

## The Future is Family

By Sam Lyman | Friday, June 17, 2022

---

From the high ground of history, we look back on ancient practices and – with an unearned sense of moral superiority – feel grateful to live in the present.

Take bloodletting.

For thousands of years, physicians from ancient Greece to Renaissance Europe deliberately bled their patients, sometimes to the point of fainting or even death. This was all in an effort to purge them of “bad humours,” which they believed to be the source of human illness.

Bloodletting provided a dramatic display of “doing something” to help the patient. Of course, we now know that it did nothing to address the underlying causes of disease, and in many cases, made symptoms worse.

In that sense, bloodletting is not unlike many of our social programs today. Since Lyndon B. Johnson launched the War on Poverty nearly 60 years ago, we have spent more than [\\$22 trillion](#) on social welfare programs. And what do we have to show for it? Stagnating wages, an even larger gap between rich and poor, the highest [out-of-wedlock birth rate](#) in US history, and millions of Americans on food stamps.

Almost always the answer to any of the above problems is “more funding.” More funding for schools, more funding for healthcare, and more funding for social programs across all levels of government. But if the persistence of poverty over the last several decades has shown us anything, it’s that “more funding” is often as futile as bloodletting. Why? Because none of these programs, as well intentioned as they are, address the root cause of our social dysfunction.

Fatherlessness.

This Sunday, our nation will celebrate Father’s Day. But we should mourn the fact that [one in four](#) American children won’t even have a father in the home to celebrate with.

Our society has yet to come to terms with an obvious fact: Nearly every social ill plaguing our communities stems from (or is severely exacerbated by) not having a father in the home. Children with absent fathers are [four times](#) more likely to be poor. They are [twice](#) as likely to be obese, [twice](#) as likely to drop out of school, and [twice](#) as likely to die by suicide. They are [ten times](#) more likely to abuse chemical substances and [32 times](#) more likely to end up homeless. And they are [three times](#) more likely to be incarcerated.

Fatherlessness has given rise to the greatest challenges facing modern society. And yet, the subject is strangely absent from policy conversations in Washington. Instead, legislators argue

over how to tackle the symptoms of disease (e.g., poverty, crime, homelessness, etc.) rather than the disease itself (fatherlessness).

So what to do?

Washington can start by reorienting its policymaking around fatherhood. A first-principles approach would make the primary purpose of *any* social program be to encourage fatherhood and family-building. And to the extent that certain social programs do the opposite – by unintentionally replacing good fathers with Big Brother – they should be scrapped.

There's a groundswell of innovative policy thinking on this front, including new [family-centered approaches](#) to reforming our criminal justice system, [bold economic proposals](#) that would allow parents to raise their kids on a single income, and an [expanded child tax credit](#) that would provide monthly payments to families across America.

But policy alone won't cure the epidemic of fatherlessness. We can't socially engineer ourselves out of this mess. Politics is downstream of culture. And the politics won't change until the culture again recognizes the paramount importance of fatherhood and makes space for positive masculinity.

A healthy society raises its boys to become good fathers. For that to happen, young men – just like young women – need positive reinforcement and constant encouragement to become the best version of themselves. But all too often this is lacking in our culture.

The drive for greater equality between the sexes is an honorable goal that is wholly worth pursuing. But sometimes, advocacy campaigns with good intentions can send mixed signals to young men. Consider the virality of made-for-T-shirt slogans like "The Future Is Female." What are young men supposed to take from this mantra? That the future, most decidedly, does not include them?

Whether that's the intended message or not, it's the message many are receiving. And it's the message they see echoed in popular media. Feeling alienated by their own culture, many young men retreat into digital worlds that leave them ill-prepared for the responsibilities of fatherhood.

As a result, millions are wasting their lives on video games, pretending to be the male heroes they wish they were in real life. They are trading in meaningful human relationships for hookups and pornography. And they are playacting political revolution online, often in insular communities that reinforce their sense of isolation and bitterness.

So many of our boys are living in a simulation. They are stuck in the Matrix, and we need to bring them back. We need to offer them a different kind of red pill – one that would free them from the half-lives they have been living on the internet. A red pill that would wake them to their potential as men, husbands, and fathers. A red pill that would invite them to bridle their masculine strength to fortify their communities, pursue education, build businesses, and ultimately form families.

Young men will be more inclined to take this red pill if we can first build a better world for them outside the Matrix – a world where they feel valued by their culture, validated for their strengths, and empowered to develop their talents.

Building this better world requires us to ask hard questions of ourselves: What is it about the current state of our society that causes so many young men to drop out in the first place? How

can we create a culture where young men feel both needed and accepted? And what can we do to reassert the importance of fatherhood and healthy masculinity in media, art, and literature?

People of all political persuasions must work together in good faith to answer these questions. We must help our boys become men and our men become fathers – because women deserve nothing less.

At the end of the day, the future we should all be fighting for is neither exclusively male nor female. It is both. Fathers and mothers *together* are the cornerstone of civilization. That's why we must recenter both our culture and our politics around the same ideal: The future is family.



*Sam Lyman is the Policy Director at the [Orrin G. Hatch Foundation](#). He served previously as a speechwriter at the US Senate and the US Chamber of Commerce.*