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## THEY SAID IT

Princess on the steeple, and all the pretty people  
They're all laughing, thinking that they've got it made.  
Exchanging all precious gifts,  
But you better take your diamond ring, you better pawn it babe.

You used to be so amused,  
At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used.  
Go to him now he calls you, you can't refuse.  
When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose.  
You're invisible now, you've got no secrets to conceal.

Bob Dylan, "Like a Rolling Stone," 1965.

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## WHEN YOU AIN'T GOT NOTHING, YOU GOT NOTHING TO LOSE.

It is always disappointing when someone whom you respect takes a philosophical or political position in direct contrast to your own, particularly on a matter that you consider important, even critical. And it is even more disappointing when the individual defends that position vehemently, even aggressively.

We found ourselves in such a position recently when we read the latest musings from the journalist and author Christopher Hitchens, a brilliant and persuasive polemicist, whose defenses of the war on terror and the war in Iraq were among the most incisive, best explained, and most convincing made. Hitchens, an erstwhile Trotskyite, is of one the most compelling writers on the political right today and also the owner of perhaps the sharpest tongue and most agile mind in the political commentary business. It was with considerable consternation, therefore, that we read his regular *Vanity Fair* column last week, learning that he not only despises the Tea Party movement but does so for many of the same reasons the left does. To wit:

Most epochs are defined by one or another anxiety. More important, though, is the form which that anxiety takes. Millions of Americans are currently worried about two things that are, in their minds, emotionally related. The first of these is the prospect that white people will no longer be the majority in this country, and the second is that the United States will be just one among many world powers. This is by no means purely a "racial" matter. (In my experience, black Americans are quite concerned that "Hispanic" immigration will relegate them, too.) Having an honest and open discussion about all this is not just a high priority. It's more like a matter of social and political survival. But the Beck-Skousen faction want to make such a debate impossible.

They need and want to sublimate the anxiety into hysteria and paranoia. The president is a Kenyan. The president is a secret Muslim. The president (why not?—after all, every little bit helps) is the unacknowledged love child of Malcolm X. And this is their response to the election of an extremely moderate half-African American candidate, who speaks better English than most and who has a model family. Revolted by this development, huge numbers of white people choose to demonstrate their independence and superiority by putting themselves eagerly at the disposal of a tear-stained semi-literate shock jock, and by repeating his list of lies and defamations. But, of course, there's nothing racial in their attitude . . .

Oh my! If this were almost any other writer, columnist, or analyst – on the left *or* on the right – we'd simply blow it off, assuming that the author simply had lost it or was incapable of lucid analysis.

But as we said, this wasn't just any other author.

Now, it's not that we never disagree with Hitchens. We do. Quite often, in fact. He continues, for example, to believe that the Viet Cong were the only righteous and honorable participants in the Vietnam War. And, perhaps more importantly, he is one of the most uncompromising and obdurate radical atheists writing these days, having, just three years ago, written a long and antagonistic book titled *God is not Great*.

But even when we think Hitch is wrong, we admire the skill with which he argues his point. He ties his support of the insurgent terrorists of South Vietnam, for example, to his broader and notably passionate loathing of tyranny – the same sentiment that directs his ongoing support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And even when arguing against religion, he is somehow less aggravating and less discordant than his fellow atheists, resembling, as David Runciman noted in the *London Review of Books*, less an

ideological fanatic than an updated version of Carl Schmitt's "political romantic," a man who "believed he was himself the transcendental ego . . . the creator of the world in which he lived."

This brings us to Hitch's attack on the Tea Party, which simply does not fit his usual outline, in that it is strident, angry, and, for the most part, poorly argued. The Tea Partiers are, we are told, irate white men and women, unhappy about their place in the nation, flirting with dangerous rhetoric, and openly embracing stupid ideas and fanatical spokesmen.

And the basis of these charges, so brusquely made? Well, Glen Beck is a Tea Party guy. And he's a nut. So, therefore . . .

This "nuts by association" argument strikes us as silly, to the say the very least. Sure, Beck has some . . . ummm . . . peculiarities. And sure, there is some overlap between his fans and the Tea Partiers. But the assumption that the two crowds are one and the same, and that because no one has called out Beck for his oddities, violence is likely, is not merely overwrought but based on nothing more than Hitchens' own prejudices.

Fortunately for us, Hitchens' prejudices are not necessarily exclusive to Hitchens. And, more to the point, because they are not unique, they provide a starting point for a broader discussion about the Tea Party and its effect on the political sphere. Indeed, Hitchens' predispositions and their causes tell us a great deal about the state of political discourse in this country and especially among the political, intellectual, and media elites who appear so threatened and offended by the Tea Party.

For starters, we suspect that Hitchens' loathing of Beck and his related attempts to dismiss as hateful anything that has even the faintest whiff of Beck on it stem from his distaste for religion. Beck is, after all, a Mormon, which is to say that he is a member of the religious group that causes our political and intellectual elites more heartburn than just about any other. It is one thing to be a Methodist. Or a Presbyterian. Or

even a Catholic. “These people” can be dealt with reasonably, at least some of the time. But Mormons are “different.”

We are not sure what it is about Mormons that rankles the ruling class so. Maybe it’s because Mormons are, nearly exclusively, middle class. Maybe it’s because they are predominantly white. Maybe it’s because they are social conservatives, who oppose gay marriage and use their economic power to advocate against it. Maybe it’s because they are suburban dwellers, or that they are proselytizers. Maybe it’s because, in these ways and others, Mormons tend to be very much like Tea Partiers in general. And, as we have heard for nearly two years now, that’s a sin in itself.

Who knows? Certainly we don’t. But before we get too far off track worrying about Hitchens’ hatred of Beck and the ruling class’s corresponding hatred of Mormons, we’d like to get back to Hitchens’ critique, the other prejudices it displays, and the insight that they provide.

Elsewhere in his piece, Hitchens declares that he is mystified by the Tea Partiers’ hatred for the government in Washington and its plans and schemes, since those plans and schemes are, in truth, rather conventional:

In the recent past, government-sponsored policies of social engineering have led to surprising success in reducing the welfare rolls and the crime figures. This came partly from the adoption by many Democrats of policies that had once been called Republican. But not a word about that from Beck and his followers, because it isn’t exciting and doesn’t present any opportunity for rabble-rousing. Far sexier to say that health care – actually another product of bipartisanship – is a step toward Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Here, Hitchens reveals the truth about himself, about the rest of the Tea-Party loathing right, and about the Washington establishment in general. Contra the Tea

Party, Hitchens, speaking for the establishment, insists that there is nothing radically wrong in Washington, certainly nothing that demands radical action or radical changes. A little tinkering here and there, on the margins, is all that’s necessary. A little less government here; a little more government there; a little nip, tuck, cut, or slash, and all will be well.

This is, essentially, a respectable position, one suited broadly to the confines and nature of modern governance. Incremental change is the name of the game in Washington, and as a general proposition, this is a better philosophy of governance than radical change followed by radical change.

Unfortunately, this erstwhile respectable position is also one that tends toward complete obliviousness to the nature of the problems facing the nation and the inability of the ruling class to see past the end of its collective nose, much less to address the problems fruitfully.

Once upon a time, the administrative state was the answer to this nation’s problems. As the author and scholar Walter Russell Meade noted recently, “The industrial revolution and associated phenomena (urbanization, mass immigration from non-English speaking, non-Protestant societies, the economic decline of small farmers and rural communities) presented liberals with new and very complicated problems.”

And the liberal/progressive administrative state – as envisioned by Wilson, as championed by Teddy Roosevelt, as implemented by Franklin Roosevelt, and as refined by LBJ – provided reasonable, rational, and productive fixes to a great many of those problems. Or, as Hitchens might put it, “government-sponsored policies of social engineering led to surprising success.”

But those fixes were temporary and, at some point, self-defeating. As early as 1960, it was clear to anyone paying attention that the trade-off for ordered, administrative governance required a monumental sacrifice in liberty. Moreover, it was equally apparent that as the administrative apparatus had grown, it had

grown less rational, more unwieldy, and more focused on process than outcome. By the middle of the '60s, a handful of observers – most notably Theodore Lowi – had deconstructed the administrative state, noting its explicit impingements on liberty, its inefficiencies, and its perversion of the nature of liberal-republican governance. The people – who were, according to design, to be sovereign – had become anything but and had come to serve the state that was intended to serve them.

It goes without saying, we think, that in the half-century since the shortcomings of the administrative state were definitively exposed, the condition of that state has deteriorated significantly, leaving the nation with a government that is massively bloated, indebted, and corrupt, and monstrously disconnected from the “will of the people.” Today, eight presidents after Johnson expanded the administrative state energetically, the administrative state is dysfunctional and will, sooner than most think, reach the stage of default and collapse. And there is little that a desperate and dejected people can do to change that.

We are reminded here of the old argument that took place between traditional conservatives and the so-called “neo-conservatives” during the darker days of the Iraq war. The traditionalists – people like George Will, William F. Buckley – and even a handful of erstwhile neocons like Francis Fukuyama insisted that the war was a mistake and, especially, that the goal of the war was impossible, since the Arab/Muslim world would never embrace democracy. “Nation building” was little more than arrogance and a lack of self-restraint on the part of the Bush team and its “neocon” allies. As some of you may recall, we here at The Political Forum were more than mildly sympathetic to this argument and often worried that the invasion and reconstruction of Iraq were hopelessly ill-conceived.

In response, some of the dastardly neos – most notably Victor Davis Hanson, the classicist and military historian – made the simplest and perhaps most powerful case for the Bush doctrine, namely that it was the only card we had left to play. Perhaps,

Hanson et al. argued, fostering democracy in the heart of the Middle East is far-fetched. And perhaps it constitutes a frivolous squandering of American blood and treasure. But all that notwithstanding, it still holds the possibility – however slim – of altering the political equation in that part of the world, which is more than can be said for any other strategy anyone can devise. As Hanson put it:

There is no other solution to either Islamic terrorism of the sort that hit us on Sept. 11, 2001, nor the sort of state fascism that caused the first Gulf War, than the Bush administration’s easily caricatured effort to work for a third democratic choice beyond either dictatorship or theocracy. We know that not because of pre-9/11 neocon pipedreams of “remaking the Middle East,” but because for decades we tried almost everything else in vain — from backing monarchs in the Gulf who pumped oil and dictators in Pakistan and Egypt who promised order, to “containing” murderous autocrats like Saddam and ignoring tyrannous theocrats like the Taliban.

The point Hanson tried to make – and, we believe, did so with reasonable success – is that when you’ve tried everything else, to no avail, then even far-fetched and radical options make more sense than simply resurrecting the same strategies that failed before. Or, to borrow from Bob Dylan: “when you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose.”

That is precisely the spirit that animates the Tea Party today. Moreover, it is that which makes the Tea Party, despite the political establishment’s insistence to the contrary, the only rational response to the current political circumstance.

Roughly a decade ago, during the Bush-Gore presidential campaign, we suggested that the Democratic Party had ceased to be “liberal” in any sense of the word and had actually morphed

into the party of the “reactionaries,” dedicated to preserving old relationships, maintaining old plans and schemes, and cementing old privileges. This formulation was true then, and it is even truer now. The only difference between 2000 and 2010 is that it is now clear that the Democratic Party is not alone in representing the forces of reaction, it is merely the most prominent player in a cast that includes the entire political, journalistic, and intellectual establishment.

Last week, in a long and extraordinary essay, the aforementioned Walter Russell Meade took up this theme, expanded it, and put it far more eloquently than we ever did. In so doing, he suggested that this embrace of the status quo and this revulsion with anything that threatens the present political stasis is the principal cause of the perilous condition of the nation and is also principally the fault of the self-indulgent and intellectually indolent ruling class. He wrote:

The biggest roadblock today is that so many of America’s best-educated, best-placed people are too invested in old social models and old visions of history to do their real job and help society transition to the next level. Instead of opportunities they see threats; instead of hope they see danger; instead of the possibility of progress they see the unraveling of everything beautiful and true . . . .

Since the late nineteenth century most intellectuals have identified progress with the advance of the bureaucratic, redistributionist and administrative state. The government, guided by credentialed intellectuals with scientific training and values, would lead society through the economic and political perils of the day. An ever more powerful state would play an ever larger role in achieving ever greater degrees of affluence and stability for the population at large, redistributing wealth to provide basic sustenance and

justice to the poor. The social mission of intellectuals was to build political support for the development of the new order, to provide enlightened guidance based on rational and scientific thought to policymakers, to administer the state through a merit based civil service, and to train new generations of managers and administrators . . . .

Most American intellectuals today are still shaped by this worldview and genuinely cannot imagine an alternative vision of progress. It is extremely difficult for such people to understand the economic forces that are making this model unsustainable and to see why so many Americans are in rebellion against this kind of state and society . . . .

How, exactly, are the American people to deal with this? How, exactly, are they to preserve their freedom, their liberty, their birthright in the face of a ruling class that increasingly sees itself as the guardian of the state’s prerogatives against the people, rather than the guardians of the people’s prerogatives against the state? What, exactly, would Christopher Hitchens have those who value liberty and seek the preservation of this great beacon of liberty do?

Perhaps Hitchens, David Frum, David Brooks, Christopher Buckley and the rest of those on the anti-Tea-Party right are correct. Perhaps the Tea Party is a dangerous exercise in unwarranted radical rabble-raising. Perhaps the Tea Party will produce nothing positive in the long-term. Perhaps it will make things worse.

We doubt it. But we’ll concede that neither we nor anyone else knows right now how any of this will play out over an extended period.

What we do know, though, is that what we’ve been doing – what the country collectively has done for the last half century – isn’t working. Problems

identified in the 1960s persist and grow worse. Liberty continues to be attacked. And wastefulness and profligacy continue to be justified in the name of “order.” This can’t hold. This won’t hold.

We understand that Ronald Reagan may not have been the infallible, unflinching conservative demigod that today’s Republicans believe him to have been. We understand that he, like any other politician, compromised, cooperated, and disappointed his base. Still, the fact of the matter is that he was as close to perfect – from a conservative’s perspective – as we are likely to get in politics, which is why his legend continues to grow. But even he couldn’t stop or put much of a dent in the inescapable crush of the administrative state. He tried. God knows he tried. But the combined power of the ruling class and the Leviathan itself proved too much for even him. And the status quo held.

And it continues to hold – unsustainable, impractical, and increasingly despotic though it may be.

We understand why people like Christopher Hitchens are uncomfortable with the Tea Party. Indeed, we empathize with him. We are leery of radicalism too. And we too think that some in the movement are borderline crackpots. But so what? What else is there?

There is, as Walter Russell Meade notes, a crisis among the American intellectual and political class. They can’t even conceive of a political circumstance in which it is not incumbent on the government and its “experts” to exert greater and greater control. The administrative state is, to them, inevitable and its rise inexorable.

What they can’t see, what they refuse to consider is that it is also unsustainable.

The Tea Party movement – for all its warts – sees this lack of long-term sustainability. And it is determined to do something about it. What that “something” is, no one can say for sure. But at least the Tea Party has the guts and the foresight to imagine that something else is possible.

## THE MIDDLE CLASS AND SEXUAL “LIBERATION.”

The American middle class is under attack. Or haven’t you heard? Since the 1970s, economic “inequality” is increasing. CEOs are getting richer. And their workers are getting poorer, relatively speaking. Real wage growth has stagnated. And with the addition of considerable debt and the subtraction of comfy and guaranteed pensions, those real wages don’t go nearly as far as they used to.

We are not – repeat NOT – making this up. The Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman insists incessantly that inequality is growing sharply, much to the middle class’s detriment. Yale professor Jacob Hacker complains that “over the past 30 years, middle-class families have faced greater insecurity.” Mike Radoiu, a columnist for a Shenandoah Valley newspaper called *The News Leader* declares that “The American middle class is in trouble,” and that “the cause has nothing to do with socialist conspirators, pointy-headed academics or latter-day hippies intent on destroying our way of life” but with “our nation’s plutocrats...” *The Atlantic* reports that new studies from financial services firms show that only about a quarter of the “middle class” will retire “on time.” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* contends that “the American middle class once offered dependable shelter, [but] that haven now is shaky, leaky and uncertain.” Even the great Oracle of Omaha, Warren Buffett his own self, noted harshly that “There is class warfare, all right. But it is my class, the rich class, that’s making war. And we’re winning.” *Etc., etc., ad infinitum.*

Generally speaking, the culprit here – as identified by the political left and its above-cited aides in the press – is the tax code, or, more specifically, the Bush tax cuts, which made the system less progressive and thereby punished the middle class. When Paul Krugman attacks the “lack of progressivity” in the tax code, he specifically means the flattening of rates undertaken by Bush. (Never mind the actual economic data that show the “rich” paying a greater burden, relatively speaking, after the cuts.) When Buffett decries the “class war” being waged by the rich, he is talking about the cuts on capital gains, dividends, and, most

especially, inheritance. And, of course, when Mike Radoiu attacks “our nation’s plutocrats” he means anybody making over \$200,000, which, as any school boy knows, makes one “ultra-wealthy” and entitles him or her to a “tax holiday” under Bush (and now Obama) policy.

Now, we are not economists. (Shocking, we know.) But it strikes us as strange that the Bush tax cuts would actually have hurt the middle class. The middle class paid less in taxes. And as a percentage of total taxes, it paid less than it did before the cuts. Moreover, most of the actual analysis of the “decline” in the middle class dates the onset of this drop to the early 1970s. We have no idea whatsoever how the Bush tax cuts hurt the middle class three decades before their passage. But then, like we said, we’re not economists. And Paul Krugman is. So who’re you gonna believe?

Whatever the case, unlike a great many conservatives, we’re actually willing to concede that there is some damage being done to the American middle class. And, moreover, we’re willing to concede that this damage is part of an ongoing process dating from at least the early 1970s. In fact, the start-date of this decline is, we think, critical to any understanding of what might actually be happening.

You see, the insistence that the “war on the middle class” has anything to do with fiscal policy is flatly absurd. Since 1972, this country has seen all sorts of politicians and all sorts of fiscal policies, implemented by all sorts of presidents, starting with two Keynesian Republican presidents; followed by a hapless semi-Keynesian Democrat, a supply-side conservative, a Keynesian country-club Republican, another confused Southern Democrat led around by a supply-side Congress, a tax-cut-and-spend Republican, and now another neo-Keynesian. In other words, there is no consistency of policy here, and certainly nothing solid enough to account for the decline of the middle class. Indeed, the only consistency in any of this is that the middle class decline has continued unabated, irrespective of fiscal policy.

So if the culprit here is not fiscal policy, as the economists insist, what is?

Obviously, we don’t have a definitive answer, but we’d guess that the culprit is sexual “liberation.” Think that’s nuts? Well, maybe. But bear with us just a moment.

Social scientists have long known that marriage is the key to avoiding poverty. Since the 1960s, it has been clear that children whose parents are married and stay married are far less likely to live in poverty and far more likely to remain beyond poverty into adulthood than children whose parents are not married or are divorced. Marriage was and is critical, as a recent Heritage Foundation study reiterated:

According to the U.S. Census, the poverty rate for single parents with children in the United States in 2008 was 36.5 percent. The rate for married couples with children was 6.4 percent. Being raised in a married family reduced a child’s probability of living in poverty by about 80 percent.

Some of this difference in poverty is due to the fact that single parents tend to have less education than married couples, but even when married couples are compared to single parents with the same level of education, the married poverty rate will still be more than 75 percent lower. Marriage is a powerful weapon in fighting poverty. In fact, being married has the same effect in reducing poverty that adding five to six years to a parent’s level of education has.

For many years, the effect of fatherless homes on low-income families has been accepted common knowledge. The “poor” tend to have more children out of wedlock and that tends to perpetuate poverty. The causes of this tendency to reproduce outside of marriage has also largely been accepted, with folks like Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Charles Murray, and Thomas Sowell demonstrating rather conclusively that government “aid” and social intervention contributed

greatly to the dissolution of poor families and black families in particular, creating a culture of self-perpetuating dependence. As Myron Magnet noted in a *City Journal* article from 2007:

In a country whose chief domestic imperative for 50 years has been ending racism and righting long-standing wrongs against blacks—with such success that we now have an expanding black middle class, a black secretary of state, black CEOs of three top corporations, a black Supreme Court justice, and a serious black presidential candidate—how can there still exist a large black urban underclass imprisoned in poverty, welfare dependency, school failure, nonwork, and crime? How even today can more black young men be entangled in the criminal-justice system than graduate from college? How can close to 70 percent of black children be born into single-mother families, which (almost all experts agree) prepare kids for success less well than two-parent families?

The legacy of slavery and racism isn't the reason, economist Thomas Sowell has long argued. That legacy didn't stop blacks from raising themselves up after Emancipation. By World War I, Sowell's data show, northern blacks scored higher on armed-forces tests than southern whites. After World War II and the GI Bill, black education and income levels rose sharply. It was only in the mid-1960s that a century of black progress seemed to make a sudden U-turn, a reversal that long-past events didn't cause. Beginning around 1964, the rates of black high school graduation, workforce participation, crime, illegitimacy, and drug use all turned sharply in the wrong direction. While many blacks continued to move forward, a sizable minority

solidified into an underclass, defined by self-destructive behavior that all but guaranteed failure.

What was going on in the mid-sixties that could explain such a startling development?

But while “what was going on in the mid-sixties” was obviously a problem for the poor, who were – unwittingly, we hope – being encouraged by government to dissolve families in favor of fatherless homes, the same circumstance did not hold among the middle class. Government aid and the attendant financial incentive to raise children without fathers were exclusively under-class problems. And so the middle class should have been safeguarded from destruction wrought by the collapse of families.

But it hasn't worked out that way.

According to Bradford Wilcox, the director of The Marriage Project and an associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, marriage is in decline as well among the middle class, with several serious and debilitating consequences. In his recent report, Wilcox wrote:

Among the affluent, marriage is stable and appears to be getting even stronger. Among the poor, marriage continues to be fragile and weak.

But the newest and perhaps most consequential marriage trend of our time concerns the broad center of our society, where marriage, that iconic middle-class institution, is foundering. Among Middle Americans, defined here as those with a high-school but not a (four-year) college degree, rates of nonmarital childbearing and divorce are rising, even as marital happiness is falling. This “moderately educated” middle of America constitutes a full 58 percent of the adult population . . .

In the 1970s, about 69 percent of moderately and highly educated married adults indicated they were “very happy” in their marriages, whereas only 59 percent of married adults with the least education (high-school dropouts) reported they were very happy. By the 2000s, 69 percent of highly educated married adults still reported that they were very happy, but only 57 percent of moderately educated married adults and 52 percent of the least educated (who make up 12 percent of the adult population) reported the same.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, divorce or separation within the first 10 years of marriage became less likely for the highly educated (15 percent down to 11 percent), somewhat more likely for the moderately educated (36 up to 37 percent), and less likely for the least educated (46 down to 36 percent).

In the early 1980s, only 2 percent of babies born to highly educated mothers were born outside of marriage, compared to 13 percent of babies born to moderately educated mothers and 33 percent of babies born to mothers who were the least educated. In the late 2000s, only 6 percent of babies born to highly educated mothers were born outside of marriage, compared to 44 percent of babies born to moderately educated mothers and 54 percent of babies born to the least-educated mothers.

The percentage of 14-year-old girls with highly educated mothers living with both their parents rose from 80 to 81 percent from the 1970s to the 2000s, but the percentage of 14-year-old girls with moderately educated mothers living with both parents fell from 74 to 58 percent. And the percentage of 14-year-old girls with the least-educated mothers living with both parents fell from 65 to 52 percent.

Overall, then, the family lives of today’s moderately educated Americans increasingly resemble those of high-school dropouts, too

often burdened by financial stress, partner conflict, single parenting, and troubled children.

Among other things, what we can discern from Wilcox’s work is that the causal relationships between and among personal economic instability, class, and marriage are far more complex than social scientists once believed. And they have serious economic implications. Last week, *National Review* editor Rich Lowry (also writing on the Wilcox study) noted the damage that is being done to the erstwhile middle class in these difficult economic times:

The unemployment rate for people with a college degree or higher is 5 percent. If that were the rate for everyone, it’d be the 1990s again.

But college graduates are only 30 percent of the country. For the rest of the population, the jobs picture is grimmer. For people without a high-school degree, the unemployment rate is more than 15 percent. If that were the rate for everyone, it’d be the 1930s again.

Social trends are intertwining with economic trends, like increased unemployment and declining wages, in a downward spiral. “High school-educated young men today,” Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins University writes, “may be the first generation in memory to earn less than their fathers did.” This economic pressure makes it harder to marry; the lack of marriage, in turn, denies men crucial social stability (married men earn more than single men with the same education and job histories).

All of this points to a slow-motion social and economic evisceration of a swath of Middle America.

What we have here, then, is a broadly defined middle class that is increasingly falling behind, growing more and more removed from the upper class and less and less removed from the poor, and increasingly unable to break this downward spiral. In short, we have exactly what the hysterics on the left have insisted.

But what we also have is an explanation that diverges from that offered by the left, which only makes sense, since the left's explanation was, as we noted above, silly. Marriage is collapsing among the middle class. And that is the source of serious and largely indisputable economic damage. As Wilcox puts it:

Given the current trends, it is not too far-fetched to imagine that the United States could be heading toward a 21st century version of a traditional Latin American model of family life, where only a comparatively small oligarchy enjoys a stable married and family life—and the economic and social fruits that flow from strong marriages. In this model, the middle and lower-middle classes would find it difficult to achieve the same goals for their families and would be bedeviled by family discord and economic insecurity.

The only question we're left with, then, is why this phenomenon bedevils everyone, it seems, except the upper class. Why do the upper classes embrace marriage while the middle class does not?

We have no data on this final point, but we do think that the answer probably has something to do with "what was going on in the mid-sixties," though slightly amended from that which affected the poor. In addition to the expanse of the welfare state, the '60s saw the advance of what we'll call sexual liberation: the increase in sexual partners per capita, the advent of

the "sexual revolution," the increase in the availability of birth control and the correlated increase in sexual liberation, and the advent of no fault divorce, all of which would have the tendency to increase the potential for children being raised in broken homes.

Now, one can argue that any or all of these developments had some social merit, empowering women, perhaps. But one cannot argue that any "merit" was accompanied by serious social detriment, as can be seen in the numbers above.

What is interesting, we think, is that the political and cultural elites who led the sexual revolution have not, according to Wilcox's data, participated in it. As we have argued before, the left's conception of liberty has devolved into a parody of sorts, in which only sexual liberty qualifies as liberty at all. Anything else is the government's business. But sex – and marriage, divorce, abortion and all other related concerns – are "individual matters" to be granted the greatest leeway possible.

Unsurprisingly, while the elitist left has "achieved" its goal of generally imposing this "liberty" upon the nation, it has not necessarily "enjoyed" that liberty itself, preferring to let the common folk rut like sheep . . . and to suffer the consequences.

We'll believe that the left is serious about addressing these issues and the collapse of the middle class when it demonstrates that it is. That is to say that we'll believe it when leftist demagogues stop trying to blame this collapse on tax policy and start admitting that strong marriages are the key.

Of course, at the moment, they still view Bill Clinton as a role model.

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