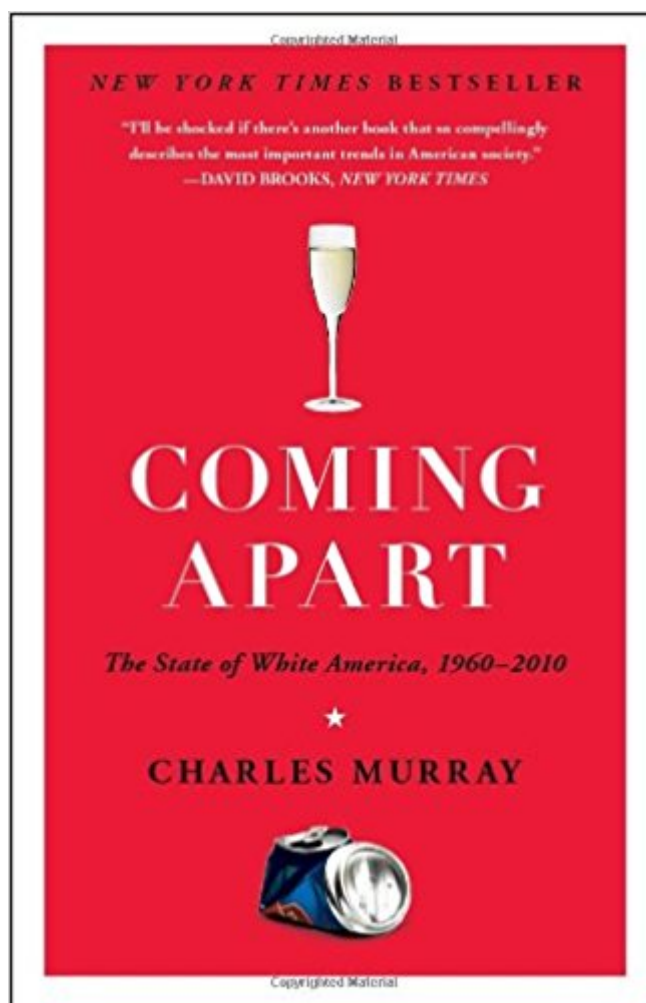


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# Coming Apart: The State Of White America, 1960-2010



## Synopsis

Coming Apart - an 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—a 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

**\*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 --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

Charles Murray, in this book prophetically described the fissure in American society between the Elites, based primarily on the Coasts, and working class White America which has now been politically expressed in Donald Trump's political movement of the alienated, bringing him successfully to the White House. Murray's book is a sociological study and not a political one, but he warns how these two groups of Americans have grown apart so that they have almost no contact nor understanding between them. Whereas in the past, conscription brought different groups of Americans together in military service, today people in these groups live separate lives. In addition, whereas in the past, working class whites with just a high school education were able to get good paying jobs like the automotive and steel industries, for example, jobs of that type have largely disappeared, leaving this group frustrated and unable to get ahead in the world as their parents did. This has led to breakdown in family life and unfortunately high levels of drug abuse, alcoholism, poor health and large numbers of children growing up in broken homes with inadequate parental guidance from two parents. The result is the rapid growth of a white underclass of people locked into a cycle of poverty and hopelessness. The black community has suffered for many years from this situation, but now a large group of whites are now suffering the same thing. As I said, Murray's book is a sociological study, but the political ramifications we are just beginning to see now, with the rise of Donald Trump to the Presidency. It is unfortunate for Hillary Clinton and President Obama that they apparently aren't aware of the facts that Murray spells out in the book because if they had, they would have understood better the anger and frustration of so many white people whose parents lived in an optimistic world of American promise, but whose children have seen that promise evaporate.

Charles Murray provides a data-driven report on how white America's changing faithfulness to what he calls the United States' four founding virtues: Religiosity, Marriage, Industriousness and Honesty, has changed the fabric of American society since 1960. Having read this book over a period of a few weeks on either side of the 2016 presidential election that has brought Donald Trump within six weeks (as of this review) of the Oval Office, I saw how anyone with Murray's perspective could have predicted how the vote would be split along lines of geography, education, and income. "Coming Apart" remains a highly relevant read to those with the patience to work through some fairly dense material about why America is what it is today. Murray views the four founding virtues mentioned above as the basis of "American exceptionalism," a phrase he uses to summarize how America is different from (not necessarily better than) any other country. That said, Murray's veneration of the four founding virtues and their role in the success of the American experiment over many generations is clear. So too, is his fear of America ending its experiment with a government that allows people to define and pursue their own happiness, rather than defining it for them. That, in Murray's view, would result in the United States becoming unexceptional among nations. The book is not for someone in search of a canned ideology or a casual read. Murray marshals much sociological data, and observations of 19th-century sociologists about how Americans used to be, in support of his conclusions and prognosis for whether the American Experiment can continue. Readers will need to focus to absorb it. Murray's thesis regarding the American educational system as a people-sorting mechanism that helps to self-perpetuate a new stratification of citizens into the current elite class, is cogent and fascinating. Add data showing that smart, well-educated kids come from smart, well-educated parents, and you have the rise of new American ruling families. They are a scant percentage of our total population. They lead us yet they have, in many ways, lost touch with us. Murray offers a somewhat amusing, yet thought-provoking quiz to help you understand how much you have in common with the elites who have isolated themselves, in many ways, from the other 98% of Americans. Murray's analysis of what has happened to working-class white America's adherence to the four founding virtues from 1960-2010, is sobering. And, Murray sees the subtle abandonment of these principles among the new elite class as well; an abandonment of commitment if not yet in behavior. The final chapter contains a critique of socialist (European-style) democracy that, while worded kindly, contains powerful insights as to why such a system, however well-meaning, would represent a serious blow to the United States' status as a place that promotes the pursuit of happiness. Those who are just interested in getting an overview of Murray's thought, might skip ahead to read this chapter. The author brightens

his prognosis for America by recalling the American tradition of rising to the difficult occasion. He awaits a new, secular "Great Awakening." This makes me consider millennials, and their well-chronicled focus on serving others and seeking out meaningful lives. Perhaps America's greatest hope to retain its exceptionalism "no, make that its distinctiveness among the nations" are the children and grandchildren of my generation who may find their meaning and call to service within the framework of the institutions of religion, family, vocation and fair play that the Founding Fathers had in mind. Some will find that formula trite; Murray might say that those people are making his point about abandonment of the four founding virtues, for him.

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