

# Does America Need a 'Civic Great Awakening'?

When it comes to the direction of society Americans (surprisingly) agree: things are not getting better.

That's the conclusion one quickly draws from a recent Pew Research [report](#) which asks what America will look like in 2050. As the chart below shows, Americans think the country will be less important on a global level, the gap between socio-economic classes will grow, and the country will be more divided politically.

Dig deeper and the reason for such pessimism becomes clear: Americans recognize that major pillars of society are crumbling and will continue to do so in the next several decades. The following stats give a small glimpse of this realization:

- 37 percent of Americans believe work will decline due to the rise of robots
- 44 percent of Americans think standard of living will decline
- 46 percent of Americans think childbearing will diminish
- 50 percent of Americans think religion will become less important
- 53 percent of Americans think marriage will become less prevalent
- 72 percent of Americans are concerned about financial stability in retirement

Yup, it's depressing.

As I read these pessimistic views, I had a sense I had heard them before. Then I remembered. In his 2012 book, [Coming Apart](#), sociologist Charles Murray uses a variety of statistics

to show how American society as we've known it is falling to pieces.

For decades, Murray writes, American life was based upon the "Founding Virtues." Murray labels these virtues as "industriousness" (the virtue of hard work and provision for the family), "honesty" (the ability to conduct oneself with integrity), "marriage" (commitment to spouse and children), and "religiosity" (a recognition of the value of church and morality).

As Murray's research goes on to show, these virtues are increasingly ignored by many Americans, a fact which seems to be reflected in the pessimism laid out in the Pew Report. Clearly there is a problem, and many Americans are now recognizing this problem... but is there any solution?

Murray thinks there is, and he refers to this solution as "A Civic Great Awakening":

*We have been the product of the cultural capital bequeathed to us by the system the founders laid down: a system that says people must be free to live life as they see fit and to be responsible for the consequences of their actions; that it is not the government's job to stage-manage how people interact with one another. Discard the system that created the cultural capital, and the qualities we have loved about Americans will go away.*

...

*The drift away from those qualities can be slowed by piecemeal victories on specific items of legislation or victories on specific Supreme Court cases, but only slowed. It is going to be stopped only when we are all talking again about why America is exceptional and why it is so important that America remain exceptional. **That requires once again seeing the American project for what it has been: a different way for people to live together, unique among the nations of***

*the earth, and immeasurably precious.*

Is Murray right? Would the problems that many Americans are recognizing and rightly viewing with pessimism have a chance at changing course if we took a look at where we have come from and recognized that we may need to turn around and get back on that path?

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