



ESSAYS BY

PAUL ALLICK
HARRY C. BOYTE
BARRY CASSELMAN
FRANK B. CERRA
JOHN C. "CHUCK" CHALBERG
WILLIAM J. DOHERTY
WILLIAM C. DUNCAN
DAVE DURENBERGER
TODD R. FLANDERS
JOHN GUNYOU
RANDY HICKS
JAMES P. LENFESTEY
KEN LEWIS
GEORGE W. LIEBMANN
ROY MAGNUSON
C. PETER MAGRATH
GEOFFREY MARUYAMA
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RHONDA KRUSE NORDIN
BOB OSBURN
TOM PRICHARD
LARRY PURDY
DONALD P. RACHETER
IAN ROWE
LYALL SCHWARZKOPF
CHUCK SLOCUM
GLENN T. STANTON
ROBERT J. WEDL
STEPHEN B. YOUNG

Was Trump and Clinton's Campaign *Silence* Regarding Family Fragmentation *Golden*?

A SYMPOSIUM

COMPILED & WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY MITCH PEARLSTEIN

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Center of the American Experiment
8441 Wayzata Boulevard ★ Suite 350 ★ Golden Valley, MN 55426



Was Trump and Clinton's Campaign *Silence* Regarding Family Fragmentation *Golden*?

MITCH PEARLSTEIN

FOUNDER & AMERICAN EXPERIMENT SENIOR FELLOW

Introduction

A huge majority of American politicians don't want to talk publicly about family fragmentation, perhaps especially during campaigns. Most clergy are similarly unenthused about discussing extraordinary rates of nonmarital births and divorce in their houses of worship. Scholars in the employ of colleges and universities are even less enthused about challenging progressive orthodoxy on the subject. All of this begs a question for the nation: Who's left to comment with candor on the overwhelming social disaster of our time?

The symposium that follows, featuring 30 writers

from Minnesota and across the nation, addresses the minuses and plusses of neither Donald Trump nor Hillary Clinton saying anything about family fragmentation – *at all* – during their respective presidential campaigns last year. It follows two other American Experiment publications over the last two years that focused on the reluctance—often severe reluctance—of many religious leaders to likewise engage.

In the matter of scholars, it's no accident that if they do write about family fragmentation from a right-of-center perspective, chances are strong they do so not under the auspices of an institution of higher education but under the umbrella of a

simultaneously tough-minded and open-minded think tank. (This is especially the case if they're not tenured.) Center of the American Experiment, I'm bold to say, is such a tough-minded and open-minded place, and I take enormous satisfaction that this current anthology continues an essential Center tradition of publishing a wide range of voices, scholarly and otherwise, on truly contentious and sensitive issues.

The specific questions on the table for our 30 contributors this time around were two:

- “Was Trump and Clinton’s campaign *silence* regarding family fragmentation *golden*?”
- Or was it *laden*, especially when it comes to reducing poverty, improving education, and reversing crime?”

Roughly speaking, participants who addressed the dual questions head-on were evenly split between those who argued, on the one hand, that it was a good idea, or at least an understandable approach, that Trump and Clinton didn’t address family fragmentation; or, on the other hand, that it wasn’t a welcomed or salutary strategy at all. Here are a few examples from each category, which blur into each other.

Glenn T. Stanton of Focus on the Family in Colorado wrote that while both candidates’ silence was not “golden,” it nonetheless was “perhaps bronze, and probably benign.” This, he argued, had to do “with the nature of the candidates themselves, the character of this particular race, and the way meaningful family policy change actually happens.”

In regards to the candidates, “Neither,” he said, “was situated ideologically or personally to speak meaningfully to the issue... Both seem to be of

the school that family can be quite pliable when we want it to be. This itself is one of the drivers of family fragmentation today.”

As for warranting a bronze medal, which is higher praise than no medal at all, Stanton contended that “an emphasis on jobs and national security at this point in our nation’s history was an appropriate primary focus for the candidates, as these issues would have no small impact on the health and well-being of the family.”

In a thematically similar vein, Todd R. Flanders of Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minnesota, noted that for “glaring biographical reasons, Trump could not have spoken credibly on family structure.” Nonetheless, his silence on the matter “didn’t feel like silence to many.” Rather, key was “his stated commitment to a trio of objectives: school choice, job opportunities for working Americans, and law and order.” All of this, Flanders said, supports families “and family structure itself.”

Finishing up, he wrote, “Trump didn’t need to preach about ‘family issues’ on the stump. In large numbers, people felt they understood what he was saying even when, *mirabile dictu*, he wasn’t saying anything.”

Randy Hicks of the Georgia Center for Opportunity wrote in an akin spirit when he noted, “Given the frustrations of the American voter, it’s quite possible that the candidates would have risked coming across as irrelevant and possibly priggish by lecturing on family fragmentation” and that “this may be one reason for the success of Trump’s unusual strategy.”

“In the past,” Hicks continued, “Republican candidates have tended to dwell on family values in isolation, often at the expense of real economic pain. Trump took the opposite approach by focusing on economic pain first, and it struck a

nerve. Whether intentional or not, Trump took the best tactical position to win an election.”

One might say more conventionally, Chuck Slocum of the Williston Group in Minnetonka, Minnesota, wrote that Trump and Clinton’s near silence on “family dysfunction” did not “surprise or disappoint me, as there is much more work to do, and much of it is best done outside our partisan political environment.” Of that environment, it was not one last year, Slocum said, in which the “two candidates could intelligently debate any issue, much less a complicated and controversial one like the disintegration of the American family.”

“Who’s left to comment with candor on the overwhelming social disaster of our time?”

While recognizing that family fragmentation is “very difficult for politicians to address,” even “treacherous,” Paul D. Allick, an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of California, offered a good bridge to symposiasts who wanted the two candidates to talk more explicitly about the issue last year. After listing some of the more unattractive things Trump had said, as well as noting that Clinton campaigned with performers having a “penchant for using the N-word and the F-bomb,” Allick concluded: “I am thoroughly unfamiliar with this America. Yet as a person of faith, I know where to turn. I turn to God and to my neighbors and ask how we can work together to heal our nation.”

What were some of the reasons why various symposium contributors would have preferred if Trump and Clinton had spoken more forthrightly

about family fragmentation in 2016?

“Inattention,” Dr. Frank B. Cerra, wrote, “has serious consequences.” An analogy, he said, “would be a doctor addressing severe, recurring, pounding headaches and not considering high blood pressure as a probable cause; which is to say, not in the differential diagnosis. . . . This analogy is helpful in analyzing the dearth of consideration by the presidential candidates of the fragmentation of the core family, a situation well documented as a major problem in all segments and cultures of society.” Dr. Cerra formerly served as dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Referring to enormous reductions in teen birth rates over the last two decades, Ian Rowe gave significant credit to Bill Clinton’s leadership as president. “He leveraged the presidential bully pulpit to galvanize the nation’s attention with a purple issue that catalyzed a movement that resulted in one of the greatest public health achievements on record.”

In contrast, he continued, “Both [Hillary] Clinton and Trump decided to capitalize on America’s growing culture of victimhood where individuals are rewarded for belonging to some wronged identity group. Why bother to speak of root causes like family destruction when they could attract voters either by finding scapegoats to distract from personal responsibility or by reaffirming personal powerlessness by citing forces beyond the oppressed locus of control?” Ian Rowe is CEO of Public Prep in New York, a network of charter schools.

Rhonda Kruse Nordin, in referring to widespread “income-inequality dissatisfaction” among voters, suggested that perhaps the two candidates “should have spent some time gingerly delving into the connection between income inequality and family fragmentation.”



Not gingerly at all, she also wrote, “Indeed, today’s families come in all shapes; therefore, most people are loath to judge, especially those who need a vote. Yet maybe the two candidates should have ventured more boldly into the topic of family fragmentation,” as it “surely touches all of us, if at least peripherally, and is at the root of most, if not all, the big issues the Brookings Institution listed that presidential candidates should have addressed in 2016.” Ronda Kruse Nordin is an American Experiment Senior Fellow.

Then there is William J. Doherty, professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, with whom I have been privileged to collaborate on many publications and other projects for a long time. This is how he opened his essay.

As a moderate progressive with a keen interest in preventing family fragmentation, I’m accustomed to being a lonely voice in my tribe. I was able to count on conservative public officials to keep the issue in the public dialogue, as evidenced by President George W. Bush with his Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Now both sides seem silent. Nowhere is this avoidance more evident than around the profound problems being experienced by working-class whites in Middle America.

And this is how he closed what he wrote.

I don’t have the prescription for the needed cultural change, but I know we have to begin with honest conversation that involves public officials and other leaders. For starters, that conversation could address how men and women in working-class (and other communities) are relating to each other inside and outside committed relationships and marriage. If good working-class jobs

are a basic building block of the materialist solution to family fragmentation, then healthy, respectful, and loving relationships between men and women is where the cultural solution begins.

Feel free to interpret Bill’s extra allowance of space as a sign of extra agreement on my part.

My great thanks to all 30 writers for this compelling collection, which invaluablely helps fill a vacuum when it comes to grasping what *wasn’t* said about families and marriage during the 2016 presidential race and what that silence continues to mean.

Large thanks also to generous Center funders who make complex projects like this one possible, especially the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the LML and FTL Lanners Foundation, and Karen and Mahlon Schneider.

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And with vast gratitude to thousands of American Experiment supporters, since 1990, for making the Center possible and influential in the first place.

May everyone have a green spring, and as always, we welcome your comments.

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Crossing a Cultural Rubicon

By Paul D. Allick

I believe family fragmentation is a central concern when we discuss poverty and education. I also believe that it is very difficult for politicians to address the issue—just ask former Vice President Dan Quayle.

Discussing morality in a political campaign is treacherous. One person's morality is another's immorality. It is difficult because, as Americans, we can no longer agree on a set of shared values when it comes to family structure and the nurture of children. Is it all up to the singular family unit? Is it up to the whole community? Or is it a mixture?

With the 2016 presidential election, we have crossed a cultural Rubicon. If we had any semblance of shared norms around decent, moral adult behavior, it has been obliterated. I believe this has a huge impact on how we are able to address such thorny issues as fragmented families.

Our new president represents this change. We now have an occupant in the White House who has publicly, and almost proudly, committed adultery. We have a man in the presidency who is, as Senator Ted Cruz aptly pointed out, a serial philanderer. Mr. Trump has publicly humiliated a wife to find a younger woman.

He also sires children along the way. He degrades women with language. In this way, he is not much different from the troubled young men of all races who listen to musical artists encouraging man-child lifestyles, use vulgar language, and objectify women—just listen to the president's

interviews over the years on the Howard Stern radio program.

There is no way on earth that Mr. Trump could have spoken to the breakdown of the family without sparking guffaws and shaking heads of disbelief.

Mrs. Clinton may have been uniquely suited to address the breakdown of families as she has held hers together through very public problems. Alas, she chose to campaign with artists such as Jay Z—a musician with a penchant for using the N-word and the F-bomb. It is pretty difficult to talk about raising families with values when you choose public spokespersons such as him.

The non-finalized impeachment of President Clinton in the late 1990s showed us that America was no longer concerned with the private behavior of politicians. All that matters is them turning our ideological agendas into law. We had a nice

**“I am thoroughly unfamiliar
with this America.”**

reprieve from personal bad behavior with Messrs. Bush and Obama. Both excelled as role models of personal dignity and commitment to their marriages. However, neither of them went out on the limb to discuss the shocking rates of out-of-wedlock births and how they tie into achievement gaps in education and employment.

With the election of President Trump, we have said that private behavior is irrelevant to national leadership. How can we expect other social/cultural negative behaviors to be questioned any longer?



I sincerely do not know what the hope is for our children when a candidate for president can garner 63 million votes after mocking a disabled reporter, telling people to go f*#k themselves, refer to grabbing a woman's genitals as something funny, and claiming to be able to shoot someone on the street with no consequences.

In a much lesser degree, neither do I see hope when an accomplished public servant like Hillary Clinton, who is also a person of deep religious faith, thinks it wise to accept any kind of celebrity support to rustle votes.

I am thoroughly unfamiliar with this America. Yet as a person of faith, I know where to turn. I turn to God and to my neighbors and ask how we can work together to heal our nation.

Paul D. Allick is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of California.

“Repairers of the Breach”

By Harry C. Boyte

Let me paraphrase American Experiment's symposium question, drawing on the latter formulation: “What might be said about the debate, or non-debate, during the Clinton-Trump presidential race regarding family fragmentation?”

The silence illustrates how electoral politics itself embodies the social fragmentation that is occurring everywhere in society. Our mediating structures of family, schools, religious congregations, businesses and labor groups rooted in the civic life of communities, and others are under siege or transforming into sites where

experts deliver services to needy clients and demanding customers.

Electoral politics is not going to be the main solution.

Marriage fragmentation, indeed, does cause great human, social, and economic pain. So does broader social fragmentation. As Dhruv Khullar, a resident physician at Massachusetts General Hospital who is also on the faculty at Harvard Medical School, reported in the *New York Times* last December (“How Social Isolation Is Killing Us”), the number of adults who report loneliness has skyrocketed since the 1980s. Social relationships and social networks have gotten smaller. One study finds that young people under 35—the most prolific social media networkers—are also those who feel alone.

Marriage breakdown and other dynamics contribute to social breakdown: geographical distance, longer working hours, multiple caring responsibilities, and social media that make it “easier to stay in touch while keeping distance,” as Lena Aburdene Derhally put it last year on the Imago Center blog site.

Another factor is the way we educate professionals as narrowly disciplinary experts who have no sense of themselves as citizens. Professionals learn to work “on” lay citizens. They do not see themselves as citizens working with other citizens. This is why the work of Bill Doherty and the Citizen Professional Center, countering this dynamic, is so crucial. Beyond the narrowing of professional identities is an even deeper Orwellian problem in the world of “Big Data” and Artificial Intelligence. Increasingly the “informational” is replacing “the relational” as our method of living.

Today's patterns of politics and activism worsen pressures on marriage because people model in their

personal lives what is happening on the public stage. President Trump picks fights and demonizes others as his DNA. He is disrupter-in-chief. Hillary Clinton also used political technologies that defined issues in good-versus-evil terms and demonized opponents.

One of the most ironic and dramatic examples of polarizing is in nonviolence itself. Mark Engler and Paul Engler in their new book *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century* redefine nonviolence, not as a philosophy of human interaction, but as a strategy for polarization and disruption. “The experience of

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social movements... shows that polarization can be a powerful friend,” they write. “Disruptive protest forces observers to decide which side they are on.” They continue, “Disruptive actions are polarizing. But this is not an unintended consequence. It is central to how they work.”

The book gets rave endorsements from many luminaries of the left. It also ignores, willfully or by remarkable ignorance, the power of nonviolence as a philosophy.

In the movement that shaped me as a young man working as a field secretary for Martin Luther King’s organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, nonviolence, for most, did not mean pacifism, the refusal to use violence in any circumstance. It was also not simply a strategy. It was a philosophy of human interaction that sought to understand opponents, not to defeat or humiliate them. It separated the sin from the sinner,

recognizing all have potential for good and evil. It promoted the ideal of public love, goodwill toward enemies and friends alike.

Finally, nonviolence was redemptive, based on the conviction that it can be profoundly empowering. Martin Luther King wrote, “The nonviolent approach... first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect. It calls up resources of strength and courage they did not know they had.”

Such nonviolence was power tied to love, seeking to win people over through understanding them and recognizing all will change and be changed in the process. Bayard Rustin, King’s mentor in nonviolence, organized the March on Washington to engage Middle America. The whole march, not simply King’s speech, embodied nonviolent discipline.

Nonviolence drew on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi but had earlier roots like the great civic and religious energies of the nation’s settling, such as the Second Great Awakening, that vast revival of spiritual energies in the first half of the nineteenth century. It fed directly into the movements against slavery and for women’s suffrage, as well as other reforms that created a more egalitarian and inclusive society. The movement came not from politicians, though some played helpful roles, but from lay citizens.

We need a new Great Civic Awakening drawing on America’s diverse spiritual, civic, and moral resources to “rebuild the ancient ruins,” in the words of the prophet Isaiah (58:12), repairing our marriages and also our politics and our civic life. We must become “repairers of the breach.”

Harry C. Boyte is senior scholar in public work philosophy at Augsburg College.



Dislocations, Disruptions, and Provisional Prospects

By Barry Casselman

There are many sober realizations about being alive today at our modern calendar date of 2017 A.D., and in spite of the benefits of all our technology and inventions, many dangers, risks, unanswered questions, and other unknown consequences face each of us in our daily lives.

One fact is not much spoken about: Depending on the estimation of human life on the planet Earth, each of us is the direct result of several thousands of generations. Our species forbearers go back millions of years, we are told, but human life is estimated at about 200,000 years. It is usually assumed that the duration of a generation to be 30 years. As we emerged as a species, our ancestors had an average lifespan much less than the one that most humans have today, and the duration of a generation was probably less. It does not matter much, of course, what the exact duration of a generation is—7,000 or so generations are more than most of us can even imagine.

This fact makes our common use of the terms mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, great-grandfather and great-grandmother, and so on, reaching back a relative tiny number of generations, to be a microscopic sense of the notion of family and ancestry. The modern family unit that seems to be undergoing considerable turmoil today is probably only a small number of years (a few thousand) old, and the only constant we can be certain of is that men and women

procreated throughout this period, regardless of the family forms.

Our species might be very, very old, but so-called history is only several thousand years old. Language as we know it, especially written language, is even younger. We keep finding older and older artifacts of human life in the locations of probable origin. Yet we probably will not soon, if ever, get to the exact point of the true Adam and Eve in spite of the logic that all of us are directly related to a single or very small set of parents so long ago.

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The current family structure developed out of necessity when we left the caves and unfarmed plains and settled into fixed-place agricultural groups that eventually led to small urban settlements and other precursory locations of human life today.

The question now is whether the contemporary formal family unit and the laws and rules that govern it will continue to work as the nature of human life is about to undergo another dramatic and sudden change.

There seems to be little doubt that in the short term—that is, in the past few centuries and under current conditions in most developed societies,

especially in Europe and North America—the disruption of the current traditional family unit has produced severe individual and societal problems. This seems especially so in the all-too-common phenomenon of an absence of a father in this family unit, not only from out-of-wedlock childbearing but also from widespread divorce and abandonment. Whereas at one time many large families were concentrated in one geographical or geopolitical area, large-scale movement of refugees and other emigrants/immigrants has become global and chronic. As societies become more developed and affluent, birth rates decline. The whole traditional notion of parenting is in crisis, and traditional networks of families with numerous siblings, uncles, aunts, and cousins are rapidly shrinking. Most sobering to people who advocate restored family cohesion is the prospect that the present trend will only increase and might never reverse.

Finally, an historic acceleration of advance in virtually all forms of technology, including those in transportation, communication, medicine and health care, artificial intelligence, and general scientific understanding portends dramatic and rapid social change, even in societies not burdened by totalitarian and economic deprivation constraints. This momentum of change means that no longer can the impact of change be absorbed over several generations. Now, this rapid change must be absorbed within a single lifetime, and, even more unsettling, it must be absorbed increasingly more than once in a lifetime—a lifetime which in itself is getting longer and longer.

This is the sobering and daunting context of any discussion about the fundamental conditions of family life today, with its dislocations, disruptions, and very much uncertain and provisional prospects as far as we are able to see.

Barry Casselman writes about national politics and public policy for Preludium News Service. His widely read blog, The Prairie Editor, can be viewed at www.barrycasselman.com

A Major Error in Differential Diagnosis with Consequences

By Frank B. Cerra, MD

The paucity of dialog regarding the fragmentation of the core family in America was very much evident during the recent presidential election campaign. Such an absence is an error in evaluating the major challenges facing America that elected officials, especially the president, should identify and address.

Inattention has serious consequences. An analogy would be a doctor addressing severe, recurring, pounding headaches and not considering high blood pressure as a probable cause; which is to say, not in the differential diagnosis. Frequently high blood pressure is the cause and is quite treatable. Missing, or being inattentive to, such a malady has serious consequences: physical and mental harm (stroke), disability, and cost.

This analogy is helpful in analyzing the dearth of consideration by the presidential candidates of the fragmentation of the core family, a situation well documented as a major problem in all segments and cultures of society via its consequences, such as the divorce rate, single parents outside of divorce, and the shortfall of basic human attitudes and behaviors generally learned inside the core family.



The latter, visible in all segments of society, are ultimately manifested in human inactions such as a poor understanding of right from wrong and shortfalls in honesty, integrity, accountability, and mutual respect and tolerance. It becomes reflected in an “I” rather than “we” attitude and behavior. These consequences are major contributors to the socioeconomic determinants of health, addiction, and crime that affect all of society. Interestingly, secular policy and regulation, law enforcement, public agencies, money, or faith-based organizations have not been able to impede the progress of this fragmentation.

Such an error in differential diagnosis demonstrated by its silence in the presidential candidate rubric must reflect:

- The candidates’ non-belief in the problem and its consequences.
- The presence of a political strategy to get elected without addressing this controversial area.
- And/or the unwillingness of the candidates to engage openly in such dialogs.

Such a silence amounts to a tacit denial that fragmentation of the core family is a problem with significant consequences for the agendas the candidates espouse. Not including potential or actual causes in a differential diagnosis leads to treatments that are not focused on the actual cause of the malady, which leads to consequences from the underlying, untreated disease. Witness the agendas both candidates put forth that would attempt to treat symptoms and not the underlying disease.

The problem of fragmentation took a relatively long time to develop to where it is today, typical of high blood pressure in the analogy. Such fragmentation will require a similar amount of time to change

direction and improve. An understanding of this may be part of the reasons that each candidate did not want to enter into dialog; the timeline for influencing the current direction in a meaningful way would extend beyond the time each candidate would serve as president.

“An analogy would be a doctor addressing severe, recurring, pounding headaches and not considering high blood pressure as a probable cause.”

Legacy is an issue. However, not addressing this problem and beginning to initiate movement in the right direction just kicks the can farther down the road. Such a kick is not an excuse for not acting and being accountable to the people the president serves. The lack of dialog reflects an “I” attitude and not a “we” attitude.

Cross-sector approaches that could change the direction of family fragmentation include:

- Cultures and individuals coming to grips with individual, family, and community responsibilities and accountabilities to themselves and their neighbors.
- Realizing that inter-professional teams are needed to recognize, define, and monitor the milestones of change in individual and cultural values and behaviors.
- Elected officials actually getting their hands dirty instead of just talking.

- Inculcating a “we” approach instead of an “I” approach into governance and engaging both secular and faith-based communities, agencies, and efforts.
- Creating commitment to improvement at the individual, community, and societal levels and tracking milestones that demonstrate those changes in direction.

The fact that fragmentation of the core family has been a process that took time to recognize, describe, and analyze means that refocusing basic attitudes and behaviors of human beings is a paramount need and can occur. A major initiation can come from elected officials, starting with the president, to create such a vision and prioritized mission that clearly emanates from that bully pulpit and for which officials can be held accountable.

Frank B. Cerra, MD is emeritus professor and dean of the Medical School, former senior vice president for health sciences, and McKnight Presidential Leadership Chair at the University of Minnesota.

What Does He or His Party Have to Lose?

By John C. “Chuck” Chalberg

That neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump chose to address the crisis of family fragmentation/breakdown during the 2016 campaign strikes me as at once understandable and lamentable. A fellow New Yorker may be at least partially responsible for their silence: That would be Daniel Patrick Moynihan, whose impoverished New York upbringing was more than slightly different from that of Donald

Trump, and whose political career took him to the New York Senate seat that Hillary Clinton would occupy upon his retirement.

In the mid-1960s, Moynihan was among the first to raise the issue of black family breakdown. Shortly thereafter, he called for a period of “benign neglect” when it came to new public programs to improve the lot of black Americans. He was pilloried on both counts at the time and forever after. A lesson had been learned, and politically ambitious people have been re-learning it on a regular basis since then.

In other words, the dual silence of Clinton and Trump on this issue is not exactly a new phenomenon. Have any two major party candidates confronted this problem, or so much as raised it, in the same presidential campaign? No pair comes to mind. Has one? Not that I can recall.

Some reasons for the silence are obvious. Democrats do not want to antagonize a key element of their base and Republicans loathe facing charges of racism.

Other reasons are less obvious. Democrats find little wrong in replacing missing fathers with government programs.

Let’s go a step further: While Democrats won’t say so out loud, it seems obvious that they rely on such social pathologies as the collapse of the family to advance their power and political agenda.

Republicans are not immune to a political temptation of their own. Many, including Donald Trump, prefer to attack the public school system and advocate for school choice rather than to confront the family breakdown that contributes so significantly to poor test scores. Democrats



see those same poor scores among black students as evidence of something they like to call systemic racism.

While I am an advocate of greater school choice (and a skeptic when it comes to anything approaching systemic racism in today's America), I am convinced that the greater problem, by far, is family breakdown. Perhaps we should bus students based on family status to assure a predominance of two-parent families in each school. Absurd? It makes as much, if not more, sense than past busing schemes based on race.

I am also convinced that the stifling atmosphere of political correctness has contributed to mutual silence on the part of major party presidential candidates. Breaking this code of silence is not a

“By ‘higher office,’ I mean religious leaders as well as presidents.”

project likely to be undertaken by Democrats. After all, its imposition has essentially been a project of the left. Given general Republican silence on this issue, it's been an all-too-successful project, at that—at least up to now.

Donald Trump has challenged political correctness on a number of fronts. Why not on this one as well? After all, to borrow from candidate Trump in a not entirely dissimilar context, what does he have to lose?

President Trump came close in his inaugural address when he referred to the “carnage” in our inner cities—carnage that he grandly claimed will end with his rise to power. “Chaos” would have

been a better word choice. (So would something other than “end.”) Had our new president chosen chaos over carnage, he certainly could have included family breakdown as part of, maybe even the most significant contributor to, that chaos—chaos that will continue if family breakdown is not confronted and reversed.

Let's return to Mr. Moynihan, who famously liked to remind us that culture trumps politics. He was generally right about that. Yet it must be noted that he spent much of his adult life operating within the political system to push the culture in desirable directions. He was generally right to do that, as well.

Long ago, Moynihan himself took that first crucial step when he pointed to the obvious problem—and impending disaster—of black family breakdown. Today, that breakdown has infected America, black and white.

In sum, it's long past high time for other political leaders, including those who aspire to and, yes, hold an office higher than U.S. senator to follow his lonely lead. By “higher office,” I mean religious leaders as well as presidents. Until that happens, policy proposals will be irrelevant and perhaps potentially dangerous, given the law of unintended consequences. The history of the American welfare system is Exhibit A in this regard. Better more doses of benign neglect than that.

As president, Barack Obama was in a unique position to confront the problem and challenge all of us by doing so. He failed on both counts. As president, Donald Trump may be uniquely able to challenge the political correctness that for too long has shielded this problem and thereby challenge all of us, including religious leaders, in the process. He should seize the opportunity.

Really, now, when it comes to black voters in particular, what does either he or his party have to lose?

John C. “Chuck” Chalberg has retired from teaching American history at Normandale Community College and is a senior fellow at Center of the American Experiment.

Loving Relations Between Men and Women is Where the Cultural Solution Begins

By William J. Doherty

As a moderate progressive with a keen interest in preventing family fragmentation, I’m accustomed to being a lonely voice in my tribe. I was able to count on conservative public officials to keep the issue in the public dialogue, as evidenced by President George W. Bush with his Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Now, both sides seem silent.

Nowhere is this avoidance more evident than around the profound problems being experienced by working-class whites in Middle America—the group credited (or blamed) for Donald Trump’s election. Declining incomes, underemployment, school dropouts, an opioid epidemic, declining life expectancy—this is quite a list of problems, all connected by decades of research to family fragmentation (non-marital births and divorces). When families fragment, incomes and assets are lower, drug addiction, crime, and school dropout rates are higher, people don’t hold onto their

jobs as well, and life expectancy—and whole communities—decline.

Why the silence on both sides of the political spectrum? In addition to political concerns about alienating voters, I point to a broad decline in cultural explanations for economic and social problems in favor of materialist explanation and solutions. Progressives have long favored structural economic factors as causes of human misery—championed most recently by Bernie Sanders. In this perspective, the system is rigged for the wealthy, and the working class is getting short shrift.

The solution: equalize power imbalances by dethroning the oligarchs, thereby lifting the other boats economically. If social problems like family fragmentation are products of economic inequality, they will presumably ameliorate on their own with greater economic opportunities, plus the better schools and health care that will come from redistributing resources. Talking about the deleterious effects of family fragmentation—even though most progressives know the evidence and see it in their personal worlds—is to blame the victims of an unjust system.

Conservatives nowadays also seem singularly focused on materialist and environmental factors when discussing the problems of the white working class, especially government interference with the free market, which keeps the economy from providing the job opportunities for working-class Americans, and lack of choice in areas such as public education because of entrenched professional and political elites. Trump has added his own twist with a focus on the role of globalization and open markets, which he claims strip working-class Americans of their jobs. Trump, in some ways, is a culturalist—he appeals to forms of cultural pride—but he’s hardly prone to talk about family stability.



Either way, the public argument is posed around the role of government in the material realm—more activist or less activist, more regulatory or less—as a facilitator of economic development and, therefore, of prosperity for the working class. The implied assumption is that if working-class Americans have the right job opportunities (along with educational and health care opportunities provided by the government or the free market), social pathologies and family fragmentation take care of themselves.

A more complex explanation for family fragmentation is a “both/and one”; both structural/material and cultural/behavioral explanations and solutions for the white working-class predicament. This combined position is emerging as a consensus among prominent progressive social scientists like Robert Putnam and Andrew Cherlin. I think it’s reasonable to assume that macroeconomic forces (like the decline in manufacturing jobs) and some government policies (take your pick) brought major hardships to white working-class communities over recent decades, and that these hardships led to increased family fragmentation.

But this does not mean that solutions lie only in the market or the government arenas. Why? Because family fragmentation also came about through cultural changes (the sexual revolution, feminism, individualism) and because—whatever its sources—it is now baked into the culture of economically struggling communities.

As such, family fragmentation has become an independent driver of economic distress and emotional despair. It’s not just an epiphenomenon that will go away when the environment changes. Men and women without models of stable families choose to have children without a permanent commitment, and, when

they marry, they lack the emotional capacity and social support to sustain a permanent union. This makes them less resilient in the face of economic and political stress, which hurts them as learners in school and workers in the economy.

A thought experiment might help.

Imagine that the economic opportunities and school systems of Middle America drastically improved overnight—that people had enough income and access to good schools. Does anyone imagine that young adults would suddenly begin

**“Nowhere is this avoidance
more evident than around the
profound problems being
experienced by working class
whites in Middle America . . .”**

to form and sustain healthy marriages or that marriage stressed by decades of economic and cultural change would suddenly become stable? In truth, men and women in working-class and low-income communities have decades-long patterns of mistrust for one another that will not be solved by materialist and environmental changes.

An analogy to my own Irish ethnic group: Great Britain’s centuries-long oppression of Ireland no doubt contributed to the emergence of alcohol abuse and associated violence. Yet removal of British oppression did not solve a problem that had long since been baked into the Irish culture: You drink to get drunk and then have permission to punch someone. That has required the patient

work of collective soul searching and public conversation and messaging.

It's worth noting in conclusion that one reason why both political sides ignore family fragmentation is that we have no ready-made solutions. No big-government or free-market answers. No school or health care policy answers. I don't have the prescription for the needed cultural change, but I know we have to begin with honest conversation that involves public officials and other leaders.

For starters, that conversation could address how men and women in working-class (and other) communities are relating to each other inside and outside committed relationships and marriages. If good working-class jobs are a basic building block of the materialist solution to family fragmentation, then healthy, respectful, and loving relationships between men and women are where the cultural solution begins.

William J. Doherty is professor of family social science and director of the Citizen Professional Center at the University of Minnesota.

Even Modest Gains Would Be Consequential

By William C. Duncan

If rates of family fragmentation (including the failure of families to form at all) remain high, it will be difficult to move the needle on stagnant upward mobility, poverty, crime, and education. Many laudable efforts can have an effect, but family structure variables remain most significant.

The correlation between poverty and family strength, for instance, is clear. One of the strongest findings in this regard is the research from the Equality of Opportunity project, which found that “the strongest predictors of upward mobility are measures of family structure such as the fraction of single parents in the area.”

We have known for a long time how foundational marriage-parent families are to child well-being. Sarah McLanahan and Gary Sandefur summarized this best:

If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children's basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent ideal. Such a design ... would not only ensure that children had access to the time and money of two adults, it also would provide a system of checks and balances that promoted quality parenting. The fact that both parents have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child, and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.

Then, why the virtual silence on this subject in national politics? Probably because most believe there's not much that can be done to affect family formation or family integrity.

In a recent meeting on intergenerational poverty in Salt Lake City, a politician said that we all know that children in poverty need two invested



parents who read to them and take an interest in their education, but that's just not the reality. Consequently, the discussion moved to other possible solutions.

Yet it's worth talking more—and doing more—about what we all recognize would help.

Talking about it more would itself be valuable. Widespread practice suggests that many people don't recognize the value of the stable, secure family life they can give their children through

“The social sector is likely to be far more significant in shaping attitudes and practices related to family strength.”

their choices about family formation. It's more common for this issue not to get much thought, and raising the issue makes it more likely that adults who are at the age to form families would be more intentional about it.

There are plenty of disincentives that could be removed, such as the legal treatment of divorce as essentially unimportant, as evidenced in short or nonexistent waiting periods, anemic (or again, nonexistent) divorce education, and so on.

Premarital education could also be incentivized. Individuals receiving public assistance could be given more information about forming and sustaining healthy marriages.

We also should not confine our thinking about solutions to potential legal changes. The social

sector is likely to be far more significant in shaping attitudes and practices related to family strength. Churches are particularly important and have a record of accomplishment in fostering integrity in marriages and families.

One reality that can motivate these efforts is that even modest gains would be consequential. We really won't know if we can make a difference until we try.

William C. Duncan is a senior fellow at Sutherland Institute in Salt Lake City.

Reading, Singing, and Playing with Every New Born

By Dave Durenberger

My St. Paul teacher friend Roy Magnuson sent me Katherine Kersten's "No Thug Left Behind" from the winter 2017 edition of *City Journal*. I cannot get out of my head the reference there to Minnesota Department of Health data, interpreted by the public policy institute Intellectual Takeout, reporting 87 percent of births to African-American mothers in St. Paul occur out-of-wedlock.

Kersten was writing about the St. Paul School District's implementation of President Obama's Department of Education effort to make racial equity in school discipline one of its top priorities. She quotes another source to the effect that "racial differences in St. Paul schools' suspension rates appear to be a function of differences in problem behaviors that emerge early in life, remain stable over time, and materialize in the classroom."

I ask myself, how do two of the least well-liked presidential candidates in history make family fragmentation an issue in the 2016 campaign? The Democratic candidate cannot, because her base includes both teacher unions and African Americans, and the Republican candidate, now president, hardly qualifies as a family man. Besides, his party and his Education Department chief are wedded to providing public financing of private school choice.

Thus, I turn to one of my former colleagues in the U.S. Senate, now deceased, for advice: Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY). In 1960, Moynihan and Nathan Glazer wrote in *Beyond the Melting Pot* about the future, in a nation of immigrants and internal migration, of “Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish in New York City.” They wrote a second edition in 1970 because, as Moynihan says in a 1985 address, *Setting Municipal Priorities*, “our prediction of a continued intensification of ethnic, racial, and religious division and conflict” held true. Yet the hope that a great city can assure economic opportunity for bringing everyone up had not yet materialized.

Pat described New York City in 1985 as “two cities.” It was, he said, “the richest city in the world,” but the “richest congressional district (the ‘Silk Stocking District’)” sat side-by-side with one of the nation’s poorest congressional districts, Harlem. He described the city he grew up in as a city, which, for much of the century, was preoccupied with upward mobility for all. “No effort seemed too great to deal with the dysfunction of whole neighborhoods and populations.” Then the city went broke, and like too many cities, it turned to Washington.

“A very great deal of American social policy of the first part of this century originated here,” he told his city audience, “making its way to Washington sometimes directly, sometimes through Albany.”

Moynihan went on to describe his own efforts as a member of the Senate Finance Committee to create workable public assistance policy, in much of which I participated, but then he observed, “Still, I would offer the thought that there are huge areas of social policy of which it must be said that today either we don’t know what to do, or don’t know how to do it.”

I reflect on the stark reality of out-of-wedlock births and discouraged teachers and, of course, fragmented families in St. Paul, a city of great neighborhoods, great private schools, houses of worship, and of family philanthropy and non-profits for every problem. I decide I don’t want family fragmentation debated by people like Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton or by my congressional representatives, who already have more than enough on their policy plates that they are unable to comprehend because it does not fit their ideology, or their re-election plans, or a seven-second sound bite, or a 144-character tweet.

I want family-related and school-related problems dealt with right here in the capital city of the great state of Minnesota, by people we all know and who should know us and our hearts. I decide to make common cause with people who choose to deal not with defining and restoring the family but saving the lives of every one of those “disruptive” five- and six-year-olds whose parent(s) have no choice but to enroll them in St. Paul’s public schools.

I’m not talking about charter schools but about talking, reading, singing, and playing with every single newborn in St. Paul for 30 minutes each day of the first three years of their little lives. Here’s what I learned from George Halvorson, a farm boy from Menasha, Minnesota, who went on to run the largest health care system in the world and to chair California’s Commission on the Future of Elementary Education: If we do this in St. Paul, we



are likely to end the vicious cycle of misbehavior, crime, and incarceration that is consuming public resources that could go into improving the prospects for intact families and providing high-quality education for every St. Paul kid of every ethnic origin.

Art Rolnick, Fred Senn, Tad Piper and so many other friends in our business and professional communities have made the same decision. They have a plan that will work and a solid cost estimate that beats kindergarten for four-year-olds. Health Partners has made this a first-line population health-improvement project.

Our state's governor and legislators should be looking for a bipartisan way and means of improving our quality of life, our cost of living, and our economic future. They might want to consider this simple strategy for brain

**“Thus, I turn to one of my
former colleagues in the U.S. Senate,
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development when it is most effective as Minnesota's solution to racial equity, upward mobility, school discipline, and teaching as a proud profession. It would be best for Greater as well as Metro Minnesota.

My friend and in many ways my mentor, Senator Pat Moynihan, concluded his 1985 challenge to his friends in New York City thus: “This is a true and worthy challenge. We need a rebirth of social policy as both a moral and an empirical exercise,

free of the mindless millennialism of the past and the equally thoughtful meanness of the present.” Pat expected this to occur in his own community where all might contribute and all might benefit. To this, I can only say, “Amen.”

Dave Durenberger, a Republican, represented Minnesota in the U.S. Senate from 1978 to 1995.

A Satirical Novelist Would Be Hard Pressed

By Todd R. Flanders

I begin with a paradoxical conclusion: Because Donald Trump won the election, it is better that the candidates were silent on family fragmentation. Had Hillary Clinton won instead, that silence would have been (as her opponent might say) a disaster.

A satirical novelist would be hard pressed to create a character like Trump and convince he's a standard bearer for the family. Yet the past two years have shown that truth really is stranger than fiction. My Trumpist friends, some who proudly say they were with him Day One, responded to my skepticism thus: “Look how great his kids are! That doesn't just happen.” Good point, and ironic. A thrice-married, loud-and-proud adulterer becomes the paragon of nuclear family success for many “values voters.”

For glaring biographical reasons, Trump did not and could not have spoken credibly on family structure. He is no Elmer Gantry, a hypocrite playing believers for fools. I think values voters saw this honesty as a virtue. Meanwhile, they saw his children and wife as models.

What is more, Trump convinced the pro-lifers that he is now pro-life. After the third presidential debate, where abortion was discussed, I spoke with a national leader in the pro-life movement. She told me she'd never heard a major politician of any party speak as forthrightly and supportively on the issue as had Trump. While the demographics of voters concerned with family fragmentation are broader and more bipartisan than those of pro-life voters are, there's a substantial overlap. It's easy for pro-life voters to view any life advocate as pro-family.

Then there is religious liberty. Trump's insistence that he wants justices and judges who will adjudicate rather than legislate encourages pro-family forces. While the causes of family fragmentation are numerous and complex, progressive "legislation" from the bench has exacerbated the problem. It has normalized lifestyle libertinism by redefining constitutional understandings of liberty and equality. This has at once changed the meaning of family and effectively undermined it. If marriage and family are words without intrinsic meaning, varying with the vagaries of individual wills, it's hard to make a public argument that people should get and stay married, have children, and raise them. *Obergefell* was the recent flashpoint but by no means the totality of the fire.

As an aside, I'm intrigued how much anti-Trump hatred there is among LGBTQ activists. Trump, like good-hearted citizens left and right, does not wish to see sexual minorities oppressed. It seems to me, in fact, that Trump is the most candidly accepting and open-minded president yet for sexual minorities. The activists' ire comes not from what Trump may believe about sex and gender or how he behaves. It springs from his apparent conviction that other Americans have rights, too—even rights now out of favor with politically correct

elites. Indeed, he appears to think that some rights, like free speech and free exercise of religion, have a special claim on constitutional protection because they are actually in the Constitution.

There is a final and less obvious reason Trump's silence on matters of family structure didn't feel like silence to many. It was his stated commitment to a trio of objectives: school choice,

“In large numbers, people felt they understood what he was saying even when, *mirabile dictu*, he wasn't saying anything.”

job opportunities for working Americans, and law and order. Families, and family structure itself, need support. Where there is no real work especially for men, where lawlessness seems to rule the streets (and yes, the borders), where public schools forsake discipline for the cause of “equity” and become battlegrounds, it's even harder than usual to do family.

I've focused on Trump more than Clinton because he did win, is now president, and matters. Yet she, too, could say little about family fragmentation during the campaign. This is not because she'd look like a hypocrite. Rather, she had nothing compelling to say. A continuation of President Obama's agendas could not have brought needed judicial reform, jobs to working Americans, safety, school choice to desperate parents, or encouragement to communities of faith that are so often the incubators and nurturers of families. She had a habit of making Americans who are concerned about such things feel deplorable.



Anyone who has read or read about J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* will understand that the family fragmentation problem is rural as well as urban. It is now multigenerational and not amenable to quick fixes. To bring about gradual improvement will take good jobs and better school options. It will require renewed reasons for kids to study hard and parents to work hard. There will need to be restored paths to affirming human dignity among people accustomed to being down on their luck, often drug addicted and mired in dependency. It will take lively and evangelistic houses of worship—able to breathe, serve, and preach freely—to help re-present these paths.

Vance's Appalachia went for Trump bigly. Not because, as their detractors claim, of racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and so on. Many had voted for Obama, after all. It certainly wasn't because of a lazy desire to remain in entrenched dependency. Trump doesn't attract lazy. I think it's because they saw in Trump a strangely sympathetic friend, a catalyst, and a glimmer of hope for real change.

Trump didn't need to preach about "family issues" on the stump. In large numbers, people felt they understood what he was saying even when, *mirabile dictu*, he wasn't saying anything.

Todd R. Flanders is headmaster of Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minnesota.

Beyond Mentoring

By John Gunyou

The personal and societal implications of family fragmentation have been well articulated, and, while we have proven quite good at admiring the

problem, we have not been as adept at crafting solutions.

Accordingly, this discussion focuses less on hand-wringing affirmations and more on realistic options to address a very real challenge, albeit one that is roundly ignored in political debates, both during and after campaign seasons. That's unfortunate, because responsible governance involves more than opportunistic sloganeering; true leaders step up to face the seemingly intractable issues.

First, a bit of perspective. While there is comfort in lamenting the loss of cohesive family and social structures, it is unrealistic to think that any amount of proselytizing might reconstitute good, old-fashioned values. The immutable laws of economics and the relentless evolution of socio-demographics have changed forever.

That suggests the need to explore honestly how we might adapt to new realities and consider alternatives that might help foster in our youth the positive values that were once the province of traditional families. To be broadly effective, we must expand our thinking beyond conventional mentoring programs, which tend to focus on the highest-risk youth. The challenge is pervasive and requires a comprehensive approach.

This brief essay suggests two strategies that can help provide supplemental role models for all youth and have the potential to move the current trend line toward a more functional future for both our children and our communities.

The first strategy involves adapting existing organizations to be more effective at providing youth access to a broader universe of role models. For example, some schools closely integrate extracurricular activities into their standard school

days to encourage or even require participation. Students take part in sports, music, or any number of club options immediately after their academic classes and are then home in time for dinner with their families.

These models would not be after-school daycare warehouses; they would be designed to expose young people to a wider array of sporting and cultural programs than might be possible if such opportunities were solely dependent on the capacities of families. More importantly, they would allow students to benefit from effective

“To be broadly effective, we must expand our thinking beyond conventional mentoring programs, which tend to focus on the highest-risk youth.”

and efficient interactions with adult and peer role models beyond their families without cutting into what little remains of family togetherness time.

Students learn from coaches who model good sportsmanship and healthy competition and from advisors who stimulate interest in lifelong activities. With mentors properly trained in both subject skills and youth development, students could be helped to mature as well-rounded individuals without the need to be schlepped hither and yon by parents who can ill afford either the time or expense of U8 through U18 semiprofessional leagues.

The second strategy involves better supporting

organizations that can supplement and even fulfill the deficit of role models in an era of fragmenting families. However, rather than simply expand traditional one-on-one mentoring, which is clearly important, these additional efforts could focus on successful program-specific activities that model shared personal and societal values.

For example, proven groups like Scouting, YMCA, Campfire, and Three Rivers Parks reconnect youth with nature at a time when such opportunities are increasingly unavailable. Outdoor activities are important for nurturing the physical and emotional health of children, and the volunteers in these organized programs model the values found in a life unplugged from gaming consoles.

I was fortunate to grow up in a home involved in Scouting, and we spent many family vacations camping in tents and hiking trails. Many children today are not so fortunate to have such family-centric experiences—especially those that help build character through hands-on contact with nature. Assuring affordable access to existing nonprofit and government nature programs for our youth can help fill that environmental experience gap.

Addressing the intricate challenges attributable to fragmenting families is necessarily dependent on a panoply of strategies that reach beyond traditional mentoring programs. We can effectively expand access to role models for all our youth by modifying existing institutional structures and better supporting already proven efforts to reach them in their value-formative years.

John Gunyou is Board Chair of Three Rivers Park District, which connects ten million people with nature every year through multiple programs and partnerships with cities, schools, and nonprofit organizations.



We are Wired for Relationships, Learning, and Work

By Randy Hicks

A prevailing theme of the 2016 campaign was that Americans lack confidence in establishment politicians to solve our nation's big problems. Donald Trump zeroed in on this anti-establishment wave with powerful success, particularly in key Rust Belt battleground states, where blue-collar voters propelled Trump to victory for two primary reasons: He addressed their deep-seated economic pain, and he called out government leaders for ignoring it.

While the rest of America was silent, Trump spoke powerfully—if inelegantly—to working-class families displaced by wage stagnation, job loss, and flat-lining economic mobility. He saw their anguish (and anger) and tapped into it.

Indeed, the driving emotion behind the 2016 campaign might be summed up in two words: “discontentment” and “anger”. As pundits have pointed out, the groundswell of support for Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left came from opposite sides of the political coin, but these popular uprisings shared this unifying factor. For working-class families, real-life economics, coupled with ineffective political leadership, comprised their greatest source of discontentment and anger.

A key driver of social and economic instability is family fragmentation. Despite the growing evidence that the condition of our families has an awful lot to say about the condition of our

wallets and bank accounts, there's little evidence that Americans in general make that connection. They may see economics (job loss, downsizing, stagnant pay) as negatively affecting their families, but it's not clear that they see family fragmentation (divorce, out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation) as driving economic instability—either their own or anyone else's.

Given the frustrations of the American voter, it's quite possible that the candidates would have risked coming across as irrelevant and possibly priggish by lecturing on family fragmentation.

Frankly, this may be one reason for the success of Trump's unusual strategy. In the past, Republican candidates have tended to dwell on family values in isolation, often at the expense of real economic pain. Trump took the opposite approach by focusing on economic pain first, and it struck a nerve. Whether intentional or not, Trump took the best tactical position to win an election.

Yet now it's time to govern. While the candidates' silence—intentional or not—during a campaign may have made sense from a purely tactical point of view, our elected leaders now have a golden opportunity to put family fragmentation in the proper context, one that integrates education and jobs into what many scholars refer to as a three-pronged “success sequence.”

It's an admittedly wonky phrase, but the success sequence represents a simple concept: Taken together, a good education, steady job, and healthy family life greatly increase the odds of people achieving economic and social stability.

Scholars on both the left and right recognize the importance of this sequence. The center-right American Enterprise Institute, for example,

says these three “domains of life interlock so tightly that they must be studied and improved together.” Similarly, the center-left Brookings Institution (which originally coined the phrase) has called the three “norms” of the success sequence the keys to a middle-class life.

If both liberal and conservative academics acknowledge these realities, then surely politicians can begin discussing how a good school, steady job, and healthy home life

“Yet now it’s time to govern.”

interrelate. No single component can be taken in isolation—all three must work together to create lasting, sustainable opportunity.

I have certainly found this to be the case during my 20 years at the Georgia Center for Opportunity. We have worked across the state to increase job readiness skills, expand access to quality education options, and bolster family formation—all with the goal of leading more individuals to experience social and economic well-being.

Along these lines, there are immediate ways that government can contribute to healthy family formation and reduce family fragmentation by addressing two of the biggest concerns Americans have—education and work. Operating mostly at the state level, elected officials can begin opening opportunities—particularly for the economically vulnerable—by expanding school choice, eliminating disincentives to work in government anti-poverty programs, and developing

apprenticeship programs through public-private alliances. This, in turn, will strike a blow to two major drivers of family fragmentation.

Here’s the case that must be made: As whole people, we are wired for relationships, learning, and work, so much so that instability or weakness in one area can spill over into other areas. Economic and educational instability and insecurity go far beyond our paychecks (or lack thereof) and extend into the condition of our relationships as well. For so many Americans, economic, educational, and relationship pain go hand in hand.

Can President Trump effectively make this case? I believe the time is right, but that doesn’t mean he’s the best messenger. He may not need to be. Sociologists and commentators on both sides of the political aisle acknowledge that family fragmentation is a problem—increasingly one that mostly affects low-income families. The key is to approach family issues in context.

While addressing family breakdown in isolation can come across as self-righteous and smug, when we speak to the whole person—integrating economic, learning, and relationship concerns—we stand a much better chance of truly reaching people where they are and creating a climate where real sustainable opportunity flourishes.

Randy Hicks is the president and chief executive officer of the Georgia Center for Opportunity, an independent, non-partisan organization that conducts public policy research and organizes community efforts around the three elements of the success sequence: education, employment, and family formation.



Family Values Were, In Fact, Central to Each Campaign

By James P. Lenfestey

Mitch Pearlstein's generous efforts and analysis on behalf of the benefits of the traditional family structure have been absolutely correct but useless against a tidal wave of technical, cultural, and economic change, beginning with widespread birth control, which ended socially sanctioned sex as a primary reason for marrying right after high school.

Today's biggest challenge to families is economic. The one-earner family is increasingly scarce. The relentless erosion of working- and middle-class wages and opportunity is a terrible problem resulting from declining manufacturing through efficient trade and automation, plus the low pay of plentiful service jobs.

I suspect that most readers are not performing daily triage over food, rent, or mortgage payments, bank fees, tuition loans, and the like, but many American families are.

Is there any way for public policy to address this?

Traditional liberal prescriptions proposed by Mrs. Clinton would definitely help families at the margins: family leave for pregnancy, affordable health insurance, funded pre-kindergarten and daycare subsidies, lower-cost higher education (vs. the current practice of most states, including Minnesota, to reduce substantially state contributions to higher education, leading to substantially higher tuition), a further reduction of rapacious college loan rates, and more. All

these practices, in much more generous forms, are standard in most European countries, especially in remarkably prosperous Scandinavia.

Think what you will about the movement for a \$15-dollar-an-hour minimum wage—it has pros and cons—it is an effort to create a living wage at the service end, where most new jobs are, as imports and automation devour the rest.

Still, as the age of automation gives way to the age of robots, drones, and big data (cf. the monstrous Amazon fulfillment warehouse in Shakopee that will challenge even Target), economic opportunity for working-class families will diminish even further.

Trump's focus on manufacturing jobs versus Clinton's focus on jobs through educational attainment resonated powerfully with the men and women from communities with or near tombstone factories or industries. In coal mining regions, plus states where after-NAFTA factories fled to Mexico, this was an entirely reasonable response. The manufacturing and mining jobs that remain—some brutal, like underground mining—can still support a family.

This appeal was key to Trump's victory, though his prescriptions appear to be of questionable effectiveness. Mrs. Clinton's sensible and proven acknowledgement of economic change and proposals for retraining was ignored.

A third and unheralded variable is mobility. I don't mean social and economic mobility, which conservatives correctly revere, but physical mobility versus roots in a community.

Twenty or so years ago, the Minnesota Department of Education developed a mobility index, describing the movement of the student

population. If one knows the mobility index of a community, one can confidently predict the relative academic success of the school district. A central tragedy of inner-city communities in the concentration of poverty, where many parents move several times a year to find cheaper or better housing, is that children were placed in several schools a year—a calamity for learning and teaching.

Two traditional family structures regularly survive extreme mobility. A corporate move is tied to increased economic return and prospects, and

“I suspect that most readers are not performing daily triage over food, rent, or mortgage payments, bank fees, tuition loans, and the like, but many American families are.”

the decision, though sometimes wrenching, is supported by a culture of corporate families in similar circumstances. In the military, families expect to move and live with other families with similar expectations. Absent the trauma inflicted by warfare on a spouse, which can devastate families, that system is stable and affordable.

Yet for the average family in America today, it is common for one spouse to work two or three jobs while the other spouse works one or two jobs as the price of raising a family. That’s a profoundly negative incentive for building stable families.

Finally, immigration: Most immigrants bring solidly conservative family, work, and religious

values absent from mainstream America. Yet they also take American working-class jobs and suppress wages. Never mind the difficult packing plant jobs and the 14-hour days of taxi drivers, they take the jobs of roofers, masons, and increasingly of carpenters and builders. From the perspective of American consumers of these services, their arrival is a boon of lower costs. From the perspective of a family of skilled roofers outbid by Mexican immigrant roofers, it is reason enough to vote for Trump.

Family values were, in fact, central to each campaign. Wage pain versus palliatives won in states and regions where economic threat or loss is palpable. Palliatives won in cities and states where the children of those just-cited ravaged communities now live and prosper.

James P. Lenfestey is a former editorial writer for the StarTribune, where he won several Page One awards for excellence. Since 2000, he has published or edited ten books. His newest, A MARRIAGE BOOK, to be published fall 2017, commemorates his 50-year marriage.

Beyond Mere Gratitude for Our Soul’s Existence

By Ken Lewis

William Ernest Henley’s poem *Invictus* and its closing proclamation, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul,” has become an accurate cultural descriptor. Many Americans believe that they, and they alone, shall determine what is right and wrong for themselves. Woe be to the person or god who transgresses those boundaries.



Our country is suffering badly because of the problems in its homes, yet because of our insistence on being our own soul's captain, despite the shipwreck all around us, we Americans are not humbly looking for solutions to our deepest deficits. Rather, we angrily look for the others we hold responsible for our perceived problems. We are in no mood even to consider changing our ways, because we are not the problem, we insist.

In this milieu, it is not surprising that the major candidates who were trying to glean every swing vote in every solitary swing state did not proffer a message the public may find irrelevant, insulting, or repugnant. This is true particularly among the coveted independent voters, who are proud because they, even more than others, see themselves as having been emancipated from rigid thinking. When we couple this with the two candidates, and the clincher, the personal baggage each candidate bore, it's not at all surprising that little was said in stump speeches.

We are resigned, for instance, to the belief that teens and unmarried people of any age are inevitably destined to be sexually active, and we hand them our implicit approval in multicolored packets. The resulting teen pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births dismay us. Yet if we can be the captains of our own ships, how can we deny, if not encourage, the same for them? In addition, married people feel constrained to maintain those vows only as long as said covenants are convenient.

Today, we have little tolerance for moral absolutes or for the people who proclaim them. Even God is viewed as an oppressive interloper worthy of being routinely ignored or booed.

The sad truth is that much needs to be said, and much needs to be heeded. Yet, until family dys-

function is addressed and individuals take the necessary steps toward healing, no matter how humbling, our land will continue to suffer. Our leaders can address immigration and health care, Islamic extremism and climate change, as well as a host of other genuine challenges. Yet we must *begin* national healing in our homes. The nature of our greatest malady is very personal. We must consider that our insistence on being our own captains has resulted in our ships running aground. We must realize that, rather than determining our course from our current culture's transient whims, our feelings or following our heart, we would do much better to heed a compass heading, a North Star, that is eternal, external and superior to our limited wisdom.

“We are in no mood even to consider changing our ways, because we are not the problem, we insist.”

Henley's *Invictus* merely thanks “whatever gods may be” for his “unconquerable soul.” Is it time for us to move beyond mere gratitude for our soul's existence to heeding the gracious instructions on soul maintenance and family health the Maker of our souls has given us? History teaches us that the Creator offers this wisdom not to constrain but truly to free us.

Rev. Ken Lewis, now retired, is the former senior pastor at Trinity Baptist Church, St. Paul.

Suggestions That Should Not be as Unfamiliar as They Are

By George W. Liebmann

The reluctance to discuss family fragmentation arises on the Democratic side from subservience to hard feminists—many of them lesbian—not interested in reconciling careers and family life, and on the Republican side from resistance to tax revisions, zoning reforms, and spending programs unrelated to the interests of the business community.

The late Max Rheinstein, an exile from Germany who was the most learned American student of family law, concluded (*Marriage Stability, Divorce and the Law*, 1972) that the only measures that might reduce the divorce rate were premarital counseling as an inducement to mutual tolerance and reduction of the economic pressures on families with young children. In that spirit, the following suggestions are tendered.

- The bully pulpit needs to be used for some re-legitimization of differences in sex roles. Because of reductions in prenatal, infant, and child mortality, it is no longer necessary for a woman to have eight or nine confinements to raise two or three children to maturity. Raising a normal family no longer requires 40 years but still requires 20. Barney Frank once spoofed the anti-abortion movement by saying that its interest in motherhood began with conception and ended at birth, but it is also fair to say that for ultra-feminists, the distinctive obligations of motherhood

begin at birth and end with the severance of the umbilical cord.

The blunt fact is that, if we are to respect what Judge Learned Hand called “the preservation of personality” and uphold our Supreme Court’s unanimously declared view that “the child is not the creature of the state,” women who have children must adjust their career aspirations accordingly. “Parents,” Bertrand Russell observed in 1927, “tend to be fond of their children and do not want them to be the subject of political schemes. The State cannot be expected to have the same attitude.” It is on this premise that Article 26(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

- The postwar explosion of divorce was in some measure due to bracket creep in income taxation and the continuous increase in payroll taxation, which taxed women of modest means into the full-time labor force. Many studies, including Mary Richmond’s “985 Widows” (1913) and the British Plowden Report, “Children and Their Primary Schools” (1967), concluded that most women would prefer to work part-time when their children are young. Bracket creep has been ended, but the previous erosion of personal exemptions has not been reversed and should be, even if this means higher taxes for the elderly and childless.

The burden of payroll taxation has been somewhat mitigated by the earned-income credit, which gives back in end-of-year lump sums funds originally extracted



from weekly paychecks, though not always to the same people because of defective tax preparation and widespread fraud. It would make sense simply to reduce payroll taxation for families of modest means despite shibboleths about the fictitious Social Security trust fund.

- Zoning rules barring accessory and mother-in-law apartments in owner-occupied homes should be relaxed and incentives provided for their creation, as in Germany, Japan, and Finland.

“Greater attention must be paid to the socialization of young men.”

Grandparents should not be zoned into the next county and could play a major role in providing childcare. For similar reasons, zoning rules barring home-based businesses should be relaxed, as in Germany and in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a bastion of the Amish.

- Greater attention must be paid to the socialization of young men. The military should no longer be the only way out of depressed communities: Persons under 25 should be exempted from payroll taxation as in Germany and The Netherlands—not a costly measure given their limited wages. They should be given access to the U.S. Employment Service, now purely an adjunct of the unemployment compensation system. There should be a revived Civilian Conservation Corps (which, we forget, is where General George

Marshall made his reputation) with a focus on soil conservation, reforestation, flood control, creation of new national parks in Appalachia and other depressed areas, and new pedestrian paths and outdoor recreation facilities.

- As an aid to this objective, state and local governments should be barred from their present self-destructive subsidy and tax-relief competition for particular new industries and encouraged to focus their economic development efforts exclusively on manpower training, a traditional strategy in North Carolina.

These are modest and not particularly expensive suggestions that should not be as unfamiliar as they are.

George W. Liebmann, a Baltimore lawyer and volunteer executive director of the Calvert Institute, is the author of The Common Law Tradition: A Collective Portrait of Five Legal Scholars (Transaction Books).

Wolves!

By Roy Magnuson

The 2016 campaign principals, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, very largely ignored the issue(s) of family fragmentation. This willful abdication of their responsibility to the greater American good will have a lingering negative effect on the well-being of American society.

I am struck by the way two classic and very different examples of different art forms came to mind as I wrestled with putting my thoughts into a man-

ageable length that still said something.

Both sides have points of view that they believe strongly. Both have proposed solutions that they advocate. When our campaigns are about ideas, when they use words to express those ideas, when those words are part of discussions filled with give and take, the best and most usable options bubble up and create possibilities. From possibilities historically have come policies.

The year 2016 represented a continuation of the belief that winning is more important than acknowledging that value can be found in an idea

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that is presented by the other side. This essay is not to promote specifics but to talk of why ignoring the fundamental issues facing individuals in challenging circumstances is short-term folly, long-term irresponsibility.

My first example from the past comes from a public radio half-hour special from 1993 that featured two middle-school-age students from the South Side of Chicago, LeeAllen Jones and Lloyd Newman, who made a documentary about themselves. It was at times amusing, at times heartbreaking, as it described life near and in the Robert B. Taylor Homes. It was illuminating in that it confirmed

what is a central point that both sides seem to agree on, but frame in such a way that it has become not just a wedge issue, but a gaping canyon of seemingly unbridgeable difference.

LeeAllen stated three-fourths of the way through, “I don’t know why some kids just give up hope, and others—like me and Lloyd—hold on. Maybe it’s just that both me and Lloyd have at least one strong person in our families to watch over us.”

This quotation says so many things. Family, even a non-traditional or fragmented family can still be the needed anchor. To ignore that reality seems to be fatally shortsighted. Family is a human need.

Twenty-four years later, among other accomplishments, LeeAllen ran as the Green Party candidate for the U.S. Senate in Illinois. Clearly, he also did what is a truism in our national debate on family and life in our United States: He pulled himself up by his bootstraps.

He also had some boots to put on.

It all too often seems that discussions in our campaigns, with the extremely high stakes of power that goes to the victor, focus on tactics and winning instead of creating a common good that all of us can share. Both major parties do this.

The division in how we see each other, even in how we define what it means to be an American, clearly has affected family life in our society. When the argument fractures over bootstraps, it is hard to see how we will have the type of thoughtful and nuanced discussion needed to move us toward a shared, accepted, and supported set of policies that will let Americans move to enhancing the lives of all of us.

Now, watching the tumult that has erupted since



the inauguration (and in full disclosure, having participated in some of that tumult), I am reminded of another, older piece of art that describes one way of looking at the state of America, past, present and perhaps future, and recognizes the importance of leadership in a society.

That is Saki's (H.H. Munro) short story from the turn of a previous century, *The Interlopers*. Ulrich, the hereditary landowner and Georg, the leader of the landless, meet during a storm in the middle of the night in the forest. Georg and his men are hunting game in what they believe is the commons. Ulrich and his men are hunting Georg.

In the setting of the story, the two enemies meet rounding a huge beech tree. Before they can attack each other, a lightning bolt severs the tree limb that they are standing under and cuts them, leaving them bleeding and both pinned to the ground.

In the time that passes, they move from curses and threats to recognition that both are dependent on the other's goodwill for survival; they each believe that while someone's men will find them, neither knows whose will arrive first.

More time passes.

An attempt at reconciliation is tried and fails. Then another is successful. The two leaders agree that they will reconcile in public and bring their factions together, regardless of whose men arrive first. They pledge their word. They holler for help. Ulrich says that he sees someone coming. Whose men, asks Georg, yours or mine? Neither, answers Ulrich hysterically.

Wolves!

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

Penguins and Albatrosses

By C. Peter Magrath

It is correct that family fragmentation was not discussed in the last presidential campaign, and I do not recall it ever being discussed in other political campaigns—and I am a political junkie who follows campaigns. That is a great human tragedy we must try to correct.

How? I do not know, but surely we must keep raising the issue and insisting it is critical to our nation's welfare.

Allow me to share thoughts that may strike readers as bizarre.

I recently returned from the magnificent and still-unspoiled continent of Antarctica. The creatures there may have something important to teach us.

**“Are there lessons we could
learn from these creatures, who,
like us, are creatures of God?”**

They, too, bring babies into the world: little chicks. Penguins (and there are tens of millions of them) have chicks, and both parents take turns sitting on the eggs. When hatched, the parents feed and nurture the chicks, never abandoning them until they can survive and thrive on their own.

A second example: albatrosses. These stunning birds with their huge wingspans court for years

before finally mating, and they mate for life, unlike us not-so-monogamous humans. Again, the albatrosses nurture and rear their offspring until they are ready to fly on their own.

Are there lessons we could learn from these creatures, who, like us, are creatures of God?

C. Peter Magrath served as president of the University of Minnesota from 1974 to 1984. He also has led the University of Missouri, West Virginia University, and Binghamton University (twice).

Bringing People Together Across Differences

By Geoffrey Maruyama

I recently read *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* by Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2015) and *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance (HarperCollins, 2016). I highly recommend both. Their messages expose the deep divides in today's society that result in many people missing the benefits that ought to be available to all Americans. Importantly, the authors demonstrate and illustrate ways in which we are now a country of subcultures with decreasing interaction across them that would help create common understandings and respect and bridge differences.

Putnam systematically shows how we have become different social class societies and discusses the implications of social class stratification and isolation on children, their parents and families, their communities, and their schools. Increasingly, the family into which one is born shapes one's

attitudes, opportunities, and successes. There is much less social class mixing than existed only a couple generations ago, resulting in unequal opportunities for educational and career advancement and increasing cultural divides across social classes.

Vance presents in a personal and compelling way the hillbilly culture, how it has influenced the working class in the United States and how it has been treated by people with access to power. He illustrates the centrality of and allegiance to family embedded within a culture too often characterized by violence, poverty, and family structure instability and dysfunction.

The two books in many ways align with and complement issues that Mitch Pearlstein has been raising about family fragmentation for years but without agreement between them about causal mechanisms underlying what is occurring. Each sees potential solutions in unique ways. Most importantly, all agree that solutions are complex and perhaps limited, for there are not villains and heroes but people building lives in their very different types of communities, which leads to very different perspectives, needs, aspirations, and outcomes.

Turning to the election and drawing from perspectives of Putnam and Vance, I suggest that politicians ignoring the issues was pragmatic and necessary. For an array of reasons, neither candidate wanted to touch issues of family structures or class.

First, any proposed solutions could seem demeaning and disrespectful—highly risky in a close election where alienating any part of their potential constituencies would have severe consequences. It could seem like more of the same from Washington: “People who don’t know me



and who are out of touch telling me how to live my life.” Workers’ backlash to government and status quo, particularly in the Rust Belt, has been, in part, a reaction to what are seen as paternalistic policies—telling people what is good for them on issues ranging from education to the environment to health to diet to parenting.

Second, there is no win in drawing attention to problems, let alone criticizing struggling but sympathy-evoking families, with compelling stories of struggle and mixed success (like

“Increasingly, the family into which
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opportunities, and successes.”

Vance). Candidates might have spoken in general terms about societal patterns they would like to change, but many people in their audiences likely would personalize those patterns, thinking about individuals they know who fit or don’t fit them. Once reduced to individuals, there is much variability in behaviors and outcomes, with visible exceptions that make proposed solutions seem impractical and wrong-headed.

Third, many white U.S. workers like those described in *Hillbilly Elegy* experience unstable family structures yet are not looking for advice on how to live their lives but want jobs and steady income. If families feel threatened by policy suggestions perceived as reducing their freedom to do, think, and behave as they wish, they likely will behave to restore their freedoms, voting against people perceived as trying to take away their freedom of choice. Psychologist Jack Brehm

and others call this “psychological reactance,” a tendency to behave in opposition to loss of freedom.

Looking forward, are we likely to see family fragmentation and family structures being addressed head on, politically? I think not, for addressing the decreasing numbers of living-wage jobs and building communities seems like more direct and pragmatic ways of try to help families stay together and prosper. Job solutions will be challenging, regardless of whether they come from the left (e.g., increasing minimum wages) or the right (e.g., increasing costs of exporting jobs abroad), for technology is turning our world into a place that needs fewer and fewer workers, increasingly affecting skilled as well as unskilled workers.

For me, solutions start with education, strengthening public schools so they attract youth from all backgrounds and provide a place where high achievement and contact across different backgrounds occurs. Segregating schools through privatization would increase separation and reduce cross-group contact.

Coupled with that is creating caring communities where people know and support their neighbors, countering the fear created by terrorism and general discomfort created by differences. We need new approaches that can bring people together across differences. Engagement of people whose lives need improvement in helping to find solutions seems essential, for solutions require balancing personal responsibility with societal and community responsibility, and people left behind must be committed to the approaches taken.

Solutions likely require sorting out and understanding relations among social class and

status, culture, family structure, and community. If we can find them, we can begin to address challenges facing the United States today, including family structures, poverty, and culture.

Geoffrey Maruyama is professor and chair of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota.

Why No Jeremiad?

By Ken Morris

The U.S. cultural framework of intact, solid, and thriving parent-child families, whether two parents or not, no longer provides the genetic material for a healthy society. Familial traditions, which provide a rich medium for emotional, communal, and relational security necessary for innovative and risk taking societies, are on the wane. Fragmented

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families lead to losses of critical relationship-building and parent-child time. Dissolving families enhance the likelihood that children will lose economic security.

The economic burden of fragmented families is immense. Taxpayer investments in the current environment aside (as they are rear-view-mirror-driving), have yielded, at best, no material benefit to society.

With outcomes such as these, why do we not see political, business, and faith leaders on a jeremiad? I submit something basic is at work here: As an open and free, individually focused society, we have planted and nurtured the seeds of our own demise. Enduring human capital—well-educated, with a strong moral compass based in faith traditions—is often at odds with our “leave me alone and let me be” narrative.

Perhaps our leaders and society have become so enamored with our individualized approach to self-government that we have forgotten the center pole of that narrative. John Adams provided an admonition and warning to future generations:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry 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.

Only intact families can provide an optimal ecosystem for the human capital development vital to a safe, secure, innovative, and self-perpetuating society. Our leaders, in whatever capacity, have a duty to keep the vision of the Founders before us by hewing a fine line and balance between individual self-governance and individual responsibility so as to maintain our moral north star, grounded in “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Thomas Jefferson understood that our liberties survive and are nourished when our nation’s liberties are a conviction in the minds of the people, and that



these liberties are the gift of God.

This war against the foundations of intact families has the capacity to upend our marvelous experiment in human development. It is our call.

Ken Morris is Founder & CEO of KnectIQ Inc., and a member of American Experiment's Board of Directors.

Look to Each Other

By Pam Myhra

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's silence on family fragmentation during the 2016 presidential election makes perfect sense but for different reasons.

Hillary Clinton was most likely silent on this issue because a key priority of her party is to re-define marriage and relationships within society, which runs counter to the objective of preserving traditional marriage and reducing family fragmentation.

President Donald Trump was most likely silent on this issue because of his recognition the U.S. Constitution does not identify the reduction of family fragmentation as a role of the federal government, and, instead, the issue is best addressed by the people through religious and social communities (Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution).

Significant responsibility for family fragmentation can be attributed to government's well-meaning but sometimes damaging policies and programs. Rather than provide long-term solutions, some government policies have perverse incentives resulting in serious ramifications.

I will always remember the tears brimming in my new friend's eyes and her voice breaking as she confided in me how her family struggled after the bankruptcy of their small business. Where could she turn? A social worker advised her to divorce her husband to qualify for government assistance for herself and their two young children. She didn't leave her husband. Instead, her family struggled financially, received help from family and friends, and, years later, they are still an intact family.

Americans should be hesitant to look to the federal government for solutions to problems best solved by families and communities. When

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government expands its influence, sometimes far-reaching and serious consequences can result as people become permanently reliant on government programs.

Consider how the Social Security Act of 1935, established to provide old-age insurance, has affected the American family and retirement of America's elderly. Before the passage of the Social Security Act, a person's old-age care, other than some veteran's pensions, was primarily dependent on adult children and on savings. A large family gave a person greater security that one of the children would look after the person when help was needed in retirement. It was common for

adult children to care for their elderly parents just as their parents cared for them in their formative years. Also, saving was part of the American culture.

Eighty years later, fertility rates have fallen and families are smaller. Madison Park, in her August 11, 2016, CNN article entitled “US fertility rate falls to lowest on record,” wrote, “The US fertility rate fell [in the first quarter of 2016] to the lowest point since record keeping started more than a century ago according to statistics released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”

Elyssa Kirkham, in her March 14, 2016, *Money* article, “1 in 3 Americans Has Saved \$0 for Retirement,” noted, “Two-thirds of women (63 percent) say they have no savings or less than \$10,000 in retirement savings, compared with just over half (52 percent) of men.”

Matthew Frankel, in his April 19, 2016, *Motley Fool* article, “When Does the Average American Start Collecting Social Security?” wrote, “According to a report by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College ... [t]he most popular age [of Americans to begin collecting Social Security retirement benefits] is 62, the earliest age possible—chosen by 42 percent of men and 48 percent of women.” This, even though doing so “will permanently reduce the monthly amount [of benefits]” by “as much as 30 percent,” according to the Social Security Administration (www.socialsecurity.gov). The federal government’s Social Security Act has permanently changed the way our society approaches retirement.

The reality is, government cannot solve all our problems. When we lean more on government, we have less strength to stand on our own. Americans are better served to look to each other than to build greater reliance on the government to solve some

problems, including family fragmentation.

Pam Myhra, is a CPA, president of the Minnesota Federation of Republican Women, and a former Minnesota state Representative.

Perhaps Trump and Clinton Thought Voters Didn’t Care

By Rhonda Kruse Nordin

I recall the election of 1960. My parents had recently purchased their first television set: a large square RCA, limited to a black and white picture that got three channels on a good day but on most days picked up only one or two. The picture often “rolled,” requiring one of us to sit arm’s length from the console and adjust a knob until the screen stabilized. When the weather changed, the definition did, too.

A good rainstorm, welcomed by the farmers on our Midwestern plains, often interrupted programming, leaving us hugely disappointed, yet the weather was rain-free on the eve of September 26, 1960. For that night, sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on the red chenille sofa, elegant in style yet tattered by wear, my mother and father, sister and brother, and I (the intact cohesive nuclear family inherent to that era, with popcorn to boot) joined 70 million other viewers, who, in the privacy of our homes, watched the first-ever broadcast of a presidential debate. Electricity in the air could have powered our sets.

No sooner had the young senator from Massachusetts taken the stage, exuding his



undeniable on-air charisma (soon to crush prospects of the more-experienced Mr. Nixon), did the convivial mood in our living room pivot on three simple words spoken softly by my mother while she shook her head vehemently from side-to-side. “He’s Roman Catholic,” she hissed.

This uncharacteristic prejudice that I cannot explain away, even today, by her devout German Lutheran upbringing, did not dim prospects for

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then-Senator Kennedy. While he may not have gotten my mother’s vote, he easily captured 80 percent of the Catholic vote and demonstrated that religion (at least Catholicism) wasn’t a deal-breaker when it came to winning the White House. Nor was divorce a deal-breaker, we learned 20 years later, when Ronald Reagan ran as the first divorced candidate in the history of the United States. Nor was race an obstacle after another few decades passed and Barack Obama sought the presidency.

Maybe the candidates of 2016 didn’t talk about the family or particularly of race or creed or color because they perceived these matters just didn’t matter. After all, Americans have evolved over a half-century to accept a wide range of personal qualities. Taking issue with one or another of them risks alienating a needed voter bloc, some that many of us fall into and that influence our values and beliefs about the big issues.

Like Donald Trump, many Americans divorce. Researchers estimate half of all marriages have or will end before death does them part. Recent Pew Research shows 86 percent of people polled said divorce “makes no difference in their willingness to support a candidate.”

Other factors that define family fragmentation are commonplace as well. Cohabitation, taboo at the time of Kennedy, has become a social norm, fueling a decrease in the number of couples who marry, and an increase in the number of children born outside marriage, which now accounts for more than 40 percent of annual births and more than 75 percent of births in some communities. Fewer than half our nation’s children under the age of 18 now live in a home with both biological parents, compared to a single-digit fraction who did so in 1960.

Indeed, today’s families come in all shapes; therefore, most people are loath to judge, especially those who need a vote.

Yet maybe the two candidates should have ventured more boldly into the topic of family fragmentation. It surely touches all of us, if at least peripherally, and is at the root of most, if not all, the big issues the Brookings Institution listed that presidential candidates should have addressed in 2016.

During the election, however, any mention of the family was overshadowed by voter concerns about poverty and opportunity—tantamount to income-inequality dissatisfaction cited by two-thirds of Americans in a recent Gallup poll.

Perhaps candidates should have spent time gingerly delving into the connection between income inequality and family fragmentation. It was an unbecoming election, for sure, that could have

gotten even uglier, I fear, had Hillary or Donald introduced such themes. Perhaps, in the estimation of each candidate, it wasn't worth addressing their opponent's perceived deficiencies at the risk of drawing attention to and having to defend their own personal histories. What? Elect a president that has twice divorced and thrice married? What about a candidate whose own spouse, our forty-second president, was impeached in part because of marital transgressions that redefined for a whole generation the meaning of sexual relationships?

What we witnessed in 2016 is that each candidate was able, without effort, it seemed, to line up family members more than presentable to strut cross-stage and support their candidacies. They did this, I think, with dignity that warrants respect. Now, the task is to get Americans onboard to govern their own behaviors and make smart choices within the home that can lead to greater economic equality for all.

Rhonda Kruse Nordin is an American Experiment senior fellow, whose research-based writing and speaking provides education, point-of-view trends, and recommendations that influence parents, professionals, and policymakers.

Faithfulness Amplifies Even When Unfaithfulness Intensifies

By Bob Osburn

On the long roads between Bangor and Bakersfield, between Orlando and Olympia,

candidates Trump and Clinton never pretended to be moral exemplars. They were mum, but their lives shouted: Both were emblems of marital adultery, the quintessential test for faithfulness, and ill-qualified to give sermons about the evils of family fragmentation and the virtues of family fusion.

At least you can't call them hypocrites.

Bill Clinton's adultery in the sultry 1990s was a betrayal of not only his wife but also the nation. That she conspired in the cover-ups ensured that Hillary would not be more presidentially faithful than her husband would.

Do we have reason to believe that the winner who now occupies the White House will be any more faithful? Yes, he won by the rules, and many of his policies merit praise, but has the office of the presidency, once known for the moral character of its occupants, been diminished because its occupant bragged about his marital unfaithfulness?

At minimum, we ought to be able to agree that our current president exemplifies marital unfaithfulness. Therefore, why should many Americans, for whom temptations of the flesh deserve satisfaction, assume they should do otherwise?

With a serious nod to the biblical prophet Hosea (760-725 BC), my inner theologian (you also have an inner theologian, even if he masquerades in atheist dress) wonders, however: Could it be that marital unfaithfulness amplifies God's faithfulness?

God told Hosea to marry a prostitute (the emblem of unfaithfulness) to show the world that the Israelites "had left their God to play the



whore” (4:12). Lesson: Marital unfaithfulness amplifies other forms of unfaithfulness and vice versa. Hillary’s husband helped teach us that lesson. Melania’s husband is the current instructor-in-chief.

Amazingly, God is faithful to Israel, even while she is unfaithful to him; thus, time after time, faithful Hosea brings back home his wife who strays. Reckless unfaithfulness amplifies the reliable faithfulness of God.

The irony abounds.

This is my best hope: The presidential candidates’ (and the winner’s) stunning personal unfaithfulness will amplify the faithfulness of a God whose moral code (the Ten Commandments, etc.) has proven its worth 100 billion times

**“Could it be that marital
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over (and more). America’s children have been relentlessly shattered by the family fragmentation that results from marital unfaithfulness. Will they now learn the message that marital and family faithfulness is both virtuous and better, especially if our president cannot?

Faithfulness amplifies even when unfaithfulness intensifies. Light shines brighter when the darkness is deeper.

Will the lack of character in the White House inadvertently help fuel a moral rebirth in our

homes and neighborhoods? Could it be that Twenty-First Century economic populism may lead the way to a bottom-up moral populism that calls forth once again what Charles Murray called our nation’s “four founding virtues:” honesty, hard work, religion, and marriage? Will the people, not the president, point the way to family fusion instead of fragmentation?

Note to President Trump, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives: Why not propose and enact policy to provide \$50 million for “Race to End Family Fragmentation” grants to NGOs, along with \$25 million in research funding for academics to study the effects of the pilot programs that are funded? Religious NGOs, which usually perceive they are excluded from such grants, should be especially encouraged to apply.

For many people, the path from family fragmentation to family fusion will be charted religiously, but one thing we may discover over the next four years is that leaders who are unfaithful, whether to their marital vows or to their nations, unwittingly amplify a better path to faithfulness and family fusion instead of fragmentation.

Bob Osburn is executive director of the Wilberforce Academy, where he trains college students to apply their Christian faith in search of solutions to social and other problems.

Silence in Churches Too

By Tom Prichard

Family fragmentation, the social crisis of our generation, was certainly not a topic for debate in the presidential election, and, I dare say, it was probably rarely brought up in most federal and

state races for elective office.

Why is that? Certainly not because it's unimportant. The decline in the number of people marrying, acceptance of cohabitation as the new norm, divorce, fatherlessness, and so on are the social crises of our day. These crises affect every stratum and institution of society, because marriage and family are the character-building institutions in society. It's where parents and children learn to love their neighbors in a very personal, unique way. The loss of character in people's lives then shows up in every area of life—e.g., business, government, education, crime, religious institutions, and so on.

To answer the question of why marriage and family aren't dealt with by our political leaders as a part of our public policy debates, I think we should first look upstream in the culture to the most formative cultural and even spiritual institution in society, the church, and what's happening with marriage there. I see a neglect of marriage and family in the church that gives insight into why marriage is neglected in the broader culture and in politics.

I think marriage is neglected in churches, based on the time and attention given to it. Sermons on marriage and intentional, ongoing teaching and training on marriage and family life are often the exception, rather the rule, in most churches. To be sure, many churches are doing a great job promoting marriage, but many aren't.

The question, then, is, "Why not?" I believe it's because they are subject to the same forces hitting the rest of society—e.g., radical individualism, a distorted notion of tolerance, fear of offending people, and political correctness—all of which keep them from speaking the truth in love.

This hits many pastors and church leaders who

maybe realize their own marriages aren't in the best shape and, therefore, don't feel qualified to champion marriage in their churches. Or, it may be fear of offending others and stepping on the toes of people who are divorced or living together. They may feel ill equipped to understand and deal with the challenges facing troubled marriages, stepfamilies, and divorced persons.

"I think once we see a grassroots marriage movement start, we'll see elected officials jump onboard."

If it's difficult to promote marriage in our churches, I'm not surprised that it's even more difficult for our policy makers and elected officials who face a similar cultural pushback regarding marriage and family.

What is, then, the answer to restoring marriage and family in society and our public life? I think it starts with our churches and religious institutions, which must make it a priority, because Scripture does. Churches and religious institutions are vitally important to society, because they provide the moral leaven necessary for a healthy society.

Marriage training, sermons, counseling, education, and small groups must become part of the fabric of our churches. I am hopeful, because I believe more churches are starting to strengthen their marriage efforts. In fact, I wonder if we're not seeing the first signs of a marriage movement beginning.

From there, we need brave souls who realize what's at stake with family breakdown and take the pro-marriage, pro-family message into the rest



of society. In the workplace, business leaders and owners must consider what they can do to help strengthen marriages and families through policies and resources for their employees. A benefit for them is a more productive workforce.

Leaders in government, at all levels, must see what they can do to strengthen marriages and families—not necessarily by creating more social programs, which too often have the consequence of weakening families by transferring the functions of families to the state, but rather by creating environments where parents and children can thrive and carry out their God-given responsibilities. This means looking at tax and education policies—e.g., school choice initiatives, eliminating marriage penalties in social programs, and reducing the tax burden on families.

I think once we see a grassroots marriage movement start, we'll see elected officials jump onboard. However, if they realize the importance of marriage and family now, they shouldn't wait to be marriage and family champions.

Tom Prichard has promoted marriage and family initiatives in Minnesota, legislatively and in many communities, since 1990.

Perhaps President Trump Will Talk About It Now

By Larry Purdy

The 2016 presidential candidates' silence regarding "family fragmentation" during the recent campaign was neither "golden and benign"

nor "leaden and malignant." Plainly and simply stated, it is impossible for me to imagine that either candidate (for a host of obvious reasons, including the political classes' obeisance to political correctness) would have chosen to address one of the most sensitive cultural issues Americans face. The simple fact is that no politician can discuss the subject without necessarily confronting the dramatically differing, and heartbreaking, degrees of fragmentation in communities divided by race.

While it is true we are witnessing increasing levels of fragmentation within every racial group, the rate has reached disastrous levels in America's black communities. Yet, had either Clinton or Trump

"Will this subject be addressed by the newly elected and decidedly renegade new president?"

initiated such a discussion, it instantly would have drawn howls of protest and cries of racism. It wasn't going to happen, at least not during the campaign.

That said, the difference between a candidate and an elected president, particularly a president in his or her final term, is vast. Here, the irony is the president who might have had the greatest impact of all, the multi-racial Barack Obama, departed the White House having done next-to-nothing to address this issue. Rather than using his obvious platform – as the successful black father of two daughters who remain part of an intact family – to utter truths that apply universally across every demographic group, he basically chose to remain silent. Instead of urging a renewed sense

of responsibility on the part of young men and women, irrespective of race, and condemning behaviors that destroy family structures, he essentially remained mute.

To Obama, and to Democrats generally, the always politically convenient villain, “institutional American racism,” is cited as the principal cause for the destruction of families within the black community, rather than each individual’s behavior. And yet Obama himself is proof that it is individual behavior that matters when it comes to ending the scourge of family fragmentation.

Thankfully, the 2016 election is over. Obama has left the White House. Donald Trump has moved in. Will this subject be addressed by the newly elected and decidedly renegade new president? Whether President Trump will try to fill the vacuum on this issue is unknown. Yet his willingness to flout political correctness is by now abundantly clear. For that reason, there is hope that somewhere within his incessant tweets he may one day, even if at 3:00 A.M., touch upon this issue and initiate a much-needed and long-overdue national dialogue. Lord knows we all need it.

One thing is certain: If Trump proves successful in changing the trajectory of family fragmentation, particularly within minority communities (perhaps as a welcomed byproduct of an improving economy), voting patterns could be altered for a generation. All voters, but black voters in particular, whose families have witnessed decades of worsening disintegration under government policies largely favored by Democratic politicians, will realize that a different approach was needed. Any notion that the voters would care that positive changes emanated from a most unlikely source – i.e., via policies promoted by a privileged white billionaire who happened to be a Republican – is ridiculous.

In the end, the soul of a nation is not found within its political parties. It is found around each family’s kitchen table. Think about it.

Larry Purdy is a Minneapolis attorney.

Celebrating Silver, Gold, and Diamonds

By Donald P. Racheter

The data on the negative impact of fragmented families on children’s socioeconomic and educational status, delinquency, and crime are clear. Our political leaders are derelict in their duty to children when they do not speak up and reach out to encourage stable, married families with a father present in the household, providing both economic and moral leadership. Our children and grandchildren’s lives and future depend on it, as does our country’s.

Of all our political leaders, presidents and presidential candidates are the most visible and thus the most important to this vital undertaking to rescue our future from the downhill slide we entered several decades ago. God created the institutions of marriage and the family as the bedrocks of society, and the further we drift from them, the worse we are for it.

It has not been politically correct to do so, but with the recent election results shifting American politics to the right, perhaps we can again begin to count on our leaders to orate, teach, and preach to our youth about why out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, divorce, and broken homes are bad for the individuals involved and for society as a whole.



Hollywood and the mainstream media have been handmaidens to the decline in our society with their glorification of alternative lifestyles and disrespect for traditional values. Perhaps our new Tweeter-in-Chief can use social media to end-run them, as he did in his break-the-mold presidential campaign, on this crusade and thus atone for his previous silence on the issue.

Earlier presidents such as Nixon, Ford, and Carter and their opponents also did not serve our nation well when they did not speak out forcefully enough against the pernicious effects of President Johnson's

**“Our political leaders are derelict
in their duty to children when they
don't speak up and reach out to
encourage stable married families
with a father present”**

Great Society programs as they began to manifest themselves in family fragmentation. In retrospect, it is clear we took a wrong turn when we tied welfare benefits to the number of children a woman had and penalized the presence of a man in the household to provide support. These bad incentives broke up many families and prevented many more from ever forming. We must admit we have been wrong, repeal the current welfare system, and replace it with something that incentivizes families to form and stay together for the sake of the children involved and for what it would mean to society.

In a previous submission to another American Experiment symposium, I provided some preliminary suggestions on what such helpful

incentives might entail. In this follow-up, I would add that we must create and nurture a culture of recognition and reward for marriage and parenthood, which has been missing for many years in our society. Just as presidents congratulate some Americans who reach 100 years of age, we must get them to devote some time and resources to recognizing people who make it to their diamond, golden, and even silver wedding anniversaries, especially if they have successfully raised children together.

What better way to spread this political gospel than during presidential campaigns when wall-to-wall media coverage creates an environment in which average Americans are actually paying attention to politics and politicians? Presidential candidates could arrange to have successful married couples appear with them at their campaign events and tout the benefits of such behavior for both the individuals involved and for society as a whole.

Such individuals who gain their 15 minutes of fame during such an appearance with a presidential candidate would undoubtedly multiply the effect by posting their coverage on all manner of social media. Studies show that such transmissions have more credibility and reach than traditional media presentations. Thus, those of us who care about fragmented families and their pernicious impact on our nation should do what we can to insist that future presidential candidates speak up on this issue as well as those of jobs, immigration, taxes, and so on.

Don Racheter is President of the Public Interest Institute in Muscatine, Iowa.

Finding Scapegoats and Reaffirming Powerlessness

By Ian Rowe

On January 24, 1995, the president of the United States used his largest platform, the State of the Union address, to issue an unprecedented call to action: “We’ve got to ask our community leaders and all kinds of organizations to help us stop our most serious social problem: the epidemic of teen pregnancies and births where there is no marriage.... Government can only do so much. Tonight, I call on parents and leaders all across this country to join in a national campaign against teen pregnancy to make a difference. We can do this and we must.”

In the early 1990s, more than a million teenage girls became pregnant each year, four out of five of them unmarried. There were certainly prominent champions throughout this period imploring the country to train its eyes on teen pregnancy and the threat it posed to stable families. Yet President Bill Clinton’s moral imperative issued on the grandest stage was the tip of the spear. Within weeks, a chorus of bipartisan voices echoed the president’s urgency, catalyzing a two-decade campaign to reduce significantly the number of children having children.

Contrast this powerful use of the presidential bully pulpit with the profound lost opportunity that was Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump’s silence on family fragmentation during the 2016 campaign. Why the duo of candidates chose to muzzle themselves is worthy of inquiry, as my hunch is that both Clinton and Trump actually believe that

family disintegration is a root cause of poverty, poor education outcomes, and increased crime.

The reason for their dual, depressed mute button is probably twofold.

First, it’s the result of political calculations: Better be mum than risk some needed voter constituency being offended. In the case of Trump, he may not have wanted to raise the issue of family instability with the evangelical community and bring renewed attention to his own checkered history of marital affairs, two divorces, and three marriages.

“[P]utting their personal liabilities
aside, both Clinton and Trump
decided to capitalize on America’s
growing culture of victimhood . . .”

Clinton may not have wanted to repel the woman’s vote by resurrecting memories of her husband’s infidelity with Monica Lewinsky et al., despite her best efforts to keep their marriage intact.

Second, putting their personal liabilities aside, both Clinton and Trump decided to capitalize on America’s growing culture of victimhood, where individuals are rewarded for belonging to some wronged identity group. Why bother to speak of root causes like family destruction when they could attract voters either by finding scapegoats to distract from personal responsibility or by reaffirming personal powerlessness by citing forces beyond the oppressed locus of control?

Hence, Trump’s magnetic appeal to white working



voters by naming illegal immigrants and job-stealing trade pacts as the enemy, not the explosion in out-of-wedlock birth rates. Or Clinton's constant invoking systemic racism to black audiences and heavily publicized meetings with the mothers of young black men who were killed by police violence versus any mention of the long-term effect of a reduced stigma surrounding single motherhood.

Whatever the motivation for Clinton and Trump's silence on the social epidemic of rampant out-of-wedlock birth rates, the nation suffered. We know what is possible. More than 20 years ago, President Clinton proved that he could lead on an issue that appealed to both conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, and established himself as the quintessential triangulator-in-chief. He leveraged the presidential bully pulpit to galvanize the nation's attention with a purple issue that catalyzed a movement that resulted in one of the greatest public health achievements on record.

Teen pregnancy in the United States is now at an historic low. Since its peak in 1990, the teen pregnancy rate has dropped by more than half. In 2011, there were approximately 562,000 pregnancies to women younger than age 20, compared (as noted above) to more than a million a year in the early 1990s. Between 1991 and 2015, the teen birth rate declined by an impressive 64 percent nationwide. It has declined in all 50 states and among all racial and ethnic groups.

All this occurred because a president chose not to be silent on a fundamental issue affecting families.

Let's hope that future presidents and those vying for the office heed the words of Charles Murray who, in 1993 wrote, "My proposition is that illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime,

drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else. Doing something about it is not just one more item on the American policy agenda, but should be at the top."

I hope.

Ian Rowe is CEO of Public Prep, a nonprofit organization that develops high-quality, pre-kindergarten and single-sex elementary and middle public schools that pursue excellence through continuous learning and data-driven instruction. He is also Thomas B. Fordham Institute Senior Visiting Fellow.

The Inescapable Obligations of Political and Religious Leaders

By Lyall Schwarzkopf

In 2013, Professor Lawrence Mead of New York University said, "Marriage, not money, now marks the chief dividing line between classes in America." Fifty years ago, 75 percent of children lived in two-parent homes. Today, only 50 percent of the children live in such homes, and 30 percent live with a single parent. When 40 percent of all births in the United States are out of marriage, the country is headed for greater class differences in the years ahead.

It seems that many religious leaders, who years ago strongly supported marriage and preached about it, talk little about family fragmentation today. Political leaders, who should be concerned about why more people are falling into poverty, do not want to talk about this subject, either.

As society has changed over the past 100 years, laws have changed to make divorce easier. Having babies without marriage is much more accepted. Cohabitation is accepted, and most religious and political leaders do not want to talk about personal responsibility or moral norms. Therefore, the march toward family fragmentation continues, creating an enlarging underclass in the United States.

Many clergy do discuss marriage and its responsibilities with couples who are planning to wed, but few preach sermons on the importance of marriage. They know that many divorced people and single parents are sitting in their church pews. They also know there are children of single parents in their congregations. Nearly every extended family is touched by family fragmentation.

Is it government's responsibility to try to encourage marriage, because family fragmentation does create serious social and costly problems for the country? Professor Mead pointed out that failure through non-work often causes lower-skilled men to become absentee fathers. He added, children born in fatherless homes are eventually less prepared to work and marry than children born in two-parent families. In addition, children of single parents are more likely to end up pregnant as teenagers, become involved in crime, and struggle in school.

Elected officials find this a delicate topic to discuss. The voting public has differing opinions on how to handle family fragmentation. Some people believe it is no one's business what married or non-married people do and, therefore, government should not be involved. Other people believe that single-parent families should not be stigmatized. Some people want to reward parents with tax breaks for staying married. Others want to provide greater benefits to single parents so their children will receive good housing, meals, and health care.

Finally, some want the government to create jobs for persons going in and out of unstable work.

Australia has passed some tax reforms hoping to encourage marriage and stable families. According to the literature, that has had some good results.

In 1999, Oklahoma passed a marriage law that took a different approach: It provided classes on conflict resolution, financial management, and parenting skills. Of the unmarried, expectant, and new-parent couples that completed these classes, 20 percent were more likely to stay together.

Thus, the question is, why aren't more religious and political leaders discussing family fragmentation, its negative results on our children and their future lives, and how many of those children will be tomorrow's poor?

“If you are a father and left your family you do not want someone to tell you how you have hurt your child.”

Because family fragmentation is so prevalent throughout American culture, it becomes difficult for religious leaders to talk about the results of fragmentation in congregations. People will not like it and will leave that congregation.

Political leaders in the recent presidential election did not discuss family fragmentation because they did not want to lose votes. If you are a father and left your family, you do not want someone to tell you how you have hurt your child. If you are a single mother and work hard to raise your



child, you do not want someone to tell you that your child may be part of tomorrow's underclass. Politicians, like religious leaders, do not want to lose support, but by talking about family fragmentation, they might.

After reviewing much literature on this subject, I believe that religious leaders must take a more active, positive position on decreasing family fragmentation. Counseling of those to be married, young married couples clubs, sermons, written material, and special meetings on this subject for congregations are all tools that are available to religious leaders.

Government must review its laws to make sure that it does not encourage family fragmentation. Tax incentives to keep married families together and the Oklahoma approach should be used to fight family fragmentation.

Lyall Schwarzkopf, who is retired, served as chief of staff for Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson, as Minneapolis city clerk and coordinator, and as a member of the Minnesota Legislature.

Not an Environment for Intelligent Debate

By Chuck Slocum

The two major presidential candidates—Republican winner Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton—were nearly silent about how our nation could address mounting family dysfunction in America.

This did not surprise or disappoint me, as there is much more work to do, and much of it is best done

outside our partisan political environment.

Consistently during the campaign, two-thirds of voters surveyed in the Trump/Clinton contest said that neither was trusted nor liked as presidential choices. As political opponents, Trump and Clinton were mostly concentrating on driving up on another's negatives. Both did that effectively.

It was, therefore, not an environment in which the two candidates could intelligently debate any issue, much less a complicated and controversial one like the disintegration of the American family.

Other important, substantive issues requiring a national consensus received similar treatment because they did not lend themselves to the kind of campaign being conducted.

Inviting family fragmentation into the presidential debate would likely result in partisan fingerpointing and misrepresentation of the facts, thus discouraging reasonable consensus in the long run.

It was early in the wonderful American experiment that distinguished Founders John Adams and Thomas Jefferson saw the value of two broad-based political parties with spirited, reasoned discussions both within and between the parties. The most important concept: compromise, to make things work in the new democracy.

Since that time, our political system has operated with a dual center/left and center/right perspective. It has also honored the leadership of the in-power party while providing a legitimate voice for the "outs."

This is not so true anymore.

Anyone who has observed the divisive partisanship

within Congress will note that policymakers clearly lack the ability or will to work together.

Republicans have traditionally emphasized individual rights, privacy, local control, and a global worldview, combined with a strong national defense. They want balanced budgets within our unique form of democratic capitalism where the private sector (businesses and nonprofits) provides more than eight in ten jobs for U.S. workers.

Democrats bring another perspective by offering consistent support for a more activist government that generally places the collective good of all

“Other important, substantive issues . . . received similar treatment because they did not lend themselves to the kind of campaign being conducted.”

over the individual. Programs advocated by the Democrats focus on building an ever-stronger national government that is mostly urban centered.

There are many reasons why America has been the longest-lasting and most successful democracy in the world. Yet only about one in ten of us currently become substantively involved in political party and campaign activity. Expanding this involvement will not be an easy sell, especially with those youngest and most affected by the lack of a caring adult in their lives.

Citizens involved in self-governance, starting at

young ages, must learn to compromise—a very good thing in a true democracy—and be trained on recruitment and the election of capable candidates of positive values and good character.

Working together, the Republican and Democrats can become more user-friendly and inclusive. Ideas for doing so should open the process to more people, including earlier primary elections where voters themselves make the key candidate choices, consideration of multiple endorsements within the parties, full disclosure of all financial contributions, an enforceable truth-in-campaigns code, and adapting technology to engage more citizens in constructive, decision-making ways.

Some years ago, I became serious about mentoring as a driving force in my life. I invited young people—some nearing age 40 now—into a two-way friendship for as long as they’d have me. I further resolved to use my time and resources to advance other successful ways to support younger kids, many of those coming from fragmented families and already identified as on a failure track.

In the most effective ways I can, I am supporting necessary early learning as a child’s brain develops, with the goal of children achieving literacy by third grade, improved K-12 and post-high-school education, job training, and a kind of continuing life coach volunteer mentoring model for these young kids at least until they are age 25.

To make things better for American families, we must do more upfront homework on the causes and solutions to family fragmentation and forge a workable consensus. It was a wise physicist named Albert Einstein who said, “If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.”



Chuck Slocum is president of The Williston Group, a Twin Cities management consulting organization. A past chair of the Independent-Republicans of Minnesota and executive director of the Minnesota Business Partnership, he is also a former corporate planning manager at Honeywell.

The Real Substance is After Inauguration Day

By Glenn T. Stanton

Both candidates' silence, while not golden, was perhaps bronze and probably benign for a number of reasons. This has to do with the nature of the candidates themselves, the character of this particular race, and the way meaningful family policy change actually happens.

First, the candidates. Neither was situated ideologically or personally to speak meaningfully to the issue. One candidate has had many wives. The other has not really seemed to have had a husband for decades. Both seem to be of the school that family can be quite pliable when we want it to be. This itself is one of the drivers of family fragmentation today. Additionally, it could be argued, even from a group called Focus on the Family, that an emphasis on jobs and national security at this point in our nation's history was an appropriate primary focus for the candidates, as these issues would have no small impact on the health and well-being of the family.

Then there was the character and quality of the race itself. It was a peerless spectacle, and not in a good way. Many of us would agree this terribly important topic of family vitality was best served being untainted by its association with the circus-

like display. Whatever discussion on the virtue of family coming out of it would most likely not have been the issue's finest moment.

Besides, we must note what motivated many of us as pro-family people to decide either for or against a particular candidate, even while being seriously turned off by them personally. A tipping point became the kinds of people they would appoint to numerous important positions. They would have very consequential and long-lasting influence on many of the policies that best ameliorate or increase family fragmentation, from Supreme Court justices to critical cabinet positions like the Secretary of HHS and his assistant secretary of the administration for children and families, to domestic policy advisors. This leads to the third point.

A strong case can be made that much of the family rhetoric bandied about by candidates in the heat of a white hot campaign can be very corrosive to the issue itself. That said, Carly Fiorina's fearless pulpit pounding on the problem of abortion—far

“The real substance is found, for good or bad, after the inauguration.”

more than she needed simply to establish her pro-life bona fides as a candidate—will hopefully go down in the political history books as an important time in our nation's public discussion on the topic. Senator Rubio regularly and easily talked about the importance of marriage and parenting for the health of the nation.

The bully pulpit of the campaign tends to be of limited beneficial effect. The real substance is

found, for good or bad, after the inauguration. Personnel is policy, as they say, and what is done there is truly impactful and has stickiness.

Consider, for example, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his 1965 report on black families; the policies of the Great Society; President Carter's very consequential 1980 Conference on Families; and President Reagan's tax policies and creation of a new presidential advisory position for domestic policy, employing Gary Bauer, which continued under President Clinton with Bill Galston.

Consider, also, the influential Clinton/Gore fatherhood initiative that many of us happily participated in and was substantially continued by the Bush administration; First Lady Hillary Clinton's very influential leadership in the U.N.'s Beijing World Congress on Women, which greatly concerned many of us; Bill Clinton's Welfare Reform Act; George W. Bush's groundbreaking marriage initiative, deftly led by Wade Horn; and President Obama's major support and advancements of LGBT policies.

We will watch with considerable interest to see what new family policies come from the cabinet and advisory and court appointments of the Trump administration. At Focus on the Family, our top desires for this new administration's family policies are:

- Defunding Planned Parenthood of all taxpayer dollars, which amounted to an estimated \$4 billion in the last eight years alone.
- Appointing Supreme Court justices and lower-court judges who keep themselves to the text of the Constitution and reserve creating legislation to Congress.
- Directing U.S. Health and Human Services to change the ObamaCare contraceptive

mandate by issuing new rules, or amending existing rules, to provide religious freedom and conscience protection for all nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies, and individuals.

- Directing the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education to revoke the "Dear Colleague" letter regarding restrooms and locker rooms in public schools.
- Working with Congress to enshrine the Hyde Amendment into law.
- And appointing individuals to key cabinet-level posts who will prioritize the investigation and prosecution of pornography and sex-trafficking crimes.

For good or bad, it is in the warp and woof of policies like these and others where the real mileage is made, during the real and difficult task of actually governing.

Glenn T. Stanton is the director of family formation studies at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs and the author of eight books on the family, most recently The Ring Makes All the Difference and Secure Daughters, Confident Sons.

The Loss of Hope

By Robert J. Wedl

What was this very unusual 2016 election about? One of my college sociology professors in the 1960s said, "The family is the cement of society." Was strengthening families viewed as important in this campaign? It depends on what one hears, I suppose.



President Trump used fear-based soundbites as the cornerstones of his campaign: build a wall, no Muslims allowed, make America great again, Hillary is a crook and a liar, terrible trade deals, bring jobs back from Mexico and China, restart the coal mines, and global warming is a hoax. Clinton focused on pre-K education and tuition-free college (borrowed from Senator Sanders), improving Obamacare, increasing the minimum wage, increasing alternative energy sources, reducing global warming, and noting that Trump's treatment of women and many other characteristics made him unfit to be president.

Campaigns today are about motivating your base to vote in huge numbers. They are about denying your opponent a banner. If the discussion between Trump and Billy Bush did not open the door for Clinton to run over the finish line, what would? Instead, voters, both men and women, "family values" advocates included, chuckled that it was just locker room guy-talk, further solidifying that Trump is just "one of us."

Campaigns are about winning. TV pundits tell us the debate winners are those who "didn't make any real mistakes," meaning, they did not say anything their base did not want to hear.

Is it even possible to discuss policies that focus on family fragmentation? I think it is, but first let me suggest that "fragmented families" is often code for "black families." Communities of color do not have a monopoly on family fragmentation. As a group, they have greater needs. We hear about the problems of the poor more often because they don't have the secret keys to escape legal consequences, as does the middle class. The lawyer gets the drug charge dismissed while the poor person takes a plea, guilty or innocent, and goes to prison for years. The impact on these families is quite different.

I suggest the main reason for family disintegration is the loss of hope. Loss of hope comes from poor education and poverty; the loss of a good job and bills piling up; loss of dignity and purpose leading to dependence on chemicals; men, primarily, and women being put in prison for decades for offenses that would result in a mere slap on the wrist for a middle-class person committing the same crimes. The past decade has seen an increasing number of mental health issues being "treated" by the prison system. These all result in loss of hope and the unraveling of the family tapestry, thereby spawning an abundance of problems for generations to come.

Candidates for national, state, and county offices can deal with these issues on a broad scale, but they must be cautious (Note: No Child Left Behind), as implementation responsibilities are often best left to states, counties, local entities, and families themselves. Families will be stronger when people are educated, healthy, employed, respected, and respectful. Hope lives in this scenario. Candidates should be proud to say their reason for running for office is to strengthen our families. And that if we do not, our nation's way of life in the Twenty-First Century will change. In this light, a few pithy suggestions.

Education. Our society must value learning. We will soon be experiencing the retirement of the Baby Boomers on a large scale. We must put in place tax incentives for companies to employ and train persons living in poverty. We must also create new models of schools for today's youth so that school attendance is motivating and purposeful, personalized and relevant. We need literacy-rich pre-K programs that include family education and education for youngsters age three to grade three that will assure they are on target by the end of third grade. Schools would teach about respect for each other and encourage community service for all students to be a part of learning.

Health. Candidates must say that healthcare is a right in America, just as it is in every nation on the planet. It is grandma and grandpa in the nursing home who are receiving the “welfare” benefits far more than is the inner-city teenage parent. Healthcare also means mental health care and family counseling when needed.

Employment. Tax incentives might be provided to corporations to locate in urban areas, with creation

“I suggest the main reason for family disintegration is the loss of hope.”

of grade 10 through 14 programs in partnership with high schools and colleges so that students either have their career certification, or two-year AA degree, when they finish high school, all at no added cost. A high school diploma was a 20th century goal.

Respect. What did Trump’s statements about women, the disabled, immigrants, etc. do to cause internal strife within families? When parents say they voted for him despite these failings what lesson is imparted to their children? Is this not a new method of family stress leading to family fragmentation? Welcoming people from other parts of the world is respectful and an American value. Our economy depends on more people working and having families. Schools, neighborhoods, churches, communities—even TV ads—can help with teaching respect for immigrants and for each other. Wouldn’t that be amazing?

We must address family fragmentation, because family hope and harmony are what cements our society.

Robert J. Wedl was Minnesota commissioner of education in Gov. Arne Carlson’s administration and deputy commissioner in Gov. Rudy Perpich’s administration. He currently is a senior fellow for Education Evolving and an adjunct professor in educational leadership at Concordia University.

The Importance of Naming the Problem

By Stephen B. Young

Our current age is dominated by the narcissism of the Baby Boomer generation. Narcissism naturally aligns with nihilism where self-absorption defines the parameters of truth differently for different folks. As has been said recently, the age of post-truth is now upon us generally.

Words that impinge on individual self-actualization, self-affirmation, self-definition are the most dangerous ones to utter in such an age. Fragile egos with no core of purpose or value other than self-satisfaction are to be protected against social conventions and discomfort at all costs.

In such a context, family is a dirty word, in harmony with misogyny, sexism, ageism, cisgenderism, homophobia, privilege, oppression, et al.

Therefore, why should family fragmentation be of any concern to any serious Baby Boomer and people who think similarly?

In a presidential election run last year with supersensitivity to Baby Boomer cultural tropes of all varieties, none of the major candidates—Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Gary



Johnson, Jill Stein—had a word to say about family fragmentation. Surprise?

It has thus come upon us that families are best to be understood as archaic constraints of little use and potentially detrimental disturbance to our well-being. Better, we are told, is the autonomy of the self, alone, standing unaided against the cosmos.

Really?

Silence about the importance of families is the new normal. Breaking up families may even be high up on the progressive agenda of reaching out for maximum anthropocentric happiness.

Yet not every step taken in life is genuinely a step forward. Some steps are regressive. That which destroys human capital and social capital I would say is, by definition, regressive. Here I assert a truth, not a comforting relativism.

Given that our species has evolved with a moral sense (welded into our brains by the fluid neurotransmitter oxytocin), among other innate attributes, that which cuts us off from others limits our potential. Extreme personal psychosocial isolation is as close we get to death while still living. We will have then entered a utopia, a no-such-place in the real world, just one inside our head.

Family failure undercuts humanity, what Mencius called “*jen*.” Parental dysfunction as we all have experienced (some more than others) cripples those caught in its emotional webs of mistrust and disappointment.

Why talk about this? It’s so depressing and intrusive from the perspective of our self-actualizing psyches. As self-actualizers, we don’t need others, so why worry about social conditions?

The quality of civilization, however, hangs on the discussion for better and for worse.

A friend of mine in Singapore just sent me a stark and hopeless email of despair on the state of the world today. He brought up these conclusions of Gibbon on a once great civilization: The five marks of the Roman decaying culture:

- Concern with displaying affluence instead of building wealth.
- Obsession with sex and perversions of sex.

“[W]hy should family fragmentation be of any concern to any serious Baby Boomer and people who think similarly?”

- Art becomes freakish and sensationalistic instead of creative and original.
- Widening disparity between very rich and very poor.
- Increased demand to live off the state.

Can we not conclude that all of these forces for decay are inculcated by family failures of one kind or another?

Capital of all kinds necessary for human flourishing—economic and financial, human dignity, cultural, and political—is consumed and not created or preserved.

When this happens, the first investment of social

capital provided to us at birth—family—is not attended to and so loses its quality, and we then seek recompense in selfish indulgence. Alternatively, as Shakespeare observed in *Julius Caesar*:

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to
fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it
serves,
Or lose our ventures.

Good families keep us in flood tides day in and day out.

I would borrow the tactic recommended by one of the forces that, in the hands especially of Baby Boomers, has contributed to family fragmentation: feminism. The call of the 1960s American feminists was to “name the problem.”

Confucius once said that the first task of the statesperson is to “rectify names” – to make sure that we are talking about the realities around us and that our speech illuminates all that is important to hold firm, and, if necessary, to correct.

Name-calling by itself accomplishes little, but it does direct attention. That which goes nameless lives in a void beyond cognition and social remediation.

That is why, when presidential candidates do not name one of our fundamental problems, they badly let us down. What is bad for us as individuals and in general should be named. It should not be another Lord Voldemort, lurking and subverting

our goodness and our hopes.

If we fix families, educational outcomes will be better. There will be less fear and mistrust among us. Our economic productivity will increase, as will our health. We will be happier.

What’s not to like in all this?

We should talk about it and demand that our leaders do, as well.

Resist!

Stephen B. Young is global executive director of the Caux Round Table. He also has served as dean and professor of law at Hamline Law School and founding chair of Center of the American Experiment.



8441 Wayzata Boulevard ★ Suite 350
Golden Valley, MN 55426

AmericanExperiment.org

To obtain copies of recent American Experiment reports such as Mitch Pearlstein's *Specifically, What Must We Do to Repair Our Culture of Massive Family Fragmentation?*, Peter Nelson's *Minnesotans on the Move to Lower Tax States 2016*, and Joseph Kennedy's *Minnesota's Economy: Mediocre Performance Threatens the State's Future*, or to subscribe to the Center's free quarterly magazine, *Thinking Minnesota*, email **Peter Zeller** at peter.zeller@americanexperiment.org, or call (612) 338-3605.

