

The Unraveling

At the moment we are facing a looming fiscal cliff, not to mention an increasingly tense international scene, America is confused over its own soul.

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(Dec 30) — The Oxford Dictionary has declared as its 2016 Word of the Year: "Post-Truth," defined as: "Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."¹

I suggest that the focus on the economic, social, political and racial realms of stratification are symptoms of one effect: Stratification in the ideological realm. I agree with Charles Murray when he states in "Coming Apart" that using race and ethnicity as reference points, while useful, "has distracted us from the way that the reference point itself is changing."² Therefore, I will argue that if we are to understand how the post-truth, multi-stratified world in which we live is causing the "American Project" to unravel, we must address the following:

Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Why is this ideological stratification happening, replacing the traditional melting-pot metaphor with a salad-bowl metaphor, such that the goal of diversity is not a strengthened alloy of one people, but a disparate stratification of many people groups all clamoring for, but never finding,

equality? If we answer this question, answers to the other three will follow as a matter of course.

The Original Reference Point

I believe that the moral character of Americans is shaped through what we believe, read and experience. These three things mold who we are and what we hold most dear. Therefore, that which we feed the minds of our citizens when they are young will be reflected in their behavior when they are old.

In his First Inaugural Address, President George Washington stated: "I behold . . . that the foundations of our national policy will be laid *in the pure and immutable principles of private morality*" (emphasis added).

The principle of private morality is the original reference point on which we must focus. I would like to dwell for just a moment on how a concerted effort led by liberal-progressive academics and their political allies among the elite ruling class of the 1920s and 1930s worked to unravel what Murray calls "the Founding Virtues of industriousness, honesty, marriage, and religion," which he introduces in Chapter 6 of "Coming Apart."

How would the young country promote Washington's concept of private morality? In 1836, William McGuffey published the "McGuffey Eclectic Reader." It was the nation's first common textbook, and sold over 120 million copies. John Westerhoff III, in his book "McGuffey and His Readers," wrote:³

When we investigate the content of "McGuffey's Readers," three dominant images of God emerge: God is creator, preserver and governor.

For over a century, the public schools of the United States used the "McGuffey Reader" to instill the "private morality" Washington had called for during his first inaugural address. But beginning in the 1920s, a movement arose to remove free-market economics and Christianity from what was taught to our young people. In 1934, Willard E. Givens issued this statement in a

report titled “Education for the New America” during the proceedings of the 72nd Annual Meeting of the National Education Association:⁴

A dying *laissez-faire* must be completely destroyed, and all of us, including the owners, must be subjected to a large amount of social control. A large section of our discussion group, accepting the conclusions of distinguished students, maintain that in our fragile, interdependent society, the credit agencies, the basic industries and utilities cannot be centrally planned and operated under private ownership. . . . Hence, they will join in creating a swift nationwide campaign of adult education which will support President Roosevelt in taking these over and operating them at full capacity as a unified national system in the interests of all of the people.

Another participant in this movement was Norman Woelfel, a doctoral candidate who studied under Dr. George Counts (part of a national commission to redesign the teaching of social studies in the U.S.) and Dr. John Dewey. In his 1934 book, “Molders of the American Mind, Woelfel” concluded:⁵

The things of highest value for individual experience and for ethical standards in modern America will not, however, be found out so long as intellectual leaders maintain sensitivity *over the supernatural significance of Christian mythology or a sentimental personal attachment to the character of Jesus* (emphasis added).

Today, the progressive educationalists have largely succeeded in their effort to remove Christianity’s influence from public education.

How our Character Changed

In 1954, Dr. George Docherty preached a sermon to commemorate the 150th birthday of Abraham Lincoln. Drawing from Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, Docherty declared that to omit the words “Under God” from the Pledge of

Allegiance was to omit “the characteristic and definitive factor in the American Way of Life.” Reflecting back on that time in his autobiography, “I’ve Seen the Day,” Docherty went on to say:⁶

I still consider my reasoning to be valid, but the times should have overruled my philosophical arguments as irrelevant in light of the greater issues at hand. . . . As such, the new Pledge unfortunately served as one more prop supporting the

civil religion that characterized the institutional Christianity of the fifties.

In other words, something had changed such that the words “Under God” no longer served as the definitive characteristic of the American Way of Life as it had in Lincoln’s day. What had happened? Writing for the Hoover Institution’s Policy Review’s August–September 2001 issue, Lawrence M. Stratton and Paul Craig Roberts wrote:⁷

The great depression’s most serious and long-lasting consequence was not the collapse of prices and employment, but the displacement of the traditional reliance on individual responsibility with government guarantees of security. Beginning with Social Security, these guarantees have grown into the all-encompassing welfare state. *This has changed the character of the American people, and it has changed the character of their government* (emphasis added).

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Amity Shlaes expanded on this topic in her seminal work “The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression.” She focuses on the year 1936 as when we created the “modern entitlement challenge” as Roosevelt figuratively rewrote the definition of the word “liberal,” changing its application from individual liberty and individual rights to that of group identity and rights.⁸

Shlaes explains that the title of her book comes from an essay by the same name written in 1883 by Yale professor William Graham Sumner. Sumner posited four men. Two of them, A and B, observe a third man, X, who is in need. They decide to use the machinery of government bureaucracy to transfer wealth to this third man, X. But the man who pays for this wealth transfer is neither A nor B, but a fourth man, C, whom we today might say is among the middle or lower middle class. In Sumner’s original construct, C was the forgotten man.⁹

Shlaes noted that the Roosevelt Administration took this concept and made the welfare recipient, X, the “forgotten man,” rather than C, the man Sumner first wrote about. Shlaes continued: “To justify giving to one forgotten man, the administration found it had to make a scapegoat of another. Businessmen and businesses were the targets.”¹⁰

The work to change the character of the American people found its completion in President Johnson’s Great Society programs. The expansion of what Shlaes called “the modern entitlement challenge” began in earnest during that administration. In 1984, Charles Murray’s book, “Losing Ground,” documented the transformation of the American character caused by these programs.

A century after the original “Forgotten Man” essay was written, Murray explained how modern

social policy had expanded the concept beyond income transfers. In his chapter titled “Rethinking Social Policy,” there is a section on education policy, “Robbing Peter to Pay Paul: Transfers from Poor to Poor.” Murray introduces the section by stating: “But in a surprising number of instances the transfers are mandated by the better-off, while the price must be paid by donors who are just as poor as the recipient.”¹¹

In this chapter, Murray provides a thought experiment wherein two poor inner city students are alternatively benefited and harmed by the federal government’s education policies. He posits

a teacher in an inner city school with students facing identical ethno-socio-economic circumstances, where one behaves in a “mischievous” way, and another does not. Out of a desire to protect the “mischievous” student’s civil rights, the education system prevents the teacher from disciplining him. As a result, Murray writes:¹²

I find that the quality of education obtained by the good student deteriorated badly, both because the teacher had less time and energy for teaching, and because the classroom environment was no longer suitable for studying. One poor and disadvantaged student has been compelled (he had no choice in the matter) to give up part of his education so that the other student could stay in the classroom.

This combination of two trends — a removal of Christianity and an extension of FDR’s repackaged “forgotten man” to what we might call the “forgotten student” — can be posited as the cause of plummeting test scores and diminished critical thinking skills. Efforts to substitute alternative methods of character education, using such works as Joseph Fletcher’s 1966 book, “Situational Ethics,” clouded rather than clarified moral thinking. Fletcher developed a theory of

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deciding what was right or wrong in a given situation based on four key principles: Pragmatism, Relativism, Positivism and Personalism.¹³

The culmination of these two trends was captured by Allan Bloom in his 1987 book titled: “The Closing of the American Mind.” Bloom is at his best when he analyzes Alexis de Tocqueville’s writings and applies them to the state of American education. Bloom writes that “the great danger, according to Tocqueville, is enslavement to public opinion. The claim of democracy is that every man decides for himself.”¹⁴ Because every man can decide for himself, Bloom argued that the new model of “value relativism” that Fletcher helped create allowed students to excuse themselves of that which their parents and grandparents once called sin.¹⁵

Applying this understanding of the impact of value relativism on the educational system, Bloom explained “The Closing of the American Mind” as follows:¹⁶

The upshot of all this for the education of young Americans is that they know much less about American history and those who were held to be its heroes. . . . relativism has extinguished the real motive of education, the search for a good life. Young Americans have less and less knowledge of and interest in foreign places. [This] openness results in American conformism — out there in the rest of the world is a drab diversity that teaches only that values are relative, whereas *here we can create all the lifestyles we want*. Our openness means we do not need others. *Thus what is advertised as a great opening is a great closing* (emphasis added).

Why is this ideological stratification happening, replacing the melting pot with a salad-bowl metaphor, leading to a disparate

stratification of many people groups all clamoring for, but never finding, equality? Because those who wish to change the character of the American people are better at using the tools of education and communication than those who wish to preserve it.

Replacing the Community Newspaper with the Social Network

The printing press led to the rise of pamphleteers such as John Locke and Thomas Paine, and eventually to the birth of the modern newspaper.¹⁷ Interestingly — perhaps due to the fact that the McGuffey readers played such a prominent role in American education — those

very same newspapers made heavy use of the Bible, and did so through much of America’s history. This observation is supported by the research of Dr. Lincoln Mullen, Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. He has compiled a database cataloguing references from the Bible in American newspapers from 1837 to 1922.¹⁸

Bible verses were once everywhere in newspapers.

Nineteenth-century periodicals printed Sunday school lessons, ran Bible clubs for readers and circulated sermons. Editorials alluded to well-known scriptural references, and verses even turned up again and again as the punch lines of jokes.

This practice extended into adulthood the moral and ethical teachings children learned at school and in their growing-up years. Thus, even though socio-economic stratification increased, ideological core beliefs, though stretched by “info wars” launched through the period of the muckrakers and yellow-dog journalism, were not

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snapped. These ideological core beliefs reinforced personal responsibility for one’s actions. It was a natural outgrowth of the educational process that had followed on the heels of the founders’ desire to nurture a society guided in private morality.

However, once these ideological core beliefs were removed and it became “morally permissible to be on welfare,” social norms made it increasingly difficult to hold individuals responsible for their circumstances.¹⁹ A and B’s income transfer policies under FDR’s and LBJ’s revised Forgotten Man synthesis had the unintended effect of expanding the number of people in the “X” recipient class. So, to get away from the Xs, the As and Bs moved to communities where they were surrounded by other A and B class individuals. The X and C class citizens were abandoned to live together, away from the gated communities of As and Bs. In “Coming Apart,” the As and Bs are people who “are *really* affluent and *really* well-educated.”²⁰ (emphasis in the original)

One last problem remained: How could the As and Bs in this Forgotten Man metaphor explain away the failure of their well-intentioned but misguided policies? Advocates of an anti-Christian, anti-free market philosophy emerged using the tools of the Internet to expand the efforts first begun by the Progressives, and redirect the blame.

The Liberal Left’s Move to Use the Tools of Social Media

Experts in social media understand that the best way to advertise on the Internet is via “viral

Millions of Unique Monthly Visitors for Top News, Political, and Viral Sites As Of 11/1/2016

Rk	Top News Sites	Monthly Visitors (Mill)	Rk	Top Political Sites	Monthly Visitors (Mill)	Rk	Top Viral Sites	Monthly Visitors (Mill)
1	Yahoo News	175	1	Huffington Post	110	1	Buzzfeed	150
2	Google News	150	2	The Blaze	25	2	Upworthy	45
3	Huffington Post	110	3	Drudge Report	21	3	ViralNova	29
4	CNN	95	4	NewsMax	16	4	Zergnet	26
5	New York Times	70	5	Politico	15	5	Little Things	25.5
6	Fox News	65	6	Salon	14	6	Distractify	25
7	NBC News	63	7	Info Wars	13	7	Thought Catalog	12.5
8	Mail Online	53	8	Breitbart	12.5	8	Ranker	12
9	Washington Post	47	9	Daily Caller	10	9	PlayBuzz	11.5
10	The Guardian	42	10	Washington Times	9.75	10	Uproxx	11
11	WSJ	40	11	CS Monitor	9.5	11	PolicyMic	10.5
12	ABC News	36	12	WND	9	12	KnowYourMeme	10
13	BBC News	35	13	DailyKos	6.5	13	DailyDot	6
14	USA Today	34	14	Think Progress	6	14	Twisted Sifter	4
15	LA Times	32.5	15	Townhall	5.5	15	Twenty Two Words	3.5

Source: *eBizMBA Rank* <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/news-websites>, <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/political-websites> and <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/viral-sites> . Accessed 11/23/2016

marketing.” The goal is to create a buzz akin to the concept of person to person “word of mouth” advertising, where one pushes a positive discussion of what one is promoting into the stream of conversation. Thus, viral marketing may defined this way:²¹

Any marketing technique that induces Web sites or users to pass on a marketing message to other sites or users, creating a potentially exponential growth in the message's visibility and effect.

Given this definition, it is instructive to document the number of unique monthly visitors of the top 15 websites listed in the categories of “news,” “political,” and “viral.” The table at right uses rankings provided by *www.eBizMBA.com*. Note that the Huffington Post is the third highest ranking site for news generally, and is number one

for political news sites. The Huffington's Post business model includes inviting as many as possible to blog for them, thus growing their link traffic. According to Alexa.com, there are 233,644 different sites linking to their site. The number two political news website, The Blaze, run by radio talk show host Glenn Beck, has only 13,295 websites linking in.²²

I would submit that the liberal left's use of articles designed to win the hearts and minds of Americans delivered via social networking sites is a key aspect of their viral marketing strategy. Dan Gainer of the Media Research Center has written extensively on the relationship between George Soros' Open Society Foundation and over 30 media organizations. One of the organizations he wrote about that receives funding from George Soros is the Center for Public Integrity, on whose board sits the Huffington Post's founder, Arianna Huffington, as well as other media elites.²³

Similarly, one can trace the connections of many of the viral sites to reveal ties to various liberal organizations. For example, according to an April 17, 2014, article titled "The Next Buzzfeeds? Five Hot New Websites," one learns that the founders of Uplink, Eli Pariser and Peter Koechley, formerly worked for Moveon.Org. Similarly, the founder and CEO of PolicyMic, Chris Altchek, had previously worked for Barack Obama's National Economic Council, and had done political organizing work for the Service Employees International Union.²⁴

Recommendations

In Chapter 3 of "Coming Apart," Murray argues that "a new kind of segregation" has

occurred in America. In this chapter, he argues the case that "the cultural divide between the new upper class and the rest of America is being reinforced by residential segregation that enables large portions of the new upper class to live their lives isolated from everyone else."²⁵ While the Baby Boom flower children of the 1960s did not have the means to control the larger society with

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their ideals, an elder Boomer class of aging hippies is capable of funding a tech savvy millennial generation to do so via the tools of social media.

William Strauss and Neil Howe coined the term "Baby Boom" generation in their 1991 groundbreaking book, "Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069." They defined the Boom generation as those born between 1943 and 1960, predicting that the next "secular crisis" Americans will face will

occur by 2025. One issue that Strauss and Howe clearly saw coming is what we now refer to as the "fiscal cliff." They also predicted that the Boomers would be moralistic in attitude — and that they would experience conflict within their generation over leadership philosophy "circa 2020."²⁶

Thus, at the moment we are facing a looming fiscal cliff, not to mention an increasingly tense international scene, America is confused over its own soul, asking who we are as a people, and what it is we believe. We do not trust our institutions, and therefore argue over what is or is not fake news. Unable to wisely discern, as a united people, the course we must chart in our moment of peril, we may fail to resolve Strauss and Howe's secular crisis of 2025.

Conservative academics are inclined to observe, analyze and commentate. Instead, like our progressive counterparts of the 1920s and

1930s, we must act. In 1934, liberal education leaders with ties to the Communist Party, like George Counts, worked to redefine how the social studies were taught in the United States. A Professor of Education at the Teachers College at Columbia University, Counts served as the Director of Research for what came to be called the Report of the Commission on the Social Studies and its report, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the Commission*. The longterm goal of the writers of the report was to develop a system of teacher education and realignment of social studies instruction that would support:²⁷

A larger measure of compulsory, as well as voluntary co-operation of citizens in the conduct of the complex national economy, a corresponding enlargement of the functions of government, and an increasing state intervention in fundamental branches of economy previously left to individual discretion and initiative — a state intervention that in some instances may be direct and mandatory and in others indirect and facilitative.

I propose that those groups and organizations that support conservative education in the areas of faith and economic self-responsibility, come together to explore how we might come together to develop suggested courses, lesson plans, reading lists and assignments geared toward equipping a new generation to articulate conservative, Judeo-Christian principles that reflect the founders' intentions under Constitutional rule of law. This effort should not be limited academics in higher education, but include those working with home school, Christian school and charter school organizations across the country. The mission of such a group should be to educate and equip the next generation of leaders, providing a better vision for Christian engagement in politics, the marketplace, and the broader public square

Lastly, we cannot simply look to the past to define our future. In his blog post "How the Word 'Post-Truth' Became the 'Word of the Year' and

What it Means for Evangelism," Greg Stier references Acts 17:28 in which Paul quoted a well-known Greek poem about Zeus. He writes:²⁸

Paul quoted a pagan poet to make a spiritual point. We ought to do the same. For us, this can be using things like music lyrics to popular songs or movie scenes to help make a spiritual point.

In a Post-Truth world, many voices will clamor to declare their version of America's story "*the truth*." That is why having a conversation with the culture about how we define the character of the American people is more important now than ever.

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