

# A Kitchen Table Conversation About Minneapolis and Its Future



Peter Bell  
Gary Cunningham  
R.T. Rybak

Moderated by Mitch Pearlstein



Center of the American Experiment is a nonpartisan, tax-exempt, public policy and educational institution that brings conservative and free market ideas to bear on the hardest problems facing Minnesota and the nation.

# A KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATION ABOUT MINNEAPOLIS AND ITS FUTURE

Peter Bell, Gary Cunningham, and R.T. Rybak

Center of the American Experiment  
Luncheon Forum

Hilton Minneapolis  
July 12, 2007

---

## Introduction

**Mitch Pearlstein, Founder & President, Center of the American Experiment:** Back in 1974, shortly after I came to Minnesota to work with new University of Minnesota President C. Peter Magrath, the two of us were flying back to the Twin Cities late one afternoon from a trip Outstate when he pointed to the urban landscape below and marveled at what he described as one of the great metropolitan areas in the nation. I agreed, of course, not that I needed the smallest amount of convincing.

Yet while I was never oblivious to local problems in my first years here, truth is, I didn't fully realize for a long time the ways in which, and the degree to which, Minneapolis specifically, and Minnesota more broadly, had been catching up with the rest of the nation when it came to immense and draining problems such as family breakdown, educational failure, and of course crime. A 1994 study by American Experiment, for example, based largely on Census data from 1960 to 1991, uncovered two mega facts: one very good, but the other, simply terrible.

The good and encouraging news was that in 15 of 16 categories reviewed, social and other conditions in Minnesota were better than they were across the nation, often significantly so.

The very bad and discouraging news was that our *rate* of deterioration was often steeper, sometimes much steeper, than it was in the nation as a whole. In shorthand, we were regressing to the *mean* in both senses of the term.

Variations on the dichotomous theme carry on.

We continue, for instance, to build and renovate cathedrals to great art and music: A brand new Guthrie, a brand new Walker, a renovated Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and a soon-to-be renovated Orchestra Hall.

But walking down Hennepin Avenue to make a curtain at the Orpheum or State theaters can be an R-rated adventure. This is especially the case around Block E, which was designed, as you may recall, as a “family destination.”

The University of Minnesota, as we speak, has plausible designs on being one of the three best public research universities in the country.

Yet the number of high school students in Minneapolis with a plausible chance of taking advantage of such a world class institution is comparatively minuscule, as the four-year high school graduation rate in Minneapolis public schools (as reported a few years ago by the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Minneapolis Foundation, and the school district itself), was 58 percent for whites, 47 percent for Asian-Americans, 31 percent for both for African Americans and Hispanic Americans, and 15 percent for American Indians.

With apologies to Dickens, these may be some of the best of times for Minneapolis aesthetically and commercially, but in other ways—starting with the cliffs thousands of kids, especially those of color, are hurtling towards—they're our worst of times, too.

All of which begs profoundly important questions like these:

Why are so many young people in Minneapolis—including men and women deep in their 20s and 30s—so lost?

Why are so many young men and women—but especially young men—stunting their lives right out of the gate by building long rap sheets rather than resumes?

With students in much of the rest of the world mastering advanced math and heavy-duty science, how can Minneapolis hope to keep up when simply getting kids to make it through high school is a battle, and achievement gaps here are larger than just about any other place in the country?

We've had a million *conference* table conversations about issues like these, the kind where politics and policies dominate, without nearly enough to show for them. What I would hope for this afternoon is a *kitchen* table conversation. The kind where serious people and trusting friends ponder subjects that are invariably more elusive, more uncomfortable, but also closer to hearts: matters, more precisely, of culture, values, faith, and personal responsibility.

We're joined this afternoon by three such friends.

Peter Bell is chairman of the Metropolitan Council, having first been named to the job by Gov. Tim Pawlenty shortly after the latter's election to a first term in 2002.

Gary Cunningham is the new vice president of programs for the Northwest Area Foundation in St. Paul, having served most recently as CEO of the Northpoint Health and Wellness Center in Minneapolis.

And R. T. Rybak is mayor of Minneapolis. He's in his second four-year term, having first been elected in 2001.

Suffice it to say, Messrs. Rybak, Cunningham, and Bell are three of our most thoughtful neighbors in regards to the complicated and hard

problems we'll be discussing over the next hour, and I'm grateful for their courage in taking them on.

I don't want to start by being a nattering nabob of negativism, so what's working well in Minneapolis these days?

**R.T. Rybak:** I'll tell you one thing that's working very well: No other city in the country is doing as much to take young people and move them from schools into the workforce. Through the "Minneapolis Promise" program, we have established privately funded career centers in every single high school; this program is tied to a new mandate requiring every student to develop a life plan. Secondly, 2,000 kids are enlisted and working in "Step Up," our summer jobs program. Third, we've worked with the community colleges and the universities on securing pre-college tuition for Minneapolis youth. The overarching idea is to say to our kids, "If you stay in school, we'll get you focused, we'll help you develop your life plan, we'll get you a summer job, and we'll get you into college, but ultimately the responsibility is yours."

Some people might see as a disadvantage the fact that the Minneapolis schools now enroll students who speak 100 languages and who either are from another country or sit next to someone from another country. Yet, in fact, the kids coming out of Minneapolis schools have a tremendous advantage. Today, every business is competing around the globe. We're sending students into a world that's desperate for global citizens who can compete. I understand all of challenges we have, but in no other place in the state can you find students as able to lead us in the new global economy as Minneapolis students are, if we train them right.

**Peter Bell:** Mayor, with all due respect, I think the thing that's working best in Minneapolis is the transit system! And if not that, maybe it would be the waste water treatment system would be second! [Please note: The Metropolitan Council has responsibility for both transit and waste water treatment. Ed.]

In all seriousness, I think that Minneapolis is perceived, and accurately so, as a very vibrant community—a community on the move. I think it is due in large part to your leadership, mayor. I think you've done a great job in listening to the community, being very visible, articulating concerns, and moving the city in a positive direction.

The other thing that I think is very positive about Minneapolis is the level of civic engagement. We have citizens in our city who understand what many of the major issues are, take the time to learn about them, and make sure their voices are heard. It's one of the few cities in the nation that is actually gaining population; that says a lot. I think it's vibrant, I think it's dynamic, and I think there's a can-do attitude here.

**Gary Cunningham:** I actually think Minneapolis is doing pretty well. Over the last decade, our economic growth has been off the charts compared to a lot of other cities. Most people don't know it, but poverty has actually been reduced in Minneapolis over the last decade.

Also, the teen pregnancy rate is down significantly from where it was a decade ago. We know that by reducing teenage pregnancy, we are helping to prevent another generation of young people from living in poverty.

I think the economic engine of downtown works very well for many people—not just for Minneapolis residents but for the region as a whole. If you compare Minneapolis to 25 other American cities of similar size, the cost of living here is reasonable. It's a great place to live. I think that, even though Minneapolis has a lot of different bureaucratic structures, many of them function fairly well.

**Pearlstein:** For the sake of argument, let's say I accept all of that. Then why is it that I have this sense that extraordinary numbers of young people in this city are doing such destructive and self-destructive things. Without getting too carried away, why are so many kids, in essence, committing suicide?

**Rybak:** That is something that the city council and I wrestle with constantly. I distill down this very complicated issue to one key sentence: There are too many kids raising themselves, and too many kids having kids of their own. We're moving in the right direction on teenage pregnancy, but because of the tinderbox into which child-parents are bringing babies, every one of those kids is very, very vulnerable. We have too many kids making decisions that are incredibly violent when they're very young. I'd love to hear anybody's ideas about this, because we need a much more aggressive battle plan.

**Bell:** As I was thinking about the challenges that Minneapolis faces and the cultural dimensions of those challenges, I thought about the large number of neighborhoods in the city of Minneapolis that have few or no children. I live in Minneapolis and where I live, there are very few young kids. There are also large segments of Minneapolis where marriage is close to extinct, where it simply does not exist. We don't consider what happens to a section of town where there's an absence of children or where marriage as an institution simply does not exist. Yet we should.

The concern I have is that some of the most intractable problems that befall Minneapolis, frankly, are beyond the reach of government. It doesn't matter what the student-to-teacher ratio is; it doesn't matter if we fully fund Headstart; it doesn't matter if we have pre-K programs. Many of these things don't matter when you have outlandish out-of-wedlock birth rates, even if they're dropping. I think one of the great lies that has been told is that we can manage cultural pathologies with government tools. I think one of the reasons we have so much cynicism in America today is that government has overpromised and underproduced. Some of the deep-seated, intractable problems we have in Minneapolis go beyond the reach of human, social, and vocational rehabilitative services; they go beyond our education system and really rest in the communities themselves.

Let me be very blunt. I think the vast majority of the problems in north Minneapolis can only be solved by the residents of north Minneapolis.

They are beyond the state legislature, they are beyond Washington, D.C., they are beyond who the mayor is, and they are beyond who's on the city council. Until we have a fundamental realization and acceptance of that fact, both in those halls of government and in those communities, little progress will be made.

**Cunningham:** I would argue that it's going to take everyone—government, nonprofit institutions, foundations, people in the community—to make a difference. There are two aspects to this problem.

First, when people lack opportunity, they lack the ability to move forward. In north Minneapolis where the largest employer has 300 people, there are practically no jobs in that community for residents. Other Minneapolis neighborhoods have an abundance of places for people to work.

Secondly, I believe that people must take personal responsibility. Yet throughout Minneapolis, institutional arrangements create intergenerational poverty. The arrest of young African-American and Native American men creates an imbalance in the ratio of females to males in north Minneapolis. For every 100 women, there are 75 men. If you want to encourage relationships and the building of the social infrastructure, you must ensure that these men, when they return to the community, can be upstanding citizens. In fact, when any of these men come back to the community after serving time, they have a 90 percent chance of going back to incarceration in the succeeding year. So we've created a caste system with our society: Once you get involved in the criminal justice system, you are forever locked into that system. In the Minneapolis public schools, 42 percent of young boys in kindergarten and third grade are suspended from school every year. The process starts at a very young age and proceeds into the adult arrest phase.

I agree with Peter, in part: Personal responsibility is important, but we also have to take responsibility for how our institutions respond to the problems.

**Rybak:** Let me also speak to this point, because I think Peter raised a number of good issues. One

is the role of government vis-à-vis the role of individuals. I believe in an activist government—I think we have to. It starts with public safety; we've done a lot. On the issue of jobs, we said a couple of years ago that we were going to close the gap between suburban and urban unemployment, and we're now at about the same level. That's because of activist government. Still, there's a point at which government can't do it all.

As I interpret my role as mayor, I'm the person who leads the city government, and I'm also "the leader" of the city. It's about people building a sense of community together—a civic infrastructure. That civic infrastructure is different from the government. There's got to be a point at which people will stand up and support their families and their community through personal responsibility. As a leader of the city, I've got to be part of inspiring that movement.

**Bell:** I think we have just heard the "conference table" response to these issues from Gary and the mayor. I'm reminded of a story of a general during a time of war. The general had a scout come back and report, "My God, sir, our army is surrounded on all sides; we're all sure to perish. Whatever are we to do?" The general, in a very calm and reassuring voice, said, "We've got the enemy just where we want him. We can now attack in any direction."

There's truth in the idea that all institutions have got to be involved—of course there has to be a partnership between government, communities, and individuals. My question is: Where should the emphasis be? We have tried now, for 30 or 40 years, with the major instrument of change being government. We have spent hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in north Minneapolis.

I would ask this audience a very simple question. If you had said, 40 years ago, that north Minneapolis would look like it does today, after the expenditure of hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, of dollars, would we have spent it? Would we have spent it in that way? My point is simple: I think the major catalyst for change has got to come from communities themselves. If north Minneapolis is going to wait for who's in

the mayor's office, or for who's on the city council, or for how much the legislature in St. Paul is going to allocate for this program or that program, or for what Washington is going to do, it will be another 40 or 50 years before change comes about. The solutions we have devised over the last 40 years—I believe this is beyond serious debate—have not worked.

**Rybak:** I'm not going to defend the last 40 years. I would say this: We're in violent agreement that this issue goes beyond government. That said, let me ask you this: Would you say we should *not* be, right now, installing public safety cameras throughout north Minneapolis so we can get criminals under control? Should we *not* be building new housing in Cottage Park and the Hawthorne Eco-Village? Should we *not* be trying to address the home foreclosure epidemic? Should we *not* be trying to renovate the buildings on Broadway? Should we *not* be doing the job-training work that has literally put hundreds of kids and adults into the workforce, or that we should we *not* be doing the Minneapolis Promise program? All of those matter.

**Bell:** I'm not saying we shouldn't do those things. What I'm saying is, every other sentence out of elected officials' mouths should be, "The onus of change rests on the community, and there are limits to what government can do; the vast majority of change is going to come from the community itself." That's what the political leadership should say, and that's what the leaders in those various communities should say. Yet government says just the opposite. I think it takes the burden off communities, off individuals, and off families, because many times the leadership in those communities is waiting for the next government program.

**Cunningham:** I don't disagree with the fundamental premise that people of the community have to be the impetus for change. We have to recognize the assets and value that people bring to the table, and that has to be in exchange for something, rather than just providing services infinitum without some expectation of change. Still, it can't happen with a pullout or a vacillation of government. I agree that within

north Minneapolis and throughout the city there has been the creation of institutions that aren't accountable for results. At the same time, without a comprehensive strategy of all elements working together to address the issues, we're not going to get very far.

**Bell:** I would argue that we're in a post-civil rights environment and that there are not huge impediments to opportunity. One of the things that I hear all of the time is how people can't get a job. I think that the ingredients to success in America today are very modest: Go to work every day, on time; dress appropriately for the job; give good value to your employer for your labor. If you do this, you may start off at a modest job, perhaps in the service industry, perhaps at minimum wage, but you will rise relatively quickly. The road to modest success in America, I would argue, is very easy and very accessible.

I also hear this all the time: Why can't we get the people in Lakeville and Prior Lake and Stillwater to realize they have a stake in what's going on in some of our more challenged areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul? One of the reasons, I think, is that people outside the inner city think that the road to success is very modest and that people in the urban areas are simply choosing not to take it.

**Pearlstein:** I've been of the mind for a long time that not nearly enough will get better – this is a bit metaphysical – until enough people grab their head and say, "My, God, we're committing suicide and we can't do this any longer." How do we get to the point where people say enough is enough?

**Rybak:** Peter is right about the idea that a lot of this can be solved by people simply getting up, getting an idea about where they want to go, going to their jobs, and doing their work. Those of us who are sitting here are better able to do that because our parents did that. Yet there are, unfortunately, some incredibly incompetent parents who aren't teaching that value. Through our Step Up summer jobs program, we are taking kids, many of whom have no value like that in their homes, and we are putting them into law

firms and accounting firms and other places, and we are changing lives.

The deeper thing is values. I happen to be a person of faith. I see a lot of people in faith communities deeply engaged in work in their communities. I want people to have some faith or values, or whatever, if it leads to such work.

**Pearlstein:** Do you think there's enough room in public squares in this city and in this country for religious expression? Do enough people take advantage of the room for religious expression, and how frequently?

**Cunningham:** I think faith does matter. Many of the African-American men who are walking a new path are doing so in part because they got in touch with their faith. Faith matters in all kind of ways. Yet I would argue, too, that race matters. In fact, I would argue that race matters at every level of our society. If it doesn't, then why do we have such segregated communities here in Minneapolis?

**Bell:** Frankly, I think racism exists in America today; I happen to think it runs a mile wide and an inch deep. I think people move beyond race relatively quickly. I think it has an impact on initial interaction. Yet if race matters, why do Chinese-Americans make more money than whites? Why do Japanese-Americans make more than whites? Why have new immigrants done so well here? It defies logic to suggest that whites discriminate negatively against African-Americans in a way that their income is lower, but at the same time discriminate positively towards Japanese-Americans and Chinese-Americans so their incomes are higher.

Income is spread very broadly. We see the experience of new immigrants coming into this country whose plight, I believe, was much worse than many of the people who are caught in deeply entrenched poverty in north Minneapolis. They move out of poverty very, very quickly, often with very little government assistance. So when I hear the argument that race matters, I say, gee whiz, the last time I looked at income distribution by ethnicity, whites were in about the middle of the pack. It's just nonsensical to me to say that

whites would discriminate against African-Americans but in favor of the Chinese.

**Cunningham:** There are differences in how race matters. You're just painting a broad brush, suggesting that race matters for everyone the same. Race doesn't matter in the same way for everyone, and it really is different for different groups, depending on their historic experiences in this country. To say that Japanese- or Chinese-Americans are the same as African-Americans, or to say that Latino- and Chicano-Americans are the same as African-Americans is not doing a deep enough analysis of the issues.

**Bell:** Even if I agreed with what you're saying—and I don't—the question that I would pose to the African-American community is this: Are we going to wait for all white people to change before we can be OK? I don't think Jewish-Americans did that. I don't think they said they were going to wait until anti-Semitism went away before they were going to study in school, get jobs, be committed to their jobs, and start businesses. I don't think Chinese-Americans or many other groups did that, either. What we essentially say in deeply depressed, particularly African-American communities, is that we are going to wait for the eradication of racism or wait for the next government program, rather than looking inward to resolve the issues.

Now, I think wherever racism exists and discrimination exists, we should be vigilant in rooting it out and attacking it. Yet to say it's the cause of all current problems in deeply depressed minority communities, or that we need to wait for a solution is a non-starter. My friend Glenn Loury, who's been all over the map politically, says that we—and I'm talking here about communities of color—will never be seen as equals in the eyes of our fellow citizens as long as we are seen as needing or requesting special treatment. That is a very important statement. *As long as we are seen as needing or requesting any special treatment, we will not be seen as equal.*

**Pearlstein:** I think we have someone in the audience who wants to ask a question. He might have a little self-interest in this. Please introduce yourself.

**Brian Bell:** I'm Brian Bell, and I actually have 22 years of kitchen table experience as Peter's son, so I sympathize with both the Mayor and Mr. Cunningham.

Dad, at the beginning, you said you think civic engagement is a strong point for Minneapolis. At the same time, you said that the role of government is limited. There's a bit of a paradox in that statement, given the problems we have in north Minneapolis: Yes, our civic engagement is very strong, but government can't solve our problems. What I really want to know is: What do you think the role for government is, because we don't want just to pull out of north Minneapolis.

**(Peter) Bell:** I do think civic engagement or involvement is very high in Minneapolis, probably as high as any place in the nation. Still, I think it's uneven. I think you will find civic engagement, particularly in deeply depressed communities, not to be nearly as prevalent as elsewhere.

I'll give one parallel story. I think the most important question in looking at a school is not per capita expenditures, not how much we're spending on special education, and not the student-to-teacher ratio. It's the number of parents who come to parent-teacher conferences. That will tell you everything you need to know about schools. I bet that in deeply depressed and particularly minority communities, the number of parents attending parent-teacher conferences is very, very low. I think there's nothing government can do about that—absolutely nothing. Parental involvement is an outgrowth of a culture that says, "We value education and, damn it, my kid is going to get an education."

To address your question further, I do think there's a very important role for government. I agree with many of the things the mayor mentioned, like providing the safety infrastructure and providing a wide array of human and social services. The concern I have is that people believe government can deal with the most intractable problems.

Quite candidly, the mayor challenged me by asking, "Peter, which of these things wouldn't you do?" And, you know what the truth is, Mayor? Probably none of them. I'd probably do all of them. The concern I have is that our political leadership and our institutions present those programs as if they are the major part of the solution. The fact of the matter is that they're a minor part of the solution.

**Pearlstein:** Mr. Mayor, you been visiting ninth grade classes in the city. Could you speak about that for a moment?

**Rybak:** I think one of the components of all of this is just for people to see their own value in a larger whole. Too often, we're dealing with people who no longer believe in themselves or their community. I think part of what we need to do is to help people understand their value. I've been trying to facilitate that with our city's youth. Their advantage is that they understand a global economy better than other students in Minnesota.

I've met with ninth graders at every single high school in the city and have said to them the following: "You're the most valuable generation we've ever raised, and you are the key to our competitiveness. We need you." I then talk about the Minneapolis Promise and ask them to stand back and for a moment visualize what they can be—what they really want to be. I ask them to close their eyes and see themselves as the best at what they want to be, and then their assignment for the summer is to find one other person who believes it, too.

Having them realize that they are valuable and can win at life is huge.

**Angie Eilers:** So far, this conversation has been around two domains: the individual responsibility domain and the domain of government responsibility. There's another domain: corporate economic responsibility. Could you comment on corporate responsibility in this community.

**Rybak:** You raise a good point. We could not move an inch in north Minneapolis without our phenomenal partnership with General Mills. It is unbelievable what they have done. At present, the

corporate culture in Minnesota is changing dramatically. We no longer have families who lead the big companies. Richard Davis of US Bank, who is not from Minnesota, has gotten deeply involved with the Step Up program. He's literally sitting there as the CEO of a company and interviewing kids and creating jobs. I could give multiple other examples. That's a good thing.

Yet one of the challenges we have in north Minneapolis, which is very different from south Minneapolis, is that the turnaround in south Minneapolis was based in large part on the fact that we've a strong network of businesses there—Honeywell, Wells Fargo, Allina, Abbott-Northwestern, and so on. It's not the same in north Minneapolis.

One other point: We need more African-American entrepreneurs with unique, one-of-a-kind businesses on Broadway, and we're desperate to find them. We need to do with African-Americans in north Minneapolis what we've done with immigrants in the Global Market in south Minneapolis. We need indigenous businesses that can exist only there. We haven't cracked that nut at all. We're trying like crazy, but I'm still frustrated.

**Pomi Tefera:** Mr. Cunningham, you talked about how kids in north Minneapolis, once they get in trouble, stay within the incarceration system. I think the problem is that this has become a cultural mindset within this community—as if incarceration is inevitable. What can be done to show them their civic responsibility?

**Pearlstein:** That's a terrific question and something I've been trying to get to, but haven't thought matters through clearly enough this afternoon. How do we get away from celebrating a culture where pants are falling down—a gangster culture—and the rest? How do we applaud the right stuff?

**Cunningham:** A number of things have been proven to work. One is creating clear rites of passages for young people as they go through the cycle of getting to adulthood. Also, we know

from all the research that having an adult in a young person's life matters, whether that's a parent or some other adult. One more thing: I think we have to develop a different way of interacting with young people so that we empower them to have some control over their own lives.

**Bell:** I want to take on rap music and the like. One of the things that has disturbed me in America over the past 30 years is that when we label something cultural, we immunize it from a serious critique, and particularly from criticism. One of the things that we have done is said that things like rap music or hip-hop attire are culturally valid and therefore we must take a nonjudgmental approach to them—that they have the same value as any other form of dress or music. That's nonsense. Rap music does, in my view, coarsen the culture.

It *does* matter how people dress. The most disrespectful thing we can say to a kid who's wearing his pants around his behind is to say that this will not affect his prospects for getting a job, because it will. How you talk will affect your prospects for getting a job. To present this as a neutral cultural decision is just disrespectful and it's not true. I think that we have, for some very understandable reasons, gotten fixated on the idea that we can't judge anything because it puts people down, shames them and the like. We've gone too far with that.

**Rybak:** I couldn't agree with you more, Peter. Let me give a small example and a big example.

When I go into any classroom, especially one with little kids, I make every single kid come by and look me in the eye and shake my hand—not a high-five, not a soul shake, not a gang thing, or anything else. I make them shake my hand and look me in the eye, and I say, "Pleased to meet you." That may seem like a small thing. Yet if they don't know it, they won't be as successful. That is how we communicate in the business world, whether we like it or not.

The larger example: I get really, really clear with kids about drugs. I say it to them, especially when they talk about murders in north Minneapolis, "If you buy a joint in this town, you

are paying for a bullet that goes in the head of your friend. Buy it, own it, that's your deal." The big money drug in gangs right now is not crack or heroin. It's marijuana. Anybody who buys marijuana in this metropolitan area is fueling the gangs in north Minneapolis.

**Ed Anderson:** Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in 1965, wrote a report about how it was dangerous that the out-of-wedlock birth rate in the black community across the country was about 26 percent. Today in Minneapolis, it's about 87 percent. Is there anything that can be done? Is there anything that should be done to change that?

**Cunningham:** Actually, Prof. Bill Doherty of the University of Minnesota, who's in the audience, is leading a fantastic project on helping couples. He's working in north Minneapolis right now. I really do believe we need to reinforce the whole issue of communication and relationships in the community as a whole, not just with African-Americans.

**Bell:** We need to think through how we can re-stigmatize out-of-wedlock births. When you think about why out-of-wedlock births were much lower in the past, it's that people felt stigmatized by them. In essence, we have de-stigmatized them. The power of stigmatizing something is significant. I would point to smoking. We have stigmatized smoking in this country today, and it's had an impact. You used to be seen as hip, sophisticated, and sexy if you smoked. Now, you're seen as dumb and addicted. Racial epithets are another example. We have stigmatized racial epithets in this country, and that's been a good thing. We have stigmatized all types of discrimination. At the same time, we've de-stigmatized out-of-wedlock births. I think the impact of that has been profound on our culture. The question is how can we re-stigmatize them and still engage with the person who might have had a child out of wedlock. I don't want to shun them into homes for girls, as they used to, or have shotgun weddings, but the wholesale de-stigmatization of out-of-wedlock births has wreaked havoc in our community.

**Pearlstein:** Mr. Mayor, the final comment is yours.

**Rybak:** I think one of the things that we need to recognize is that in building communities, it's not an either/or between what the government does and what values we need in the community. You've heard me, and not just here but everywhere, talking passionately about the need for values. Yet we also have to recognize that there is a role for government to play.

We need huge wind in our sails right now. We need everybody in this room to say, thank God the city government is aggressively engaged in north Minneapolis, and what can I do to help? We are moving people into jobs, we are redeveloping areas, and we are sticking our finger in a dyke on home foreclosures. We need aggressive help. There has never been a challenge like this or as aggressive a city response.

Government matters. Government mattered in south Minneapolis, and it was turned around. North Minneapolis is more complex. At the core will be those issues that we've touched on. It's complicated to lead a social movement that changes long-standing value systems that have been destructive, and it falls more deeply on African-Americans than on anyone else, but I think it's all of our responsibility.

**Pearlstein:** To the extent that some might have hoped that everything would be tied together in this short discussion, sorry. No great surprise. But everyone on the panel has said very important things, and I thank you all. ■



1024 Plymouth Building  
12 South 6th Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55402

612-338-3605  
612-338-3621 (fax)

[AmericanExperiment.org](http://AmericanExperiment.org)  
[IntellectualTakeout.com](http://IntellectualTakeout.com)  
[Info@AmericanExperiment.org](mailto:Info@AmericanExperiment.org)