

compensation when practiced by dead white people, why passively stand by when the current Sudanese kidnap their black compatriots into servitude?

"We as a nation have grown and profited from the exploited labor . . . of people of every race, creed and condition of servitude, from the indentured servants of colonial days to the migrant workers of today," Beauchamp says. "Can we even begin to imagine a social mechanism that could right wrongs of this magnitude that were committed so long ago?"

History offers so much to apologize for that it's hard to know where to stop. The towering 19th-century historian Lord Acton said that "neither paganism nor Christianity ever produced a profound political historian whose mind was not turned to gloom by the contemplation of the affairs of men." History depresses, saddens, chastens, tempers, and rigorously instructs us. It's an essential process, Beauchamp says. But "no more apologies."

SOCIETY

Shrink to Greatness

THE SOURCE: "Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?" by Edward L. Glaeser, in *City Journal*, Autumn 2007.

BUFFALO IS NOT THE ONLY old, cold city where urban fortunes seem stuck in reverse. Cleveland, Camden, and Detroit can tell the same tale. When cities shrink, increased poverty is a likely outcome. Declining areas with cheap housing become magnets for even more poor people, who drive up

demand for social services. Buffalo's advantages—good transportation, plentiful electricity, proximity to Niagara Falls—are historic. Its disadvantages—bad weather and a lack of jobs—are city wreckers of the most modern sort.

Buffalo's last boom occurred in the 1920s. It got its first great boost from the Erie Canal a century earlier, when it became a premier transfer point for wheat and other goods from the boats of the Great Lakes to the barges that traveled east on the canal. The invention of a steam-driven grain shovel made the city the world's leading grain port. So much wheat was offloaded that it became a flour milling center. Its transportation advantages attracted steelworks, and with its access to the electricity generated by Niagara Falls it began calling itself the City of Light.

But eventually trucks and efficient rail transport undermined Buffalo's *raison d'être*, writes Edward L. Glaeser, an economist at Harvard University. Its population, 580,000 in 1950, is now well under 300,000.

Since 1950, the federal government has invested billions upon billions of dollars in Buffalo and other failing cities, Glaeser says, but none of it has worked. The city "renewed" a district of its downtown. A 40-story bank headquarters designed by a famous architectural firm rose on its waterfront. A multimillion-dollar arena sprouted nearby. A \$500 million rail system running from the arena to the University of Buffalo took six years to build, but its ridership has been declin-

ing steadily for more than a decade.

The federal government should stop spending money on distressed *places* and instead use aid to help disadvantaged *people*, Glaeser argues. America's taxpayers should not be bribing people to stay in Buffalo. Washington should invest in people-based policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit to improve the economic futures of children, whether they stay put in New York State or move to Las Vegas. If Buffalo is to rebound, private innovators will have to make it happen. Better schools and safe streets might improve its odds of survival. But Buffalo should accept life as a smaller but more vibrant community, Glaeser says. It should shrink to greatness.

SOCIETY

America Escapes Again

THE SOURCE: "Crime, Drugs, Welfare—and Other Good News" by Peter Wehner and Yuval Levin, in *Commentary*, Dec. 2007.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, CONSERVATIVE social commentators were predicting a precipitous and seemingly inexorable national decline. Former education secretary and drug czar William J. Bennett summed up the evidence most starkly: Since 1960 violent crime had increased 500 percent; out-of-wedlock births, 400 percent. The teenage suicide rate had tripled and the divorce rate had doubled. SAT scores had plunged by more than 70 points.

Then, “just when it seemed as if the storm clouds were about to burst, they began to part,” write Peter Wehner and Yuval Levin, fellows at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. The rates of both violent and property crime fell between 1993 and 2005, reaching their lowest levels since 1973, the first year for which data are available. Teenage drug use declined 23 percent from the rates of the 1990s. Welfare caseloads shrank 60 percent from their peak. Annual abortions decreased from 1.6 to 1.3 million. And the mean SAT score was eight points higher in 2005 than in 1993, the year Bennett issued his warning.

The change is “impressive, undeniable, and beyond what most people thought possible,” say Wehner and Levin. It appears that it flowed from changes in government policy combined “with a more-or-less simultaneous shift in public attitudes, with each sustaining and feeding the other.”

While policy changes played a clear role in the fall in the rates of

Crime, teenage drug use, welfare caseloads, and abortions underwent dramatic declines during the 1990s.

crime, welfare dependency, and drug use and in the rise in test scores, the authors write, the decrease in abortions seems to have grassroots causes. It was not a decision of the Supreme Court or the passage of legislation by Congress that affected the numbers, but rather that the “give and take of public discussion . . .

[prompted] a slow, subterranean shifting” of views. “All in all, not only has the public discussion of abortion been profoundly transformed, but younger Americans seem to have moved the farthest.” In September, a poll showed that Americans between the ages of 18 and 30 were the most likely of all

age groups to oppose abortion.

One institution still seems headed south, the authors say. Although better-educated Americans are less likely to get divorced than in the past, the marriage rate is down, the number of couples cohabiting without marrying is up, and so is the number of babies born out of wedlock. Will this change as other social indicators have? The authors say it could go either way. The family is so important, and the percentage of births to unmarried women so high (37 percent), that its problems could undo all the other signs of cultural progress. Or not. Sometimes traditional moral values begin in one social group—the well educated in the case of marriage—and become more universal.

But to those who still write off American society as “incorrigibly corrupt and adrift,” the authors say, young people are a powerful embodiment of America’s “surprising national resilience.”

EXCERPT

Be True to Your Crew

By the time I became a professor I had developed the contempt that I think is widespread in academe for any institution that brings young men together to do groupish things. Primitive tribalism, I thought. . . . I'd have gladly voted to ban fraternities, ROTC, and most sports teams from my university.

But not anymore. . . . When we made the transition over the last 200 years from tight communities to free

and mobile societies, we escaped from bonds that were sometimes oppressive, yes, but into a world so free that it left many of us gasping for connection, purpose, and meaning. I began to think about the many ways that people, particularly young people, have found to combat this isolation. . . . Suddenly sports teams, fraternities, and even the military made a lot more sense.

I now believe that such groups do great things for their members, and that they often create social capital and other benefits that spread beyond their borders.

—JONATHAN HAIDT, a psychologist at the University of Virginia, in response to the question “What Have You Changed Your Mind About?” in www.Edge.org (Jan. 2008)

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