1930 are estimates.

Part of the solution, I believe, is to move the big chart to a place where everybody can see it. Get the subject on the public agenda—not from the myopic view of today's news, but from a historical perspective. Let's get everybody to wrap their heads around the story this chart tells.

This is a wake-up call. Births to unmarried women have gone from 3 percent to over 40 percent in just two generations. Think about the “greatest generation”—those who fought in World War II, came home, went to school, got jobs, started families, and rebuilt the economy. Over 90 percent of the greatest generation was born to married parents. What kind of nation will we be if half our children lack the natural advantage of an intact family?

Sadly, all the research I have seen shows that, on average, children raised by a single, unmarried parent will not prosper at the same level as children raised by married parents. That raises the hypothesis that the cycle of poverty is directly linked to the

marriage rate. (Or does poverty cause family dysfunction? It is hard to make that case when black women were more likely to be married than white women until 1970, and black men were more likely to be married than white men until 1960, in spite of large black-white income disparities.)

It's clear that children with only one parent have the cards stacked against them. If that's true, then a society with almost half its children depending on a single parent will struggle with prosperity as well. There are no examples in history of a successful society without strong families.

It's odd that marriage rates would drop dramatically in one of the most religiously observant civilized societies. Church leaders must raise their voices. Churches are the most logical place to start the conversation. But every channel that reaches street level must step up.

In 1986 Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, persuaded our ad agency to volunteer our services on behalf of children. (After 30 years, we are still her agency.) That experience brought us face to face with the plight of poor children. I will never forget an argument I was having with a CDF executive about the proper role of government in the lives of families. He said, "The role of government is to help parents do the right thing." He won the argument. Who could disagree with that? Part of doing the right thing is to be *loudly intentional* about policies that support and encourage marriage.

It's much easier to stop smoking in Minneapolis than in Paris. Very few of your friends here still smoke. There's a bit of shame connected with lighting up. That cultural change is less than three decades old.

"The big chart" has to become a loud and public

part of every measure we take of the health of our community: the unemployment rate, the crime rate, the graduation rate, *and the rate of births to unmarried women*. A mention in the Governor's State of the State address would be a courageous step in the right direction.

In parts of our society struggling the most, building more two-parent families is the critical link to progress in all success metrics for children. Imagine a brave discussion in a church basement in North Minneapolis about marriage and parenting. Our culture is very supportive of single mothers, as it must be. Still, the facts are undeniable. Children in stable two-parent homes have a much better chance of success.

The frightening growth in the rate of births to unmarried women seems to have slowed for the moment. Or in the case of teenagers, gone markedly down. That's important news. People are much more receptive to messages that are moving *with* cultural change than messages moving *against* cultural change.

What are we waiting for?

Fred Senn is a founding partner of Fallon Worldwide. He is actively involved in several organizations working to improve early education and close the achievement gap.

A People without a Story Dies

By Chong Yang Thao

We are children of mythological heroes. Imagine that you have the choice of leaving your home,

ravaged by war and mostly abandoned; your neighbors are long gone, many hiding in caves and forests while others taking up arms to fight for their freedom. If you stay, you may live, but there is no guarantee of a return to the previous life you knew and loved. If you leave, your family will walk under the cover of darkness and be pursued and possibly killed by soldiers. You will face fear, starvation, sickness, rejection, and alienation, and you will settle in a place where you will not know the people, language, climate, or culture.

Would you do it? Given the choice, many people did not, but my grandma, mom, uncles, and other

“Parents, come home. Come home to your children.” *Chong Yang Thao*

Hmong elders like them did, and what is even more remarkable is that they did this with no inkling of the future, only that there would be a chance for their children to start over.

I grew up listening to the story of my titanic ancestors who created the world, forming mountains and valleys with their hands. Such evidence of their existence can be found in the giant jars of Luang Prabang, in Laos, today and explains our parents’ larger-than-life courage. In America, the children of my generation were sustained by the story of our parents’ journey across the Mekong River into Thailand, only to settle into refugee camps and be treated as second-class citizens. Their journey continued into America, equally difficult in its finality, and sewn into story clothes large enough for blankets that wrapped us in warmth, memory, and mythology.

Our parents’ struggles and sacrifices motivated us to achieve in life, through education, so that we may realize their dreams. And as our American-defined successes are diminished by our parents’ heroic sacrifices, our American individualism takes over, and, eventually, we forget our parents’ story altogether.

Today, while many first-generation Hmong women and men, born in the United States, are highly educated, successful, and serving in leadership roles, many are living backwards, trying to recapture their lost youth—that time when, out of necessity, they became their parents’ parents or abided by cultural mandates to marry and have children young.

On any given weekend, these now-middle-aged couples are out partying, giving rise to a Hmong clubbing subculture. An offshoot of this lifestyle is a rise in divorce rates in the Hmong community, and while this generation has learned to navigate various American systems, their children are having to do it all over again on their own, as their parents’ new-found youth has left them to fend for themselves. Unlike their parents, who were sustained by the stories of their people’s epic origin and fight—and flight—for freedom, these children do not know they are descended from heroes, as they flounder in school and struggle in life. Not mentioned in the local and national conversation about the education achievement gap are Hmong students.

Another group living backwards is older Hmong men, who abandon their families in America to marry underage girls in Laos. Unforeseen by our parents when they left Laos was that when our fathers crossed America’s borders, their authority would diminish as children become their leaders and women become educated. Perhaps it is American individualism that has given voice to



women, who look at their husbands in the eyes and call law enforcement when abused. Perhaps it is that these Hmong men long for another kind of mythology—the false hope that they can reclaim the past, which they have given up for their children. Perhaps these men, like many of their own grown children, also wish to start over, whether to reclaim their youth or the patriarchal power they have lost.

Whatever the reasons, and maybe there are no good or real reasons, the abandonment of families in America creates one cycle of dependency as mothers become sole providers and children are displaced. When a man marries his child-bride, he will quickly impregnate her in an effort to make her stay with him. As these girls are young, usually uneducated, and in America without their families, they and their children form another cycle of dependency. This, by far, is the most destructive factor in the fracturing of Hmong families.

For too long, the Hmong community has operated under a code of silence, *kav liam*, that turns a blind eye to bad behavior. Implied in this phrase, which means “let it go,” are the virtues of forgiveness, patience, and endurance. At the same time, *kav liam* suggests ignoring what may be right in front of us. And while inherent in this attitude is independence and adaptation and survival, making it a source of our strength, it also permits us to do terrible things to each other with impunity. The negligence and abuse of children continue because the doers rely on the protection of this code.

At the community level, the complacency of *kav liam* needs to stop. We, as community members, must call out and condemn this deplorable behavior, as I am doing now. In the meantime, parents, come home. Come home to your children. Talk to your children. Remind yourselves of our story, which is grounded in hope, love,

and the preservation of family. This is what our predecessors left their homes and their entire lives for, a chance for you and me and our children. Then, tell your children who they are, and then let them make of themselves what they wish. Come to parent-teacher conferences, watch them play ball, sing, dance, compete, and be young. You had your time, and now it is theirs, and they cannot do it without you.

While the dominant American culture has some knowledge of these practices in the Hmong community, it also practices *kav liam* in its reluctance to intervene. On the one hand, there is a genuine lack of understanding of the Hmong community by mainstream society, and child-neglect and abuse are mistaken for culture. On the other hand, the Hmong is the invisible stepchild of the American society, the quiet one in the corner, the shy student in the back of the classroom.

Culture, then, is an excuse for the American mainstream to turn a blind eye to an epidemic that will surface in a tidal wave of Hmong youth in limbo, unable to succeed in either world. Hmong men who break American law in these abusive international marriages must face legal consequences. And while there is vehement denial of the problem’s existence, certainly within the Hmong community and appallingly among prominent Hmong leaders, the problem is real and needs close scrutiny with the hand of the law. These girls are our children, too.

The Hmong’s story is an immigrant story of a people’s dream for a better life that rests within our children, but when we cannibalize each other, we threaten our very existence. When our fathers, who are supposed to be our protectors, storytellers—and carriers of a legacy of courage, sacrifice, and heroism—marry their children, a story ends.

A people without a story dies.

Chong Yang Thao was born in Laos and, along with members of her family, came to Minnesota in 1980 after four years in a refugee camp in Thailand. She grew up in St. Paul, earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Minnesota, and has taught at Como Park Senior High School in St. Paul for the last nineteen years.

Rejecting the Cultural Foundations of the “Progressive” Leviathan

By David J. Theroux

America is experiencing an unprecedented flight from the family, with a growing number of women neither marrying nor having children. Simultaneously over the past fifty years, the welfare state has experienced a gigantic expansion, and the intact, natural family as a norm has broken up in ever-increasing numbers, with high rates of nonmarital births, long-term and intergenerational welfare dependence, divorce, juvenile and adult crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and other pathologies. This mounting calamity has proceeded as the traditional moral values of individual liberty, personal responsibility, family, community, and the rule of law have been eclipsed by the secular, moral relativism of utilitarianism in claiming that the end justifies the means.

The Oxford/Cambridge scholar C.S. Lewis stressed in his book, *The Abolition of Man* (1943), the importance of the natural law for moral ethics, a code of moral conscience that is inescapable and defines each person as human. Like the inherent

truism of mathematics or the natural physical laws, such morality exists on its own, independent of subjective choices or experiences, according to Lewis.

Lewis drew on the natural law insights of such thinkers as the Apostle Paul, Augustine, Magnus, Aquinas, Cicero, Grotius, Blackstone, Acton, and Locke, and he considered modernist dismissals of such work to be fundamentally erroneous. In particular, both Aquinas’s notion of common sense (*communis sensus*) as described in the *Summa Theologica* and the legacy of rational theism found in Jewish, Islamic, Christian, and certain pagan

“The cultural foundations of the ‘progressive’ leviathan must be abandoned to restore liberty, personal responsibility, the family, and community.” *David J. Theroux*

writers—in other words, the core philosophical system of the West—had a powerful effect on Lewis. To him, the culture of modernism is not just an historical aberration of this common sense, but a profound threat to the pursuit of truth, goodness, beauty, and civilization itself.

This common sense, or Lewis’s notion of common rationality, consisted, in part, of each individual human being’s intrinsic understanding of an objective, universal, and natural legal order of truth and morality—the natural law, or what Lewis called the *Tao*—upon which he or she discerns, chooses, and acts.



Of central importance in Lewis's discussion of natural law is his critique of moral relativism as a theory of ethics and guide to behavior. Lewis claimed that the precepts of moral ethics cannot just be innovated or improvised as we go along.

This thing which I have called for convenience the *Tao*, and which others may call Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason or the First Platitudes, is not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is *the* sole source of all value judgments. . . . What purport to be new systems or (as they now call them) "ideologies," all consist of fragments from the *Tao* itself. Arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to the *Tao* and to it alone such validity as they possess. If my duty to my parents is a superstition, then so is my duty to posterity. If justice is a superstition, then so is my duty to my country or my race. If the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a real value, then so is conjugal fidelity.

In this regard, David Brooks noted in his *New York Times* column "The Cost of Relativism in America" (March 10, 2015), that in abandoning the natural-law tradition upon which the social norms for liberty and civil society rest, we have unleashed a self-destructive, cultural chaos: "The health of society is primarily determined by the habits and virtues of its citizens. In many parts of America there are no minimally agreed upon standards for what it means to be a father. There are no basic codes and rules woven into daily life, which people can absorb unconsciously and follow automatically."

Brooks's insight is as profound today as when the same view was first reported in 1965 in the

then controversial *Moynihan Report*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor. Daniel Patrick Moynihan noted that "from the wild Irish slums of the 19th-century Eastern seaboard, to the riot-torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: A community that allows large numbers of young men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future—that community asks for and gets chaos. Crime, violence, unrest, disorder . . . are not only to be expected, they are very near to inevitable."

Although the poisonous government policies causing the breakdown of the family are now known, the question remains whether the cultural decline that has led to such measures will be reversed. To do so will require abandoning the delusional, moral relativism of utilitarianism in order to restore natural law as the standard for public morality. In the process, the needed privatization and de-politicization of civic institutions can fully proceed. In short, the cultural foundations of the "progressive" leviathan must be abandoned to restore liberty, personal responsibility, the family, and community.

David J. Theroux is founder and president of the Independent Institute and publisher of The Independent Review.

The Strongest Forces of Healing are Within Neighborhoods

By Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

In a search to identify an effective response to the crisis of family fragmentation in America, it's important to look to what can be done to address this tragedy within the black community, because it is here that the trend toward family dissolution has taken its greatest toll. Throughout the nation as a whole, 40 percent of children are born to single mothers; in the black community, the incidence of births outside of marriage has skyrocketed to more than 70 percent.

Lest the blame for these dismal statistics be assigned to the catch-all culprit currently in vogue—institutional racism—a look to data on the family in the black community in an era of legalized segregation and racial discrimination reveals that in 1960 nearly 80 percent of black children lived in homes with both a mother and father. The proportion of blacks aged 25 and older who had never married was just 9 percent in 1960, compared with nearly 40 percent today.

Going back even further, marriage and the family were cherished institutions among blacks in America, even throughout the most repressive era of slavery. Consider the following passage from a well-documented history of the saga of blacks in this nation:

Slaves nonetheless managed to create and sustain a stable family life with two-parent, male-headed households evidently the norm. . . . Fathers, within

the limits of the system, played a paternal role—customarily meting out discipline and doing what they could to supplement the family diet by hunting and fishing. The eagerness with which slaves hastened to legalize their marriages after the Civil War and sought to reunite with long-separated families reveals the importance of this institution to them.

The tragic plummet of marriage and family throughout black America since the mid-1960s is due largely to the creation of a self-perpetuating welfare system that was marked by disincentives and penalties for a key stepping stone to self-sufficiency: entering a marital union. This devastating flaw might have been unintentional in some quarters,

“No large-scale political transformation is a prerequisite for change and restoration to begin.”

Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

but it was part of a calculated strategy of some of the academic elite who announced a goal of crushing the establishment with the unsustainable weight of the welfare rolls and who accepted the demise of the black family as collateral damage in this agenda. Removing stifling restrictions from marriage in the welfare system could help slow the family dissolution that has been going on throughout the past 50 years, but more must be done to restore marriage and the family.

The fact that “institutional racism” and economic disparities are not at the root of family dissolution



entails the good news that steps that can be taken immediately to address the crisis. No large-scale political transformation is a prerequisite for change and restoration to begin. In fact, even now, effective efforts are underway to promote marriage and strengthen families.

Just as in the case of a physical malady—for which the most effective agent for health is the body's natural immune system and antibodies targeted to the part of a body that is most greatly afflicted with disease—the strongest forces of societal healing are indigenous to and at work within the neighborhoods where family dissolution has taken its greatest toll: America's most disadvantaged, impoverished communities.

In Washington DC, Bishop Shirley Holloway includes marital and premarital counseling in the House of Help / City of Hope ministries she launched to empower homeless men and women (many of whom arrive at her door as addicts and alcoholics) to reclaim their lives. More than 100 couples have come together and married through Holloway's ministry. Among them are James and Angela Woods.

Angela entered the program as a mother of two and an addict who was on the street in the depths of despair; James had just been released early from a 20-year prison term for dealing drugs. As the two rebuilt their lives, they became a couple and were married in 2000. Their union benefited from the pre-marriage counseling and financial guidance provided by the ministry. Today, the Woodses have five children and four grandchildren and are proud homeowners. They serve as a couple within the ministry to uplift the lives of others.

In Indianapolis, Pastor Darryl Webster launched what he dubbed a "Boot Camp for Men" in the Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church in 2005 with

a goal to "challenge men to rise to the responsibility that God has given them, regardless of their lot in life." As word spread about the camp, each 21-day session attracted as many as 200 participants who gathered daily in the early dawn hours to hear testimonies, practical advice, and inspirational guidance. On that model, Pastor Webster and his wife Sibyl launched a companion "Boot Camp for Marriage" with a similar format, focused on strengthening marriages and guiding couples to navigate the challenges that come their way.

In Hartford, Connecticut, in the 1970s, another dedicated neighborhood healer, Carl Hardrick, touched the life of Steve Holter, the leader of the city's largest gang, which boasted a membership of more than 600. Steve's turn-around comprised two stages: First, he was able to redirect his followers and changed the direction of his gang's activities from violence and crime to community service projects; second and eventually, Steve became the co-president of a thriving construction firm. His relationship with Carl continues today, more than 40 years after his first outreach.

Although Carl Hardrick did not have a program targeted to strengthening and promoting marriage, his role as a surrogate father shows that even the lives of young men of a generation that has suffered dissolution can be made whole. Sociological data do not determine destiny.

Policymakers and philanthropists who are concerned about the crisis of the family and civil society in America should put their expertise and financial support in the service of those who are on the ground, engendering transformation and creating islands of excellence in their communities, against the greatest odds.

Robert L. Woodson, Sr., is founder and president of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Smoking-out and Deconstructing Self-Actualization

By Stephen B. Young

How do you change a culture? Where do you start —with ideas and belief systems, with values, with habits, with institutions, with incentives?

Is the attempt so improbable because culture is so ingrained in lives and so supported by a multiplicity of interdependent institutional, cognitive, and emotional forces that we must refrain from pointless exertion and, as Shakespeare put it, only “Trouble deaf Heaven with our bootless cries?”

Perhaps; it is a daunting challenge in every case. Yet cultural change has happened. Cultures do not arise by accident of fate; they are shaped by human needs and human will responding to both realities and aspirations.

There was once no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam, and then there was. There was once slavery, legal and widely accepted in England and the United States, and then it was not. Rome was once mighty, and then it wasn't.

Family fragmentation in America is a comparatively recent cultural expression of social preferences. It has yet to burrow its way deeply into our national soul. It is still vulnerable to attack from the right directions.

For all the complexities upholding a culture from generation to generation, there are at the core of each cultural pattern a few axial principles around

which subordinate values and beliefs, habits, and institutions circle and from which they draw their legitimation.

I posit for discussion that the axial principle at the core of family fragmentation is legitimized selfishness as a basic human right holding all the trump cards in our behaviors and social discourses.

Self-actualization trumps duty; it trumps parental responsibilities; it trumps working out difficulties with spouses to keep a family together.

Self-actualization justifies all manner of self-

*“Family fragmentation . . .
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seeking and the putting aside of others to enhance the self. By this axial principle, the self has been liberated from social constraint. Jean Jacques Rousseau is gloating in his grave over this sea-change in norms and behaviors, for he gave intellectual birth to the self-actualization culture of modern times with his dictum, “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.”

Yet once the self is liberated, all else falls apart. Passions and greed are in the saddle and ride humankind.

The classic statement of this at commencement



of our Culture War, written to advance self-actualization as the new American norm, was Norman Mailer's 1958 essay in *Dissent* entitled "The White Negro."

Now the unhinged self is bloated to extremes by social media, education without rigor to provide "self-esteem" and "safe spaces" for fragile egos, government entitlements, the abolition of male/female gender frameworks, and the replacement in homes of parental authority with children's petulance.

The culture and system of self-actualization has dissolved authority everywhere. We have no leaders any more—just insecure team coordinators. Churches have no *dignitas*; colleges and universities have no *gravitas*; politics has no *auctoritas*; and business is AWOL as a force for responsibility and the common good.

Life seems to have become just a grabbing for personal power. Philosophically speaking, it is more and more a war of all against all.

As V.I. Lenin asked in different circumstances: "What is to be done?"

The first step is to smoke out and deconstruct the axial principle of self-actualization.

Deconstruction was invented by French nihilists and has been used by the Left to upend our traditional culture of personal responsibility and service to others. Yet like any tool, deconstruction can be put to many uses. It can even be used against the Left on behalf of better values.

The basic move of deconstruction to de-legitimate rival cultural forces and their supporting social structures is to argue that the rival axial principle is not true—that it is only discourse. Once it is

pilloried as "only" discourse, then the argument moves to the second step of pointing out that the discourse was invented by and is used by a power structure or a structure of privilege to keep social power for itself and thereby oppress others. The third step follows quickly: The oppressed need to liberate themselves and dis-establish privilege (think patriarchy or white privilege or "too big to fail") by refusing to follow its cultural tropes.

This logic can be turned against the Left and its axial principle of self-actualization. By the mental process of deconstruction, self-actualization is not truth, only a discourse. Rousseau's dictum is only that: an invention of his mind. It is not a truth. And it may not be good for children and other living things.

The next step in the deconstruction of self-actualization is to point out who wins and who loses from the assertion of this privilege to subordinate others to one's whim and pleasure.

When the power structure pressing self-actualization upon us is thus exposed for its selfishness as an unjustified privilege, it should be confronted by demands that it be justified in terms of the common good. What does it accomplish that is healthy and constructive and leads to better lives for all?

This outspoken effort to deconstruct self-actualization should be pressed on our normative institutions – churches, schools, newspapers, poets, novelists, moviemakers, opinion leaders, politicians.

Still, the deconstruction of self-actualization is not enough. A different axial principle must be suggested and defended on the merits of truth, goodness, and beauty.

I suggest that such a constructive principle is the moral sense, for which we now have massive but unorganized scientific evidence from neuroscience that it exists and drives human lives towards happiness, just as Aristotle, Buddha, Mencius, Cicero, Jesus, Mohammad, and Adam Smith argued in their days.

The moral sense guides self-actualization towards service. In a family setting, this works against fragmentation towards community and love.

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Mitch Pearlstein is Founder & American Experiment Senior Fellow, having served until 2015 as Center of the American Experiment's president for its first quarter century. His most recent books are *Broken Bonds: What Family Fragmentation Means for America's Future* and *From Family Collapse to America's Decline: The Educational, Economic, and Social Costs of Family Fragmentation*.



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Center of the American Experiment's Minnesota Policy Blueprint delivers a wide-ranging set of policy recommendations aimed at enabling all Minnesotans to thrive in their personal and financial pursuits. These recommendations are grounded in the firm belief that broad prosperity depends on free enterprise, personal initiative and a limited, frugal government. The Blueprint represents American Experiment's most strategic, comprehensive, and ambitious effort to shape and shift public policy in Minnesota. The full set of recommendations can be found at the Center's website, AmericanExperiment.org.

