

# Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010

By Charles Murray

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**In the bestselling tradition of *Hillbilly Elegy*, the acclaimed bestseller that explains why white America has become fractured and divided in education and class**

In *Coming Apart*, Charles Murray explores the formation of American classes that are different in kind from anything we have ever known, focusing on whites as a way of driving home the fact that the trends he describes do not break along lines of race or ethnicity.

Drawing on five decades of statistics and research, *Coming Apart* demonstrates that a new upper class and a new lower class have diverged so far in core behaviors and values that they barely recognize their underlying American kinship—divergence that has nothing to do with income inequality and that has grown during good economic times and bad.

The top and bottom of white America increasingly live in different cultures, Murray argues, with the powerful upper class living in enclaves surrounded by their own kind, ignorant about life in mainstream America, and the lower class suffering from erosions of family and community life that strike at the heart of the pursuit of happiness. That divergence puts the success of the American project at risk.

The evidence in *Coming Apart* is about white America. Its message is about all of America.

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**Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010 By Charles Murray Bibliography**

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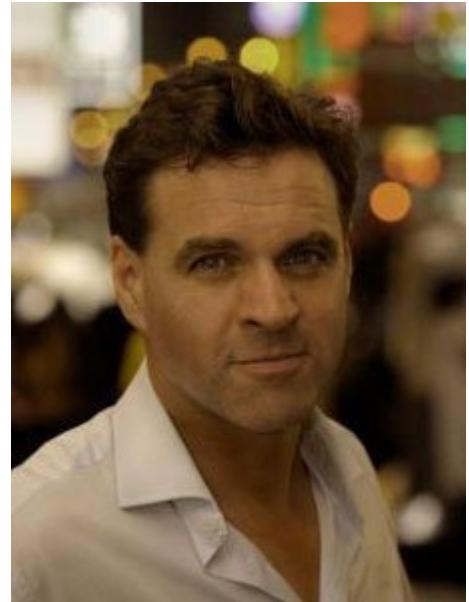
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## Editorial Review

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### Featured Guest Review: Niall Ferguson on *Coming Apart*



**Niall Ferguson is professor of history at Harvard, a fellow of the Hoover Institution and the author of numerous books, most recently *Civilization: The West and the Rest* and *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*.**

Since the advent of "Occupy Wall Street," there has been a tendency to assume that only the Left worries about inequality in America. Charles Murray's *Coming Apart* shows that conservatives, too, need to be concerned.

This is an immensely important and utterly gripping book. It deserves to be as much talked about as Murray's most controversial work (co-authored with Richard J. Herrnstein), *The Bell Curve*. Quite unjustly, that book was anathematized as "racist" because it pointed out that, on average, African-Americans had lower IQ scores than white Americans.

No doubt the same politically correct critics will complain about this book, because it is almost entirely devoted to the problem of social polarization within "white America." They will have to ignore one of *Coming Apart*'s most surprising findings: that race is *not* a significant determinant of social polarization in today's America. It is class that really matters.

Murray meticulously chronicles and measures the emergence of two wholly distinct classes: a new upper class, first identified in *The Bell Curve* as "the cognitive elite," and a new "lower class," which he is too polite to give a name. And he vividly localizes his argument by imagining two emblematic communities: Belmont, where everyone has at least one college degree, and Fishtown, where no one has any. (Read: Tonyville and Trashtown.)

The key point is that the four great social trends of the past half-century--the decline of marriage, of the work ethic, of respect for the law and of religious observance--have affected Fishtown much more than Belmont. As a consequence, the traditional bonds of civil society have atrophied in Fishtown. And that, Murray concludes, is why people there are so very unhappy--and dysfunctional.

What can be done to reunite these two classes? Murray is dismissive of the standard liberal prescription of higher taxes on the rich and higher spending on the poor. As he points out, there could hardly be a worse moment to try to import the European welfare state, just as that system suffers fiscal collapse in its continent of origin.

What the country needs is not an even larger federal government but a kind of civic Great Awakening--a return to the republic's original foundations of family, vocation, community, and faith.

*Coming Apart* is a model of rigorous sociological inquiry, yet it is also highly readable. After the chronic incoherence of Occupy Wall Street, it comes as a blessed relief. Every American should read it. Too bad only the cognitive elite will.

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#### From Booklist

\*Starred Review\* Despite the subtitle, Murray's book is actually about class in America, not race. By zeroing in on troubling trends in white America, he keeps the focus on the country's increasing polarization along class lines, on the growing isolation of the well-off from the poor, with each group developing radically different cultures, perspectives, and expectations from the other's. Murray provides historical context, showing that, before the 1960s, Americans of all races and classes had similar perspectives and expectations. Using census data for 1960 and 2000, Murray, coauthor of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994), shows increasing segregation of a college-educated elite living in "SuperZips" from those with little education, eking out a living in poor neighborhoods. Murray also shows strong divergence in education, employment, marriage, crime, and other indicators. Beyond statistics, Murray offers sketches of life lived in the upper class and the lower class and argues for the need to focus on what has made the U.S. exceptional beyond its wealth and military power, the ideals that have held a highly diverse nation together: religion, marriage, industriousness, and morality. Writing from a libertarian perspective, Murray offers a hopeful long view of elites, who have enormous influence on economic and social policy, coming to understand the peril of their disconnection from the rest of America. --Vanessa Bush

#### Review

"[A] searing sociological study." --*Businessweek*

"This is an immensely important and utterly gripping book . . . *Coming Apart* is a model of rigorous sociological inquiry, yet it is also highly readable. After the chronic incoherence of Occupy Wall Street, it comes as a blessed relief. Every American should read it. Too bad only the cognitive elite will." --Niall Ferguson, professor of history at Harvard and fellow of the Hoover Institution

"[Charles Murray] argues for the need to focus on what has made the US exceptional beyond its wealth and military power . . . religion, marriage, industriousness, and morality." --*Booklist* (starred review)

"A timely investigation into a worsening class divide no one can afford to ignore." --*Publishers Weekly*

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