General Information

Source: Rock Center with Brian Williams  
Creator: Brian Williams  
Event Date: 02/22/2012  
Air/Publish Date: 02/22/2012

Resource Type: Video News Report  
Copyright: NBCUniversal Media, LLC.  
Copyright Date: 2012  
Clip Length: 00:05:00

Description

Author and social scientist Charles Murray has written a book based on the idea that the cultural divide between America's upper middle class and working class is growing.

Keywords

Author, Charles Murray, Class, Divide, Middle, Upper, Lower, Cultural, Culture, Inequality, Rich, Poor, Separation, Coming Apart, Traditional, Values, White, Diversity

Citation

MLA

"Charles Murray: Class Divide Is Growing in America." Brian Williams, correspondent. Rock Center with
Transcript

Charles Murray - Class Divide Is Growing in America

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:

There's a new book out that says our country is coming apart. In fact, that's the title of the book by the author, Charles Murray. It's based on the idea that the cultural divide between the upper and lower classes in America is greater than it has ever been. This book came up, in fact, just tonight at the GOP debate in Arizona. If the name Charles Murray rings a bell, it may have to do with this book cover. He co-authored a book called "The Bell Curve" a decade ago. It was hugely controversial. The book looked at differences in intelligence across socioeconomic and racial lines. He was harshly criticized, labeled as a racist by some folks for linking IQ to genetics and, therefore, to race. With this new book, he's found a novel way to get around that hot button issue. He's based his findings entirely on white people. But listen to what he says is happening to all the people in our country. What is the central theme of your book and what's happening, in your view, to our country?

CHARLES MURRAY: We have a kind of cultural inequality that exists now between the working class, the upper middle class that is new in American history. We've always had rich people, we've always had poor people. But they didn't live in separate cultures. They both inhabited an American civic culture that we used to call the American way of life, a phrase that was in use when you were a boy. You don't hear it much anymore.

WILLIAMS: In the book, Murray cites statistics that document the breakdown of that American way of life, beginning with marriage.

MURRAY: In 1960, you had over 80% of the working class which was married. You had over 90% of the upper middle class, same for both in terms of the norm. Here's the stunning statistic. In 2010, for the white working class, that's down to 48%. Not only that, that's 30 to 49-year-olds. So you're not talking about them getting married later or whatever. That's--collapse is a very strong word, but it's very close to the collapse of this crucial cultural institution.

WILLIAMS: A lot of people believe it's the upper classes who have abandoned what we've always called
traditional American values. But in the book, Murray says the truth is just the opposite. You make a point that there's been a value shift, while we continue to make an assumption, a sweeping assumption as to where the repository of those rock-ribbed American values are.

MURRAY: Right. The founders all said, unanimously, this constitution won't work unless you have a certain kind of people. And the four founding virtues that they all agreed on were, first, the integrity of the family; industriousness, which was maybe the signature quality of the American people at that time; plain American honesty, in the words of Thomas Jefferson; and religiosity. The working class has been falling away from all four, whereas the upper middle class maybe surprisingly is still doing pretty well.

WILLIAMS: How much is race a part of this, of what ails us?

MURRAY: Race has nothing to do with these problems. The subtitle of the book is "The State of White America 1960-2010" because I want to clear away all of the complications associated with race and say, 'Look what's happening with non-Latino white America.'

WILLIAMS: In a highly charged atmosphere that we live in today, when you put a subtitle on your book, "The State of White America 1960-2010," you know, you know you're going to get trouble for that.

MURRAY: It's my reference points. White America is my reference points. To put it one way, they have no excuses. They aren't recent immigrants that don't speak the language. They don't have a legacy of slavery. If you've got problems there, we've got to think of other understandings of how we can solve them.

WILLIAMS: Murray says one way to solve them is to somehow convince Americans from different classes with nothing in common to find something, anything to share. You talk about the cognitive elite. They go to the same schools, then they come out and they marry each other, and they pursue two separate tracks, these two groups in society. Why don't they co-mingle? They used to co-mingle.

MURRAY: And part of it's really natural. I mean, there's always been an attraction to people we can talk to, people who get our jokes, people who understand us. You ought to fight against it because this country is really wonderful in terms of its history. And all the interesting people don't live on the Upper East Side. They don't live in Bethesda, Maryland. America is filled with really interesting, attractive people that you ought to get to know, who you'll never get to know unless you make an effort to break out of your bubble.