

Rebuilding Social Capital in Trump Country

Posted By *Kevin E. Stuart* On May 9, 2019 @ 12:01 am In | [24 Comments](#)



Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse, Timothy P. Carney, Harper, 368 pages ^[1]

Harvard University Professor Harvey Mansfield begins the editor's note of his translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's seminal 19th-century study: "*Democracy in America* is at once the best ever written on democracy and the best ever written on America." He is right. The time is fast approaching two centuries since Tocqueville's brief sojourn in Jacksonian America, and while his reflections have inspired dozens of books from some of the 20th and 21st centuries' most thoughtful observers of politics—including Robert Nisbet, Robert Putnam, and Sheldon Wolin, to name but a few—we never quite seem to exhaust the Frenchman's insights.

Washington Examiner journalist Timothy Carney is the latest in the line of authors who take Tocqueville as their guide, and one of the chief virtues of *Alienated America* is Carney's skill at pairing social science data with Tocqueville's thought in a way that freshens Tocqueville and gives depth of meaning to the numbers. In the encounter with these alienated Americans, we reach the sharp point of the stick—the dangers Tocqueville saw latent in democracy and particularly in the people of the United States have now come to fruition. We are in trouble.

Let us begin by correcting a misnomer. The American economy nearly collapsed in 2008 in what has been called the Great Recession, a downturn topped only by the Great Depression in its severity and scale. And yet, 11 years on, the economy is not only back, but stronger than it was before most of us had ever heard of credit default swaps and mortgage-backed securities. There are, however, societal indicators more significant than GDP. The Real Great Recession, the subject of *Alienated America*, is the ongoing, widespread, half-century-long collapse of civil society, of

the relationships and institutions that are the foundation of a good life.

Just as the Great Depression shaped the lives of an entire generation, so the Real Great Recession of civil society is shaping us. “Civil society” encompasses the institutions that mediate between the individual and the state: everything from the family to one’s neighborhood, from churches to clubs, volunteer organizations, and even labor force participation rates. And all of these institutions have been in sustained decline for decades. Many are gone entirely.

Does it matter? Is it really so bad if people are less tied down, if most people have never married, if fertility plummets, if Main Street churches close, if Kiwanis, Rotary, and the Junior League wither? The common sense answer is that of course it matters, and it is bad. The thinking here is premised on an ancient insight that man is a political animal. Humankind’s distinction among the animals is that we deliberate together to shape a shared life. This is core to who we are and to our flourishing.



Carney takes the reader to communities where it is still happening, places such as Chevy Chase, Maryland, and Oostburg, Wisconsin. In the Maryland suburb outside Washington, D.C., we learn that extreme wealth and advanced education have insulated the people of that small village from the loss of social capital. Cultural elites, solidly Democratic voters, are practicing what conservatives preach. They have healthy marriages, children, robust public spaces, community events and offerings, and neighborly spirit. They are active in their schools and generous to those in need. In considerably less wealthy Oostburg, it’s religion that guards the health of civil society. People help one another, make sacrifices for the common good, and regard the town’s children as the responsibility of everyone. In these places, the American dream of getting ahead by working hard, of each generation achieving a little more than the previous one, is alive and well.

Elsewhere, where civil society has collapsed, life is very different. The alternative to civil society—what has taken the place of marriage, neighbors, religious communities, and meaningful work (the four factors that account for nearly all of the happiness gap between these places)—is the soft despotism of the tutelary state: anonymous, transactional, formulaic, and coercive.

These features of bureaucratic care were brilliantly encapsulated (unintentionally) by President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign video “The Life of Julia,” which went viral among conservatives. In the animated short, a woman, Julia, progresses through every stage of life from toddler to retirement with the assistance and support of federal government programs. And only government programs—no friends, no mate, no parents, no community. When Julia is a child, we do not see the parents who instilled in her the virtues that contribute to her later success. When

Julia has a child herself, there is no father there to share the responsibility. In her old age, it is not Julia's child who cares for her, but the "benevolence" of the federal government.

Julia's insipid life, even while materially well provisioned, is unappealing because it is largely devoid of the matrix of relationships—family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, co-religionists—that forms a meaningful life. For many Americans, as Carney demonstrates with ample, precise, and depressing statistics and anecdotes, a catastrophic loss of civil society (or social capital) is similarly affecting the prospects for a good life. They are like Julia, only poor. In those places, the American Dream is dead. Plagued by substance abuse, loss of economic mobility, unhappiness, anxiety, depression, and even suicide, they live in rotting towns marked by boarded-up buildings. People in these towns are alienated; they not only feel cheated, but no longer even feel a part of the social order. Opioids, transfer payments, free porn, and NFL football may keep them docile enough to avoid civil unrest, but those things are a terrible substitute for life.



Part of the book's conceit is that Carney goes in search of Trump Country, of the places where people supported Trump in the primaries over and against his more conservative rivals. One of the recovery's salient features Carney brings to light is the quality of life—and almost all of it has happened in the major metropolises. In fact, employment and the economy in small towns and rural areas have contracted further since the crash, even as large urban areas have seen one of the country's longest sustained expansions.

This partly explains why in the primaries Trump did poorly in most big cities, but was at his strongest in the areas that have seen no recovery. The more important explanation is that these are also the places where the collapse of social capital has been most complete. Trump beat Cruz more than two-to-one in the places where social disengagement is highest. Here is where Carney offers an important and original insight. Trump's core voters were often not themselves poor or struggling, but they are *from* places that are poor and struggling. That is to say, it was not the economic collapse of 2008 that got Trump elected; it was the civil society collapse of the last 50 years that did. The culture is more important than the economy.

Is there hope? This is America—of course there is. But if the hope is to be realistic, it has to confront the truth of what really generates social capital and builds civil society—of what really makes a good life. The most important institutions bar none are marriage, family, religion, and meaningful work. And there's data to prove it, from Raj Chetty's research on social mobility within neighborhoods, Mark Regnerus's tour of the contemporary mating market's wreckage, and W. Bradford Wilcox's analysis on marriage and economic success. What we learn from the best social science minds today is that the prospects for the future depend above all on a society that offers wide latitude to religious organizations and fosters family formation.

No amount of GDP growth will fix what's broken. That said, the prescription can be stated simply and clearly (even if achieving it will inevitably be more complex and difficult): a culture that encourages people to go to church, graduate from high school (preferably with marketable skills), get married, and have children (and in that order).

When people do that, it's almost like magic. Happiness goes up, poverty goes down; health gets better, suicide decreases; communities flourish and crime declines.



So what do we do? As a conservative, Carney is apprehensive about attempting much through public policy. After all, centralization and the smothering of mediating institutions are the core of the problem. He rightly prescribes local action (start a T-ball team or a coffee group or a book club), but is too quick in letting public policy mostly off the hook: "Where paving stones have killed grass, removing the stones doesn't guarantee the grass will come back." True, but you cannot successfully re-sod the ground until the stones *are* removed. A wide array of federal and state policies that discourage skilled trades, penalize marriage, disempower families, and offer perverse incentives to the vulnerable need to change. Those which harass churches, confessional charities, and religious businesspeople are actively harming American society and especially the poorest among us. Those policies (whether practices, laws, or court precedents) must change.

Our fellow Americans on the secularist Left will have to decide whether they care more about the most vulnerable in our society or their project of ridding public life of any trace of religion. If the former, then the prospects for compromise legislation improve. At the same time, they will need to stop chasing religious organizations out of adoption, stop threatening to push them out of healthcare (if, say, they refuse to perform abortions, euthanasia, or gender reassignment surgeries), and stop punishing (as Yale University recently did) those who go to work for religiously aligned employers. Churches are absolutely central to American civil society. As Robert Putnam once wrote, "Religious Americans are, in fact, more generous neighbors and more conscientious citizens than their secular counterparts."

Those on the Right will have to bend as well, using the fearsome power of the state, at least at times and for a while, to create conditions where vulnerable institutions can grow stronger and, once healthy, displace much of the state's current workload. When the stones are removed, it is worth exploring what incentives might help nurture new growth in social capital. We have a lot to learn from our thriving immigrant communities. Policies and programs that discourage family members from taking care of one another and that force churches out of social services need to be identified and replaced with policies and programs that foster family health and community



strength.

Reorienting our political imagination to center around social capital—and particularly the importance of marriage, family, and religion—will lead to policies that create a healthy social environment in which relationships and institutions can flourish and rebuild our society. Even if that requires using the tax code in ways that smack of social engineering.

One of Tocqueville's many other insights is that in a democratic society marked by flux, the law (and lawyers) will be the guardian of fixed commitments. The law is a teacher, and at every possible opportunity our law should commend to the next generation the priority and goodness of those fundamental relationships that promote the general welfare and are central to the pursuit of happiness. For all the attention economic growth receives, our country's future hangs on whether and how we stop the slide of a half-century-long recession in social capital and restore civil society.

Kevin E. Stuart is executive director of the Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture.

24 Comments To "Rebuilding Social Capital in Trump Country"

#1 Comment By [Forthright Assets](#) On May 8, 2019 @ 11:57 pm

[2]

No problem with sharing these views. Just good to be transparent about where they are coming from, and their considered parameters of acceptable debate.

#2 Comment By [Whine Merchant](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 4:45 am

Well, if you are genuinely talking about social capital, and not as a proxy for fiscal capital, then we need to admit that this is not political in the usual sense of the word. Articles and comments at TAC usually have a political theme, frequently overly simplistic "left" and "right", sometimes Dems and GOP, other times "elites" and "yokels".

Social conservatism is about preserving what is good, not just railing against all change. Sadly, too many social conservatives I see would gladly return to pre-Civil Rights Mayberry, insulated from any change at all. The strawman "liberal" SJW does not want to destroy families, but wants to allow each person to have the family that they want, free of bureaucratic involvement, even if it is different to 1950s black and white Hollywood shows. They want neighbours and close friends too, and want them to live next door, even if of a different colour or creed.

Trump's Deplorable are understandably angry about their circumstances, and rightfully feel betrayed. But it is betrayal of a myth sold by Madison Avenue, Hollywood, and false preachers, not "progressives" nor the gub'ment.

The destructive influence is the ease and pandemic of illicit drugs. Abortion, birth control, welfare and government programs do not make people abuse drugs. Programs may be abused by the feckless, but they do not destroy social capital.

Thank you –

#3 Comment By [TheScientist880](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 6:31 am

Not the success sequence nonsense again. There is no evidence that the people truly struggling will end up not struggling if they graduate from HS. There are tons of high school grads who struggle with HS diplomas in hand. Marriage is a lagging indicator for men, not a leading indicator meaning that a man is already viewed as a stable partner by the time he is getting married typically for successful marriages. The marriage doesn't make him a stable partner.

Oostberg is just about at median income for the nation at \$59k a year. The poverty rate in the area is WAY lower than the national rate at around 2.27% vs 13.4%. This is a poor example. I would want to see an example of a truly struggling area with a thriving social scene.

I know conservatives want to beat the drum of the cities being rich centers but this totally ignores the Detroit, Dayton Ohio, Milwaukee, and Rochester of the world that DID NOT vote for Trump even though they are experiencing some of the most serious economic struggles in the country. Trump lost all large cities and the vast majority of midsized cities as well. It's not just some wealth thing.

#4 Comment By [Kent](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 7:07 am

" culture that encourages people to go to church, graduate from high school (preferably with marketable skills), get married, and have children (and in that order)."

And these things are dependent upon the availability of good-income producing jobs. The items in the list above happen automatically when people see a brighter future for themselves. When they can imagine flourishing within their communities.

Unfortunately, conservative economic policies over the last 40 years has destroyed those opportunities. Yes there are more jobs today than at any time in history. However, what conservatives find impossible to understand is that not all jobs are the same. Having a good union job that can last for 30 years with pay raises, healthcare and retirement is not the same as having 2 part-time barista jobs with no benefits and no confidence you'll have a job tomorrow.

What the author here doesn't understand is that economic capital is what creates social capital. Together they create an upward spiral of flourishing. The adoption of Reaganomics and the free market ideology was guaranteed to destroy families, religious belief and community.

Unfortunately, we are stuck in an America where the right is controlled by an evil libertarian ideology and the left is controlled by an evil identitarian ideology.

#5 Comment By [Lert345](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 9:40 am

The same problems afflict poor city residents – broken families, underachieving children, lack of social capital and crime. But most of these people are not Trump voters.

#6 Comment By [Dan Green](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 9:55 am

I contend, we are experiencing the full effects of well intended globalization. My first hand experience was as a senior executive working for a fortune 500 multinational who at one point had some 70 manufacturing facilities in North America. Most were in rural communities . Decent wages were common with excellent benefits for skills we taught. Little did the employees know in our board rooms plans to shut down these factories and either contract Asian labor or hire Asian labor was underway. Also underway was to incorporate in Bermuda then later Ireland. Point being

these small towns left these workers with no transferrable skills and limited opportunity to earn the same income. This isn't rocket science why the youth flee these communities and huddle in major city centers. They then live socialize and work with their own kind.

#7 Comment By [TomG](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 10:12 am

The fundamental flaw of the analysis of declining rural America presented here (and in numerous other efforts looking at 'correlation' analysis by others) is that it seems to presume this is some unique problem for 'middle America.' But the causation of an economy that is inherently extractive and violent is every bit as problematic for anywhere in America.

There is no loyalty to place or community in the global strategy and somehow the fact that China beats us at our own game time and again is supposed to waken us to some panacea of trade policy that will fix it all. Technology and its new shiny goo-gaw, AI, will always be preferred to actual workers doing the work. Corporations go to cheap labor where they haven't yet figured out how to get rid of labor altogether. I don't have the answer to economic justice for all, but reckoning with automation in this global economy we find ourselves is an important conversation we must have. If Mr. Stuart wants to tie this as religion and family being issue number one and two, well, then acknowledge that be it city or country, the religion of this country is might makes right and profit above long term common good.

I'm a country boy and have seen first hand the disintegration of rural communities. Certainly, the inverse subsidizing of agri-business commodity cropping over sustainable small farming is a major driver to all this poverty in the countryside, but alas it is yet one more example of our unrelenting extractive and violent economy. Until that model is addressed, city and country will suffer. The problems may appear different—one thriving and one not, but the risks, poverty and degradation of the eco-system are shared. Yet again, there is more that unites us rather than divides us if we will but awaken.

Also, since Mr. Stuart mentions the wealthy 'blue city' democrats 'living the values espoused by conservatives, I would direct readers to Benjamin Schneider's thoughtful post in The Nation where he points out that the so called progressive communities have built their own walls of exclusion by zoning laws. They may talk 'green new deals' but the reality of their housing and urban policies still is all about number one. He points to some concrete reasons for the lack of affordable housing:

"Los Angeles went from being zoned to accommodate 10 million people in 1960 to 4.3 million in 2010. San Francisco's 1978 citywide downzoning decreased the number of housing units that could be built in the city by 180,000, equivalent to more than 50 percent of the city's housing stock at that time."

#8 Comment By [William Gordon](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 10:40 am

I do think simplistic: Republican good, Democrat, bad; conservative Christian good, progressive Christian mega-bad perspectives are a big part of our problem.

It's true that we progressive Christians and liberal Democrats have fewer abortions, more stable marriages and children who are successful in academic and economic terms compared to conservative Christian Republicans.

It's also true that we progressive Christian Democrats happen to live in areas of the country which suffered much less from the horrendous harm Reaganomics did to our country.

All those little farmers knee-jerk voting Republican – and yet who was it who established the legislation favoring the big agricultural conglomerates over the little guys?

All – well, the list is long and it's too tempting to make the same mistake from my side of the divide as so many conservatives here do: It's all the other side's fault. Everything.

Nope. For starters, we're one country. Yes, I get the pathetic dreams of people seeking to re-fight the 1860's. What they forget:

- 1) We libruhls would not fight to keep you, we'd let you go. We'd help you pack, take back our nukes, keep Austin and Atlanta and wave goodbye when you got on the train to Nowheresville.
- 2) You're not even a significant minority of the country.

#9 Comment By [TheScientist880](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 10:58 am

The vast majority of high schools do not teach people marketable skills and never have. People learned in the job in that 1950's era and certainly didn't have high school diplomas universally. The majority of Americans didn't graduate from high school until the mid 1950's. The vast majority of the population does not attend or live near a tech high school which could provide narrowly useful skills as well.

#10 Comment By [Roy Fassel](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 11:01 am

There is no question that the divide between the upper and lower is widening into dangerous territory, which usually ends up with some sort of revolution to even out the wealth. There is no question that America has move from and agricultural and manufacturing culture to a technology and science driven economy, which is usually centered in the urban areas.

Part of the problem is agricultural prices are driven by global prices. This is a rough analysis but explains part of the problem.....when looking at certain agriculture prices in the 70-90s period and now. The current prices do not reflect the increased cost of operation through the years and therefore reflects the squeeze on the bottom line.

Soybeans 70-90s—\$8.00 was hit many years. Today, because of the Trump tariff nonsense....around \$8.00

Wheat 70-90s...\$5.00 hit many times. Today around \$4.50.

Corn 70-90s—\$3-\$4.00. Today around \$3.50.

Cotton during the 70-90s hit 80c many times. Today it's around 75cents.

Agricultural prices and income are the driving revenue for many rural areas and global prices are very competitive.

There might not be viable solution politically to address this issue. Agricultural subsidies are already quite robust!

#11 Comment By [JeffK](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 11:26 am

@Whine Merchant says:
May 9, 2019 at 4:45 am

100%.

I remember my wayward youth back in he 1970's growing up in New Castle, PA, a mill town north of Pittsburgh. New Castle was BOOMING, with many types of mill jobs and supporting industries and businesses. Per Wiki, "In 1950, the population peaked at 48,834, but became part of the rust belt, with population dwindling to 28,334 by 1990.". I doubt the population has

increased much above 1990 levels.

What happened? Almost every one of those mills closed. Imagine what happens to lives, families, community, and property values when the population of an area self-deports to 50% of previous levels. The city collapses. Property tax revenue plummets, and social services degrade or totally fail.

"The destructive influence is the ease and pandemic of illicit drugs. Abortion, birth control, welfare and government programs do not make people abuse drugs. Programs may be abused by the feckless, but they do not destroy social capital." –

When I was in college ('75-'80), the area was still prosperous. At the end of the day, it all came down to JOBS. People would get up and go to work 6-7 days of the week, come home, hang with the family and friends, and then maybe go out at night and party. And many partied quite hard. But they got up in the morning and went to WORK.

Many types of drugs (pot, coke, legal speed (black beauties, yellow jackets)hallucinogens) were abused by many types of people. Except, of course, those that just weren't inclined or exposed. But they did it in relative moderation. Most aged out of the party lifestyle as they married and had kids.

This article started out interestingly enough, and said many truths. Unfortunately this author then took it down the typical 'conservative' strawman beatdown of 'the Left' and laid every issue at their feet, without offering any real analysis or remedies.

Let me repeat it again. Most of society's problems can be solved by a simple, 4 letter word. JOBS. When people have a job that provides some satisfaction, a living wage, and safe working conditions they will come home after work and enjoy family and support community. When their JOBS are shyte, or non-existent, you will have dysfunctional people living in dysfunctional communities.

JOBS. This is the one place Trump and I agree. Trouble is his remedies will make things much worse before they make it marginally better, if at all.

#12 Comment By [Virginia Gentleman](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 12:02 pm

The old fashioned town square in the opening photo is exactly the location that every small town in America deserted starting in the fifties. You can blame automobiles, if you like, but you can't blame Left or Right or Walmart. The people voted and the only ones who have ever objected are the sentimentalists who want to go back to Mayberry, as someone else said above.

#13 Comment By [Hank Linderman](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 12:22 pm

A stronger than ever economy? Sure, if all you look at is the stock market. The benefits are not trickling down and they never will.

There is virtually nothing in this piece that I agree with, other than that rural America is in crisis. Rural citizens vote mostly Republican, surely that deserves some consideration.

Why is there no Republican support for Rural Broadband, higher minimum wage, support for rural hospitals, support for single-family and cooperative farms, legalized cannabis (a cash crop if there ever was one and a positive influence on lowering opioid addiction rates), a serious approach to addiction, punishment for overzealous opioid manufacturers who encouraged the prescription of addiction in rural America? It is progressives who are willing to tackle these and other issues but so far they have gotten only limited traction.

The real reasons rural America remains in crisis and in the control of Republicans are social issues – God, guns, gays, and gynecology. This is what allows rural Americans to be taken advantage of by the grifter wing of the Republican Party. These people have no actual values other than money and power. And yes, there are grifters in both Parties. Neither justifies the other.

Time and the world are moving on, rural America will need more than a booming stock market and traditional beliefs to overcome the crisis they are in.

#14 Comment By [Collin](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 1:37 pm

Our fellow Americans on the secularist Left will have to decide whether they care more about the most vulnerable in our society or their project of ridding public life of any trace of religion.

Geez, it turns there are lots of Christian Democrats is you cared to look and maybe work with them. Did you notice Biden is leading 45 – 50% of Christian Democrats? How do conservatives expect to grow the impact of the church if they don't include ~45 – 50% of the population?

#15 Comment By [JeffK](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 2:50 pm

@Collin says:
May 9, 2019 at 1:37 pm

"Our fellow Americans on the secularist Left will have to decide whether they care more about the most vulnerable in our society or their project of ridding public life of any trace of religion."

I don't get the point. That statement is a logical fallacy – Either/Or Reasoning (#45). Also False Dilemma, All or Nothing Thinking; False Dichotomy, Black/White Fallacy.

The Secular Left can do neither, one, or both. There is no real relationship between the two.

[3]

#16 Comment By [Tom Blanton](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 4:04 pm

"Those on the Right will have to bend as well, using the fearsome power of the state, at least at times and for a while, to create conditions where vulnerable institutions can grow stronger and, once healthy, displace much of the state's current workload."

Will Church Patrol Swat Teams come and take people to church? Or will churches and government approved civil organizations receive subsidies?

#17 Comment By [FJR – Atlanta](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 4:17 pm

Definition of society: A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. The issue lies in part due to the minority political (and religious) authority not being aligned with the dominant cultural expectation. This is exemplified in the issue of marriage. As the cultural expectation wanted to expand the definition, the former fought. At some point, the cultural expectation on marriage changed to "why bother."

#18 Comment By [FL Transplant](#) On May 9, 2019 @ 5:14 pm

I found Carney's book to be the best non-fiction book I've read in a number of years. It was well

thought out, highly researched, and strongly supported with data, studies, and analysis. I'd recommend it to anyone interested in the current state of America.

At the end of the book, though, I was left hanging—Carney did a great job identifying and delineating a number of problems, but had little in the way of potential solutions. At the same time I have to say that I find it hard to come up with any myself. What's needed is a change so deep and significant that I find it hard to see how anything less than something along the lines of being inducted into the military, forced through basic training and living in a controlled environment—something like what happened to J. D. Vance that he describes in his book "Hillbilly Elegy"—can accomplish the needed changes.

#19 Comment By bt On May 9, 2019 @ 7:30 pm

There are a lot of interesting threads in this article, but one stood out to me for its unintended ironies:

It is this section:

"This partly explains why in the primaries Trump did poorly in most big cities, but was at his strongest in the areas that have seen no recovery. The more important explanation is that these are also the places where the collapse of social capital has been most complete."

Something here is not adding up. These unhappy rural places are for the most part whiter, redder and more religious than these socialist hellholes in the big bad cities full of people that don't like Trump. Why has the social capital in these small towns shriveled? It's certainly not the gays, they know to get out of dodge when they come of age in places like that.

If these red Trump areas that are more or less ruled continuously by Republicans are deeply distressed and so unhappy with their Republican politicians that they went for Trump while people in blue areas are prosperous and seemingly happier, why is that?

According to conservative principles, the people in the blue areas should be deeply unhappy – with our suffocating government, low morals and with the atheism and gayness all over the place, while people who are in these red areas clinging to the guns and bibles should be very happy. But they are not happy, and it seems that the notion that people who live in blue areas might be happier and more prosperous than they seems to be driving them to an angry froth. Angry enough to elect an idiot impostor Republican for President. If you stop and think about it though, they should be angry, they are following the conservative program, they are voting for Republicans and it's not working at all.

It's interesting to ponder the nature of economic growth and decline, the issues are interesting and real. Of why places exist and what happens when circumstances change. But Conservative ideology doesn't seem to be offering any coherent answers to what's wrong with the middle of the country.

Even most of the authors on TAC aren't foolish enough to think that if we all just went back to Church that would fix it all. Meanwhile Trump comes along and pins it all on the Mexicans and Muslims and these distressed places are all in. Trump is a con man; he has read his marks like a book and they sort of know they are being conned but they are not finding any solutions that fit their ideological framework so Trump will have to do. And the anger keeps building, while there offspring keep moving away to go to college and never return.

No one has good answers for places like Buffalo or Troy NY, places that were economically abandoned when the Erie Canal lost its luster with the coming of the railroads, nor for Gary Indiana, a former steel town without its steel mills. But one thing is for sure, it's not the fault of the Atheists, Gays, Mexicans and Muslims and if you think it is, and that it's time for a 2nd amendment remedy, you are very deep down the hole with no rope.

#20 Comment By Stavros On May 9, 2019 @ 10:52 pm

Try building social capital and community engagement when you are in the "gig economy" with a job lasting week to week with no benefits, no health insurance, no long-term savings, and no commitment. Try joining Rotary when your retail job is limited by corporate fiat to 29 paid working hours, the better to reduce benefits costs, while at the same time keeping you "on call" at two hours notice for 50 unpaid hours a week to staff up the store when they randomly need you. Try attending Sunday church when your job requires you to work as an exempt supervisor and devote countless hours of unpaid overtime, even if your salary is a meager \$30,000 a year, to keeping your department functioning at pain of termination if you slip up. And try running a girl scout troop when your time off or flexible schedule for child care is zero. Conservatives rightly rail against government substitutions of national social programs for local social capital, but they turn a blind eye on market failures that directly destroy that social capital. I've seen it and I am tired of those who tell me the "free market" is the solution to our social woes. It isn't free, it is not proving beneficial, and it is in dire need of a New Progressive Movement that will re-define employment and work to re-humanize employees and re-capitalize our communities.

#21 Comment By Wayne Lusvardi On May 10, 2019 @ 1:23 am

Firstly, social capital is always bound up in some way with economic and spiritual capital (following Max Weber). What can be done to rebuild social capital?

A starting point might be to re-build the old local-generational economy where the old saved by putting their money in local banks. In turn the banks lent the money to young families for cars, houses and small businesses. And, again, in turn, the young families paid the elderly a decent return on their money (6% to 8% per annum). This local economy created a virtuous cycle whereby money was recirculated locally.

This cyclical-sharing economy was eclipsed by globalism which turned banks into vehicles to invest in global stocks, bonds and mortgage backed bonds, which brought about the Mortgage Meltdown of 2008 to 2012, the bad consequences of foreclosures, bankruptcies, divorces and opioid abuse fell disproportionately on the private, working class in mid America whose jobs were outsourced since the 1970's.

#22 Comment By Rob G On May 10, 2019 @ 8:57 am

Funny—The author faults both left and right in the article, but all the former still show up to play "Whatabout!"

The working assumptions in this rhetoric seem to be:

- A) The left is never wrong, and thus can never admit fault for anything.
- B) On those occasions when the left seems to be wrong, any resultant "problem" can be fixed by the application of more leftism.
- C) Thus, the only time that the left can be wrong is when it isn't being leftist enough.

Note that this is exactly the same approach that fundamentalists take towards the Bible. It makes true debate impossible.

It also makes one wonder, if they're so sure of the rightness of their cause(s), why are they so defensive?

#23 Comment By Rob G On May 10, 2019 @ 12:38 pm

"Something here is not adding up. These unhappy rural places are for the most part whiter, redder and more religious than these socialist hellholes in the big bad cities full of people that don't like Trump."

Can't speak for the entire nation, but in the area I'm most familiar with, SW Pa. and SE Ohio, the places that went for DT and have also lost social capital aren't just purely rural, but smaller rust-belt communities that are largely blue, and had previously voted for Obama twice. Many of these places would have gone for the Democratic candidate had A) it not been HRC, and B) the person would have paid them a dime's worth of attention. It's even possible that HRC may have eked out a victory had she done so. For documentation on this, see Justin Gest's book *The New Minority*.

"Trump is a con man; he has read his marks like a book and they sort of know they are being conned but they are not finding any solutions that fit their ideological framework so Trump will have to do."

Again, this perhaps partially explains the red areas that went for DT, but it entirely misses those places that were blue before the election, but where Trump won. Expand your horizons — you're doing waaaaaaaaaaaaay too much broad-brush painting. Unless you want to see DT for another four years, which I certainly don't, quit blaming the "right" for everything and take some damn responsibility. I say this as an independent conservative who hasn't voted for the GOP on the national level since 2008.

#24 Comment By JeffK On May 10, 2019 @ 1:53 pm

@Rob G says:
May 10, 2019 at 12:38 pm

"Unless you want to see DT for another four years, which I certainly don't, quit blaming the "right" for everything and take some damn responsibility. I say this as an independent conservative who hasn't voted for the GOP on the national level since 2008."

Bingo. 100%. I grew up in New Castle, PA. Left in 1980 after college graduation, and never went back, except for visits and funerals. I too am a registered Republican, but quit voting that way after GB2's first term.

Democrats need to focus on class, without regard to race, and not dwell on sexual preference. Gays need to be protected from discrimination. After that they should be treated like everybody else.

HRC was a bad candidate, for lots of real and fake reasons. The Democrats did a great disservice to the party by ramming her nomination through.

They must not make that mistake again. Biden, at this time, looks like a pretty good bet for POTUS. The VP can be a bit more progressive but cannot be seen as a crazy SJW.

URL to article: **<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/rebuilding-social-capital-in-trump-country/>**

URLs in this post:

[1] Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse, *Timothy P. Carney, Harper, 368 pages*: **<https://amzn.to/2H6QIEt>**

[2] : **<https://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/news/2014-03-03/austins-new-no-sex-institute/>**

[3] : **<http://utminers.utep.edu/omwilliamson/ENGL1311/fallacies.htm>**

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